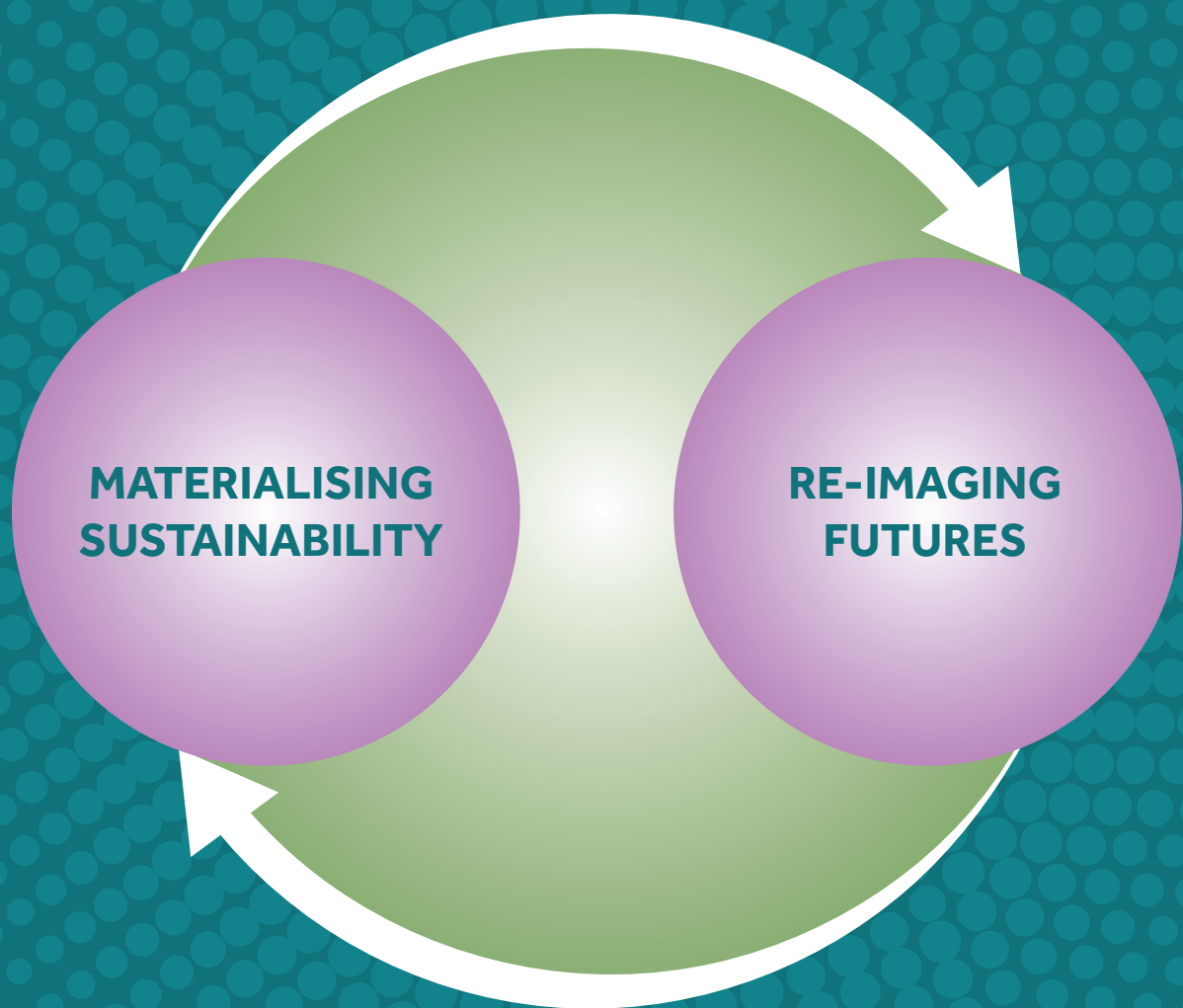

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION INSTITUTE

RESEARCH AGENDA
2020-2024

**For presentation at the SCI Festival
5 December 2019**



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Background and acknowledgements

This report has been prepared on the basis of a series of reflections over the future direction of research within the SCI, throughout the course of 2019. Tally Katz-Gerro led discussions among the members of the Institute while she was Research Director, and produced an initial draft of the agenda on the basis of those discussions. The institute's working groups provided useful background on their activities and focus. Matthew Paterson took over as Research Director in August 2019 and continued the work, in conjunction with other SCI members, in particular Frank Boons as SCI Director, of revising and finalising a draft for external circulation. We thank the leaders of the four working groups and all the SCI's members for their active engagement in this process that has at the same time helped build a stronger sense of our collective endeavour.

