

## Sustainable Consumption in Hungary - what is small-footprint-living and can we make it attractive?

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The overall objective of this paper is threefold. First, it aims to define small-footprint-living in theory, philosophy and practice, then examine to what extent it has been possible to achieve in Hungary with the help of selected sustainable lifestyle initiatives, and finally to provide an overview of how it could be made more attractive through various means in order to challenge the widespread view that above a certain threshold, reduced material consumption leads to reduced well-being and life satisfaction.

The paper begins by providing a definition of small-footprint-living for the purposes of this paper through a brief overview of literature as well as practice, and, where possible, also defined by indicators such as, for example, the ecological footprint and carbon footprint.

Following this, an overview of current consumption and consumption trends in Hungary is provided, among others, in the field of energy consumption and carbon emissions, energy poverty, household expenditure and its structure, ecological footprint, well-being and life satisfaction, etc. These consumption data and trends are then compared to trends in the rest of Europe, and where possible and data exist, to a status that is considered sustainable in the literature.

As the general level of well-being in Hungarian society as expressed by, for example, the well-being component of the Happy Planet Index, is rather low, it is of great importance to emphasize that the level of well-being can and should be raised in ways that do not result in increased ecological footprint for Hungarian society as whole.

The aim of this overview and analysis is to challenge the decades' long view shared by many that in order to be sustainable and be able to offer higher levels of well-being, Hungary's economy needs to grow and 'catch up' to consumption levels in Western Europe. It has been observed in the literature that such a path is highly unlikely to result in a sustainable outcome. The paper draws attention to the fact that achieving and implementing sustainable lifestyles in Hungary - and indeed in other Central Eastern European countries - is a somewhat different challenge from that in Western Europe. It is discussed and is supported by data that even though Hungarian *society as a whole* needs to reduce its ecological footprint in order to be more sustainable, *at the level of individual households* the question is often not about concrete reduction but a re-evaluation of existing lifestyle practices, not about scaling down from large-footprint lifestyles but accepting and valuing current smaller-footprint lifestyles and not wanting to progress to resource-rich Western European lifestyles.

At the practical level this means for example that the various practices households employ either because that has been the way they have always done things - e.g. make preserves from garden produce or mend clothes -, or because they need to save money - e.g. wear second-hand clothes, save bathing water for cleaning, etc. - and are viewed by mainstream society as neither modern nor trendy, but quirky at best, have to be placed in a new light to be accepted as practices people should follow and be proud of. In order for this to happen, among many other things, a wide-scale awareness-raising and learning process needs to occur in society.

Following this, the paper introduces various sustainable lifestyle campaigns that have targeted households in Hungary. The methodology they applied is based on behaviour change theories, and emphasizes the importance of small groups and community support. The methodology is explained in the light of how the campaigns intended to educate, convince and motivate households that more

sustainable, smaller-footprint living is liveable as well as desirable and attractive for both environmental and social reasons. The components of the methodology they applied include

- helping people develop a positive attitude to small-footprint-living through various means, e.g. organizing community events;
- organizing informal and involving training events where households can share their already existing best practice;
- training and assisting volunteers to become change agents in their local community;
- assisting people in measuring the impact of their households;
- assisting people in becoming trendsetters for their peers through publishing and presenting their case stories;
- engaging the mainstream media and convincing them to report on small-footprint living and household good practice interviewing and filming families; etc.

Conclusions are made as to whether these campaigns achieved their aims in getting households closer to small-footprint-living as well as making these lifestyles attractive, and what could be done to make these lifestyles more widely accepted and practiced.

Household case studies supported by actual consumption-based data are related. Both quantitative (e.g. carbon footprints) and qualitative results are provided. Most importantly, attention is drawn to the importance of working actively, on the one hand, with the mainstream media, and on the other, with voluntary change agents.

It needs to be emphasized that households participated in these programmes voluntarily. Thus, in order for the kind of transformation needed to happen on a wider scale, appropriate policies and funding should be available to support successful programmes for longer periods of time, allowing for the programme to spread and giving participants the chance to motivate others to join through relating their good experience as well as creating a shared group identity. As a certain percentage of participants in these programmes are happy to become voluntary change agents, it is conceivable that the support necessary for programmes can be progressively reduced as the number of local change agents grow.

Further research would be needed to establish how to encourage and empower people more effectively to become change agents as well as what kind of frameworks and structures are needed to support them in their work. In the cases described here, small-footprint living competitions with set timelines, tasks and attractive low-carbon prizes, and an expert organization available to provide continued professional support proved to be a useful and effective framework.

It is also worth noting that a lot of the people who volunteered to be change agents were at some kind of a changing point in their lives, so becoming a change agent for small-footprint-living was in a way a carrier option. Processes designed to provide some form of recognition for these people could contribute to small-footprint-lifestyles becoming the norm.