

## **LIFE EVENTS AS WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AS ILLUSTRATED BY AN EXHIBITION AND A NUTRITION CAMPAIGN.**

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### **Abstract**

The goal of this paper is to present two “windows of opportunity” for sustainable consumption. The first example focuses on two sections of the traveling exhibitions “Klima verbündet”<sup>2</sup> in Austria and the second example deals with the health campaign “Besser essen. Mehr Bewegen”<sup>3</sup> in Germany. Both examples can be viewed as different communication strategies to make children sensitive to healthy and sustainable nutrition. This paper is based on theories of health communication, sustainability communication, social marketing, visual communication and the entertainment-education approach. It advances the view that life events are windows of opportunity for behavioural changes that involve sustainable consumption and a healthy lifestyle.

### **Keywords**

Sustainable consumption; campaigns – and nutrition exhibitions; consumer behaviour; child nutrition.



## **Are behavioural changes necessary?**

Given the environmental problems that humanity is facing in the long run, changes in people's behaviour and way of life are inevitable. On an almost daily basis, we are confronted with media reports on natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, droughts, fires as well as the melting of the glaciers and the poles etc. Scientific studies about these disasters discuss the relationship between human behaviour and the use of natural resources.

Several studies such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment<sup>4</sup> or the most recent reports by the IPCC<sup>5</sup> draw attention to the negative human impact on the global climate – such as global warming – predicting dramatic scenarios.

Furthermore, several international conferences were held (the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment– Stockholm 1972, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development – Rio de Janeiro 1992) that brought forward documents on environmental protection. Moreover, many international agreements were signed that built upon *Our Common Future* (1987), also known as the Brundtland Report which triggered the discussion on sustainability.

*Our Common Future* (1987) draws attention to the concept of sustainability, which was thoroughly discussed in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Sustainability is defined in the report as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”<sup>6</sup>.

However, while most of the facts are well known and are constantly being discussed, the question “*Why a change in behaviour is so difficult*” is still pertinent. The advantages of a healthy lifestyle are obvious. A healthy lifestyle not only involves more comfort and less disease, but also more efficiency at work and even social recognition (cf. Krause et al., 1989, p. 52).

However, in order to change long-standing habits, considerable efforts have to be made while “short-term” results might be unsatisfying (cf. 1989, p. 52). In addition, new habits always involve uncertainties. During periods of change, it is therefore important to see the overall change in lifestyle as positive (cf. 1989, p. 53).

The relationship between eating habits, lifestyles and diseases clearly illustrates the difficulties as well as the opportunities offered by critical life events. Either disease is

perceived as a challenge to change certain habits, or the symptoms are treated while the causes remain unknown. The work of David Servan-Schreiber is exemplary in this respect. He wrote the book “Anticancer – a new way of life” (2009) as a result of his brain tumour. Based on his scientific work, he describes the different causes of cancer, which are determined by our lifestyle.

On the other hand, modern medicine attempts to convince us that disease is unaffected by external factors. It treats symptoms and fails to recognize the relationship between health and the quality of food. It thus justifies the behaviour of people who are sick and do not want to change their habits. According to Capra (1999) another reason “*why a change in behaviour is so difficult*” has to do with a crisis of perception. He alludes to a reductionist view, which often obscures the relationship between disease and nutrition or consumer behaviour. It therefore discourages the responsible use of the limited natural resources.

Certain “life events” can be translated into a positive change of consumption. In this seminar paper, two campaigns are presented as examples of possible ways to promote health. The first example is a traveling exhibition within the framework of the Climate Alliance Austria. The focus is on the effects and the effectiveness of two sections of the traveling exhibition „Klima verbündet“<sup>7</sup> (see Chapter 4).

The second example draws attention to the first funding phase of the nutrition campaign “Besser Essen. Mehr Bewegen”. This campaign was carried out in 24 model regions in Germany from 2006-2009 as part of the national plan of action “IN FORM – Deutschlands Initiative für gesunde Ernährung und mehr Bewegung”<sup>8</sup> (see Chapter 5).

