

Experiments with sustainable daily lifestyle in Finland

Live simpler – a study circle

The first result was that I had more time and felt better. That made it easier in a second stage to consider the big perspective about sustainability and how we would like society to be. We looked at consumer society and how it increases the stress of daily life.

This is how Frida Crofts, one of the participants in the "Live Simpler" study circle, describes her experience in this project, which is arranged by the Martha Association and the Swedish Study Centre in Finland. Talks, discussions, study tours and experiences highlight the theme of "sustainable lifestyle", combined with practical trials and exercises from the book "Live Simpler" by Giséla Linde. Based on her own experiences, the book was inspired by the "Simple Living Movement". It focuses on how we can decide to live more simply through conscious choices as consumers, leading to a life based on values other than mere materialism.

To have or to be?

Frida Crofts says: We discussed and practiced. Which activities can we do with our children and our friends that do not require consumption? The

study circle has also made me much more aware of how my actions and choices influence my local environment. For example, I do nearly all my shopping locally now. A group of us have also formed a "food circle". First five families and now more, where we order fruit and vegetables together from a local ecological farm, "Solsidens trädgård" – they deliver to us twice a month. It's simple, and good!"

Frida has also become much better at making good use of local opportunities, such as the local library, and taking others along with her. "It's better than driving long distances", she says. "In today's society the kids often have hobbies that require us to drive them around quite a lot. So now we have formed a transport circle too, to coordinate and share the driving".



Theory and practice – Tessa Turtonen of the Martha Association inspiring her friends

Perhaps the most important thing, she says, is that they have had so much fun. It has not been all about “being environmentally friendly”. They have asked themselves, “What makes us happy?” and in addition to discussing consumerism, food and other themes they have read poetry too. It is, says Frida, primarily about seeing the whole picture and finding out what makes a good life.

She adds that it is a good thing that they do not belong to any particular political party or grouping, but have been able to look at daily life independently of ideological positions. Sustainable development, she says, needs to be independent of party affiliations and not only for “the Greens”.



One circle leads to others

The study circle described here by Frida Crofts has actually finished its work, but the group has wanted to keep on meeting. Several members experienced the tendency to fall back into old habits. “One is not so strong on one’s own”, says Frida; “we needed each other”. And perhaps that is a good quality in any sustainable society?

The study circle concept has been a great success. As of January 2011 no less than 50 study circles are in progress. The activities leader, Ulrica Taylor from the organization Bildningsforum says that study circles with other, related themes have started up now too: one such is “The Real Thing”, a study circle about question of daily consumption and food awareness.

The UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development

“Learning to change our world” – thus was the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014) launched. Sustainable Development should provide today’s needs without reducing the capacity for future generations to fulfil their needs. It requires a better balance between ecological, economic and social considerations. The goal of the UN decade is to strengthen awareness and knowledge in order to enable us to think and act in new, sustainable ways.

The target is both schools and society at large. Governments are urged to “promote public understanding and broad participation, including cooperation with civil society and all stakeholders”. Broad public information should play a central role, combining theory and practice in values-based decision making. UNESCO is the international coordinator: see: www.unesco.org/en/esd as well as: www.thebalancingact.info

Themes for discussion:

What is needed in order to initiate similar work where you live?

Does your own municipality have plans for the local sustainability work?

What is the policy and practice of your municipality for citizen participation?

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