

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

EUROSTAT

Joint ECE/Eurostat Work Session on  
Methodological Issues of Environment  
Statistics

(Ma'ale Hachamisha (15 km from Jerusalem),  
Israel, 11-14 October 1999)

Working paper No.19

## THE SLOW GREENING OF LIFESTYLES IN FRENCH HOUSEHOLDS : FIRST FINDINGS FROM THE NATIONAL STATISTIC SURVEY OF JANUARY 1998

Submitted by the "Institut Français de l'Environnement (IFEN)"<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The main purpose of the Permanent Survey on Living Conditions realised by the INSEE (French Statistic National Office) together with the French Institute of the Environment (IFEN) in January 1998 was, for the first time in France, to gather household data and establish indicators on the "greening" of French people's lifestyles. The definition of "environmental practices" was established following the main criteria of *sustainability* : is considered as ecologically significant any practice that tends to induce less *pollution* and/or to generate less consumption of natural resources and energy. Four types of everyday-life practices were identified : green consumerism, natural resources and energy savings, "do-it-yourself" capacities, and environmental civism (values, opinions, commitment in environmental NGOs ). The classical socio-demographic factors (age, income, education) and the material equipment (i.e. local waste management plans) are playing a major part in the differentiation of practices. But ecological concern as measured through opinion questions and environmental NGOs membership also contributes to define a more intensive profile of environmental practice.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Michelle DOBRÉ chargée de mission en socio-économie de l'environnement, Monitoring Environmental Practices and Perceptions (OPRESE).

## 1. Institutional context of the survey on Households Environmental Practice

The French Institute of the Environment (IFEN) was created in 1992 in order to take in charge the statistical information on environmental problems and to be the focal point of the European Environmental Agency in Copenhagen. The IFEN's main mission is to provide reliable information and data to the actors engaged in environmental policies - so as to feed a reasonable public debate in a rather controversial domain. Among the thirteen environmental themes the IFEN was in charge of since the beginning, such as air, waste or land pollution, we can mention the socio-economical dimension of environmental problems. The obligation of publishing a periodical "State of the Environment in France" is one of its main legal tasks. This is also an obligation to search for the most appropriate physical and social *indicators* to communicate information on environment.

*The social dimension* of environmental questions was early organised through a multi-institutional group called "Monitoring Environmental Perceptions and Practice", (OPRESE). OPRESE is both producing and disseminating data on environmental opinions and practices. Its field of study is the evolution of environmental awareness in French society. The methodological aspects of the surveys are discussed among its members, who are all producing social data on environmental concern. The results are published in the IFEN's regular series, such as "Les données de l'environnement" or "Etudes et travaux".

### 1.1. Social Indicators in the "Permanent Survey on Living Conditions"

The INSEE established a series of household surveys that takes place three times a year since 1996. A coherent ensemble of social indicators is introduced in this programme, called "EPCV": *Enquête Permanente Conditions de Vie* - Permanent Survey on Living Conditions. This programme is more regular and more homogenous than the long-term set of surveys on "Living Conditions"(Conditions de vie) in which some questions had already been asked about outdoors environment (noise, urban amenities). The same difference is to be taken into account with the European panel Survey, which does not cover all the themes dealt with in the EPCV.

Social Indicators, following a development since the 70 and the crisis of growth, are required in order to gather non-monetary aspects of Living Conditions. The final aim of Social Indicators is to propose a basis for analysing social change<sup>2</sup>. The challenge is to resemble, on the same theme, two kinds of different data, descriptive and subjective - so as to integrate perception of Living Conditions together with the description of the objective situation. In this particular meaning, social Indicators are *composite* by nature.

The second important characteristic of this system of surveys is its multi-thematic nature. A lot of different everyday life criteria can be put together to enrich the approach. Last but not least, international comparisons are made possible on a complete set of criteria. This is related to the list of Social Indicators established by Eurostat on a proposal of the Swedish Statistical Institute<sup>3</sup>.

