



Youth, sustainable consumption patterns and life styles

MANAGEMENT
OF SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATIONS



United Nations
Educational,
Scientific and Cultural
Organization



UNEP
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Environment
Programme

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Introduction

This report reflects the results of the UNESCO/UNEP project on Youth, Sustainable Consumption and Life Styles, which was launched in March 2000. The project was framed around a survey on the consumption patterns of young people in 24 countries and six country 24 countries, and six country case studies. The results of the survey and the case studies were presented and discussed in a workshop held at UNESCO, Paris on 6-7 November 2000.

The objective of the workshop was to discuss the development of a strategy for UNEP and UNESCO to promote sustainable consumption patterns among youth. The workshop gathered over 50 experts, social actors, youth leadership, researchers, and business representatives. The underlying belief was that youth deserve special attention when considering consumption patterns. Young people are an important target group on the demand-side in this consumer society and play a determinant role in future consumption patterns. Yet, they should not be regarded as merely 'victims' of a contemporary consumer culture. Young people are often very concerned about the future of the earth they will inherit, and their voice should be heard. Moreover, some groups of young people are proposing alternatives to the "consume more" trend. They could be the messengers of a new approach that could involve both their peers, and adults.

This report attempts to understand some preliminary youth attitudes towards consumption, and evaluates the potential role of young people in a transition towards sustainable consumption lifestyles. In particular, it looks at:

- The driving forces of youth consumption and especially the influence of media and globalisation in shaping their aspirations and values;
- Youth perception of sustainable consumption and their role;
- Approaches to consumption issues in different cultural areas.

Ideas are drawn from the research papers with a view to designing policy recommendations for UNEP's and UNESCO's future actions to promote sustainable consumption among youth.

Is the future yours?

1

*Anders Nyberg
and Eivind Stø¹*

This chapter will provide a preliminary insight into the attitudes and interests of middle class urban youth towards adopting more environmentally and ethically sound consumption practices. It is based upon the results of a survey: “UNEP/UNESCO Survey on Youth and Consumption: Is the future yours?”. It must be emphasised that the survey did by no means intend to cover scientifically and exhaustively all issues related to youth consumption patterns and their relationship to sustainability. Its goal was to draw an initial mapping of the attitudes, behaviours, and expectations for the future of youth and their sense of power to change lifestyles and promote sustainable consumption.

The survey also intended to open a dialogue between UNEP/UNESCO and future decision-makers and was designed to have a strong awareness-raising component. The distribution of the questionnaires and the collection of the answers were managed by UNEP in cooperation with a large number of young people and consumer associations. The large majority of these organisations did the work on a voluntary basis, or with very little financial reward. This survey should therefore be seen as the collective effort of a large number of extremely motivated and devoted people, who believe in promoting more environmentally friendly and ethically sound consumption practices as one of the ways to reach sustainable development.

The large amount of data collected offers a unique opportunity to make some first hypotheses concerning the relationship young adults have with their own consumption practices, and on their expectations for the future.

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- the organisation of consumer interests
- consumer dissatisfaction and complaint behaviour
- sustainable consumption.

Anders Nyberg holds a masters (cand. polit.) degree in sociology (1997), with particular focus on environmental and consumption sociology. Since joining SIFO as research assistant in 1997, Nyberg has worked with:

- consumer attitudes towards ecological food
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- consumer's trust in food.

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The main conclusions to be drawn from the responses are:

- Respondents recognise an environmental and social impact of their use and disposal of goods but not of their shopping behaviour;
- Respondents seem to prefer unorganised forms of everyday action rather than organised mobilisation as a strategy to improve the world;
- Respondents share many of the same values, however the social implications of production and consumption seem more important in Africa, Asia and Latin America than in the other regions of the world.

With these and the other conclusions from the survey in mind, this report tries to answer the following questions:

- To what degree do young consumers recognise the relation between their own consumption, on one side, and the environment, human rights and other social issues on the other?
- Who do young consumers see as mainly responsible for a sustainable development? Do they feel that they have any real power to improve the world and their own future?
- Is it possible to identify a common global consumer culture among youth?
- What are the main differences between cultures, continents and countries?
- What can be done by international organisations, governments and NGOs to promote the adoption of more environmentally and ethically sound consumption habits among youth?

Methodology

A questionnaire and a brochure were distributed to about 10,000 youth in 24 countries. The brochure provided general information on the concept of sustainable consumption and some tips to translate it into day-to-day actions. The questionnaires were collected between July and September 2000. Over 8,000 answers were received, but unfortunately, not all of them arrived on time to be analysed, so the present report is based on 5,322 answers from 24 countries: an average of 250 answers per country.

Data was also collected from young environmentalists, in order to understand what young “activists” think of the complex issues linked to sustainability. Members of youth environmental organisations are likely to drive the debate on sustainable consumption in the future,

so it is important for UNEP/UNESCO to understand what values lie behind their actions. Do they have a clear and balanced vision of sustainable consumption? Do they link the need for environmental protection to economic and labour conditions? What kind of actions do they intend to focus on in the future?

Unfortunately, the response rate from this category was surprisingly low. Out of 24 countries, only nine could provide answers from Youth organisations. In most cases, these answers were delayed and could not be analysed. In other cases, the project correspondents preferred to collect answers from the young public knowing that they would not get enough responses from environmental or ethical NGOs. The fact that young people involved in organisations promoting environmental and social activities hardly responded might be interpreted as a result in itself, however negative. It can be read as a confirmation of one of the major findings of the present report: on issues like sustainability and sustainable consumption, youth prefer individual actions to collective initiatives undertaken by NGOs.

The questionnaire consists of 13 questions covering personal interests, consumption habits, visions for the future and sense of empowerment. Questions aimed to:

- Ascertain youth interests and leisure activities;
- Understand youth attitudes towards sustainable consumption and how they relate this to their daily actions;
- Analyse youth awareness of their power as consumers and opinion makers: how they perceive their role in the market;
- Understand youth perceptions of themselves as citizens and the role they believe they will play in shaping the future;
- Draw recommendations for future actions for the project partners (UNESCO, UNEP, national authorities, NGOs).

The choice of the target group

Despite the huge divide in the level and quality of consumption between developed and developing countries, middle class consumption in the world is rather homogeneous. The difference is the number of people who belong to this middle class: they constitute the vast majority of the population in industrialised countries and a minority in developing countries.

Middle class youth have access to instruction, information, television, and the Internet. They have the power to shape ideas, trends, cultures

and thus consumption patterns and aspirations. UNEP/UNESCO believe that these young people can be a key ally in creating a significant shift towards sustainable consumption.

This does not mean that other categories of young consumers (the poorest) will not be included in future, more in-depth research and action on youth and sustainable consumption.

CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLE: IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES

Environmental and societal challenges for the future

Respondents were asked to give their personal view on what they regarded as the biggest challenge for the future. They were asked questions concerning *human rights, child labour, population increases, climate change, unemployment, pollution (air, water, soil), differences between rich and poor and health.*

The possible answers to these questions were: *crucial, important, one of many, a little and not important.* The perceptions of the importance of these dimensions turned out to be significantly different in the countries analysed. Moreover, it is worth noting that none of them is judged to be of no importance for the future. Below we will highlight some of the most interesting results.

According to the young public, the most important challenges for the future seem to be reducing pollution, improving people's health and improving the respect for human rights.

The concern about pollution has an overall high level in all continents: an average of 84% answered "crucial" or "important" on the option "reducing pollution in air, water and soil". The corresponding number for "health and human rights" was 75%. Moreover, the concern for health and human rights seems to be most urgent for youth in Latin America and Africa.

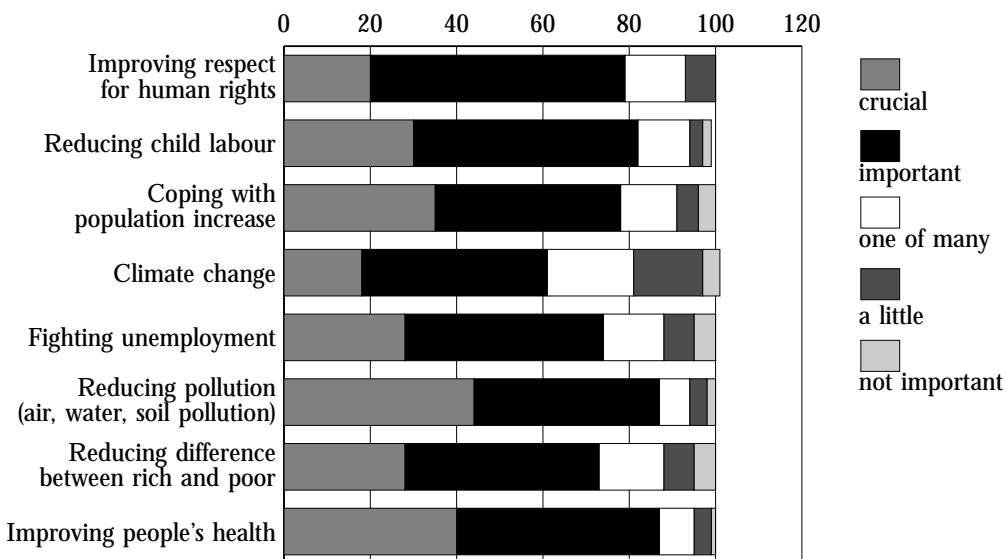
About two thirds of the respondents judged child labour, population increase, climate change, fighting unemployment and reducing the differences between rich and poor to be crucial or important.

- Reducing child labour is more important for the young public in Argentina, Mexico, France, Italy and Canada, followed by China, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Eastern Europe.
- Coping with population increases is regarded as a major challenge for the future not only in China, India, the Philippines and Mexico, but also in Canada, the USA and Australia.
- Climate change ranks as crucial or important to the young public in Argentina, Mexico and the Russian Federation.
- Fighting unemployment is most important for young respondents in Africa and Latin America.
- Reducing the differences between rich and poor is a matter of importance for young people in Africa and Latin America, but also in Canada, France, China and the Republic of Korea. This is not so important, however, for the young public in Eastern Europe.

