



## Press release

*Brussels/Vienna, 24 October 2013*

# **Towards a Sustainable Europe: Experts Call for Stronger Joint Efforts to Stimulate Systemic Innovations**

**Ecosystem degradation continues // European researchers discuss how policy and science can be better linked to address the fundamental transformation of modern society // “Systemic Eco-Social Innovations” seen as key for a shift towards sustainable lifestyles**

**Brussels/Vienna, 24 October 2013** – Technological innovations are commonly seen as decisive for overcoming environmental exploitation and degradation. That this view is too narrow was the common sense of an encounter of Europe’s leading sustainability experts which took place in Brussels from 10-11 October 2013. The researchers stressed that only the interplay with social innovations can lead to a significant step towards a sustainable society. “Too often we have experienced that technological innovations, e.g. improvements in the mobility sector, have been over-compensated through rising demand and intensified use”, stated Jill Jäger from the Sustainable Europe Research Institute. “To improve the performance of society at large, new technologies alone will not suffice. A broader stimulation of innovations that include social and systemic dimensions is of uttermost importance.”

The experts’ gathering was attended by 38 sustainability experts from 12 countries. It was part of the European project RESPONDER, which enables scientists and policy makers to exchange experiences and knowledge with regard to sustainable consumption issues.

### **“Europe is facing a fundamental transformation”**

“Making Europe sustainable requires changes in individual behaviour and social norms next to eco-innovations”, commented André Martinuzzi, coordinator of the RESPONDER consortium and director of the Vienna-based Institute for Managing Sustainability. “The task is comprehensive: We need new rules and institutions, innovative mobility solutions, a change in consumption and use patterns, a new form of living. Ultimately Europe is facing the task of fundamentally transforming the systems of society on which humans depend.”

### **Collaborative system innovations are needed at the local level**

Yet, the guiding principle of sustainable consumption contains many contradictions to the conventional paradigm of economic growth. These should be managed by stimulating systemic changes at many levels. “It will not be enough to address single organisations and sectors”, said Jill Jäger. “In the EU-27 it will cover a complex interaction of public policy and reforms to legislation. It will lead to changes in business cultures and practices, and finally to shifts in consumer attitudes and behaviours. At the meeting we agreed that focusing at the local level will be crucial when talking about ‘Systemic Eco-Social Innovations’. The journey requires: Involvement, involvement, involvement.”

### **RESPONDER – Linking Science and Policy**

The European consortium RESPONDER aims at advancing sustainable consumption by closing the gap between science and policy. “Finding the right answers and approaches requires a systematic integration of the latest scientific knowledge”, says Martinuzzi. “Hence, networking and community building are critical, especially for tasks such big as a great transformation of Europe.” The

RESPONDER project has so far organized three European expert dialogues and a series of multinational knowledge brokerage events in the sectors food consumption, housing, mobility, ICT and household savings and debts. The results will be joined in a conference that will take place in Brussels in April 2014.

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#### About RESPONDER:

The European project RESPONDER aims to promote sustainable consumption by assessing potential contradictions with economic growth. The project links four communities by facilitating a structured dialogue: science, policy, pro-growth, and beyond growth.

**Further information:** <http://www.scp-responder.eu>



#### Contact

Dr. André Martinuzzi

Associate professor and head of the Institute for Managing Sustainability

Vienna University of Economics and Business

phone: +43-1-313 36 46 98

email: [andre.martinuzzi@wu.ac.at](mailto:andre.martinuzzi@wu.ac.at)

The RESPONDER consortium comprises nine partners from seven European countries. The participants are:

Organisation	Country
Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Institute for Managing Sustainability (project coordinator) & Institute for Regional Development and Environment	AT
Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW)	DE
Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI)	AT
University of Barcelona, Institute of Environmental Science and Technology	ES
University of Aalborg, The Center for Design, Innovation and Sustainable Transition	DK
University of Surrey, Centre for Environmental Strategy	GB
Institute for Forecasting of the Slovak Academy of Sciences	SK
Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Center for Environmental and Sustainability Research	PT
German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety	DE