



Book review

# Teaching and Learning Sustainable Consumption: A Guidebook

*Editors Daniel Fischer, Marlyne Sahakian, Jordan King, Jen Dyer and Gill Seyfang, Taylor & Francis, 2023, Paperback, £23.99*

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The book entitled *Teaching and learning sustainable consumption: A guidebook* is divided into two thematic parts. Part I is entitled “Design considerations for teaching and learning sustainable consumption” and consists of four chapters. The authors discuss the teaching and learning of sustainable consumption principles in higher education. This includes considerations on the dynamics of learning processes and the transition to pragmatic aspects such as goal setting and assessment of learning outcomes. Part II is entitled “Examples of teaching and learning sustainable consumption” and consists of fifty-seven chapters (yes, you read that right!) with diverse and innovative contributions from educators and practitioners from different socio-cultural contexts.

Why should we read this book? I can think of at least two major reasons why the book is essential reading for anyone involved in teaching and learning for sustainable development and sustainable consumption in higher education.

The first has to do with the lifestyle of people in contemporary societies. The situation in economically less and more developed societies around the world is far from being equal: nevertheless, consumption of



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natural resources is a common thing for all people and other living beings. The editors use Warde's (2005) definition of consumption in the book, where sustainable consumption is perceived as one that "[...] satisfy needs in different areas of life, without compromising the ability for others to do the same, today and in the future. This implies a consideration for the material and energy usage and related impacts of consumption, both social and environmental" (p. 8).

Today, not everyone in the world is in the same socio-economic situation, but we are all already feeling the consequences of global environmental changes, which the inhabitants of developed countries can, for now, cushion more easily. Peccei (1969) wrote that we grind into the future using the most advanced technologies at our disposal: but our thoughts, feelings, policies, and institutions remain anchored in a past that no longer exists. The gap between our technological perfection and our philosophical and behavioural obsolescence only magnifies the forces that created our crisis.

Sustainability is a way of looking at the world, our place in it and the future. I would like to draw attention to the introductory chapter "Sustainable consumption, a tricky topic to teach", written by all five editors, which introduces the theoretical perspectives of this book. This chapter is a must-read to understand the aims of the book. In this chapter, different representations of sustainable development are presented (Figure 1.1, p. 6) and the difference between weaker and stronger sustainable consumption is emphasised. Only the stronger sustainable consumption emphasises the consumption maxima and minima. Thinking about sustainability is probably an uncomfortable lesson in wisdom and consideration for all, but especially uncomfortable for economically developed societies. They need to adopt the most, rethink their thinking and actions to live more sustainably and achieve the good life for all.

Only by understanding and critically evaluating our own actions and involvement in the community at different levels can we adapt to change, passing on our existence and prosperity to the next generations. Sustainability should be central not only in the big steps we proudly call "progress of humanity", but also in the small, everyday decisions of the individual who should constantly ask themselves: "Can I do what I can?" and "Do I really need what I want?". Sustainability remains a lofty, unattainable goal, but at the same time the only way forward.

Second, an equally important reason for reading the book is the current central position of sustainable consumption in international efforts to achieve a sustainable future. I would just like to refer here to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12, entitled *Responsible Consumption and Production*, which is one of the 17 SDGs set by the United Nations in 2015. The official wording of SDG 12 is: "Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns". This book particularly addresses SDG 12.8 "Promote universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles" to ensure that people around the world are informed and aware of

sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature by 2030. The book brings the conceptual debates on higher education and sustainable consumption to the fore.

It should be noted that the book rightly bears the title “a guidebook”, as its chapters also deal with the processes of learning and teaching. This is particularly clear in the second, third and fourth chapters of Part I, which deal with learning theories, didactic approaches and strategies, learning objectives and knowledge assessment. In these chapters, important information for lecturers and educators is presented in a comprehensive and transparent manner, which will be particularly welcomed by those who do not have a theoretical and practical pedagogical background.

The 57 chapters in Part II can be studied in no particular order. These chapters are a collection of examples (e.g. “The good life game: bargaining needs and resources”; “A letter to Aadya: uncovering social injustices in fast fashion”; “Clothing libraries: on-campus stores as real-world experiments for sustainable fashion”; “How to draw the economy? Putting care and nature back into economic models”; “Powering practices: developing scenarios for energy futures”). These chapters differ in both the content areas and contexts within which learning and teaching take place. The editors explained that “[...] there is an even distribution between graduate and undergraduate examples, as well as between small and medium-sized classroom formats. We have a handful of examples of short exercises, and mostly examples cover single or multiple sessions” (p. 67). All contributions follow the same format, describing the group size, level, duration of the activity, topics, competences, objectives, methods, assessment, details of the activity, challenges and insights, and the context of the example. Some authors go into further detail in their descriptions and also present teaching materials, slides, posters and examples of student products. Reading these contributions, I got the impression that the higher education community has set out to find a way for sustainable consumption. However, most of the contributions come from Europe and North America, which should be improved in new editions of the book—with other contexts in which the examples are given. In addition, thematic black-and-white illustrations have been added to the contributions in some places to visually convey the content of the contributions. Without corresponding captions, the illustrations appear more like filler material and decorative accessories that are unnecessary.

Overall, the book makes an interesting reading, containing a great deal of high-quality information. This is also thanks to the editors: Daniela Fischer, Marlyne Sahakian, Jordan King, Jen Dyer and Gill Seyfang, who have already done an excellent job of collating the inspiring examples from 57 contributors to the book and linking them all together in a meaningful way. In conclusion, I highly recommend this book to all interested in teaching about sustainability and consumption.

## References

Peccei, A. (1969). *The chasm ahead*. Macmillan & Co.

Warde, A. (2005). Consumption and theories of practice. *Journal of consumer culture*, 5(2), 131–153.

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