**Environment** is not directly mentioned in the list of thirteen domains which are covered by the research of Social indicators. We can suppose that the inequalities analysed in the other domains of Living Conditions are to be reflected by the differences in the perceived outdoors environment.

The survey that takes place every January<sup>4</sup> is called "Qualité de l'habitat et environnement" (Housing Quality and Environment). This stable part contains a series of questions about immediately *perceived* pollution such as noise (from the neighbourhood or traffic) or air pollution. The rest of it deals mainly with

---

<sup>2</sup>CRENNER, E., ROWENCZYK, C., "Les indicateurs sociaux au coeur de l'EPCV", *Courrier des Statistiques*, N. 83-84, INSEE, décembre 1997

<sup>3</sup>The recommendations for these indicators were : they should be able to measure living conditions at a micro level, individual and household; the list of indicators should be based on non monetary criteria for the well being; there should be synthetical well targeted indicators on different social domains; the indicators should analyse the tendencies of the level and the distribution of well being (also related to sex, age or other socio-demographic variables).

<sup>4</sup>the two other surveys are: every month of May, "Health, Housing and Financial Situation of Households", and every month of October "Participation and Social Interactions".

personal security and violence questions, which are not present in any other statistical survey of the INSEE.

### **1.2. The Thematic Part : Household Environmental Practice (HEP, 1998)**

The recent reform of the household surveys system carried by the INSEE opened the possibility to introduce, for the first time in France, the theme of environmental practice in a national statistical survey. Until 1998, the only data available on environmental concern were produced either through opinion polls of, as for the National Survey financed by the Ministry of the Environment in 1992 and realized by the INED (National Institute for Demographic Studies)<sup>5</sup> with individual declarations.

The stable part "Housing Quality and Environment" is completed every year by a thematic part which is variable. In January 1997 the subject of the variable part was "The possible switch from work to activity". In January 1998, the thematic part was defined to approach everyday life and environmental practices, as a decision of the "OPRESE" partnership. This part is limited to 20 minutes face-to-face interview.

The questionnaire on Household Environmental Practice (HEP-1998) was established in the Monitor group OPRESE, with the help of past experience accumulated on relevant questions for our topic, and the cooperation with the Statistical Office experts (INSEE). There were two tests of 30 than 100 households interviews before the final questionnaire was adopted.

### **2. Scientific Context : Ecological Consequences of Lifestyles**

The ecological physical consequences of industrial and agricultural activities are often dealt with in many institutional research and study programs. These measures are published many regular reports.<sup>6</sup>

Yet it becomes more and more obvious that serious environmental problems of today are related as much to the urban lifestyles than to the industrial, productive activities.

For historical reasons, the field of Production is much more investigated than lifestyles and consumption matters. The institutional accent on Lifestyle matters is quite recent, after the Rio Summit in 1992. In the chapter IV (Production and Consumption) of the Agenda 21, we can read the recognition of "strong link" between poverty and environmental damage, of which the main cause is "an unsustainable production and consumption schemes, especially in industrialised countries".<sup>7</sup>

The general extension of mercantile consumption implies not only that the "consumer choice" has a growing meaning for the environment, but also that a part of the environmental problems (such as traffic in town centers and air pollution associated) are a **result** of attempts to escape negative counterparts of lifestyles based on growing monetary-dependant consumption.

That means our knowledge on the ecological awareness of the population cannot limit itself to the measure of opinion evolutions in favour of environmental policies, but also study concretely the material organisation and constraints that determines the more or less ecological profile of practices.

Sustainable consumption is defined as (Oslo, 1995) *the use of goods and services to fulfill basic needs and provide a better quality of life, while reducing the use of natural resources, toxic emissions and pollution, in order to preserve next generations' capacities to fulfill their needs.*

---

<sup>5</sup>COLLOMB Ph., GUERIN F. (et alii), *Les Français et l'environnement – L'enquête « Populations-Espaces de vie-Environnements »*, INED-PUF Diffusion, Cahier n°141, 1998.

