

UiO : Centre for Development and the Environment
University of Oslo

Climate Emergency! Energy Crisis!
The 2022 international symposium of Include

Negotiating sustainable consumption in everyday life: Projects, practices and provision



Arve Hansen and Ulrikke Wethal
Include - Research Centre for Socially Inclusive Energy Transitions
Centre for Development and the Environment
University of Oslo



About the project

Include - Research centre for socially inclusive energy transitions

[← Research](#) [← Projects](#) [← Research projects](#)

Sustainability and household consumption in Norway

What factors prevent and enable a transition to a more sustainable and fair consumption in Norway?



Photo by Siniz Kim on Unsplash

Participants

- [Arve Hansen](#)
- [Ulrikke Bryn Wethal](#)
- [Thea Sandnes](#)

[Detailed list of participants](#)

Involved research groups

- Sustainable consumption and energy equity



Projects, negotiations and agency

- How do households 'do' sustainability, and how is this negotiated in everyday life?
- How are these negotiations shaped in relation to socio-material arrangements?



Theoretical starting points: Projects, practices and provision

Agency of individual consumers as contested and (still) underdeveloped part of practice-approaches to consumption
(e.g. Welch et al. 2020)

The structuring effects of capitalist political economy ignored in much of contemporary practice theory
(e.g. Evans, 2018; Authors)

Agency of resistance + agency through 'projects' - **intentions or desire to reach particular (culturally constituted) goals**
(Ortner, 2006)

'Projects' as simultaneously constrained and defined by dominant socio-material arrangements and **as negotiations of these**

Methods

- Self-defined environmentally conscious households in Norway (N=20)
- Digital interviews
- Autophotography



Vil du bidra til forskning på bærekraftig forbruk i Norge? Vi ser etter miljøbevisste husholdninger som ønsker å bidra med sine erfaringer i et forskningsintervju. (Takk til som har meldt seg, nå trenger vi flere.)
Les mer om prosjektet her: sum.uio.no/include/forskn

...
[Oversett tweeten](#)



What is sustainability?

It is buying as little as possible and throwing away as little as possible, that I think maybe is the essence

(Woman, 1993, Viken)



Household 13: Food waste – doable

I don't know, I find it a bit big and complex in a way. So what's easiest to relate to is what has to do with me. The nature I see, and the food I eat. And then it's a bit like abstract with this big climate stuff. But it is a bit like sad to read about lots of animals being threatened by extinction and lots of bad weather due to climate change and stuff like that. But that also becomes a bit abstract.

Should I eat farmed salmon, or wild caught fish, or should I not eat fish, because they empty the ocean with bottom trawlers? I haven't got a clue! Should I eat scampi, or was there something wrong with that as well?

(Woman, 1976, Trondheim)

Negotiating social relations - households

I think we have a bit...different attitude towards material consumption.... he's much more into stuff than I am. But it's mostly the kind of things that more men than women are into, stuff that has a motor

I guess that's one of the things I find difficult...to influence others, how much should I try to influence others?

I find that difficult

*Because **if he thinks its important to have a new motorcycle, and I think it's nonsense. What do you do then?***

(Female, 1956, Slependen)



Household 24 – Dependence on large diesel truck - challenging

Negotiating social relations – (not) being an ecojerk

*I guess there is a growing awareness in society, but I think it will take at least 10-20 years more, I'm afraid, until we actually..until we can have this conversation on sustainability **without being accused of being some kind of ecofool** (økofjott)*

*How does one do it **without arguing? How do you do it without being labeled as some ecojerk? How do you do it without being labeled as a 'rødstrømpe' [feminist]? How do you do it without being labeled as this or that, because then you're really just pigeonholed, and put in a kind of «I don't have to listen to it because you're one of those».** (man, 1976, Klokkarstua)*



Household 28 – own eggs, doable

Negotiating energy technologies and infrastructures



Household 17: Half full washing machine and dishwasher – challenging to live alone

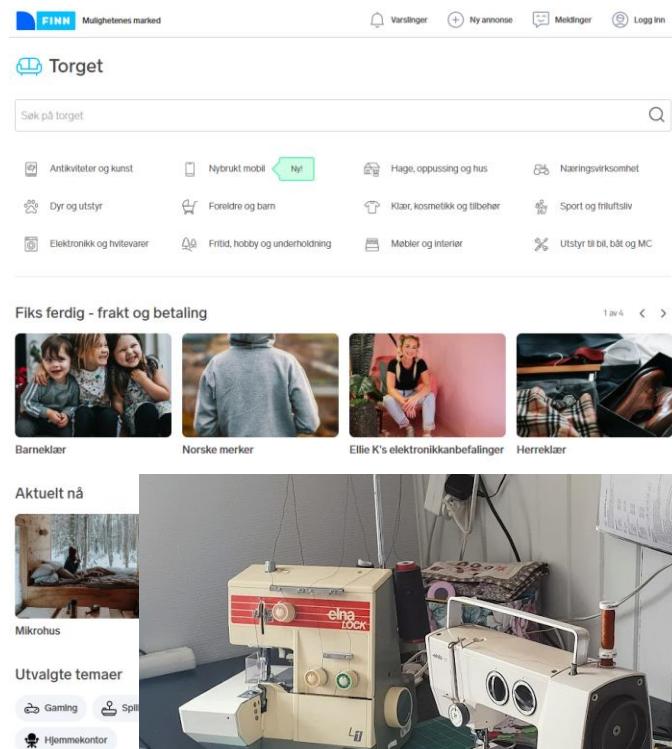
Household 10: Heat pump and energy consumption - challenging