The draft was then sent to two groups of people.

We sent it to a group of other academics working in our field, that we call our 'critical friends', who provided us with extensive critical commentary on the draft, and will be at the Festival to continue the discussion. We are enormously grateful to Manisha Anantharaman, Vanesa Castán Broto, Miriam Glucksmann, Mark Harvey, Eva Heiskanen, Kersty Hobson, and Lucie Middlemiss, for their input and we hope they see at least some of their comments reflected in not only the final draft but (more importantly!) in the work we do in the Institute in the future.

We also sent the draft to a set of stakeholders, both within and outside the University, and met with them to discuss the draft. Again, we are very grateful for their time and ideas and look forward to working with them in the future on aspects of this research agenda. We thank specifically: Pete Abel (Manchester Friends of the Earth), Claire Alexander (University of Manchester, SOSS), Corin Bell (Open Kitchen Manchester), Mark Driscoll (Tasting the Future), Keith James (Wrap), Celina Jones (University of Manchester, Department of Materials), Chris Jones (University of Manchester, Tyndall Centre on Climate Change), Raichael Lock (Manchester Environmental Education Network), Michelle Lynch (GMCA), Amy McDowell (Manchester Museum), Ken McPhail (University of Manchester, AMBS), Sarah Mellor (GMCA), Bryony Moore (Stitched Up), Rose O'Neill (Natural England), Michael Shaver (Henry Royce Institute), Angeliki Stogia (Manchester City Council), and Robert Thompson (the Co-operative) Andrew Woodend (DEFRA).

We are particularly grateful for the patient support of the administrators at SCI. Katrina Ferrugia has been unwaveringly supportive in this process, and Susan Hogan and now Debbie Cox have provided a solid basis for this report and the institute's work more generally.

A critical voice:

SCI research past, present and future

The Sustainable Consumption Institute (SCI) was founded in 2007 at The University of Manchester through a generous donation of Tesco Plc. In the decade that followed, leading scholars from the fields of sociology of consumption and innovation studies collaborated to produce unique contributions to their fields, as well as developing a sociologically informed perspective on evolving systems of production and consumption, sometimes provoking heated debates that resonated for years.

Examples of this work are the Eating Out project led by Alan Warde, which sought to map the sustainability consequences of the changing ways of eating as a recreational practice (see vignette 1). Frank Geels led the international Pathways project, which provided a comparative analysis of the trajectories of national mobility and energy systems towards sustainability (see vignette 2). Another team of researchers developed the ISM (individual, social and material) tool that was adopted by the Scottish government to bring in the social practices perspective, a key constituting theoretical framework for SCI, into policymaking on waste and other areas.

Under the directorship of Dale Southerton and Andrew McMeekin, research in the SCI developed in different directions and was enriched by the innovative work of a large number of scholars. In the process, SCI has become a place that has nurtured new talent – through funding PhDs and postdoctoral fellowships, involving early career researchers in projects led by highly experienced scholars. The significant mentorship involved has led both to an increased diversity of scholars working at SCI, notably attempting to address gender imbalances in work in the field, and also to the diversity of the thematic areas involved in the institute's work.

Vignette 1 - Policy shapes practices, not behaviour

Our work on sustainable consumption is rooted in an understanding of social practices: consumption is not a behaviour that can be made more sustainable through simple incentives or 'nudges'; it consists of social practices, routinized patterns of actions connected to physical objects, infrastructure, and symbolic meaning. We consistently seek to bring this perspective into policy making, which often builds on the implicit notion of consumer behaviour, as it is understood by economists. This work goes back to 2008, when an SCI team supported the Scottish government with a concrete approach: the ISM tool (ISM stands for Individual Social Material) www.gov.scot/publications/influencing-behaviours-moving-beyond-individual-userguide-ism-tool. We continue this work today. The Change Points project, involving Alison Browne, Claire Hoolohan, Dale Southerton and Alan Warde, along with colleagues at Sheffield University, worked with DEFRA, the Environment Agency and others to bringing in social practice thinking to shape environmental policy to influence household and everyday practices particularly around water and waste (www.changepoints.net). It also continues with our work in the Systems Research Programme at DEFRA. This programme seeks to develop a more systemic evidence base for policies, and Frank Boons is appointed as academic Fellow to lead on the theme of Resources and Waste (www.gov.uk/government/news/science-research-programme-launched-to-inform-defra-policy-making)

A critical voice:

SCI research past, present and future

In the course of working together, the members of the SCI have found ways to combine their approaches, and today the SCI is a key contributor to the University of Manchester's aim to excel in research that combines the insight of different academic disciplines. It is also a key part of the University's range of centres and institutes working on sustainability and related areas, notably the Tyndall Centre on Climate Change Research, the Manchester Environment Research Institute, The Manchester Urban Institute, the Henry Royce Institute. While these measures are always imperfect and need to be interrogated critically, the strength of this range of institutes of which SCI is part, are reflected in Manchester being equal first in the Times Higher Education Supplement's annual rankings of world universities according to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2019.

