

Stop Shop 2012 and the role of simplicity movements in sustainable change

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of social movements in sustainable change based on a case study of Stop Shop 2012, a privately initiated, simplicity initiative developed by three women with the aim of not shopping unnecessary goods and services for a period of two years (2012-2013). More specifically, the research addresses if and how Stop Shop 2012 changed the consumer practices of its funders and other consumers, and what reactions it got from other actors in the market: authorities, businesses and organizations. The analysis is based on content analyses of a book written by one of the members of the initiative, the initiative's Facebook site and newspaper, as well as qualitative interviews with the founders of Stop Shop 2012 some months after the initiative ended. The research indicates that the funders and the followers of Stop Shop 2012 reduced the consumption of some consumer goods, mainly clothes. However, some of the consumption that impacted the climate most, such as the consumption of meat and airplane travel, remained unchanged or even increased. The initiative got support from degrowth-politicians and environmental organisation, and opposition from growth-politicians and business organisations.

KEYWORDS:

Social Movements, Simplicity, Sustainability, Shopping, Clothes

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All over the world, privately initiated green initiatives aiming to change society in a more sustainable direction are being established. On the one hand, these initiatives are seen as drivers of change without which sustainable change would be impossible. For example, Alexander and Ussher (2012), argue that sustainable change need to be built from the grassroots up given the hegemony of the growth paradigm in the political and economic sphere. On the other hand, green initiatives are criticized for being 'inefficient' due to their individualistic rather than collective character (e.g., Schneider and Miller, 2011), and use of informal rather than formal political channels (e.g., Haenfler et al., 2012).

To contribute to the ongoing knowledge development of the role of green social movements in sustainable change, this paper reports the main results of a case-study of Stop Shop 2012, a simplicity initiative initiated by three women with the aim of not shopping for unnecessary goods and services in two years. The research questions are: In what way did Stop Shop 2012 contribute to reducing the level of CO₂ emissions of its founders and other consumers? What support did it get from actors in the market – the authorities, businesses and organizations? The article starts with two sections describing social movement concepts and how Stop Shop 2012 relates to these concepts. After a description of the case and research methods, the main results of the analysis are reported. The paper closes with a main conclusion discussed in light of social movement theories.

Social movement concepts

In the last centuries, social movements have been explored within a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, political science, history, economics and communication (Morris and Herring, 1984). Whereas early scholars tended to address the role of social movements in economic change (e.g. Marx and Weber), later contributors have been more concerned

about the role of movements in identity, lifestyle and culture (e.g. Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1989). A telling example of this cultural shift from economy to culture is the work of Gusfield et al. (1994), in which social movements are defined as ‘a collective search for identity’ characterised as follows:

Table 1: Characteristics of New Social Movements

New Social Movements as a “collective search for identity” defined by Gusfield et al. (1994)

1. New social movements tend to transcend class structure; youth, gender, sexual orientation, or professions do not correspond with structural explanations.
2. The ideological characteristics of the new social movements are not overarching ideologies but rather pluralistic values and ideas with pragmatic orientations.
3. The mobilizing factors tend to focus on cultural and symbolic issues that are linked with issues of identity rather than on economic grievances.
4. New social movements are more “acted out” in individual actions rather than through or among mobilized groups.
5. New social movements often involve personal and intimate aspects of human life, they extend into arenas of daily life: what we eat, wear, and enjoy; how we make love, cope with personal problems, or plan or shun careers.
6. New social movements are characterized by nonviolence and civil disobedience challenging dominant norms of conduct.
7. The development of new social movement is related to the credibility crisis of the conventional channels for participation in Western democracies.
8. New social movements tend to be segmented, diffuse, and decentralized.

Source: Cherrier (2007, pp. 324)

As exemplified with the theories of Gusfield et al. (1994), the culturally oriented forms of social movements have since the 1980s been called New Social Movements (NSMs). More recently, the characteristics of NSMs has been associated with Haenfler et al.'s (2012) Lifestyle Movements, which, in contrast to NSMs, does not focus on organisations but on looser constellations of individuals sharing the same lifestyle, such as 'vegetarians', 'promise keepers', 'slow fooders' and 'simple livers'.

