

Connecting Communities of Practice on Sustainable Production and Consumption: Prospects for Regional Cooperation

Jeffrey Barber (Integrative Strategies Forum) and
Jack Luskin (University of Massachusetts Lowell)

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- Symposium on Sustainable Consumption, Oslo, 1994

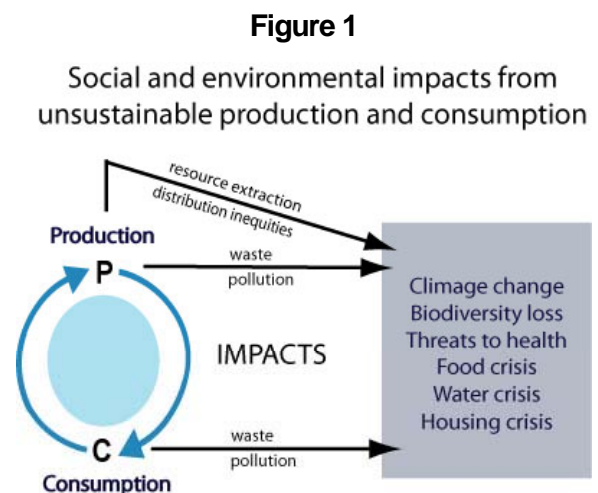
Abstract

A wide spectrum of different understandings, policies and strategies are involved in the broad but decentralized social movement to change production and consumption patterns. Practices range from those at the individual and household level, working to transform habits or entire lifestyles and livelihoods, to those aimed at transforming institutions, industries, and cultural norms. These practices and the individuals and organizations engaged in them are often linked through professional or social networks and communities, each with their own methods, jargon, publications, personal relationships, history and perspectives. Efforts to build a coherent political movement promoting communication, cooperation and coordination among these communities of practice requires an appreciation and understanding of their differences as well as their common aims and interests. This paper explores efforts to understand and engage these communities of practice, as well as efforts to link them together in a broader social and political movement to change North America's unsustainable consumption and production patterns.

A movement to create sustainable economies

The movement to achieve sustainable production and consumption (SPAC),¹ as it has evolved over the years under various names and banners,² involves a range of players— governments, businesses, researchers, educators, public interest organizations and citizens (as both consumers, producers, and political actors). It crosses all economic sectors and operates from the level of individual lifestyles and livelihoods to national and international policymaking.

This movement takes shape through a dynamic range of practices addressing the



major ecological and social crises of the planet -- climate change and energy, species extinction, economic insecurity, the food and water crises -- by focusing on the root unsustainable production (P) and consumption (C) patterns driving those problems (Figure 1). These practices, targeting specific leverage points in the production/consumption system, are characterized by people, organizations, and networks operating in communities of practice, each with their own history, identity, discourse and web of relationships.

Together these communities of practice form a broad movement working to create sustainable economies.

The practice of global politics

One of the most visible communities of practice promoting sustainable production and consumption involves those groups and individuals, including governments, industry groups, trade unions, researchers, environmental and consumer activists, and others engaged in the global policy dialogue on this topic. Often traveling from country to country to attend and attempt to influence the direction of the various meetings of experts and ministers, this practice combines advocacy, education, research and especially diplomacy.³ The strategic focus of these activities is on the values defining and shaping governmental policies and decisions, not simply on environmental protection but on investment and trade, technology, development assistance, and policies for each of the economic sectors.

For decades, scientists, environmentalists, heads of state and concerned observers identified the underlying roots of many of the world's major crises in unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.⁴ These discussions go back to the early 1970s, especially after the first "energy crisis," when E.F. Schumacher warned that our industrial society's addiction to fossil fuels and nonrenewable resources is putting us on a collision course. If we are to change course we need to "thoroughly understand the problem and begin to see the possibility of evolving a new life-style, with new methods of production and new patterns of consumption."⁵

Earth Summit

However, it was two decades later, at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development ("Earth Summit"), when governments formally agreed that the industrialized countries would "take the lead" in moving towards the "reorientation of existing production and consumption patterns,"⁶ committing themselves to "new concepts of wealth and prosperity,"⁷ to promoting efficiency in production processes and reducing wasteful consumption, and developing "a domestic policy framework that will encourage a shift to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption."⁸ This was apparently the first time that changing consumption patterns was formally placed on the agenda for multilateral negotiations.⁹

While government delegates, industry representatives, and credentialed NGOs busily negotiated the consumption chapter of Agenda 21, miles away 17,000 NGO participants

met at the Global Forum¹⁰ to hammer out a series of "NGO alternative treaties," including the alternative "Treaty on Consumption and Lifestyle."¹¹ Identifying actions putting into practice six principles (revalue, restructure, redistribute, reduce, reuse, recycle), the Treaty called for "collaboration between grassroots, national and international social movements and NGOs" for its implementation.