In this seminar paper, both examples are viewed as “windows of opportunity”, that can contribute to sustainable consumer behaviour in different ways. In order to encourage visitors to change their lifestyles substantially, the selected form of information is supposed to both educate and alert.

It should be mentioned that the health awareness of the population, especially in Germany, has increased significantly in recent years. For this reason, people become increasingly interested in health issues. Many actively look for information that facilitates orientation in the health system and encourages health-promoting behaviour (cf. Lampert et al., 2011, p. 73).

An important part of any campaign promoting health and behavioural change is the

communication of information, which is important to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Konrad Lorenz, the father of behavioural research, argued that only those that keep up the recommended behaviour will experience positive health effects (cf. Krause et al., 1989, p. 15).

The author of this paper experienced the work on the traveling exhibition “Klima verbündet” as a process that contributed to behavioural change. In this particular case, realising a project revolving around sustainability becomes a life event that represents a window of opportunity. The nutrition-related sections of the exhibition, in particular, triggered a process of awareness in the team of employees. Behavioural change was also encouraged among the students who led through the exhibition as guides.

### **Strategies to promote health**

Strategies determine how the stated objectives can be realized by addressing different target groups. The strategies selected for the campaign and exhibition borrowed from theories such as social marketing, health communication, visual communication as well as the entertainment-education approach (cf. Dauschek / Rymarcewicz, 1997; Lampert et al, 2011). Gromberg defines social marketing as the plans and actions that ensure that a social organization, a social offer, product, or a social action is made known to individuals or the public. Effective social marketing intervenes in product development, pricing, communication and distribution and provides an optimal exchange between the various groups (cf. Gromberg, 2006, p. 19).

The entertainment-education approach also helps improve public health through information and education. This is particularly true for primary prevention. Compared to infotainment or social marketing, entertainment-education follows a clear *pedagogical interest*. One aim is to create or raise awareness for certain topics among the recipients. Desired lifestyles are supposed to be reinforced and behavioural changes should be directed into the desired direction (cf. Lampert et al., 2011, p. 141).

### **The exhibition as an instrument of effective communication**

At a conference on health exhibitions that was organized by the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden in November 1996, various partners showed interest in the theme. The biggest challenge at the time was to define the medium Exhibition while there were approaches that showed how to effectively reach a wider public with health exhibitions

(cf. Dauschek/Rymarcewicz, 1997, p. 175).

According to Dauschek and Rymarcewicz, perspectives regarding the communicative quality of an exhibition were demonstrated at the conference, and fundamental questions were being asked: Why an exhibition? Who is the exhibition supposed to address? What is the message of the exhibition? How is the content communicated to the audience? Where is the exhibition supposed to take place? With which partners should it be organized? Dauschek and Rymarcewicz think that the reception of the medium exhibition differs from person to person, just like attitudes and behaviours concerning health (cf. 1997, p. 187).

The language of images can be used as an effective kind of communication and opens up possibilities to promote health in a creative way (cf. Ballstaedt, 2011, p. 428-29). Visualized detail information facilitates the understanding of longer texts or more complex themes (cf. Krause et al., 1989, p. 159).

In the case of the traveling exhibition “Klima verbündet” that is going to be looked at closer in the next chapter, the challenge was to develop a hands-on exhibition with a focus on sustainable consumption. The exhibition was supposed to be a means of environmental education that contributes to a sustainable life. Information and knowledge could thus be communicated through authentic education, with a focus on individuality as part of the whole rather than abstract knowledge, taking into account the chain of cause and effect. This approach corresponds roughly with the transdisciplinary education approach:

Authentic education cannot value abstraction over other forms of knowledge. It must teach contextual, concrete and global approaches. Transdisciplinary education revalues the role of intuition, imagination, sensibility and the body in the transmission of knowledge (Morin et al., 1994, Article 11).

Among other things, these relationships are demonstrated by the sections of the exhibition that are discussed in chapters 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. Nowadays, exhibitions are supposed to integrate education, adventure and experience, reaching a wider audience through new forms of representation. Through a combination of information and entertainment and by using interactive elements and multi-media, exhibitions can convey complex issues in a playful way (cf. Pyhel, 2007, p. 375-76).