Whereas Haenfler et al. (2012) use simple livers as an example of Lifestyle Movements, most researchers studying this group of people see them as part of the Voluntary Simplicity Movement. The voluntary simplicity movement covers a variety of ways in which simple livers practise their lives. In essence, living simply is about promoting a lifestyle of reduced or restrained income, consumption and/or working hours (Simplicity Institute, 2011). The reduction is chosen of one's own free will rather than being coerced by poverty, government austerity programmes or imprisonment (Etzioni, 1998: 620). Etzioni (1998) distinguishes between three variations of voluntary simplicity, ranging in degree of strength from 'downshifting' to 'strong simplification' and the 'simple living movement'.

Downshiffters, the most moderate simplifiers, are economically well off and choose to give up some luxuries but not the luxurious lifestyle as a whole. Strong simplifiers are those who give up high-paying, high-stress jobs to live on much reduced incomes or early retirement packages, or take up new careers that either free up more time or are personally more meaningful. The simple living movement comprises the most dedicated voluntary simplifiers, those who change their lifestyles completely to adhere to the principles of voluntary simplicity.

The most famous example of simple livers is probably No Impact Man. No Impact Man is an experiment conducted by the author Colin Beavan and his family on Manhattan Island. The experiment went on for one year and covered two phases. In phase 1, the family aimed to reduce the damage they inflicted on the climate by not producing rubbish, not using carbon-producing transport, avoiding buying new products, eating local food and not using

electricity in the apartment. In phase 2, Colin aimed to 'pay back' the damage that the family had caused in phase 1 by doing voluntary work. A documentary of the project was made with Colin himself and spread all over the world.

Research indicates that the consumer practices of Colin and his family do not distinguish significantly from the thinking and acting of other simple livers. Based on a multi-national online survey including 2268 voluntary simplicity members, Alexander and Ussher (2012) found that most participants of the simplicity movement come from cities in the western part of the world. Two of three (67%) had reduced their income from what it had been in the past. Frugality was a frequent value. They focused on quality rather than quantity of goods, home food production played a role, travelled locally, used second-hand, homemade and repaired clothing. In contrast to Colin and his family, most simple livers explored by Alexander and Ussher (2012) were most likely operating at a lower level of the simplicity scale, representing Etzioni's (1998) 'downshiffters' or what McDonald et al.'s (2006) calls 'beginner voluntary simplifiers' rather than the 'simple living movement'.

No Impact Man was launched in 2007. Since then it has been criticized and praised. One criticism has been that the project is based on a capitalist idea of selling a non-consumption lifestyle and hence promotes a message of growth rather than of degrowth. Adherents, on their side, dismiss this view pointing at the fact that if the project had not been promoted, the people would not have been informed about the project and the degrowth-message not been spread (Schneider and Miller, 2011). Another criticism has been that No Impact Man is an initiative for the privileged part of the society as poor people would not have access to the expensive ecological food and the easy access to publicity through digital and public media (Schneider and Miller, 2011). Adherents, however, argue that simplicity initiative is not meant to be an initiative for the poor, but rather for the growing part of the world's middle class who spend too much money on products they do not need (Borch, 2016). A third criticism of the Beavan family has been that they should not only have focused on their own consumption but also cooperated with their neighbours to find more efficient energy

solution in the apartment building in which they lived. In that way the total reduction of CO₂ emission would have been higher (Schneider and Miller, 2011).

The latter criticism is in line with the general criticism of NSMs arguing that this kind of social movements represents an individualized and hence a more inefficient way of working for social change than more strictly defined collective actions. Also in line with the general criticism of NSMs, No Impact Man can be accused for using informal policy channels at the expense of presumably more 'democratic' formal policy channels, such as voting and organizational work in political parties (e.g. Haenfler et al., 2012). This last criticism has however been rejected in research indicating that people participating in social movements tend to make use of formal policy channels as well. For example, Willis and Shor (2012) found that engaging in political consumption does not undermine, displace, or substitute for conventional collective and political involvement, rather 'crowds in' than 'crowds out' political activism.