SCI's particular niche in these centres of research, both within and outside the University of Manchester, is that we combine insights from sociology, human geography and urban studies, business and management studies, environmental politics, social movement and innovation studies as a basis for research that illuminates the myriad ways in which consumption practices shape societal responses to questions of sustainable development. Our unique combination of expertise makes us a partner of choice for collaborators from a range of influential bodies including the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Henry Royce Institute, The European Environmental Agency, the UK Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Throughout its existence, SCI members have contributed to international academic and societal debates. This is evidenced through our active participation in research communities such as the Sustainability Transitions Research Network (STRN), the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI), and the Belmont Forum. Also, the vignettes you will find throughout this report are a testament to our influence and leadership in our fields. In making these contributions, the SCI is a well-recognised critical voice on the role of consumption as a key force in shaping the transition to a more just and sustainable society.

When the SCI was founded, significant social, cultural and policy changes were starting to take place in response to socio-environmental problems. But the pace of change has been slow. Today, rapid developments in environmental science have fed into an acute sense of urgency reflected in media coverage, about plastic and air pollution for example. This urgency is reflected in the vocabulary being used: climate emergency, environmental breakdown, mass extinction. There is a political struggle taking place over how to understand and act on these crises, and within this struggle, there is in many quarters a real suspicion about green consumerism. The concept of 'sustainability' as we have known it for decades is itself coming into question. One of the debates that guides our work is over whether we can consume our way sustainably out of this crisis or whether it is time for a more radical approach.

SCI has always taken a critical perspective on sustainability and sustainable consumption. But in the face of new ecological threats, new social and political conditions (such as the rise in right wing populism in many parts of the world), and new institutionalised responses to those threats and conditions, as expressed for example in the SDGs, it is time for a new research agenda. Social change is driven in large part by public opinion, (social) media, celebrity influencers, ordinary citizens and many other factors. This is why SCI now aims to refocus its research. Alongside our existing focus on the consumer, the supermarket, and business innovation, we need also to direct our attention to a wider set of sites and scales, such as cities, social movements, social enterprises, and thus on a more diverse range of people than have typically been included in sustainable consumption and production research (e.g., children, women, BAME groups and immigrants from the Global South). In the face of seemingly insoluble problems and dangerous inaction, critical attention to power structures and to unconventional, imaginative experimentation seems more important than ever.

This report documents our ambition to continue building on past contributions and to develop new questions and commitments in the years to come. The next section shows indicates how our understanding of the nature of social and environmental challenges is shifting to mean we need a new research agenda, and the following section details the framework we are developing to guide our research in response to this new understanding of our challenges. The report articulates our vision for future research and is an invitation to citizens, politicians, fellow researchers, policy makers, CEOs, and NGOs to join us in collaborations to help 're-imagine futures' and 'materialise sustainabilities'.

Vignette 2 - Sustainable consumption requires the transition of societal systems

In the Pathways project (2012-2016), the perspective of sustainability transitions was used in a crossnational setting to explore the possibilities for transitions to a low-carbon, sustainable Europe. The project combined the analysis of different scientific disciplines: integrated assessment modelling, socio-technical transition analysis, and initiative-based learning. By combining and coordinating information from these different disciplines for selected cases, the pathways project specifically sought to provide better policy advice for European, Member State and local policy-makers. Frank Geels, one of the leading scholars in this area, led the project from the SCI side, and Andy McMeekin and Mike Hodson were other SCI scholars involved. The project, which generated a wealth of resources that are still available (www.pathways-project.nl), was furthermore successful as the European Environmental Agency decided to use the transitions perspective as a main constituent for its work, as evidenced in the 2019 report www.eea.europa.eu/publications/sustainabilitytransitions-policy-and-practice.

Setting the stage for the future of consumption: planetary boundaries, unequal access and digitalisation

SCI's research agenda for the coming years recognises that three key global trends have become ever more evident in shaping both practices of consumption and the nature of the challenge in thinking about sustainability's relationship to consumption.

