



# Beyond the behavior-impact gap

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# Background of the study



- Research question: “How much of a reduction in ecological footprint can be achieved through voluntary action”
- Csutora, M.: One More Awareness Gap? The Behaviour–Impact Gap Problem, *Journal of Consumer Policy*, Vol. 35, No. 1. (1 March 2012), pp. 145-163, or through
- Follow-up: New York Times online  
<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/07/30/responsible-shoppers-but-bad-citizens/individual-actions-just-dont-add-up-to-environmental-change>

# Presentation outline



1

Description of  
the survey

2

Definition and  
reasons for the  
behavior-impact  
gap

3

Good policy  
examples

# Awareness gaps



- Studies suggest that there exists a gap between environmental awareness components (Zsóka, 2009) **Consumers with high level of environmental awareness may not act sustainably.** (Sanne, 2003), (Gatersleben et al. 2002; Thøgersen and Grønhøj 2010), Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), Thøgersen, JCP 2005)
- According to Sanne (2002) **consumers are locked into unsustainable lifestyles** (e.g. by social norms), even though they are not necessarily willing and happy to act this way.
- **But** sometimes, even with these barriers, **people do act on their environmental awareness and we generally assume that doing so will lead to reduced ecological impact.** So this gets to the heart of my research.

# The BIG question...



- Does action by green consumers have a beneficial environmental impact as compared to actions by brown consumers? How much is this impact?



100%

50%

10%

# The BIG question...



- Is there a big impact? We can rely on awareness raising policy campaigns.