As illustrated here, research on the role of simplicity movement in sustainable change is split between advocates and critics emphasising their positive and negative side. As more empirical research is needed to clarify the role of consumer-driven movements in sustainable change, I will in this paper report the main results from a case-study of Stop Shop 2012. A description of Stop Shop 2012 and how it relates to concepts like NSM, Lifestyle Movements, and Voluntary Simplicity Movements, is given in the next section.

Stop Shop 2012

Stop Shop 2012 is a Facebook group established January 2012 by three friends, Irina, Ida and Charlotte, living in the western (upper-class) part of Oslo. Although their income was quite well, their level of expenditure was, according to Irina, 'pretty average' for women at their age (Lee, 2013: 14). Stop Shop 2012 was meant to continue until January 2013, but was

prolonged for a further year. In addition to the three friends, the members of the Facebook site included five or six 'supporters'. During autumn 2012, the initiative gained three new members, Linda, Bodil and Birte, from another city in Norway, Bergen; they also, to a large extent, adopted the rules of Stop Shop 2012 (Lee, 2013a).

The main reasons for establishing Stop Shop 2012 were that the women felt there was something fundamentally wrong with their style of consumption. They bought clothes, shoes and kitchen equipment they did not need. The clothes were hanging in the closet, unused, and the women lost control of what they had. In the worst case, they bought the same clothes once again. In addition, the shopping took time, produced waste, expressed and promoted material values and made the women look and act as though they were 'addicted to shopping'. Moreover, such shopping behaviour has a negative impact on the environment. It is under-paid workers and child labour in China, Bangladesh, Vietnam and other countries with low production costs in the developing world who pay the price for those who purchase cheap products.

In November 2012, the founders of Stop Shop 2012 established a new Facebook group called 'Stop Shop 2013'. The group was open to all those who wanted to take a break from shopping. Two days later, A-Magasinet published a news article about the project and in two days 200 people had enrolled. In December 2012, the founders decided to prolong the shopping ban for one year. On 25 February 2013, member number 1,000 enrolled. By the end of 2013, the group had over 2,000 members (Lee, 2013a). Approximately eight per cent of these were men (Irina, interview). The low percentage of men may reflect the fact that the group's discussion to a large extent dealt with clothes, a product category which has traditionally attracted purchases from women more than men.

Within the theoretical framework of social movement concepts Stop Shop 2012's can be placed as illustrated in Figure 1.

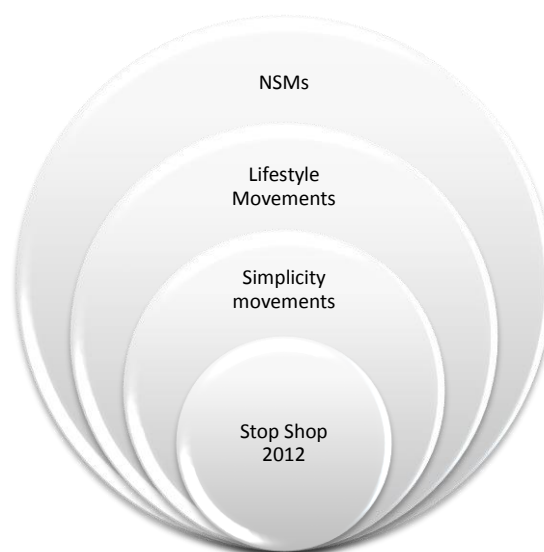


Figure 1: Stop Shop 2012's place within the theoretical framework of social movement concepts.