The first trend is that of increasing pressure to *live within the boundaries of our planet*. We have known for example about climate change for several decades. But what is new is the widespread recognition of the depth of social change necessary to address the change, the timeframes we have to pursue such change, and the disastrous consequences of failure. This is expressed most clearly in the 2°C and then 1.5°C thresholds identified in the most recent IPCC reports, and how they have shown that these thresholds mean we need to have in effect eliminated 'net' greenhouse gas emissions globally by around 2050, and much more quickly in rich, high-emitting countries like the UK. This 1.5°C target, and the 'net zero emissions' goal needed to reach it, are embedded in the Paris Agreement of 2015. An increasing group of businesses, national and local governments, and groups of citizens recognise that this entails transformative as opposed to incremental action, expressed by some as declarations of 'climate emergency'.

This renewed focus on planetary boundaries is not limited to climate change. We see this also: in relation to biodiversity loss and species extinction; in the current focus on plastics and the many ways in which they disrupt ecosystems; and in many of the specific SDGs. It is perhaps most sharply expressed overall in WWF's annual Living Planet Report, which aggregates all of these ways that societies are already routinely breaching these boundaries, exceeding the limits of ecosystems' abilities to absorb our various wastes.

Social science research is critical to understanding planetary boundaries. In part this is because it forces us to cast a critical eye at how these boundaries are framed within the natural sciences. But beyond this, addressing such boundaries raises fundamental questions of social change, and are thus generating renewed attention to radical initiatives to rethink and practice our economies. This is not only in how, for example, the awareness of plastics pollution is currently shaping initiatives to generate radical increases in the re-use of products and materials, but also new ways of socially organising production and consumption beyond markets.

A second trend is the increasingly *unequal access* that citizens and non-citizens have to sustainable goods and services and to a healthy and liveable environment. As evidenced by the UN Commissioner's report on poverty in the UK from 2019, large groups of individuals do not have the means to provide for basic

needs, let alone do so in a sustainable way. Across the globe, hundreds of millions live in extreme poverty, while the number of billionaires has almost doubled since the 2008 financial crisis. The hyper-consumption and luxury lifestyle of the wealthy are among the biggest drivers of unsustainability, therefore deserving as much or more critical attention than the concept of sustainable development in the majority world. The geography of these inequalities is also rapidly changing, considerably beyond the older image of a rich 'North' and a poor 'South', geopolitical changes that structure debates about sustainability in important ways. As it interacts with questions of planetary boundaries, unequal access also raises not only questions of minimum thresholds of consumption for a decent life, but also upper limits on consumption. But wealth and income are not the only factors relevant to understanding this trend; the distribution of leisure time and caring responsibilities, as well as access to environmental goods (like clean air and public spaces) are all shaped by the many intersecting lines of social difference including race/ethnicity, gender, age, ability, geographical location and citizenship status. These inequalities are also expressed over time, where existing generations' practices and systems of provision act to deny those of younger generations or those yet to come.

These trends continue to shape our society while at the same time the combination of *new digital technologies and pervasive globalisation* leads to radical new ways and scales of delivering services via platforms. The radical implications of these socio-technical changes have been widely expressed via notions of the internet of things, industry 4.0, and the fourth industrial revolution. While accompanied by promises of inclusiveness and sustainability, the actual implications for urban and rural infrastructures, and the communities that inhabit them, are poorly understood. Moreover, growing unease with the experienced consequences of these trends lead to exclusion becoming the centre of political debate.

Thus, our already fundamentally changing systems of provision will continue to be shaped by ecological and social pressures and the renewed sense of urgency they generate, that require us to develop a new research agenda and framework to organise our research and practice.

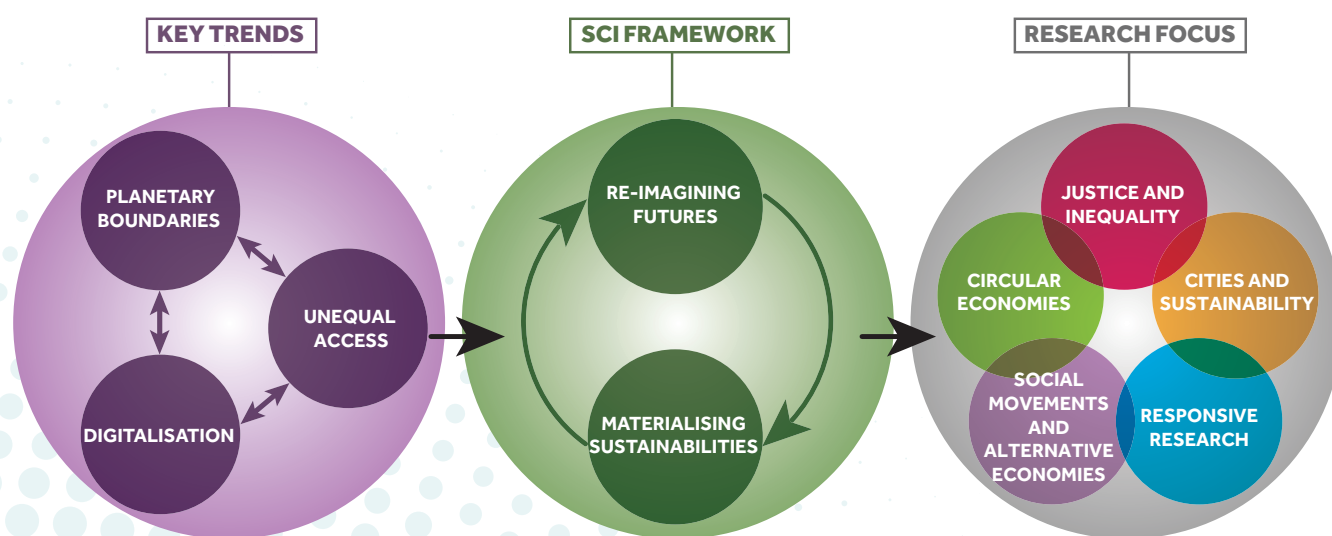
Re-imagining futures, materialising sustainabilities: a framework for SCI's research

