

North American Roundtable for Sustainable Production and Consumption (NARSPAC)

Draft Retreat summary report Aug. 19-20, 2010

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Introduction

This report aims to summarize the main discussions and outcomes of the NARSPAC retreat. The aim of the retreat was to meet and to get to know each other in person, and to discuss the mission and potential activities of NARSPAC. I will try to follow the chronology, but also introduce some thematic elements. This version is primarily intended for participants; a shortened version could be sent to networks and constituents.

The retreat took place at Tellus Institute, Boston, August 19-20, 2010. Participants were: Dianne Dillon-Ridgley (Friday); Jeff Barber, Karen Onthank (Friday); Jack Luskin, Maurie Cohen (Thu), Halina Brown, Philip Vergragt, John Stutz, John Wooding (Thu), Veena Ramani (Fri-afternoon); Joshua Galiwango (Fri-morning); Eric Assadourian. Callers-in were: Emmanuel Prinnet, Vanessa Timmer, Nathalie Lum-Tai, Tania Del Matto, Allen White. For affiliations and email addresses see appendix 1.

Constituent partners and Mission of NARSPAC

NARSPAC constituents are NASCA, CitNet, Canadian Environmental Network, and SCORAI. In appendix 2 each of these organizations will be described in more detail. Affiliated are at this moment: Worldwatch Institute, and SustainUS; which might become constituents later. Basis for the discussion was a paper written by Emmanuel Prinnet, "North American Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption (appendix 3). In this paper are a number of links to relevant other papers.

We agreed on the mission of NARSPAC as:

The North American Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption seeks to promote dialogue, understanding and collaboration among different stakeholder groups within North America and with other regions, with the goal of catalyzing the transformation of society to sustainable production and consumption patterns.

The word "Roundtable" in the title could create confusion. NARSPAC could best be conceived as a lean organization (a node), a network of networks, and as a "process" that will include discussion forums and other activities to foster its mission. Its constituent partners are NGOs and civil society representatives as well as organization(s) of researchers; they set the agenda and organize and create activities; invited will be selected business and government representatives, representatives of faith-based groups; trade unions and labor, and others.

The roots of NARSPAC go back to a meeting at the end of 2008 organized by the US government in Washington DC, to which many stakeholders were invited. The meeting resulted in a list of recommendations (appendix 4). However, no follow-up took place to date, For that reason Jeff Barber took the initiative at the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) in May 2010 to launch NARSPAC and to create a

partnership with the UN. The present retreat was organized, after a series of conference calls, to consolidate this Roundtable.

The Roundtable focuses on sustainable production and consumption in North America. In other parts of the world similar Roundtables have been formed, especially in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Roundtables typically aim to bring together multiple stakeholders to create dialogue and deeper understanding of each others' perspectives. The proposed NA Roundtable would aim to go further and develop outreach processes and materials, especially towards the public at large, youth and education, faith-based groups, and policy makers. NARSPAC should not confine itself to North America alone, but should also seek a global dialogue.

The Roundtable connects ecological issues with economic, social, and cultural issues. It thus goes beyond the 'green economy, commonly understood as just greener production and the consumption of green products; it aims to reframe the concept of 'green economy' through more radical notions like zero-growth or degrowth economy, addressing the growth and consumerism paradigms of the economy at large; and thus addressing the need for deep cultural change. The basic idea is that through dialogue, discussion, and exchange of information deep learning among participants takes place, which would then be diffused through participant stakeholders' constituents.

Various commentators stressed the necessity of cultural change, reframing the 'green economy', degrowth not only as a strategy but also possibly as a reality for the next 10 years; reappraisal of consumption as a consequences of the economic crisis; however there is not yet a broad understanding of the connections between consumption habits and environmental disasters; attention was for class differentiations in consumption habits; many see end of paradigm of economic growth and possibly of consumerism; the inherent contradictions have become evident; alternatives are needed; however "sustainable consumption is a contested concept.

