



# SPREAD

Sustainable Lifestyles 2050

## MEMORANDUM

on directions for future social scientific research  
on sustainable lifestyles



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
European Research Area



SEVENTH FRAMEWORK  
PROGRAMME

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## INTRODUCTION

This Memorandum presents first findings of the SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 project. It is intended to provide the European Commission with input in the form of potential research topics regarding the preparation of future research programmes, particularly concerning the needs for future social scientific research on sustainable lifestyles.

### The SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 project

The EU SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 project<sup>1</sup> is a European social platform project running from January 2011 to December 2012. Different societal stakeholders from business, research policy and civil society will be invited to participate in the development of a vision for sustainable lifestyles in 2050. This process will result in a roadmap for strategic action for policy makers and will deliver innovative ideas for research, business and society on how to achieve sustainable lifestyles in European society. Another aim of the SPREAD project is the formulation of a research agenda outlining research needs in the field of sustainable lifestyles (with a focus on social sciences) based on outcomes of the social platform process.

### Objective and process of the Memorandum

The SPREAD project consortium has been asked by the European Commission to provide preliminary ideas for future social scientific research on sustainable lifestyles as input to the development of new research programmes by April 2011. By this time, the first stakeholder meetings are still one month away. Therefore, the consortium decided to collect ideas for future research topics from experts that are part of the SPREAD project consortium and from external experts through an electronic Delphi survey (see Annex 1 for details). The aim of this process is to broaden topics beyond the expertise represented in the consortium. Contributing experts represent a variety of social scientific fields and disciplines (see Annex 2 for the list of all contributors). All of them are involved in relevant research and are aware of state-of-the-art developments and publications in their field of expertise and beyond.

The preliminary ideas for future research topics presented below will be elaborated and refined in the course of the project together with stakeholders involved in the SPREAD social platform process. This Memorandum can be regarded as a brief 'foretaste' of the full Research Agenda that will result from the SPREAD project by the end of 2012 and which will also contain a detailed list of relevant resources and references.

### Creation of thematic clusters

The collected topics for future research have been clustered for presentation purposes according to the following ten themes:

- Definitions and evidence base
- Indicators and impacts
- Products, services and eco-labels
- Economics and business
- Policy and capacity
- Networks and partnerships
- Health, well-being and work-life balance
- Social, societal and behavioural change
- The potential of communities and social innovation
- Steps towards systemic change

The different themes have in common that they cut across scientific disciplines and call for multi- or interdisciplinary research when addressing sustainable lifestyles. Several topics could not be attributed to one theme exclusively which shows that the different themes are related. The topics collected often show sensitivity to contextual processes, e.g. technological innovation or demographic changes that shape and are shaped by changes towards more sustainable lifestyles. Additionally, many topics pay due attention to the impact of social, political, economic or technological changes towards more sustainable lifestyles on different socio-economic groups.

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<sup>1</sup> The full project title is *Social Platform Identifying Research and Policy Needs for Sustainable Lifestyles in Europe 2050*. It is funded under the European Commission's FP7 programme, Grant Agreement 263962. Project partners are UNEP/Wuppertal Institute Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP), Germany; Energy research Centre of the Netherlands (ECN), The Netherlands; Demos Helsinki (Demos), Finland; Politecnico di Milano (Polimi), Italy; EuroHealthNet; The International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics at Lund University (ULUND), Sweden; Regional Environmental Center for CEE countries (REC), Hungary; Ecoinstitut Barcelona (ECOI), Spain; The Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED), Belgium; Ashoka, France.

## LIST OF RELEVANT RESEARCH TOPICS ON SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

### Research on definitions and evidence base

- Consumers' willingness and capability/capacity to take up more sustainable and healthier lifestyles.
- Evidence that societal success factors (once focused on wealth creation) are being re-defined.
- The current promising practices and sign-posts to future systems for sustainable ways of living.
- Definition of common standards or guidelines of a 'sustainable diet'.
- New definitions of well-being, happiness and life satisfaction.
- New criteria of local and regional development, based on the re-definition of the relationship between agricultural and industrial activities and between rural and urban areas.
- Evidence that those people and communities that lead sustainable lifestyles indeed have smaller ecological footprints.
- Quantitative and qualitative assessment of the Transition Town movement (e.g. environmental impact; life satisfaction; collaboration with policy).
- Required or necessary standards of living in view of the 'sufficiency discussion'.
- More information on what sustainable levels of resource use are for different materials to usefully discuss resource efficient lifestyles.