We have turned down, not much, but some degrees. I think we are in general good at turning off the light..and that maybe doesnt matter much.. But, it says something about mindset or attitude maybe. That you dont need to use more than you have to. But we still keep on, we need to keep the heating on. So we have not cut back dramatically. But maybe a bit shorter showers, maybe..

But it's, yeah, I read about people who have kind of just cut off. Yeah, turned down to the minimum and worn a jacket inside. That's completely, yeah wild

Household 16, student, shared flat

Negotiating materials and systems



*To me much has to do with time and availability. That it's easy to repair, easy to buy used. That it's not a leisure activity in itself. Now you kind of need to be the **Norwegian Champion of Finn.no** to find skis and skiing boots for an 8 year old boy... So you have to keep track of Finn.no, drive around half the city. Yeah. Struggle to find shoes there, skis there, and poles there in the right size and everything. It's kind of so fragmented in every way, so **XXL has everything**. But if you want it used or repaired it's like a larger investigative project*

(Woman, 1976, Trondheim)



Household 16 – repair, doable

Negotiating normativity – conforming to unsustainability

*One thing is to prioritize it during everyday life. Social relations are something else. When the kids are going to a birthday party and they want to do exactly as the rest. When you're throwing a party you are supposed to serve meat and give gifts. And the kids want all kinds of plastic crap when its birthday. **It's a bit difficult to be the one standing out in these situations***

(Female, 1976, Trondheim)



Household 15: Toys for the kids - challenging

*Now we've given in and booked a flight to London during the autumn break. So now we're back. So it's kind of... **so it's very difficult to just disconnect, so I feel a bit of cross-pressure. I know its really bad, but then I cannot avoid doing it***

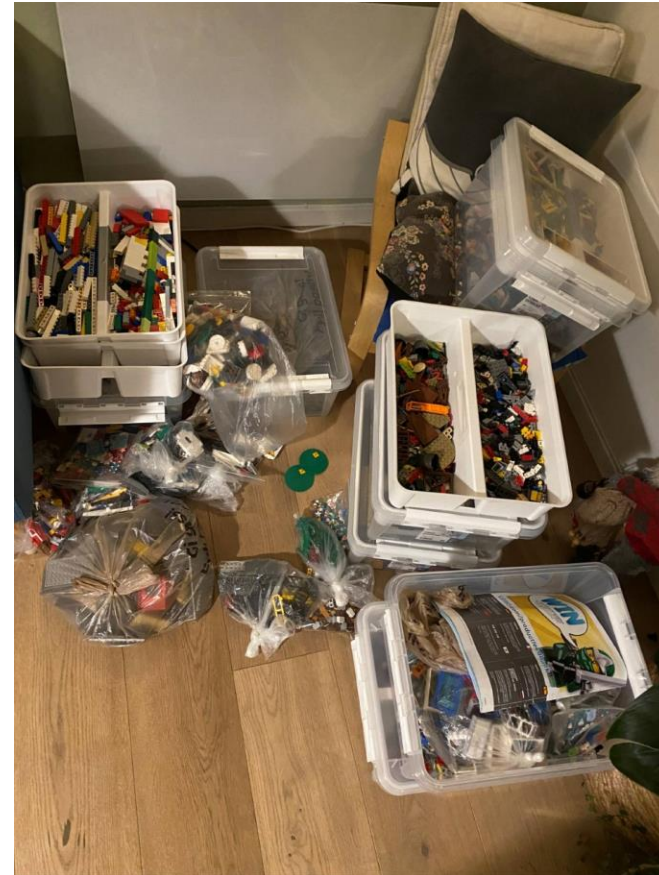
(Female, 1978, Viken)



Household 20: Travels and flying - challenging

The agency of consumer society: Swamped in dinosaurs with led lights

*And then you get swamped in things from grandparents and birthday celebrations and this and that, and a bit like... we went to the science centre one Sunday, and there were some stuff, my daughter wanted dinosaurs with led lights from the store at the science centre. So it was a bit like **we were all tired and then suddenly we had dinosaurs with led lights** (Female, 1976, Trondheim)*



Household 10 – Used toys, doable



Household 22 – gadgets - challenging

Preliminary conclusions

Our households are clear examples of reflexive consumers who try to make a difference

Their sustainability projects range from weak to strong

Projects are negotiated against socio-material arrangements across different scales

Sustainability projects are important, but must be analysed in broader socio-material contexts, including the structuring agency of consumer society



Household 28 – grow own vegetables - doable