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A sustainable consumption teaching review: from building competencies to transformative learning

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Abstract

Sustainable consumption (SC) is a growing area of research, practice and policy-making that has been gaining momentum in teaching programs among higher education institutions. Understanding how, in what way, and what we consume, in relation to environmental integrity and intra/inter-generational equity, is a complex question, all the more so when tied up with questions of social change, justice and citizenship. To understand and address (un)sustainable consumption, different disciplines and related methodologies are often brought together, ranging from sociology, economics and psychology, to political science, history and environmental engineering. Combining and indeed transcending disciplinary approaches is necessary, and what better place to explore these approaches than in the classroom? In this article, a review of sustainable consumption teaching is presented in relation to learning competencies, with discussions around emerging topics related to this theme, as well as promising approaches towards transdisciplinary learning. Examples of how action-oriented, learner-centered and transformative approaches can be put into practice are also provided. In the conclusion, emerging trends are discussed, along with challenges and opportunities for teaching sustainable consumption in the future.

Highlights

- 49 survey respondents provided data about 58 courses related to “sustainable consumption”
- Social change is an emerging theme, as well as the moral dimension of economics and markets
- Transformative learning is a key learning approach, which presents tensions in the dual role of students as consumers and citizens
- Transdisciplinary learning is gaining in popularity, but representing a diversity of worldviews remains a challenge

Key words:

- Sustainable consumption
- Education for sustainable development
- Teaching
- Transformative learning

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