

COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION AS A NEW TREND OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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Abstract. In their article, the authors present the essence of sustainable consumption and the level of awareness among Polish consumers. A particular attention is paid to collaborative consumption as one of possible ways of implementation the idea of sustainable consumption. They made an attempt to characterise collaborative consumption and its manifestations in Poles' behaviours. They paid attention to some aspects of consumers' behaviours which may be treated as designata of the trend indicating, at the same time, the possible popularisation of those behaviours. Based on an analysis of the carried out quantitative research surveys, the authors defined the sociodemographic profile of consumers being supporters or opponents of collaborative consumption indicating that the issue of belonging to these categories is decided by the basic sociodemographic variables and awareness of the idea of collaborative consumption.

Key words: collaborative consumption, sustainable consumption, consumer behavior

INTRODUCTION

Development of the markets for goods and services allows meeting various needs, particularly those at the fringe of basic needs, what may lead to excessive consumption, i.e. consumerism, while the need to meet the basic needs concerns only a small part of the products being consumed.

Psychologists dealing with purchasing behaviours perceive that the greater and greater number of consumers assume a certain type of the defensive reaction making more and more frequently an unwitting, not rationalised choice, what may lead to the conclusion that the consumer is being changed from *homo oeconomicus* into *homo automaticus* [Stasiak and Maison 2013].

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The emerging in an ever growing degree symptoms of consumerism in the recent decades facilitate discussion on the effects of consumerism and the necessity to implement the idea of sustainable development, including also that of sustainable consumption. In this discourse, there participate representatives of various academic fields and disciplines but also decision-makers and representatives of the economic practice concerned about unfavourable consequences of excessive consumption of various products for the natural environment and, in result, for the quality of life of next generations. Having this context in mind, the idea of sustainable development, including that of sustainable consumption, acquires a particular attention.

The sustainable development concept goes back to the 1980s and is often understood as the commitment to a simultaneous involvement in the three following pillars: economic growth, ecological balance, and social progress [Facts and trends 2015].

It is proper to remind here the definition of sustainable development, which was given in the Brundtland report (coined after the name of the Chairman of the Brundtland Commission, Gro Harlem Brundtland), titled *Our Common Future*: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [UN Documents 2015].

In other words, sustainable development is development that ensures implementation of the needs of the present generation without exerting a negative influence on the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Degradation of the natural environment is a serious problem of present days, a threat to that sustainability due to the emergence of greater and more severe developmental barriers: environmental pollution, climate change, atrophy of biological variety, exhaustion of natural resources, and landscape degradation. There is being increasingly recognised the direct threat to the human existence.

All over the world, there are wasted 1.3 billion t of food (the total production amounts to 6 billion t; households almost equally with manufacturing are located in this respect in the third place – around 350 million t; at the same time, more than 2 billion people across the world need more for their survival than what they have got)¹.

In the European Union, every year there are wasted around 89 million t of food. In 2013, wastage of food was admitted by 39% of Polish households, by 9% more than in 2012. The European Parliament called for an immediate collective action aimed at reduction by half of the amount of wasted food by the year 2025, and the European Commission aspires to that reduction by the year 2020, considering food as the main priority in its “Roadmap for a Resource-efficient Europe”. This ambition requires joint efforts of the entire chain of food handling – “from the field to the table” [the European Parliament 2011, Dąbrowska and Janoś-Kresło 2013]. If nothing has changed, the total amount of wasted food will have grown in 2020 to approximately 126 million t, i.e. by 40%.

As the European Commission’s report on waste management shows, every year in the European Union there are produced 2.6 billion t of waste, of which more than 90 million t are considered as dangerous.

¹ <http://www.forbes.pl/artykuly/sekcje/Wydarzenia/co-roku-na-swiecie-marnuje-sie-1-3-mld-ton-zywnosci,14724,1> (accessed: 20.07.2014).