A hands-on exhibition encourages the visitors to actively engage with environmental

and health concerns as well as consider environmentally relevant aspects in their everyday lives (cf. 2007, p. 377).

### **The traveling exhibition of the Climate Alliance Campaign**

The traveling exhibition “Klima verbündet” was originally conceived and created in 1993 as part of the Climate Campaign of the “Österreichischer Informationsdienst für Entwicklungspolitik”<sup>9</sup> on behalf of the government of Lower Austria<sup>10</sup>. A modified version is being used in schools and Climate Alliance Communities in the Austrian state Vorarlberg (cf. Youtube, 2010).

In a health-related context, two sections of the exhibition are being highlighted in this seminar paper. Moreover, the paper presents the exhibition’s effects (impacts of the campaign), its effectiveness (to what extent the campaign goals have been achieved) and efficiency (positive economical relationship between the desired, target-conformal effects and the investment made (cf. Lampert et al., 2011, p. 139).

### **The Climate Alliance**

The Climate Alliance is a global partnership between European communities and Indigenous Peoples of the South American rainforests dedicated to the protection of the world climate. It has grown steadily since 1990, when the Climate Alliance was founded in Frankfurt/Main, and constitutes the largest communal network for climate protection in Europe. More than 1,700 communities have joined the network.

In Austria this communal network for climate protection is the biggest of its kind; at the moment there are 921 Climate Alliance Communities, 610 Climate Alliance Companies and 246 Climate Alliance Schools that are cooperating with the Indigenous Organisations in the Amazon region.

The Climate Alliance aims at reducing climate-damaging emissions (through energy efficiency, the use of renewable sources of energy and environmentally friendly mobility). It promotes the use of regional and ecological products and supports partners in the Amazon region in the preservation of the rainforest. In 1993, Climate Alliance Austria entered into a project partnership with FOIRN (Federation of Indigenous Organisations of the Rio Negro). The area covers a surface of 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to 35,000 inhabitants of 22 different peoples.

## **“Klima verbündet” – a hands-on exhibition**

The primary target group of the two-hour tour are *8 to 13 year olds* but also young adults and grown-ups are addressed.

Playing with a world map of cloth; experiencing the greenhouse effect first-hand; walking through the “rainforest”; tasting fruits of the rainforest or food of the indigenous people of the Amazon region; getting to know toys and everyday things from Amazonia; becoming aware of the way of a beverage can; learning what we can all do for the climate (cf. Homepage Climate Alliance-Vorarlberg, 2011).

After the tour, the participants get a pupil’s book with examples of handicrafts and puzzles to read, paint and write into. For teachers, there is a map with background information as well as teaching materials for the classroom.

### **Nutrition- and health-related sections of the exhibition**

The exhibition “Klima verbündet” consists of numerous sections. Two are emphasized in this paper because of their nutrition-related subject matter.

#### **What has a beverage can got to do with the rainforest?**

At one section the children are sitting on the floor picking up the information on the boards in a playful way. The information boards relate the story of the aluminium can, from the exploitation of the raw materials to their destructive effects on the rainforest. Aluminium is not only used for beverage cans, but also in the construction of aircrafts (components), for window frames etc. (cf. Pupil’s book “Klima verbündet”, 1993, p. 13). The children are also made aware of the enormous amounts of energy that are consumed until the product is finished. Furthermore, the information boards illustrate how much sewage and harmful substances are released in the process.



**Illustration 1: Information boards – what has the beverage can got to do with the rainforest?<sup>11</sup>**

### **What does my lunch package contain? What can we all do for the climate?**

The children are standing in front of a world map with notes they have made on the topic breakfast. Every pupil is asked to present his or her notes and the words are pinned onto the board. Subsequently, the origins and the transport routes of the food (bananas, cacao, cornflakes, kiwi, etc.) are explained and discussed. Every pupil is made aware of the distance their food has to travel and how much they are thus contributing to the daily CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions.