To illustrate the general trends in the survey, we have chosen the Philippines and Senegal as examples:

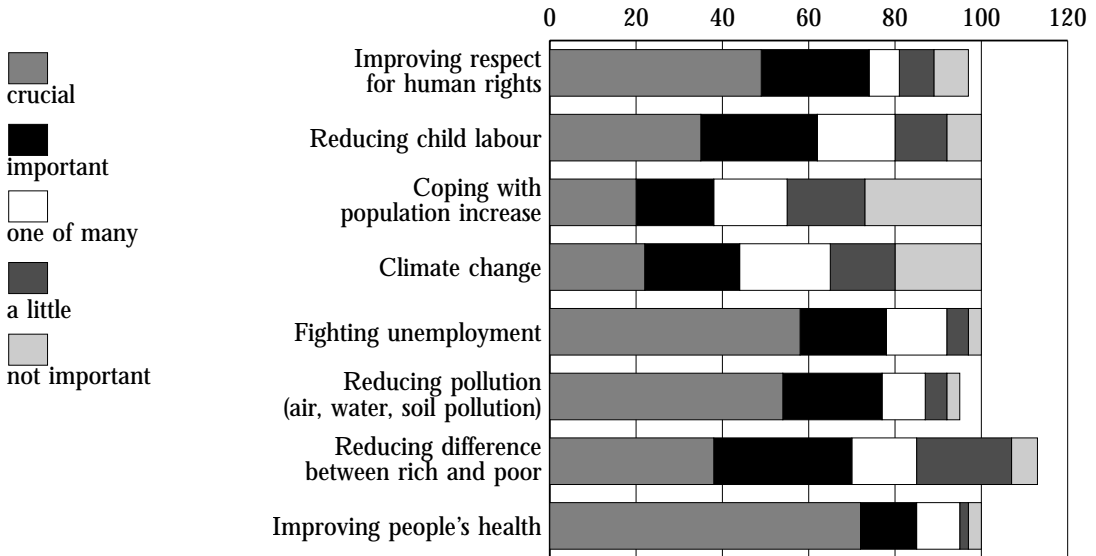
The Philippines:

For me, the biggest challenge for the world in the next years will be...%



Senegal:

For me, the biggest challenge for the world in the next years will be...%



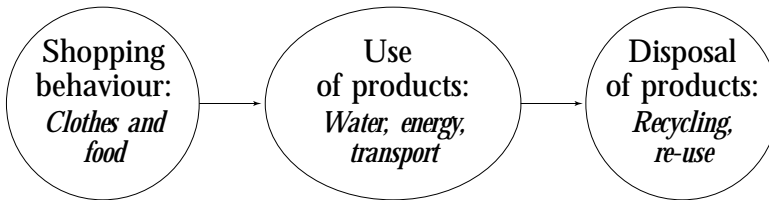
The impact of consumption on society, the economy and the environment

Our everyday actions have an impact on the world in which we live, and in turn, this environment has an influence on our life. The questionnaires tried to understand whether youth relate their everyday actions to what happens around them. Being aware of, and using their power as consumers is a very important step in becoming more conscious citizens.

The respondents were requested to consider the impact of some of their actions – travel, shopping [clothes and food], waste disposal, energy and water use, leisure and work – on the economy, society and the environment.

The analysis focuses on the environmental impact of these actions, regarding them as a consumption process, consisting of:

- Buying
- Use of products
- Disposal



Young consumers show an understanding of the environmental impact of the last two phases. They do not however, acknowledge the environmental impact of their buying.

When asked questions regarding the environmental impact of consumption², respondents consider travel patterns, waste disposal, use of energy, and use of water to have a much greater impact on the environment than the purchase of clothes and food. Only 11% and 7% respectively see their purchase of food and clothing as having an impact on the environment. In contrast, a country average of 52% are of the opinion that the way in which they dispose of their waste affects the environment, 42% believe that the way they travel has an impact on the environment, 41% think that their use of water affects the environment, and 29% believe that their energy use (gas and electricity) has consequences for the environment.

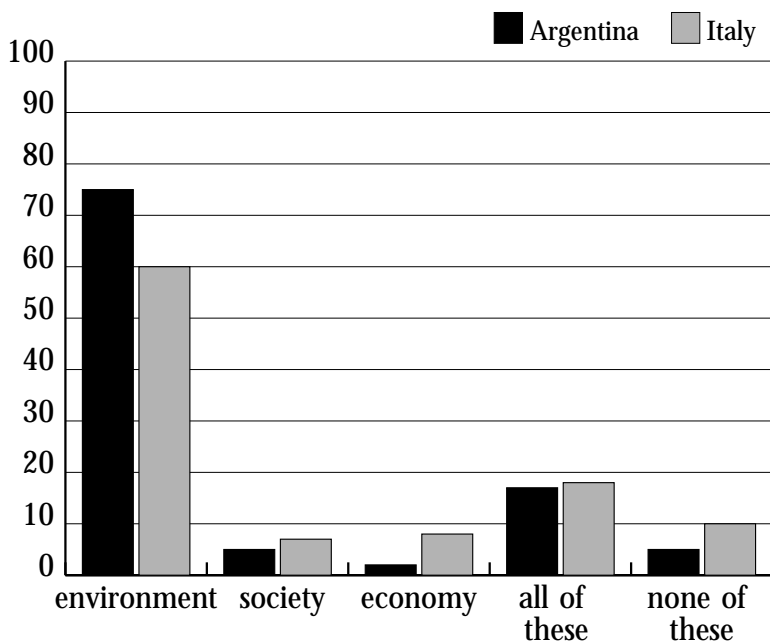
As illustrations for these trends, we have chosen to focus on Argentina and Italy.

(See graphs next pages).

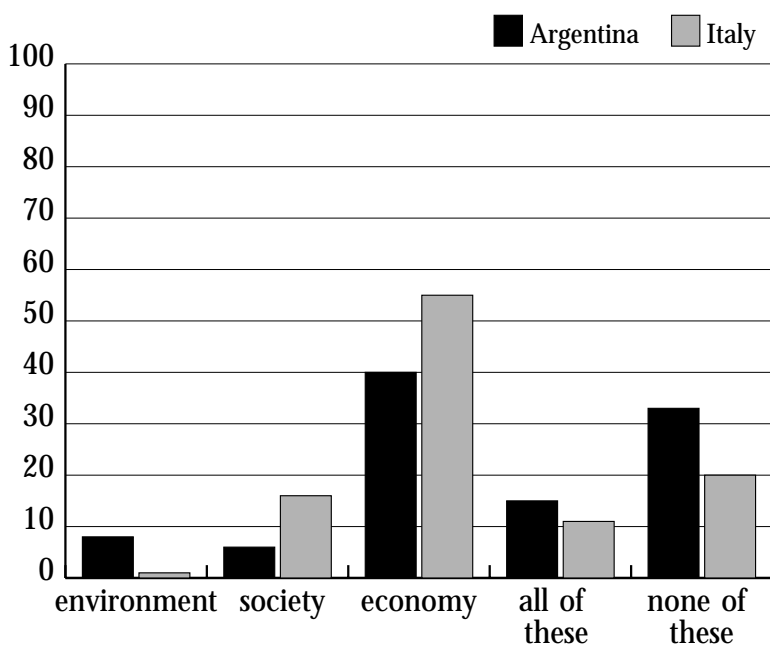
² We must make some reservations regarding the accuracy of these results. The respondents were asked to report whether or not they believed that particular activities had an impact on the following areas: environment (pollution, noise, quality of water), society (employment, work conditions, child labour), and economy (what companies produce and how, economic growth). There was also a category for 'all of these' and 'none of these'. Ideally, those who responded 'all of these' should be added to those who responded 'environment' but for the sake of simplicity we are here referring exclusively to those who mentioned the environmental consequences.

What is my impact? Our actions may have an impact on the world in which we live. Would you associate the elements on the graph with the following actions? (per cent)

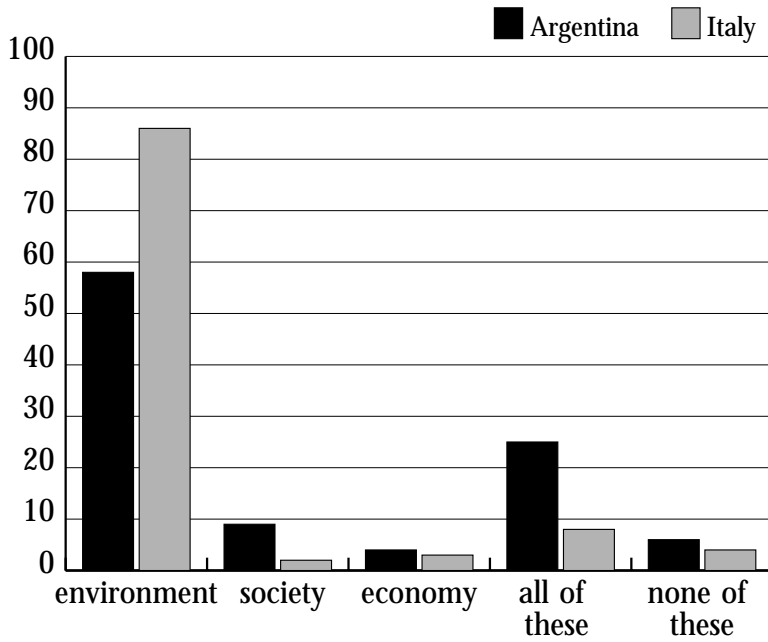
The way I travel (in or out of town) affects...%



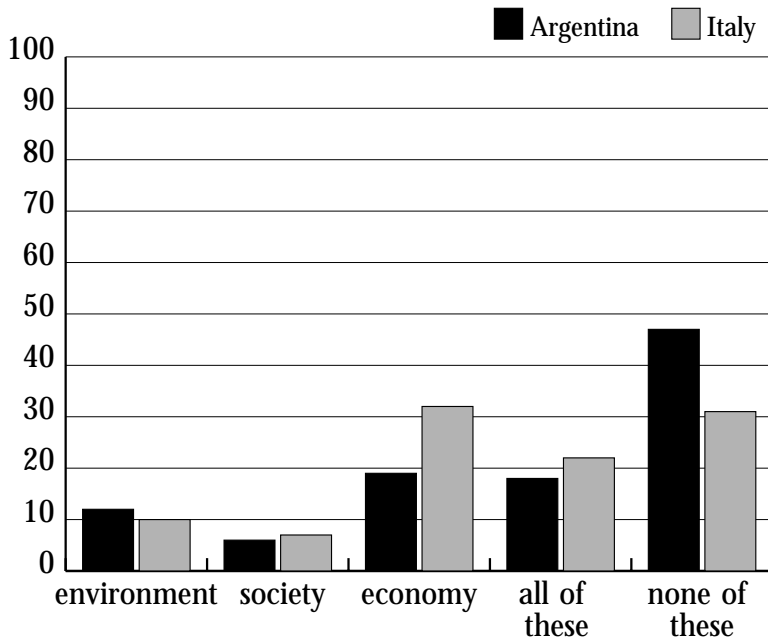
The clothes I buy affect...%



The way I dispose of my waste affects...%



The food I buy affects...%



The relationship between price, quality and the environment

It is clear that respondents recognise certain connections between their consumption and the environment. However, when making purchasing decisions consumers are faced with many considerations in addition to environmental aspects, such as the price and quality of the commodities, and peer pressure (to be trendy etc.).

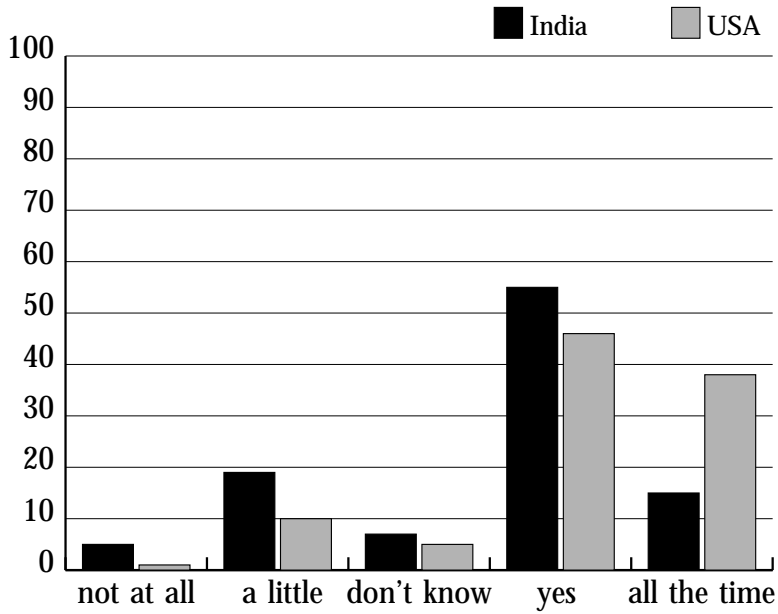
In order to get a picture of the driving forces behind the young consumers purchasing decisions they were asked to what extent they base their decisions on price, quality, fashion, or eco-friendliness.

