From Consumer Kids to Sustainable Childhood
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This past year my wife and I joined the ranks of new parents—along with millions of others around the world. And in just a few months I found my perspective on life changed dramatically. Our son quickly became our first priority and most important element of our lives—achieving this with his meaningful babbles and smiles, his long looks into our eyes, and yes, his regular cries for milk and attention.

It was easy at that point to see how all the marketing targeted to new parents could make us consume to whole new degrees. How could good parents not buy the safest car seat, the least toxic crib mattress, or the fanciest books and toys that promise to stimulate their little baby’s brain? Marketing—whether to new parents or anyone else—plays off consumers’ fears and aspirations and in four months time I’ve been subjected to ads for things I didn’t know existed just last year. A process that will now continue for the next 18 years—enabled by marketing aimed not just at me but directly at my son to help make him the loudest voice of why we need to buy this, that, or the other.

I’ve seen this before—in the sustainable consumption and education literature that I’ve studied for the past decade, in the 11 years I’ve had nieces and watched them go from one toy fad to the next—Disney princesses, Webkins, Polly Pockets, now girl-friendly pink Legos that include playsets like a beauty shop, horse stables, and a pet store (reinforcing not just gender stereotypes, but helping to further normalize unsustainable consumer trends like pet ownership).

With billions of dollars being spent each year to encourage a consumer lifestyle from babyhood onwards, does it come as any surprise that children quickly become “empowered” consumers, demanding more toys, more junk food, more, more, more? And as all parents know, they can demand rather persistently.
The challenge is how do we transform this cultural system so children continue to demand more—as persistently—but instead demand more time with parents, more time outside, more interaction with the natural world—playing, gardening, foraging, and playing some more. I dream of a world where children can no longer identify more brand logos or Pokémon characters than they can plant species.¹

Personally, I’m trying to do just this with my son—buying as little as possible and buying used when I have to (yes, even including used cloth diapers). We already spend a lot of time outside with me describing plants and animals to him. At this point it’s of course all gibberish to him, but I hope that maybe a little will sink in at an unconscious level. Having no television and making a commitment to keep him from a screen of any type for his first years of life will help as well.

But the challenge is not the first few years of life when parents are mostly in control, but when children enter into daycares and schools. What values do the teachers and caregivers bring? The other children? The school curriculum? What foods are in the cafeteria and what tastes and preferences do these normalize?

Every aspect of the school day has the opportunity to help make a sustainable lifestyle feel completely natural or totally unnatural. What children learn, how the school is designed, whether advertising messages are present—in classroom materials, in vending machines, on sponsored “educational” posters—all of these shape the cultural norms of the newest generation.

While there are powerful examples of schools integrating sustainability into the school day—from establishing media literacy and environmental education courses, to setting up school gardens that provide a deeper understanding of nature, exercise, and an interactive outdoor classroom—the vast majority of the school day reinforces a consumer lifestyle, and the values that have been normalized over 200 years of
life during The Consumer Age. The challenge, as this new report by Worldwatch Institute Europe reveals, is to reorient every aspect of the school day on sustainability—from what’s taught in the classroom to what’s served in the lunchroom and everything in between. This is a big challenge—one that I know I will face in not too many years time. And right now I naively hope I’ll be able to beat the system—teaching my child how to live sustainably in an unsustainable culture; how to prepare for the 2-4 degrees of climate change that he’ll face during his lifetime; and how to preserve his humanity in the brutally disrupted world that will come with rapid ecological decline.

I wish all parents luck in grappling with these challenges, but also recognize that there is no way we can succeed unless the broader systems change—the schools, the media, the government and community structures that normalize our unsustainable consumer lifestyle at every turn. And that is going to take commitment and bold action by leaders in all of those fields—school administrators, teachers, policy makers, journalists, marketing executives. The good news is that many of these leaders are also parents. And embedded in networks of other parents—parents that would speak up to put pressure on these leaders to change the systems for the better if they just understood how broken the current systems are. Let us hope that this report represents the first step at educating parents and leaders, and redirecting schools’ and societies’ priorities, helping to bring about a culture where nurturing a deep understanding of ecology and a strong moral character are put at the heart of children’s educations—knowledge that will prove far more valuable in a changing future than how to surf the Internet, launch an Angry Bird, or identify which brand icons are the coolest.

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Growing up as a Child in Europe

How Sustainable are European Families?
How a child is brought up determines the values and concepts that will last throughout adult life. Early experiences and even traditions shape future lifestyles. The role of family has been reevaluated. In 1992 the Brundtland report, *Our Common Future*, concluded that adopting sustainable lifestyles should become a key concern for all citizens in order to develop societies that “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Few would disagree, that human well-being and happiness should be at the heart of a successful economy. Taking this concept to its logical conclusion would mean envisioning a sustainable future beyond the obsession of economic growth. The intuitive creation of sustainable childhoods should therefore be seen as fundamental for any future economic solution.

This report examines how unsustainable lifestyle practices are passed on from one European generation to the next. It identifies important themes that should be seen as central to the analysis of the sustainability of European families’ lifestyles. Achieving this requires a focus on a broader set of activities than simply material consumption. It requires a reflection on social interaction, leisure activities, and education.

The issues raised in the report are far-reaching. A fundamental question is asked: How do we raise children so that they no longer grow up learning to be consumers but instead learn to become guardians of sustainable living?

In this first section of the report we focus on some of the important themes that are central to the analysis of sustainability – or lack thereof – of European family lifestyles. This will lay the foundation for the report’s later sections, which ultimately will produce ideas on how to shift from practices like consumerism to more sustainable lifestyles.
Today’s European Family Structures

In European countries today the family structure is a strong determinant of the level of well-being and the family still remains the main sphere where social, emotional, and material support is provided. To understand the characteristics behind the different dimensions of sustainability it is therefore essential to be aware of how families function and are structured. The potential for change to more sustainable lifestyles for future generations can be identified in the gap between present unsustainable lifestyles and lifestyles that can increase well-being.

During the last decades, the average birth rates in Europe have declined significantly, leading to a household structure of ever smaller families. European household sizes now range from as low as 2.5 in Denmark up to 4.2 in Turkey. Today, 49% of European families with children have only one child (Figure 1).

![Figure 1](average_number_of_children_in_european_families)  
**Figure 1.** Average number of children in European families in percentage of households where children are present. Source: Iacovou and Skew.

