
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Markus Vinnari, MSc (Economics) and MSc (Environmental Biotechnology), is a Researcher in University of Eastern Finland. He is defending his thesis in Economic Sociology titled 'Past, present and future of eating meat in Finland' in March 2010. In his thesis, he studies the changes in the amounts of meat consumed and in the prevalence of vegetarianism in Finland. He is interested in consumer studies and in human–animal studies. He often utilises a futures research perspective in his research.

Marileena Koskela, MSc Eng. and Econ., is a Project Manager in Finland Futures Research Centre in University of Turku. She currently works with environmental impact and aspect measurement in forest industry. Her research interests are in the use of corporate social responsibility information in companies.

This special issue of *PIE (Progress in Industrial Ecology – An International Journal)* is formed out of some of the best papers from the 11th Annual International Conference of the Finland Futures Research Centre. The conference was held from 28th May to 29th May 2009 at the University of Tampere, Finland. The theme of the conference was 'The Future of the Consumer Society' and it covered two subjects: consumption and futures research methods. The conference brought together academic experts of sustainable development and future studies to interact with corporate representatives. More than 140 people attended the conference. The conference programme included 46 parallel presentations with topic such as environmentally significant consumption, consumers and changing values and sustainable food consumption.

The reason to target especially consumption in this 11th annual conference was that consumption is becoming a key issue in the debate on creating a sustainable future. In particular, the worldwide spread of extremely resource-intensive lifestyles and economic practices has become one of the most important challenges humankind faces.

As one of the largest organisations in the world performing future-oriented research Finland Futures Research Centre's goal is to promote future-oriented thinking. Futures studies is ideally placed to help face the current global challenges as it includes tools for describing possible, probable and preferable variations of the future that are both socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, by examining a variety of possibilities we can come closer to choosing and shaping the future, rather than merely predicting it. Thus, future studies offer valuable tools for understanding and guiding consumer society. Some authors have stated that sustainable consumption is not plausible because consumption would always have negative impacts to environment and as such sustainable consumption should not be studied. This is not, however, the correct perspective to tackle the problem in our opinion. Consumption is necessary part of human interaction, but more attention is definitely needed to analyse and guide our consumption practices to more sustainable direction. The papers of this special issue give their input in shaping the future of consumer society into a more sustainable one.

In the discussions in the conference, wide perspectives of plausible and preferable future were outlined. One key message from the conference was that we should now use this financial recession as a means to build a more sustainable future for the consumer society. Also, we learned during the conference that the choices that each one of us makes, as consumers, makes a difference in shaping the future.

The five papers selected for this special issue focus on the future consumers. Topics of the papers relate with sustainable food consumption, consumers' energy consumption, policy evaluation and sustainability press releases.

Risku-Norja, Kurppa and Helenius explore greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of different diet choices. They compare in their paper diet from animal-based products towards more ecologically produced food. Their calculations suggest that vegan diet would half the GHG emissions of primary food production and would result in 7% reduction of overall consumption. In reduction of GHG emissions, their conclusions are that the focus should be in public catering and in policy development.

Ulvila, Paloviita and Puupponen examine the consumers' perceptions of sustainable produced food. Their study focused on organic, Fair Trade and locally produced food. These products seemed to differ to consumers' perceptions. They found in their study that important attributes for selecting sustainability produced food was, e.g., animal welfare, environmental issues, quality and taste. They offer some marketing-related conclusions in the paper, since consumers find it time consuming to find reliable information about these products.

Saikka evaluates in her paper the consumers' possibilities in decreasing energy consumption. Saikka uses in her paper the ImPACT framework to evaluate the effects of population, affluence, intensity of energy use and technology on the level of CO₂ emissions. Also, Saikka emphasises in her paper possibility of the consumer to decrease CO₂ emissions. Consumers' daily choices, such as shopping or conserving energy, have impact on overall level of CO₂ emissions.

Heiskanen, Brohmann, Fritsche, Schönherr and Aalto have created a framework for evaluating policies of sustainable consumption. A framework is highly needed since governments develop different policies for sustainable consumption but the evaluation of their impacts is not easy. Their framework is based on regulatory, economic, communication-based and voluntary and procedural instruments.

Kujala, Toikka and Heikkinen examine in their paper how companies reach the consumers via press releases and media. Their paper has a highly topical case study on forest industry in South America. They conclude that press releases are an important way of communicating social responsibility. However, they also point out that companies could provide more information about their stakeholder relationships in the press releases.

As these papers represent, actions are needed in many levels and in many areas if more sustainable way of living is to be reached. When the sustainability of human consumption decisions is evaluated the emphasis should be on the total environmental burden caused by the products' total lifespan. We as editors of this special issue believe that the papers presented here give a valuable addition to the discussion how to evaluate the social, environmental and economic consequences of peoples' consumption decisions. We like to express our warmest thanks to the authors of the papers as well as to the reviewers of these papers.