



The Ecological Modernization of Social Practices at the Consumption-Junction

Theoretical reflections underpinning empirical research on sustainable consumption¹

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1. Introduction

When judged from the social sciences debate on sustainable consumption, ecological modernization theories most of the times can be said to represent a rather narrow defined eco-efficiency and innovation perspective, associated with mainstream politics, culture and economics. Ecological modernization is used by some authors to sharpen the contrast with more radical ‘sufficiency’ perspectives which can be said to represent a fundamental critique of modern consumer-society. We argue that there is more to ecological modernization than just eco-efficiency, since especially later formulations of the theory combine a focus on innovation and eco-rationalization with an equally important emphasis on the social, meaningful behaviors of consumers (section 2). This profound sociological variant of ecological modernization theory can be used for analyzing environmental change at the consumption-junction, where social practices of consumption are located right in between provision and demand. It is at the consumption junction that the productivist (technology and market originated) logics of providers run into the everyday-life logics as implied in ordinary consumption (section 3). Since environmental innovations are of recent origin and becoming wide-spread in modern societies, these ‘green innovations’ offer great possibilities to do research on the development, diffusion and appropriation of environmental innovations, with respect to both their technological and socio-cultural dimension. Three clusters of research questions are presented to

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