SCI's research agenda for the coming years recognises that three key global trends have become ever more evident in shaping both practices of consumption and the nature of the challenge in thinking about sustainability's relationship to consumption.

SCI responds to these three trends by organising its research around a framework focused on 're-imagining futures' and 'materialising sustainabilities'. If we are to work out how to live within planetary boundaries, while addressing deep inequalities, and in a context of rapid socio-technical change driven by digitalisation, then we need:

- a heightened focus on the one hand on how we *re-imagine* the future, since it is increasingly clear that small, incremental changes will be inadequate to the challenges facing us; and
- more closely focused attention to how we make such radical changes *material* in more or less all social and economic practices.

The figure below summarises how we see this logic in broad terms.



Re-imagining futures is not solely the domain of academics and visionaries. Indeed various actors across society are already engaged in this re-imagining. These include regional political authorities like the GMCA, business firms partnering with NGOs, such as Tesco Plc. and WWF, as well as regional, national and international governments, but also social movements that seek radical socio-ecological change, from the Repair Café movement to Transition Towns. Consumption plays a key role in such re-imagined futures: the circular economy envisions consumers engaging in additional work to clean and separate packaging waste, and participate in communities for repair and re-use, while the envisioned future of a sustainable diet and food system sees them to modify practices of food foraging, preparing and eating (see vignette 3).

Vignette 3 - The work of imagining

A key component of our agenda revolves around a critical look at processes in which local communities, NGOs, governments, firms, but also the general public, envision the future of sustainable consumption. These imagined futures play a key role in shaping current actions, as they signal expectations on which others act. Part of a dedicated project led by Daniel Welch and involving Ulrike Ehrgartner looks at formalized imagined futures, such as the roadmaps developed by policymakers to provide a focal point for achieving goals such as a net-zero carbon economy. Another part uses Mass Observatory Data to uncover the imagined futures of the general public. We are keen to better understand the practices of imagining, but equally eager to see how emerging technologies such as the Internet of Things and robotics are envisioned as a part of, or a threat to, sustainable consumption. The project is embedded in a closely-knit network of international researchers, and is gaining traction through a research track at the European Sociological Association.

In our research we critically study and facilitate the process through which futures are re-imagined by business, government and social movements. Rather than taking labels such as 'circular economy', 'zero waste' and a 'carbon neutral' society as a given, the process of re-imagining is a key part in the process of change, because it delimits what sorts of concrete options (policies, technologies, etc.) are available, and perhaps as importantly, who is to be included and excluded in the decision-making processes.

Alongside these processes of re-imagining, there are many efforts, both grassroots and top down by governments or large companies, to actively shape systems of provision in ways that make them more sustainable. We term this dimension of our work *materialising sustainabilities*. By using the word materialising we indicate that we will continue our focus on the active role played by material objects as large as mobility infrastructures, and as small as micro-plastic particles, in the systems that provide in our needs. But we also mean it to focus on the patient work by businesses, social movements, governments, and citizens to pursue, or 'materialise' sustainability in their work.

We see the relationship between these two as interactive. On the one hand acts of re-imagining may generate initiatives that actors then seek to 'materialise' in specific ways. But just as important is how the practical experience of trying to generate circular economy processes in a specific sector, or mobilise people around re-using food waste in the city to simultaneously deal with food inequalities, may generate new ways of imagining sustainable futures.