# The BIG question...

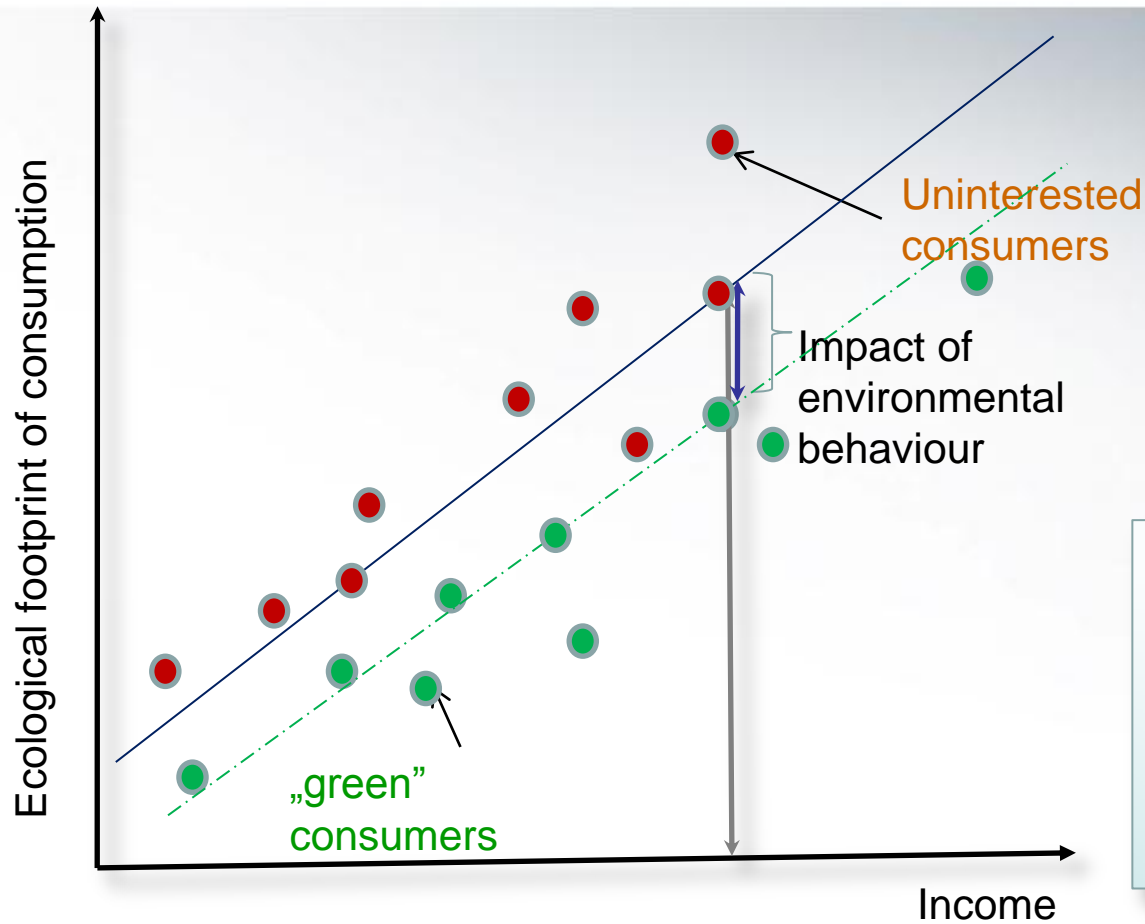


- Is there a small impact? Change in the policy is needed.



Then, It will require systemic change in regulations, etc. and production and infrastructure changes

# Hypothesis of the study



“Green” consumers have lower footprint than uninterested consumers of similar income



# Survey



- 1012 respondents, representative survey of Hungarian residents
- Adult population
- Lead by Corvinus University of Budapest
- Used one of the most acknowledged opinion poll institutions
- Questions:
  - For ecological footprint components
  - Pro-environmental behavior
  - Life satisfaction
  - Demographic questions



**PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR  
(EUROBAROMETER QUESTIONS):**

**ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT**

# Definition of “green” and “brown” consumers



## PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR (EUROBAROMETER QUESTIONS):

Chose an environmentally friendly way of **traveling**

Reduced consumption of **disposable items**

Separated most of their waste for **recycling**

Cut down on **water consumption**

Cut down on **energy consumption**

Bought environmentally friendly products marked with an **environmental label**

Chose **locally produced** products or groceries

Used **car less**

**zero activity: brown**  
21.5%

**1-3 activities: average**  
56.9%

**4 or more activities:**  
**green**  
21.6%

# Measuring ecological footprint



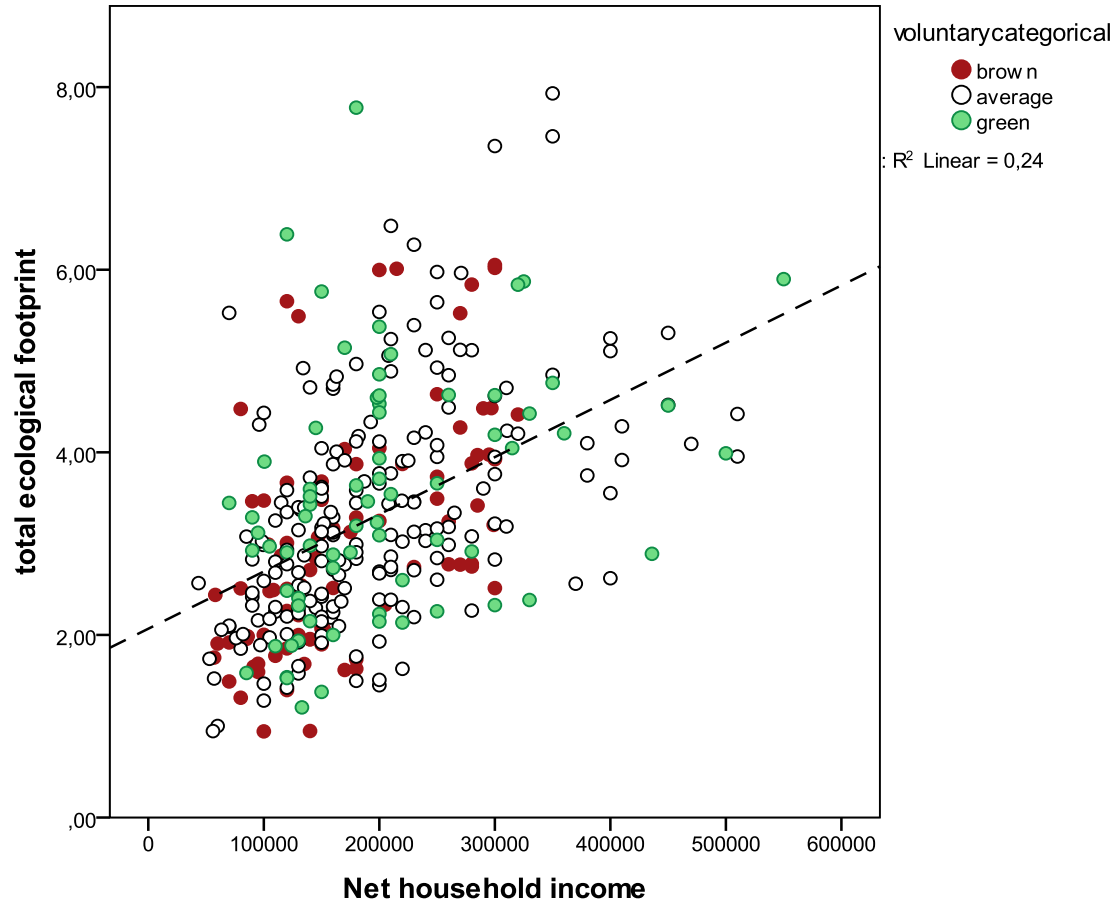
Detailed questions on major items  
(based on previous studies)