<sup>6</sup>OECD, The European Environmental Agency, Eurostat, UN, Worldwatch Institute...and also the *Report on the State of the Environment in France*, Ifen, La Découverte Eds., 1998. *en France*, Ed. de la Découverte-IFEN, 1998, p.11.

<sup>7</sup>Agenda 21", Rapport de la Conférence des Nations Unies sur l'environnement et le développement, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 juin 1992, Service des Affaires Internationales du Ministère de l'environnement, 345 p.

This definition is only a first step to establish rather simple criteria for measuring evolution of Lifestyles into the direction of a better impact on the environment and, further, to sustainability. The other aspects of "greening of lifestyles" are related to community capacities to take in charge in an autonomous way (i.e. not through the market) the satisfaction of material and social needs. This second aspect is more complicated to measure, but nevertheless as important as the first one in the context of measuring sustainability. Both aspects were present in our Survey on "Household Environmental Practice."

### **The relation to consumption in environmental practice : less and better**

Social practice and lifestyles are studied for a long while in France in the perspective of public policies domains of action.

The "cultural practice" are the best known, as the specialised study of these practice is directly a monitor for Cultural Policy. The INSEE Surveys on "Time Budgets" are a complete inventory of everyday-life activities, studied from the point of view of "groups of practice" and differentiated socio-demographic profiles (men/women inequalities, different everyday rythms among social categories or age groups). The organisation of domestic activities is the main field of research in this domain.<sup>8</sup> Health practices, sexual practices, touristical practices, and mainly consumption practices are steadily part of institutional research programs.

Practices were much less studied than opinions in the field of ecology and environment<sup>9</sup>. The results we show in this paper are the first one to approach household universe from this point of view. **It is obvious that domestic ecology is less an individual kind of practice than a family endeavour, which means the household level and the housing unit are the most appropriate to describe practical ecological concern.**

To resume : it is important to measure *consumption* attitudes (from the Lifestyle change point of view), at a *household* level, and to re-integrate the *subjective* dimension (opinion) in a second time, with the aim to measure the "greening of society".

#### ***Methodological description of the HEP-Survey 1998***

*The master sample is formed of 8000 housing units. A half-panel sub-sample of 4000 households is made from the master sample. It is a representative sample of the population more than 15 years ofd living in metropolitan France. Part of the questions are asked at the household level, another is addressed to individual (mainly opinion questions. The answering individuals are selected though a KISH random method.. Since January 1997, l'INSEE interviews all the individuals starting with 15 years old in a family, until three members. If the household size is bigger, than a random selection is made to obtain only three interviewed individual per household. This concerns about 8% of the households.*

*For january 1998 there are 5807 observations in the results files.*

---

<sup>8</sup>MAURIN, E. "Types de pratiques quotidiennes, types de journées et déterminants sociaux de la vie quotidienne", Économie et Statistique, N. 223, 1989, pp.25-46.

<sup>9</sup>DOBRE, M., *L'opinion publique et l'environnement*, IFEN, 1995

## Poor information about environmental equipments...

When we analysed the answers “does not know,” which were proposed directly on some questions of the HEP Survey, we found out that for some very ordinary gesture, such as domestic waste deposit, most of the people ignore all. Where are the waste going once we get rid of it in the garbage can? Four households out of ten do not know. Among those who think to know (57%), 39% declare the destination of the waste is an “industrial plant,” refusing implicitly the idea the waste is simply placed in a rubbish dump. And yet, the rubbish dumping is the major waste treatment still today ( 59%) in France, according to the figures of the ADEME (Waste and Energy Agency).

### ... related to everyday use

The availability of glass containers for glass sorting, the most ancient practice (as it was first introduced to sponsor cancer research), is well known in 98% of households. On the opposite side, as 42% of the households do not have any bicycle, it appears less surprising that 10% ignore if the local government installed bicycle equipments on the roads. For those who know about its existence, 53% find it insufficient. About a quarter of the French population does not know what “organic food” label means, neither the protecting hand on the aerosol cans.

