

# Global Research Forum on Sustainable Production and Consumption (GRF-SCP)

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ISDRC19

# Who I am?

- Researcher, activist, educator
- Ph.D. in Chemistry, RU Leiden
- Research in technological innovation and sustainable consumption
- Expert in technology assessment
- More recently in societal transition to sustainability on all levels (from global to local)
- Agent of change in a complex world with systemic challenges





## Global Research Forum

The mission of the Global Research Forum on Sustainable Production and Consumption is to strengthen the community of researchers and practitioners engaged in research on the worldwide transition to sustainable production and consumption systems. It builds on a 20+ year research tradition on SPC by numerous researchers, institutes, and networks around the world, and on many successful attempts to apply research findings into policy, civil society, and business. Explore our mission and vision [here](#).

Read the **GRF blog** [here](#). We also welcome your contributions.

You can download the latest **GRF newsletter** [here](#) (January 2013), which includes results from a recent survey of the network. Archived newsletters can be viewed [here](#).

### ABOUT THE GRF

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# GRF-SPaC mission& vision

- The Global Research Forum on Sustainable Production and Consumption (GRF-SPC) was created by and for the community of researchers and practitioners engaged in research on the worldwide transition to sustainable production and consumption systems.
- GRF-SPC strives to develop and strengthen methods of fundamental and applied research to achieve a deeper understanding of the possibilities and barriers to systemic change.
- Its ultimate goal is to enhance development and adoption of production and consumption policies, practices and systems which meet basic needs –especially of the poor and vulnerable- and provide prosperity, while conserving natural resources and protecting the environment.

# Global research Forum GRF-SPaC

GRF-SPaC launched in 2011, initially as part of 10YFP of UNEP

- Inaugural workshop Rio 2012: 90 participants; 40 papers; JCP Special Issue in preparation
- October 2012 Beijing workshop as part of World Resources Forum
- March 2013 workshop GRF-SPC REDUCTIONS project at Wuppertal Institute
- July 2013 launch GRF-S. Africa at ISDRC19, Stellenbosch, S. Africa
- October 2013 plenary and workshop WRF Davos, Switzerland
- October 2013 session at WSSF conference Montreal, Canada
- February 2014 workshop in Guadelajara, Mexico
- June 2014 2<sup>nd</sup> International conference, Fudan University, Shanghai
- Listserve; website; 2 surveys; database in preparation.

Aims at global network of organizations and individuals; bridging disciplines, perspectives, and the research-practice gap

Aims to contribute to Future Earth global research Project

# GRF-SPaC is supported by the following organizations:

- Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI), USA
- One Earth Initiative Society, Canada
- Integrative Strategies Forum, USA
- Asia Pacific Roundtable for SCP, Philippines
- Clark University, USA
- Copenhagen Resource Institute, Denmark
- European Roundtable on SCP
- European Topic Center on SCP
- European Environmental Agency
- Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) Japan
- Smart CSOs Initiative
- Society in Action Group, India
- Sustainable Europe Research Institute, Germany
- Tellus Institute, USA
- UNEP/Wuppertal Institute Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production, Germany
- Gaiasoft, United Kingdom
- Vitae Civilis, Brazil
- Green Liberty, Latvia
- Greening of Industry Network
- PERL (The Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living), Norway
- UFRRJ - Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro – Brazil
- ESPM Rio de Janeiro
- Asian Institute of Technology
- National University of Singapore
- Munasinghe Institute for Development – MIND
- Centre for Environment and Development, Sri Lanka
- UNENGO "MAMA-86", Ukraine
- UNEP
- UNDESA
- ANPED
- International Environment Forum

**Financial Support** for the workshop is provided by: The Nordic Council of Ministers; IGES, Tokyo, Japan; The Brazilian Ministry of the Environment; Manchester University; Espaço Eco Foundation; and Tellus Institute, Boston.