The survey revealed that the young public focus more on the price and quality of products, and less on considerations of eco-friendliness or fashion. On average, 78% claim to base their purchasing decisions on quality considerations, 71% on price, 40% on eco-friendliness, and 48% on fashion.

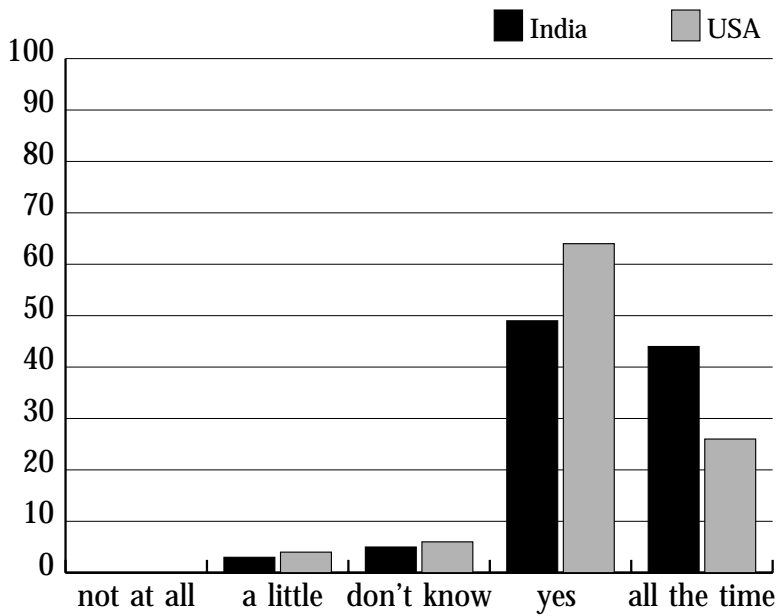
- The propensity to take the eco-friendliness of the product into consideration when buying things is most pronounced in Cameroon where 64% answered “all the time”, Kenya, 40%. The concern for the environment during purchasing decisions is least pronounced in the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and in the Western European countries, France, Italy, and Norway. In these countries, less than 20% of respondents claim to make environmental considerations when they buy things.
- In most countries price is an important factor. The most price-conscious consumers are found in Africa, while in some countries (Senegal, Mexico and Canada) less than 50% of the respondents answered “yes” or “all the time” to this question.
- The quality-oriented consumers are more or less found in all countries, except in Latin America. In Mexico, Argentina and Peru, less than 40% buy products based on their quality.
- The share claiming to be trend-oriented appears to be smallest in Australia, Japan, Canada, North America and Western Europe.

As illustrations for these trends, we have chosen to focus on the USA and India.

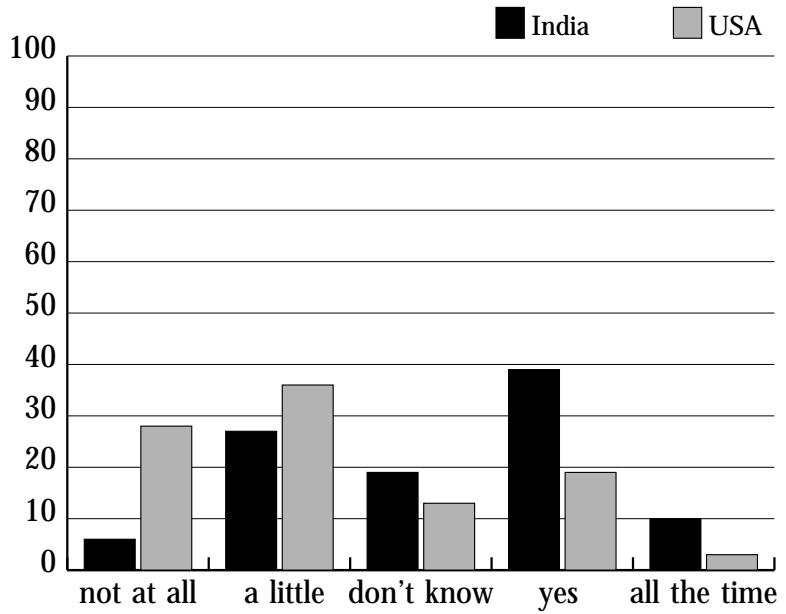
In general, when I buy I make my decision based on price (%)



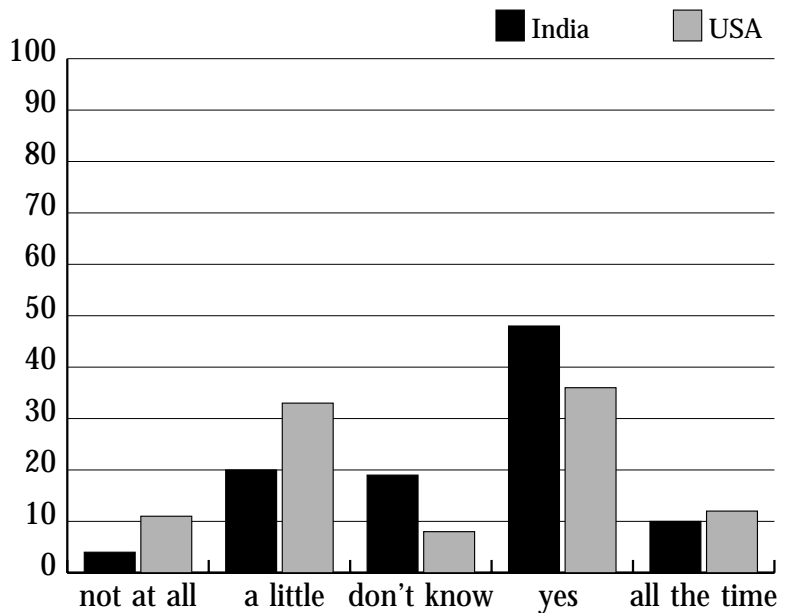
In general, when I buy I make my decision based on quality (%)



In general, when I buy I make my decision based on what's trendier (%)



In general, when I buy I make my decision based on the eco-friendliness of the product (%)



Youth's reflections on their own consumption

In order to ascertain the young public's views about their own consumption and consumption in general, respondents were asked to report their degree of consent to the following five statements. We focus particularly on the last issue.

- *It is important for me to have a lifestyle compatible with that of my friends*
- *People of my age are consuming too much (me included!)*
- *It is the first time I had to think about my own consumption*
- *Consuming efficiently is part of my values*
- *Having more would still make me happier*

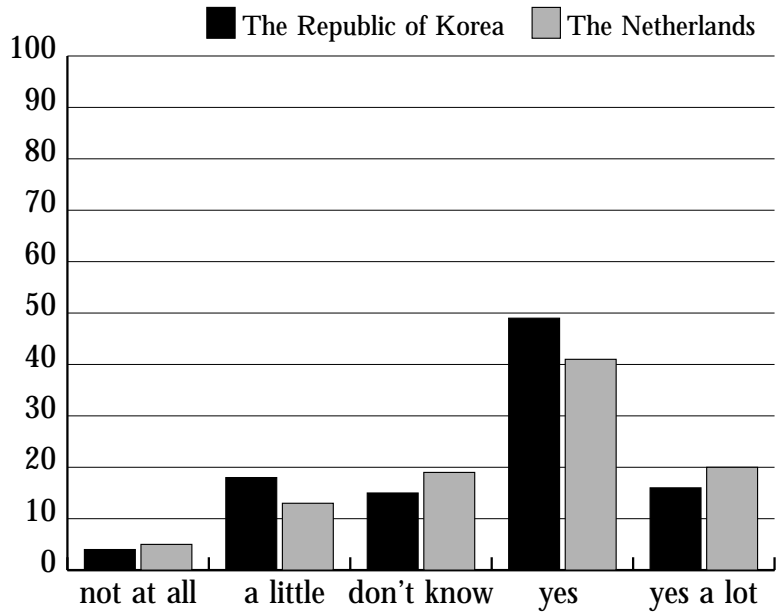
A country average of 45%³ agreed with the statement that it is important to have a lifestyle compatible with that of their friends. Furthermore, 60% consented to the statement that people of their own age are consuming too much (themselves included), while 44% agreed that having more would still make them happier. On average 37% were of the opinion that participation in this survey occasioned the first time they had to think about their consumption.

³ We refer here to the categories "yes, a lot" and "yes".

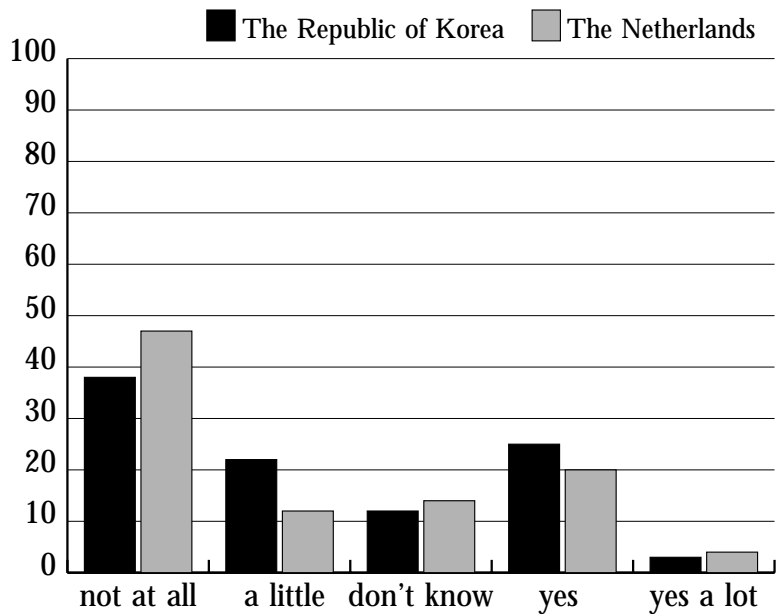
- African (except Ugandan) and Chinese youth turned out to be the most concerned with having a lifestyle compatible with that of their friends.
- African youth (except Ugandan) were also most likely to agree with the statement that they are consuming too much. Eastern European youth to a lesser extent consented to this statement.
- In the African countries a large percentage answered that it was the first time they had to think about their consumption, while the topic seems to be more common among youth in North America, Australia and Western Europe, except for Italy.
- Having more would nevertheless make many of these young people happier. This is the case for the African countries, many of the Asian countries (except Japan), and Bulgaria. On the other hand, less than 25% agreed with this statement ("yes" or "yes, a lot") in Argentina, Canada, Japan, Australia, Poland and Norway.

To illustrate this section we have chosen the question "People of my age are consuming too much", and "It is the first time I had to think about my consumption". The countries selected to illustrate the answers are the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea.

People of my age are consuming too much – me included! (%)



It is the first time I had to think about my consumption (%)



RESPONSIBILITY & INFLUENCE: FEELING OF EMPOWERMENT

This part focuses on the feeling of empowerment of young people. Who do they see as responsible for a sustainable future, and what do they feel they can do to improve the world?

Attribution of responsibility

Responsibility for the environment rests on actors at many different levels. Industrial actors have a responsibility for the products they make; national governments are responsible for legal frameworks and economic taxation, while supranational organisations may serve to co-ordinate the efforts among countries. The role of the individual is to exert his/her power of action and freedom of expression and choice both at a political level and on the market with his/her purchase decisions.