### **Table 1. How much knowledge about resource and energy savings and less pollution?**

The percentage in the first part of the table are on households, the second (darker) on individuals.

**DOES NOT KNOW :            %**

<b>Destination of the local community waste</b>	<b>43</b>
Existence of ...	
- a municipal separate waste collection center	20
- public containers for old paper	12
- collecting system for bulky objects	9
- a waste sorting system at home	4
- public containers for old glass	4
Local bicycle equipment	10
During the last five years, were there any...	
- Local decisions to limit tap water consumption	12
- Local decisions to limit car traffic in the center of the town.....	10 <sup>(2)</sup>
Is there, on your working place...	28
- an “environment management plan”	
- a car sharing system	3
<i>Does not know what means :</i>	
Organic food	27
The label « NF Environnement »	52
The label « Préserve la couche d’ozone »	26

Source : HEP, EPCV, INSEE-IFEN, January 1998.

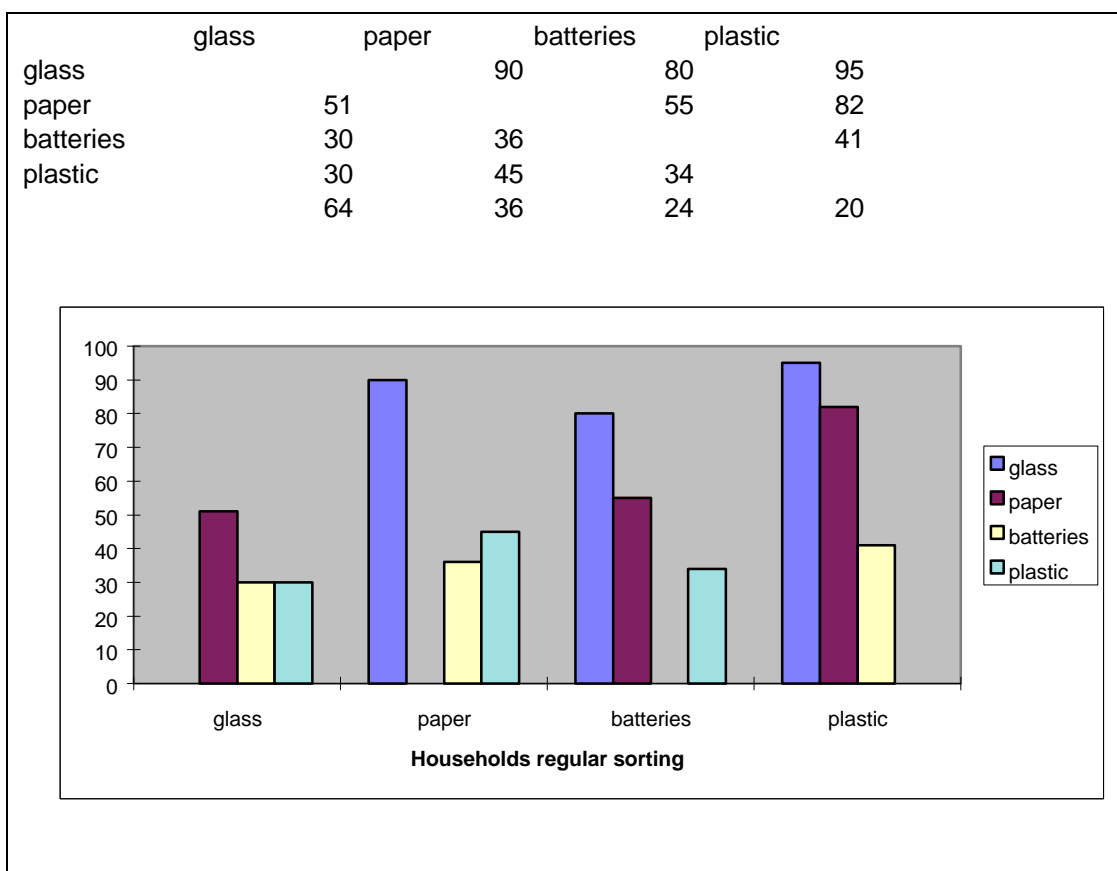
<sup>(1)</sup> Regroups “does not know” and negative answers to the knowledge questions