As here illustrated, Stop Shop 2012 can be seen as an initiative within NSM and Lifestyle Movements as it includes a loose constellation of people (or an 'organisation') who are aiming for a simpler lifestyle. As the analysis will show, the members of Stop Shop 2012 can be categorized as downshiffters (cf. Etzioni, 1998) or beginner voluntary simplifiers (cf. McDonald et al. 2006). Although Stop Shop 2012 in this respect operates at a lower level on Etzioni's (1998) simplicity scale than No Impact Man, it has many of the same qualities. Like No Impact Man, Stop Shop 2012 can be criticized for promoting a growth rather than a degrowth message; for being an initiative for the privileged part of the society; and for representing a less efficient, democratic channel than voting and organisational work in political parties. However, also like No impact Man, Stop Shop 2012 can be praised for spreading a degrowth message; for targeting the privileged part of the society; and for representing an informal policy channels supplying more formal channels like voting and organisational work in political parties.

Overall, Stop Shop 2012 can be described as an initiative that like most social movements can be subject for many interesting discussion e.g. regarding their environmental and political impact. In this paper we continue this discussion, this time by questioning a simplicity initiative's influence on the level of CO₂ emission of its funders and other consumers in the market, as well as the reaction it causes among actors in the market— authorities, businesses and organisations. Before the main results of the analysis are reported, a brief introduction of the methods that are used is given in the next section.

Data and analysis

The analysis is based on qualitative case study of Stop Shop 2012 and its funders, other consumers and other actors in the market. Stop Shop 2012 is (or was) the first privately initiated simplicity established initiative in Norway with more than 100 members or followers. The case was chosen because it represents the first of its kind in Norway, and because it, by virtue of representing what Flyvberg (2004) calls a “paradigmatic case”, sets the standards of simplicity movements in Norway.

Data

Case-study is a methodology that typically address one subject of research examined from several sources of data. The study is based on four sources of data. To explore Stop Shop 2012's influence its funders' consumer practices, the book Shoppingfri. Et år med kjøpestopp [Shopping-free. One year without shopping] written by Irina (Lee, 2013a) made an important source of information. In this book Irina gives her version of the Stop Shop 2012 story, addressing, amongst other things, how the initiative was established and how it was justified and developed. The story is told over 176 pages and is most likely more well-funded than it would have been if it was told in a research interview. Although the initiative's influence on the funders' consumer practices probably are thoroughly described,

it should be noted that the reliability of the data can be questioned. Since the book was written by Irina alone, her practices are more thoroughly described than the practices of Ida and Charlotte. Moreover, since Irina had commercial interests in writing a book about the initiative, she may have exaggerated the initiative's influence on the funders' consumer practices.

To get the version of the Stop Shop story of Ida, and Charlotte, and compare these versions with Irina's, a personal interview with Irina, Ida and Charlotte was carried out in Oslo on 27 February 2014, that is, about 2 months after the Stop Shop 2013 was ceased. The intention by interviewing them together rather than one by one was to give the funders an opportunity to discuss the reliability of Irina's version from their point of view. Unfortunately, Charlotte could not take part in the interview. Ida did however approve Irina's version of the book.

To explore the influence of Stop Shop 2012 on other consumers, contributions published on the Stop Shop 2013 Facebook group page from 1 January 2013 to 1 January 2014 (1,369 in total) was analysed. The analysis is delimited to the first contributions in the threads. As the analysis showed that the members of Stop Shop 2013 to a large extent seem to have gone through the same changes as Irina, less emphasis is put on reporting the influence of Stop Shop 2012 on other consumers than the initiative's founders.

Finally, to examine Stop Shop 2012's impact on other actors in the market—governments, businesses and organisations, magazine and news articles (13) published on Google and A-tekst (a Scandinavian archive of news articles), found on the basis of the search query 'stop shop 2012' was analysed. As there was no information about how Stop shop 2012 influenced the consumption practices of these actors, the analysis focused on the actors' perceptions of the role of Stop Shop 2012.