Follow-up

The Earth Summit inspired a whole new chapter in sustainability discourse and practice. At the first meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in 1993, the Norwegian environment minister, Thorbjørn Berntsen proposed for the next CSD session to focus on "the interrelationship between economy and environment and production and consumption patterns."¹² Supporting this proposal, the Norwegian Ministry of Environment organized an experts meeting in 1994, the Soria Moria Symposium,¹³ which produced a series of recommendations presented later that year at the next meeting of the CSD. The report pointed out that "the industrialized countries should assume a leading role, but all Governments as well as non-governmental organizations must cooperate in the process of change," also noting that "encouraging processes are taking place, but these are too few and fall far short of the magnitude of effort needed."¹⁴ The recommendations stressed the need for research, for "a detailed analysis of the relationship between production and consumption patterns and their environmental, economic and social impacts."

The Symposium called on governments to establish an "international work programme on sustainable production and consumption,"¹⁵ the elements of which were prepared at the February 1995 Oslo Ministerial Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption, drawing on governments, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, business, trade unions and the academic community, with recommendations covering each group. Their report was presented in April to the third session of the CSD,¹⁶ which adopted a multi-year program with five objectives:

- Identify the policy implications of projected trends in consumption and production patterns.
- Assess the impacts on developing countries of changes in consumption and production patterns in developed countries.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of policy instruments.
- Elicit time-bound voluntary commitments from countries to make measurable progress.
- Revise the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection.

At its 7th session, the Commission reported on the results of the work program. While noting the trend of steadily growing consumption of energy and natural resources, the report tended to stress positive examples of improvement, how "efforts to change consumption and production patterns have gained considerable momentum in recent years, and have involved increasing numbers of concerned stakeholders."¹⁷

Although the work program was "intended for implementation by all concerned actors, including Governments and local authorities, the United Nations and other international organizations, business and industry, and organizations of civil society," the inclusion of views from civil society groups were minimal with few exceptions. In this community of practice, the UN agencies, governments and industry groups tend to maintain relatively tight control over the microphone and the record — particularly in the evaluation of UN and intergovernmental progress.

The report examined a number of policy instruments and strategies,¹⁸ referring to the database of instruments established by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). However, this was not an in-depth analysis of policy effectiveness, but a brief summary of various developments, concluding, "further study is needed." The report on country commitments to measurable progress was notably weak, particularly any analysis of obstacles to progress, instead reflecting more the political constraints on UN research staff.

WSSD

In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development reviewed progress in the decade following the Earth Summit agreements. Instead of improving, the review pointed out, the social and ecological trends had worsened. Overall increases in production and consumption had outpaced improvements in efficiency and awareness. Whatever the effectiveness of various individual policies and practices, it was not enough.

Another factor noted was lack of political will. At that time no one country had yet developed much less implemented the domestic policy framework they agreed was a "basis for action." Examining this "gap in implementation," the Secretary General's review highlighted the "fragmentation" and lack of "policy coherence" in the international community's approach to sustainable development, inadequately integrating the social, environmental and economic dimensions in decision making at the national and international level.¹⁹

In the WSSD's answer to this implementation gap, the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* called for a "10 year framework of programs to support national and regional initiatives to accelerate the shift to sustainable consumption and production." Governments agreed that this shift is one of the "overarching objectives of sustainable development."²⁰ NGOs, such as members of the International Coalition for Sustainable Production and Consumption (ICSPAC), called on governments to make good on their original Agenda 21 commitments as well as this new "framework of programs," to take the necessary action to span the implementation gap.²¹

Marrakech Process

Following up on the call for this 10-year framework of programs, in 2003 the UN launched the "Marrakech Process" to "develop the framework and to coordinate international activities in support of national and regional activities."²² In practice, this process delivered not the actual programs of support mandated by the WSSD, but

instead a new series of regional and international consultations, expert meetings, and thematic task forces.

