

# Understanding the historical dynamics of sustainable consumption

## PhD Studentship

"Sustainable development" came to the fore of public attention in 1987 with the report of the Brundlandt Commission but it has had a longer history. The aim of this PhD studentship is to advance our understanding of the dynamics of sustainable consumption in the past to shed fresh light on the present.

The project will make a contribution to the SCI research strand on Sustainable Consumer Behaviours and Lifestyles by developing a historical case study. The following research areas are indicative but not meant to be exclusive. We particularly invite project applications that speak to one of the following problems:

### **1) Solo Living and the Consequences of Changing Living Arrangements for Sustainability:**

The late twentieth century witnessed a steep rise in single households and living alone. In the United Kingdom, 2% of 25-44 year olds lived alone in 1973. By 2003 it was 12%. In France, the share of single-parent households with children almost doubled in the 1980s-90s. Such changes have implications for the built environment, mobility, and lifestyles. What is their history and how have households, communities and authorities responded to the material pressures resulting from such shifts in the past? What can be learnt from earlier types of communal living arrangements with shared facilities?

### **2) Sustainable Cities:**

The world today is an urban world. Cities have placed themselves at the forefront of sustainability initiatives, ranging from sustainable architecture and climate action plans for schools to "future weeks" of fair trade and global solidarity. In Zurich, public housing purchases only energy efficient A-class appliances, such as heat pump tumble dryers. Urbanisation, however, is nothing new. How have cities in the past coped with pressures on material resources? What is the pre-history of current attempts in urban planning and architecture to minimise energy, lighting, water and material use in private and public spaces? Most historical literature on consumption focuses exclusively on private households and market behaviour. Through their public institutions, buildings, and powers of public procurement and regulation, however, cities are vital agents of consumption in their own right. History offers a rich archive to explore the interplay between private and public forces for more (or less) sustainable living.

### **3) Generational Politics and Ethics:**

Sustainable development, in the words of the 1987 Brundlant Commission, 'is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' How has the interpretation of "needs" and "ability" changed over time? And, how have societies in the past viewed their obligation to future generations? In the literature about Fair Trade, recent geographers have debated the potential for "caring at a distance". Historians might similarly ask about the changing ethics of "caring for the future".

We are seeking an outstanding researcher with an interest in the interface between history and social science. The successful candidate is expected to develop his/her own project, with the help of supervisory guidance. Unlike a conventional History PhD, the researcher will benefit from playing an

active part in the multidisciplinary community at SCI and from the wider expertise gained in the process. The successful project can be a national, comparative or transnational study in modern/contemporary history. The call for applications is open to European and Non-European topics. Applicants should have experience with historical research (the application is open to students with a history degree as well as those with a degree in a relevant, neighbouring discipline). Language and research skills should be appropriate for the project proposed. In addition to the research question and its significance, the personal statement should include an indicative list of sources/archives and scholarly literature, and a brief discussion of proposed method. Short-listed candidates will be asked for a writing sample.

Proposed Supervisors: Prof. Frank Trentmann and SCI colleague as appropriate  
School of Social Sciences

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Applications for 2012 will be considered from December 2011. The closing date for applications is 29th February 2012.

A minimum of four funded studentships are available on the four year SCI CDT programme. The Sustainable Consumption Institute examines issues related to environmental sustainability through the lens of consumption. A key current focus is on climate change; it is imperative that international, national and company climate change strategies and targets are grounded in climate science. The challenge facing society means that we cannot rely only on technology based solutions to combat climate change and move to a low carbon based economy; it will be vital to also change patterns of consumption and production.

The SCI currently has three interrelated themes to guide and organise research activities: Sustainable Consumer Behaviours and Lifestyles, Stimulating Eco-Innovation for Sustainable Production and Distribution and Climate Change and Carbon: Mitigation, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Applicants are welcome to apply for specific projects (details listed below) or to submit their own project ideas.

Applicants are required to hold a first class honours degree or equivalent, and/or distinction at Masters level. Full fees and stipend equivalent to UK research councils.

Contact for further information: Sue Huzar, Senior Programme Administrator –  
[sue.huzar@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:sue.huzar@manchester.ac.uk)

If you wish to apply please send applications to:

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Centre for Doctoral Training  
Sustainable Consumption Institute  
The University of Manchester  
188 Waterloo Place  
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M13 9PL UK  
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Applications should contain:

- Academic Curriculum Vitae
- Contact details of at least two academic referees
- Copy of official academic transcripts from your undergraduate or Masters degree
- A personal statement (1000 words maximum) outlining: your own project ideas; or the specific project you are applying for; your research experience to date; your suitability to join the SCI CDT; also what you hope to achieve from your PhD and your post-PhD career aspirations
- Alternative funding sources (eg. government, industry, family etc.)

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