

Press release

7 September, Budapest

Sustainable consumption and social justice in a constrained world

We need new approaches to promote social change to address overconsumption and its drivers; in order to address ecological disasters and social inequities.

On 29-30 August 30 international researchers and experts came together to discuss emerging knowledge and strategies to make sustainable consumption the “new norm”. The workshop organised by [SCORAI Europe](#) and the [Resource Cap Coalition](#), and hosted by the [Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in Hungary](#) was focusing on the possible ways of achieving radical transformation of our consumption patterns in Europe. The conclusions were also presented at the [5th Degrowth Conference](#) organised in Budapest.

When we are building up a growing ecological debt year by year, meaning that we are using more natural resources each year than the planet can reproduce in a sustainable way, it is hard to deny the ecological limits of our planet. An average European lives a lifestyle which would require 2.6 planets, and this comes at a price. Climate change, overfishing, soil degradation, the disappearance of bees are all the consequences of unsustainable consumption and production.

Ecological limits were recognised decades ago, and there is also a growing concern about the aspect of social justice, which shall be equally integrated into the responses striving for sustainability. While social inequality has been on the rise since the WWII in Europe, we need to acknowledge that in addition to the need of reducing consumption by most Europeans, there is a growing number of people who cannot satisfy their basic needs.

The vibrant discussions at the [workshop](#) focused on sustainable consumption and social justice while respecting ecological limits, and led to some interesting conclusions, which can help to put theory into practice throughout the society:

- We need a transformative process and supporting tools, which can achieve systemic change that involves living within upper and lower limits in a more equal society. Wellbeing and individual happiness can be achieved on a small ecological footprint. While it may require some personal sacrifices by individuals, freedom comes with societal responsibility. Such measures can contribute to building a society where strong social connections and cooperation prevail.
- We need changes on multiple levels, from households through cities and regions to the global level. Enabling conditions are needed that involve rethinking institutions, infrastructure, technologies, and social norms, among other factors. Governments and citizens have a key role to play here. Community led initiatives, such as [EnergyNeighbourhoods](#) can foster lifestyle change based on cooperation, sharing and common creativity. However, in order to scaled up and multiply such local actions, reformed national frameworks are needed where voluntary decisions are complemented with regulatory measures. The [Energy Budget Scheme](#) could offer a chance to phase out fossil fuels and minimise the carbon footprint, without putting excessive burden on the poor.
- The drivers of unsustainable consumption and lifestyles need to be addressed: the economic system aimed at competition and growth; the culture of consumerism; the power relationships preventing social change, etc. A combination of bottom-up, grass-roots initiatives and top-down, policy-mandated changes are necessary.

- We need a positive narrative around sustainable lifestyles, involving media, advertising, celebrities and social networks. People leading a modest and decent lifestyles that meets their needs while respects planetary boundaries should be given recognition. Such lifestyles are diverse, and involve actions and decision that go beyond recycling, using energy efficient lighting and buying local food. Such environmental actions are needed, but need to be taken forward to actions that involves a more radical rethinking of car use, avoiding flying, eating less meat and dairy products, living in smaller, more autonomous homes, etc. Such different lifestyles need to become the norm instead of being somewhat curious alternatives.

The participants of the workshop are aware that actions cannot be delayed and we need to address our own overconsumption as well. Thus **the carbon footprint of the workshop was calculated to be 10.2 tons**, which is about twice the ecological footprint of an average Hungarian for a year. 90% of this footprint is made up from international flights, while train and bus travels locally and within Europe, the energy consumption during the event, the locally sourced food and drinks, workshop materials printed on recycled paper contributed to a much smaller extent. This also highlights the **large contribution of flights to carbon footprints**. Participants also made voluntary contributions to plant trees as a sign of taking collective responsibility for the environmental impact of the workshop and mitigating it in a way that has the additional benefit of protecting local biodiversity and creating local food supply.

