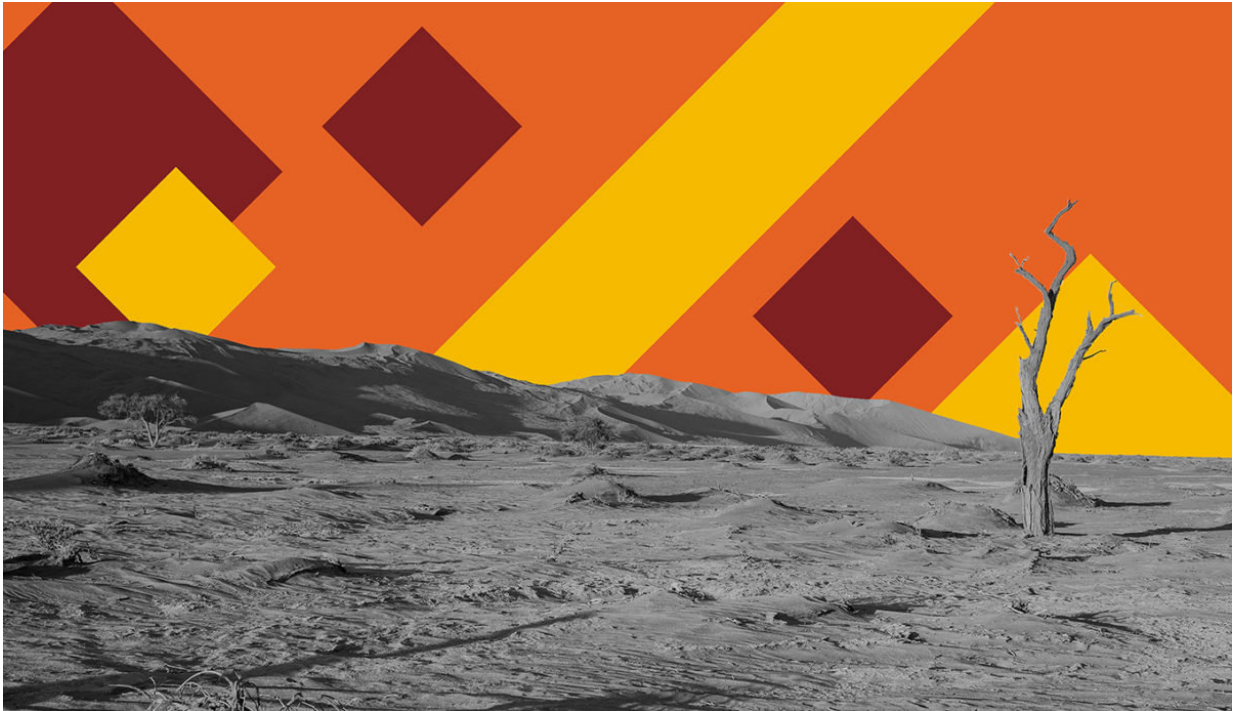


# Climate change and sustainable lifestyles

January 10 2018, by Ricardo García-Mira

---



Credit: University of Bath

Professor Ricardo García-Mira is currently a Member of the Parliament of Spain, and is the Spokesperson of the Commission for the Study of Climate Change. He is a Professor of Social and Environmental Psychology at the University of A Coruna, and a Visiting Professor at the IPR, as well as the President of the International Association for People-Environment Studies.

Over the past few decades we have accumulated enough scientific evidence to show that our resource-intensive patterns and the resulting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inevitably lead to a greater scarcity of resources, an appreciable loss of biodiversity and a [climate change](#) that is already clearly showing disastrous effects on our lives. Current patterns of production and consumption are not sustainable and are already responsible for problems that are complex to solve – and interconnected with each other. This makes it a priority for any political leader to find the most appropriate ways to introduce a new scenario of ecological transition towards a more sustainable economic model.

The economic crisis has led to a deep recession in many parts of Europe and has underlined the need for a profound transformation of our economic institutions and government in an intelligent, sustainable and inclusive direction. Europe today faces a challenge: in addition to developing sufficient capacities to improve well-being, providing decent employment, reducing inequality, combatting poverty and preserving the natural environment, it must also manage natural resources efficiently and responsibly. It must decarbonise the economy and promote alternative lifestyles less dependent on carbon.