We asked the young public “Who should do something to improve the world”, and the alternatives were: *international organisations, governments, industry, citizens, young people, and myself*. We wanted to know if these institutions and stakeholders were: *mainly responsible, important actors, slightly responsible or not responsible*.

On average, 46% see citizens as mainly responsible when it comes to improving the world. The corresponding percentages for governments and international organisations such as the United Nations are 44% and 40%. Furthermore, on average 38% see young people as mainly responsible, while 36% see themselves as mainly responsible. On average, only 32% hold industry as mainly responsible for the state of the world.

The main conclusion is that young consumers see the responsibility as shared between institutions and stakeholders. This becomes even clearer if we add the category “important actor”. 84% of respondents perceived (national) governments as either mainly responsible or important actors, while corresponding percentages were 82% for citizens, 80% for international organisations such as the United Nations, 78% for industry, 77% for young people, and 72% for “myself”.

There are considerable differences between the countries and their respective views on who is the most important actor for improving the state of the world:

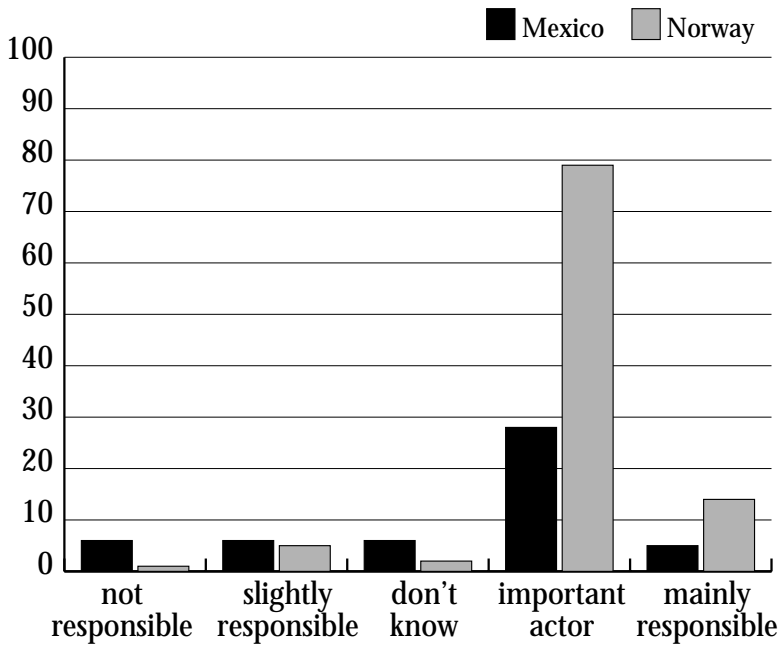
- International organisations are seen as mainly responsible actors in Cameroon, Kenya and Argentina, although differences between the 24 countries more or less disappear when we add the category “important actors”.
- With the exception of Cameroon and Canada, governments are seen as mainly responsible or important actors in all countries.
- Industry is seen as mainly responsible for improving the world in the American continent, Australia, France, the Philippines and Thailand, but less in Eastern Europe.
- Citizens, young people and “myself” are seen as important actors in most countries, but rank consistently lower in the Eastern European countries, Cameroon and Norway.

To illustrate the findings in this chapter we will present the results from two countries with different profiles: Mexico and Norway.

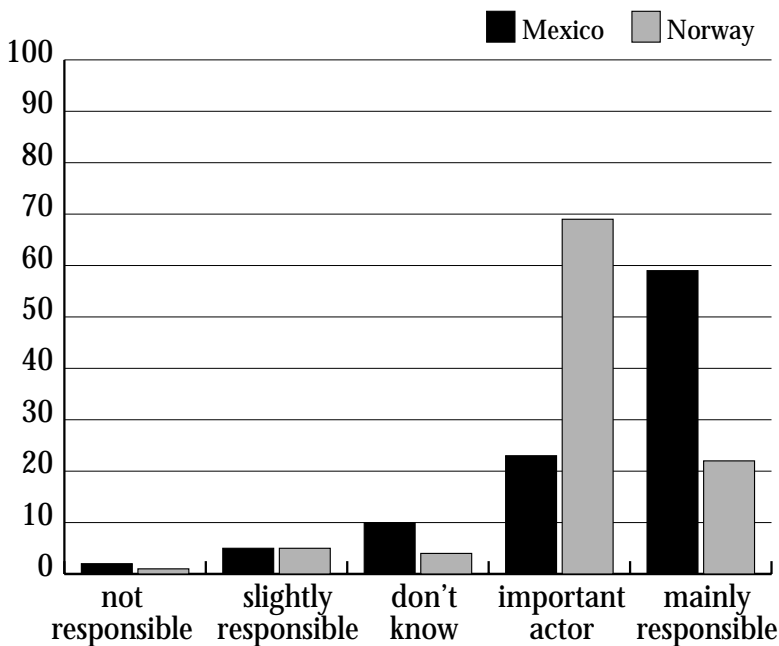
The differences between Norway and Mexico are not so great when considering the responsibility of the United Nations, Governments and Industry. Nevertheless, when we turn to citizens, young people and “myself”, we see significant differences. While more than 20% of the Norwegians see young people and themselves as “slightly responsible”, the corresponding share in Mexico is 2%.

Who should do something to improve the world? (%)

International organisations such as the United Nations

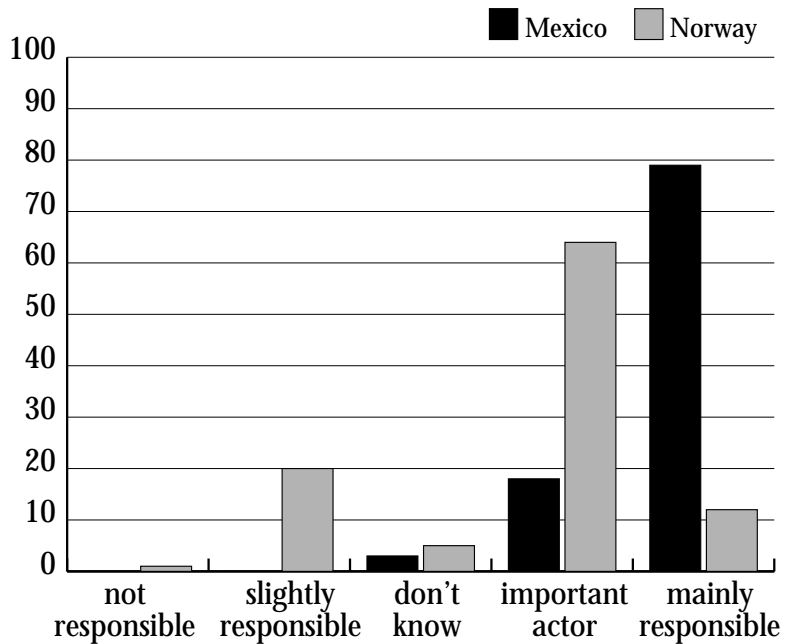


Government



Who should do something to improve the world? (%)

Young people



Empowerment of young consumers

As we have seen, environmental problems can be approached at many different levels, and respondents' opinions of where the responsibility lies varies. Here we will take a closer look at how young people feel they can contribute to improve the world.

Efforts for a better future can encompass diverse actions such as everyday consumption choices or active participation in environmental or ethical organisations. Respondents were asked to choose whether they would rather: *support an environmental or an ethical NGO, be involved in information campaigns, be informed and inform friends and family, or look closer at how we live and where our things come from.*

The general impression is that the young public seem to prefer unorganised forms of everyday action rather than organised mobilisation as a strategy to improve the world.

On average, 72% saw the strategy to look closer at how we live and where our things come from as "very important or effective".

Furthermore, 70% regarded it as very important or effective to be informed and inform friends and family, as well as participating in information campaigns. On average, 61% considered support for environmental/ethical NGOs to be very important or effective.

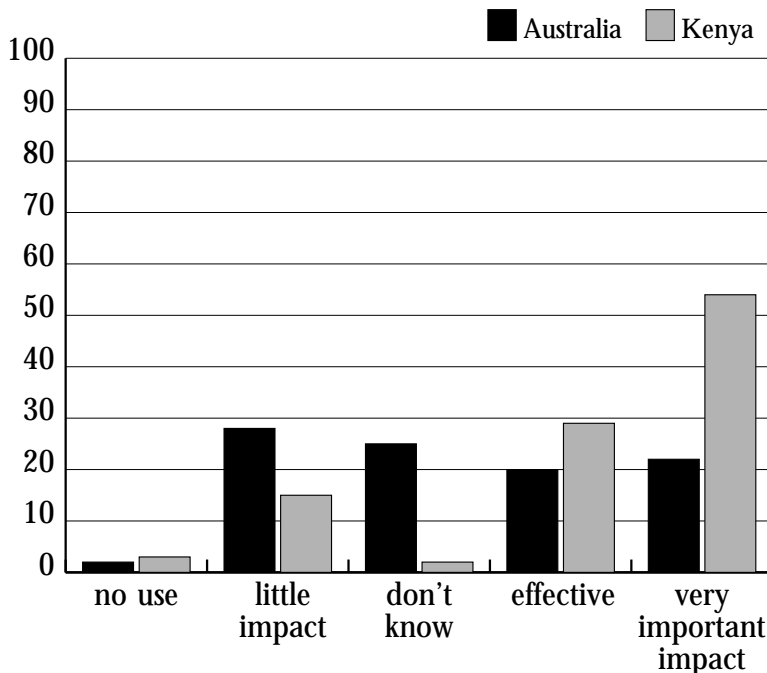
There are considerable variations among the countries regarding this issue:

- Generally, youth in Africa and Latin America seem more supportive towards NGOs
- Youth in Latin America are the strongest supporters of information campaigns
- Consent to the statement “look closer at how we live and where our things come from” was strongest in Australia, India and Mexico

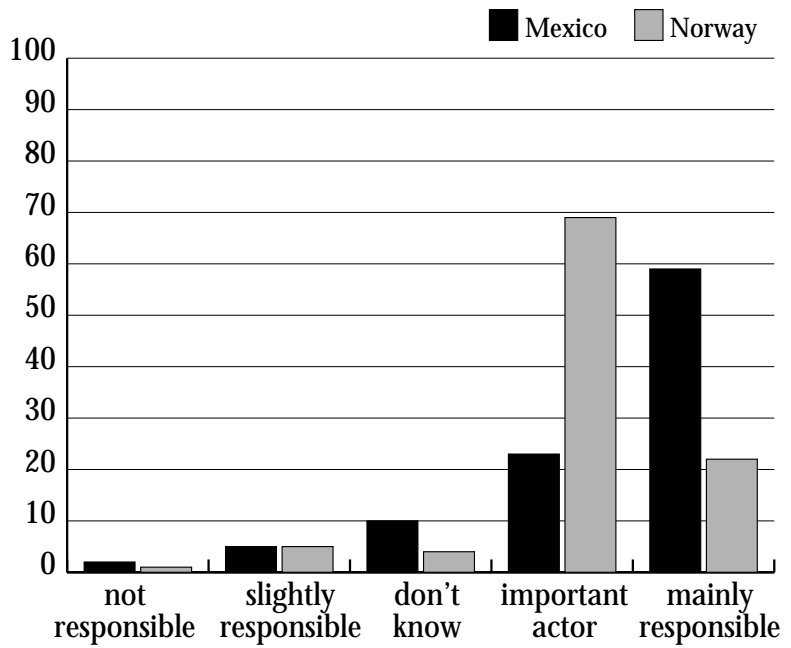
We will illustrate these findings by comparing the data from two selected countries, Australia and Kenya. While youth in Kenya tend to express strong support towards collective solutions, young consumers in Australia are more individualistic in their solutions.