Although marriage rates have decreased and divorce rates increased during this period, most children are still raised in families with both parents. Living as a couple is still the predominant living arrangement (74%) among all families with children.
However, there are some distinct differences in the European family structures. The Northern European structure is generally characterized by “weak” family ties and a sense of social rather than familial solidarity with elderly and weak members of society. In Southern Europe, family ties are more often characterized as “strong”, meaning a more family-based sense of solidarity. Even co-residence between grandparents, parents and children is seen in parts of Eastern and Southern Europe. These trends should be viewed in light of the different cultural and religious orientations ranging from Northern-Protestant to Southern-Catholic and Eastern-Orthodox.

Children of course need their parents for guidance and support. A crucial factor for that to happen is parental time. However, time is a scarce resource in European families. Long days at work for parents, and long hours in schools or kindergartens for children leave the family separated for most of the day. There are often only a few hours in the evening for family time. In a recent European survey, 28% of respondents felt that they spent too little time with their family and 27% believed they spent too much time at work (Figure 2). In recent years, female employment rates have been on the rise in the EU, and dual-earner couples now make up approximately 57% in Northern Europe, but still only 7% in Southern Europe.

![Figure 2](image-url)

**Figure 2.** Percentage of Europeans who wish to spend their time differently. Source: Eurostat.
The European Media Family

Since the television was introduced in the 1950s, time spent watching TV has been steadily increasing and has become the predominant way of spending leisure time in many European families. At the same time television programming has changed and moved towards targeting children much more. The rapid expansion of other media, such as computers, DVDs, and smart phones, is now adding to the total time spent on electronic media.

A recent Danish survey shows that an average child aged 5 to 16 years old spends 5 hours and 23 minutes on electronic media a day on weekdays and 7 hours and 17 minutes a day on weekends (Figure 3). Totalling 41 hours and 30 minutes a week in front of a screen; children’s media use is essentially the same as an adult’s working week. Children are not only spending more and more time on electronic media, they also start at an earlier age. A Swedish study shows that a child’s debut age on the internet has decreased from nine-years-old in 2005 to only four-years-old in 2010.

Figure 3. Children’s average media use in Denmark on a weekday. Source: TNS Gallup.
An overwhelming majority of Europeans have access to various electronic media in their homes. Close to a hundred percent of European families have one or more TVs in their households. From 2004 to 2011 the ratio of European households with internet access increased from 41% to 73% (Figure 4). Europeans are also major consumers of mobile phones, including smart phones, and the number of subscribers has more than doubled since the beginning of the century, with 54 subscribers per 100 people in 2000 to 124 subscribers per 100 people in 2011.

![Figure 4. Europeans access to and use of the internet between 2004 and 2011. Source: UNESCO.](image)

The use of media has shifted status in most families. It is moving away from only being an activity in the family’s leisure time to being an integrated part of everyday family life. Electronic media is now playing a role in how family activities are mediated, time schedules organized, and family members communicate. Overall, parents are positive towards their children’s use of electronic media.
Families with younger children often use TV or DVDs as childcare during daily peak hours; i.e. while they get dressed for work, prepare the evening meal, or do other household chores. Time spent on electronic media, however, is at the expense of time spent on other social activities, displacing reading time, and leading to more compartmentalized family lifestyles. The most frequent activity in which younger children engage in their leisure time is still playing, albeit closely followed by watching TV (Figure 5).

**Children 5-9 Years Old**

![Figure 5. Parents reporting on what their children do in their leisure time. Source: Swedish Media Council.](image-url)
Modern families live in a historical period where they have the opportunity to enjoy all the advancements of mankind; however their lives, filled with pressure for instant gratification, do not always seem happier. In Europe, consumption of goods has increased steadily over the past decade although a slight recession was observed in 2008-2009 (Figure 6). This can be seen as an indication of how quality of life has improved. However, the relationship is not linear; indicating that there may be decreasing returns to scale, i.e. past a certain point there is less gratification or utility gained per euro spent. Beyond a certain level of consumption there may even be a negative influence on well-being and happiness, since material wealth cannot satisfy non-material needs, such as social relationships, for either adults or children.18

Consumption per capita

Figure 6. Consumption expenditure per capita per year in the EU. Source: Eurostat.19

Children are strongly influenced by consumerism. The games and toy industry is one of the strongest consumer industries worldwide. In 2005, the average amount spent on children’s toys in the EU was € 168 per child. Spending on toys was highest in Luxembourg, the U.K. and Denmark with an annual average of over € 250 per child.20
In recent decades traditions and birthdays, instead of being family and community-centred, have largely been taken over by consumer choices making parents stressed about the material gifts they feel they need to provide their children. In all European countries, the Christmas season is the most important season for gifts, including the purchases of toys and games. This gift season starts in October and results in almost 60% of annual sales in the toy industry, with almost 50% in the final two months.21

Technological advancements used by the toy industry have affected the way children develop their creative imaginations with the introduction of electronic games. The presence of electronics in toys is overwhelming; to the extent that one analyst claimed that kids wonder what is wrong when a doll does not respond when being pressed.22 More than half of European parents (52%) believe that electronic toys reduce the imagination of children, but due to the psychological effect of peer pressure, children feel the need to own electronic toys; thus parents are placed in a difficult position as their freedom to raise their own children according to their values is challenged.23

The globalized children’s market is extremely attractive to international corporations who are trying to establish their brands and products in different cultures. Toys and games markets are dominated by global brands such as Disney, Lego, Hasbro, and Mattel, who direct the general market trends. Next to the global corporations there are a number of domestic companies in each country, but the majority of them lack the strength to play a significant role in the market. Thus, children in western societies are predominately using the same toys and have the same influences as their peers in different countries; a situation that can lead to a weakening of local traditions, and a loss of cultural diversity.

Another leading industry in the globalization efforts of the children’s market is the food industry. A 1997 survey by Brandweek magazine stated that “...McDonald’s was found to be the favorite fast food and Coca-Cola
the favorite drink all over the world” and there is no evidence that this picture is different at the present time.\textsuperscript{24} The increased consumption of fast food by children has been associated with the increase of childhood obesity in consumer societies.

According to an EU survey on health and food issues, 83 % of the respondents support the view that obesity in children has increased over the last five years (Figure 7). Furthermore, a large percentage of Europeans attribute this increase to the growth in consumption of ready meals and fast food.\textsuperscript{25}

Question: From what I see in my country, there seem to be more overweight children these days than there were five years ago.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Self-reported data on the impression of the increase in obesity in European countries (EU 25). Source: European Commission.\textsuperscript{26}}
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“Play in nature, particularly during the critical period of middle childhood, appears to be an especially important time for developing the capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development.”

Stephen R. Kellert, professor, Yale University, USA

“Children in the UK view more than 18000 television adverts each year.”

