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Urban policies for sustainable living and consumption

Cities are increasingly understood as key locations for tackling questions related to sustainable production and consumption. Urban and transport planning are often highlighted as having the greatest potential impact on to successfully shape sustainable lifestyles and behaviour. How to plan for, not only sustainable urban areas but also sustainable lifestyles is a challenging issue which requires an integrated perspective that considers both the production and consumption of the built environment as well as innovative approaches for citizen engagement.

THIS POLICY BRIEF highlights the possibilities when linking housing and living with mobility and transport, and the challenges of connecting city-wide strategies and local innovative projects. It primarily targets urban policymakers in the European Union concerned with the ambition of exploiting the potential of lifestyle and consumption in relation to sustainable urban development. The results and policy considerations are derived from a critical review of urban sustainable policies and assessment in eight different cities in Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden, including Vienna and Stockholm. The review was conducted within the framework of the CASUAL project.

Box 1. Sustainable production and consumption (SPC) and lifestyles

Ever since the 1992 Rio Summit production and consumption (SPC) is an important concept in the policy debate around sustainability as it highlights the need to it addresses the unsustainable consumption practices and behaviour nature of modern industrialized societies. With the design of the Marrakech Process at Johannesburg in 2002, a global process to support the elaboration of a 10-Year Framework of Programs on sustainable consumption and production, policy-makers internationally showed their enduring commitment towards the issues related to sustainable production and consumption (SPC).

Lifestyles have been given a key role for achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns. In 2005 a Task Force on Sustainable Lifestyles, led by the Swedish Ministry of Environment, was set up as part of the Marrakech Process, which aims to facilitate the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation that came out of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. At EU level, SPC has been added as a further "priority challenge" to the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, alongside issues climate change and clean energy; and sustainable transport.

Policy considerations for better addressing sustainable urban lifestyles and consumption

■ Visualising the effects of changed behaviour on a human scale

Strategic policies can do a lot to rhetorically relate infrastructure systems and their effects to the human scale. The use of pictographic material and engaging heuristics can help to achieve this. Effective information campaigns and innovative instruments to visualize are potent instruments to confront individuals with the positive effects of changed behaviour. The use of new technologies such as apps and social media can be powerful tools to making effects of change visible. (see Box 2)

■ Integrating key actors as important drivers of city wide strategies

In order to make piloted approaches and bottom up initiatives influence city wide practices they have to be supported by a key set of partners and individuals capable of assembling the right partners at the city wide level. Starting with pilot project that was scientifically evaluated, and the extending a scheme to the general city level is a recommendable procedure to demonstrate exemplary behaviour to others.

■ Targeting specific lifestyles without stigmatizing them

New participatory approaches can be used to target certain segments of populations and to improve the design of policy measures. If they increase the probability of impact on sustainability, they have to be combined with existing production side measures and technologies to increase chances of impact on the city wide level. In terms of the population they target they have to include both pioneers of sustainable consumption and participants using conventional approaches, allowing the latter to learn from others. Sustainable consumption policy needs to allow for learning, instead of segregating between different lifestyle groups. (see Box 3)

Box 2. Visualizing effects of behaviour: Stockholm Climate Account

The Climate Account helps you to calculate your greenhouse gas emissions in four main categories through set of questions. Each set of questions is split into several subcategories, for example "car", and you must answer all the questions in that subcategory before the emissions can be calculated. You can answer the questions in whichever order you like. The results page is always available to see the result of your answers so far.

The Climate Account has been developed by IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute (www.ivl.se) in a joint project with The Swedish EPA, Stiftelsen Futura, E.ON, Skanska, City of Stockholm, City of Göteborg, Umeå Municipality, the Church of Sweden, The Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation. The tool is a development on IVL's carbon footprint calculator and on the "Klimatlöftet" tool.

Climate account can be used to evaluate personal emissions in all sectors related to urban consumption.

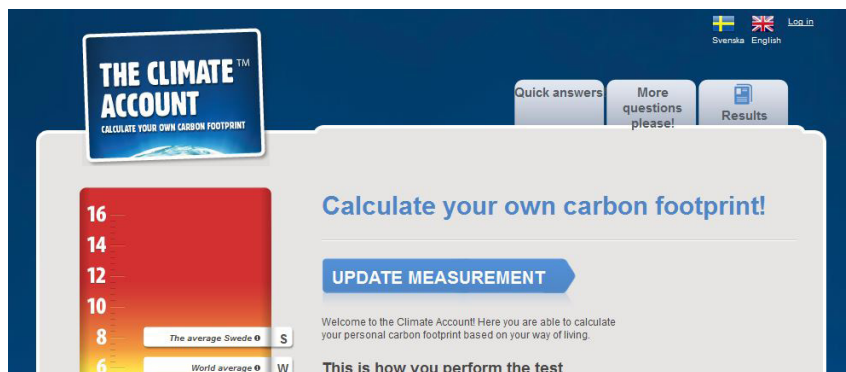


Image: Screen print from www.klimatkontot.se

Production and consumption of the urban environment

Urban policies aiming at transforming unsustainable behaviour in housing and mobility have often been guided by the idea that it suffices to consume more efficiently instead of less or differently. As an effect of eco-efficiency, sustainable consumption is thought of nothing but greater sustainability in the way we produce the built environment rather than as a change of the values that sustain behaviour. But in terms of eco-efficiency, policies have had difficulties to avoid the so-called "rebound effects", where the consumption of ever more resources in the wake of technological developments outpaces their potentially positive effects.