Here are some of the most common options for youth’s action to improve the world. Which approach would you suggest? (%)

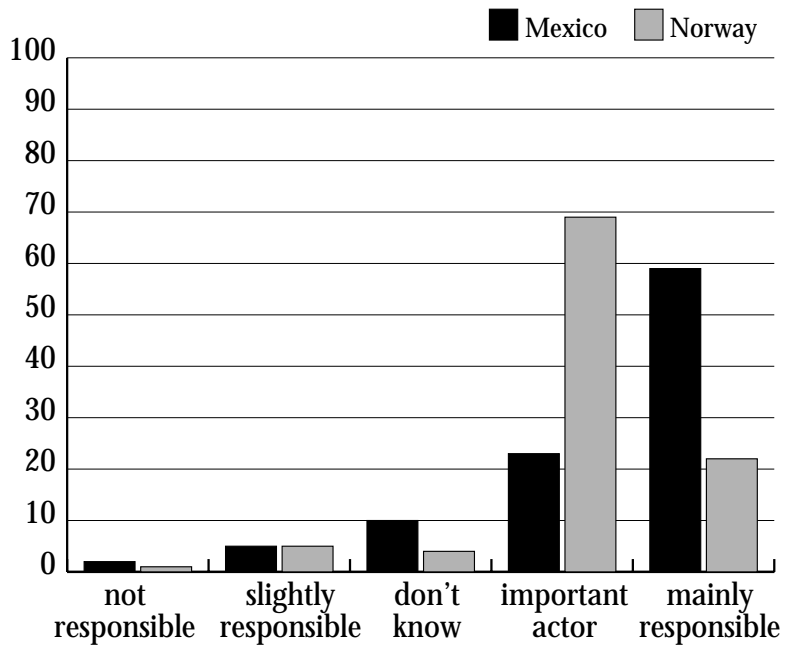
Support an environmental or an ethical NGO



Be involved in information campaigns (for instance on water or energy consumption)



Look closer at how we live and where our things come from



Perceptions of influence on local, national and international levels

So far, we have seen that youth recognise the relationship between their consumption and the environment to varying degrees, and we have also seen variations in their views on solutions to improve the world. However, their views on the latter depend on their sense of power to influence.

We asked the young consumers if their actions for a better world would affect what happens in: *“the world”*, *“my town”* and *“my own life”*.

Respondents see a larger potential for local rather than global impacts of their actions.

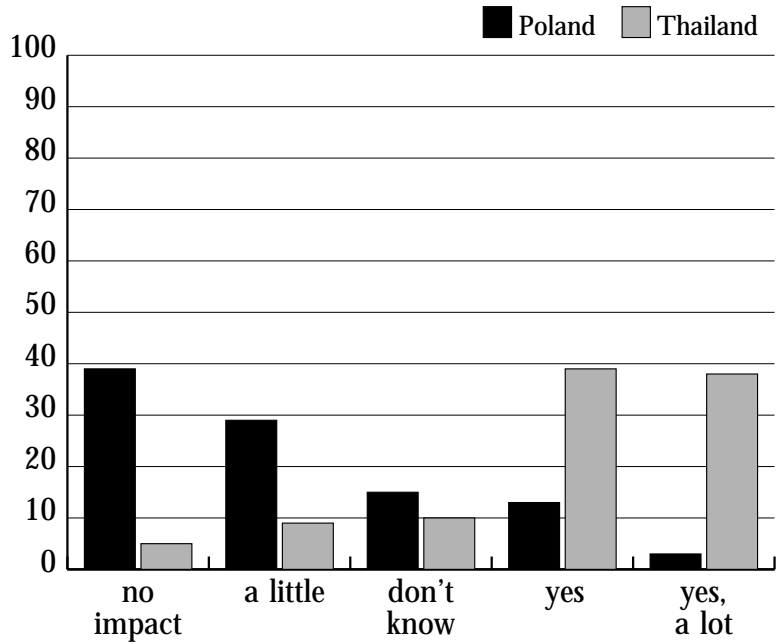
When it comes to anticipation of the impact of their own actions, on average 45% believe that their actions have an impact on what happens in the world, while 59% believe that their actions have an impact on what happens in their town. There are, however, significant differences among the countries:

- The most optimistic about the impact of their own actions are found in the Philippines, Thailand, and Uganda. In these countries approximately 75% of respondents answered “yes” or “yes a lot” to the question whether they believe their actions for a better world would have any impact.
- Conversely, we find the least confident respondents in the Russian Federation, Poland, Bulgaria, Italy, Norway, and Japan. In these countries, less than 25% of the respondents see any potential for personal influence on the state of the world. Moreover, less than 10% of the Russian respondents believe that their actions have any consequences for the state of the world.
- With some exceptions, youth in Africa, Latin America, and Asia turn out to be the most optimistic regarding their prospects for influencing what happens in their own town.

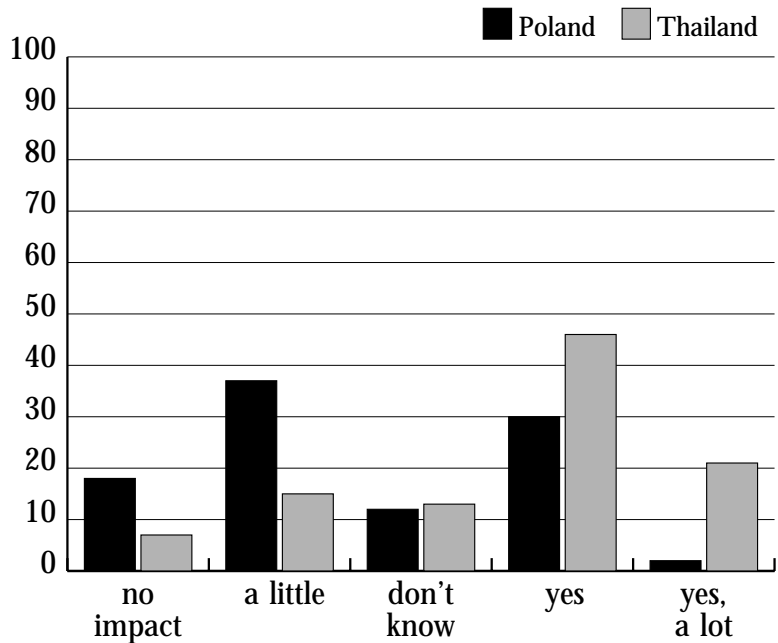
To illustrate the variances in the material, we have chosen Thailand and Poland. In Thailand the young public tends to be much more optimistic about their prospects for changing the world and their own town than in Poland.

My actions for a better world would impact... (%)

What happens in the world

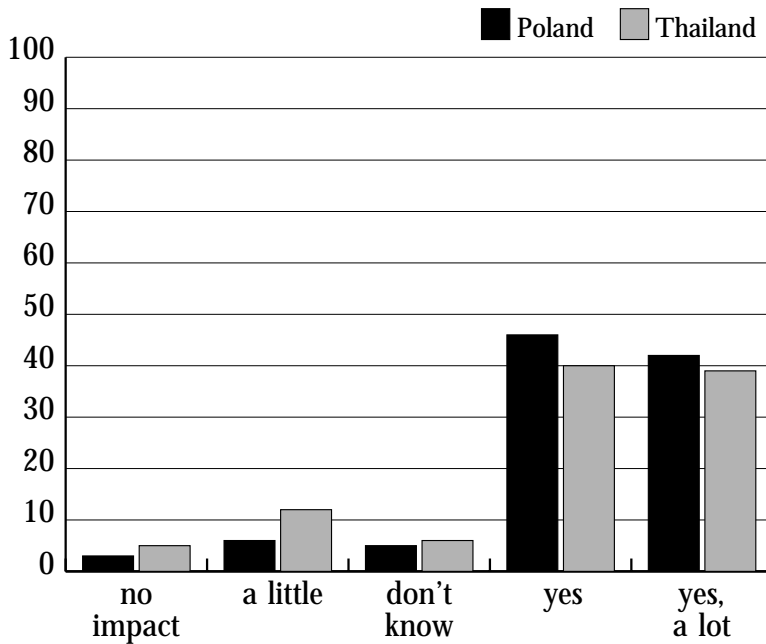


What happens in my town



My actions for a better world would impact... (%)

What happens in my own life



Differences related to gender, age and education

So far, we have focused on differences between countries. In this section, we will compare different demographic segments: gender, age and education. The choice of these variables is based on the belief that they are likely to influence people's views on the matters treated in this survey.

As mentioned above, we only have individual data from some of the countries. The following analysis is based on the total sample of 2561 respondents, covering: Cameroon (155), Italy (300), Kenya (237), the Republic of Korea (199), Malaysia (285), The Netherlands (127), Norway (253), Peru (58), the Russian Federation (250), Senegal (251) and the USA (446).⁴

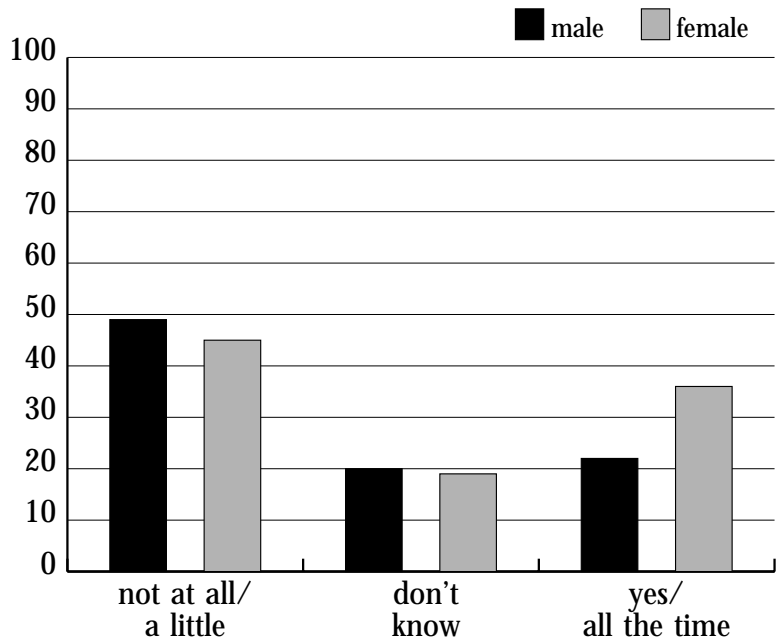
⁴ The data are not weighted. This means that the results probably would have been different if we had weighted according to the size of the countries, age, gender and education. The decision not to weight the data is based on the lack of representativity of the samples.

■ Gender

Young women report making their purchasing decisions based on considerations of the eco-friendliness of the product to a larger extent than young men. In general, young women seem to be more conscious of the relationship between consumption and environment and more inclined to undertake active efforts to improve the state of the environment. Furthermore, young women appear to be generally less materialistic than young men. For instance they appear to be more convinced that people of their own age are consuming too much, and are less certain that having more would make them happier.