Sharon Beder, professor, University of Wollongong, Australia
“Play in nature, particularly during the critical period of middle childhood, appears to be an especially important time for developing the capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development.”
Stephen R. Kellert, professor, Yale University, USA

“The future of the planet is at stake if we allow advertisers and marketers to turn children into hyper consumers of the future.”
Sharon Beder, professor, University of Wollongong, Australia

“Human identity is no longer defined by what one does but by what one owns.”
Jimmy Carter, former U.S. President
Adults are not the only ones feeling the pressures of owning the latest products; children similarly feel the pressure of consumer-connected status. Their vulnerable, not-yet-assembled personality is already being judged if they do not possess all the up-to-date toys and computer gadgets that their peers own. Marketing practices are constantly reinforcing the process of turning children into consumers, not citizens, offering a model of living connected to selfishness, as opposed to caring for society and the environment.

Today's marketing practices manipulate the psychology of modern families by exploiting their aspirations and fears. Since the 1980s advertisers have been working on finding the most effective ways of attracting children's attention. This can vary from supermarket adverts placed at the height of a child's position in the cart, to product marketing in bright, colourful packaging that will immediately grab the child's attention, to using music and video to attract children through the internet and television.

Up until now television was the best transmitter of advertising aimed at children; by 1988 64% of television toy advertisements were for toys related to children's television programmes. The head of Disney explained to the magazine Advertising Age in 1989 how the Disney Corporation's activities all reinforced each other: “The Disney Stores promote the consumer products which promote the [theme] parks which promote the television shows. The television shows promote the company.” These practices have been continuously applied up to the present moment.²⁷

Since the 1990s, the effects of the internet revolution have become visible and children have been constantly bombarded with advertisement links through their computers. In 2009, there were 16 million internet users between the ages of two and eleven-years-old in Europe.²⁸ According to the director of the international web design company Saatchi & Saatchi Interactive, “This is a medium for advertisers that is
unprecedented... there’s probably no other product or service that we can think of that is like it in terms of capturing kids’ interest.”

Often companies’ advertisements target children with the prospect that they will grow up to be lifelong consumers of specific products. As a result of this strategy, the companies’ target audience is constantly decreasing in age. Children as young as four years old are being targeted by advertisements, making parents, teachers, and other caregivers unable to intervene, or in some cases, unaware of their child’s exposure to advertisement. Modern-day children are constantly exposed to stories not coming from parents, teachers, peers, books, or films but from marketing and advertising (Figure 8). Childhood memories are no longer mainly connected with places, people, and emotions, but with products, and their advertising jingles and slogans.

Figure 8. Illustration of how children are influenced by different sources. Source: McLean.

Marketing and advertising have also been linked to the increase of health issues amongst children. The constant promotion of images of what beauty and perfection are supposed to be has been connected to the increase of low self-esteem amongst children, resulting in some cases to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Eating disorders among teenagers are disturbingly common and even girls as young as six are worrying about their weight. In the United States, a recent survey
reported that about 42% of first to third-grade girls, want to be thinner and 81% of ten-year-olds are afraid of being fat.\textsuperscript{31}

Furthermore, the increase of obesity among children has been connected to the marketing and promotion of unhealthy food. In one study, advertisement of unhealthy food on the internet was found to account for almost 50% of all the food advertisements being surveyed on children’s and the food industry’s websites.\textsuperscript{32} The fast food industry in the United States spends about 500 million Euro of its annual €3.2 billion advertising budget (about 16%) on marketing to children and teenagers, and more than half of that is spent on toy giveaways included in children’s meals.\textsuperscript{33}

In a recent European Commission survey, as much as 81% of the respondents consider that food advertising and promotion influences totally or to a large extent children’s eating habits (Figure 9). 15% of the respondents mentioned that “restrictions on advertising the most harmful food products” should be implemented in order to improve children’s diets.\textsuperscript{34}

Question: To what extent do you think food advertising and promotion influence what children choose to eat?

![Figure 9. Food advertisement’s influence on children’s diets in European countries (EU 25). Source: European Commission.\textsuperscript{35}](image-url)
Education is simultaneously one of the most important and most complex issues involved in any child’s development. Throughout Europe, education practices and approaches have developed based on a variety of different cultures and ideas. This also affects the diversity of ways in which schools and kindergartens take in environmental and sustainability issues in their curricula.

Following the launch of the United Nations Decade (2005-2014) of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), the UN Economic Commission for Europe drew up a separate strategy in 2005 that recognises that ESD “is a lifelong process from early childhood to higher and adult education and goes beyond formal education.” The shift in focus is from what children should be taught to a process in which kids, adults, and the community learn together. In this way, children develop competences that enable them to take an active role and tackle society’s global environmental issues.36

Yet, progress in childhood education in sustainability has been very slow so far. In a 2010 status report, the European Panel on Sustainable Development points to very few examples of schools that have actually implemented ESD in their practices and teaching. Few schools have sustainable development as an individual topic in their curriculum. Mostly, it is integrated in nature and biology classes, which, however, omits the more social and economic dimensions of sustainability. Often schools also fail to address learning-by-doing, by for example practicing waste collection or planting trees in the school yard.37

As ESD entails broad skills and holistic thinking, a limitation to its implementation is the increased European focus on tests, which assess children’s attainment with respect to individual disciplines and not broader aspects of learning such as for example sustainable development. There are also concerns that performing well in the tests becomes the focus of teaching. This is shown to result in children acquiring test-taking skills, rather than ‘real world’ ones.38
One of the international tools aiming to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students is the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). A recent comparison between the data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor and data from PISA indicates that countries with higher PISA scores in math have fewer people who are confident in their entrepreneurial capabilities (Figure 10). Thus, testing children in individual performance does not always draw a real picture of children’s abilities in a broader sense.

As formal education forms such a substantial part of a child’s life – with European children starting school at an increasingly early age, for example 94% of five-year-olds are attending school – teaching plays a vital role in the development of children’s values and their ability to handle the increasing complexity of societal issues. This goes beyond testing and requires a more holistic approach, especially when related to such complex issues as sustainable development.
Ranking by PISA Math Score and Perceived Entrepreneurial Capability

Figure 10. Comparing the ranking of 23 countries by PISA math score in 2009 and perceived entrepreneurial capability in 2011. Source: Zhao. ⁴⁰
The design of the places in which we live influences the opportunities that children have to explore their surroundings, socialise with their peers, engage in physical activity, and play. According to a professor at Yale University, Stephen R. Kellert, the natural environment is fundamentally important to children’s healthy development: “Play in nature, particularly during the critical period of middle childhood, appears to be an especially important time for developing the capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development.”