After seven years of such meetings and discussions, the question of programs and framework will instead be placed before the 18th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. This session is tasked with reviewing progress on the WSSD's mandated 10-year framework and will be asked to negotiate what kind of programs of support and/or other kinds of action the UN and international community will finally take. Unfortunately, as of mid-2009, the current language of the draft "framework" is tentative, discussing options of what governments "could" do rather than present a clear set of program proposals and how they can each make a difference.

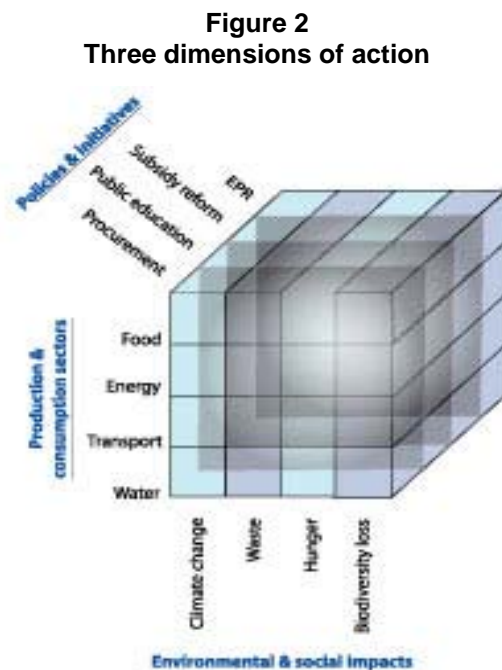
Regional, national and local initiatives

In the meantime, mostly unaware or unconcerned with these discussions at the UN, hundreds, perhaps thousands of sustainability initiatives have been operating and continue to emerge at the local, national, and regional levels.

Most of these initiatives tend to be focused on their particular mission within its particular political, social and economic context and set of players. They involve various combinations of different "stakeholders:" trade unions and trade associations, researchers and educators, environmentalists, consumer advocates, and other public interest groups, as well as large and small businesses, federal government agencies and local authorities.

Some operate alone, some in partnerships, and others as part of formal or informal networks or coalitions. They speak to a range of different audiences, from the public to professional groups to government or corporate policymakers.

Each initiative possesses a multi-dimensional identity (Figure 2). Some initiatives operate within a single economic sector, such as food, energy, transportation, mining, housing, chemicals, health. Others may cut-across these sectors, targeting one or more social, environmental and/or economic impacts of concern to their constituents, e.g., climate change, fresh water, hunger, biodiversity loss, children's health, unemployment.



Most of these initiatives stress a type of practice and/or policy aiming to influence critical decisions and behavior at specific points in the production/consumption cycle. Their approach and strategies range from designing and marketing energy-efficient, carbon-

neutral products and services to redefining personal and institutional meaning and measures of wealth and progress. Several studies have taken place to inventory and evaluate the effectiveness of these policies, practices and initiatives — some focusing solely on influencing consumption, others on production, still others on the overall system of production/consumption decisions and processes.²³ Many of these evaluations tend to focus on the objective of finding the best mix of policy instruments for adoption and top-down implementation by governments, rather than on the strategic and methodological question of how best to engage and gain cooperation among the various practitioners and practice communities.

The complexity of considering all these factors can be daunting when trying to assess the nature and extent of this regional movement of people, organizations, and initiatives towards sustainable production and consumption.

Yet these practices and initiatives have one thing in common: They address, to varying degrees, the underlying, root causes of major environmental and social concerns. They target particular leverage points within the current system and cycles of production and consumption. They each strive to bring sustainable solutions to those concerns and ultimately improve the quality of life for everyone.

Sustainability practices and strategic leverage

Given that the roots and drivers of the world's major crises are unsustainable production and consumption patterns, how does one choose the most strategic leverage point to focus one's practice? Climate change, for example, is driven by the rising CO² and other emissions from a number of different production/consumption patterns. About 20% of the greenhouse gases contributing to climate change come from power stations, producing electricity for residential, commercial and industrial consumers, serving the need for lighting, temperature control, running appliances such as computers, TV and washing machines. About 14% comes from transportation fuels, serving the need for personal and business mobility. About 12% comes from agricultural byproducts, serving the basic need for food. Which point in these different processes represents the most strategic place to focus one's action? The answer is that there needs to be a range of strategic actions, focusing on different production and consumption cycles, and on different phases of those cycles. The answer also depends on the particular person or organization concerned.

