Lifestyles and Changing Consumption Patterns and their Impacts on Climate Change in Hyderabad/India

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Abstract

Anthropogenic climate change jeopardises nearly all human life-support systems and its mitigation represents one of the most eminent challenges to humanity. To abate climate change, it requires long-term, globally oriented, and far-reaching changes of the economy, of our ways of life and coexistence, and of our consumption patterns. Such a transformation pertains to the state and the economy, but it also concerns society in general and the individual consumer in particular. In order to address this challenge and examine the interlinkages between environment, state, economy, and society with a problem-oriented focus on the individual human being, new and transdisciplinary approaches are urgently needed. A rather young social-ecological research perspective combines the concept of lifestyle with issues of sustainability and climate change.

Lifestyles are group-specific, value-, attitude-, and preference-driven patterns of everyday life, that unfold within an economically, social-culturally, and environmentally pre-structured field of social interaction. Such a typology-oriented approach considers a multiplicity of driving factors and their interactions in order to get hold of and understand group-specific differences in conduct of life and their underlying causes, motives, and impacts. It can also highlight vantage points for targeted climate protection policies. Moreover, the study presented here developed a simple procedure to measure the specific climate impact of single consumption practices and their levels of diffusion. This approach reveals the most relevant areas of consumption (key points of climate policy intervention). Only a few studies have coupled the lifestyle concept with an approach to analyse and explain differences in personal-level carbon footprints. This PhD thesis contributes to the theoretical and methodological development of this approach and applies it to a context that has not been examined in this way before – urban India.

Over the last two to three decades, India has faced unprecedented dynamics of development and urbanisation that involve processes such as changing incomes, a growing and increasingly globally oriented choice of goods and services, and growing social disparities. As in many other countries of the Global South, these changes particularly concentrate in urban areas and it is often argued that a great transformation to sustainability will largely be decided in cities.

This study therefore applies the theoretical framework of lifestyle to the city of Hyderabad, a city which saw very rapid development dynamics and which attracted attention through global and technology-oriented urban and economic policies.

For the conceptualisation of the standardised lifestyle survey, an explorative qualitative study was conducted with 26 semi-structured interviews. In a following step, the resulting questionnaire was pre-tested, analysed, and modified accordingly. For the main survey (n=600), a three-stage proportionate geographical cluster sampling approach was chosen. The most relevant methodical steps of the data analysis were to develop a carbon calculator, the application of dimension reduction methods, and cluster analysis.

The analysis of income-group-specific effects on climate change revealed significant results with higher incomes leading to higher carbon footprints, especially with respect to household electricity consumption, individual motorised transport (IMT), and airtravel. Surprisingly, emissions from meat consumption showed negative effects with rising income.

The analysis of consumption-practice-specific effects on carbon footprints also delivered definite results. Key points of climate policy intervention in particular are those consumption practices which show high carbon intensities. The analysis reveals that such carbon-intensive practices are far less prevalent in Hyderabad, but with a potential to spread vastly (e.g. air travel, use of air-condition systems). Other practices having low emission intensities, but being extensively used, are identified as relevant due to the potential scale effects associated with addressing them. The analysis therefore allows for a precise and targeted assessment of different consumption practices and their emission reduction potential.

The development of the lifestyle typology brought about meaningful and internally consistent groups of lifestyle. The analysis of the groups revealed interesting and relevant insights with respect to the interrelated character of the incorporated dimensions (values, practices, and social-demographic factors). Group-specific differences concerning impacts on climate change were found among three out of six lifestyle groups. The analysis of these differences allowed for conclusions in respect to the underlying behavioural and motivational drivers, which tend to remain hidden for linear models of analysis and especially for purely economic analysis. In sum, this study was able to make an important contribution to the analysis of lifestyle-related impacts on climate change. Although a big challenge, the application of the lifestyle concept to the urban Indian context succeeded and delivered valuable insights.