**In kind support** given by: ESPM, ISF, One Earth, and many volunteers.

# The GRF-SCP workshop 2012 in Rio

- About 30 papers, most of them academic and peer-reviewed
- About 80 participants from Asia, Africa, Eastern and W. Europe, South and Latin America, and North America.
- Papers were read in advance, so presentations could be brief (10 minutes) and there was much time for discussion
- Most papers were presented plenary, but we had a few break-out sessions.
- Facilitated discussions in world-café format, and roundtable format; and a lot 1:1 breakouts
- 4 keynotes by internationally recognized scholars and activists: Chee Yoke Ling, Jacqueline McGlade, Tim Jackson, Peter Victor, and Adrian Smith.
- More information on the website <http://grfscp.wordpress.com>

# ESPM



# Some outcomes

- Individual consumers cannot be blamed as they are part of a complex system
- They can be influenced by more than rational arguments and data (persuasion and peer pressure)
- Technology can help, but other mechanisms are necessary (cultural and value change; economic instruments, choice editing)
- Supply side and governments have important roles to play
- Interaction between researchers and practitioners is sometimes difficult, needs to improve
- Developing countries and East Europe catch up fast; and it is not clear if and how they will find an alternative path.
- Addressing unsustainable consumption in the south is complex because of parallel persisting poverty; and sometimes 'bling culture' of conspicuous consumption and showing off.

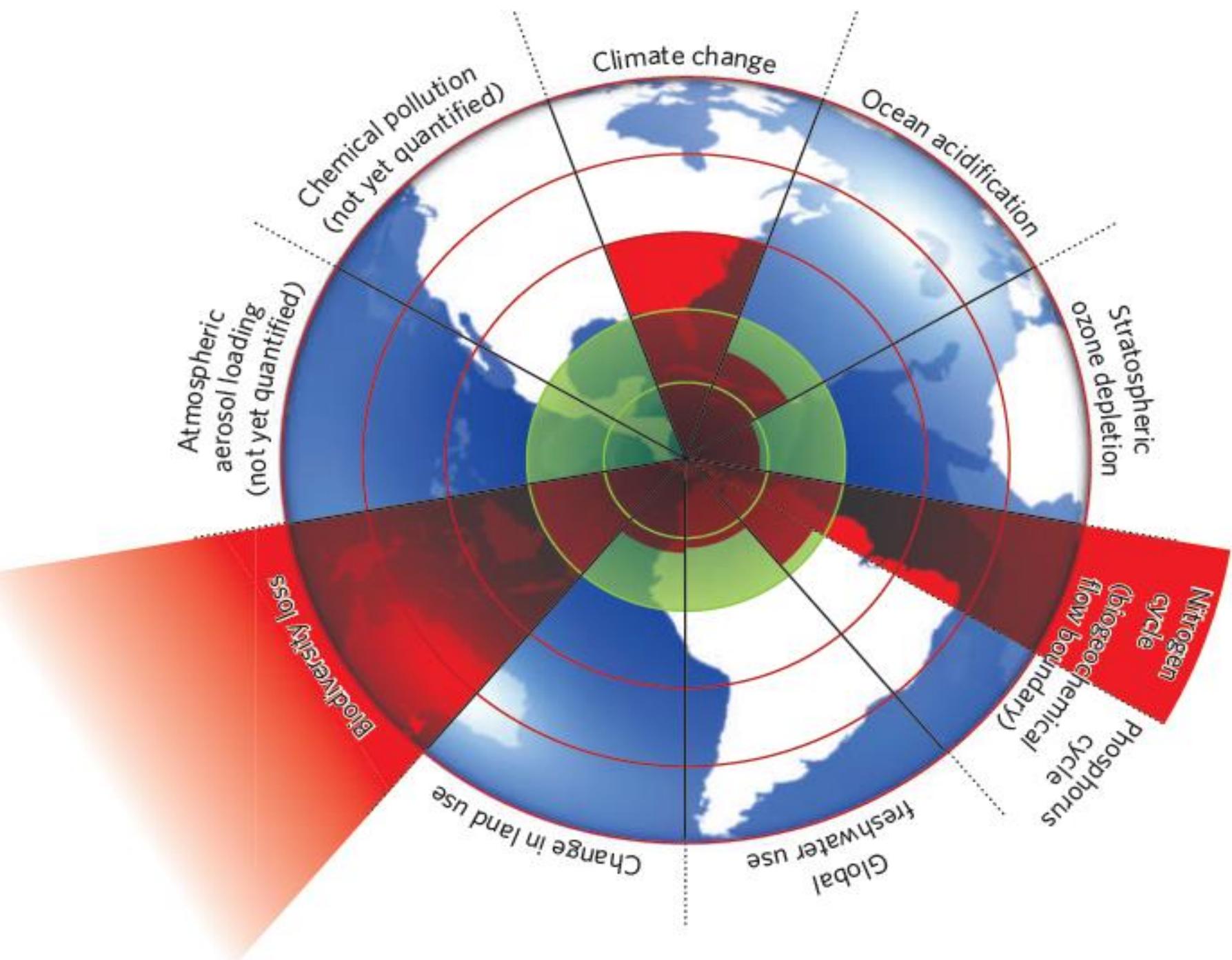
# Outcomes (2)