Several studies describe the ties between consumption and climate change.²⁴ However, when considering this connection, it is important to recognize consumption is the end point, not the beginning of the cycle. To successfully change consumption patterns requires focusing not simply on the consumption phase but on the various stages of the cycle leading to consumption. The cycle moves through the following stages:

1. Recognition of the needs and priorities (i.e., *values*), which then mobilizes
2. *investment* of resources (money, labor, time, natural capital) necessary for
3. *production* of the good or service needed or desired, followed by its

4. *distribution* (through sales, transport, packaging), which may or may not finally reach the original person or group in need, for its final acquisition and
5. *consumption* or use.

In the case of climate change, these needs include mobility, food, and electricity for lighting, heating and appliances. Each involves a production/consumption cycle in which each stage in the cycle represents a potential strategic intervention point.

Considering the fact that there are indeed hundreds if not thousands of action initiatives addressing these many different leverage points — from legislative campaigns to child education campaigns, product boycotts to ecological product design, candlelight vigils to Energy Star light bulbs — how to construct a meaningful and useful conceptual map of these many practices and practitioners?

Mapping the movement

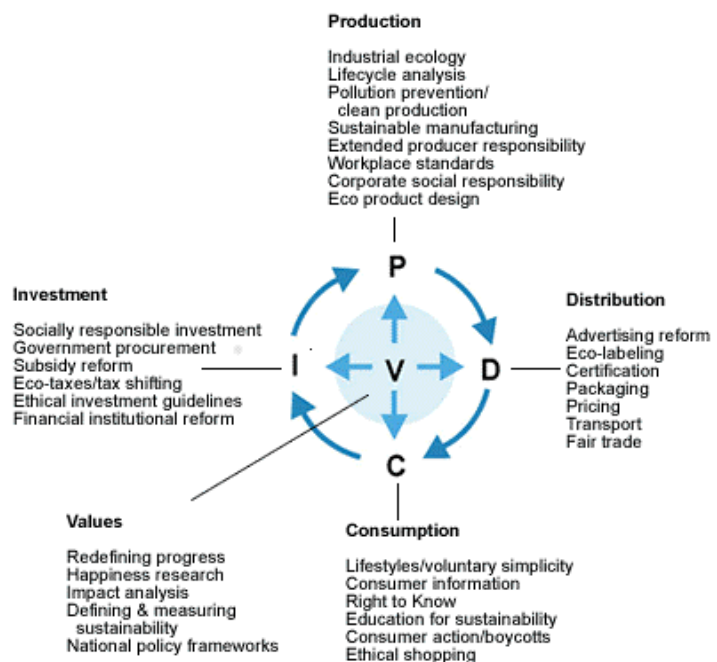
Given the many factors determining and defining the spectrum of sustainability initiatives and practices, what tools and methods are available and helpful to assess and provide an overview of this movement?

In 2003, members of the North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance (NASCA)²⁵ (including the authors) faced this question in a study²⁶ interviewing organizations in the US, Canada and Mexico engaged in sustainable production and consumption practices and initiatives.²⁷

Rather than focusing solely on initiatives primarily addressing consumption or production, what evolved was a schema (Figure 3) which includes initiatives targeting both these and other intervention points (i.e., investment, distribution, values) in the production/consumption (supply/demand) cycle.²⁸ While such categorization may not be precisely exact, it provides a useful method for mapping initiatives and practices.

We might first consider the starting point of most production/consumption cycles, which is that of the needs and underlying *values* motivating action, whether of

Figure 3
Practices by Strategic Leverage Points



the individual consumer, the business entrepreneur, or government policymaker. Some of the initiatives in this category aim at redefining conventional concepts of wealth and progress, at researching “happiness” and sufficiency, or promoting the historic paradigm shift from economic growth to sustainability norms.

The next stage of the cycle is the *investment* of resources (money, labor, energy, knowledge, time). An extremely important group of sustainability initiatives and strategies are those targeting those investment decisions that ultimately shape production. The current financial crisis now focuses public attention and scrutiny to this realm of decision-making, thus giving more weight to initiatives addressing those decisions. Examples include procurement initiatives, socially responsible investment, subsidy reform, and financial institutional reform. Without access to and investment of resources, whether personal income, investment capital, or the necessary natural resources) there can be no production or consumption.

The third group of initiatives focuses primarily on changing *production* patterns. Some cover a wide range of processes such as lifecycle analysis, industrial ecology and clean production while others target more specific parts of a product’s lifecycle such as product design and extended producer responsibility. One set of strategies may be viewed as more of a management approach (e.g., corporate social responsibility), including company codes or principles, and company sustainability indicators and reporting.