In Europe, about 75 % of the population lives in urban areas and this is expected to rise to about 80 % by 2020. As cities have become the places to live, it is crucial that they become places were human well-being plays a central role. At present, the share of green urban areas in cities varies across Europe, with a tendency for a higher share of public green areas in Eastern European cities (Figure 11). As a large proportion of European children live in urban areas with meagre daily contact with nature, it becomes difficult for them to gather direct knowledge of how the natural environment can have positive effects on their well-being.

Of immediate concern for the child’s well-being is urban transport. Transport accounts for a large percentage of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Particularly in urban areas where people live closely together, it has a negative effect on human health as well as the environmental impact through climate change. A report from the World Health Organisation indicates that children living close to busy roads have a 50 % increased risk of suffering from respiratory diseases, and suggests an increased risk of childhood leukaemia from exposure to vehicle exhaust. In addition, road traffic injuries, the leading cause of death among Europeans aged 5 to 24 years, in many places discourage parents from allowing kids to walk, cycle, and play outside.

Driving kids to school, their friends’ places, and other activities, and having limited access to safe green outdoor spaces, restricts the
choices for kids to be physically active. Low physical activity along with an unhealthy diet is a major determinant of becoming overweight and obese. In Europe only 34% of children report undertaking physical activity at a level that meets the current guidelines for sufficient physical activity (that is being physically active for at least 60 minutes per day).\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{Figure 11.} Percentage of green urban areas in European Cities. Source: EEA.\textsuperscript{46}
Voices from European Families

The Potential for Change to More Sustainable Lifestyles
“I would like them [the children] to lead less commercial lives, lives turned to education, to friendship, to being humane – that is very important for me, to be humane, because I don’t think people can be happy without being generous, humane. That is what I try to pass on to my children... I really believe that they can be happy only with these essential values: education, humanity, friendship.” (Mrs. Stankovic, Belgrade)

Wishing for a ‘good life’, one in which people are valued for who they are, is something that appears to be simple but is in fact riddled with complexity. How can we live according to humanity’s fundamental values, such as friendship, sharing, cooperating, self-esteem, and love?

What are the impediments families face, which hinder them from living according to their wishes? What makes it difficult for children to discover and develop their potential? How do families and children envision the values of sustainable living, away from consumerism and with respect to nature and the environment?

This report does not seek to give one-off answers but wishes to explore some aspects of the questions above together with six families from across Europe. Aspects such as looking at the conditions societal structures enforce upon families, and how these structures affect the values behind the choices made.

**Understanding how and what affects our current lifestyle in Europe is important if we wish our society to reflect our aspirations and to move in a more sustainable direction.**
Methodology

Between September and October 2012, we conducted qualitative interviews with six European families; two in Serbia (Belgrade and Pancevo), two in Spain (Palma de Mallorca) and two in Denmark (Odense). The aim of the interviews was to gain insight into the day-to-day decisions and choices of family life in Europe.

Families were chosen to fit the average European family profile, determined by the following criteria: families who live in a city, parents between 25 and 55 years old that have one or two children, with at least one child between 4 and 12. In each country families with two different types of professional backgrounds were selected, one where at least one of the parents had an academic background and one family with a non-academic background.

Qualitative interviews were conducted and recorded live and the dialogue was based on the use of a semi-structured questionnaire. The mothers of the families were interviewed and one of the children was asked pre-defined questions on their wishes and interests for the future.

Interview guidelines, a transcription manual, and transcribed interviews can be obtained at www.worldwatch-europe.org/living_economy
My name is Maria Stankovic. I’m from Serbia, 46 years old and a translator and English teacher. Milos, an engineer of 42 is my husband and Sanja, 11, and Alexandar, 7, are my children. My mother lives with us in a 9th floor flat in the center of Belgrade next to a large park where my children spend a lot of time outdoors.

I’m Lucia Ruiz, 41, dedicated to my family: Alberto, 46, self-employed, is my husband and David, 11 and Matéo, 6 are our sons. My father in law lives next door. We live in the suburb of a provincial city in Spain on a top floor flat on the first floor. We like being together doing family things on the weekend when we have time.

‘Hej’ from Denmark. Our family is called Jensen and consists of me; Helle, 37 years old, psychologist; my husband Tom, 42, social educator; and our sons Holger and Niels, 5 and 9 respectively. We have a small house in a cooperative community with outdoor facilities for children in a suburb of Odense.
Our family name is Djordjevic.
I’m Jelena, 45 years old, and my husband is Raijo, 50 years old. We both work at a telephone company. Raijo is also a farmer and our life together with our daughters Milica and Vesna, 10 and 12 and grandmother Irena is connected to many farming activities close to our house in the province of Pancevo.

Our family name is Cobos.
I’m Sandra, 35 years old. I work as a primary school teacher and I’m married to Eduardo, 33, who has studied tourism and now works for a waste incineration plant. We make conscious environmental choices in our life with our boys Nicolás, 2, and Oscar, 4. We live in a flat in Palma de Mallorca.

I’m Signe Hansen,
42 years old, kindergarten teacher and married to Jens, 39, electrician. Our children are Verner, 2 and Oliver, 5. We live in a small twin house in a residential area in Odense with easy access to the green outdoors.

Family Life and Time Balance

The interviewed families in Serbia, Spain, and Denmark all express a strong commitment to their family life and prioritize spending time with their children when not at work. Mrs. Stankovic expresses it this way: “Our free time we spend exclusively with our children, if we don’t have additional obligations”. It is emphasized that spending time with their children is a source of joy and happiness, and family life is prioritized above the parent’s individual desires for leisure activities.

Although it has not yet become the norm that both parents work across Europe, all the interviewed families are dual income families. The Djordjevic family’s father even has a second job due to financial constraints, while in the Ruiz family the mother works part time. In all of the families the children and their parents only spent the mornings and the late afternoons-early evenings together. These patterns emphasize just how important time constraints are to European families with children as described in the previous section of this report.

In general the families are happy with the time distribution between work and family life. They all seem to be able to find individual solutions to their specific time constraints; either the grandparents support the family by cooking and looking after the children, or total family time is distributed between the parents. However, when the mothers were asked to think of an ideal situation they all replied that a reduction in working hours would be desirable as well as an increase in time spent with the children. Mrs. Cobos expresses it like this: “Like to work less time. Work part time. Go and pick them at lunchtime from school and eat together with them. And then again take them back to school. And do activities at school with them.”

There is still an emphasis on integrating the grandparents in the family life and the intergenerational contact is explicitly stated as something that is valued and adds to the experience of ‘the good life’. Three families, two in Serbia and one in Spain live together with one of their grandparents. Mrs. Stankovic explains the integration this way:
“My mother cooks, every day fresh food, fresh vegetables, we are lucky to have her. My children are scarcely ill and I think it’s because of the healthy food granny makes for them and because of the love she puts into that food.” Mrs. Jensen expresses a different approach: “For example, the children they have a fixed grandparents day; so my husband’s parents are very involved in our lives and in the lives of the children and I also see it as an important tradition to keep up to date.”