(2) for 30% of households living in the rural areas the question is irrelevant

### 1. Waste sorting attitudes

One of the most significant environmental practice - waste sorting - is part of the first group as defined previously, of domestic action “without (direct) monetary expenses”. Here the kind of sorting is as important as the factual realisation of the practice. The glass is sorted by 64% of the households, while plastic is sorted in 20% of the households. The plastic sorting is a good indicator of the dissemination of environmental practice : people who sort plastic are more often sorting all the other types of waste (see Figure 3 below). In return, glass sorting has no particular signification for environmentalism, as people who sort glass are less sorting the other types of domestic waste.

**Figure 1 : Waste Sorting Practices Comparison**



Source : HEP, EPCV, INSEE-IFEN, January 1998.

Plastic sorting is linked to the characteristics of housing : two times less households are doing it in the collective housing than in individual houses. An analysis “all other things being equal” shows, nevertheless, that the existence of a municipal equipment program is the most important to explain the plastic sorting, while for the batteries sorting, the age (less than 20) is the most important variable. (See Table ANNEX).

**Table 2. Regular household practice of waste sorting (kerbside separate collection)**

	En %			
	Glass	Paper	Batteries	Plastic
<b>All</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Type of housing</b>				
Individual house	75	41	26	24
Collective housing	46	29	21	14
<b>Available local equipment</b>				
Waste sorting system at home	76	60	26	40
Existence of a municipal separate waste collection center	68	41	29	25

**Lecture** : 75 % of households living in individual houses are regularly sorting the glass to be recycled

Source : HEP, EPCV, INSEE-IFEN, January 1998.

The purchase of refills instead of the whole new product contributes to reduce waste volume at the end of use. This practice has a different profile : the housing is less important for it than young age and high educational level, as well as middle income level. The difference we can notice ranges this practice among the “green consuming” ones, while the waste attitudes are mainly related to objective equipment and age factors.

(See Table 3)

## 2. “Green Consumption” : mainly education level

We could expect a strong link between the income level and the choice of green products, often more expensive, i.e. organic food, water or energy saving electric appliance, recycled paper... For all these consumption choices, the statistical link to the income is not absent, but much less significant than the education level. The choice of environmental friendly electric appliance belongs more to middle aged, wealthy owners – who are also the most frequently to face this kind of purchase. (See Table 3)

## 3. Small income households : resource savings and “do-it-yourself”

As we could easily foresee, low income households are more often in the situation to watch the water and energy consumption, to use other transport than the individual car (like bicycle or public transportation) to reach working place (in this group, the part of those who do not own a car is 12 points superior to the average). In this relatively poor households it is more frequent to repair by oneself small electric appliance, to consume fruit and vegetable from domestic self-production.

The ownership of an individual house is favouring this kind of “autonomous” practice. We can find a similar *profile* for “do-it-yourself” practice in the Survey “Mode de vie” (Lifestyles) realised by the INSEE with the CNRS in 1988-89 : living in an individual house, being rather young, worker or employee with a technical education level (but less the household without any education assets) are the heaviest variables.

Besides, the use of bicycle for utilitarian transport (not leisure) reasons and the water and energy saving behaviour are more frequent in households of 65 years old members, retired from the active professional life.

In spite of the constant diminution of food self-production (vegetables, fruit, meat, grocery products), still today one third of French households regularly consume from their own production. Most of the time, the

condition for it is that these households have time and space available. This concerns older agricultural professions, retired persons and rural inhabitants, earning rather low income<sup>10</sup>.