In general, when I buy I make my decision based on... (%)

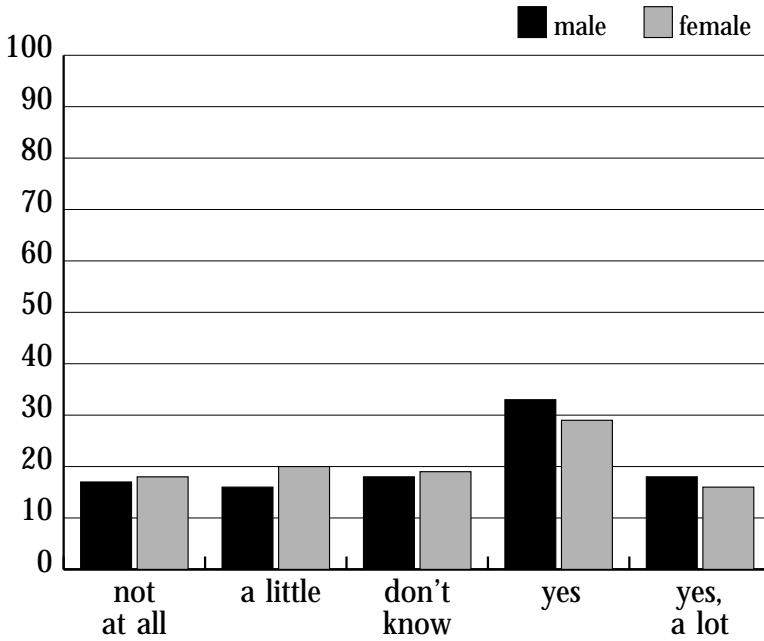
The eco-friendliness of the product



$P < 0.05$ (Pearson chi-square test)(N=2494)

Consumption and me (%)

Having more would still make me happier



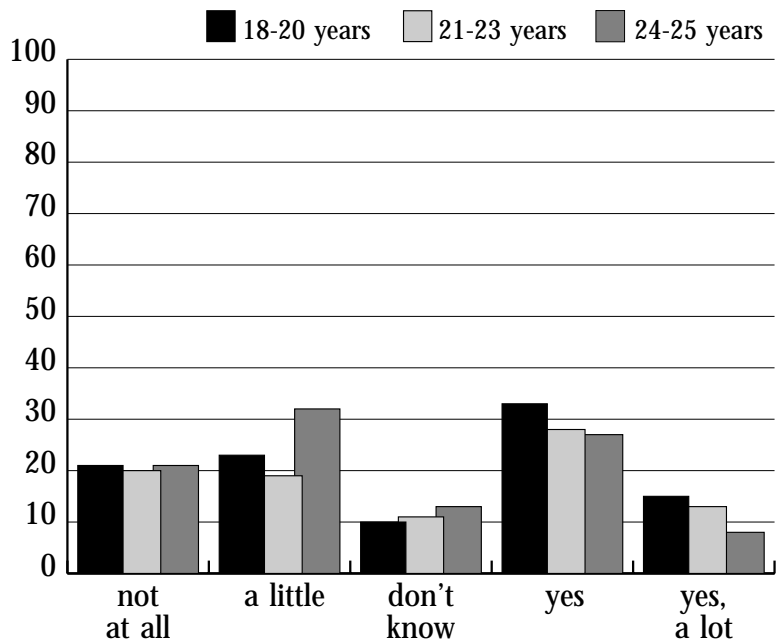
$P < 0.05$ (Pearson chi-square test)($N=2461$)

■ Age

The survey covered three age segments: 18-20, 21-23, and 24-25. Having a lifestyle compatible with that of one's friends seems to be more important to the younger segments. They also appear to be more materialistically oriented, in the sense that having more would make them happier. These answers reflect the fact that peer pressure tends to be strongest among teenagers. In addition, their materialism might reflect that, to a large degree, their identity is constructed with the help of material commodities. The younger consumers to a lesser degree report to have been reflecting on their consumption.

Consumption and me (%)

It is important for me to have a lifestyle compatible with that of my friends



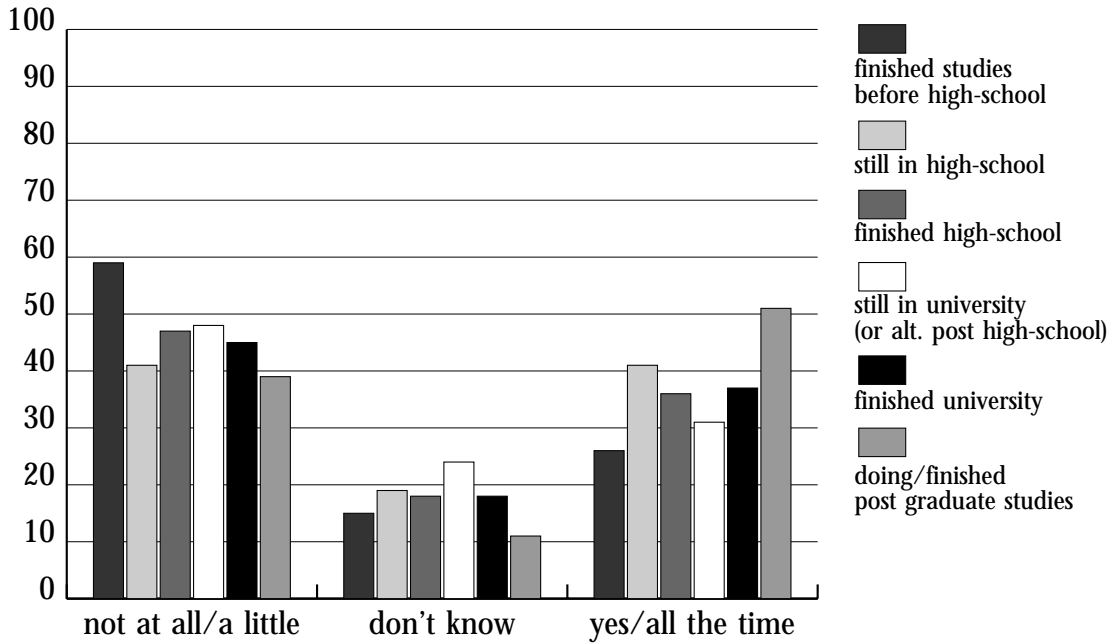
$P < 0.001$ (Pearson chi-square test)($N=2495$)

■ Education

In the age span covered by our sample, the segments for education and age coincide to a considerable degree, as people with higher education necessarily belong to older segments. Hence, we find that it is less important for people with higher education to have a lifestyle compatible to that of their friends, that they are less inclined to think that having more would make them happier, and that they seem to have reflected more on their own consumption. In addition, they report to a higher degree that they base their purchase decisions on ecological considerations. Education tends to raise the level of consciousness regarding environmental issues, both because it is often a part of the curricula, and because environmental issues tend to be a salient political topic in academic settings.

In general, when I buy I make my decision based on... (%)

The eco-friendliness of the product



$P < 0.001$ (Pearson chi-square test)($N=2506$)

A GLOBAL CONSUMER CULTURE?

The aim of this section is to present and discuss the main tendencies in the data. We are introducing here some hypotheses meant to serve as guiding themes or propositions to structure the discussion of the results. The first hypothesis, concerning globalisation, is introduced as a tool meant to aid the explanation of *similarities* among the countries. The three other hypotheses (the economical/technological, the social/cultural, and the political culture hypotheses) are introduced to help explain *differences* between countries or continents.

We must stress that some of the hypotheses reflect (more or less prejudiced) preconceptions, or stereotypes, circulating among the public as well as social scientists, rather than necessarily our own expectations. Furthermore, expectations regarding the applicability of the hypotheses have to take into consideration the fact that the samples

in this study do not reflect the population in the countries as such, but represent only the middle upper class.

Explaining similarities: Globalisation

The concept of globalisation has been central in social theories in recent years, and it is at the core of rather heated debates in mass media discourses and among the public. Globalisation is a term with many uses and meanings, all of which in some sense imply that ‘the world is becoming smaller’, a ‘global village’ (McLuhan, 1964). The most frequent use of the term refers to a sense of economic, cultural, or political homogenisation, indicating that the world is becoming one large marketplace, one cultural community, or one political arena. In addition, environmental and human rights issues are treated increasingly as global problems. In his speech at Davos in January 1999, UN General Secretary Kofi Annan launched the *Global Compact*: a UN-run, multi-stakeholder partnership intended to give globalisation a “human face”. The *Global Compact* fosters initiatives that harmonise economic development with global environmental and human rights.

When we ask the question whether it is possible to identify a common global consumer culture among youth, we are primarily thinking of cultural globalisation. However, a prospective global consumer culture must be seen in close connection with economic globalisation. Worldwide, the most popular cultural phenomena, like Hollywood films, popular music, commercial brands etc. are widespread first and foremost thanks to the persistent marketing efforts of large multinational corporations. Ritzer (1993) has introduced the concept “McDonaldisation of society” to describe these tendencies. Nonetheless, youth often move in exactly the opposite direction of companies’ marketing efforts. Young people are not always that easy to get!

Globalisation is not totally dominating the development of modern society. In parallel with homogenising tendencies, local reactions and adaptations are rising up all over the world. Global ideas, concepts, brands etc. are adapted to local contexts and given meaning according to the local frames of reference.

With this ambivalence in mind, we nevertheless expect to find some indications of a common global consumer culture among young people. However, similarities in answers between countries do not necessarily prove a common culture, they can only be treated as a possible indication of the existence of a global trend.

■ Explaining differences

On a general level, one would expect that variations between the countries reflect differences in economic/technological development, social/cultural traditions, and differences in political culture and history. Although these dimensions are closely interconnected, it is nevertheless meaningful, for analytical purposes, to treat them as more or less autonomous factors.

■ The economic/technological hypothesis

The level of economic and technological development is fundamental to the structure of the society as a whole. The economy in many ways lays the premises for other elements of society. Furthermore, the satisfaction of basic economic needs often is a precondition for the establishment of the surplus energy needed for people to focus on less immediate physical concerns (Inglehart, 1997).

Along these lines of thought, we expect countries to vary in their priorities according to differences in their economical and technological development.

■ The social/cultural hypothesis

The social structures in different countries can explain variations in trust in different political institutions and towards society in general. Studies have shown that there are important relationships between the nature of the social structure in different countries and the way the inhabitants tend to meet different challenges (Fukuyama, 1995).

We expect countries with more community-oriented social structures and collective cultural orientations to be more inclined towards collective solutions to environmental problems. On the other hand, we expect people in countries with more individualised social structures, where individualism is the prevailing cultural orientation, to have a stronger preference for individual-centred approaches.

■ The political culture hypothesis

Political culture is, to a significant degree, a reflection of economical/technological and social/cultural structures. It is nevertheless meaningful to treat political culture as a causal factor in itself when it comes to explaining differences between countries. An important political cleavage is the difference between regimes with democratic traditions versus more authoritarian oriented regimes, or countries with a short democratic history. We expect these political differences to be somehow reflected in the answers.

This hypothesis is based on the assumption that countries with democratic (liberal) political cultures would be more inclined towards stressing individual responsibility (but at the same time trust governmental solutions), whilst individual responsibility would not play such a great role in countries with a more authoritarian political tradition.

■ Similarities and main variances in the data

In the introduction, we asked the question whether it is possible to identify a common consumer culture among urban, middle-class youth. To what extent do the “Is the Future Yours” Survey findings give support to our hypothesis by explaining differences among countries, continents and cultures?

It must be emphasised that this report represents a first step in the study of youth consumer culture across cultures and continents. Further research is necessary to answer the fundamental questions emerging from the UNEP/UNESCO Youth and Sustainable Consumption Survey. However, some interesting preliminary conclusions can still be drawn.