- It is important to distinguish between green consumerism and sustainable consumption; and between weak and strong sustainable consumption
- Consumption is political and should be analyzed through political-economic lenses.
- Education is key, for all ages, but especially for the young
- Advertisements should be tamed and greened
- Solidarity economy, grassroots innovations, and ethical consumption need to be further developed
- Macro-economic modeling does not give conclusive evidence that degrowth is desirable or possible
- Leadership is key
- Mapping the movement; and conceptualizing interactions between researchers and practitioners need to be further developed.

# Brief history and definition of SPaC

- 1992: Rio Agenda 21: “[t]he major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the **unsustainable pattern of consumption and production**, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances.”
- 1994: Oslo declaration: “**Sustainable consumption** is the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.”
- 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation: “[f]undamental **changes in the way societies produce and consume** are indispensable for achieving global sustainable development [and that] [a]ll countries should promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, with the developed countries taking the lead and with all countries benefiting from the process.”

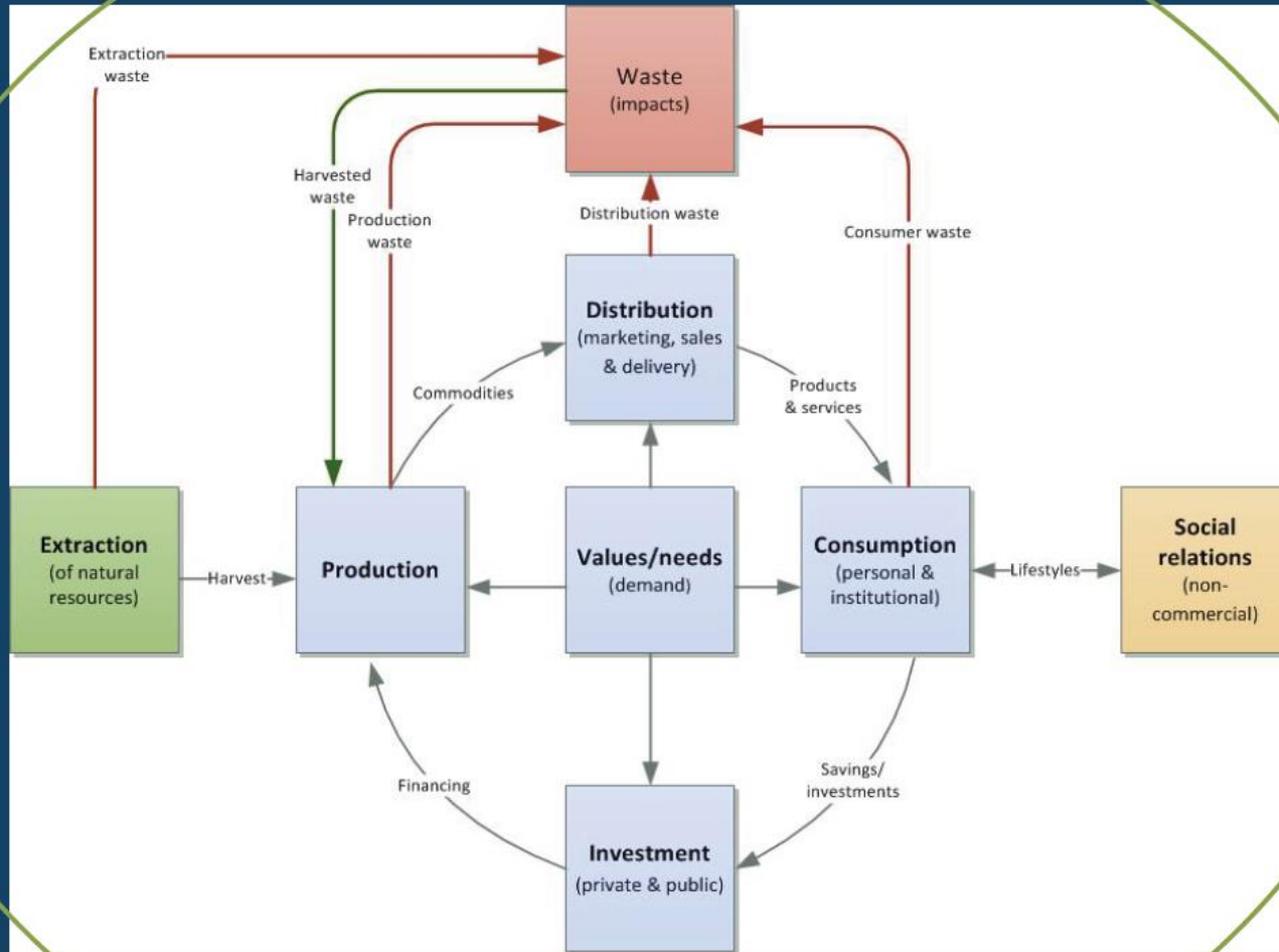




# Brief history (2)

- Sustainable consumption has developed from a rather narrow concept (how to influence consumer behavior) to a much broader research and policy program
- This includes:
  - Green products and immaterial product-service systems
  - connections between production and consumption
  - The consumerist culture
  - The economic growth paradigm and its challenges
  - Sustainable lifestyles
  - Socio-technical transitions
  - (in)equality
  - Well-being and happiness research
- It can thus be seen as a “lens” in a complex system
- Actors are: governments (policy); business; NGOs, civil society, faith-based groups; researchers

# Consumption and Production systems



# What drives consumption?

Consumption cannot be analyzed in isolation

At the individual level: fundamental differences between basic needs fulfillment (needs) and wants

Drivers of (individual) consumption:

- Advertisements
- Peer pressure (keeping up with the Joneses)
- The “hedonic treadmill”
- Status symbols
- Cultural identity
- “consumerist culture”
- Ideology of economic growth

- Individual consumption is linked to the macro-economic system; which is based on unlimited economic growth
  - This is now challenged by the “Degrowth’ movement
- Consumption drives economic growth, which creates jobs and wealth
- Economic growth is (partially) driven by technological innovations: they create productivity growth, which (in theory) would lead to shorter working weeks and more leisure time
- Consumption is thus part of a much wider system:



# Connection with other concepts: Well-being, happiness, and inequality

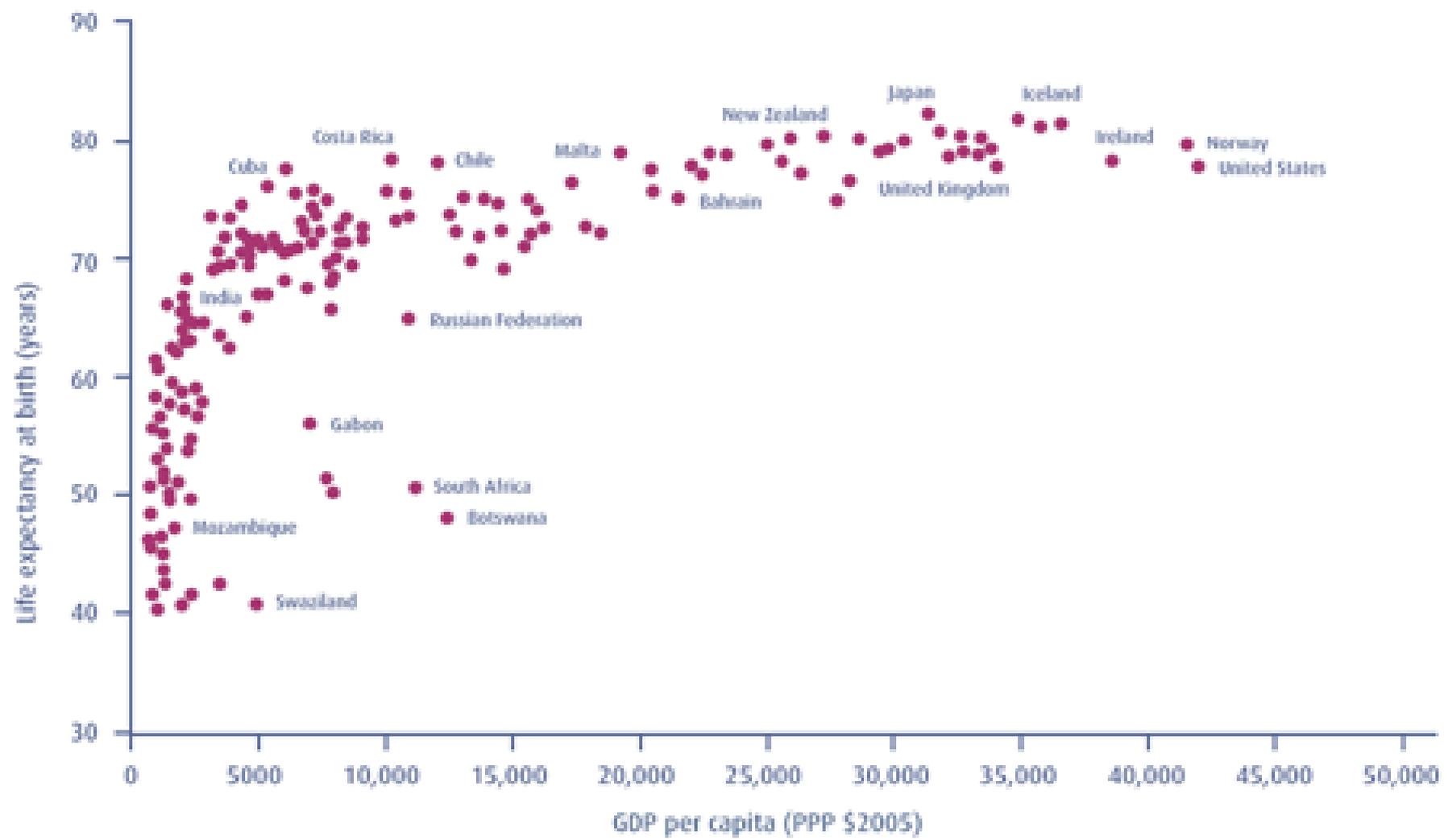
- More material consumption does not lead to more happiness
- On the level of countries, above a certain threshold of GDP, happiness is stationary
- The economic growth paradigm and the present economic system has however lead to an increase in inequality
- Inequality is related to health and social problems
- Inequality is one of the drivers of (unsustainable) consumption



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Figure 8 Life expectancy at birth vs average annual income<sup>16</sup>



# Health and Social Problems vs. Income Inequality (9 indicators combined)

From: Wilkinson and Pickett "The Spirit Level"