## **Growth, consumption and well-being**

The ways of life in the global North, derived from an increase in wealth, have brought with them intensive consumption of resources that directly affect climate change – and despite the evidence, which shows that materialism imposes a high price on individual welfare, such consumption is still our reference point for what well-being is.

Climate change is now beginning to raise questions about the assumptions on which current socio-economic growth is sustained. It is well known that our lifestyles do not seem to lead to the expected promise of happiness or a more tranquil life. On the contrary, citizens

experience more and more pressure on their time, less well-being, and at the same time they realise that our ecological footprint is increasing and that our ways of life are unsustainable.

Recent studies (e.g. Soper, 2007; Kasser & Sheldon, 2009; Kasser, 2011; Unanue et al., 2014) show that citizens of western countries experience a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the current consumer lifestyle and with the accelerated pace of modern life. Hence the equation of economic consumption with welfare has led to a dissociation between economic growth and environmental impact, involving strategies to improve the efficiency of resources on the supply side. Technological advances and carbon prices have been considered key aspects of transitions to a green economy, and all kinds of eco-efficiency strategies and mechanisms have been put in place to clean up production processes and make them more ecological and greener. However, cleaner production processes have not produced the expected effect. Rather, they have generated increases in the levels of real consumption, cancelling out the positive effects that could be rationally expected from a cleaner production process. This makes it clear that the strategies of action for production processes should be complemented by changes in consumption patterns and the reduction of resource consumption levels, while promoting a supply that is more focused on alternative patterns.

## **New scenarios of consumption reduction**

There is a great concern throughout Europe about how new scenarios of consumption reduction might impact the economy, and how the changes that these scenarios elicit could influence employment and its distribution; the balance between work and free time; and, in general, everything that produces a negative impact. It is necessary to be aware of these new scenarios, along with the conditions, potentials and obstacles so that we can identify our priorities and design the necessary regulatory processes and action protocols. Such processes and protocols will serve

as the basis for the transformation of our economic system within the framework of the transition towards a more sustainable society, towards a more sustainable lifestyle. They should also include proposals on the most effective means to support and accelerate the green transition, especially in the fields of energy, water, transport and mobility (see García-Mira et al., 2016), as well as in the energy efficiency of building, agriculture and forest policy. It is urgent that we evaluate the impact that the introduction of urban transformations with solutions based on nature could have on adaptation to climate change, health and well-being, social cohesion and [sustainable economic development](#). This implies implementing a green tax system and incentive programming capable of maintaining a constant process of decarbonisation in the economy.

## **The European strategy: Sustainable lifestyles and the green economy**

In 2009, the European Union, in its commitment to energy efficiency and climate change, approved the Legislative Package on Energy and Climate for 2013-2020, consisting of a set of directives that set specific objectives to increase [energy efficiency](#) and reduce emissions in production and management for the horizon of 2020. In response to the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel of Experts on Climate Change, the European Council recognised that by 2050 Europe and the developed countries should have reduced emissions by around 80-95% in comparison to the values of 1990 if we want to keep the increase in the average temperature below 2°C, which coincides with the objective of the 2015 Paris Agreement. If we analyse current trends, it is likely that by the time the necessary changes are made in our technological processes to reduce the impact of climate change and help less developed countries to mitigate the negative externalities that they will have to face, we will still be far from the adoption of truly sustainable lifestyles being a fact on a large scale.

## **Sustainability initiatives that mitigate the impact of climate change**

This being the general panorama, if we put the focus on the local level, there are initiatives in multiple places in Europe that are opening up spaces for a series of ecologically responsible activities (ecovillages, cities in transition, consumer cooperatives and organic food production, institutional programmes for equilibrium between work and private life, cooperatives with climate and energy models, sustainable textile production, etc.), and which are demonstrating the small-scale viability of alternative economic models, such as research carried out within the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#) and the [European Strategy for Resource Efficiency](#) have shown.

Such research analyses different sustainability initiatives in Europe (see [García-Mira and Dumitru, 2017](#)) and shows that, although the collective responses to addressing climate change are not yet articulated, there is enough evidence to ensure that it is possible to move towards a more sustainable economy. This is true even though the challenges of behavioral change and support for the dissemination of sustainable lifestyles on a large scale would require a 180° change in the still-deeply rooted conceptions of what success, self-realisation and [consumption](#) mean for the majority of citizens.