### Research on indicators and impacts

- Impacts and effects of sustainable development actions undertaken in the areas of mobility, living, housing and consuming, including short-term and long-term impacts on health, well-being, equity and environment.
- Better welfare and sustainability indicators also for official use (building on the 'Beyond GDP' discussion and the history of successful and unsuccessful indicators, e.g. GDP, DJSI).
- Health impacts of sustainable lifestyles, e.g. reduction of pollution, greener environment, more ecological food.
- Creation of sustainability assessment tools with appropriate indicators for the food industry as a whole (supply chain wide assessment).
- More systematic research on sustainable lifestyles, including understanding of specific practices, change factors and impacts.

### Research on products, services and eco-labels

- Consumers' view on reliability and relevance of sustainable labelling schemes.
- Appropriate criteria, award provision and verification for eco-labels for sustainable services (e.g. learn from and extend the Nordic Swan scheme).
- How products, services and environments can affect/support changes in peoples' daily practices.
- Availability and demand for sustainable products in smaller retail outlets beyond the large supermarket chains, especially in Eastern Europe.
- Understand characteristics of products and services that are part of social traditions (e.g. Christmas) and their impacts on consumption patterns and lifestyles.

### Research on economics and business

- How the green economy will help to foster sustainable lifestyles.
- Find alternative ways of generating profit than linking it to sales of short-lived products, produced with decreasing periods of planned obsolescence.
- New economic models that are not based on continuous economic growth.
- How credit systems can be designed to support sustainable lifestyles.
- Connect demand and supply: how consumers can use their purchasing power to spur demand for sustainable products and how businesses adapt.

- How to include the use of natural resources and production of waste (including CO<sub>2</sub>) in national and European (economic) strategies.
- Economic benefits of healthier and more sustainable lifestyles, and especially how investments could be earned back over time.
- The impacts of alternative money systems, complementary currencies, micro-credit, microfinance etc. on consumption patterns, well-being, health and lifestyles.
- How cooperation rather than competition can be promoted between business partners in order to optimise resource efficiency in value chains.
- Differentiate home economy from corporate economy, identify determining variables in home economy and construct a new vocabulary.

### Research on policy and capacity

- National, regional and local level capacities to develop sustainable policies aimed at more sustainable lifestyles across the social gradient.
- More effective policy approaches targeting demand.
- Interdependencies between several policy instruments and other intervening factors and how this affects evaluation of success and failure of interventions.
- The potentially differentiated impacts of policies across the social gradient.
- The role Green Public Procurement can play in the EU.
- The possibilities of the ecotax reform in the EU.
- Establish a European database to effectively exchange and communicate policies, interventions, learning experiences, tools and mechanisms for advancing sustainable lifestyles in the EU.
- Challenges to implementing systems ensuring extended producer responsibilities.
- Develop and use Health Impact Assessment Tools to ensure that health impacts of policies aimed at more sustainable lifestyles are acknowledged and addressed.

### Research on networks and partnerships

- How to improve collaboration and partnerships between government, business and civil society in aiming for healthy and sustainable lifestyles.
- How to support the cooperation of civil society organisations with other relevant actors.
- Identify and understand new partnerships, collaborations and networks starting to emerge around the enabling of healthy and sustainable lifestyles.

### Research on health, well-being and work-life balance

- Challenges brought about by demographic changes (e.g. ageing populations) on future sustainable lifestyles including health, equity and well-being.
- Ensure that health, equity and well-being are included in policy planning and development, e.g. addressing the health benefits of more ecological measures in policy.
- How far and in what ways the distribution of paid and unpaid time, and degrees of people's control over their time, influence their capacity to live and consume more sustainably.
- The relation between work, consumption and other aspects of life: under which conditions people are most satisfied with their lives, social relations and capable of living sustainably.
- The relation of shorter working weeks and sustainable societies (e.g. less consumption, less ecological impact, less unemployment) and policy and legal implications.
- Health benefits of a greener environment at the workplace and the effects of light, plants, fresh air etc. on the work process.
- The concept of gross national happiness and consumption patterns, well-being, health and lifestyles.

