



Call for Papers for a Special Issue of the Journal of Consumer Policy on

System Perspectives on Sustainable Consumption Policies

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Research on sustainable consumption in general and on consumer policies in particular has rarely made use of systems perspectives to date. Sustainable consumption has mostly been discussed in terms of changes in individual awareness, behaviour and consumer choices, development of societal practices, implementation of corporate strategies and as market phenomenon. Although it is broadly accepted that individual consumer behaviour is embedded in multiple contexts, such as social groups and milieus, institutions, sociocultural norms, socio-technical and socio-spatial systems; complexity theory and systems thinking approaches are comparably rare and publications are scattered across communities and academic journals.

System perspectives could inspire the development of more effective SCP policies. In evaluating the effectiveness of sustainable consumption policies Tukker et al. (2008) identified a lack of systemic approaches in the development of SCP policies which leads to ineffective policy instruments, blind faith in technological solutions, misbalances and incoherence in the policy mixes, and fragmentation of existing policy strategies and approaches, as well as implementation. Since then several projects have applied systems thinking in the area of sustainable consumption.

This special issue aims to introduce a systems thinking view to the scientific debate on sustainable consumption policies. This new perspective will offer more effective ways of dealing with complex situations, provide tools to work with different world views and paradigms, give proper attention to properties of systems that emerge unexpectedly, and help identify leverage points for policy interventions derived from a dynamic and holistic approach. Therefore, we invite contributions that:

- ⇒ follow a sound understanding of systems thinking and sustainable consumption
- ⇒ address a specific consumption area such as food, housing, mobility in order to provide substantial insights and recommendations
- ⇒ present conceptual and/or empirical results that take key elements of systems thinking (such as feedback cycles, systems dynamics, system boundaries) into account
- ⇒ provide conclusions, e.g. for political agenda setting, design and implementation of policy instruments and policy mixes or governance mechanisms

We expect the majority of papers in this special issue to include empirical data, however, papers with a predominantly conceptual focus are also welcomed. In all papers consumer policy implications of findings need to be addressed explicitly. All submissions are subject to the Journal of Consumer Policy's blind-review process. The Journal of Consumer Policy does not offer individualized editorial support. This means that non-native speaker authors must send their manuscript for academic editing before submission, and that all authors must ensure that their manuscript is correct and formatted in JCP style (see Journal Website).

Introducing system perspectives into the scientific debate on sustainable consumption requires a sound understanding of the term "systems". Over the last decades, the scientific debate on cybernetics, systems dynamics and resilience has identified three key elements of systems thinking (see Reynolds & Holwell 2010):

1. **Interrelationships**, as a key concept of systems thinking, focus on the question of how things are connected, by what, to what and with what consequence. A major challenge of interrelatedness is the definition of system boundaries, as systems are often embedded in larger systems and tend to overlap with each other. Consequently, it is necessary to examine system relationships in a horizontal and vertical way.

⇒ Taking a systems perspective on sustainable consumption policies would allow looking inside, outside, alongside and between readily identified systems boundaries. In particular, systems approaches would consider dynamic aspects of interrelationships, non-linear aspects, and the sensitivity of interrelationships to their context. Stable and temporary systems, as well as physical, communicative or symbolic interactions would also be taken into account.

2. **Perspectives** acknowledge that there is no one single reality but a broad variety of equally valid perspectives different people can have on the same system. This will affect how they understand it. In order to deal with these issues, methods have been developed with a view to exploring the implications of different perspectives on the same situation (e.g. soft systems methodology).

⇒ Taking a systems perspective on sustainable consumption policies would allow contrasting different views on the same system and gaining new insights from these different perspectives. This would permit highlighting contradictions in order to stimulate much deeper understanding, generate better insights into the behaviour of systems and help understand the reasons for malfunctions and ambiguities.

3. **Boundaries** focus on the choices between what is perceived as part of a system and what is not, what is therefore deemed relevant and irrelevant. Recent systems thinking approaches try identify the most important boundaries and assess the consequences of boundary choices.

⇒ Taking a systems perspective on sustainable consumption policies allows for a critical review of boundary decisions, questioning perceived benefits and disadvantages, taking values and power into consideration and reflection on the explicit and implicit decisions inherent to systems thinking approaches themselves.

Schedule

- Call for papers issued: January 2015
- **Submission of papers: September 30th, 2015**
- Planned publication: September 2016 (No. 3)

Prospective contributors are invited to discuss their ideas informally with the special issue editors (contact: andre.martinuzzi@wu.ac.at).

Tukker, A.; Diaz-Lopez, F.; Van de Lindt, M; Mont, O., Lorek, S.; Spangenberg, J.; Giljum, S.; Bruckner, M.; & Oman, I. (2008). Sustainable Consumption Policies Effectiveness Evaluation (SCOPE2), Final Project Report, FP6 Contract no: 044256, Date of preparation: 7 October 2008

Reynolds, M. & Holwell, S. (Eds.) (2010). Systems approaches to managing change: A practical guide. Berlin: Springer

About the Journal

The interdisciplinary Journal of Consumer Policy (Springer Publ.) is a (double blind) peer reviewed journal publishing theoretical and empirical works that use a wide variety of methodological approaches that advance the studies of consumer behaviour, explore the interests of consumers and consequences of actions of consumers as well as consumers' policy issues. It has published four issues per year for more than three decades (Vol. 33). JCP encompasses a broad range of issues concerned with consumer affairs. It looks at the consumer's dependence on existing social and economic structures, helps to define the consumer's interest, and discusses the ways in which consumer welfare can be fostered – or restrained – through actions and policies of consumers, industry, organizations, government, educational institutions, and the mass media. It publishes theoretical and empirical research on consumer and producer conduct, emphasizing the implications for consumers and increasing communication between the parties in the marketplace.



Articles cover consumer issues in law, economics, and behavioural sciences. Current areas of topical interest include the impact of new information technologies, the economics of information, the consequences of regulation or deregulation of markets, problems related to an increasing internationalization of trade and marketing practices, consumers in less affluent societies, the efficacy of economic cooperation, consumers and the environment, problems with products and services provided by the public sector, the setting of priorities by consumer organizations and agencies, gender issues, product safety and product liability, and the interaction between consumption and associated forms of behaviour such as work and leisure.

The Journal of Consumer Policy has a substantial track record not only in publishing cutting-edge research, but also in providing a high-level platform in the area of sustainable consumption by publishing special issues in this area such as:

Issue 3, Sept 2014: Behavioural Economics, Environmental Policy and the Consumer

Issue 1, March 2012: From Knowledge to Action - New Paths towards Sustainable Consumption

Issue 1, March 2011: Special Issue: Putting Sustainable Consumption into Practice

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