The next category consists of initiatives focusing on some of the many forces directly driving or shaping consumption decisions and behavior. These practices aim to influence the *distribution* or marketing of products and services. These initiatives aim more at influencing the processes in between product and consumers such as sales, advertising, labeling, packaging, and transport. This is also the area of trade such as fair trade, environmental technology export, international marketing of green products.

Finally, there are the initiatives and strategies focusing directly on changing *consumption* behavior — encouraging lifestyle change, promoting ethical shopping choices, establishing consumer protection rights, encouraging or requiring recycling, providing information about a product's social and environmental impacts, organizing product boycotts.

Engaging communities of practice

The engagement of practitioners takes place within a social context. Most initiatives do not operate in isolation but within “communities of practice,” groups of people “who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.”²⁹

The different practices and strategies addressing the various aspects of production and/or consumption are at the center of a range of different communities of practice, each with its own unique culture. The members often have their own language (i.e.,

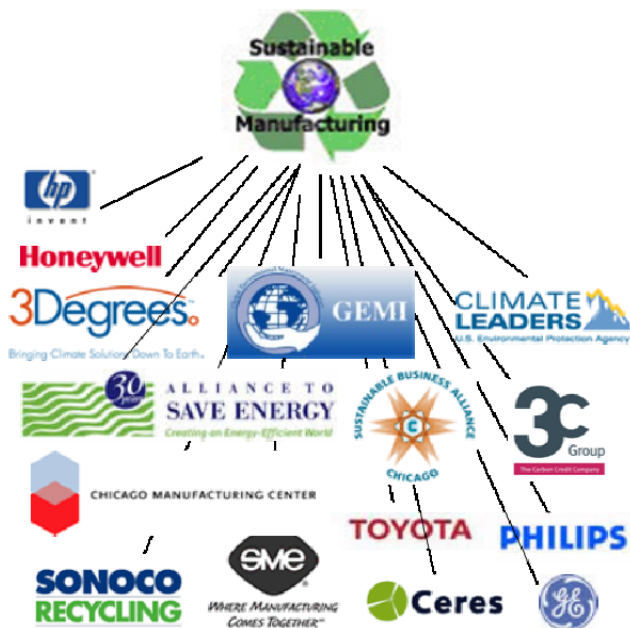
jargon and acronyms), conferences or study groups, friendships and publications. They work at different scales from the local level to the national to the international.

The composition of these communities of sustainability practices may vary greatly by type of practitioner-members. Some are more or less homogeneous; others involve a wide diversity of members. Some practitioners may belong to a number of different communities.

The community of **voluntary simplicity** practitioners (Figure 4) is more likely to involve concerned citizens, educators, and religious groups engaged in changing the nature, quantity and quality of consumption practices and experience. Familiar terminology within this community includes downshifting, simple living and simplicity, sufficiency and well-being. Notable networks include the Simple Living Network, the Simplicity Forum, and the Global Action Plan.



By contrast, the major practitioners engaged in **sustainable manufacturing** are likely to be large corporations, industry associations, and government agencies, particularly the Department of Commerce and US Trade Representative (Figure 5). Within this community we are more likely to hear terms like eco-innovation, competitiveness and profitability, green product portfolios, carbon offsetting, lifecycle approach, and sustainable supply chain management.



This community could also be contrasted with what is widely known as the **fair trade** movement, a community mostly composed of producers (collectives, small farmers, artisans and other workers in Southern countries), importers and wholesalers (earlier known as "alternative trading organizations"), retailers ("world shops," stores or mail-order catalogues, including the many supermarkets carrying fair trade brands, and fair trade labeling initiatives (certifying the chain of supply adheres to fair trade practices) such as International Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO), TransFair Canada

and USA and the many other national labeling initiatives coordinated by FLO. According to FLO, there are more than 7.5 million producers and their families benefiting from fair trade funded infrastructure and community development projects.³⁰

Some of these communities overlap, such as the pollution prevention community with those engaged in industrial ecology and the life cycle approach and those promoting extended producer responsibility. There are also organizations or movements that unite many communities of practice such as NASCA (an affiliation of NGOs, academia, and government organizations promoting sustainable consumption and production) and the Business Alliance for a Local Living Economy (BALLE) which is an affiliation of mostly small and entrepreneurial business networks in the US and Canada.

The following matrix (Figure 6) represents an approach to mapping the member types making up various communities of practice.