**Illustration 2: The long way of our fruits<sup>12</sup>**



## **The nutrition campaign “Besser essen. Mehr bewegen” (First funding phase 2006-2009)**

The nutrition campaign “Besser essen. Mehr bewegen” is part of the national plan of action “IN FORM – Deutschlands Initiative für gesunde Ernährung und mehr Bewegung”. The initiative’s goals are a sustainable improvement of the population’s eating and exercise habits. It also aims at achieving a decline in diet-related diseases until the year 2020.

In the first funding phase, the campaign was carried out in 24 model regions in Germany, that were selected from 450 project proposals that had been submitted. In terms of professional expertise, the campaign was supported by the German Federal Office for Agriculture and Food.

In Germany, 15 percent of all children and young people below the age of 17 are overweight, including 6 per cent who are obese. The German Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, Ilse Aigner, explains that the model project was initiated because overweight in children can lead to a multitude of health problems in later life (cf. Leaflet “24 Modellregionen stellen sich vor”, 2009, p. 5).

Preventing unhealthy diets and a lack of exercise is indeed important, not only in Germany. At an international level, healthy nutrition, physical exercise and solutions for a sustainable lifestyle have been promoted for a longer period of time and also the World Health Organisation has developed many concepts and strategies in recent years.

Walpurga Weiss considers the increase of diet-related diseases and associated costs a growing social problem that is highly relevant for sustainable politics. Her study shows the negative consequences of wealth in terms of nutrition in Austria. She explains that the combination of an unbalanced diet and a lack of exercise leads to a high rate of cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes type 2 and overweight (Weiss, 2007, p. 99).

According to the responsible persons, the nutrition campaign “Besser essen. Mehr bewegen.” seeks to remedy these undesirable developments. To do so, local initiatives were developed that exemplify and investigate how overweight in children might be prevented (cf. Leaflet “24 Modellregionen stellen sich vor”, 2009, p. 8).

### **Goals**

The main goal of the nutrition campaign is to make children aware of the importance of

“healthy nutrition” and “exercise” at an early age. To this end, permanent structures are supposed to be created that continue to promote health once the funding phase is over. The target group is children until the end of primary school, in particular from socially disadvantaged families, which are supposed to cooperate with day nurseries, schools and organisations. In the relevant projects, 56 percent of schools and 44 percent of day nurseries are in deprived areas. 23 percent of parents have a migratory background (cf. Klima-Kampagnen-Baukasten, 2008-2011).

### **Measures and evaluation**

Different preventive approaches were tested in the 24 model regions: Exercise-friendly design of day nurseries, schools and neighbourhoods, ensuring a supply of healthy food for the community and the training of multipliers (pedagogues, teachers). In so doing, a holistic approach was adopted, which was realized in the immediate surroundings of the children.

The cooking class was a particularly successful example. In light of the frequently asked questions “*How do I make my children eat fruits and vegetables? ... What is healthy food anyway?*” the participants learned how to cook vegetables. New recipes were developed together with the families. Step by step, this learning process made people realize how important it was to change old eating habits and adopt a healthy and sustainable diet. The exchange with other people was welcomed and acted as a multiplier (cf. MRI 2009, p. 21).

The campaign “BioKids”, which was organized at Leipzig Elementary School Holzhausen on March 27, 2007, was among the winner projects of the contest “Besser Essen. Mehr Bewegen”. It is also a successful example of how the topics nutrition and exercise can motivate teachers and pupils alike. A BioKids-team committed itself to bringing the importance of healthy food home to the young generation. Organic Food Chef Tino Schmidt argued that organic food plays an important role, not only for a healthy diet. Who buys regional products, actively contributes to environmental protection and promotes their region at the same time (cf. BioKids 2007, p. 2).

The campaign’s preventive approach also emphasized the importance of physical exercise, combining cooking and dancing. Dance coach Rafael Antonio pointed out that dancing was the ideal sport to train both stamina and coordination, which is particularly important for children because it makes it easier to stay fit as adult (cf. BioKids 2007, p.

2).



