

JULKAISUJA 1 · 2004

Tulevaisuuden keittiö



Päivi Timonen, Johanna Mäkelä, Mari Niva,
Kaarina Hyvönen, Esa Vesmanen

ABSTRACT

This study applies consumer research methods to assess whether it would be possible to link the development of a sustainable information society with ecologically sustainable kitchen-related innovations. The kitchen was chosen as the study context, because it belongs to the consumers' everyday operating environment and social environment. Besides being where they prepare food and where they eat, it is also a place where they maintain social relations. Additionally, the kitchen is where the most material- and energy-intensive household operations are concentrated, which makes it particularly important and challenging in terms of environmental policy. The kitchen is also interesting from the viewpoint of e-commerce and communication technology. Technological visions of online shopping or home information and control systems are often presented with reference to kitchen activities.

The study investigates the conditions and ways in which technological innovations targeted at conserving natural resources could be integrated into the consumers' everyday. It also examines how these innovations of information and communication technology would be adopted as part of their everyday culture. The study has important methodological objectives as well. The aim is to introduce the citizens' and laymen's view into the ongoing futurological discussions.

The research method tested in the study is called 'visionary interaction', which allows consumers to take a stand and comment on alternative visions of the future presented by the researchers. The radical kitchen-related innovations picked out by our team of researchers from various environmental, technological and consumption visions were presented to a group of consumers in the form of four different scenarios, tying together four dimensions – namely, the users, space, technologies and operation of the kitchen.

According to our background questionnaire, the consumers participating in the group discussions shared the common European positive view of the possibilities of science and technology to make life healthier, easier and more convenient. Young participants had the most critical attitude to the reception of technology. Yet, in considering the acceptability of technology in a kitchen context, it is noteworthy that many aspects of the ideal kitchen were shared by all participants, despite the fact that they represented widely different life situations and life stages. A good kitchen was to be functional and spacious, with lots of worktop space and enough cupboards. Practicality and functionality were shared ideals which also determined the differentiation between what was redundant and what essential. A good kitchen had to be pleasant as well – a place where one felt comfortable, where the family would gather together and where one could meet one's friends.

Environmental aspects were named in connection with the ideal kitchen only when they met the need for practicality. The environment was usually not actively dealt with in the discussions, but it came up, for instance, when consumers talked about sorting the garbage. The environment figured in their normal kitchen routines: letting the food cool before placing it in the refrigerator, using a lid on the kettle, washing full loads in the dishwasher, sorting of garbage and utilisation of a water boiler. Such habits which mitigate the environmental impacts of consumption had become self-evident for many consumers.

The information society was not seen as a partner to sustainable development. This opinion was shared both by technology-optimistic families with children and experienced consumers as well as by young consumers who were critical of technology. The applied research method revealed that although consumers are interested in new kitchen technology, it is difficult to find a culturally shared view of what a sustainable information society might mean in terms of everyday kitchen practices. If sustainable development and the information society are to be mutually supportive and meet in people's everyday lives, sustainability needs to be actively integrated into new technology and its applications.

Keywords: kitchens, home, future, operation, operating environment, technology, consumers, everyday life, social behaviour