**Table 3 : Some regular environmental practice  
(two examples for each of the three categories defined below)**

**Financial criterium for groups of practice :**

The probable consequences on the households budget were used as a criterium to class 3 types of practices :

1. • practice without specific expenses (waste and recycling attitudes)
2. • practice with probable expenses (green consumption),
3. • practice inducing less expenses (savings and self-production) (the darkest part in the Table3)

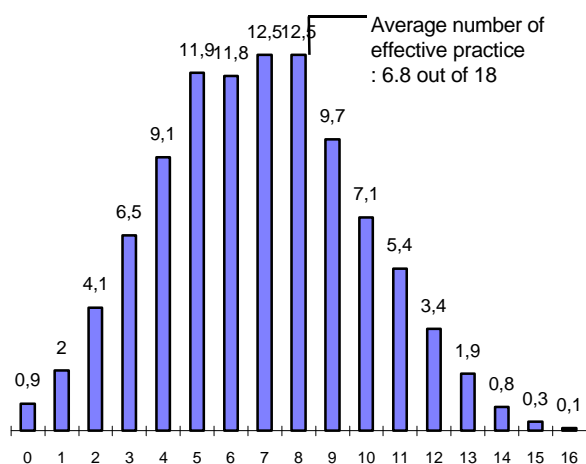
	Regularly sort plastic	Prefer buying refills to buying a new product	Chose environmentally friendly label when purchase electric appliance	Regularly consume organic food	Repair themselves rather than throw away	Frequently use bicycle for transport (other than leisure) Utilisent fréquemment le vélo pour les déplacements autres que de loisirs
<b>All</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Income (head of family)</b>						
Inf. au 1 <sup>er</sup> quartile	16	57	40	8	61	21
Du 1 <sup>er</sup> au 2 <sup>ème</sup> quart.	20	65	42	7	58	18
Du 2 <sup>e</sup> au 3 <sup>ème</sup> quart.	22	69	42	10	54	15
Sup. au 3 <sup>ème</sup> quart.	21	71	46	11	54	11
<b>Age (head of family)</b>						
15-24 ans	9	72	40	8	66	14
25-29 ans	15	67	31	8	66	21
30-39 ans	18	69	38	11	61	14
40-49 ans	21	69	48	10	62	14
50-64 ans	22	67	49	10	57	15
65-69 ans	20	67	48	5	49	25
70 et +	21	53	36	8	41	23
<b>Education (head of family)</b>						
Without any	9	38	26	3	46	15
Before primary	18	45	30	4	42	24
End primary	20	56	40	7	49	22
6 <sup>ème</sup> -3 <sup>ème</sup>	20	63	43	7	53	17
2 <sup>nde</sup> -terminale	19	66	46	11	49	13
CAP-BEP	21	67	41	8	64	15
BAC (technical)	17	73	44	8	65	13
University	21	76	48	14	58	14
<b>Occupational status (head of family)</b>						
Active occupied	20	69	43	9	61	12
Unemployed	13	58	38	10	64	20
Other un-occupied	20	60	42	9	48	21
<b>Housing area</b>						
Rural	22	63	41	8	53	18
Urban	22	65	42	10	58	16
Paris	10	67	45	10	54	13
<b>Type of housing</b>						
Individual House	24	66	43	9	58	17
Collective	13	64	41	10	54	14

Guideline : During the last 12 months, 20% of French households regularly sorted plastic. To compare to the 16% with the lowest income (first quartile)

<sup>10</sup> In 1991, 25% of the total fruit and vegetables consumption was due to family vegetable gardens. (INSEE)

*Source* : HEP, EPCV, INSEE-IFEN, January 1998.

**Figure 2 : Distribution of households related to the number of environmental practice they accomplish (out of 18) (%) The average number of practices is 6.8 out of 18 selected here**



Source : HEP, EPCV, INSEE-IFEN, January 1998.

### Environmental practices are related to the general family welfare

**6 % of the households are effectively doing 12 environmental practice among the 18 selected in the Figure 2 and 3.** They are most of the time owner of their house, out of Paris area, and have income superior to the half of the population. The head of this type of family is an adult between 40 and 65 years old, have technical or university education, and they occupy a managerial position.