**Figure 6
Communities of Practice by Participant Group**

SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES BY LEVERAGE POINT		Government agencies	Companies/ industry groups	Public interest groups	Researchers/ Educators	Religious orgs	Citizen & community orgs
Consumption	Voluntary simplicity						
	Consumer information						
	Right to Know						
	Education for sustainable consumption						
	Consumer action/boycotts						
	Ethical shopping						
Production	Lifecycle analysis/ industrial ecology						
	Pollution prevention/ clean production						
	Sustainable manufacturing						
	Green building design						
	Extended producer responsibility						
Distribution	Labeling/ certification						
	Sustainable packaging						
	Full cost pricing/ triple bottom line						
	Fair trade						
Investment	Socially responsible investment						
	Green procurement						
	Eco-tax shifting						
	Subsidy reform						
Values	Happiness research						
	Redefining progress						
	Defining/measuring sustainability criteria						
	National SPAC policy development						
	International policy advocacy on SPAC						

This is not the place to describe in depth the many different communities engaged in sustainability practices throughout North America. (A wider snapshot of these practices can be found in the paper "Mapping the movement to achieve sustainable production and consumption in North America."³¹) The point of these few examples is that these practitioners tend to evolve their own communication and organizing structures, their own discourse, terminology and publications, their own system of meetings and networks, their own sets of rules, principles and standards, that is, their own subcultures. Many see and describe themselves as social movements, with a history and identity that can be studied in parallel with other sustainability practice communities.

How best to study these communities and the nature of connections among them? Individual disciplines like anthropology, sociology, social psychology, history, and political science, and organizational management have their own methods and theoretical frames for such a task. These approaches need to be explored for their contributions in their own right. However, what are the most feasible interdisciplinary strategies and methods that we can also draw upon to examine each of these communities, their contributions and their interrelationships in greater depth?

Another question that needs to be explored is: How can these many communities of practice be better understood and encouraged by government agencies, particularly regarding their potential contributions to federal policy and frameworks addressing sustainable production and consumption priorities?

Towards a national policy framework

As mentioned earlier, one of the neglected commitments of the Earth Summit was for countries to develop domestic policy frameworks on sustainable production and consumption.

It was not until after the WSSD that a number of countries finally began developing national programs, frameworks or strategies to promote sustainable consumption and production, such as the United Kingdom (2003), Japan (2003), Czech Republic (2005), Finland (2006), Thailand (2007), and several other countries.³² These each represent national government policy commitments to working with business, educators, local authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders to initiate or support a series of sustainability activities across different time periods. Many of these programs involved public and stakeholder consultations in their formation.

In the United States, the uneven evolution of such a framework goes back well before the energy crisis of the 1970s and President Carter's efforts towards an energy conservation ethic within "the most wasteful nation on earth."³³ Lizabeth Cohen reminds us that decades earlier, during World War II, frugality and rationing of resources was a patriotic virtue, a message and consumption ethic strongly promoted by the federal government. Likewise, after the war, it was the federal government that reversed its policy priorities, actively investing in the promotion of mass consumption society, amplified by the new advances in marketing and advertising science and technology.³⁴

The Clinton Administration began exploring the notion of a policy framework on sustainable production and consumption following the formation of the President's Council on Sustainable Development in 1993. This took shape in a number of actions.

In 1994 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), following a Presidential Directive, asked the National Research Council to define a research agenda to guide future policy on the environmental impacts of consumption. One immediate insight was that "although a vast amount of potentially relevant research existed, the amount of empirical work focusing specifically on the environmental impacts of consumption and on the nature and causes of environmentally significant consumption was relatively small."³⁵ Study director Paul Stern, noting that the concept of consumption "appears to refer to everything people do, aside from increasing their numbers, that may harm the environment," then highlighted the need to develop a working definition for research and policymaking.³⁶

Also in 1994 the Taskforce on Population and Consumption was formed, co-chaired by Dianne Dillon Ridgley and Timothy Wirth. In its report to the President, following a series of three national roundtables, the Taskforce recommended the following list of policies and actions:³⁷

1. Shifting taxes
2. Reducing inefficient and environmentally harmful subsidies
3. Environmental labeling and certification
4. Government procurement
5. Public education and the development of a stewardship ethic
6. Reduction, reuse and recycling of packaging materials
7. Volume-based garbage fees
8. Disposal of household toxics
9. Efficient and clean technologies

Another notable contribution towards a national SPAC policy framework came from the U.S. Interagency Working Group on Industrial Ecology, Material and Energy Flows. This was initiated in 1996 by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Office of Science and Technology Policy, tasked to provide "analysis and research on industrial ecology and materials and energy flows in production and consumption."