**Illustration 3: BioKids in action**<sup>13</sup>

The involvement of parents is critical for any project to be realized e.g. the construction of playgrounds, the design of festivities and lunch breaks. These approaches led to a high rate of participation during the first funding phase, said Corinna Wilhöft, one member of the evaluation team (cf. Wilhöft, 2009, p. 3).

### **General results and communication of results**

An interdisciplinary approach of quantitative and qualitative methods was used for the evaluation of the campaign. A qualified team of scientists from relevant disciplines was responsible for this approach (cf. “24 Modellregionen stellen sich vor”, 2009, p. 11).

Practical activities developed as “follow-on products” of the campaigns, e.g. cooking classes (see above) that are carried out together (exercise, cooking, eating). Weekly exercise programs in day nurseries and schools are features of the campaign, which also includes more permanent measures, such as the redesign of exercise areas, playgrounds and gardens.

At the end of the first funding phase (2006-2009) of the campaign, numerous documents were published, including an evaluative report, which can be downloaded as a pdf-file (Evaluation BEMBKR 2009).

Several scientific evaluations of the campaign were presented at a conference on February 12, 2009, in Berlin.



**Illustration 4: Flyer of the conference, Berlin 2009<sup>14</sup>**

The scientific evaluation of the model project “Besser essen. Mehr bewegen” was carried out by the Max Rubner-Institute in Karlsruhe. The challenge for the evaluation team was to highlight the success factors of the model project in their respective contexts. To this end, an evaluation concept was developed – a longitudinal study of app. 10,600 children, including an evaluation of the prevention networks (cf. evaluation BEMBKR, 2009).

According to Corinna Willhöft, the evaluation was supposed to provide recommendations for future programs to prevent overweight in children (cf. Willhöft, 2009, p. 1).

### **Perspectives**

Both an exhibition and a campaign can be viewed as carriers of health messages that can start a trend reversal once all participants are ready to strive for sustainable consumption and a healthy lifestyle. All sectors of society have to recognize the connection between a balanced diet, physical activity and health, and be ready to promote a healthy and sustainable lifestyle among themselves.

Besides the examples from the campaign, personal experiences can be important as “life events” for behavioural changes. Serious illnesses, for example, can become windows of opportunity for people to radically change their own lifestyle as well as particular

habits in order to improve their personal quality of life. With adults, in particular, it is otherwise difficult to bring about a change, because certain opinions and habits have become deeply ingrained. This makes them more difficult to influence than children.

There is no blueprint for a successful campaign. Communication plays a key role, and the media often exerts a strong influence on consumption and lifestyle. However, the media does not only provide their users and recipients with information. It sets in motion processes of mediatisation that influence the collective consciousness as well as people's attitudes, norms and behaviours (cf. Lampert et al., 2011: 97).

Initiatives such as health campaigns can create positive and sustainable consumer behaviour with the support of the media. The two "practical" examples in this paper show positive results and represent what, according to Krause, is most important in health communication, that is, a conceptual approach as essential to any successful work (cf. Krause et al., 1989: 139).



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<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: Climate Allied

<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: Eat better. Exercise more

<sup>4</sup> Cf. MEA (2001-2005).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. IPCC (2001-2011).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-ov.htm#1.2> (23.4.2012)

<sup>7</sup> The author of this seminar paper was involved in the design of the traveling exhibition between 1993-1997 and helped organize guided tours of different Austrian communities and schools.

<sup>8</sup> Translator's note: IN FORM – Germany's initiative for healthy nutrition and more physical exercise.

<sup>9</sup> Translator's note: Austrian Information Service for Development Aid.

<sup>10</sup> Translator's note: Lower Austria is one of nine Austrian states

<sup>11</sup> Source: Klapptafeln: Was hat der Regenwald mit uns zu tun?

<sup>12</sup> Source: Der Standard (23.04.2012).

<sup>13</sup> Source: <http://www.bio-spitzenkoeche.de/top-thema/kategorien/mission-bio-die-koeche-auf-tour/uebersicht-mission-bio/biokids-tour-in-leipzig> (23.04.2012).

<sup>14</sup> Source: <http://www.besseressenmehrbebewegen.de/index.php?id=355> (23.4.2012).