This framework is premised on recognising that key categories for SCI research – notably sustainability and consumption – are called into question by the three trends sketched in the previous section. At one level, consumption, in the 'traditional' sense of individual consumers and their practices, remains a core of the research agenda, but at the same time, many of these trends and the transformative action in response to them blur the boundaries between consumption, provisioning, maintenance, production and distribution across society and the economy. This is the case for example for platform economies (Uber, Airbnb, and the like) or many circular economy processes, but also for novel systems of provision outside traditional market forms. This entails also the blurring of boundaries between public and private, and in particular a focus on citizen active engagement in sustainability initiatives. SCI research is already focused on these dynamics and the future agenda is designed to build on this strength.

Vignette 4 – Cultural politics of climate change

Decarbonising societies entails complex dynamics that centre in various ways on practices in daily life and their interactions with processes of economic development. A project led by Matthew Paterson focused on the political contestations over climate policy at city level, in Ottawa, Canada, over interventions aimed at reducing carbon emissions in the City. These interventions included redesign of streets to promote walking and cycling, planning changes to increase urban density, community initiatives for renewable energy development, and institutional initiatives focused on radical reductions in buildings energy use in the city's universities. The research focuses on the specific qualities of these political contestations over efforts to change daily practices.

Re-imagining futures, materialising sustainabilities:

a framework for SCI's research

Sustainability has tended to be couched in largely fixed, material terms: questions of material throughput, global flows, and so on, where there is a sense of a single outcome that could be understood as 'sustainable'. We put it in the plural - sustainabilities - in order to call the term into question. The focus on re-imagining futures recognises that pursuing sustainability is both an open-ended process, containing many uncertainties, much improvisation and experimentation, and also a highly contested process, with multiple imaginings competing with each other (see vignette 4). These contestations are driven in part by the implications of the question of unequal access: some imagined futures may be highly inegalitarian and dystopian. But they are also driven in part by the ambiguous implications of digitalisation, some aspects of which can enable radical shifts in consumption and work practices, others which may simply generate novel expansions in material consumption.

This new research agenda builds on the track record and SCI's earlier work centred in the sociology of consumption and in innovation studies. The framework enables a continued focus on multiple systems of provision (healthcare, energy, mobility, water, food, fashion), sites of provision (urban areas, households, workplaces, international value chains, circulation networks) and formal and informal relations of provision (families, communities, social networks, labour, lived experiences, power, governance, capability). The various elements in our research focus express our focus on various of these systems, sites, and relations of provision.

These are reflected in the figure above but the table below also seeks to show how we understand the elements in the framework (both the background trends and the key concepts we deploy) via the specific example of the systems of provision around food and how some of our existing and future research focuses on them. SCI scholars such as Jo Mylan, Steffen Hirth, Alan Warde, Malte Rödl, are all involved in research on various aspects of this. We envision developing similar exercises for the other systems of provision alluded to above.

Re-imagining futures	Lancet report on sustainable/healthy food; UK national food strategy; protein challenge 2040.
Materialising sustainabilities	Transition of vegetarianism/veganism from niche to mainstream; community food provisioning; food waste initiatives; novel food products (lab grown meat, e.g.); foraging; food preparation practices.
Planetary boundaries	Challenge of net zero emissions in agrifood system; competing demands for land use.
Unequal access	Cost of vegan/vegetarian/local food; uneven geography of food retail and restaurants; divisions of labour around food provisioning; questions of power and control in food chains.
Digitalisation	Novel food delivery systems (Deliveroo/Uber Eats; farmers markets and food coops).

Our driving question and how we seek to answer it

We can summarize how these trends, and the framework we develop, in one question that is at the heart of all our work:

Within a dynamic social context shaped by ecological crises, socio-economic inequalities and digital revolutions, how do actors (human and non-human) interact to re-imagine and materialise sustainable and just futures?

Our ambition is to continue to act as a well-recognised critical voice. This implies working in close collaboration with societal stakeholders, to ensure that we can contribute constructively to inspiring processes of re-imagining as well as realistic trajectories of materialising sustainabilities.

Members of the SCl respond to this question, using and developing our overall framework, principally through collaborative research on four principal themes. These are in practice highly intertwined, informing each other and interacting as hinted in the figure above. The four principal themes are:

Sustainability and social inequalities

The core research question in this theme is:

- How are interconnected and enduring social inequalities related to problems of unsustainability and what are possible strategies for addressing these concerns?

The focus is on developing novel approaches to understanding how intersecting axes of inequality (i.e., gender, race, culture, class/caste, age and dis/ability) shape provisioning in households and communities, both locally and globally, and how they enable or constrain efforts to be environmentally sustainable. It is also conversely on how sustainability strategies can themselves generate novel forms of inequality.