At the opposite, 45 % of households are regularly accomplishing 1 to 6 practices. For this second group, the head of the family is rather young (less than 30 years old), or more than 70. The level of education is low, and he or she is a single

The employees, the workers and the persons without professional activity are over represented in this category. These households are living in urban areas, renting an apartment in a collective housing.

The poorest quarter of the population is also in this group of low practices. They are also less

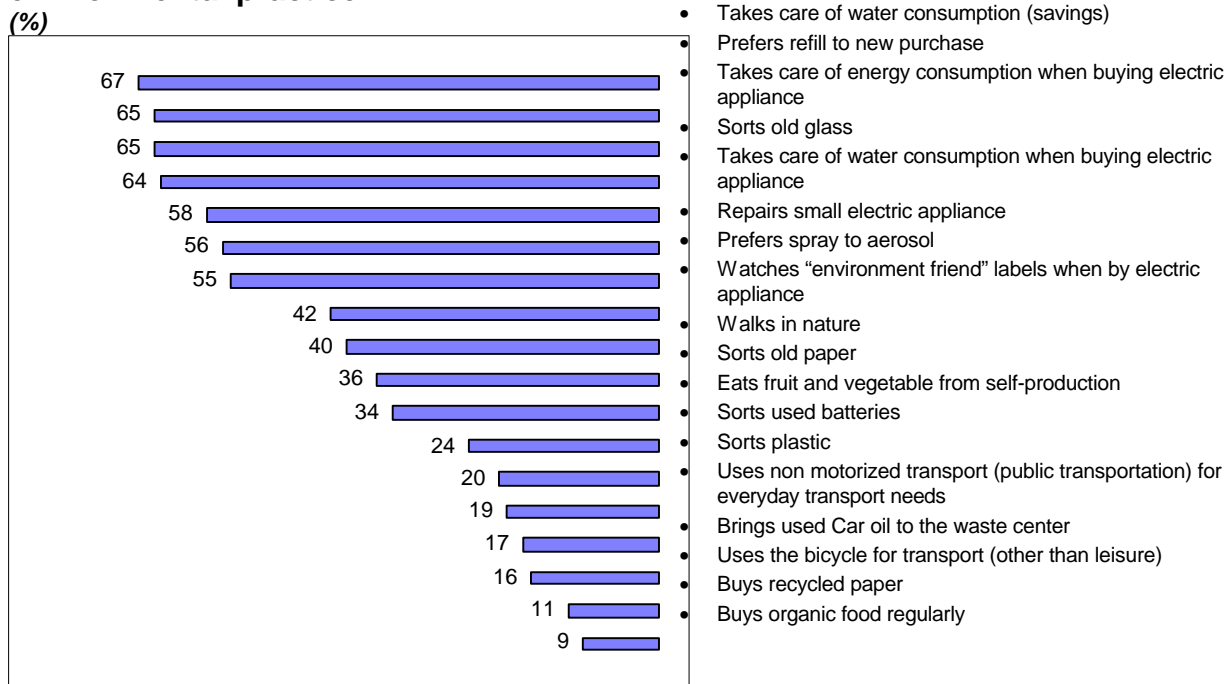
consuming than the other categories (so less the opportunity to "chose" environmentally friendly device).

The 47 % of households who are in the intermediate position, with 7 to 11 environmental practice regularly done, are quite near to the profile of the first category, but have less income..

### To conclude

The characteristic of everyday practice related to environment depend on a high amount of factors. The groups we presented are the result of a first statistical work. More sophisticated analysis are needed to reveal the links between practice and the expressed opinions. Nevertheless, it is already possible to underline that material and institutional conditions strongly orient environmental practice. With this elements, it is possible to foresee that not only the "change" needed in Lifestyles from the point of view of sustainability is difficult to imagine as a whole (everyday life is not the same for everybody), but also that special measures to encourage social capacities to autonomy have a major part to play.

