

Sustainable ways of living are SPREADING across Europe

New initiatives and social innovation to inspire a shift to sustainable, high-quality lifestyles in the Europe of 2050

New report finds that a growing number of people across Europe are changing the ways in which they live, move, and consume in exchange for higher quality, less impact on the environment, and that saves money.

According to the report *Sustainable Lifestyles: Today's Facts & Tomorrow's Trends*, many initiatives, policies, businesses and social movements have accumulated in Europe in the last decade. Examples are abound: increase of solar water heaters (to 75% on Malta), car and bike-sharing initiatives across the EU, local food chains, urban farming, eco-villages and travel agencies offering *stay-cations*. Smart meters not only make energy conservation but also energy production at home easier. More and more people live in 'passive' energy efficient houses and a new trend is dynamic buildings that respond to changing weather and indoor conditions. Neighbourhoods emerge around the principles of sustainable living. Cities adopt urban planning policies to decrease the need for cars and transport. The emergence of an experience economy is demonstrated by the growing interest in gifts such as massage treatments, instead of goods. Consumption appears to be partially moving towards products of increased quality and endurance which are serviced instead of being discarded. Of course, apart from the solar water heaters on Malta, these examples are marginal rather than mainstream. Our current lifestyles are still largely unsustainable and based on overproduction and overconsumption. We eat more meat and dairy, live in larger homes with fewer people, travel more and increasing numbers of people are confronted with obesity and heart disease.

Saving the environment and saving money

While the future potential for sustainable lifestyles is huge, so are the challenges. Not in the least do these lie in the widely-held perception of well-being as intimately linked to a high level of material welfare. However, once a certain level of welfare is attained, more 'stuff' does not make people proportionally happier. Another perception that can be challenged is that a sustainable lifestyle is costly. Many initiatives towards sustainable lifestyles can bring multiple benefits: not only energy and/or resource saving, but also improved social relationships, enhanced comfort and safety, saving on parking space and costs and so on. They exemplify and point towards changes in lifestyles which are not just about 'saving the environment': people are saving money, they are healthier, happier, more socially engaged and using new technologies to make their lives more efficient.

The report *Sustainable Lifestyles: Today's Facts & Tomorrow's Trends* presents a synthesis of research, leading policy and practice, and stakeholder views on potential pathways toward a further spreading of sustainable lifestyles. Relevant questions addressed include:

- What makes a lifestyle sustainable?
- Why do sustainable ways of consuming, living and moving appear to remain marginal?
- How to make sustainable lifestyles mainstream?
- What is happening now and how can we encourage positive trends to ensure a better future usage of our scarce natural resource base (including energy)?

Making it easier to change our behaviours

In order to mainstream, upscale, multiply current examples of sustainable lifestyles, two things are crucial. First, (we) individuals need to become more aware of the social, economic and environmental implications of all choices and behaviours, as a first step towards actually changing our behaviours. There is no 'one size fits all' solution as to how to motivate people

to behave and live more sustainably. Successful sustainability initiatives are those that try to understand how to motivate and enable behavioural change among different groups of people.

Second, the world in which we live should facilitate sustainable lifestyles as the effortless norm, because currently, too often, the sustainable alternative is the most difficult one to perform. It is important to make sustainable lifestyles easy, convenient, accessible and enjoyable. This requires the development of appropriate infrastructure (e.g. to encourage walking and cycling) and context-specific solutions (e.g. communal rental bikes in Paris, Barcelona, London).

About the SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 European Social Platform Project

SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 is a European social platform project running from January 2011 to December 2012. Different societal stakeholders – from business, research, policy and civil society – are participating in the development of a vision for sustainable ways of living in 2050. This process will result in a roadmap for strategic action for policy makers and will deliver innovative ideas for business, research and society, regarding the enabling of sustainable lifestyles in European society. The SPREAD project will formulate a research agenda outlining research needs in the field of sustainable lifestyles based on outcomes of the social platform process. The project is led by UNEP/Wuppertal Institute Collaborating Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP, Germany), the coordinating partner. The project consortium partners are Demos Helsinki (Finland), the Energy research Centre of the Netherlands (ECN, The Netherlands), Politecnico di Milano (Polimi, Italy), EuroHealthNet, the International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics at Lund University (ULUND, Sweden), the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC, Hungary), Ecoinstitut Barcelona (ECOI, Spain), the Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED, Belgium) and Ashoka France (France). The project is funded by the 7th Research Framework Programme of the European Union (Call SSH-2010-2.1-4). Up to date information about the project is available on its website. Please visit www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu Join the SPREAD online community of experts and practitioners on the topic of sustainable lifestyles at <http://spread2050.ning.com/>.

About ECN

The Energy research Centre of the Netherlands (ECN) develops knowledge and technology to facilitate the transition to a more sustainable, secure and affordable energy system, addressing energy efficiency, the introduction of new and renewable energy technologies and the clean application of fossil fuels. Within the unit ECN Policy studies, a team of social scientists addresses the societal aspects of energy-innovation (see <http://www.ecn.nl/units/ps/themes/social-aspects-of-energy-innovations/>) for instance issues around changes towards more sustainable lifestyles and behaviours.

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