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Lifestyles in transition, a new working agenda

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Consumption and production patterns have long been at the heart of sustainable development international political processes (see Rio Declaration of 1992, Marrakech Process in 2002, Sustainable Development Goals in 2015). Consumption and its environmental impacts mirror our lifestyles. As part of the implementation of the ecological transition, this issue is becoming increasingly important on the political agenda, and must be addressed in order to reveal associated challenges (social, economic, environmental) and to propose avenues for public action.

Consumer and lifestyle issues on the scientific agenda

Recently, various scientific studies have made it possible to better understand and assess the threats posed by the generalisation of certain lifestyles to limiting global warming, respecting the balance of the biosphere or limiting inequalities ([Rockstrom et al., 2009](#); [O'Neill et al., 2018](#)). While some practices with a high environmental impact are spreading throughout the world (e.g. international long-haul flights or the generalisation of a more carnivore diet), and technological advances have not been sufficient to limit the impact of these lifestyles in terms of pollution or resource consumption in developed countries, the scientific world is gradually incorporating the hypothesis of changing lifestyles as a variable in transition scenarios. This is reflected in the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which presents options for limiting global warming to 1.5°C¹ : some scenarios assume a change in lifestyles (e.g. mobility choices, diet, housing choices, etc.), while others are based much more broadly on carbon capture and storage technologies that are still very immature ([Rankovic et al., 2018](#)).

New consumption practices motivated by environmental reasons?

This scientific observation is coupled with a rise in public debate of the question of adopting more sustainable practices at the individual level. In Sweden, for example, there is a societal tendency to refuse to fly.² Similarly, in many countries, changes in diet are emerging, partly due to environmental, but also health or animal welfare considerations (such as the consumption of organic products or vegetarian or "flexitarian" diets). Thus, while in the past they were confined to minority political positions (alter-globalisation and degrowth movements in particular), changes in certain behaviours for environmental reasons seem to be gaining ground in the public debate; and in practice, for example, organic sales have increased fourfold in 10 years.³

Questions at the heart of the "Lifestyles in Transition" issue

The transition of lifestyles, whether as an emerging phenomenon or as a collective objective to be achieved, raises many questions: what is the extent of these societal changes? What practices and types of populations do they involve? What political legitimacy can the public authorities have to support or even encourage them? How can these changes be accompanied by simultaneous changes in production patterns? These reflections must go beyond the average individual to consider the diversity of society: how do the promoted lifestyle changes provide an opportunity to redesign inequality maps or do they constitute sources of new social and cultural inequalities? For example, do policies to promote the consumption of organically produced food products reach all population groups, or only the most favoured groups? This questioning is necessary on the one hand for reasons of equity, and on the other hand for reasons of environmental efficiency: the ecological transition requires the involvement of as many people as possible, and not just the wealthiest or most aware segment of the population.

Finally, the question of the means of action of public authorities to accompany and encourage these developments—while restricting those incompatible with environmental objectives—remains to be tackled: in a context where individual lifestyles and behaviours are the result of a multitude of determinants (psychological, sociological, economic, technical, cultural, etc.) from a multitude of actors, the political management of the transition seems extremely complex.

Activities of the Lifestyles in Transition Initiative

IDDRI is launching a new initiative, "Lifestyles in transition", in order to better understand the changes in lifestyles and their place in ecological transition pathways, and to identify public action plans to guide these changes.

In this context, several activities are planned:

- Conduct case studies with the various IDDRI teams (e.g. agriculture and food; mobility and decarbonisation) in order to take more in-depth account of lifestyles in different fields and analyse the issues raised by this dimension in these different sectors.
- Identify controversies on the different ways of approaching the issue of lifestyle changes and propose a political framework.
- Lead a collective internal and external reflection, allowing to cross sectoral and disciplinary perspectives in order to forge an original approach to the issue, able to feed the research agenda of the initiative.

Photo credits: [wikimedia](#)

¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

² [in French] <https://www.franceinter.fr/societe/en-suede-la-honte-de-prendre-l-avion-face-a-la-fierte-de-voyager-en-train>

³ [in French] Panorama des industries agroalimentaires- Chiffres et indicateurs clés. Édition 2018. Ministère de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation.

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