**Figure 3. Frequency of some regular environmental practice**



Source : EPCV, INSEE-Ifen, janvier 1998.

---

***Publications issued from the Households Environmental Practice Survey (Insee, Ifen, 1998)***

- « Automobiliste, cycliste, piéton, ou le gêneur gêné », Xavier Niel, INSEE Première n°590, juin 1998.
- « Pourquoi se passer de sa voiture ? », Xavier Niel, INSEE Première n°607, septembre 1998.
- " Pratiques environnementales des ménages et modes de vie", C. Caraire, Michelle Dobré, Ifen, Données de l'environnement N. 41, december 1998
- « Trier, récupérer, réparer : pratiques des ménages en matière de déchets », Michelle Dobré (Ifen) et Sylvie Monteiro (INSEE), INSEE Première, to be published.

**ANNEX**

**What are the determinants of the environmental practices in domestic economy?**

	Regular waste sorting				Purchase refills rather than new produce	Chooosed to repair small electric appliance out of fix rather than purchase a new one	Households percentage (%)
	Old Glass sorting	Old Papers sorting	Plastic	Batteries			
<b>Type of Housing</b>							
Individual House	*	*	*	*	*	*	60
Large Building	- 0,5	- 0,5	- 0,6	- 0,4		- 0,2	40
<b>Housing Ownership</b>							
Owner	*	*	*	*	*	*	55
Tenant	- 0,5	- 0,3					40
<b>Profession</b>							
Farmer		- 0,5		- 0,7			2
Trader							5
Manager				- 0,3			10
Intermediate Professions							14
Employee							12
Worker	*	*	*	*	*	*	22
Retired							30
Other inactive							4
<b>Residence</b>							
Rural locality	1,0		- 0,2	- 0,3			24
Small town	0,6		- 0,3	- 0,2			16
Middle town	0,2		- 0,3				13
Big town	*	*	*	*	*	*	29
Region of Paris		0,2	- 0,9			- 0,3	17
<b>Age of the Family Head</b>							
Less than 20	- 0,8	- 1,2		0,5	0,5	0,8	3
20-29	- 0,5	- 0,7				0,5	8
30-39	- 0,5	- 0,6			0,3		19
40-49		- 0,3			0,3		20
50-59					0,3		16
60 and more	*	*	*	*	*	*	34
<b>Occupational Status of the Family Head</b>							
Wage earner	*	*	*	*	*	*	55
Disoccupied	- 0,3	- 0,3	- 0,3	- 0,5			7
Retired							25
Retired form business							6
Other							7
<b>Diploma of the Family Head</b>							
None	- 0,4	- 0,4		- 0,6	- 0,5		20
CEP, DFEO	*	*	*	*	*	*	28
CAP, BEP				- 0,3			8
BEPC					0,4		12
Bac (technical)					0,4		3
Bac (general)					0,3		10
Bac + 2 years higher studies				0,4	0,6		8
Higher education (university)		0,3		0,3	0,4		11
<b>Availability of Waste Equipment</b>							
Multiple dustbin system at home							
Yes	*	*	*	*	*	*	23
No	- 0,6	- 1,1	- 1,4				77
Municipal separate waste collection center							
Yes	*	*	*	*	*	*	51
No	- 0,2	- 0,3	- 0,4	- 0,5	- 0,2	- 0,2	29
Does not know	- 0,5	- 0,5	- 0,6	- 0,6	- 0,3		20

**Guidelines for reading** : Households for whom there is no multiple dustbin system at home stand, “all the other things being equal”, less chances to sort old paper (coef. -1,1) than those for whom such a system is available, considered as the reference situation. The reference situation of which the effects are studied is marked with a \*.

**Source** : *Enquête permanente sur les conditions de vie (EPCV), janvier 1998, Insee-Ifen*  
Permanent Survey on Living Conditions, January 1998, Insee-Ifen

