

GRF Arequipa workshop October 19, 2014

On SCORAI by Philip Vergragt (GRF-SPaC, SCORAI, Tellus Institute, Clark University)

SCORAI was founded in 2008 by a small group of researchers. Several of us had been involved in the European SCORE! Project, Sustainable Consumption Research Exchanges; and felt that North America was lagging behind Europe. We thought that research on sustainable consumption was fragmented; and that the field could benefit from bringing diverse researchers, disciplines, and approaches together.

Two of us: (John Stutz and myself) were at Tellus Institute; and John is a Vice President there; and that greatly helped in many ways. Another founding member (Halina Brown) is at Clark University, and Maurie Cohen at NJT. Jeff joined SCORAI after its first workshop in 2009. What really helped us was a diverse skill set (from visionaries like Jeff and deep thinkers like Halina, to more practical people like Maurie and me. It was important to have an institutional home (Tellus) that gave us credibility. What also helped was a mix of academics like Maurie, Halina, and me, and practitioners like John and Jeff; jointly with access to a wide network of researchers and practitioners.

We started with a series of lunches where we invited people who had published papers or had done more practical work, thus creating a small group of interested people in Boston. Next we made a list of all researchers we knew in North America and invited the top researchers for our first workshop. We aimed at a mix of about 25% practitioners and the rest researchers, so the research would be practically relevant. The workshop participants were invited to write papers, which were read in advance and discussed in-depth at the workshop.

The first workshop, in 2009, was, like this one, completely without budget; although Clark University provided the venue. About 40 top researchers and aspiring younger researchers came; and a few practitioners; it was a great workshop which created a basis of a group of people who knew and understand each other. The outcomes are summarized in a paper. The next year, 2011, we got some funding from the America Netherlands Foundation to bring over 2 Dutch researchers. The workshop was focused on bringing together three research traditions: socio-technical transitions, theories of practice, and the new economy. It turned out that a fourth tradition, social movement theories, completed this trio. This workshop resulted in a real book: *Innovations in Sustainable Consumption* (2013).

For the third workshop, in 2012 in Vancouver, Canada, we finally got some funding from A FOUNDATION; BUT THERE WERE STRINGS ATTACHED. THE MOST IMPORTANT WAS THAT we needed to bridge researchers and practitioners. This we tried with a limited success. The workshop was well-organized and had nearly 100 participants; and many people were very happy with it. We as organizers felt that we could have done things better. A workshop report is on our website. Our first real conference was in 2013 at Clark University; with more than 100 participants, and in a more conference style format. This conference was very successful; but the follow up was not so good; part of the conference resulted in a book, that is currently under development. But the conference could have laid the groundwork for follow up working groups, and this was not accomplished.

Recently we were approached by a foundation who loves our work and wanted to fund our activities, which is quite a success for such a young organization. From this funding we organize a series of lectures on Consumption and Social Change. We invited accomplished scholars mostly from outside our own

community and challenged them to apply their knowledge on our question: how to change consumerist culture? These lectures are in full video on the Tellus website. They will culminate in a workshop next year October 2015. From this funding we also organize a workshop on Consumption and Cities, later this month in Eugene, Oregon; jointly with the USDN, the Urban Sustainability Directors Network.

SCORAI's mission: The Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI) is a knowledge network of professionals working at the interface of material consumption, human well-being, and technological and cultural change. We aim to foster a transition beyond the currently dominant consumer society. The network provides a forum for scholars and practitioners striving to understand the drivers of the consumerist economy in affluent technological societies; to formulate and analyze options for post-consumerist lifestyles, social institutions, and economic systems; and to provide the knowledge for emergent grassroots innovations, social movements, and public policies.

Apart from workshops, conferences, and the colloquium we have a listserv of 650-700 people, many of them out of North America; with often lively discussions. We have a rather good website; and a monthly newsletter. Plans for the future include webinars and making the website more interactive.

SCORAI can be considered as the North American regional chapter of GRF; there is also NARSPAC, the North American Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption, but this is more a multi-stakeholder platform and less focused on research. Also, NARSPAC is less outward looking beyond the US and Canada, while SCORAI has an international membership and a more global outlook; and also helped to create SCORAI Europe (in 2012). SCORAI China (2014) has its roots both in SCORAI and in GRF: the Shanghai conference created an initiative that will result in a first workshop in November 2014 in Beijing. Although it is called SCORAI-China, it could also be called GRF-China; it is a hybrid.

Summarizing: factors of success for SCORAI were: a dedicated small group of people, who communicate often; an institutional home; a website and listserv; funding; a plan for the next few years; patience, and organizational skills. Having people who can serve as editors for special journal issues or books is also very helpful. Skills to set up a database would have helped us greatly.

Website: www.scorai.org