Throughout the Retreat there was a discussion about the merits of creating roundtable discussions about concrete issues, and to generate a more general discussion about principles. There are good arguments for each of those positions. A stakeholder dialogue about the principles of the "green economy", for instance, could lead to a very interesting mapping of different notions of what stakeholders have in mind, ranging from clean technology to degrowth. However, there is some danger of remaining too abstract, and a consensus might be hard to reach. Alternatively, there were proponents of discussions on more specific subjects, like shortening the working week. Although there is some danger of not being understood why such a subject is chosen, it could focus the discussion on a more specific issue, while there are obvious systemic elements and leverage points in a stakeholder dialogue about such an issue.

The group reached a consensus through the idea of treating a discussion about a specific subject as an '*experiment*' (with thanks to John Stutz), with the hypothesis that a discussion about a specific issue with multiple stakeholders with different "world views" would be worth while and would open up a space to discuss other aspects and wider systemic issues. In the Retreat a list of potential ideas has been generated that could serve as subjects for focused workshops, and that each could provide an inroad to the systemic issues that are more difficult to discuss. Some of the ideas were (with thanks to Maurie):

- Reduce working hours
- Limits to advertising

- Consumer protection policy
- Consumption tax
- Health and life styles
- Household energy use
- Food practices
- Lifestyle experiments

For now, the group reached an agreement to test the idea of “reducing working hours” in a multistakeholder workshop. Erik, John Stutz, and Philip will take the lead. Connections need to be sought with the ‘Take back your time’ movement.

Business participation

Allen White gave us a useful insight on business perspectives on SCP. The key question is how to frame SCP as a business issue; and how to create business perspectives on SCP and ensure business participation in a stakeholder dialogue. Dematerialized lifestyles might appeal to business, creating new business opportunities. Shorter working weeks might also be a good starting point for a dialogue; some business could find that interesting. We need to address them with a short memo (500 words). Allen could help us to identify the right people.

Success factors could be: people showing up and participating; learning and reframing takes place; finding common ground; agenda setting and follow-up activities.

Youth involvement

We all agreed that youth involvement is key, and that SustainUS would be a good way to involve them. The 9-12 age groups merits special attention. Outreach and education has been mentioned as one of the key issues. SustainUS is already involved in the CSD process, and working with them would be a good starting point. They are willing to follow the agenda and would bring in youth caucuses, and depending on the issue at hand rely on various expertise and capacity.

Addressing policy processes

Throughout the Retreat we discussed which policy processes could be addressed. The candidates are: the US and Canadian governments, especially influencing their positions on the Rio+20- summit; and helping the US and Canadian governments to develop a National Sustainable Development Strategy. A related approach would be to contact the US EPA, especially Allen Hecht and his proposed NGO consultation process on Rio + 20.

A different line would be to work with UN institutions: to create a presence, possibly with other regional NGO groups, at Rio+20; to influence the CSD notion of a green economy; and to seek active presence in discussions organized in and around UN and UNEP institutions.

I think that there was a consensus that these opportunities could be important, but that priority should be given to the formation and strengthening of our own identity and missions, by organizing stakeholder workshop that could provide unique learning opportunities for the invited stakeholders as well as for ourselves.

Strategy and time line

We brainstormed about long-term goals, mid-term strategy, and short term actions: (see box). What appears in the box are undeveloped notions that mix goals, strategies, and actions; but it reflects ideas in the group (not necessarily consensus) and could be a starting point for the development of a strategy document.