Analytical steps

The analysis aimed to examine whether and how Stop Shop 2012 contributed to moving society in a more sustainable direction in terms of reducing the level of CO₂ emissions of its funders and other consumers, and in terms of getting support from other actors in the market—authorities, businesses and organizations. Basically, there are three ways of reducing the level of CO₂ emission through consumption behaviour: i) reducing the level of consumption, ii) changing consumption from goods to services, or iii) changing consumption from less to more sustainable goods and services (Vittersø, 2003; Strandbakken and Heidenstrøm, 2013). The first analytical step was therefore to explore if and how these strategies were used by Stop Shop 2012's founders and other consumers. The next step was to research the initiative's level of support among other actors in the market – authors, businesses and organizations.

Generalisation

A general criticism of qualitative case-studies has been that they are based on biased notions. This criticism is however rejected by several researchers, for example by Flyvberg (2004) pointing at the fact that all research, also those based on surveys, is biased, and that case-studies, in contrast to surveys, give the researchers a chance to test and correct preconceived notions and misunderstandings during the research process. The possibility to test and correct biased notions and misunderstandings has in this analysis been used twice, first, when I checked my own and Ida's interpretation of Irina's Stop Shop story in the interview; second, when I asked Irina to review a preliminary version of the analysis. Based on this review, a couple of misunderstandings were revised.

Another general criticism of qualitatively oriented research case studies is that they are based on data that is hard to generalize and, hence, cannot contribute to scientific development. Inspired by the theories of Flyvberg (2004), I will however argue that the results of this study can be generalised to all privately initiated simplicity initiative in Norway, simply because Stop Shop 2012 is the only initiative of this kind that have been

established in this context. Indeed, it can be argued that the results cannot be generalised similar initiatives established in other countries. Notwithstanding, they will contribute to scientific development by representing one of many experiences from which it most likely will be possible to make generalized conclusions at a later stage.

Results

The founders

According to the original rules of Stop Shop 2012, the members were to give up shopping for non-essentials from 14 January 2012 to 14 January 2013. This included all forms of clothes, equipment and other goods and services that the founders regarded as ‘unnecessary’ for themselves and their children. There were, however, many exceptions, one of which was food. Although there was no prohibition on food, Irina could have reduced her CO₂ emissions by buying less red meat and more vegetables. In the book, Irina writes little about her purchasing of food, which may indicate that she did not make significant changes in this area. However, Irina does write that during the first year of the movement, she bought more ‘food for celebrations’ on a daily basis: ‘because I deserve it and because I can afford it’ (Lee, 2013a: 94). As food for celebrations in the Norwegian context is associated with meat, this may imply that she increased her consumption of meat.

Another exception from the ban-list was travel. In the book, Irina writes that she went on two trips to New York, two trips to Spain, one trip to England and one to Azerbaijan in 2012 (Lee, 2013a). Irina comments on this exception as follows:

Of course, the project would have been more ascetic if the shopping ban had been global... I know that I could have done more. But, at any rate, I do something. It is a start and it works. For even though I still have the opportunity to shop abroad, the

Stop Shop project influences me to more moderation that I would show otherwise... I actually think of what I need! (Lee, 2013a, pp. 77–78)

Although trips abroad should not be undertaken for shopping, shopping whilst abroad was allowed. During her trips, Irina bought a bicycle, a piece of luggage, two sets of inflatable swimming rings to put on the children's arms for safety reasons, a t-shirt with high sun protection factor and two colourful shawls. The bicycle was meant to replace another bicycle that she had previously bought because of its design, but that turned out to be difficult to use. As a starting point, replacing a useful bicycle is not a sustainable investment. However, in the interview, Irina stated that she had become more conscious about driving her car and therefore used the bicycle more. As cars powered by fossil fuels are amongst the consumer goods that most harm the environment, her reduced car driving may have contributed to changing her consumption in a more sustainable direction.

Gifts were also allowed. In the book, Irina writes that she once bought two gifts, a book and a device that could be used to hang skis (Lee, 2013a). This is in line with previous research indicating that most gifts are material goods and that most people do not think of the environment when they buy gifts (Borch, 2012). Even though Irina's gifts were material, they were bought on Finn.no (a Norwegian online site usually employed for the exchange of used products). The transaction thus included reduced CO₂ emissions linked to production. Also, the CO₂ emissions related to transport were limited as the book was sent by post. Irina writes that she wanted a retro telephone receiver and an iPhone cover for her birthday and that these wishes came through (Lee, 2013a); she did not consider the environment when making her wishes.