- Diet
- Energy bill (electricity, heating)
- Detailed questions on mobility

Spending structure in case of minor  
items

- Footprint was calculated using EF values from the Global Footprint Network national accounts
- Consistency with national consumption was checked

# Survey finding

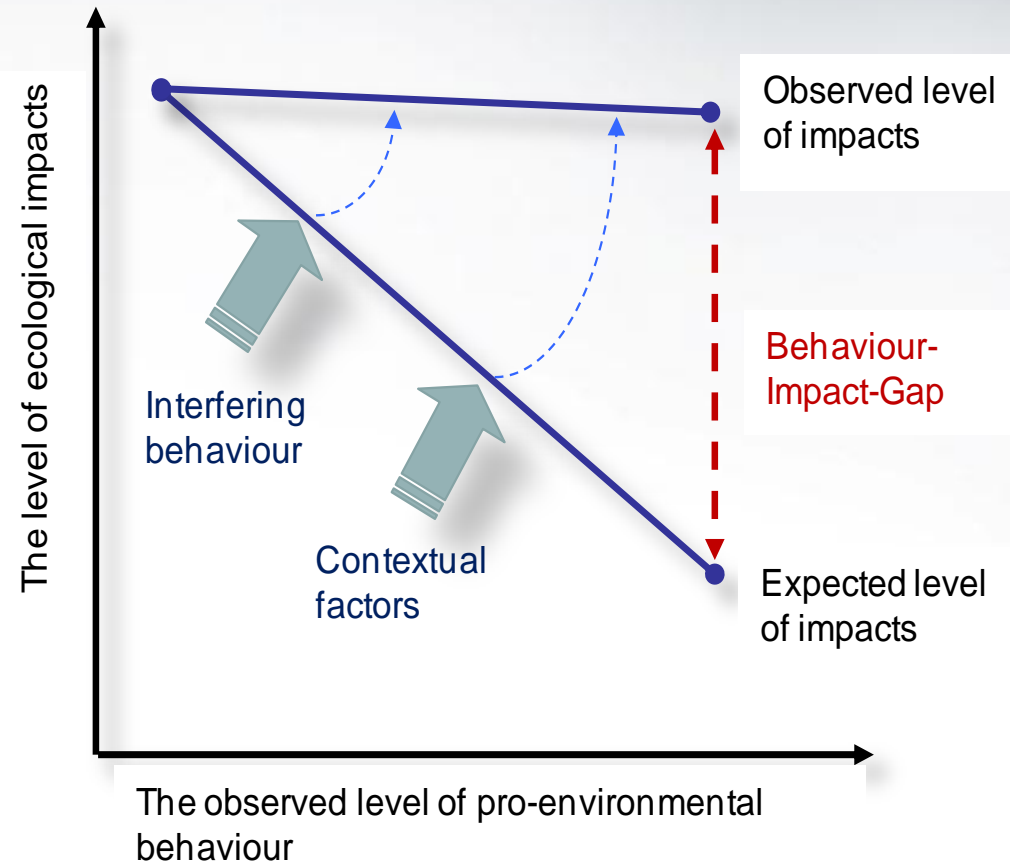


No significant difference was found between the ecological footprint of green and brown consumers

# Behavior-impact gap



- A BIG problem is confronted whenever the required behavioural change is achieved, but the observed ecological effect is minor or missing



# Reasons for the behavior impact gap.



- Offset by increased use of high footprint items (Imported exotic organic food may not be better environmental choice than non-organic local food).
- Contextual factors beyond the competence and influence of consumers (market demand and supply, infrastructure)
