

Chapter 9

Changing Consumption Patterns in Green Economy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter has considered the recent changes occurring in consumer habits, aiming to highlight the link between them and the transition to a green economy. In the first part, after a brief introduction, the authors perform a review of the literature in the field, starting from the presentation of the concept of sustainable consumption. They start with the major changes in the social current economic environment and their impact on changes of the consumption patterns; they continue with the presentation of the changes of the consumption pattern in the European Union and the specific aspects of the current changes of the consumption patterns in Romania. Thus, the authors aim to identify the key features of the New European Consumer.

INTRODUCTION

Lately expressions like responsible consumption, sustainable consumption and green consumption are used in various contexts, often being related to the current theme of sustainable development. However, most of the times, these terms have different meanings and it seems not to be always clear what the one who uses the term means.

In order to implement the Single Market for Green Products initiative adopted by The European Commission in April 2013, a better under-

standing of the consumer behavior and attitudes it is requested. To meet this need, a survey was conducted on the 'Attitudes of Europeans towards building the single market for green products.'

In 2011 in Barcelona, during the congress RIPESS (Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Economy and Solidarity), the idea that *People seem to have forgotten that the economy, namely, economic activity must be rational because processed resources are limited and, therefore, they must be used rationally* was launched.

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The green economy requires changing consumer habits. It speaks thus about sustainable consumption patterns and green consumption patterns.

A change in consumption patterns requires a strategy that takes into account the imbalance of excessive consumption and ignoring the limited resources available.

Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption can be achieved by several ways: the reduction in total consumption, the reduction in the consumption of particular goods or some of the shift to a more sustainable consumption (Karen & Charles, 2014).

The question arises whether these patterns exist or the concepts are just the reflection of an environmentalist current or anti-consumerism current.

The objective of this chapter is to highlight the changes in the green economy and the transformations they bring in consumption patterns.

BACKGROUND

The concept of sustainable consumption was introduced in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in chapter 4 of the Agenda 21, refereeing also, to sustainable consumption patterns. Thus, *developing national policies and strategies to encourage changes in unsustainable consumption patterns* was considered.

Subsequently, in 1994 within the Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption, sustainable consumption was defined as follows: *the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.*

Consumption patterns problem was approached in the literature before the '80s. Analysis of the changes in lifestyles and consumption patterns

should be performed in order to evaluate the role of the relations between needs and satisfaction. Among the first analyzes of the evolution of the consumption patterns, work of Wilkinson it is remarkable (1973). In the same time, we must mention proposals belonging to Douglas and Isherwood (1979), Campbell (1987) and Fine and Leopold (1993).

Max-Neef (1991) elaborated the need-satisfiers theory as the foundations of a framework for analyzing lifestyles and households consumption patterns. It defined nine basic universal needs, without establishing a hierarchy permanently fixed to them. In working out his theory, Max-Neef's objective was helping grassroots groups to build their own conception of (human) development. Although the analyze of consumption patterns or lifestyles didn't represent the main concern for many sociological analysis, it should be mentioned as a continuous presence in the papers of many scholars

It was not primarily meant to analyze consumption patterns or lifestyles as such, notwithstanding its use as such by several scholars (Jackson & Marks, 1999, Stagl & O'Hara, 2001, Jackson, Jager, & Stagl, 2004)

Consumption and environmental studies have started to capture the attention of researchers. (Stern, Dietz, Ruttan, Socolow, & Sweeney, 1997, Princen, Maniates, & Conca, 2002).

Howes's study (1996) on cultural influences in consumption and globalization are also worth mentioning. The role of cultural factors in various consumer practices attracted the attention of many researchers, such as Lury (1996), Slater (1996), Humphery (1998), Gottdiener (2000), Scanlon (2000).

In the '90s and after, environmental issues began to be increasingly present in research related to consumption. Work of Stern (1997), Jackson, and Michaelis (2003), Jackson, Jager, and Stagl (2004), Michaelis and Lorek (2004), Jalas (2005, 2006), Jackson (2006), Boulanger (2007), Lintott (2007), Jonathan (2009), Jackson (2009), Jackson and Victor (2011) is noteworthy.

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