Other exceptions were household fixtures (mounted interior products), office equipment and products necessary for subsistence. If products were wanted but were not on the exceptions list, the products could be bought if accepted by the 'personal shopping advisory board'. In general, products bought on Finn.no had a greater chance of being accepted than

others. Examples of the products that were accepted for purchase were an edible plant for growing on a balcony, a bicycle helmet, flowers, lottery tickets with a low chance of winning and purchases for which the money was given to charity; a balcony flag and a Missoni/Lindex shirt were, however, refused (Lee, 2013a).

Overall, the founders' main contribution to the climate seems to have been based on strategy 1: a general reduction in the level of consumption by banning 'unnecessary' consumption, with exceptions made for food and consumer goods, travel not undertaking for shopping, gifts, products necessary to ensure a decent life, such as deodorant and toothpaste, household fixtures (products fastened to the residence) and office equipment (Lee, 2013a: 49).

The second strategy, changing from goods to services, was also reported. In a contribution for discussions published in the Norwegian newspapers, *Aftenposten*, 19 December 2013b, Irina writes:

During 2012, we should not buy anything that could be put in a drawer, placed in a closet, or set on the mantelpiece. Every material object that belonged to us and our homes was written on the banned list. On the other hand, cinema tickets, food and travel got the green light. The year should be filled with adventures, not material things.

The third strategy, changing from less to more sustainable products, was less frequently adopted, but was represented for example in Irina's change from car to bicycle.

Other consumers

An analysis of the contributions published on the Stop Shop 2013 Facebook group page indicates that the initiative influenced the members in several ways. Amongst other things,

some members reported that they refrained from shopping in situations in which they would otherwise have shopped ('I have visited four big shopping markets in Copenhagen and have not bought anything. Stop Shop has changed my mind set'). Even though some members wrote that they sometimes yielded to temptation, buying things they did not need, most of those who actively published contributions on the group's site seemed to succeed in reducing their consumption, mainly of clothes, but also of other products.

Some members reported that they had changed from goods to services and to less environmentally harmful products. Like Irina, one member wrote that Stop Shop 2013 had improved her budget so that she could allow herself 'luxuries, such as expensive lunches out and more and better music experiences'. Another wrote that she had become a member of PLAN (a children's development organization) and spent her funds on somebody that 'ACTUALLY needs them!' Several members reported that their consumption had changed meaning. As reported by Irina, this change is connected to a change in competence from purchasing to repairing clothes. Links to news articles that could improve the participants' knowledge of environmental issues and measures to adopt, for example about online sewing courses and spray chemicals in bananas, were often shared. As one of the group's most important functions was to inspire and give advice, the change in meaning and competence seemed to be an important part of the members' change of practice.

A general observation is that the members of Stop Shop 2013 seem to have gone through the same processes as the founders to varying degrees. Even the founders' unsustainable practices seem to have been adopted, but not all and for some, not without regret:

Lovely to be abroad without focusing on shops, rather relaxing at a café.

Have been in Greece for one week. Have bad conscience. Now my goal is to travel locally, get to know my locality.

Other actors in the market

Like all social movements, the simplicity initiatives are nourished and strengthened by some tendencies in society while counteracted by others, e.g. the financial crisis of 2008, as well as a general, increased concern for the environment in society. The simplicity movement's message of consumer reduction was a central subject in a panel debate on the financial crisis arranged in November 2008, at which the former Minister of Finance in Norway, Kristin Halvorsen, declared:

If I have been shopping, I now take some extra rounds on Karl Johan [the main shopping street in the centre of Oslo], just to show that it is circulation in the economy. (Grønlund and Johnson, VG, 22 November 2008)

