



'A holiday is a holiday': practicing sustainability, home and away

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ABSTRACT

'Behaviour change' is one of the major concerns for academics and practitioners concerned with tackling climate change. Research amongst tourism geographers has conventionally focussed on the various choices that individuals can make, both before and during their holidays, to reduce environmental footprints, specifically through the use of sustainability criteria. However, whilst there is a developing understanding of the motivations for sustainable tourism practices, there is less appreciation of the relationship tourist practices have to everyday environmental activities in and around the home. This latter issue has been researched extensively by social psychologists and environmental sociologists. Accordingly, the paper will draw upon these two existing bodies of research to argue that a holistic understanding of 'sustainable lifestyles' is needed if effective behavioural change strategies for climate change are to be developed, revealing the complexities of contemporary environmental practices. Using data from a recent British Academy research project, the paper will explore the changing nature of sustainable lifestyles and will demonstrate the relationships between home- and tourism-based environmental practices. The paper will argue that whilst individuals are relatively comfortable with participating in a range of environmental behaviours in and around the home, the transference of these practices to tourism contexts can be problematic. This is particularly the case for high-consumption activities such as low-cost air travel. The paper concludes by arguing that both academics and policy makers need to re-frame their notions of 'sustainable lifestyles', transcending a series of practices and contexts.

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1. Introduction and research context

This paper explores the growing role of individual citizens in debates and potential solutions for global environmental challenges, of which climate change is now the most pressing (Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007). The rise in concern for environmental issues over the past 15–20 years has witnessed a major shift in how academics and practitioners view the potential solutions to such problems. Conventionally, environmental issues were perceived as macro-scale problems, which required the application of large-scale solutions, implemented by governments or large organizations (Barr, 2008). Indeed, the UK Government's first *Sustainable Development Strategy* (HM Government, 1994) barely makes mention of the role that could be played by other stakeholders, such as individual citizens. However, in recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the role of individual consumers and their potential to mitigate against global, as well as local, environmental problems. This is clearly reflected in major policy shifts, notably the emphasis placed on peoples'

choices by the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in its most recent sustainable development strategy (DEFRA, 2005) and the newly published *Framework for Environmental Behaviours* (DEFRA, 2008). Accordingly, the role of individual citizens has been raised to an unprecedented position in the policy agenda.

Although there has been significant activity surrounding the establishment of policy frameworks for encouraging and embedding environmental practices into everyday life, these behaviours have tended to be those which are based in and around the home. Accordingly, the types of activities which the UK government has placed greatest emphasis on encouraging have been recycling, energy saving, water conservation and 'green' consumption, such as reducing packaging and buying 'green' products (DEFRA, 2008). Indeed, in framing environmental action in and around the home, there has also been great emphasis placed on personal travel decisions and personalised travel planning, with behaviour-change messages targeted at those who use private motor transport (for example, the Department for Transport's (DfT) recent investment in *Smarter Choices* as a suite of techniques for encouraging travel planning for sustainability mobility) (Department for Transport, 2008).

Until comparatively recently these policies for promoting sustainable practices in and around the home were heavily compart-

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mentalised, with national or local bodies taking specific responsibility for promoting particular behaviours (such as sustainable travel) with little recourse to the notion of changing lifestyles holistically. Nonetheless, research by social psychologists such as Thøgersen (1999), De Young (2000), Thøgersen and Olander (2003) and other researchers (e.g. Barr and Gilg, 2006) has clearly demonstrated that sustainable forms of behaviour are closely linked to everyday practices (including 'habits', such as switching off lights and taps, or 'purchasing' activities related to green forms of consumption), providing evidence that in the home environment, sustainable behaviours are unlikely to be compartmentalised and that such behaviours can become embedded into daily lifestyle practices, at least for certain groups in society. Indeed, from the perspective of environmental sociology and geography, the research of Hobson (2002), Shove (2003) and Gregson et al. (2007) also suggests that environmental practice in the home needs to be framed in terms of the everyday context of household routines and 'normality' where environmental behaviour is demonstration of wider household and individual consumption practices.

Despite these findings, the theoretical and empirical research on environmental behaviours has generally remained at this home-based scale and thus relates to everyday practices. Yet the notion of 'sustainable lifestyles' implies that individuals would demonstrate a series of commitments across lifestyle practices, not merely as part of their daily routine, but also in tourism contexts. This notion that behavioural commitments in one lifestyle domain could 'spill-over' to another area (i.e. from daily to tourism-related practices) has become an unwritten assumption of many policy makers (Thøgersen, 1999) and yet this specific relationship between the home and tourism environments has received very little attention since much earlier work on tourist behaviour (Krippendorf, 1987).