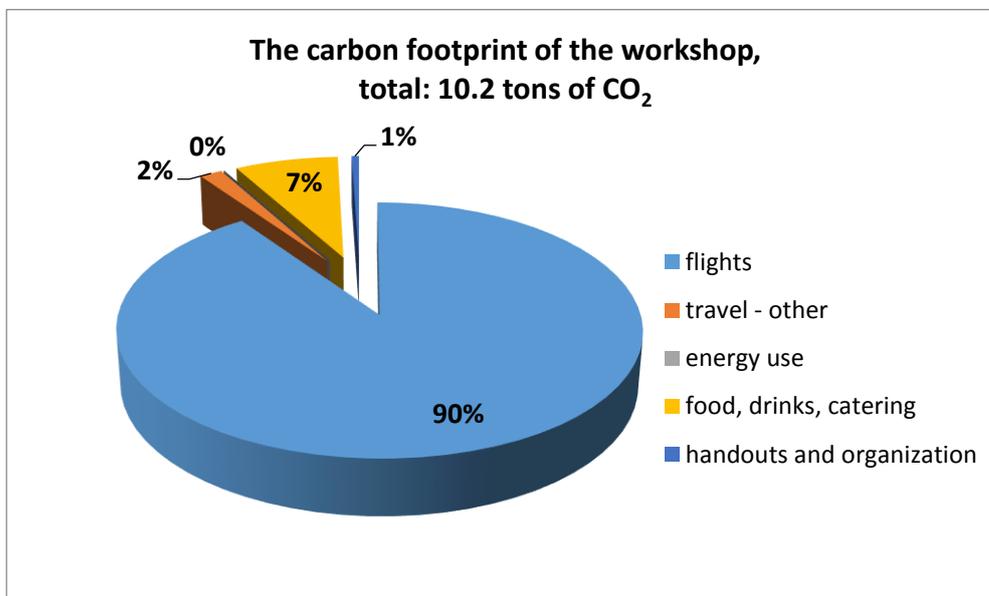


Figure. 1. The carbon footprint of the workshop. International flights have an especially high carbon footprint: the flight between Cologne - Budapest results in a carbon footprint of 220 kg CO₂/person, while the same journey by train means only 20 kg CO₂/person.

Marcel Szabó, the Ombudsman for Future Generations stated that intergenerational equity, humankind's responsibility towards our children is one of the oldest moral imperatives, yet no generation has been more selfish in terms of consumption than the current one. Real action cannot be postponed any longer regarding the need to switch to just consumption in a constrained world for the sake of ensuring a habitable planet for our children

As **Klára Hajdu** on behalf of the Resource cap Coalition commented: "We shall not allow that the inevitable economic transition, which will be forced this way or the other by the ecological limits, further burdens the poor and vulnerable. We have enough evidence to act, and we have policy alternatives at hand, such as the Energy budget Scheme to ensure a smooth transition."

Edina Vadovics from GreenDependent believes that "Everyone can and should contribute to the change. We can all act at different levels, beginning from making changes in our personal lifestyles through becoming active in our neighbourhoods to enabling change through our work or lobbying for policy change. It is important that decision-makers take action, but we cannot afford to wait for them, we all need to become responsible and active citizens in our own different ways."

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Notes to editors

SCORAI Europe is a community that contributes forward-thinking, innovative research and teaching in the area of **sustainable consumption**, while also bridging academic research with mainstream thinking and policy-making. It is **an international network of professionals** working to address challenges at the interface of material consumption, human fulfilment, lifestyle satisfaction, and technological change.

<http://scorai.org/scorai-europe/>

The **Resource Cap Coalition**, initiated by CEEweb for Biodiversity and its partners in 2010, brings together European organisations advocating for a global resource use reduction, a precondition for sustainability. It proposes an [Energy Budget Scheme](#) on national and European levels, which can realise the deep decarbonisation of the economy, without putting excessive burden on the poor. <http://www.ceeweb.org/work-areas/priority-areas/rcc/>

CEEweb for Biodiversity is a network of NGOs working in Central and Eastern Europe, and a co-founder of the European Resource Cap Coalition. It is also a partner of the European [Stop Mad Mining](#) campaign, which aims for sustainable resource consumption and phasing out non-renewable energy use in the EU.

GreenDependent Institute is a not-for-profit organization with the mission to research, develop and promote sustainable lifestyles, production methods and consumption patterns. Being active in research and action at the national and international level, GreenDependent works primarily with households, communities, municipalities and researchers.

<http://intezet.greendependent.org/>

Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights is a National Human Rights Institution responsible for the protection of fundamental rights in Hungary, covering the whole spectrum of fundamental rights. The Office can proceed upon complaint or ex officio in the case of fundamental rights infringements. The Ombudsman for Future Generations is a Deputy Commissioner responsible for the protection of the interests of future generation.



The campaign is realised with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this press release are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