For example, the average citizen in Denmark produced in 2011 – 718 kg of rubbish, in Luxembourg, Cyprus and Ireland – 600–700 kg, whereas in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and Finland – 500–600 kg, and in Poland – below 400 kg. There is recommended establishment of a special agency at the level of the European Union whose task would be resolving crucial problems connected with implementation and enforcement of the European rules concerning waste. In the recent years, due to an increase of volumes of waste produced and dislocated in the enlarged EU, this problem has become still more important [Investments... 2014].

In the recent years, all over the world, there has been noted an avalanche-style increase of amounts of disposed by users obsolete electronic products (smartphones, washing machines, refrigerators, TV sets, computers etc.). Every year we produce 20–50 million t of such waste and it is anticipated that by the year 2017 the amount of electronic rubbish will have increased by as much as one third².

In Poland, smartphonisation has been going on what is evidenced at least by the fact that in January 2014 44% of Poles had smartphones, whereas in 2013 every third and in 2012 every fourth Pole. It is anticipated that at the beginning of 2015 we should reach the level of almost 60% [Smartfonizacja... 2014]. The biggest number of smartphones is in the group of the youngest Poles (in case of 29-year-olds or younger, more than 70% of the population have a smartphone). This indicates, on the one hand, how quickly there is growing the equipment of Poles with up-to-date devices, and, on the other hand, we should be aware that these are the products that very quickly are wearing out technically, hence becoming obsolete.

Having in mind the above-mentioned data, we should refer to the key Polish strategic document, titled *Strategia zmian wzorców produkcji i konsumpcji na sprzyjające realizacji zasad trwałego, zrównoważonego rozwoju* [Strategia... 2003]. As the basic directions of actions there were then adopted the influencing growth of responsibility of producers and consumers for environmental effects of their activity through the legal, administrative and economic mechanisms as well as while undertaking by those entities voluntary behaviours.

As the main threats in the sphere of consumption there were considered the permanent growth of amount of packaging waste in households, the high dynamics of growth of the number of electric appliances in households as well as the growth of the number of information and recreation devices and the dynamic growth of the number of cars.

Sustainable development is a search for such developmental paths that could ensure improvement of living standards without growth, and still better with a considerable reduction of the pressure on the natural environment [Kielczewski 2009, Rogal 2010, Dąbrowska et al. 2014].

² Compare <http://www.greenpeace.org/poland/pl/co-robimy/substancje-toksyczne/odpady-elektroniczne> and <http://www.spidersweb.pl/2013/12/elektroniczne-smieci.html> (accessed: 14.06.2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research survey carried out in 2013 on a representative sample of 1000 adult Poles by the omnibus³ method shows that there can be distinguished attitudes relevant both for consumerism but also such that may be treated as designata of sustainable consumption. Thus, the symptoms of the first category of behaviours are the following facts:

- 76% of Poles believe that the Polish society is currently more focused on consumption than on living in the proecological (environment-friendly) way (55% think “rather yes”);
- 57% of Poles used to buy more often cheaper and less durable products instead of one more expensive which, however, can be used longer (what does matter for the environment) where answers “I rather act in this way” prevail.

On the other hand, the symptoms of sustainable consumption may be other facts diagnosed in the mentioned research surveys:

- 63% of Poles declared that they were regularly sorting rubbish (21% act so definitely). Waste sorting is a method streamlining neutralisation and recovery of waste that may become a valuable raw material. In 2020, according to the EU law, rubbish tips should absorb only 35% of rubbish; the remaining part should be sorted and subjected to recycling⁴;
- 76% of Poles prior to a purchase almost always check the shelf life of the product (49% rather do so);
- 70% hand over needless or used things to other people (every fifth Pole definitely acts so).