An integrated perspective on changing unsustainable behaviour through addressing lifestyle choices should give equal weight to infrastructures promoting choice and methods for understanding and targeting policy measures towards particular culturally induced patterns of consumption.

In this context, the design of sustainable production and consumption (SPC) policy (see box 1) crucially depends on the interaction of classic and new policy approaches. New instruments and partnerships have especially aimed at targeting change of values through engaging citizens and interests groups that have traditionally been excluded in the process of policy making.

Connecting city-wide strategies and local innovative projects

Change of behaviour is mostly thought through in terms of improving the sustainable city through eco-efficiency of technological infrastructures at the strategic policy levels. Although there are signs of awareness amongst policy makers about the need to understand the context in which unsustainable behaviour arises, urban infrastructures and their cultural context are still largely segregated in sustainable urban policy documents on the city wide level. Some strategies are more willing to relate urban infrastructures to everyday life through engaging language and rhetoric, and the provision of a greater degree of choice and flexibility in relation to different lifestyles. While some country-specific differences can be detected, differences seem to be more important on the level of policy documents than of planning cultures.

Governance of sustainable consumption and production is marked by a gap between willingness and institutional capacities to integrate citizens and new perspectives. While the integration of diverse social and cultural perspectives in the making of strategic policy making processes is an ambition of policy documents across the countries examined, they have not in all cities examined led to new institutionalized forms of strategic partnerships on the city wide level. For the newest comprehensive plan of Vienna (STEP 2025) which was recently adopted by the municipal council, strong efforts were for instance undertaken in order to involve stakeholders and integrate the strategies of all municipal departments concerned. The attempts of stronger policy integration meet strong opposition within the political game of assigning and withdrawing – or sharing – competencies.

Innovative approaches and projects on the local level are difficult to translate in overarching policy practice, but certain city specific conditions for success could be identified. These projects target change of consumption patterns through the analysis of lifestyle choices. In Stockholm and Vienna, municipal authorities have gone beyond the business-as-usual approach in certain instances, particularly when it comes to new development projects. However, these approaches are mostly limited to the project level and there exist difficulties in making experiences integral to

higher order strategic documents or other projects. Similar in Vienna and Stockholm, the practices tested in new projects are seldom shared with higher-order policy contexts and other projects. Based on the combined findings of our analysis of city-wide strategies and bundles of measures and projects, the following policy options for measures in the two cities examined have nevertheless supported the spread of knowledge from project to strategic policy making (in housing and living, and mobility and transport).

Box 3. WHA Bike City: an example of a local targeted lifestyle project

Bike City is a bicycle friendly residential project in Vienna that has a reduced part of compulsory car parking spaces per flat constructed. The project was developed by the municipal housing developer GESIBA and had political and economic support of the City of Vienna. An idea competition for the area started in 2003. The selected project "Bike City" was publicly presented by the City Of Vienna in 2005. The housing project was opened in 2008, when the first residents moved in.

The objective of project was to build housing that specifically targets the needs of cyclists, with the idea of establishing a link between the housing type and the propensity of individuals living there to choose the bicycle as favoured means of transportation. The intention was not to exclude tenants with other modal preferences, especially for car drivers, but to make comfortable residential living less dependent on the car by allowing modal change without major disadvantage in comfort. The project can be qualified as a bundle of infrastructural and regulatory tools and measures, that took effect both in the design of the residential project and transport infrastructure in its immediate proximity.

The project inserts itself into a set of pilot initiatives in the housing sector fostered by the city of Vienna. The construction of "Bike-City" followed the successful realization of Vienna's "Car Free Housing Project" in 2001. Both projects were initiated by Christoph Chorherr, a city councillor who has been a big proponent of urban mobility without automobiles. As a successful example of combining housing and sustainable mobility it has been replicated ever since with several other initiatives.