Research on this theme focuses on the following two sub-themes and related questions:

Household sustainability: We aim to contribute to the growing body of scholarship in that is concerned with how environmentally-significant practices (e.g. waste, food, energy, and water) are shaped by complex relationships, embedded in everyday life, and enacted and negotiated in households (see vignette 5).

Inclusive sustainabilities: We are engaged in research to consider how race/ethnicity and migration experiences also shape gendered, generational, environmental values and practices within households. An emphasis on the multiple intersections that influence how environmental sustainability agendas are perceived and negotiated at a household level will not only provide more inclusive and accurate picture of the ways environmentally-significant practices are negotiated but also of the inequalities that make sustainability an inherently political concept.

Research on this theme has a number of external stakeholders and collaborators, including the GMCA, Upping It, the Ahmed Iqbal Ulla Race Relations Resource Centre, Manchester Environmental Education Network (MEEN), Friends of the Earth, and the Women' Environmental Network.

Vignette 5 – Immigration, inequality, and household sustainability

(Un)sustainability is closely linked to social inequality, which manifests in diverse ways at the local and household levels. To develop situated insights into this issue, Sheryllyn MacGregor led a research project involving Tally Katz-Gerro and Catherine Walker which looked at how Somali immigrants living in Moss Side understand and engage with 'sustainability' in their everyday lives. This research fits within a broader interest in the ways that increased South-North migration and environmental degradation (accelerated by climate change) are intertwined and exert intensifying pressure on global cities. We sought to explore how non-Western cultural knowledge and experience intersect with inequalities (along the lines of gender, race, age, and class) to shape how people perceive and respond to local and national sustainability and carbon reduction agendas. This work required close engagement with the local Somali community, and the team took great care to feed insights back to the community, local organisations and Manchester City Council.

www.hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/sci/research/projects/household-sustainability/challenging-assumptionsenabling-inclusivity-report.pdf

Circular economy

There is currently a strong interest in business models and government policy initiatives to close the material loops associated with production and consumption practices. This interest resonates strongly with several of our key research areas, including practices of reuse and sustainable transition pathways of systems of provision. We acknowledge the potential contribution that the closing of material loops can have for sustainability - while taking a critical stance, arguing we should look at the plurality of circular economies rather than an abstract conception of circular economy. We address a number of key questions in our research:

- What are the key debates and trends within circular economy and how can our research engage and influence these? How can we create trends in CE research?
- What are the synergies between circular economy and other nascent forms of economy such as sharing economy – what implications do such synergies have on sustainability debates?
- What are the multiple scales and spaces in which circular economy is occurring? What does this tell us about the role CE plays in access to sustainable goods and services?
- What impact does CE have on everyday lives across the globe and what implications does this have for issues of sustainable resource use and also equal access to goods and services?

We explore these questions through investigations of ways to measure and determine circular economy processes and dynamics, but also by focusing on the lived experience of circular economies, and by thinking explicitly about what the past history of circular economies can tell us about its potential futures.

Current funded projects focus on how CE can contribute to eliminating plastics waste as part of a University-wide interdisciplinary project to address the plastics challenge, the role of CE in sustainable food systems (see also vignette 6), as well as our work in the Systems Research Programme at DEFRA.

Vignette 6 – The circular economy needs consumers/users

Several of our researchers have a longstanding interest in what is now called the circular economy. Circulation of goods and materials is actually a practice that has an age-old history; supported by the Alliance Manchester Business School we organized a research workshop where we collaborated with historians to discuss the commonalities and differences between medieval and current circulation. This work is currently being further developed.

(www.alliancembs.manchester.ac.uk/news/wastemanagement-research-to-feature-at-conference).

Complementary to much work that is being done on circulation from a business perspective, Helen Holmes led a project called Makers, make do and mend (www.makersmakedoandmend.org/resources). The project uncovered the mundane practices of repairing and sharing based on thrift as they exist in the present. It is part of our evidence base for the circular economy, which looks at circulation not as a future state of the economy, but instead as already existing sets of practices as diverse as repairing, sharing, scavenging, and handing over. A key question is how these practices can co-exist with commercial forms of circulation as they are currently being developed.

Cities and sustainability

A central theme in the pursuit of sustainability are the twin issues of how urban areas are responding to a range of environmental and social challenges, and how we construct frameworks for knowing what the sustainable city might look like. Cities researchers in SCI have developed an existing body of work and expertise that it will build on and extend to address the following research questions:

- What is happening to debates around urban sustainability and what forms of urban knowledge, and multi-stakeholder action, are required for us to research it?
- To what extent and in what ways do tangible attempts to reconfigure urban systems of provision and circulations of resources contribute to strategies of urban sustainability?
- How are strategies of digitalisation of urban provision reconfiguring existing modes of urban provision and with what implications for sustainability?
- Who is promoting such change, who benefits from it and what are the implications for everyday life and socio-political and economic justice?