The world debate on the issue of sustainable consumption was initiated during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In the document, titled Agenda 21 – the Global Programme of Action, crowning that conference, there were references to the change of

³ The omnibus survey was carried out on the representative, nation-wide sample of 1000 individuals aged 15–74, in the time-period of June–July 2013 by the CAPI (computer-aided personal interview) method, with the use of laptops or palmtops, during a face-to-face interview, at respondents' homes. The sample was of the quota-random nature. Respondents were sampled for the survey in compliance with the quota by the following traits: sex and age. The representative sample allowed extrapolating findings on the adult population of Poles, with an error of $\pm 3.2\%$.

The survey made it possible to select 5 of 20 statements that indicated definite competencies of Poles, namely: (1) If the product is proecological and has such a marking, then I shall readily buy it, even if it is by 10% more expensive than the one without such a marking; (2) I would like the direct producer could receive fair payment for the product, even if I had to pay for it 10% more; (3) I regularly sort rubbish; (4) When buying something new, I first listen to my acquaintances' opinion on the issue; (5) I almost always read the composition of the food product being bought. For the second survey (the main one), there were qualified the respondents who indicated their positive opinions on at least three of the five statements. They were considered as the consumers with the minimal competencies what allows defining their behaviours, particularly as regards sustainable consumption.

The survey was carried out for the purpose of the project financed by the National Science Centre “Consumers' Competencies as a Stimulator of Innovative Behaviours and Sustainable Consumption”, 2011/03/B/HS4/04417, Instytut Badań Rynku, Konsumpcji i Koniunktur; the project manager – prof. Anna Dąbrowska, Ph.D.

⁴ http://cp.gig.katowice.pl/pdf/segr_odp.pdf (accessed: 10.10.2014).

consumption models. There was paid attention to the problem of unsustainable patterns of consumption as well as, what is equally important, to the national policies and strategies of sustainable consumption development. As early as then it was already emphasised the necessity of research and international cooperation in the mentioned fields. Among the most important tasks there were specified, i.a., the growth of effectiveness of the use of energy and resources as well as reduction of amount of waste.

The development of research on sustainable consumption has created the bases for distinguishing at least three ways of formulating this category:

- sustainable consumption as an alternative lifestyle,
- sustainable consumption as ecoconsumption,
- holistic approach to sustainable consumption, hence expansion of this notion onto the social and economic issues.

As the quantitative survey (the main one) carried out in 2013 among 1000 adult Poles⁵ by the CATI (computer-assisted telephone interview) method shows, opinions of Polish consumers on the issue of sustainable consumption do rather not fit into the mentioned criteria of this notion understanding. And so, there were noted that the way of understanding “sustainable consumption” was most often connected with the following: though-out purchases (25% of indications), buying the products which are necessary (24%), moderate consumption, adequately to one’s financial abilities (21% of indications). At the same time, the “I do not know” responses accounted for 34% of indications [Dąbrowska et al. 2014].

We can say that the idea of sustainable consumption is associated by consumers quite narrowly what may evidence the need to educate Poles in the area of environmental and social consequences of their excessive, not justified by actual needs, purchases depleting the natural environment and reducing opportunities for dignified life of next generations.

In the world of surrounding, not to say crowding us products, of newer and newer brands, models, warding off temptation to buy a definite good or service is difficult and requires adoption and implementation of a new philosophy of life, and practically alteration of the lifestyle, the style of consumption. Collaborative consumption is such an example.

COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION

Collaborative consumption is a new trend in sustainable consumption, which remains in a certain opposition to consumerism understood as the cult of possession. The source of the concept of collaborative consumption is the book titled *What’s Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption* by Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers, who define this notion as a socioeconomic idea that has a chance to revolutionise the way in which we consume [Botsman and Rogers 2010].

⁵ It was the second stage of research surveys for the earlier mentioned research project. The average respondent was a woman (51%), the person aged 18–29 (26%), with secondary education (46%), with household’s gross income of 2001–4000 PLN (34%), living in the countryside (39%), being a married person or remaining in a partner relationship (64%), the childless person (81%), retired person (23%), from Masovian Voivodeship (14%).