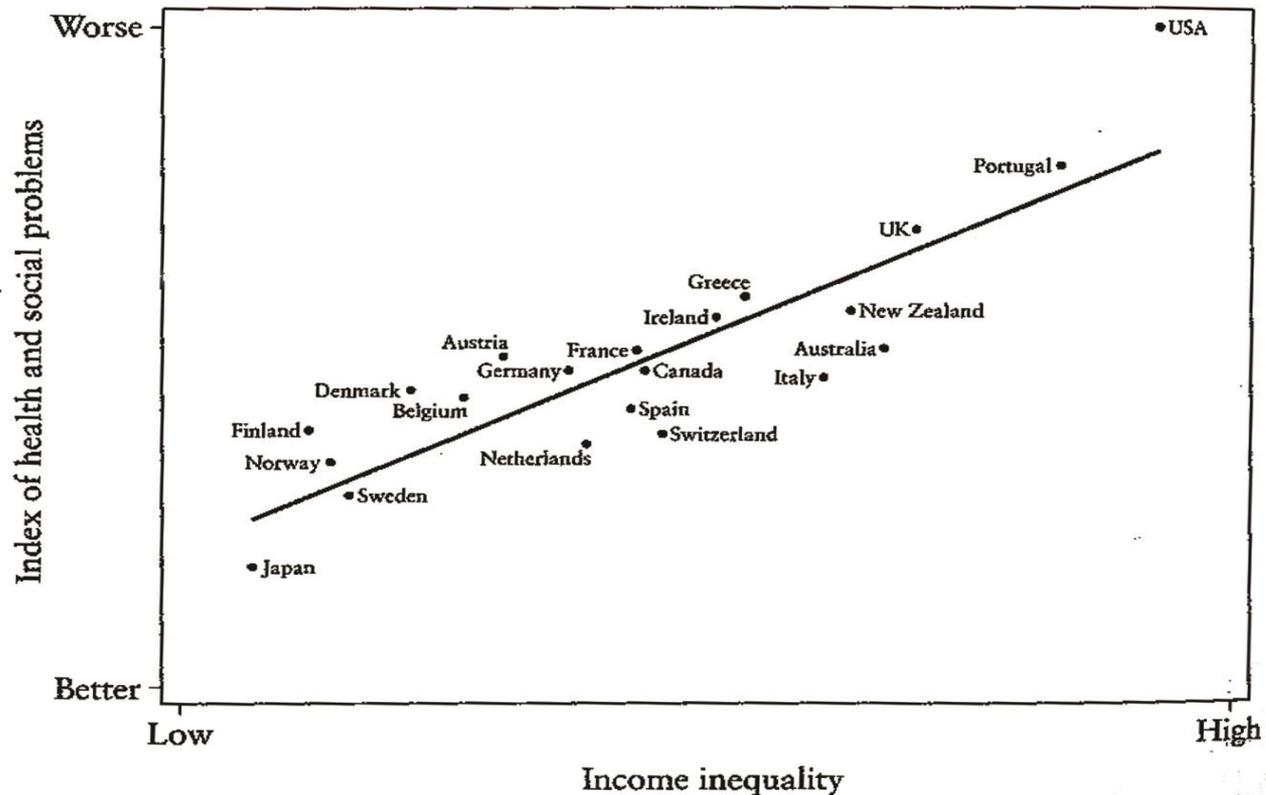


Figure 13.1 *Health and social problems are more common in more