## Research on social, societal and behavioural change

- How to make alternatives to the current consumerist lifestyle appealing and marketable to a much larger public.
- Social adaptation to global warming in industrialised countries.
- Bottle-necks for achieving more sustainable and healthier lifestyles across different socio-economic groups.
- Differences in behaviour changes towards more sustainable and healthier lifestyles in different socio-economic groups.
- The role of informal institutions in shaping consumer behaviour.
- Interrelations and challenges of megatrends (e.g. ageing society) and more sustainable and healthier lifestyles.
- How to define and motivate important gatekeepers of behavioural change.
- How a transition to low-carbon living is likely to be experienced by different income groups and what are the implications for sustainable social justice.
- How changes in government, business and consumption can co-develop to accomplish that sustainable consumption becomes the normal, default option for citizens.
- Explore the Transformation Model 'Living with Less' which maps the stages in the change process towards a moderate lifestyle.
- Understanding different values and needs across households in order to understand motivators and triggers to consumption and lifestyle choices.
- How systems of population segmentation can be improved to include data that captures individual needs, motivators, and triggers across European demographic categories.
- Dynamics of credit and household borrowing trends on sustainable lifestyle patterns: consumption and production practices, the movement of people, urban landscapes, infrastructures and social services.
- The changing multiple roles civil society fulfils in supporting a move towards more sustainable lifestyles and how these roles change across different socio-economic groups.

## Research on the potential of communities and social innovation

- The role and potential of social innovation as main driver of sustainable changes in everyday life (e.g. collaborative housing, new food networks, active welfare).
- The influence of peer pressure and group preferences in promoting more sustainable and healthier lifestyles.
- Involving communities of users in the co-production of solutions: multidisciplinary action-research, long-term immersions in contexts of use, rapid prototyping of promising solutions, participative experimentation, iterative co-evolution processes.
- How local context (e.g. networks, movements, business and social entrepreneurs) can facilitate reductions in energy use and more sustainable lifestyles.
- How to support civil society organisations to develop more effective strategies to foster behaviour change towards more sustainable and healthier lifestyles.
- The potential of 'Collaborative Consumption': traditional sharing, bartering, lending in more sectors than currently and the (potential) role of government and business.

## Research on steps towards systemic change

- The drivers and requirements to enable a better scale up/out of sustainable infrastructure in Europe.
- Identification of leverage points: strategic places in complex systems where small shifts in one thing can engender systemic changes.
- How to create the needed 'physical', 'social' and 'institutional' infrastructure towards sustainable lifestyles within industrialised societies.
- Barriers to diffusion of socio-technical experiments into wider society (e.g. economic, social-normative, cultural, infrastructural, communicative, technological).

- Address the issue of sustainable lifestyles within the co-evolution of social and technological change; make the ongoing social change not a barrier, but a driver for sustainable lifestyles in the short-, medium- and long-term perspective (e.g. role models, social pioneering and prototyping, open-source experiences).
- Potential of both incremental and radical innovations.
- Potential of 'distributed systems' (e.g. distributed power generation; water management; manufacturing).
- Frameworks for coordinated initiatives across systems (e.g. reducing meat consumption and changing dietary conventions).
- Systematic, coherent and effective sustainable consumption and production (SCP) strategies: set targets in SCP area, measure indicators, and develop practical implementation steps.
- How to enable educational institutions to include healthy and sustainable lifestyles as a cross-cutting topic into educational curriculum.
- Possibilities for the rise of new co-systems of provision.
- Bring together three fields of research: economics of steady state and material growth, socio-technical transitions to sustainability and lock-ins of unsustainable lifestyles.

## CONCLUSIONS

The above list of topics provides initial ideas for future social scientific research on sustainable lifestyles collected in the framework of the SPREAD project.