The idea of collaborative consumption is connected with the new lifestyle, the ability to share, borrow, lend, barter exchange, hiring among consumers, where technology and social portals play a great role, but also confidence in other people. Consumers exchange goods, provide accommodation, share skills, sometimes share real estate, exchange clothes, carry out the so-called lotting (collective renting of employee lots, joint spending time therein, barbecue) etc. One of the examples of implementation of the idea of collaborative consumption in Poland is the Service-Free City Bicycle Rental which has been operating since recently in several cities, e.g. in Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, Wrocław. It helps the cities in achieving a more ecological but also an effective system of urban transport.

Another example of the development of collaborative consumption in Poland is carpooling (carpooling.pl), i.e. provision and use of free seats in private cars. Owing to joint travel, both the driver and the passenger not only save money but also positively affect the environment.

There arises the question whether in Poland did not earlier exist examples of collaborative consumption. Naturally, they did exist though they were not called so. At the times of deficits, the exchange of many products, just to mention apparel, particularly for children, was a quite frequently met behaviour among consumers.

An equivalent of collaborative consumption is also the Time Bank [Sobczyk 2005, Dąbrowska 2013]. Most often they are informal groups whose activities are based on the free exchange of services among its members (service self-help) based on the principle: "Help me and I shall help you". Depending on the possessed skills, talents, stock of knowledge and time, the Bank's participants declare what sorts of services they may provide for other participants of that project. The persons coordinating the Time Bank's activities keep the register of individuals and direct help to those in need on a regular basis, in accordance with the reported requirement. Services exchanged at the Time Banks are such diversified as diversified are members' skills: from cakes baking, teaching foreign languages, including the sign language, playing instruments (e.g. the guitar, piano, keyboard), through credit consultancy and making online payments, assistance in writing official letters, repair of cars and other vehicles, still to face massage or the salsa dance teaching. The services are not paid with money but there is rendered another service for another member of the Bank. Most often the settlement unit is hour and not the market value of the service. The "earned" hours may be "spent" on other necessary service works.

The idea of Time Banks dates back to the 20th century. In 1980, Edgar Cahn, an American lawyer and sociologist, coined the term "Time Dollars". The concept of Time Bank was very simple. Particular individuals devote their free hours to the local community. In exchange for providing a definite service, e.g. shopping, senior care, assistance at home etc., they are gaining credits in the form of time banking for which they can "buy" services provided by other people, thus creating the community based on an equivalent exchange (the range of services depends on the skills of the individuals setting up the Time Bank). Therefore, Time Dollars serve as a local currency and they are not anyway tied up with the money in force what does not change the fact that it can be used for "payments" for the real activities executed by other members of the local community [Cahn 2003].

In Poland, this idea has found and finds newer and newer followers, contributing also to rebuilding social ties. As we have already mentioned, the more the group of users is diversified, the more attractive the offer is. In the offer of Internet Time Bank, there are most often offered foreign language learning, private lessons, walking, baby sitting, and sewing. There deserves attention the Poznan Time Bank where the offer has included original services: playing tarot, Arabic language learning and dream interpretation, whereas in the Silesian Time Banks – grand piano tuning, icon painting.

In 2012, there was established the Student Time Bank at the University of Commerce and International Finance⁶; on the portal Eurostudent we can read: “Would you like to learn Spanish but you want to assign your savings for something else? Do you like taking care of children and would you readily help anybody? Or maybe you do not have anybody to play billiards? Do you think you have been left with your problems alone? Nothing could be more wrong! The idea of the Time Bank is a remedy to all these problems”.

In one of articles [Collaborative consumption... 2011], there was asked the reasonable question if collaborative consumption appears to be a new economic model where more important than what people consume is how they consume. One may also ask the question of how a robust element of the model of sustainable consumption it will be.

In 2010, collaborative consumption was mentioned by the “Time” magazine among 10 ideas that will change the world [10 Ideas That... 2011].