unequal countries.*

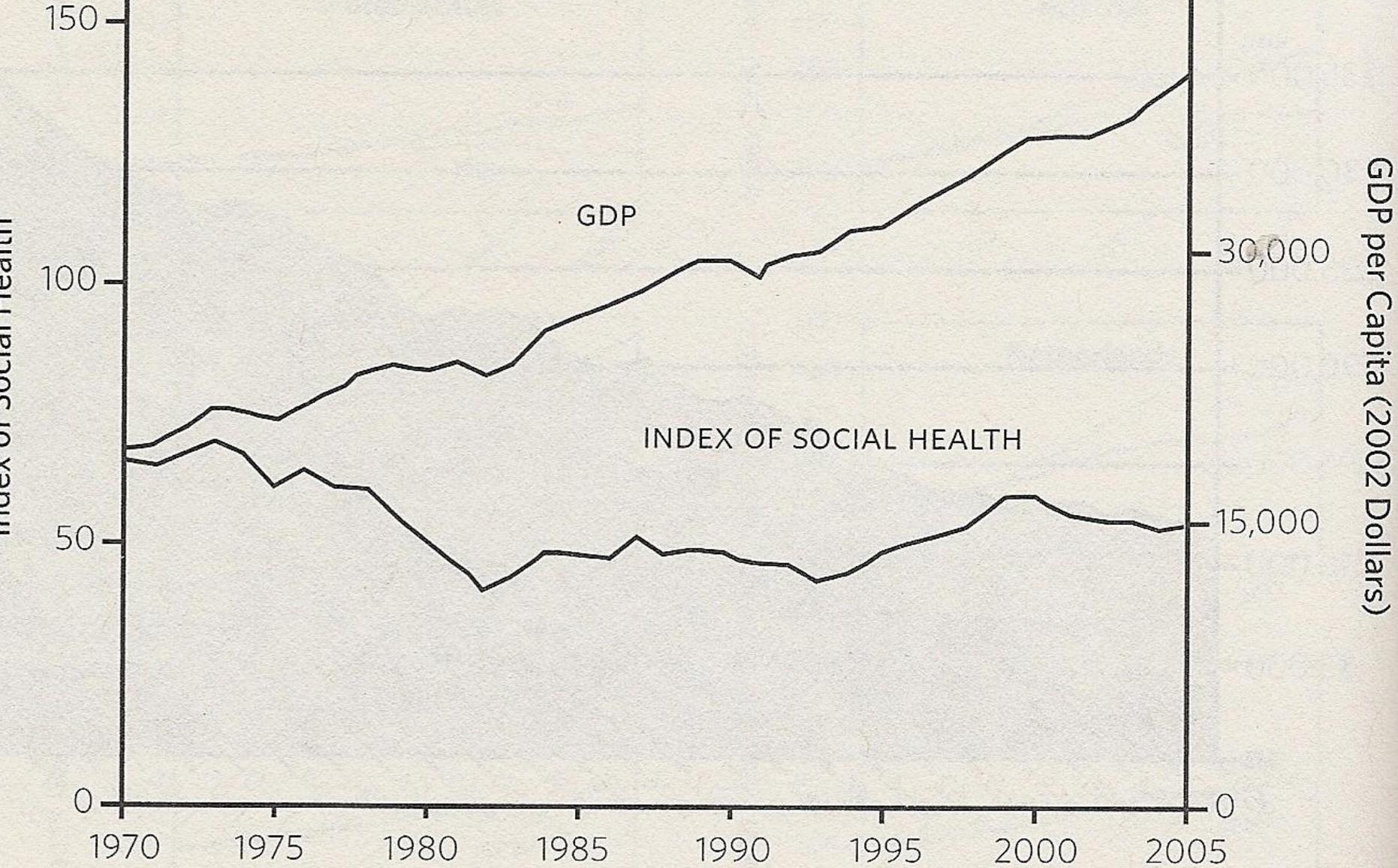
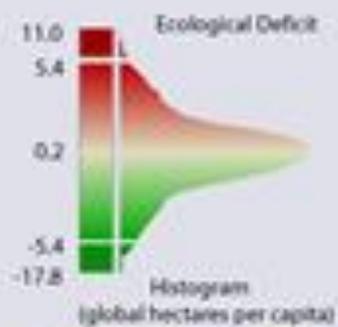