- Misleading market segmentation (eco-labeled products)





# Reasons for the behavior impact gap.



- Chose easy-to-do but marginal actions in the target field
- Interfering behavior (Over-enthusiasm in separating waste, accompanied by rare enthusiasm in buying articles made from recycled material)
- Rebound effect



# CONCLUSIONS



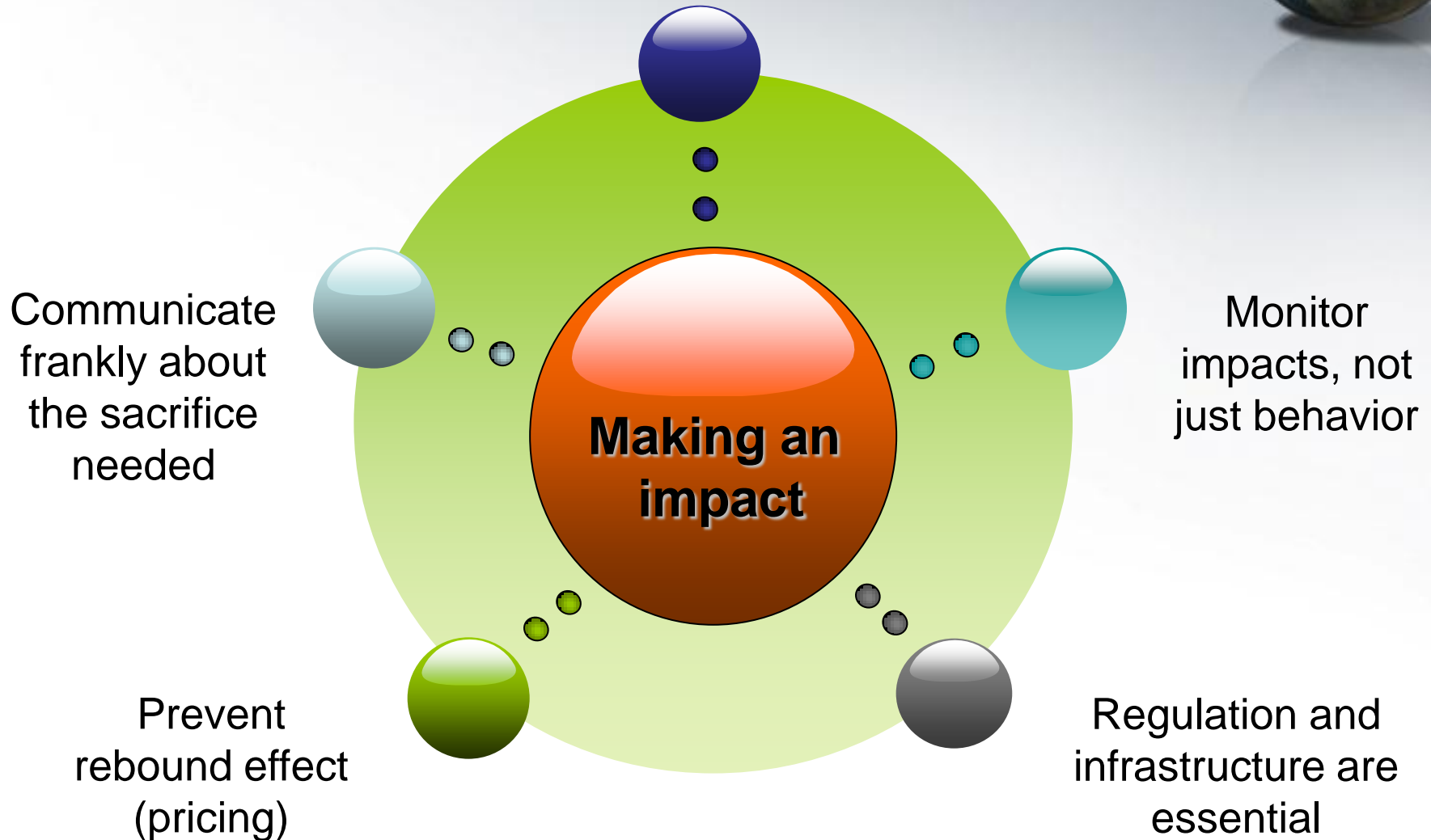
- Pro-environmental behaviour was coupled with only a small reduction in ecological footprint in specific areas.
- More emphasis should be placed on communicating the ecological consequences of consumption habits.
- Re-structuring of the socio-economic determinants of life, including the culture of consumption, is necessary.
- There is still a place for individual action. One can be a green dot below the regression line, even though most people would not do the same