The Media Family

The interviewed families clearly mirror the fact that electronic media has become such an integral part of everyday life. Watching TV and playing computer games are the main activities in the children’s age groups included here – from 4 to 12. All children watch TV and use the computer daily except for the smaller children aged 5 and below. For these children computer use has not yet entered their world of playing.

Not surprisingly the children watch more TV and play more computer games during weekends and holidays. The total media time seems to vary between half an hour and two hours a day. This pattern is less than the figures described in the previous section and may reflect the variation in average numbers, but also that people would tend to underestimate when asked such questions.

The families’ views on the limit to what is considered as ‘many hours’, is also very different among the interviewed families. As Mrs. Djordjevic explained when asked about her daughter’s use of electronic media, even though the family does not use electronic media a lot: “If they are not watching TV, then they are on the computer”. The Serbian mother stresses that the time spent on the TV and computer is highest during holidays, and that the children respect their parent’s requirements of doing homework and other duties before watching TV or playing computer games.
The parents in the three countries did not set strict rules for their children’s use of media. However, they often monitor the children’s use of the TV and the computer, and interfere if they think the time used is too long or the program or game is inappropriate. It seems that restrictions on watching TV or playing on the computer are mainly imposed by the time constraints set by the family’s busy daily schedules.

For both parents and children the main reason for watching TV is relaxation. This is argued as a consequence of a busy daily schedule with long hours at school and school related activities for the children and long working hours for the parents. As Mrs. Hansen expresses: “When he comes home after a long day playing outside in the kindergarten, he often relaxes by watching TV; actually until we have dinner”. Computer games are more often used for playing but also sometimes for education. For example Mrs. Djordjevic says: “They like the English learning games on the computer”.

Watching TV is used more often than computer games for family entertainment. A cosy family evening may be spent in front of the TV watching a movie and the recipe is as follows: “…we had a cinema session. Pop corn, nachos, coke. We put on a movie. We closed the windows so it is all dark and put on a movie. We have the home theatre session,” says Mrs. Ruiz.

The main purpose of using media is leisure time entertainment and relaxation. Although there is a large variation in Europe of how and for how long media is used, it it is a double-edged sword on one side, bringing the family together, but on another, preventing them from being together. The potential for change lies in the tension herein.
Consumerism in Family Life

Even though the families involved in this survey are characterized by different values and traditions, they all express serious concerns about the effect consumer-lead society has on their personal lives and their children’s upbringing through various dimensions.

All of the interviewees felt that material possessions do not bring happiness. However, they also agreed that having a satisfactory level of material wealth is important for their children’s wellbeing. Finding the balance between these two realities is a difficult task as Mrs. Stankovic points out: “Material possessions for sure do not make happiness, but they are necessary.”

Excess unnecessary purchases resulting in large credit issues can cause problems of anxiety and lead to long working hours necessary for repaying the debt. Mrs. Stankovic discusses how this affects the family’s life: “…Yes, it was not a necessary credit at all… it has been affecting my life in different dimensions, not only inability to buy something. It brings nervousness, anxiety. I’m only sorry because of my children, we would have been more relaxed, have more time to spend together, to teach them.”

It seems that consumerism is sometimes used to conceal deeper personal and family issues. The Ruiz family identifies the problem of trying to substitute the lack of quality family time by buying material goods: “Sometimes I have free time and I end up buying clothes for them, maybe it’s because I want to be with them and I can not.” Mrs. Cobos also comments: “I consume and then I’m not happy about it. It doesn’t make me feel good. Obviously, at that moment you get happy to buy something…but you end up buying things they do not need.”

Social structures are also shown to affect the families’ approach to material goods as the Jensen family suggests: “…and sometimes he [the son] must have certain things to be a part of the community.” The Stankovic mother adds: “I don’t want them to feel bad compared
to other children...Because the other children also don’t have too much, with time they have become modest.” Mrs. Jensen discusses material possessions’ connection to family status and how attainment of this status can become an overall personal and social objective: “Much importance is attached to the materialistic things and goods at the society level I think…it becomes like an image of who you are as a person.”

The interviewees commented on children’s attraction to material possessions and how this creates problems within the family and the different ways parents handle these demands. Some of the families discuss with their children the need and use of new material things and toys, others try to avoid bringing their children into stores. Overall there seems to be a lot of time spent by the families tackling this issue. It has become one of the main problematic areas associated with children’s upbringing, causing inner conflicts amongst parents’ values and the demands of material possessions by their children. Especially since children can get emotional if denied their wishes, as the Hansen family points out “We would like to go to Toys ‘R’ us [a toy store], but we have not done this so much because we know it’s difficult to get out from there again without the child crying because he has seen a lot of nice things he wants to own.”

Technological advancements in the toy industry and the fact that very young children demand electronic toys were commented on by Mrs. Jensen: “Niels [9 years old son] is wishing for a mobile phone and it’s actually something he wants most.” Additionally, the effect electronic toys have on children’s imagination and the possible associated loss of creativity was highlighted by Mrs. Ruiz: “...they do not know how to play, they can not imagine that with four stones or a branch. Now children need something electronic to play, they are not creative.”

Nowadays, families are practicing consumer-centred traditions instead of focusing on the values behind traditions, such as love, spirituality,
family, and community bonding. As Mrs. Ruiz comments, “At birthdays, everyone wants to give a present. You can not say that you do not want them to give them a present because people feel offended”. Consumerism, therefore, is passed on to the next generation through these new customs. This change was commented on by the Spanish and Danish families but Interestingly, the Serbian families, who are more religious, kept their traditions less consumer-oriented and more family-centred.

**The Influence of Marketing on Children**

Marketing emerges as an important issue for all the families involved in this study as they feel their children are exposed to an excess amount of advertising, which affects in diverse ways the development of their personality. Mrs. Jensen summarises: “It’s too much, both quality and quantity. You cannot drive through town without there being advertisements for everything everywhere, it affects one, you then buy more of the things you see, as you come to believe that the things you see they are better than anything else. So it has indeed a huge influence and impact of our consumption habits.”

Children’s inability to understand the commercial intent and manipulation behind advertisements is one of the main concerns. Mrs. Ruiz commented on the emotional manipulation of younger children by marketing campaigns: “My eldest son, when he was small, we had to hide the catalogues, because he used to get very nervous, he nearly had like a heart attack from seeing so much. And he started to say I don’t know what I want, and what shall I choose? As if he had an obligation to ask for something.” Another form of manipulation mentioned is the ‘incorrect’ presentation of products and their quality by advertising
Children express what is most fun to do

“I like to do everything! I like to draw. I like to play “chasing” when I am outside with my friends”
Alexander, 7 years old (Stankovic family)

“Mom takes me to the planetarium!”
Alexander, 7 years old (Stankovic family)

“Me, I would like to go to the park!”
Mateo, 6 years old (Ruiz family)

“Play play station, play outside, jumping on trampoline … and watch TV”.
Niels, 9 years old (Jensen family)
What children wish the most?