More recently, the call for a national policy framework was renewed when the US State Department began preparations to co-host with Canada a regional meeting on consumption and production, partly in response to the Marrakech Process consultation series and the upcoming CSD session reviewing progress in this area.

Towards a regional cooperative framework

Beginning in Argentina in 2003, the UN and host countries organized a series of regional consultations. These are "to identify key regional priorities and needs for SCP," the UN Environment Program explains, "and to support the development of regional and national SCP programmes building cooperation and partnerships among different stakeholders." ³⁸ North America, however, did not participate in these regional consultations until late 2008.

Before that time, one of the main regional initiatives organized to address sustainable production and consumption was the formation in 2001 of the North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance (NASCA), " a strategic partnership of people and organizations who are working to promote more sustainable consumption patterns in Mexico, Canada and the United States." ³⁹ In addition to creating an online database of sustainable production and consumption initiatives in the region, ⁴⁰ NASCA organized a number of regional meetings and national workshops, including the 2005 workshop "Towards a North American Framework for Achieving Sustainable Production and Consumption."

This workshop produced the joint civil society statement "Producing and Consuming in North America: A Call for Action and Leadership on Sustainability." ⁴¹ The statement, later presented to audiences in a number of other countries and regions, articulated a group commitment to engaging fellow North Americans and helping "build public support for government and business policies and practices which protects and promotes human and environmental health and well-being, encourages sustainable livelihoods and lifestyles, and reduces our region's ecological footprint." The statement also called for a "framework of action and cooperation" to realize those aims.

However, it was not until November 2008 that the Canadian and US governments agreed to organize a regional multi-stakeholder workshop "to promote a regional approach to advance sustainable consumption and production in North America." ⁴² The workshop report noted "many different SCP perspectives and experiences across and within different stakeholder groups"

The November 2008 meeting also recommended that a regional SCP plan be crafted as a guide for governments at all levels and stakeholders and would help set priorities for actions by government and civil society, and identify practical metrics to measure SCP progress. Further, the participants felt that "a regional cooperative framework or approach could encourage and help those communities of practice tell their stories to the public, and at the same time draw public awareness and support to this important work taking place on their behalf. This calls for outreach and building bridges of understanding among groups that do not necessarily always communicate with each other or the broader public." ⁴³

Participants felt that the framework should be easy to understand, and would help unify ongoing efforts, clarify where additional efforts are needed and be sufficiently flexible to encourage a diversity of innovative SCP approaches. The framework should be used to

help shift SCP discussions from theory to practice, with a focus on encouraging productive actions in all parts of society.⁴⁴

Participants at the November 2008 meeting also believed it important to better understand current activities in SCP, to “find ways to link people together via communities of practice,” and to “leverage existing groups, organizations and programs that contribute to SCP rather than create new, competing efforts.”⁴⁵

Finally, there was a general consensus “that the recent concern about the global financial crisis, climbing energy and food prices and global warming are generating among citizens, communities and institutions greater interest in sustainability solutions and approaches. This work could be significantly enhanced by a regional framework supporting cooperation and collaboration.”⁴⁶

This discussion will be taken up again later this year. Hopefully the following questions will be addressed as to how such a framework might be constructed and function; what kind of cooperation and collaboration it would support; what kinds of support it would provide and how this would be provided. Another important question is: Where and how do the many communities of sustainability practices fit within this framework and plan? How will they be approached and engaged? Which communities will be included and which overlooked? There needs to be not simply a strategy for engaging these practice communities but a conceptual framework for understanding and addressing their differences.

One recommendation is to establish a consultation process supported by appropriate research to better understand the views, perspectives and priorities of these practitioners in establishing the most productive exchange with policymakers and the public.

¹ There are a number of different definitions of "sustainability" and "sustainable consumption." For the purposes of this paper, we use the following definition regarding "sustainable production and consumption:"

A system providing for human needs, improving social and economic security and quality of life for all people, including future generations, while protecting the ecosystems upon which human life depends.