We explore these questions around three specific themes: the role of 'urban knowledge' in sustainability initiatives and practices; processes of urban material transformation; and everyday urban sustainability. Specific ongoing projects focus on: local residents' perceptions of waste (mis)management in Moss Side; the emergence of 'platform economies' at urban scale (see vignette 7); health, infrastructures and everyday life in East Asian urban contexts; water-energy-food-waste nexus within the UK and China; using already existing sustainability experiments as a way of thinking through the social within spaces of urban and resource experimentation; and the cultural politics of household sustainability in Manchester.

Vignette 7 - A Platform for urban sustainability

Digitalisation is enabling a fundamental disruption in society as it allows the formation of platforms, which connects the work of a multitude of persons into a single point of service delivery. At SCI we see this as a key shaping force for consumption practices which is already materialising. A team led by Andy McMeekin and Mike Hodson has developed a global comparative database of initiatives, which forms the starting point for analysis and in depth case studies. Our key aim is to understand how platforms develop in the long run, and how they transform the shape and dynamics of cities throughout the world. This works combines the insights from transition studies and social practices to understand how this transformation plays out in terms of social and ecological sustainability.

Collective action, social movements and alternative economies

Work on this theme emerges from an interest in collective action around political, economic and ecological alternatives. It concerns how different modes of governance shape and frame what is possible and how social, political and technological innovation challenge the status quo. It begins from the observation that sustainability and consumption are intrinsically contentious, entailing struggles between different approaches to prosperity, justice and the good life. We organise our research around two key questions:

- How are problems, conflicts and challenges around sustainable production and consumption framed and addressed?
- What is the nature of the political struggles around transformation towards more sustainable production and consumption?

We have explored these questions in projects focused on: governance, politics and everyday life in the platform economy; the emergence, development and impacts of grassroots sustainability networks and alternative or communal modes of provision; challenges to mainstream forms of organising everyday consumption, in particular for example around food habits, systems and exchange; relationships of environmental policy and governance at different scales; youth movements over climate change; and the articulation of visions of the future economy, from individual hopes and fears to the demands of social movements.

Responsive research

Not all research by SCI members is captured by these four themes. We aim also to be able to respond to emerging issues, themes, in a timely fashion. Sometimes this is to respond to opportunities from research funding agencies. But we also seek to impact a range of actors in wider society, such as our existing partners and our ambition to build new partnerships, and seek thus to respond to their concerns and interest in sustainability and the transitions that entails. Often in our experience these are exactly in the realm of 're-imagining' – thinking about new ways to solve problems, new framings that might make us think differently about a problem – and in 'materialising' – working through the concrete ways to shift practices and systems towards sustainability.

Who we are, how we are organised, and how we aim to pursue this agenda

The SCl is an interdisciplinary, problem-driven research community that consists of a group of core members from the Alliance Manchester Business School, the School of Social Sciences, and the School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED), who are co-located in The University of Manchester's AMBS building.

The organisation of the Institute is designed to manage an overall strategy to achieve the above research agenda. It comprises a director and research director, as well as a management group, which oversees key aspects of the Institute's work, notably in managing the process of securing funding for the research within the Institute, extensive mentoring of early career researchers to enable their research and career development, maintaining an active research culture and common identity within the Institute, and building partnerships with other researchers and institutes within and outside the university. Co-location is key to our strategic objective to ***build research capacity through the development of*** future research leaders in the area of sustainable consumption and production, oriented towards excellence in academic research, methodological innovation, knowledge exchange and the generation of societal impact.

In addition to core members we have a group of ***affiliate members***, usually from other parts of the University, with whom we have close working relationships. Building on our Fellowship programme of 2018-2019, we now have affiliate members which strengthen our links with various other parts of the University, notably: the Tyndall Centre, SEED, The Centre for Sustainable Industrial Systems, the Manchester Urban Institute, and the Manchester Institute of Innovation Research. Affiliate members participate in our internal seminars and skill sessions, and help us shape our research agenda.

This closely-knit internal network is complemented with strategic links to outside institutes and research partners. Some of these are local and regionally focused, including the Manchester Climate Change Agency, the GMCA, and MEEN, for example. Others are national and international research and policy agencies, including the IPCC, the EEA, and DEFRA. And others are research carried out in partnership with other universities, such as Lund, Stockholm, Melbourne, Ryerson (Toronto) and Toulouse, as well as key research networks in the field of sustainable consumption, such as STRN, SCORAI, and the Belmont Forum mentioned earlier. We seek to extend and deepen these connections in our future

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