Undoubtedly fatigue by consumerism, paying greater attention to the environment induces to search new phenomena with opposite features and collaborative consumption is a part of this trend. Its driving force is young generations, particularly individuals free of stereotypes and sensitive to the state of the environment and sensitive to another human being.

Does collaborative consumption have chances for development? It will perhaps depend on the very consumers, their lifestyle, the shared values, and the economic condition but also on the ability to act jointly.

Perhaps the development of collaborative consumption will be affected by sociodemographic and economic factors, e.g. the economic situation, the scale of poverty, ageing of societies or digital division. There are allegations that the growth of interest in collaborative consumption has been caused by the global crisis and its effects. Since 2007, there has been increasing criticism of overconsumption, search of new forms of meeting needs and, practically, of a new lifestyle where greater attention is paid to thriftiness and rationalism [Burgiel 2013].

Development and implementation of new ideas within sustainable consumption in a broad sense are connected with social innovations that may be described as development and implementation of new concepts (goods, services and models) to meet social needs, as creating new social relations and bonds. Their role is to raise the living standard, people’s wealth but also to promote cooperation [Guide to Social Innovation 2013].

Quite a considerable role in developing and adding dynamics to new forms of sustainable consumption, including collaborative consumption, is played by up-to-date technologies facilitating communication of members of various social groups or communities.

⁶ <http://www.wshifm.edu.pl/x.php/1,772/Studencki-Bank-Czasu.html> (accessed: 5.02.2013).

When discussing the new trends in sustainable consumption it is worthwhile to refer to the trends presented in the report named “13 for 2013”. We can find there many contrasts. The development of high technologies which, no doubt, make life easier (saving of time and money, overcoming the barriers of space), contrasts with the pursuit of slowing down, also in the sphere of consumption, of return to a simpler life. However, in all the presented trends, there takes place the discriminant relevant to collaborative consumption, Time Bank or digitisation; this is the permanent need to associate and establish interpersonal contacts.

In this article, we pay attention to the three trends distinguished in the report, namely [13 for 2013, 2012]:

1. “Co” – cooperation which is nowadays the hottest trend both in professional and private life. All words beginning with “co-” (contribution to, compatibility, collaboration, even coexistence) will raise their importance expanding, at the same time, the population of prosumers.
2. Austerity and doubled thriftiness. Consumerism will be replaced by collaborative consumption and respecting the slogan “less means more” implemented by micro-ownership. It is anticipated that consumers will pursue to reduce consumption and reuse the products in order to minimise the need to go shopping and to generate new rubbish dumps.
3. We are entering the epoch of fatigue. There is much said about the chronic fatigue syndrome. May be this is also fatigue with consumption, the pursuit of products, evaluation of the human being through the prism of possession.

PLACE OF COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION IN POLISH CONSUMERS’ BEHAVIOURS – RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the already mentioned surveys carried out in 2013, there was also the reference to the symptoms of collaborative consumption. In the omnibus survey, Poles were asked whether they were handling needless or used things to other people. Rather so there conducts every second Pole and every fifth behaves “definitely so” the least percentage of such behaviours was noted in the group of the youngest (15–24-year old) and the oldest (65 and more) Poles. Propensity for such behaviours is growing with the level of education (47% among the individuals with primary/vocational education and 57% with higher education for the answers “rather yes” and 18 and 22% for the answers “definitely yes”). In terms of the vocational situation, most often such attitudes (answers “definitely yes”) were presented by managers (34%), unemployed people (25%) and farmers (23%). It is worthwhile to emphasise the fact that more often such attitudes concerned the Poles who assessed their financial condition as favourable and they are inhabitants of big cities (more than 500 thousand inhabitants).

In turn, in the quantitative survey (the main one), carried out among 1000 adult Poles (18–74 years of age), considered as the minimally competent, the respondents were asked, first, whether they would be interested in collaborative consumption and whether they had heard of the Time Bank.

In case of collaborative consumption, there were more opponents than the individuals interested in this idea (Fig. 1).