Box 1: NARSPAC Long-term goals, strategies, and actions:

Long-term societal goals (30-50 years)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop SCP patterns in NA • Reverse current trends (climate; ecological; economical; cultural) • Achieve economic security • Create individual, collective, and ecological well-being 	
Mid-term SCP strategies (5-10 years)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From growth to degrowth • Change cultural norms (consumerism) • Create ongoing dialogue • Contribute to movement • SCP becomes mainstream in business and government • Develop metrics to measure progress • Organize a bigger stakeholder conference 	
Short term actions (1-2 years)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote national sustainability policy framework • 5 roundtable sessions/ workshops • Youth consultation workshop • Write position paper for lobbying • Engage in dialogue among 4 networks' members; buy-in of working week as try-out subject for dialogue; list of other ideas • Identify and add missing networks to RT • Citizen consultation meetings in Washington DC involving government • A workshop outside DC for mainstream Americans • Progress report on RT 	

We agreed on a **time line for activities**:

Aug 24	Draft Retreat report	Philip
Aug 24	Short version for constituents (incl. SCORAI newsletter)	Philip, Halina
Aug 30	Feed-back on draft report	All
Sept 15	Final Retreat Report	Philip
Oct 15	Working web tool	Jeff
Nov 15	Workshop proposals submitted (incl. funding)	All
	1. Workweek	Erik, John, Ph.
	2. Citizens consultation	Jeff
	3.	
Jan 15 '11	Intergovt meeting (?)	Jeff?
April	NARSPAC report for CSD	?

May May '12	CSD Rio+20	
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Final decisions and conclusions:

- All participants agreed that the Roundtable could be worth while. John Stutz made his support conditional (on what, John?)
- The four groups will be the constituent groups. Representatives of those four groups will form a core group. Jeff will act as coordinator
- We will decide on formally inviting other groups like Worldwatch and SustainUS. Up till then, they can participate in discussions and conference calls.
- No agreement has been reached on the necessity of establishing an advisory group.
- The metaphor for the Roundtable is an Umbrella under which activities like stakeholder dialogues will be organized; one or more stakeholder dialogue workshops will test the concept, after which we establish decision points. Trust needs to be built.
- Another function for the Roundtable could be information clearing house
- Proposals for three workshops will be prepared: Consultations with youth (Jeff, Joshua); Shortening working week (Erik, JohnS, Philip); and Citizens' consultation in DC (Jeff). Another proposal (by Jeff) is to organize a more strategic workshop on Green economy; possibly consulting each stakeholder separately (Jeff, Philip).
- Workshop Proposals are due Nov 15, 2010
- Briefing materials will be prepared before each workshops; also useful beyond workshops. Other methodologies will be developed and applied such as weblogs and webinars.
- We should focus on capacity building and funding; through organization of small events (workshops)
- No clear agreement has been reached on decision points in-between workshops. My interpretation is that around Nov 15 we decide collectively on the basis of proposals that have been submitted at that time.
- Jeff will create interactive website and will act as coordinator.
- We will contact Alan Hecht (EPA) with a suggestion of cooperation (Maurie?)
- Dianne will help to create 'bridging language' to avoid jargon
- We will develop power point slides to use at various meetings (Vanessa)
- We will expand activity map (Tania: please develop somewhat)
- We could address sectoral approach (Jeff develop further)
- This was a successful first meeting; more work needs to be done to successfully launch the Roundtable; A decision point is Nov 15 after submitting workshop proposals including funding arrangements.

Appendix 1: List of participants

Attending		
Dianne Dillon-Ridgley	NASCA/CitNet/Interface	CITNET/NASCA
Jeffrey Barber	Integrative Strategies Forum	CITNET/NASCA
Karen Onthank	Integrative Strategies Forum	CITNET
Jack Luskin	NASCA	NASCA
Halina Brown	Clark University	SCORAI
Philip Vergragt	Tellus Institute/ Clark University	SCORAI
John Stutz	Tellus Institute	SCORAI
John Wooding	University of Massachusetts, Lowell	
Veena Ramani	Ceres	
Joshua Galiwango	Sustain US	
Erik Assodourian	Worldwatch	
Maurie Cohen	New Jersey Institute of Technology	SCORAI
Calling-in		
Emmanuel Prinnet	One Earth Initiative	CEN
Vanessa Timmer	One Earth Initiative	CEN
Natalie Lum-Tai	Canadian Environmental Network	CEN
Linda Varangu	My Sustainable Canada	NASCA
Tania DelMatto	My Sustainable Canada,	NASCA
Alan White	Tellus Institute	