“Me, I would like to go to the park!”
Mateo, 6 years old (Ruiz family)

“I wished that I soon could go to Lalandia [a large water park](...) but I’ve already been there”.
Oliver, 5 years old (Hansen family)

“I wish a touch mobile phone, playstation wita [a pocket model]”.
Niels, 9 years old (Jensen family)

“I would like the most to have my own room”.
Vesna, 12 years old (Djordjevic family)
campaigns. Mrs. Jensen explains: “What you see on advertising is junk and it doesn’t always quite work in real life, as it’s made seem in the ad.”

The interviewees question the need for advertising and marketing and express concern about the effect it has on influencing the families’ budgets through their children. Mrs. Jensen says: “I cannot see why it should be there and I think it’s really a shame that children are influenced so much regarding consumption... It’s obvious that children are bombarded with it because they influence so much of their parents’ money.”

The role of television in marketing campaigns and the promotion of advertising are highlighted by several of the interviewees. Mrs. Stankovic comments on the parent’s inability to protect their children from advertising: “He watches commercials on these children’s programmes, because there are a lot of commercials on these”. Mrs. Jensen is worried about the false material needs of her children created through their exposure to excess advertising: “Cartoon Network and Disney Channel basically run advertising every five minutes. And it’s certainly there that a lot of their needs emerge.”

Some of the interviewees discuss the influence of marketing on the eating habits of their children. Focus is given on marketing campaigns promoting toys as gifts with ready meals or other eating products. Once more the emotional stability of children, requesting these “gifts”, and parents’ decisions are being manipulated. Mrs. Cobos comments: “If they have seen a product on television, then they notice it in the supermarket, especially when you buy cereals. On the cereal box, they see the picture of Mickey Mouse; they want to buy it because of the toy that’s included more than for the food. You buy because of the marketing, not because you think it’s a good product. Just like McDonald’s and the toys. Then what is left at the back is the food. The present becomes more important. It’s very big for them.”
All the interviewees agreed that marketing and advertising restrict their freedom to raise their children by their own values. An example of this restriction is the choice of products being advertised and how this limits the family’s ability to pick from a variety of activities. As Mrs. Stankovic points out: “Maybe commercials about theatre plays or concerts or some children’s activities or workshops would be much better. Not only toys, toys, toys. My freedom and their freedom to choose is restricted.”
Sustainability in Education

European schools often include the environment as a subject and children have one-off experiences of handling environmental issues. In Denmark, Mrs. Jensen describes that their school teaches a subject called “nature and technology”, whilst a school in Serbia, as Mrs. Djordjevic explains, teaches about “nature guardians.” The subject of nature and environmental issues was approached in a variety of ways in the schools pupils in the survey attended; from waste-free lunches, using natural materials to make art, recycling, picking-up waste, to hands-on approaches in green school yards.

Overall, the families discuss the different approaches to environmental education, but they all agree that it is an important subject to teach. As Mrs. Stankovic puts it: “I would like them to be interested in nature, we are all worried about these things, the planet is changing rapidly in front of our eyes.”

Some schools are widening the skill set children are taught, which supports a framework for learning that is more in line with an education for sustainability. Practical learning, together with lifelong learning, is essential to education for sustainable development. The interviewees point out the significance of using practical approaches in order to integrate environmental issues into schools. Mrs. Djordjevic describes the importance of children’s practical engagement with nature: “Yes, they have a school yard and they plant trees in it. They’re their trees and they take care of them.”

Mrs. Jensen also comments on practical learning concerning recycling: “They have for example been out to collect waste and had to sort it so they got some knowledge about recycling and such.” The fact that environmental education is also important for parents was pointed out, as one school’s recycling policy led through the child’s insistence to start recycling at home. Other initiatives, such as waste free lunch boxes, are also ways that move environmental education beyond the school perimeter and into the home.
Lastly, the importance of free play for the healthy development of children was discussed. Mrs. Djordjevic suggests that playing forms an integral part of a sustainable childhood: “I think children should play more, as we used to play. I let my children play, they still have dolls lying all around. I don’t think children should grow up fast. I would like for them to have a happy childhood, to play, and then find their way.”

As discussed by the interviewees, an education for sustainable development, in which children develop the skills and insights that enable them to challenge the current way society is organised and seek to live within the resources of one planet, poses a large challenge. At present, most schools are trying to include the topics of nature and the environment in their curriculum in some form, but what is missing is the opportunity to provide an education that develops the potential in all children, guiding them by providing a broad learning framework that is embedded in fundamental ‘human’ values.
The families interviewed in this study stress two main subjects with regards to the areas in which they live. Initially, emphasis was given on easy and safe access via public transport, bicycle, and on foot. The second subject emphasized was the importance of being outdoors and how it influences their children.

Mrs. Stankovic mentions the importance of children being independent from their parents with regards to their ability to be mobile and safe: “I take her sometimes by car and she comes back by bus. I’m trying to get her independent. Today we have to be cautious and at the same time try to make them independent.” Safety is an issue that limits families’ choices of transport modes. Especially since road traffic accidents are a major risk to childrens’ safety.

The Cobos family interviewed in Spain lives close to the children’s nursery and school but due to a lack of cycle paths, the car becomes the only choice. Mrs. Cobos wishes for safe cycling paths, pedestrian walkways and reliable public transport: “It’s not safe to go with the bike in my area... It’s impossible... It’s too dangerous. No, I don’t dare.”

Having access to safe cycle paths is a strong feature of the Danish urban environment, enabling children to cycle to and from school and friends. But even in this environment, there is still plenty of room for improvement, as Mrs. Jensen suggests: “In a perfect world, one would have a job within cycling distance. I think it’s really nice to cycle also because it’s economical. It doesn’t cost anything. It’s also good for the environment.” Interestingly, attached to the children’s ability to be independent and cycle in safety was a ‘feel good’ factor expressed by Mrs. Hansen: “It’s nice to think that when he [my son] starts school, there’s a good cycle path.”

Mrs. Jensen puts emphasis on the advantage of having a safe and enclosed green area that is attractive to children: “A small garden, with all sorts of berries and bushes that kids can go and look at, smell and eat...
as the berries mature. They use it very much and we have a cabin made of sticks and a play area.”