# Beyond the behavior-impact gap



Focus on “big impacts”



# Biggest impacts



Food: Too much food, too much meat, wasting)

42% of footprint in my study



Energy: Heating and cooling, electricity: 18%

Mobility: 14%



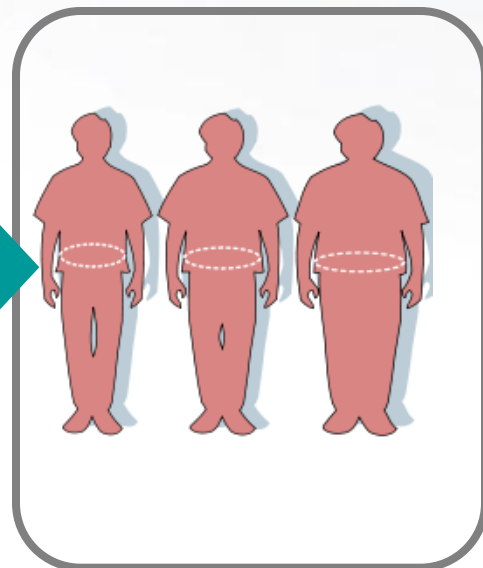
# Good examples: regulation with big impact



- EU building codes
  - Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) requires Member States to ensure that by 2021 all new buildings are so-called 'nearly zero-energy buildings (passive houses)
  - Phasing out incandescent bulbs



# Healthy diet supports the environment – double dividend in diet amendments





# Stop wasting



- Formally fruits and vegetables that looked different were not allowed to be marketed. "Straight cucumber" standards seem ridiculous during crises time.
- "Cucumber Regulation" (EEC No 1677/88) and the "Carrot Regulation" (EEC No 730/1999) set EU-wide quality standards
- 2009. phasing out of minimum EU standards for 26 types of fruit and veg



<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20090706STO57744+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

# Reducing consumption is essential



- Energy: reinventing physical work, e.g. “Garden fitness” as an alternative to jogging
- Stop freezing in the summer and sweating in the winter
- Increasing longevity of goods, slow fashion, slow tourism
- Long term planning is essential for mobility





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