Appendix 2: Constituent partner organizations and affiliates:

The North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance (NASCA) is a strategic partnership of people and organizations who are working to promote more sustainable consumption patterns in Mexico, Canada, and the United States. Our mission is to facilitate information exchange, communication and outreach and collaborative action around sustainable consumption. (<http://nasca.icspac.net>). It is been founded in 2001, and has organized various meetings. It developed a database with 200+ entries of organizations and activities on SCP in North America. It works with Integrative Strategies Forum (ISF) <http://www.isforum.org>

The Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN) (<http://cen-rce.org/eng/index.html>)

For more than thirty years, the Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN) has been facilitating networking between environmental organizations and others who share its mandate - *To Protect the Earth and Promote Ecologically Sound Ways of Life*. The RCEN works directly with concerned citizens and organizations striving to protect, preserve and restore the environment. RCEN partners with OneEarth Initiative and My Sustainable Canada. They are focused on systemic and holistic approaches and finding leverage points for change. One Earth develops an actor and activity map.

Citizens Network for Sustainable Development (CitNet) <http://citnet.org> works in local, regional, and global arenas to make sustainable development a reality. By supporting citizen-led activities in developing, monitoring and implementing sustainability initiatives, promoting civil society participation in important policy fora, and connecting individuals and organizations, CitNet works to create an ecologically sound and socially equitable and economically just world. Created in October 1990 to coordinate civil society participation in the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (the “Earth Summit”), CitNet and its members have spent almost two decades connecting, educating, and acting to make real the Earth Summit’s vision of a more sustainable and equitable world. Some of CitNet's objectives include

- *strengthen sustainability movements* across the US, by providing a framework for information-sharing and collaboration across issue areas, sectors, and levels of activity;
- build cooperative bridges between the US sustainability movement and the global sustainability movement;
- encourage and help enable broad-based, multi-stakeholder participation in decision making on sustainable development at the local, national, regional and global levels; and
- [promote leadership on sustainability](#), highlighting and celebrating the efforts of citizens and organizations putting the principles of sustainability into practice in daily life, community development, business and public policy.

Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI) www.scorai.org

is an emergent network of academics and practitioners in the United States and Canada working since 2008 to address challenges at the interface of material consumption, human fulfillment, lifestyle satisfaction, and technological change. Network members are seeking to facilitate the design of a coherent North American research program that forges connections between scholars and communities of practice and contributes to an ongoing policy dialogue on these interrelated issues.

Appendix 3: Position paper for retreat by Emmanuel Prinet;

North American Roundtable on
Sustainable Consumption and Production

Purpose

The main purpose of the North American Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption is to promote dialogue, understanding and collaboration about sustainable production and consumption among different stakeholder groups within North America and with other regions.

Rationale

At the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, Heads of State agreed that the “major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances” (Agenda 21, 4.3). Today, the world is facing some daunting challenges as ecological and social trends have gotten significantly worse over the last 20 years, with resulting impacts that include climate change, the loss of biodiversity, growing economic insecurity, and geopolitical instability over access to increasingly scarce and expensive natural resources. Indeed, humanity’s unsustainable draw on the planet’s resources has created a state of ecological overshoot at the global scale, in a context where nearly a third of humanity still lives in poverty and has yet to benefit from the promises of development and economic growth, and where the affluent aspire to ever-increasing rates of material consumption.

Moving towards sustainability is a complex and “sticky” problem which requires large systemic shifts throughout the entire production-consumption system, including in the intermediary sectors that drive this system, such as investment and ultimately the needs, values and cultural norms that underpin it. The root causes of unsustainable consumption and production patterns need to be explored in much greater depth than they have to date. Some key barriers to meaningful change are already well known, and include the lack of political will, skewed markets resulting from misplaced subsidies and the externalization of costs, misunderstandings around the seriousness of issues, the influence of powerful interest lobbies, the fragmentation of sustainability initiatives at all scales, the inertia of habits and cultural norms, paralysis in front of tremendous complexity and an inability to effectively apply a systems perspective to problem solving.