On one hand, the survey reveals considerable differences between the countries. A quick glance at the distribution of answers to the different questions is enough to prove this point. On the other hand, there are also important similarities.

Shared values, priorities and attitudes among middle-class youth

- The most important challenges for the future are pollution, improving people's health and respect for human rights
- The environmental impact of consumption is perceived as being linked to the use of products and the recycling process, rather than to shopping behaviour
- The price and quality of products is more important than what is trendier and eco-friendly
- People of their age are consuming too much (themselves included)
- The responsibility to improve the world is shared by international organisations, governments, industries, citizens, and young people including themselves
- They believe in individual as opposed to collective action to improve the world
- There is a larger potential for local rather than global actions

The indications of a common youth consumer culture are strong. However, we must remember that this is a study among middle class youth, many of them at universities in large cities and urban areas. There are also considerable differences between continents and countries. We should therefore be very prudent before announcing the existence of an established global consumer culture.

Relevant differences in youth attitudes towards sustainable consumption

1. In Africa and Latin America the young public are more concerned about the social aspects of the future than the majority: improving health, fighting unemployment and reducing the differences between rich and poor are particularly important.
2. The Asians are more concerned about population increase than most other continents.
3. The less trend-oriented consumers are found in Australia, Canada, the USA and Western Europe, and they are to a large degree more familiar with the discussion on environment and consumption than the others.

4. The concern for the environment during purchasing decisions is least present in France, Italy and Norway.
5. African and Asian youth to a considerable degree feel that having more would still make them happier.
6. The young public in Western Countries is more individualistic, while young people in Latin America and Africa seem to support NGOs and collective actions more than individual behaviour.
7. Eastern European youth do not think that they consume too much, and citizens, young people and “myself” are not seen as important actors in the effort to improve the world, in contrast to the majority in this study.
8. With some exceptions, youth in Africa, Latin America and Asia turn out to be the most optimistic regarding their influence on what happens in their own town.

To what extent do the data give support to the hypotheses developed above?

- The economical/technological hypothesis is supported by the first three points above, as well as by point 5.
- The social/cultural hypothesis is supported by point 6.
- The political culture hypothesis is supported by points 6 and 7.

Profiles of the different continents and regions

Here we will attempt to draw the profiles of the continents or regions in this study. We have chosen to draw a joint profile of the Western countries because of strong similarities among the seven involved countries. It is also worth noting that the profiles of Africa and Latin America are very similar. The most difficult task was the Asian profile, because Japan and the Republic of Korea in many aspects have more in common with the Western OECD countries than their Asian neighbours. We also found it important to present relevant national differences within the regional profiles, although these differences in many cases are difficult to explain.

■ Profile of the African respondents

The four countries from Africa are Cameroon, Kenya, Senegal and Uganda. They share the main fundamental values and attitudes in this study outlined above. However, some interesting deviations from the majority were found for all the young Africans:

- First of all, they turn out to be more concerned about the social aspects of the future than the majority: improving health, fighting unemployment and reducing the differences between rich and poor.

This gives some support to the economic/technological hypothesis, claiming that we expect countries in economically and technologically less developed countries to be more focused on the immediate material aspects of their lives.

- They seem to be stronger adherents of NGOs and collective action than of individual behaviour.

This gives support to the social/cultural hypothesis, claiming that people in more community-oriented societies tend to be more inclined towards collective solutions to environmental problems.

However, other common aspects of the African consumers are not so easily understood:

- The environmental impact of transportation is not recognised in Kenya, Senegal and Cameroon.
- African respondents (except Ugandan) turned out to be those most concerned with having a lifestyle compatible with that of their friends.
- African respondents (except Ugandan) were also those most likely to agree with the statement that they are consuming too much.
- At the same time, having more would still make many of the African respondents happier.
- In the African countries of our survey, a large percentage of youth answered that this was the first time they had to think about their consumption.
- They also appeared to be more optimistic than the majority regarding the possibility to influence what happens in their own town.

There are also some interesting differences between the four African countries surveyed:

- The environmental impact of waste disposal is most widely acknowledged in Cameroon, while this link is least frequently made in Senegal.
- The consciousness of the connection between energy use (gas and electricity) and environment is most pronounced in Uganda, but is not at all present in Cameroon and Kenya.
- The environmental consequences of water use are widely recognised in Cameroon but not in Kenya and Senegal.
- Consumers in Senegal are among the least price-conscious consumers in the survey.

■ Profile of the Asian respondents

There are seven Asian countries in this survey: China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. Due to large cultural variations between the Asian countries, it is not so easy to draw a common profile of the Asian continent.

Asian youth share many of the common values and attitudes in this study. However, some interesting deviations were found:

- Regarding the social dimensions of consumption, Asian respondents are more concerned about coping with the population increase than the majority of the other countries.
- Asian youth (except Japanese) to a considerable degree feel that having more would still make them happier.
- They are more optimistic than the majority regarding the possibility of influencing what happens in their own town.
This gives support to the economic/technological hypothesis.

We will also emphasise some interesting differences within the Asian continent:

- Reducing child labour is not an important issue for the young public in China, the Republic of Korea and Malaysia.
- Reducing the differences between rich and poor is more important in China and the Republic of Korea than in most other countries.
- The environmental impact of transportation is not recognised in China and the Republic of Korea.
- The Japanese youth are among the least trend-oriented consumers in the study.
- The Chinese youth turned out to be the most concerned with having a lifestyle compatible with that of their friends.

- In the Philippines and Thailand it is common to regard industry as responsible for improving the state of the world.
- Support for the statement “look closer at how we live and where our things come from” as an option in the effort to improve the world was very high in India.
- The most optimistic regarding the prospects of their own actions are found in the Philippines and Thailand.

■ Profile of Latin American respondents

The three Latin American countries are Argentina, Peru and Mexico. Young Latin Americans share the fundamental values and attitudes in this study. However, some interesting deviations from the majority were found for all the young Latin American consumers:

- First of all, they are more concerned about the social aspects of the future than the majority: improving health, fighting unemployment and reducing the differences between rich and poor.

This gives support to the economic/technological hypothesis claiming that we expect countries in economically and technologically less developed countries to be more focused on the material aspects of their lives.

On the other hand:

- Young consumers in Peru, Argentina and Mexico are less concerned about the quality of products.
- They seem to be more supportive towards NGOs and collective actions than other respondents are.
- Youth in Latin America are the strongest supporters of information campaigns.
- They are more optimistic than the majority when it comes to the prospects of influencing what happens in their own town.

There are small differences between the three countries. However, it is interesting to note that:

- The environmental impact of transportation is highly recognised in Argentina but the environmental impact of water and energy use is less acknowledged.
- In Mexico young consumers are less concerned about the price of the products.
- Argentine youth to a lesser degree think that having more would make them happier.

■ Profile of Eastern European respondents

The three Eastern European countries in this study are Bulgaria, Poland and the Russian Federation. Young Eastern-Europeans share the main values and attitudes in this study. However, it is possible to trace three important elements for which Eastern Europeans are distinctive:

- First of all, they do not emphasise the need to reduce the differences between rich and poor to the same degree as young people in other countries.
- Secondly, they do not think they consume too much.
- In agreement with the majority of respondents, “young people in general” and “myself”, are not seen as important actors in improving the world. Moreover, Russian and Bulgarian youth do not seem to have any concept of their role as citizens.

Each of these exceptions could be explained with reference to the recent political, economic and social developments in Eastern Europe. The middle-class youth in these countries have probably very high expectations of rapid economic progress.

There are also some interesting differences between the three countries:

- Climate change is important for young Russians, and they are more concerned about the environmental impacts of transportation and water use than the majority of the other countries.
- In Bulgaria, young people believe they would be happier if they could consume more, while in Poland support of this view is significantly below the average.

■ Profile of Western European, North American and Australian respondents

Western European countries participating in the survey were France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway. Because of strong similarities we will also include Canada, the USA, and Australia in this “Western” profile.

Western youth share the fundamental values and attitudes in this study. However, two interesting deviations from the majority of the countries were found:

- The less trend-oriented consumers were found in Australia, Canada, the USA and Western Europe.
- To a large extent, they are more familiar with the discussion on the environment and consumption, compared with youth in other regions.

Young Western consumers seem to have a more reflexive view on their own consumption as foreseen by the economical/technological hypothesis. This same hypothesis was however contradicted by the following result:

- Concern for the environment during purchasing decisions is least present in France, Italy and Norway.

This is difficult to explain, but it is true that consumers in France and Italy were not very active in the environmental movement during the 1990s, and the support for environmental organisations declined in Norway during the same period. Furthermore, the apparent contradiction between the latter two points might also be an indication of inconsistency in the relationship between attitudes and actions among the young consumers.

However, the economic/technological hypothesis is supported by the following findings:

- French and Italian youth are very much concerned about child labour.
- Coping with population increase is regarded as a major concern in Canada, the USA and Australia.
- The Norwegians do not appear to think that having more will make them happy.

It is worth noting that the young public in Norway does not see young people or themselves as important actors in efforts to improve the world. This is probably a reflection of a society where the citizens are used to trusting governmental decisions. Rather than involving themselves, they leave the responsibility to politicians. This gives support to the political culture hypothesis.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the data from this survey, there are strong indications of a global middle class youth consumer culture. Across countries and continents respondents share many values and attitudes. However, some significant differences prevent us from concluding without reservation that we have a global consumer culture within middle class youth in large cities.

Furthermore, we have discovered variations according to gender, age and education. In general, young women seem to be more conscious of the relationship between consumption and the environment and are more inclined to undertake active efforts aimed at improving the state of the environment. Moreover, young women appear to be generally less materialistically oriented than young men. When it comes to age, younger segments appear to be more materialistic and more occupied with having a lifestyle compatible with that of their friends. Furthermore, they appear to a lesser degree to have adopted a reflexive stance on their consumption. Compared to those with less education, young people with higher education seem to be generally more aware of the environmental consequences of their consumption, less materialistically oriented and to have reflected more on their own consumption.

The three main conclusions are:

- The young public in the survey believes that the environmental impact of consumption is linked to the use of products and the recycling process, rather than to shopping behaviour.
- They seem to prefer unorganised forms of everyday action to organised mobilisation as a strategy to improve the world.
- The young public shares many of the same values; however, the social aspects of sustainable consumption appear to be more important in Africa, Asia and Latin America as compared to other areas of the world.

1. The environmental impact of consumption is linked to the use of products and the recycling process, rather than to shopping behaviour.

Consumption can be regarded as a process, consisting of three phases: acquisition, use, and disposal of products. Young consumers seem to be more aware of the environmental impact of the two last steps in the consumption process than the first. When they consider the environmental impacts of consumption, respondents tend to focus on travel patterns, disposal of waste, use of energy, and use of water rather than purchasing of clothes and food.

It is very tempting to speculate on the reason behind this lack of consciousness. One obvious reason is that the consequences of single purchasing decisions appear insignificant in the big picture of global environmental problems. It is difficult to see the immediate environmental relevance of such apparently insignificant everyday actions. The chain of events that links the action to its consequences is complex and difficult to follow. Another aspect that can probably help to explain these priorities is the fact that both food and clothing lie at the core of young people's identities. Youth are less flexible when it comes to changing habits that they feel are essential in defining who they are.

The political response to this conclusion is not obvious. However, we will suggest that a new environmental campaign or education programme from UNEP/UNESCO should emphasise the relevance of shopping behaviour and the world-wide commercial pressure on youth.

2. The young public in our study seems to prefer unorganised forms of everyday action rather than organised mobilisation as a strategy to improve the world.

