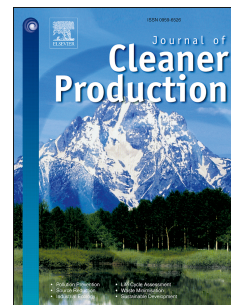


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Abstract

Social innovations are often assumed to have high potential for promoting sustainable development and transformation towards more sustainable consumption practices. Meanwhile, the spectrum of social phenomena that are labelled as socially innovative is quite diverse and heterogeneous, ranging from urban gardening projects to swapping and sharing platforms to Do-It-Yourself workshops. This article describes a research project where sixty-two cases of potential social innovations for sustainable consumption were analysed, based on a process model of innovation and practice theory. Thorough document and case analyses revealed five distinguishable types of innovation: Do-It-Together, Strategic Consumption, Sharing Communities, Do-It-Yourself and Utility-enhancing Consumption. These are mainly characterised by differences along four dimensions – innovativeness, formality, communality and personal engagement – each of which is connected to potential problems and advantages in the process of initiation and stabilisation of innovative practices. Based on this typology, type-specific measures to overcome problems and strengthen advantages are presented which help practitioners in politics, administration, associations and foundations to support social innovations for sustainable consumption. For sustainability science the typology can add to a more thorough understanding of the multi-faceted field of social innovation for sustainable consumption. Thereby the study takes up theoretical and practical desiderata stressed by other authors in this field. However, we agree with other authors that further research is necessary to assess the ecological, social and economic impacts of social innovations for sustainable consumption.

Keywords:

Social innovation, social practices, sustainable consumption, policy measures

Highlights:

- Social innovations have potential to enhance transformations towards sustainable consumption.
- Sixty-two empirical cases were analysed in order to develop a policy relevant typology of social innovations for sustainable consumption.
- Five different types of social innovations for sustainable consumption were identified each responding to specific measures of support.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, also known as the Rio Conference, set the framework for an international forum emphasizing the crucial role of consumers for sustainable development. Since then, many attempts have been made to influence

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