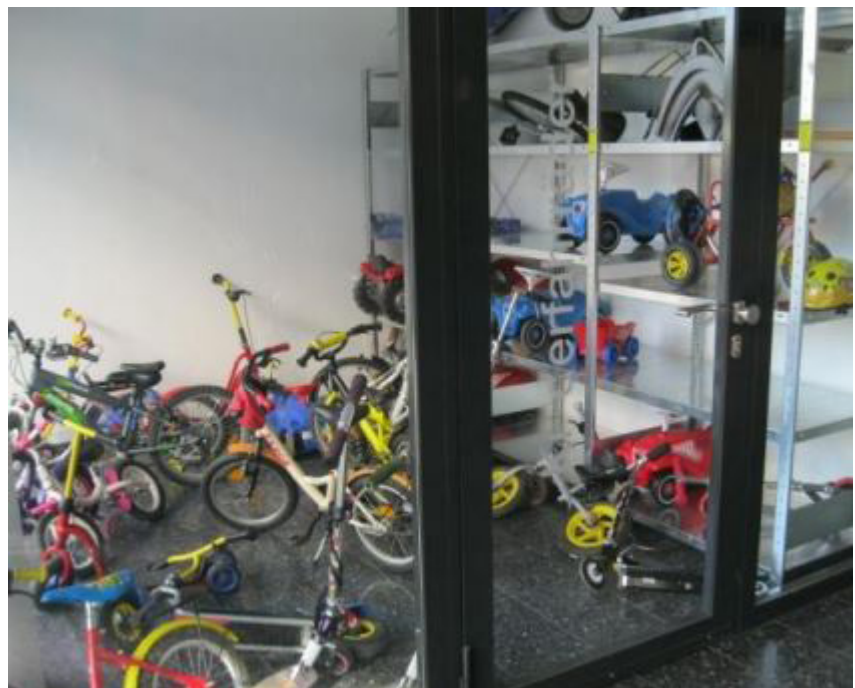


Image: From the presentation: "ÖBIKE CITY: FAHRRADSTELLPLÄTZE IN WOHNBAUTEN", by Michael Szeiler

Linking housing and living with mobility and transport

Differences are notable between housing and living, and mobility and transport across the board of strategies examined. While behaviour change is in most strategies dominated by an infrastructural perspective, it has been shown that strategies to foster integrated production and consumption are more elaborated in the area of transport and mobility, than in housing and living. This policy sector across the board of strategies examined shows greater integration of measures into bundles of production- and consumption-side interventions, with the question of information and awareness playing a predominant role in fostering sustainable mobility. We have seen the integration of different policy areas in principles of mobility & transport, where housing & living as remained more segregated. Similar conclusions can be drawn in terms of the targeted nature of policies towards certain lifestyle types and choices. Generally, lifestyle choices and types are not always explicitly addressed within the particular bundles of measures used in transport and mobility and housing and living in the comprehensive policy plans of Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands examined.

Sustainable urban development policies in the cities examined show a contrasting role for citizens in the making of policies. In some strategies citizens are co-decision makers, while in others they are simply consulted. If there is a standard set of instruments used to organize participation processes, certain strategies use innovative tools making use of a network and horizontal understanding of policy process. The general political aim to integrate citizens stronger into urban development decisions is challenged by the ability and determination of the local actors to approach the local population and to share decision making competences. Analyses of the Local Agenda 21 and the Local Area Management policy

(Grätzl-management) in Vienna indicate that the general ascent of relational concepts of sustainability and local consumer perspectives coexist with traditional conceptions of “passive” citizenship and top-down ecological modernization. Sustainable urban development policy, while on the outset procedurally promoting the greater collaboration of different administrative bodies, is embedded in an environment where policy actors are traditionally segregated. Similar conclusions can be made for the city of Stockholm, even if on the outset policy discourse promotes the wider integration of citizen views and perspectives in planning.

Endnotes

1. Spaargaren, Gert (2003): Sustainable Consumption: A Theoretical and Environmental Policy Perspective, *Society and Natural Resources*, 16:687–701, 2003
2. UNCED (1992): Agenda 21, the United Nations Programme of Actions from Rio. UN Department of Public Information: New York.
3. EEB European Environmental Bureau (2009) Blueprint for European production and consumption- Finding the path of transition to a sustainable society, http://www.eeb.org/publication/2009/0905_SCPBlueprint_FINAL.pdf

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Nordregio conducts strategic research in the fields of planning and regional policy. We are active in research and dissemination and provide policy relevant knowledge, particularly with a Nordic and European comparative perspective.

Resources

CASUAL: Co-creating Attractive and Sustainable Urban Areas and Lifestyles: exploring new forms of inclusive urban governance is a research project within Joint Programme Initiative (JPI) Urban Europe (www.jpi-urbaneurope.eu/casual/).

The CASUAL project explores how to promote sustainable living and consumption patterns by engaging people, as citizens and consumers, along with other urban development actors in the governance of urban areas.

To that end the project focuses on the intersections between the built environment and technical elements where individual preferences influence sustainability (e.g. choice of transport modes and related mobility patterns, housing preferences and lifestyles).

Nordregio is lead partner of the project which includes the Austrian Institute for Spatial Planning (OIR) and TUDelft – Delft University of Technology.