

First Trans-Atlantic SCORAI Workshop
May 1, 2012
Bregenz, Austria

Call for Research and Strategy Papers

Sustainable Consumption During Times of Crisis

The **Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI)** is convening a one-day workshop in Bregenz, Austria on May 1, 2012. The event will take place just prior to the 2012 conference of the European Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption and Production (ERSCP). Participants are invited to submit research and strategy papers that contribute to the following theme and focus areas.

Theme

(The problem) Research over the past four decades has demonstrated the limits of economic growth and the social and environmental problems associated with contemporary consumption-oriented lifestyles. Efforts to reform unsustainable patterns through development of cleaner production technologies and facilitation of different household decision-making processes have not lead to significant reductions in aggregate material and energy throughputs. At the same time, public policies, commercial inducements, and global media images continue to vigorously promote resource-intensive consumption practices. Meaningful transitions toward sustainable consumption require confronting existing consumerist culture and consumer models and formulating long-term visions based on systemic transformation.

(The challenges and opportunities presented by crisis) Recurrent financial and ecological crises have triggered extraordinary responses from national and transnational governments, multilateral organizations, and central banks. However, it is questionable if and how much these events have instigated new public awareness about the systemic interconnections among growing resource scarcities, widening income disparities, increasing unemployment, pervasive institutional failure, and others. The current wave of instability prompts numerous questions about prevalent consumption patterns in affluent countries and holds challenges and opportunities for scholars and practitioners seeking to envisage more sustainable pathways.

Across much of Europe, austerity policies are prompting reductions in household consumption by, for example, cutting social welfare payments and increasing taxes. While this material downsizing has potential to lower certain sources of ecological stress, it is also emblematic of widening inequality, declining governmental capacity, and increasing political instability. In some especially hard-pressed countries we are already seeing adaptive responses such as the rediscovery of bartering and localized trading as ways to meet daily needs. Though public discontent is spreading, uncertainty remains about whether current forms of political expression will be sufficient to achieve systemic changes consistent with more sustainable consumption, and whether links will be made between activist movements and sustainable development communities. A striking prototype could be Japan, where economic growth has stagnated for more than twenty years and the recent tsunami-induced disasters have compounded the country's despondent economic mood. Indeed, one result may very well be a repackaging and relaunching of the growth paradigm.

(The goal and main theme of the workshop) The ongoing financial crisis—and the flaws that it exposes in the current system of economic organization—signals a need to go beyond customary approaches for conceptualizing sustainable consumption and to envision how we might configure entirely new systems of consumption. This workshop will bring together an international group of researchers and practitioners for focused consideration of these challenges and opportunities.

Focus Areas

- What needs to change? Macro-level perspective: institutions, rules, regulations, norms, values.
- Who can lead change? The usual set of characters (public, private, civil society engagement) or other entities? What type of collective action?
- What is already changing? What are the alternatives? Micro-level perspective: social and solidarity-based economies, local exchange systems, others.
- What is the long-term vision? Is there one? What does a sustainable consumption system look like?

Format

This one-day workshop will engage 30-40 participants from academia, policy making, business, and civil society to discuss approximately one dozen research and strategy papers that will be circulated to all participants in advance. In keeping with prior SCORAI workshops, each presenter will briefly recap the key points of his or her paper at the workshop. A discussant will be assigned to each contribution and s/he will elaborate a substantive critique. This arrangement will allow us to devote significant time to an in-depth group discussion of each paper. The workshop aims to stimulate debate around the changing circumstances for sustainable consumption with an emphasis on macroeconomic and political economic perspectives. The workshop will conclude with a discussion about the emergent SCORAI network in Europe.

Timeline

January 16	Submission of abstracts/expressions of interest (send to scoraieurope@gmail.com)
January 30	Notification of accepted abstracts
April 2	Submission of final papers
April 16	Distribution of papers and final program
May 1	Trans-Atlantic SCORAI workshop in Bregenz
May 2-4	15th European Round Table on Sustainable Consumption and Production (ERSCP)

We look forward to your participation in this timely and important event.

On behalf of the organizing team,

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