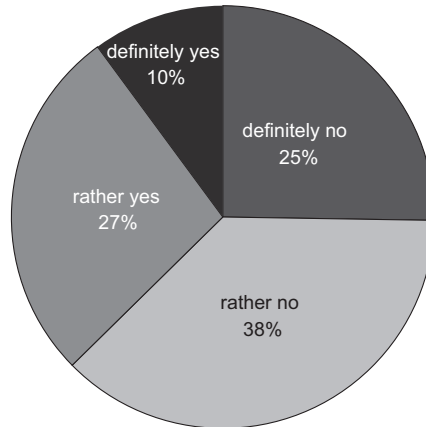


Fig. 1. Respondents' attitude to collaborative consumption (percentage of answers)

Source: Own research, IBRKK [2013].

The definite adherents of collaborative consumption are most often men (statistically significant dependence), individuals aged 18–29, with at least secondary education, assessing their financial situation as average, inhabitants of cities with 100 thousand and more inhabitants (statistically significant dependence), childless ones, top managerial staff, persons not deciding on household budget management, positively evaluating their knowledge as regards sustainable consumption.

On the other hand, definite opponents of collaborative consumption are mainly men, individuals aged 60 and elder (statistically significant dependence), people with primary/vocational education (statistically significant dependence), negatively evaluating their financial condition, individuals living in cities below 100 thousand inhabitants (statistically significant dependence), childless, old age pensioners (statistically significant dependence), individuals not deciding on household budget management, negatively assessing their knowledge as regards sustainable consumption.

Of the Time Bank there had heard and declared awareness of this term merely 3% of the respondents and 9% had heard but they did not remember details. Others (89%) had not heard of such initiative.

Those who had heard but did not remember details were people aged 30–39, with higher education, individuals negatively evaluating their financial condition, residents of cities with 100 thousand and more inhabitants, having children, top managers, and farmers, individuals deciding on household budget management.

CONCLUSIONS

The idea of sustainable consumption and collaborative consumption included into its designate are a response to the negative for the natural environments effects of consumerism, though they are also treated as a reaction to the global economic crisis. The symptoms of these new trends in consumption among Polish consumers can be seen in

a minor scale and their intensity is differentiated by not only the basic sociodemographic variables but also by the variables connoted by the lifestyle. The findings of the surveys carried out indicate that Poles declare to a low degree awareness of the idea of sustainable consumption; however, they are familiar with the exchange of goods and services with other people what can be facilitated by the experience of market shortages of the 1980s. One may suppose that the behaviours relevant to collaborative consumption will manifest themselves to a larger and larger extent, what will be facilitated by digitisation and development of up-to-date technologies of social communication.

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KONSUMPCJA WSPÓLNA JAKO NOWY TREND ZRÓWNOWAŻONEJ KONSUMPCJI

Streszczenie. W artykule przedstawiono istotę konsumpcji zrównoważonej i poziom jej uświadomienia wśród polskich konsumentów. Szczególną uwagę zwrócono na konsumpcję wspólną (collaborative consumption), jako jeden z możliwych sposobów realizacji idei zrównoważonej konsumpcji. Podjęto próbę charakterystyki konsumpcji kolaboratywnej i jej przejawów w zachowaniach Polaków. Zwrócono uwagę na wybrane aspekty zachowań konsumentów, które mogą być traktowane jako desygnaty tego trendu, wskazując jednocześnie na możliwe upowszechnianie się tych zachowań. Na podstawie analizy przeprowadzonych badań określono profil społeczno-demograficzny konsumentów będących zarówno zwolennikami, jak i przeciwnikami konsumpcji wspólnej, wskazując, że o przynależności do tych kategorii decydują podstawowe zmienne socjodemograficzne oraz znajomość idei wspólnej konsumpcji.

Słowa kluczowe: konsumpcja wspólna, zrównoważona konsumpcja, zachowanie konsumenta

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