Also the national trade organization, *Virke*, seems to find the notion of a shop stop unfortunate. In the magazine, *Hegnar Kvinner* (Thue, 2014), the director for the division Mote og Fritid [Fashion and Leisure], Bror Stende, says:

It is wrong to go for a full shop stop... By purchasing we keep up an economy on which many people around the world are dependent. If we stop purchasing, working places will get lost, in Norway, as well as in developing countries, which are dependent on current cloth production... We have a social responsibility to keep up consumption. (Thue, 2014)

In contrast, the spokesperson for the environmental Green Party, Hanna Marcussen, says in the same article that 'most people understand that keeping up the level of consumption does not work in the long term'. In the interview, Irina confirmed that the Green Party was positive about Stop Shop 2012:

The Green Party ... thinks that these types of independent voices are important. What may make this extra intriguing is that we are private persons who make ourselves heard; we are not spokespersons of an organization.

The response from environmental organizations has also been positive. Arild Hermestad, head of Framtiden i våre hender [The Future in Our Hands], said to the magazine *mamma* (Rambøl, 2013):

Irina and other shop stoppers have a great influence, even though they only constitute a small group at the moment. They contribute to discussions about current consumer culture. People are more conscious and there are signs already that multinational companies have made changes. They have started with ecological cotton, recycling solutions, or open distribution lists. This shows that consumer power is significant.

Organizations and political parties seem in this respect to divide into two groups. Whereas economically orientated politicians and organizations were negative about Stop Shop 2012, environmentally orientated politicians and organizations were positive. In 2008, when the VG article above was published, Kristin Halvorsen was not only the Minister of Finance but also head of Sosialistisk Venstre (SV), a left-wing political party that at the time distinguished itself as the party in Norwegian policy placing most emphasis on the importance of the environment. Since then, her prioritizing of the financial situation has been characterized as symptomatic of the situation of Norway and the rest of the Western world: when economic policy is at stake, environmental concerns have to be set aside. The economic growth policy is too strong.

Discussion: The role of simplicity movements

It has been maintained that given the hegemony of the growth policy in the political and economic sphere, a realisation of a macro economy beyond growth will need to build from the grassroots up (Alexander and Ussher, 2012). From this perspective, consumer-driven

initiatives like Stop Shop 2012 represent some of the seeds without which sustainable change would be difficult.

In this paper, one of these grassroots seeds, Stop Shop 2012, has been examined. On the one hand, Stop Shop 2012 is a story of about three strong women who through their consumer choices, intentionally or unintentionally, and quite different from most people, have confronted prevailing growth policy and the consumer society's focus on short-term pleasure at the expense of the climate and those living in developing countries. Although the initiative can be accused for being elitist and capitalist, its founders and their followers have undoubtedly contributed to society in terms of showing politicians, businesses and other actors in the market what some citizens and consumers care about and what a society-based degrowth ideology might look like. Most likely, it is here, in their function as paradigmatic cases and role models, that degrowth initiatives like Stop Shop 2012 make their most important contribution to sustainable change.

On the other hand, we may take a more critical approach, for example asking as I have done in this paper whether these kind of initiatives actually have an impact in environmental change in terms of changing the unsustainable practices of actors—its founders, other consumers, politicians, businesses and organisations. From this perspective, another and more nuanced picture appears. Thus, some cautions must be made regarding the research results, in particular as all the data are based on self-reporting and only addresses short term-effects (2012-2013).

One important observation in this study has been that Stop Shop 2012 had a strong impact on the founders' consumption practices, mostly by reducing their level of consumption, for example in terms of buying fewer clothes, but also by changing the products, for example switching from a private car to a bicycle. However, it is worth noting that some of the consumer practices that most affect the climate, such as the consumption of meat and airplane travel, were not reduced. Taking into consideration that the founders most likely

improved their personal finances because of the shop stop, it cannot be ruled out that the consumption of meat and air travel actually increased during the project. One observation can therefore be that Stop Shop 2012 had a strong impact on the founders' CO₂ emissions, but the effect could have been even stronger if the shopping ban also had included meat and air travel.