The push-and-pull forces on this production-and-consumption system need to be identified, as do the strategic leverage points that can lead to broad social change in order to create and implement practical and effective strategies, tools and policies. For one, the current level of awareness of interconnections between the economic, social, ecological, cultural dimensions are not adequate for optimal decision making, nor are the prevailing interactions that are taking place between various stakeholders (government, business, civil society) and sectors (financial; health; manufacturing; services; etc.), and even within stakeholder groups themselves. Ideas and solutions need to be developed, and “framed” according to the target audience they are destined to. More profoundly, the governance models that establish the framework for effective sustainable development must be at the heart of the discussions.

The founding networks of the North American Roundtable recognize the urgent need to transform our highly unsustainable production and consumption patterns, and are coming together in order to help catalyze this broad societal change regionally and internationally.

The need for a North American Roundtable

The North American Roundtable represents a vehicle to support discussions between civil society, academic, and other groups including government and business in North America around sustainable consumption and production. This process-led partnership builds on the discussions and exchanges already taking place formally and informally at the regional level. It is intended to serve as a platform to discuss sustainable consumption and production-related issues to provide input into, *inter alia*, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the Marrakech Process, the North American Workshops on Sustainable Consumption and Production, the Rio+20 process, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) and the development of national sustainable development strategies.

History of the Roundtable

The founding four networks—the North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance (NASCA); the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI); the Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN); and the Citizens Network for Sustainable Development (CitNet)—have already established an informal relationship over the past year, and have agreed (announced in a statement¹ delivered at the December 2009 UNECE 4th Regional Implementation Meeting in Geneva) to work together to develop regional dialogue on sustainable production and consumption. As a next step, the Roundtable was officially registered as a UN CSD Partnership for the 19th CSD, and was launched at the UN Headquarters on May 5, 2010, at a Partnership Fair event under the title “Building North American Dialogue on Sustainable Consumption and Production”.

Current next steps include organizing a retreat in Boston, MA, August 19 and 20, 2010, convened by the four founding networks, with the participation of some key players and thinkers from civil society, NGOs and academia in Canada and the USA—including artists, labour, youth, communications experts, faith communities, business experts and front-of-the-curve innovators, etc. The goals of this retreat include reinforcing existing connections and creating new ones between sustainability practitioners by meeting in person, as well as discussing the specific goals and support goals of the Roundtable, its scope, mandate, structure, method of work, etc. Whereas not every invitee has the time or means to travel to Boston, a call-in option will be arranged by the organizers for those wishing to join in.

Roundtable goals

A number of preliminary goals for the Roundtable have been discussed by the founding networks, and these are to be refined and improved at the Boston meeting and over the coming months. These include:

1. To use the roundtable-format of convening to stimulate exchanges and discussions on sustainable consumption and production by, *inter alia*, investigating and exploring the relevance and applicability of various production and consumption-related topics, themes, tools, approaches, strategies, policies, leverage points, and so forth.
2. To provide qualitative regional input into the CSD, the UN Marrakech Process, the 10 Year Framework of Programs, Rio+20, the CEC, the Marrakech Process, and other fora and events.

3. To raise the level of public awareness, understanding and action to promote and practice sustainable production and consumption values.

Process-related objectives to achieve goals

The Roundtable's objectives will be discussed at the Boston meeting, and will depend largely on the goals that have been identified. Some of the objectives already identified include:

1. To establish a working relationship between the initial four networks and to expand this relationship to include a number of other stakeholder networks as well as representatives of the two countries.
2. To develop a set of communication tools by which to exchange information and promote discussion and collaboration (e.g., e-mail listserv, website, social networking sites, teleconferencing, webinars).
3. To organize a series of workshops, panels and presentations in different locales on agreed topics of interest, and to invest existing fora (seminars; conferences; blogs; etc.) with the goal of infusing these spaces with systems thinking, game-changing ideas and innovative solutions, and of promoting sustainable production and consumption as a concept.
4. To fundraise in order to support the Roundtable's activities.
5. To refine the Roundtables purpose, goals, objectives and means of implementation in an iterative and continuous way.

