



## BOOK REVIEW

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Daniel Fischer, Marlyne Sahakian, Jordan King, Jen Dyer and Gill Seyfang (eds) (2023)  
*Teaching and Learning Sustainable Consumption: A Guidebook*  
Routledge  
396 pp  
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During their academic socialisation, some scholars develop the attitude that teaching is a time-consuming activity that distracts from what scientists are supposed to do: Generate research results and publish them. With their 'Guidebook' on 'Teaching and Learning Sustainable Consumption', Daniel Fischer, Marlyne Sahakian, Jordan King, Jen Dyer and Gill Seyfang clearly demonstrate that such an attitude is inadequate – especially in the field of sustainable consumption. The editors and their 57 contributors show their passion for teaching and that teaching sustainable consumption – or rather, helping students to learn for it – is a very rewarding and satisfying endeavour. They make it clear that it is fruitful to publish on teaching foundations and examples – not only on research about teaching or well-selling textbooks for students. This book is neither a compilation of research papers nor a 'ready-to-use' course book. Nevertheless – or precisely because of this – it fills a gap in the literature on sustainable consumption and education for sustainable development.

The main target group of the book are teachers in higher education, both undergraduate and graduate. The book is structured in two parts: Part I (65 pages) presents relevant foundations of teaching and learning sustainable consumption in four chapters, all co-authored by the five editors. Part II (300 pages) consists of 57 teaching examples – from the editors and many colleagues (mainly from the countries in which the editors work: Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

Part I consists of four chapters: After an introduction on sustainable consumption as 'a tricky topic to teach', three aspects in this field are highlighted: 'learning theories and pedagogies' (chapter 2), 'learning objectives' (chapter 3) and 'assessing learning' (chapter 4). A unique feature of this book is that chapters 2–4 are written in the form of a narrative about 'Assistant Professor Y', who is 'starting a new position in a consumer research department at a public university and is slated to take over the pre-existing Sustainable Consumption 210 class', so far mainly a lecture for more than 100 students. Even though it has been a few years since the reviewer was in a similar situation, this storytelling approach (see [Fischer et al, 2023](#)) works very well

for him. It is probably easy for all university teachers – no matter how experienced – to identify with the challenges faced by colleague Y. The goal of gaining useful impulses for her upcoming course development additionally motivates them to work through theoretical concepts and teaching principles. This approach of looking at the topics presented through the eyes of Professor Y is a particular strength of this book. Perhaps it could have been applied even more consistently and throughout the first part of the book.

Another unique feature of this book is the great emphasis placed on assessment. Very often, teaching materials focus on content and methods, leaving teachers alone with the assessment task, which is usually linked to formal teaching. The significance of assessment is reflected in the importance that most students – for good reasons – attach to the grades they receive as assessment results. Chapter 4 makes it very clear that assessment for teachers should mean much more than just grading, that it is an integral part of the learning process, and that students themselves can be involved in it (through self-assessment, peer assessment and co-development of instructor-assessment).

Assessment is one of the features described for every teaching example in Part II. This part builds on the ‘sustainable consumption teaching review’ by [Sahakian and Seyfang \(2018\)](#) and uses the space provided by this book to present the expanded and updated set of examples. They come mainly from members of the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI) and the Sociology of Consumption research network of the European Sociological Association. The SCORAI network is also responsible for the series in which this book is published. Part II begins with an introduction in which the editors describe the main characteristics of the examples included and classify them according to group size (small, medium, large), level (undergraduate, graduate, teacher training), duration (short exercise, single session, multiple sessions, extended period) and key competencies targeted. The documentation of the 57 examples is organized according to duration. Each example begins with an indication of the recommended group size, level and duration, followed by a short summary (often just one sentence) and a ‘fact box’. This box contains topics and addressed competencies, objectives, used method, assessment, size, format, level and the preparation required. The three to ten pages long example presentations are completed by an ‘Activity snapshot’, ‘A little bit more detail ...’ (for example, on context and challenges), and in some cases a theory box and/or references.

As the editors promise in their introduction, Part II is a ‘dive into inspiring examples’! All phases of consumption are considered (acquisition, usage, disposal), also the role of political actors, companies and other stakeholders. The settings vary from classrooms to supermarkets, from theatres to entire university campuses, or from the home town to a foreign country as a location for study trips. Digital learning opportunities are also taken into account to varying degrees.

One issue that cannot be blamed on either the editors or the contributors is the layout, which does not live up to the vividness and up-to-dateness of the examples collected and the teaching principles presented. Although the claim was not to deliver a textbook, and even though the invitation to contact the contributors for further information is explicitly mentioned, readers would benefit from the provision of attractively designed, ready-to-use teaching materials (perhaps on a separate website). The reviewer would especially like to see the full course outline, slides, texts, exercises, tests, and so on that Assistant Professor Y eventually developed.

However, this is too much to ask for. This is a guidebook, not a course book. It makes clear in every chapter and in every example that good teaching for sustainable consumption does not mean providing students with ‘the truth’ or ready-made behavioural instructions, but rather facilitating their own competence development. Accordingly, this book addresses teachers as learners, too, to guide and inspire them in course and lesson development, but without making it superfluous. It is highly recommended for anyone teaching sustainable consumption – or thinking about doing so.

### **References**

- Fischer, D., Fückler, S., Selm, H. and Sundermann, A. (eds) (2023) *Narrating Sustainability Through Storytelling*, London: Taylor & Francis.
- Sahakian, M. and Seyfang, G. (2018) A sustainable consumption teaching review: from building competencies to transformative learning, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 198: 231–41. doi: [10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.06.238](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.06.238)