The lack of research on the links between home-based and tourism-related environmental practices does not imply that research on sustainable tourism practices and the wider issue of tourism and climate change is lacking (Hall and Higham, 2005; Becken and Hay, 2007). Indeed, there has been considerable work amongst tourism researchers in the field of sustainable tourism (Becken and Hay, 2007; Blamey and Braithwaite, 1997; Mowforth and Munt, 2003; Shaw and Williams, 2004) and the development of strategies for behaviour change amongst tourists whilst on holiday and the relationships between tourism and transport use (e.g. Anable, 2005; Böhrer et al., 2006; Dallen, 2007). Similar to the work focused on the home context, this research has identified both motivations and barriers for participating in sustainable activities whilst on holiday. Nonetheless, very few researchers have developed the notion of a holistic 'lifestyles' approach to sustainable behaviours, in which the synergies between different contexts (home, leisure, tourism and work) are explored. Although tourism researchers have begun to look beyond the tourism context at environmental behaviours more broadly (Miller, 2003; Dickinson and Dickinson, 2006; Hunter and Shaw, 2007), there are still relatively few studies that have specifically explored the theoretical and empirical links between home-based and tourism-based environmental behaviours. This link is critical to establish because it is only when individuals are able to transfer their behaviours between contexts, as part of an embedded set of lifestyle practices, that it will be possible to argue that 'sustainable lifestyles' can and do exist. From a social-psychological perspective, this raises the challenge of establishing whether there is indeed a 'generalisable' conservation ethics (De Young, 2000) and the characteristics of any such 'spill-over' effects, related to underlying values and beliefs (De Groot and Steg, 2008) and wider socio-structural characteristics.

2. Research programme

This paper therefore aims to provide a brief exploration of the relationships between commitments towards the environment by individuals in and around the home and their behaviours when on holiday. The paper will develop research that the authors have been pursuing since 2001 through a series of externally funded research projects (Fig. 1). The first project, from 2001 to 2003 was dedicated to understanding the motivations and barriers for participating in home-based environmental actions, such as recycling, energy saving, water conservation and green consumption. The findings from this work indicated that environmental practices were clearly related to everyday habits and that there were a series of lifestyle groups, with varying commitments to the environment.

This research was further developed during a DEFRA-funded project in 2005–2006 (Barr et al., 2006) when a series of focus groups were held with representatives from each of the four lifestyle groups identified during the earlier research, notably 'committed', 'mainstream', 'occasional' and 'non' environmentalists. In this research, the authors sought to explore both behaviours in the home and also on holiday. Initial findings suggested that there was a major gap between what individuals were willing to do at home and what was acceptable and desirable to undertake on vacation. Indeed, as one specific example, individuals stated that they were very unwilling to give up their use of low-cost flights (a high-profile contributor to climate change) and often contested the science behind climate change. Overall, individuals often argued that holidays were 'different' to everyday life in terms of their environmental commitments, with one participant arguing that:

"I suppose people think a holiday is a holiday and that they go there to relax and do their own thing. And you know, it sounds a bit nasty but you know, when you're holiday, you're really thinking about yourself aren't you because it's your time away". (see Barr et al. (2006) for further examples)

On the basis of these initial findings, the research team obtained a British Academy grant to undertake further research on individuals' attitudes towards sustainable holidays, low-cost air travel and climate change and it is this research that forms the basis of this paper. This research, undertaken during 2007–2008, aimed to explore the notion that sustainable behaviours on holiday were regarded differently to those in the domestic context. It also sought to explore the ways in which individuals viewed the debate surrounding climate change and flying, a specific issue which has received both regular media attention and also a raised profile in academic work in tourism recently (Becken, 2007; Chapman, 2007; Gössling and Peeters, 2007; Gössling et al., 2006; Graham and Shaw, 2008). The research will also feed into a current study on promoting sustainable travel, which is exploring attitudes towards travel in a range of contexts.

3. Methodology

The research presented in this paper was undertaken during the spring of 2008 and involved a three-stage process. First, an on-street survey of 202 individuals was undertaken in Exeter High Street, based on a convenience sampling method. This survey was primarily designed to recruit participants to upcoming focus group discussions and so a limited sample size was selected based on a non-probabilistic method of selection. The survey posed questions related to environmental behaviours in and around the home and whilst on holiday, the type and number of holidays individuals took, their flying habits, use of low-cost carriers and attitudes towards acting sustainably on holiday and at home. Individuals were also asked a series of questions related to climate change and their

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