Indicating how being in the outdoors influences her children’s personality and happiness, Mrs. Cobos states: “It’s basic to be in the outdoors, they are relaxed. They play well and are more relaxed, happy. Sometimes we go to these indoor play centres for birthdays. In these places they become nervous. At shopping centres they always want to buy something.”

Mrs. Hansen underlines that childhood experiences in natural areas are strong predictors of how children relate to the environment in adult life: “…and then I also do a lot to tell them about grasses and … because I was told myself when I was little and spent time with my grandparents. They know what things are, roses and … so my son Oliver he’ll come over and ask which hand I want? And he has often a flower in it. I think that’s incredibly sweet.”

It is not only the evidence of researchers that suggests the need to consider how we structure the places we live, in order for children to develop their potential; but it is the experiences and wishes of families that supports the need to change the urban environment.
Visions for Sustainable Childhood

Transforming Consumer Cultures
As illustrated in the previous sections of this report, unsustainable lifestyles are passed on from one generation to the next in many families across Europe. Childhood is no longer shaped alone by parents and schools, but increasingly the media, marketers and others are just as, if not more, influential in shaping children’s values, thoughts and ambitions.

**How do we raise our children so that they no longer grow up learning to be consumers but instead learn to become guardians of sustainable living?**

To create sustainable cultures for our children we need to transform the way we see childhood. Firstly, we need to address education. How do parents and schools teach children to tackle some of the biggest sustainability challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and overconsumption of resources?

We will also need to address children’s access to the media and what children are exposed to through the media. How do we reduce the large influence that media and marketers have on European kids today so that parents and teachers are reinforced as children’s primary caregivers?

Finally, leisure time activities will need to be designed to reinforce principles of sustainability. How do we inspire our children to take up healthy living with respect for nature and the environment?

These are some of the key elements that need to be addressed to help nurture sustainable living for the next generations. If we fail to inspire our children, a more sustainable world will be difficult – if not impossible – to reach.
Teaching Sustainability in Schools

“Education is the most effective means that society possesses for confronting the challenges of the future. Indeed, education will shape the world of tomorrow” – UNESCO

Internationally, the United Nations has spearheaded efforts to upgrade sustainability teaching via the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). One major output of these efforts is a multimedia teacher education programme on ‘Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future’ complete with learning modules and child-focused learning activities. Overall, the objective is to advise national governments to implement sustainability in all formal education.¹

Supporting this ambition, the Foundation for Environment Education (FEE) runs an international Eco-Schools programme. It involves seven steps that any school can adopt – including establishing a Committee to encourage and manage the programme; providing an environmental curriculum to students which includes hands-on opportunities for students to improve and empower the school and community; and developing an eco-code which outlines the school’s values and objectives alongside education goals. After accomplishing all seven steps, a school is awarded with the Green Flag. By 2012 the Green Flag has been awarded to 39,500 schools in Europe, and the number continues to increase.²

Another source of inspiration is the European SAUCE programme – Schools at University for Climate and Energy – which brings 10 to 13 year-old school children to universities to learn about sustainable development. The approach provides solutions where children themselves play a role, for example perform science experiments to demonstrate chemical and physical processes behind climate change, or guided tours to university facilities which are combined with a “research” question, e.g. how can I draw energy from waves or what does it take to heat and cool buildings?³
Fomenting children’s involvement in their own learning about the environment is a crucial aspect of education that can be developed in very simple ways. There is for example a scheme in the Netherlands that promotes nature playgrounds. Children play with the flow of water, make bridges with sticks and stones, and teachers make use of the ‘green playground’ in their teaching. ⁴

Mainstreaming sustainability education is essential to creating the awareness and inherent understanding among all children of the bounded reality of a closed system such as Earth’s where infinite growth based on natural resources is an oxymoron. Understanding the links between a consumer lifestyle and environmental degradation is paramount to children’s ability to think critically and take action towards more sustainable lifestyles for themselves and their current and future communities.

Redirecting Leisure and Family Time

School is an important influence in children’s lives, but not the only one. European kids spend many hours a day engaging in various media, such as television, computers and smart phones. For example as elaborated on page 12, a recent Danish study shows that an average child aged 5 to 16 spends 41 hours and 30 minutes a week in front of a screen, which is essentially the same time as an adult’s working week. ⁵

Although media use can have some educational purposes, overall it also leads to physical inactivity, lack of social interaction and commercialisation of children’s behaviour through direct and indirect advertising. Time freed from media use may be better spent on other activities. Children love to spend time on sports, outdoor activities, and engaging with the family or friends etc.
Parents can provide alternative ways of spending leisure time by engaging in activities that reinforce community bonds and social cohesion and at the same time weakens focus on individualistic activities; an approach that a group of citizens in Athens have realised the power of. The Atenistas community programme organises green actions where families get together to build/rebuild playgrounds, take care of parks, paint schools and other public spaces under the guidance of artists, and organise nature walks in the city. Another outcome has been weekly bike rides through the streets of Athens with hundreds of people participating. 6

Another example of strengthening family life by community activities is the Greek NGO Mediterranean SOS network which has for 17 years run the campaign “Clean Mediterranean Shores” in which many generations of people come together to help along with their community to improve the coastal areas around their cities, towns and villages. 7

Taken as a whole, parents, teachers, and caregivers could act as good examples and increase their engagement and time spent on community based activities and at the same time reduce their own time on media and leisure activities that promote “consumer life”.

Restricting Advertising to Children

Through extensive media use but also in the physical environment, e.g. in shopping malls, children are exposed daily to substantial commercial efforts to sell various products and services. Children are generally naïve about advertising and can easily be manipulated and exploited by marketing to want and demand products. Therefore, it is not surprising that marketers actively target children.
It is under this framework that in 1991 Sweden banned all advertising to children under 12 years of age after a Swedish Consumer Agency report concluded that a number of studies “all indicate that it is only after the age of 12 that children develop a fuller understanding of the purpose of advertising.”

However, the Swedish example is far from the norm in Europe as most countries have limited regulation, if any, of ads directed towards children. Moreover, media conglomerates and toy manufacturers establish themselves in countries with liberal regulation, such as the U.K., distributing to other countries by various cross-border electronic means. Therefore, even in countries with some regulation in place, children get exceedingly exposed to electronic marketing when they watch Cartoon Network for example (U.S.-based cable television network) or play so-called “free” games on tablets or the internet.

To prevent cross-border advertising activities, Sweden called for a Europe-wide ban in 2001. However, negations in the EU got stranded, partly because of industry claims of great economic losses. A decade later, the European Economic and Social Committee reinforced the discussion on restricting children’s advertising, which may eventually lead to a common regulative framework in the EU.

