Swindon revealed

New questions, new methods and new understanding

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

From resources to services

Climate change policy makers tend to focus on energy or water consumption as topics in their own right.

This is a mistake.

The challenge is to learn about the range and variety of practices of which energy and water use are a part.

Practices that entail water consumption include:

Laundering
Showering
Bathing
Cooking
Washing up
Washing the car
Flushing the loo
Gardening

Each practice has different qualities in terms of duration, timing, social and cultural variation, history, negotiability,
and implications for water demand.

WWF, Thames Water and Waterwise are working on *Save Water Swindon*, a project that aims to reduce water consumption in the town.

As well as offering water efficiency advice and devices to 77,000 households, the project is designed to increase understanding of water use, and inform new approaches that can help reduce consumption.

What questions should they ask?

How long does it take to use 75 litres of water?

Beyond averages

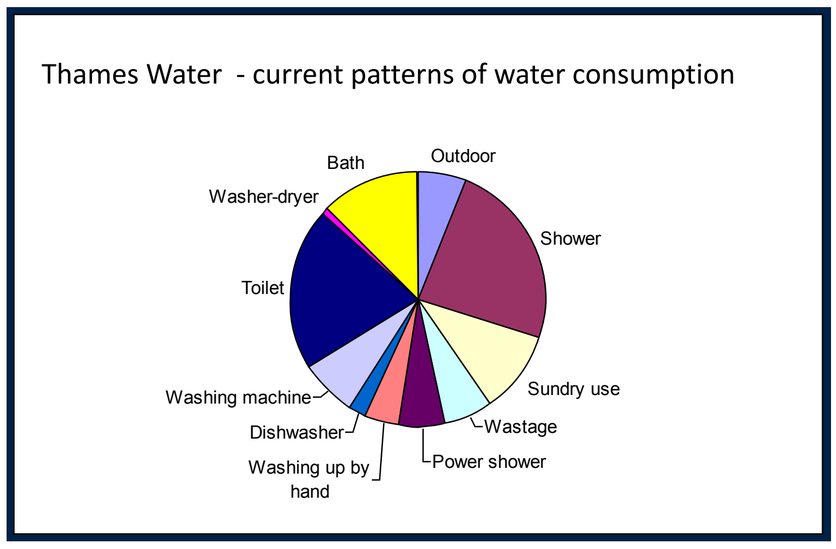
Water policy deals in average per capita consumption per day and treats water as a uniform resource.

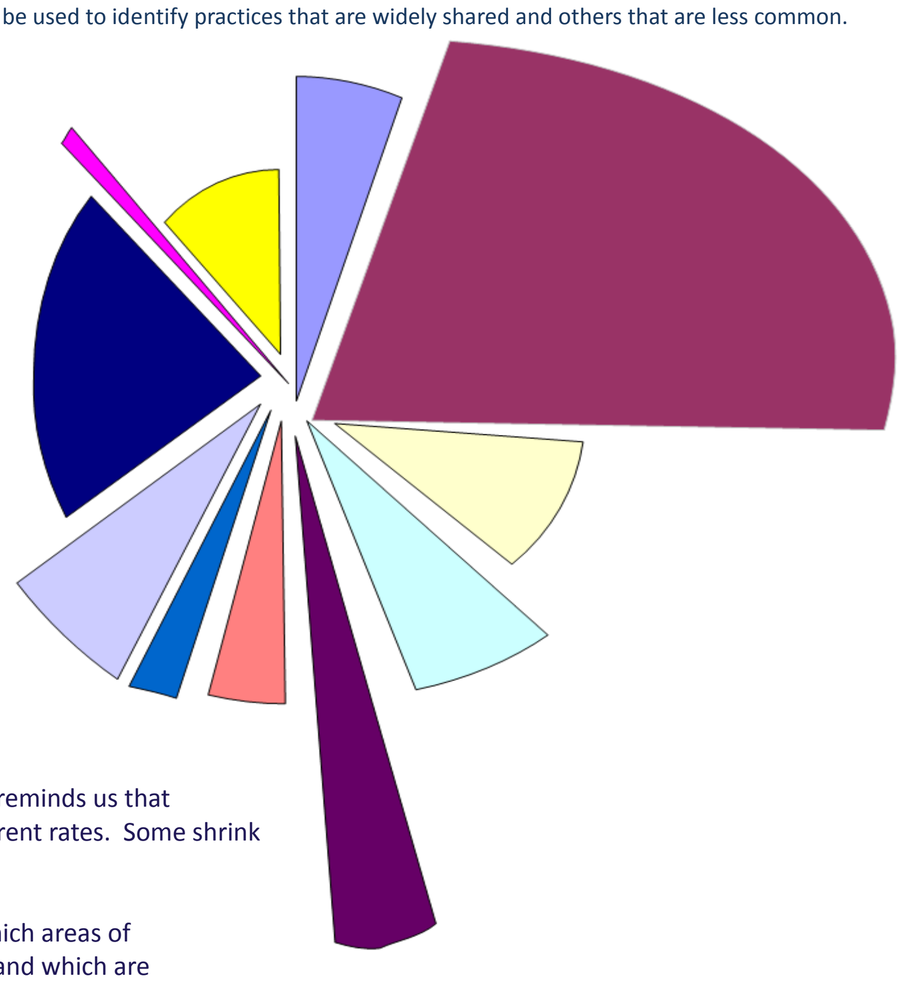
Aggregating and averaging individual use obscures the diversity and variety of daily practice. This gets in the way of understanding how some taken-for-granted routines are sustained and how others die out.

