

SUSTAINABLE GRASSROOTS INNOVATIONS AS OPPORTUNITIES TO FOSTER SUFFICIENT LIFESTYLES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Meeting the goals of the Paris climate agreement to combat climate change produced by CO₂ emissions will require fundamental innovations of how energy is produced and consumed on a systemic level. Eco-efficiency strategies will not do this job alone. Advocates of sufficiency strategies argue that we additionally need to reduce our energy consumption by simply consuming less. The sufficiency strategy demands people to change the way they live. Such changes in lifestyles are facilitated by reshaping the physical and societal (consumption) structures in a way that makes more sufficient behaviour more salient, attractive, convenient, and easier. One way of how such rearrangements of the external behaviour structures may evolve is the emergence and diffusion of social innovations and grassroots-based initiatives. Our research project aims to shed light on the potential and intermediary role of such grassroots-based initiatives in regard to the promotion of sufficient lifestyles. We are interested in what relevant attributes of different types of grassroots-based initiatives may be in order to address different antecedents of individual behaviour change, and thus in how initiatives can be characterized that are successful in fostering more sufficient lifestyles.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to better understand the nexus between individual behaviour and external structures we rely our research on two research threads: First, we draw on research on social innovations, particularly on the work of Jaeger-Erben and colleagues [1], who distinguish different types of social innovations in regard with sustainable consumption practices, based on so-called consumption principles: Following the authors, innovation types differ in the degree to which they mainly provide new opportunities for alternative products, services and practices (need and utility oriented consumption), focus on enhancing new competences (competence-expanding consumption), or on bringing like-minded people together (collaborative consumption and community-empowering consumption).

Second, we rely on environmental psychological behaviour change theories, particularly on the comprehensive model of Klöckner [2]. This model integrates the most common behaviour change theories, namely, the theory of planned behaviour [3], the norm-activation-theory [4], the value-belief-norm-theory [5], and habits [6]. While this comprehensive model is particularly suited to explain private consumption decisions, for our context, it is equally important to understand, why individuals

engage in collective actions, i.e. why they initiate and join activities of grassroots-based initiatives. Research on collective sustainable behaviour has emphasized the role of social identity and collective efficacy beliefs as important drivers for participation [7].

To better understand whether and how grassroots-based initiatives might foster sufficient lifestyles we build thus a nexus of the typology of sustainable social innovations [1], and the antecedents of environmentally significant behaviour change [2], and collective action [7]. We assume that grassroots-based initiatives (a) provide “enabling structures”, i.e. new opportunities for action by changing their accessibility and simplicity, (b) provide “motivational elements” that address individuals values, personal norms and self-identity (c) enable and create interactions within a group of like-minded people by “community-building elements” thus addressing perceived social norms, social identities and collective efficacy beliefs, and (d) provide new capabilities and skills by “competence-enhancing elements” thus enhancing perceived behavioural control.

3. METHOD

Our empirical work follows a two-step procedure. First, by means of 27 qualitative interviews with incorporators, users, and supporters of grassroots-based initiatives we explored, based on our theoretical assumptions, individual and structural factors that support or hinder the initiation, diffusion, and usage of such initiatives. Researched examples encompass various innovation types in the fields of mobility, food, and everyday consumption (namely cargo e-bike sharing, repair cafés, community-supported agricultures, and sharing platforms).

Second, we test for the relevance and exploratory power of potentially relevant attributes of the grassroots-based initiatives on psychological antecedents of behaviour change. To this we run a standardized online survey among users of the different grassroot-based initiatives (envisaged $N = 200$). By means of a factorial survey design [8], we experimentally vary the attributes of fictive initiatives presented. Multiple linear regression analysis will be calculated for analysing the data.

4. EXPECTED RESULTS

At the moment data gathering of the online survey is running. At BEHAVE 2018 we will present insights of our qualitative and quantitative empirical work, and derive implications for further research, as well as policy recommendations.

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