Another observation is that Stop Shop 2012 had an impact on other consumers in that another Facebook group was established which within one year got more than 2,000 members. Of course, the number of members in Stop Shop 2013 does not prove that the members' CO₂ emissions decreased. However, most of the members of Stop Shop 2013 seem to have adopted many of the rules of Stop Shop 2012. Hence, to the extent that the initiative contributed to reducing Irina's CO₂ emissions, it may also have diminished the CO₂ emissions of other consumers. That being said, the members seemed to have adopted Stop Shop 2012's unfortunate exceptions to the shopping ban as well, such as travelling by plane. It can therefore not be ruled out that the initiative also contributed to justifying unsustainable consumer practices.

A third observation has been that the initiative got support from green political parties and organizations, but meet resistance among politicians and trade organizations promoting economic growth. As Stop Shop 2012 essentially was an initiative against economic growth, it is reasonable to believe that it did not play a significant role in societal development. To be effective, it is rather more likely that this type of degrowth initiative must be in line with and get support from prevailing economic policy, which requires a change in current policy from growth to degrowth.

Conclusion: Minor impact

Inspired by the discussion above, I will argue that a main lesson learned from this case-study is that consumer-driven, de-growth initiatives like Stop Shop 2012 at this stage in history plays a minor role on sustainable change. One reason is that Stop Shop 2012, like most NSM, LMs and simplicity movements, is based on individual rather than collective actions. Indeed, there were some sporadic attempts to exchange clothes and advices between the initiative's members, but for the most part these attempts remained on an individual level. To increase the impact of the Stop Shop 2012, the members could have focused less on their own consumption and more on cooperating with other members to find more efficient ways to reduce their level of consumption, e.g. by establishing a site for putting collective pressure on unsustainable and unethical businesses.

Another, related reason is that Stop Shop 2012, like NSMs, LMs and simplicity movements, tended to make use of informal rather than formal political channels. True, the initiative got some political publicity especially after the Irina's book was launched, but the publicity seemed to confirm rather than change political opinions that were already established in society. In short, whereas adherents of the de-growth paradigm seemed to support the initiative's cause, adherents of the growth paradigm did not. As such, it seems like the initiative stabilised current opinions in society rather than moving it in a more sustainable direction. To increase the impact of Stop Shop 2012, more formal political channels could have been used. For example, the members could have taken more actively part in political processes at local, regional, national or global levels, as suggested by Alexander and Ussher (2012). They could also have identified and influenced key actors in the market, e.g., taken part in their organizations and changed their networks from within.

The most important reason for suggesting that consumer-driven initiatives like Stop Shop 2012 play a minor role in sustainable change is however not based on the initiatives' individual character and use of informal political channels, but on the observation that the

members' reduced consumption of clothes seemed cause rebound effects in terms of legitimising a relatively high level of consumption of meat and travelling by plain. Of course, a criticism of Stop Shop 2012 could have been that members' should have had higher ambitions and followed the example of No Impact Man, that is, changed from being downshifters (characterised with giving up some luxuries), into being members of a 'real' simple living movement (characterized with a complete life style change) (Etzioni, 1998). Making such complete life style changes in a world dominated by the growth-paradigm is however hard and may even be ethical debatable as it may put too much responsibility on the consumers. Even No Impact Man, which had followers all over the globe, ceased after one years, apparently to great relief for the family members (see the final scenes of the documentary "No Impact Man").

As pointed by several researchers (e.g., Alexander and Ussher, 2012; Shove, 2010; Borch et al, 2014), sustainable change requires a change from the growth to the de-growth paradigm. As a change of paradigm is a structural shift going beyond consumers' control, the main responsibility has to be placed on those being best equipped doing these kinds of shifts, namely on the authorities, in cooperation with businesses, organisations and consumers (Shove et al., 2012; Borch et al., 2015). In other words, if authorities' facilitate for change, consumers and other actors in the market can make them happen.

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