Figure 5. Trends in the Index of Social Health and GDP per capita in the United States, 1970–2005 (Source: Miringoff and Opdycke, *America's Social Health: Putting Social Issues Back on the Public Agenda*, 2007)



Blue represents insufficient data.

## 2003 World Consumption Cartogram

<http://pnhbb.org/natural/footprint/>

Countries have been stretched to indicate their effective consumption based upon 2006 Global Footprint Network and corresponding 2003 CIA World Fact Book data. The basemap is an edited ESRI ArcIMS world shapefile in the Mollweide equal area projection. Created with ArcMap 9, MAPresso 1.3, OpenOffice 2.2 & Perl 5.8

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# Lock-ins and rebound effects

- Consumption patterns are locked-in culturally, economically, technologically, infrastructurally, and institutionally
- To change them, economic incentives are not enough. Cultural changes and changes in institutions and values are also necessary
- Technology has created increases in efficiency; which often leads to rebound effects
- Next to efficiency we also need a measure of sufficiency

# Towards systemic change

- Influencing individual consumption: through education; information; product labeling; choice editing
  - Limited effectiveness; emotions rather than information
- Creating peer pressure: ecoteams
  - Limited target group (5%)
- New business models: green products; sustainable product-service-systems; greening the supply chain; green procurement; circular economy (recycling)
  - Business and government approach; does not challenge economic growth paradigm

# Systemic change (2)

- New roles for consumers: as *investors*; as *producers* (Prosumers; Røpke); as *innovators*: grassroots innovations (Seyfang, Smith); as *experimenters*: Bounded Socio-Technical Experiments (Brown, Vergragt)
- Social movements: slow living; voluntary simplicity; local currencies; transition towns; grassroots innovations; collaborative consumption; degrowth movement
  - Unclear how to mainstream them
- Challenging *economic growth paradigm*; alternatives for GDP as indicator for wellbeing
  - mostly academics; some attention among policy makers (Sarkozy: Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report on alternatives for GDP; Bhutan: Gross National Happiness Index)
- Sufficiency instead of efficiency
  - mostly academics

# “Leapfrogging” in the global south

- Some researchers and activists see the largest challenges in the global South
- The BRICS countries aspire to fast economic growth and to becoming consumer societies
- Chandran Nair (“consumptionomics”) advocates that the Western model of consumption-led economic growth cannot be replicated in Asia.
- Spangenberg and Lorek (JCP 2013) argue for both a floor (poverty alleviation) and a ceiling (overconsumption)
- Anantharaman and Schroeder (SCORAI 2013) argue for policies to enhance “leapfrogging”: avoiding overconsumption patterns in the global south.



# Innovations in Sustainable Consumption

New Economics, Socio-technical Transitions  
and Social Practices

Edited by  
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and **Philip J. Vergragt**



Advances in Ecological Economics  
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# Questions?

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- <http://scorai.org/>

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