Research has also shown that the most effective policy tool for reducing fast-food consumption in children is to ban ads targeted at children. Researchers in Canada have shown that banning fast-food ads in the province of Quebec has reduced fast-food expenditures by 13 %, leading to up to 22 million fewer fast-food meals eaten per year. As a result Quebec has the lowest childhood obesity rate in the whole of Canada.
Transforming Consumerism through Nudging

Besides direct marketing, such as ads on TV or billboards, indirect marketing approaches play an important role for sellers to make adults and children buy their products. An often used method of indirect marketing is nudging, meaning poking or pushing someone gently in a desired direction.

Most supermarkets use nudging by placing selected product categories in pre-determined areas. For example impulsive buys such as candies are placed near the counter, every-day-use products such as milk are placed in the far back making the consumer walk through the whole shopping area, and toys and candies are placed low at the eye-level of children.

According to professor Torben Jørgensen at Glostrup Hospital in Denmark, nudging makes us buy larger quantities of unhealthy products than we actually need. To counter this, he leads a research project aimed to reverse nudging and make it green and healthy. In sample supermarkets on the island of Bornholm, healthy foods are placed near the counter, and soft drinks, crisps and candies are moved away from central spaces to more remote corners. The project also tests nudging in schools and kindergartens. The initial results from the supermarkets show that reversing nudging makes shopping significantly healthier and more sustainable. ¹¹
“You gave me Coca-Cola
You said it tasted good
You watch the television
It tells you that you should.

How can you live in this way?
You must have something to say.
There must be more than this life.
It’s time we did something right.

Child of Vision, won’t you listen?
Find yourself a new ambition.”

Supertramp, lyrics from Child of Vision, 1979
Greening Urban Life

The benefits of nature to children’s development are concerned with diverse perspectives, such as the child’s physical development, health, and psychology. The notion that children have the ‘right’ to have access and grow-up in a ‘green’ environment, so as to enable him or her to connect with nature, support the need for designing nature into the daily spaces of childhood development, especially in highly urbanised areas. Additionally, studies suggest that childhood experiences in natural landscapes are strong predictors of how positive children will relate to the environment in adult life.  

There are inspiring examples in Europe that address some of these issues. A number of urban gardening and rooftop farming initiatives have emerged in Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris, and a growing number of other cities. For example, in Todmoren, U.K., the “Incredible Edible” scheme gathers families and individuals in planting orchards, herb gardens and vegetable patches in the city as well as promoting food-based learning for communities and schools.  

More than half of Europe’s children live in urban areas, which underlines the importance of linking childhood in cities to more sustainable and natural practices. Besides urban gardening and greening, providing sustainable transport means is essential. In the city of Copenhagen, the ‘Safe School Routes’ scheme aims to improve safety at schools by physical means such as restricting car access, in combination with developing education and dialogue with all schools to establish good traffic routines. For example make parents walk their children to school instead of taking the car. Moreover, the city’s comprehensive network of biking lanes supports parents’ and children’s choice of a healthy and environmentally-friendly transport form.  
Another example comes from Lecco in Italy, where groups of parents have gathered together to set up walking buses. These are groups of children guided by an adult who walk to school together in instead of taking the bus. In this way, children get to walk and learn to act in order to live more sustainably.
Eating Healthy and Sustainable Food

Eating habits are learned from early childhood onwards and are a major component of a healthy lifestyle. For example, not eating regular meals has been shown to be strongly associated with unhealthy snacking as well as difficulty concentrating in school. 17

There are strong links between healthy food and sustainable agricultural production that presents local, fresh, nutritious raw materials for use in the food that children are served at home and in school. FAO defines ‘sustainable diets’ as diets that contribute to health, protect biodiversity and environmental balance, serve nutrient needs, support cultural heritage, and ensure fair trade. 18

School authorities have a major role to play in promoting sustainable diets for children. In the U.K., the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver has taken up healthy school meals as a cause with his ‘Feed Me Better’ campaign from 2005 and school food manifesto from 2011, putting school lunch high on the agenda and spurring policy makers to establish a School Food Trust that sets nutritional standards and ban the sale of junk food in schools. 19

With similar ambitions, the Scottish Council of East Ayrshire has redesigned its bidding process to enable local and organic suppliers to compete for public tenders. Compliance with animal welfare standards and contribution to biodiversity began to be awarded. Already by 2006, 70 % of the ingredients in primary school meals were locally sourced. 20

In Italy, what has become known as the Rome school food revolution takes into account the socio-environmental externalities of bids for school food contracts and require provision of fresh, organic food. Four quality principles are now in force: 1) seasonal variation, 2) a large variety of different meals, 3) locally produced goods, and 4) high level of nutrition. 21 Another example is the city of Copenhagen where 75 % of school food is now organic and the municipality is working toward 90 % of food in all public institutions being organic by 2015. 22
A stronger focus on children’s meals and eating habits is essential to their well-being and ability to achieve their full potential and will at the same time promote more sustainable food production.

**In Conclusion**

With this report we have aimed to address a fundamental question: How can children grow up to become guardians of sustainable living instead of learning to become ardent consumers? We have studied how societal structures frame European family lifestyles and affect the values behind the choices being made. It is in the understanding of the underlying mechanisms and complexities that we turn to in order to identify the potential for change.

While living in modern European societies many of us already have the notion of consumer society’s drawbacks; that we consume too much, spend more time at work than with loved ones, use precious leisure time in front of media screens and forget about what we gain from exploring nature. But we mostly act according to the overriding ideology backed by ubiquitous marketing messages about how we should look and act, and what we should own.

It is often in the obvious that we may find the most surprising information. Here, the obvious may be the way consumer society and the norms herein have been internalised in European family lives to an extent that we hardly question the norms and underlying values anymore. This study has clearly identified a gap between the norms and ambitions linked to present lifestyles and those that parents express when asked about their wishes for their children’s future lives.

For a number of reasons – which span from the scarcity of resources to the impact of climate change – business as usual is simply not an option. European lifestyles will need to change. How a child is brought up
determines the values and influences the choices made throughout adult life. It is therefore, why what influences childhood becomes such a crucial issue.

The European families interviewed in this study unanimously expressed their willingness to change to more sustainable lifestyles. It is clear from the study that there is a need to support the will for change that can drive forward the good intentions of families into positive action. This requires that families see their involvement in the process of change as part of a larger societal movement.

There is no way we can succeed unless the broader systems change; the schools, the media, the government and community structures that normalise our unsustainable consumer lifestyle. And that is going to take strong commitment by leaders in all of those fields; school administrators, teachers, policy makers, journalists, and marketing executives.

We hope this publication may give some inspiration to the large efforts needed to pave the way.
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