Recommended readings

- *North American Actor & Activity Map on Sustainable Consumption and Production*, by the One Earth Initiative (available upon request: emmanuel@oneearthweb.org)

- *Prosperity Without Growth*, by Tim Jackson

<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=914>

- *Mapping the Movement to Sustainable Production and Consumption in North America*, by Jeffrey Barber

www.isforum.org/pubs/documents/copyofmappingthemovement.pdf

- *Vision 2050: The New Agenda for Business*, by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

<http://www.wbcd.org/Plugins/DocSearch/details.asp?DocTypeId=33&ObjectId=Mzc0MDE>

- *Sustainable Consumption: Facts and Trends from a Business Perspective*, by the WBCSD

<http://www.wbcd.org/Plugins/DocSearch/details.asp?DocTypeId=251&ObjectId=Mzi5MDI>

- *Plenitude*, by Juliet Schor

<http://www.julietschor.org/2010/05/plenitude-the-lecture/>

- *Premises for a New Economy*, by T. Jackson, P. Raskin, W. Rees, J. Schor, P. Victor *et al.*

http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_sdkp/sdkp_pdf/sdkp_workshop_0510/joint_statement.pdf

- "The zero hour is coming", by Peter Gorrie

<http://www.thestar.com/article/561016>

- "We are all Madoffs: Our relationship to the natural world is a Ponzi scheme", by David Barash

<http://chronicle.com/article/We-Are-All-Madoffs/48182/>

- "The fallacy of growth in a finite world", by Jack Hart

http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2010/07/the_fallacy_of_growth_in_a_fin.html

- Marrakech Process Sustainable Lifestyles Task Force final report

<http://www.unep.fr/scp/marrakech/taskforces/pdf/SLT%20Report.pdf>

- *Great Transition: The Promise and Lures of the Times Ahead*, by the Tellus Institute

http://www.tellus.org/documents/Great_Transition.pdf

- *Growth isn't possible: Why we need a new economic direction*, by the new economics foundation (nef)

<http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/growth-isnt-possible>

- *Sustainable Household Consumption: Key Considerations and Elements for a Canadian Strategy*, by the One Earth Initiative

http://www.consumerscouncil.com/site/consumers_council_of_canada/assets/pdf/SHC_Report.pdf

Founding networks' websites

North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance (NASCA):

<http://nasca.icspac.net/>

Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI):

<http://www.scorai.org/>

Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN):

<http://www.cen-rce.org/>

Citizens Network for Sustainable Development (CitNet):

<http://www.citnet.org/>

Appendix 4: List of recommendations from Washington meeting

Appendix 5: original proposal for partnership (May 2010, Jeff Barber):

North American Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption

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Partner organizations

- North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance (NASCA)
- Citizens Network for Sustainable Development (CitNet)
- Canadian Environmental Network (CEN)
- Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI)

Objectives of partnership

1. To establish a working relationship between the initial four networks and to expand this relationship to include a number of other stakeholder networks as well as representatives of the two countries.
2. To develop a set of communication tools by which to exchange information and promote discussion and collaboration (e.g., email listserve, website, social networking sites, teleconferencing, webinars).
3. To organize a series of workshops, panels and presentations in different locales on agreed topics of interest.
4. To provide qualitative regional input into the CSD, the UN Marrakech Process, the 10 Year Framework of Programs and Rio+20.
5. To raise the level of public awareness, understanding and action.

Encouraging public participation

The North American Roundtable represents a vehicle to support discussions between civil society, academic, and other groups including government and business in North America around sustainable consumption and production. This process-led partnership builds on the discussions and exchanges already taking place formally and informally at the regional level. It is intended to serve as a platform to discuss sustainable consumption and production-related issues to provide input into the UN CSD, the North American Workshops on SCP, the Rio+20 process, and the development of national sustainable development strategies.