The leap that these sustainable lifestyle initiatives will need to make from the micro to the macro requires alternative models that make the current understanding more complex regarding the interaction of social, economic, technological and psychological factors that either promote or restrict the adoption of sustainable lifestyles.

## **Sustainability, governance and the joint generation of knowledge**

The transition to a sustainable lifestyle requires important urban transformations whose main goal is to guarantee an increase in the efficiency of resource management, an improvement in the quality of life and greater environmental resilience. The question of a changing lifestyle naturally involves the places and urban spaces where that life unfolds. The adaptation of cities, therefore, is a priority to be addressed, together with an exploration of the ways in which transformations take place in a sustainable direction, a need that has never been so urgent. We need to think about the most appropriate models, strategies and mechanisms, and consider which governance patterns are most appropriate, reflecting on how power constellations work and how to involve civil society organisations more.

In addition, it is urgent to highlight the importance of researchers, citizens and politicians jointly contributing to the creation of knowledge; this also challenges universities, by reinforcing the link between research and politics, while reinforcing the idea of transforming cities into more sustainable places to live. Close collaboration with citizens, professionals and politicians is characteristic of transdisciplinary research which seeks to guarantee the relevance and transfer of research results to society. Given that effective approaches to climate change require the contribution of all of us, the solutions must be built together, with the involvement of a variety of actors, and that makes the need clear to consider professionals, politicians and civil society in its multiple forms of organisation and manifestation. A new paradigm of knowledge development is therefore needed, based on methodologies that integrate citizens, users, politicians and stakeholders within an integral system of cogenerating knowledge.

## **A space for social innovation and participation**

The creation of an appropriate space for innovation and social



participation is also demanded here, where [social innovation](#) can emerge as the result of the creative processes that arise from the encounters between the different actors. Creating new spaces in which different disciplines and actors can establish common terms of reference and a shared language is absolutely necessary. But perhaps it is even more important, in addition to a shared language, to share the idea that the social and the environmental – when based on knowledge of the social sciences – can contribute to improving society. Social innovation refers here to introducing changes in the relationships between actors and institutions that incorporate new ways of approaching problems such as environmental migration, unemployment, energy poverty, climate change, inequality, marginalisation and difficulties in accessing certain services. These are new ways of responding to social needs that are not adequately covered when they fall under the exclusive responsibility of public institutions.

Social innovation initiatives experiment with new models of local economy and community relations, and are proving to be viable alternatives to existing modes of social, economic and political organisation. These social innovation initiatives also aim to empower local communities, generating international networks that are implementing changes towards a social and solidarity-based economy, towards the sustainability of our lifestyles and towards democratic regeneration. One of the most important characteristics of this new approach is that it involves bringing together different actors with different opinions, agendas, languages and expectations. Finally, it demands a consensus in the model of governance, which implies commitment to the implementation of participation mechanisms in order to build community policies.

**More information:** Kate Soper. Re-thinking the `Good Life`, *Journal of Consumer Culture* (2007). [DOI: 10.1177/1469540507077681](https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540507077681)

Tim Kasser et al. Time Affluence as a Path toward Personal Happiness and Ethical Business Practice: Empirical Evidence from Four Studies, *Journal of Business Ethics* (2008). [DOI: 10.1007/s10551-008-9696-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-008-9696-1)

Tim Kasser. Can Thrift Bring Well-being? A Review of the Research and a Tentative Theory, *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* (2011). [DOI: 10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00396.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00396.x)

Wenceslao Unanue et al. Materialism and Well-being in the UK and Chile: Basic Need Satisfaction and Basic Need Frustration as Underlying Psychological Processes, *European Journal of Personality* (2014). [DOI: 10.1002/per.1954](https://doi.org/10.1002/per.1954)

Ricardo García-Mira et al. Testing Scenarios to Achieve Workplace Sustainability Goals Using Backcasting and Agent-Based Modeling, *Environment and Behavior* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/0013916516673869](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916516673869)

Provided by University of Bath

Citation: Climate change and sustainable lifestyles (2018, January 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-01-climate-sustainable-lifestyles.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.