

# Foreword

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Unless you are one of the people called ‘climate change sceptics’ – actually ‘deniers’, in that they reject rather than evaluate the obvious empirical evidence that human activities are changing the global climate – you recognize that human society needs to rethink the way we live and the economic activities that support our way of life. As an engineer, I have some understanding of how far technological developments can reduce the environmental impacts of consumption and I am sure that behavioural change is at least as important as technological change if we are to find the phantom called Sustainability. My engineering perspective also tells me that analysis, whether of global climate change or of consumer behaviour, is not enough: we need to go beyond understanding how individuals behave and what influences behaviour in different societies and contexts, to apply that understanding to promote behavioural change. The contribution of this book lies in this difficult area. It brings together analyses and case studies from different countries and disciplinary perspectives – psychological, sociological and economic – to provide an understanding of consumer behaviour and the barriers and inertia that constrain behavioural change, but goes further to inform policy and actions at all levels: local, national and supranational. It should therefore be useful not just to academic researchers but also anyone trying to promote changes in the behaviour of individuals and communities.

Policy concerns include being clear on objectives and also understanding what policy measures can and cannot achieve. Most readers of this book will be familiar with the ‘tripartite’ model of sustainability: the need to find a future that lies within the constraints imposed by the finite carrying and resource capacity of the planet, the need for technical and economic efficiency and the imperative of ‘ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come’ (to quote from a UK government document). As an engineer, I sometimes feel obliged to point out that the ‘laws’ of economics are human constructs and therefore subject to policy intervention, whereas the laws of thermodynamics really are immutable and indulgences against thermodynamic laws are not available. The extent to which behaviour can be changed by policy interventions is a different matter again, not so rigid as thermodynamics nor yet so susceptible

to direct intervention as the economic system. These simple observations underline why multidisciplinary approaches are essential: roads to sustainability do not lie within any single disciplinary field.

This 'flash of the blindingly obvious' was what prompted me to set up the Centre for Environmental Strategy (CES) at the University of Surrey, more than 20 years ago. It seemed to me (and unfortunately still looks that way) that much of the work published under the heading of Socio-Technical Studies was of limited merit or value because the 'socio' researchers had at best a tenuous grasp of technology and the technologists did not really appreciate the social sciences. The CES was intended to provide an environment where engineers, natural scientists and social scientists would work together directly, with a proper understanding not just of each other's terminology but each other's assumptions and perspectives. The measure of success in this kind of transdisciplinary work is whether you can address questions that cannot even be articulated within a single academic discipline. This book meets that criterion: it approaches the challenges of achieving sustainable lifestyles from different and multiple disciplinary perspectives. As an engineer who tries not to look at the world through a disciplinary tube, I value that. I hope you, the reader, will also find it valuable.

**Roland Clift**