Average daily household water use in Swindon is 400 litres, but actual daily consumption ranges from 48 to over 1,000 litres. How can this variation be represented and understood?

Capturing the dynamics of water consumption means asking new questions and working with new units and methods of enquiry.

These coloured blocks indicate how water consuming practices vary between households. Figures like these could be used to identify practices that are widely shared and others that are less common.



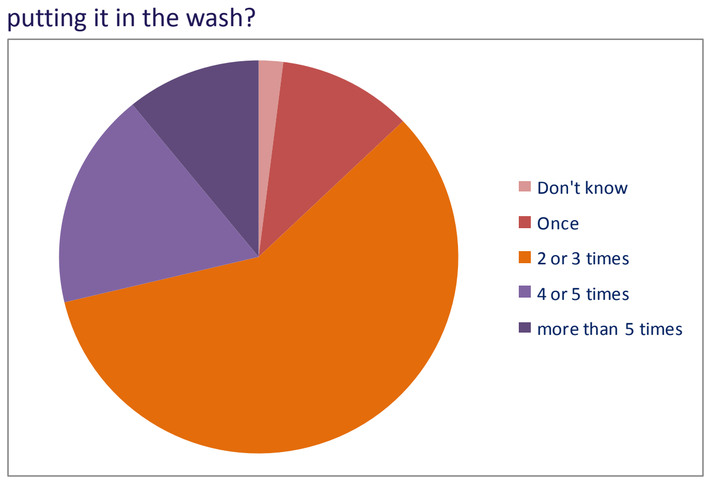


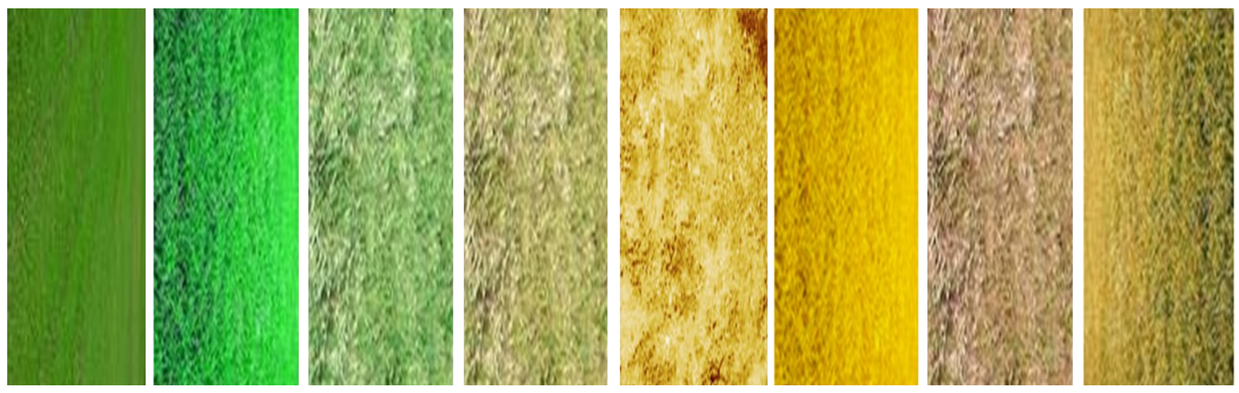
This exploding pie chart reminds us that practices change at different rates. Some shrink and others grow.

It is important to ask: which areas of consumption are stable and which are changing?

How much water do you use to do a week's worth of laundry?
Do you use a hosepipe to water the garden?
Do you use more water than you 'need'?
What do you need water for?

How many times would you wear a favourite sweatshirt before putting it in the wash?





What is the colour of grass?

How would you Describe your garden?

A place to play →
Somewhere that needs to be kept tidy →
A wilderness →
A work in progress →
Motorcycle maintenance and DIY (I have a shed) →

Different orientations to the garden matter for patterns of consumption.