² The choice of the term "sustainable production and consumption (SPAC)" is intended to be more heuristic than finalistic. Another term could arguably be "sustainable economy." In recent years, the UN has in recent years, with a particular push from UNEP, more frequently refers to "sustainable consumption and production" or "SCP" for short. Others prefer to discuss "sustainable consumption," subsuming production as a broader function of consumption. Another viewpoint sees the linkage of "sustainable" and "consumption" to be more of an oxymoron, preferring other terminology to describe relatively common values and aims. Some have expressed distrust of the term "sustainable development," viewing this as more a UN-promoted greenwash of corporate environmentalism. Many others tend to use terminology more closely tied to a particular practice, such as "simple living" or "voluntary simplicity," avoiding the negative associations with "sustainable development." The point of using this somewhat more controversial term is to emphasize the need to encourage respectful dialogue among different communities of practice using different terminologies for addressing common overall problems and aims falling under the provocative term "sustainability."

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- ²² United Nations (2004) *Overview of Progress Towards Sustainable Development: A Review of the Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*. Report of the Secretary-General. E/CN.17/2004/2
- ²³ OECD (2008) *Promoting Sustainable Consumption: Good Practices in OCED Countries*, Paris; SCOPE (2008) *Sustainable Consumption Policies Effectiveness Evaluation*, Delft, the Netherlands; Jackson, Tim and Michaelis, Laurie (2003) *Policies for Sustainable Consumption: A Report to the Sustainable Development Commission*; OECD (2002) *Policies to Promote Sustainable Consumption: An Overview*; United Nations (1996) *Report on the Workshop on Policy Measures for Changing Consumption Patterns*, New York;

²⁴ Cohen, Mark and Vandenberg, Michael (2008) "Consumption, happiness, and climate change." Resources for the Future, Washington, DC; Harris, Jonathan (2008) "Ecological macroeconomics: consumption, investment, and climate change." Global Development and Environment Institute Working Paper No. 08-02, Tufts University, Medford, MA; Kysar, Douglas and Vandenberg, Michael (2008) "Climate change and consumption." *Environmental Law Reporter*, Vol. 38.

²⁵ In partnership with the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, Environment Canada, UNEP and others.

²⁶ The main objective of the study, involving telephone interviews with representatives of 200 such initiatives, with the results available on a public online database, was to provide "best practice" examples of initiatives that might be replicated by others.

²⁷ See www.nasca.icspac.net/

²⁸ The logic is that while the problematic emissions, waste, resource extraction, or other impacts may derive from a particular production, distribution, or consumption act or process, the strategy targeting those impacts may focus not on the point of release but on an earlier part of the chain — such as investment or values.

²⁹ Wenger, Etienne (2008) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (2008) *An Inspiration for Change: Annual Report 2007*. Bonn, Germany.

³¹ Barber, Jeffrey (2007) "Mapping the movement to achieve sustainable production and consumption in North America," *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Volume 15, Issue 6

³² UN Environment Programme (2008), *Planning for Change: Guidelines for National Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production*.

³³ Carter, Jimmy (1977) "The President's proposed energy policy," speech given on April 18, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 14

³⁴ Cohen, Elizabeth (2004) *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, Vintage Books, New York.

³⁵ National Research Council (1997) *Environmentally Significant Consumption: Research Directions*, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.

³⁶ Stern, Paul (1994) "Toward a working definition of consumption for environmental research and policy." Stern shared his proposed definition for "consumption":

Consumption consists of human transformations of materials and energy. Consumption is environmentally important to the extent that it makes materials or energy less available for future use, moves dynamically stable biophysical systems toward a different state or, through its effects on those systems, threatens human health, welfare, or other things people value.

However, he also noted that his definition "makes it necessary to speak of the "environmental impact of human activity" (rather than of consumption) as the object of research."

³⁷ President's Council on Sustainable Development (1995) *Population and Consumption Task Force Report*, Washington, D.C.

³⁸ <http://www.unep.fr/scp/marrakech/consultations/regional/>

³⁹ <http://nasca.icspac.net/about/whatis.aspx>

⁴⁰ <http://www.cec.org/news/details/index.cfm?varlan=english&ID=2606>

⁴¹ <http://nasca.icspac.net/North%20American%20framework/regionalstatement.aspx>

⁴² UNEP Regional Office of North America (2008) *North American Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on Sustainable Consumption and Production: Co-Chairs Summary and Workshop Report*, organized by the government of Canada and United States, UN Environment Program, and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, November 6-7.

⁴³ UNEP Regional Office of North America (2008) *North American Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on Sustainable Consumption and Production: Co-Chairs Summary and Workshop Report*, organized by the government of Canada and United States, UN Environment Program, and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, November 6-7.

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ *ibid*