

Sustainable Life Path Concept: Journeying Toward Sustainable Consumption

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As a modest estimate, the average person enters into at least a million consumer transactions over the span of their lifetime (based on 75 years of consumption (during ages 15-80) and 35 decisions each day, totalling 958,125). This guestimate puts a face to the scope of people's consumption behaviour during their life. People tend to view these purchases as single events, that build up over time. From this fragmented point of view, it is easy to dismiss the lifetime impact of these many consumption decisions. Most of these individual consumer transactions result in unsustainable consumption. Multiply this complexity by billions of consumers and the unsustainability quotient goes through the roof.

This paper introduces the idea of a *sustainable life path* as a way to help people view consumption as a journey, a complex, lifelong process, rather than a series of one-time, separate shopping trips. Currently, people tend to think of consumers as making a lot of individual shopping trips, leading to a pile of goods and services (called materialistic gain). The sustainable life path concept presumes instead that people's consumer journey decisions are a key part of their overall life decisions, which are made over the course of their life journey. A journey entails travelling from one place to another, usually taking a rather long time. Over the course of a journey, people make many journey decisions and journey choices, informed by both their rational decision making and their experiences on the journey. Thinking of consumer decisions as *better life journey choices* (instead of better consumer choices) is a new way of thinking.

Just to clarify, this is a think piece rather than a scientific study. The intent is to bring this idea to people's attention, in hopes they will think more about it. It asks people to intentionally journey through their life making decisions that will *sustain all life*, especially their consumer decisions. The paper offers for the first time a detailed definition of a *life path*, followed with a discussion of a the new idea of a *sustainable* life path, applied to consumption decisions.

A *life path* is defined as a course along which people travel while they are alive. This path is rich with (a) life events, experiences and activities, (b) informed or not by a particular purpose(s), (c) blocked or not by obstacles and barriers, and (d) likely involves socially-judged conduct along the way. Seven ideas were then woven together to create the definition of a *sustainable* life path. In short, it is informed by an examined and vitally engaged life. It reflects a worthy and purposeful life shaped by choiceful and soulful simplicity, life intentions and acumen (deep insights). In their consumer role, people will become purposeful pathfinders striving to find their path to purpose, consuming 'on purpose.'

In more detail, people living an *examined life* look very closely at their life, and come up with a deliberately chosen set of beliefs and values. Living an *engaged life* means people choose to build their life based on awareness, consciousness, deliberation, confidence, persistence, efficacy (feel they can make a difference), commitment and connections. Indeed, if people live a *vitally engaged life*, they become active as powerful catalyst for change. The vitality (energy and action) stems from intense, passionate, absorbing and meaningful relationships with all life. Examined and engaged living leads to *purposeful living*, meaning people live life according to a carefully deliberated and clearly expressed philosophy of life - they live life 'on purpose.'

Steeped in an examined, engaged and purposeful life (and life philosophy), people in their consumer role are more inclined to live a life of *choiceful voluntary simplicity*, which is more than just voluntary simplicity. To be choiceful means people consciously and freely give the essence of themselves to the world by living an examined life and by connecting with the universe, living in harmony, on purpose (with purpose). Even more enlightened

consumers will live a life of *soulful simplicity* meaning they purposefully bring interior aliveness into all of their relationships, especially when consuming. They cultivate a soulful connection with all life. They can then live simply, with intentions, especially with acumen (keen, deep insights into a very complex world). Grounded in this rich mind set (engaged, vital, enlightened, soulful, living life on purpose, with a purpose), consumers can become *pathfinders*, moral leaders. They can become life-way innovators who purposefully and mindfully travel along paths previously unexplored and untraveled - they can now consume in very life-sustaining ways.

Drawing all of these concepts together, the paper defines a *sustainable life path* as a pathfinder's lifelong, engaged journey where this person consumes in such a way that his or her examined decisions sustain all life (including those who make the products, other species and nature). This pathfinder purposefully consumes with acumen in a complex world, fulfilling the roles of life-long innovator and moral leader. Perceiving consumers as pathfinders is a new way to envision consumer behaviour, as is framing consumption as a lifelong journey, a way to 'live life on purpose,' with intention, passion, conviction, vitality, simplicity and soulfulness.

This approach to consuming assumes that the sustainability of life's decisions is a reflection of choosing certain pursuits over others. We can now suggest that people acting in their consumer role *could choose* to become pathfinders, engaged moral leaders and life innovators committed to a sustainable life path that moves them along their journey toward a more examined, vital and soulful life. Enough people travelling a sustainable life path could create a culture of engaged living with the world, leading to deeply sustainable consumption. With this new idea, consumers can be viewed as *tomorrow makers*, people journeying along a sustainable life path while making *responsible 'consumer journey' decisions*, ever conscious of being accountable for their life.