Specific observations from the thematic clusters can be drawn. The themes 'definitions and evidence base' and 'indicators and impacts', for example, call for research to arrive at a common and better understanding of what truly sustainable lifestyles should and could look like and how to measure progress or success in establishing them. Here the need to learn from practice and successful initiatives is clearly spelled out. Similarly, the theme 'products, services and eco-labels' addresses the need to develop guidelines or standards for sustainable products and services and the question of how this can be best communicated to consumers. One proposition is to learn from previous or existing labelling schemes and to develop them further. In the field of 'economics and business' experts identified the need for alternative approaches to 'doing business', economic models and business strategies. Amongst others, alternative financing systems are addressed. The theme 'policy and capacity' bundles research topics that are concerned with the development and evaluation of effective policy instruments and capacity development on local, national and international levels. 'Networks and partnerships' includes topics for future research concerning the need and potential of new partnerships across policy, business and civil society; thereby tying together the earlier themes. The theme 'health, well-being and work-life balance' lists topics that are related to people's physical and mental well-being. One central question is how a shift to more sustainable lifestyles entails or relates to healthier lifestyles. The cluster 'social, societal and behavioural change' lists topics that are concerned with how behavioural change on the individual or household level can be facilitated and maintained. These issues are taken a step further under the theme 'the potential of communities and social innovation' which includes topics that address how individual change can be embedded in and facilitated by groups of people or new networks of relevant actors. Finally, the cluster of topics addressing 'next steps towards systemic change' connects all previous themes. It offers directions for future research that address the necessity for systemic change, taking into account policy, business, technology and civil society alike. This last thematic cluster in particular shows that future research should learn from practice and aim at implementation, involve all relevant actors and address all necessary levels (e.g. in policy) for a better understanding and effective shift towards more sustainable lifestyles.

Overall, this Memorandum indicates the need for future research to take into account the co-dependencies or co-evolution of policy, technology, business and society in order to address the much needed systemic change to support sustainable lifestyles. One possible approach in research involves close collaboration of research and practice, e.g. in action research projects aiming at implementation. Furthermore, the collected topics indicate that research needs to pay attention to ongoing change, learn from successful initiatives and get a better understanding of how sustainable lifestyles can be diffused through society, across socio-economic groups. Finally, research needs to address different levels of policy making (e.g. local, national, EU) and different levels of context (e.g. local, national, EU) to understand and bring about the necessary changes to make sustainable lifestyles relevant, fun, maybe even effortless for people.

In the further course of the SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 project the above list of research topics will be elaborated and refined in order to arrive at a final Research Agenda by November 2012. In this process stakeholders from policy, business, research and civil society will be involved to include a broader range of perspectives. The SPREAD project aims to make a significant contribution to developing the knowledge base and ideas for practice initiatives for the 'spreading' of sustainable lifestyles.

## ANNEX

### Annex 1: Explanation of the E-delphi process

The Memorandum was developed by experts who are either part of the SPREAD project consortium or external to the project. External stakeholders were involved in order to arrive at relevant topics for future research that are not only based on knowledge, disciplines and research approaches represented in the consortium. The SPREAD project is a European social platform project and based on the idea of stakeholder involvement. This was an additional stimulus to open the process of identifying future research needs to external stakeholders. The process to arrive at a list of relevant research gaps followed two steps:

1. Initially, experts (both internal and external to the project) were asked to provide ideas for future research in the field of sustainable lifestyles through an online survey with the following question: “Where do you see the most important social-scientific research gaps related to sustainable lifestyles and societal challenges in Europe that should have priority in research programmes by the European Commission in the coming years?” Several project partners contacted relevant experts in their network to invite their input. The survey asked respondents to provide up to three ideas for future research topics in the field of sustainable lifestyles. All input was collected in the form of brief statements and was clustered according to the following themes:
  - Definitions and evidence base
  - The potential of communities and social innovation
  - Health, well-being and work-life balance
  - Policy and capacity
  - Economics and business
  - Networks and partnerships
  - Products, services and eco-labels
  - Indicators and impacts
  - Social, societal and behavioural change
  - Steps towards systemic change
2. In a second survey, project partners and external experts were asked to evaluate the relevance of each research topic listed and were invited to provide feedback or comments. All input received was used to develop the list of research gaps included in this Memorandum. This list follows the relevance ranking of experts who responded to the second survey and makes note of issues raised during this feedback round.

## Annex 2: Names of internal and external experts

### Partners involved in the SPREAD project:

Name	Affiliation
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### External experts providing input to the Memorandum:

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## PROJECT IDENTITY

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<b>Online community</b>	<a href="http://www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu/community">www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu/community</a>