As we see it, this is the most interesting conclusion from the section on responsibility and influence. Youth were asked what they could do to improve the world and were offered four alternatives: *support an environmental or an ethical NGO, be involved in information campaigns, be informed and inform friends and family, look closer at how we live and where*

our things come from. It turned out that their preference was “look closer at how we live and where our things come from”, whereas “support an environmental or an ethical NGO” scored lowest.

It is, of course, positive that young people see the potential for environmental improvements through changes of their own consumption patterns. Without this commitment, it would be difficult to change the levels and patterns of consumption. However, such a lack of collective organisation and support for NGOs is alarming for environmental and social youth organisations. Especially since the support for collective action is lowest in the Western countries, where the NGOs have played an important role in the last twenty years.

The political response to this conclusion could be a joint project between UNEP/UNESCO and youth NGOs, focusing on the need for both individual commitment and collective organisation.

3. Young people share many of the same values; however, the social aspects of sustainable production and consumption are much more important in Africa, Asia and Latin America than in the other countries.

In this conclusion, we will emphasis two important elements. The first is that the social aspects of consumption are crucial to young people in many parts of the world. The survey findings show that the implications of consumption on both environment and society are well understood, even if this does not necessarily lead to action.

Second, the differences between countries and continents found in this report should be the object of a more in depth research. Some of the main differences emphasised by the survey can be understood with reference to the political culture, the economic and social situation in each country. Also crucial to the reaction of the respondents is the public discussion of these themes and their media coverage. Health problems are serious in many African countries, while unemployment is a major issue in Latin America and population increase is important in Asia.

The political response to this third main conclusion must be further research. We have to verify, understand and explain the differences

found in the study. The best way to do this is to shift from a quantitative survey in a large number of countries to a more qualitative approach concentrated to a limited number of strategic countries. It will then be possible to widen the scope from middle class youth to more representative studies, including both quantitative and qualitative data.

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Towards sustainable consumption among Australian young people

2

*John Fien
and Petra Skoien¹*

Governments should make things that aren't good for the environment more expensive. How do you expect young people to take the government seriously when a litre of Coke costs more than a litre of petrol?

Young adult in Brisbane, Australia, focus group.
Reported in Connell, Fien, Lee, Sykes and Yencken (1999)

The issue of media and corporate pressure on young people was a significant if not enduring media story in Australia in early July 2000. Social commentator, Philip Adams, used his weekly column in a national newspaper to critique the process of 'corporate paedophilia', a term he used to describe "the mass molestation of the innocents as mighty corporations turn youngsters into economic units ... as parents lose their children to mass production and mass marketing" (Adams 2000). He referred to the work of Neil Postman whose book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1986), described schools as the "second curriculum", after television. Postman's new book, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century* (1999), which furthers his critique of television's impact on youth culture, describes mothers as the prime mediator between young people and culture, at least in terms of attention time. Postman goes on to describe television as 'the second parent', followed by the Internet, CDs, radios and movies with fathers often being fifth or sixth in importance. Adams quotes Postman's conclusion that parents "must conceive of parenting as an act of rebellion against culture ... To insist that one's children learn the discipline of delayed gratification or modesty in their sexuality or self-restraint in manners, language and style is to place oneself in opposition to almost every social trend. But most rebellious of all is the attempt to control the media's access to one's children" (Adams 2000).

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Responses to Adams's article were often heated. Many parents almost begged for guidance and support in controlling the frequency and impact of television viewing in their children's lives. Language and social education teachers identified a need for increased resources for media literacy: this would act as a panacea in the face of the diversion of educational funding to teaching and testing basic literacy without recognition of the social pressures of consumerism. Business executives argued that press freedom was a safeguard against the type of 'social engineering' they saw Adams advocating. Meanwhile, several advertising and television icons reacted by depicting the depressing lifestyles of people in the former Eastern Bloc who lacked the glamour of advertising and consumer culture in their pre-'freedom' days.

The Adams debate was mainly about the exposure of children and teenagers to consumer culture in Australia. Although nothing was written of the experiences of young adults in the 18-25 year age range that is the concern of this paper, the debate is pertinent here for a number of reasons.

First and foremost, it shows Australia as a consumer society. Per capita consumption spending doubled (in real terms) between 1949 and 1994. Australia now owns more cars per 100 persons than the USA and is second, just behind the USA, at the head of the world listing of 'ecological footprint' size (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996; Chambers, Simmons and Wackernagel, 2000).

Second, it indicates the power of industry and business to set public priorities in Australia, such as education, and to marginalize divergent voices such as teachers and parents whose interests are threatened by appeals to symbols. Young adults in Australia have grown up in the glamorous world of advertising where the "good life" is promoted and associations between symbols are reinforced: "materialism" equals "freedom" and "progress". This is the world in which they are trying to study, work, make friends, enjoy themselves and create personal and group identities. On the social front, everyday life today is very much a material one. It is a world in which "social life is largely made possible by material objects, and their manufacture, exchange and consumption provides the framework and means of most forms of social interaction and cultural interchange." (Clammer 1997).

As a result, consumerism in Australia – and the values that owning and displaying different products signify – is not only a means of

creating wealth, satisfying personal needs and forming and maintaining social networks. It is also one of the chief ways through which young adults establish their personal identities and present themselves to others. As Featherstone (1991) says, "One's body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, home, car, choice of holidays, etc. are to be regarded as indicators of individuality of taste and sense of style of the owner/consumer". This situation is one of the key demand side influences on consumption by all Australians, especially young adults. However, it also indicates that categorisation of influences into demand and supply side factors can disguise the creation of demand by the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which people live.

Third, the lack of attention paid to the experiences of young adults in the debate highlights the neglect for this age group, symbolic of a much wider neglect of research on young people in Australia. From a purely methodological point of view, no consistent age groupings are used by governments in Australia to report youth data. Different minimum age limits are set for the right to drink, vote, drive, earn money, join the armed forces or consent to sexual intercourse – even though they have little bearing on the physical maturation and psychological development of young people – and limits vary between legal jurisdictions. As Sibley (1995) argues, youth, the period between child- and adulthood, represents a "contested boundary". As a result, age-based data analyses vary widely in their age groupings and it is not possible to develop a coherent picture of the characteristics of young adults and their perceptions and experiences. The effects of this problem are all the worse when "youth" perceptions and experiences are reported as a generic category that disguises gender, ethnic, race and class differences.

The final, and perhaps most obvious lesson from the Adams debate is that there is a dearth of literature on the consumption experiences of young adults in Australia. In fact, the major text on youth studies in Australia (Bessant, Sercombe and Watts 1998) does not even refer to consumption patterns or the relationships between consumption and identity. An in-depth analysis of the sociology and youth studies journals in Australia conducted for this paper proved that these were also silent, as were the Internet sites of the consumer and environmental departments of all Australian states and the national government. Similarly, when telephone interviews were conducted for this paper with education and communication colleagues in the national consumer affairs and environment ministries, no evidence of research or other initiatives for the 18-25 age group

was uncovered. My research indicates that there are no educational programmes that encourage young adults in Australia to reflect critically on the place of consumerism in their lives and the imperatives for sustainable consumption and production. As a result, much of the material that follows tends to be inferences from data on the Australian population in general, or reports on the effects of sustainable consumption campaigns for the general community, or predictions of likely impacts of such initiatives at the school level. These are important limitations on the discussion that follows.

2 *Generation X* was a term first used by Douglas Coupland in his novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* and has been adopted and popularised by the media to refer to young adults.

Limitations also apply to the potential of sustainable consumption-oriented programmes for the 18-25 year age group in Australia. Most of these young people, often referred to as *Generation X*² or *Generation Y*, are better educated than their parents, and around 80% have completed secondary school and are in the process of finding or studying for their first jobs. It is a time when the responsibility of economic independence begins, at least in a consistent way, and when young people can assert their own style and taste in clothing, places of residence, furnishings, music, entertainment, travel and intimate relationships. It is seen by the retailers as an important 'market segment', especially for clothing, leisure goods and services, and motor cars.

However, it is also a time of paradoxes. Jobs do not come easy for those without a tertiary education and university students are often forced to work part-time and borrow from parents, often until after their mid-twenties due to the lack of scholarships and study support programmes. Many spend almost all their income on rent, food and transport, with little left over for discretionary spending. This is an especially acute problem for young women who may have become single parents. A car is seen as a necessity by many due to poorly planned, unreliable and expensive public transport, which can be dangerous for women at night. This is coupled with the belief of young Australian males that they will not be socially desirable until they have a car which, then, of course, often becomes the vehicle (no pun intended) for certain rights-of-passage. *Generation X/Y* are also prone to swings from the teenage idealism (e.g. over the environment) that they are outgrowing, to cynicism – and often anger – about the motives of older adults and authority figures, who often see youth as responsible for many social problems such as drugs, crime, promiscuity, bad music and tasteless clothes and hairstyles. It is also a hedonistic time of life, especially when money is available, with weekends devoted to partying, clubbing and alcohol.

Thus, the 18-25 year age range in Australia is an interesting, but perhaps problematical, group to consider as leaders in the move towards sustainable consumption. There is great potential for significant long-term impact if the message takes, but, to mix metaphors, the message may fall on resistant soil. Of course, this is not the fault of the young Australians in this age range. The bedrock of Australian society from which they have come is a materialistic one with a high level of ambivalence towards environmental issues. Young Australians are the product of a wider cultural, historical, social, economic and political context.

Demand-side factors influencing consumption

■ Cultural and historical values

Cultural and historical factors in Australia have shaped a materialistic culture that forms a major part of a national psyche which values and holds consumption as an ideal. In the post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s, high employment and a growth economy contributed to a huge increase in the rate of consumption. Indeed, Yencken and Wilkinson (2000) note that Australia's consumption of resources has tripled since 1940. These social and economic circumstances also contributed to the 'suburban imperative', which is the perceived need for Australians to buy a house, car and associated appliances (Elkington & Hailes 1988). Over 80% of Australians live in suburbs of the ten major cities. Suburban sprawl and very low population densities mean that public transport is irregular and expensive. Many families have a car for every person over 17 years of age, while the large garden allotments and weekly car washes mean that water (in the world's driest continent) is used quite wantonly.

The materialism behind the suburban imperatives helps to explain the strong drive in Australians to seek 'in-group' approval and status – even though pursuing these goals is not only economically expensive but also very costly in resource and energy use (Boyden 1996). As Eckersley (1999) states,

Australians are torn between a sound common sense and a basic decency on the one hand, and the appeal of constant distraction and gratification on the other.

Despite poll results that indicate a high level of environmental concern (70-90% of Australians indicate that they are concerned about the environment), Australians tend to lack a detailed understanding of actual environmental problems and their causes (Department of Environment, Sport and Territories 1996). This makes informed decisions to minimise consumption difficult. For example, Australians considered the most critical environmental concerns to be air, fresh water and marine pollution with soil erosion, salinity and biodiversity loss rated lowest. This counters the findings of Australia's national environmental report, *Australia: State of the Environment* (1996) which identifies the most critical environmental problems to be biodiversity loss through habitat destruction, soil erosion, deteriorating inland water systems, logging of old growth forests, and the hole in the ozone layer as well as storm and waste water treatment, solid and hazardous waste disposal, suburban sprawl, over-reliance on private car use, and the climate change implications of burning fossil fuels for electricity. The disparity between perceived and actual environmental problems has been attributed to the fact that most Australians are geographically located in urban areas near Australia's coastline – away from the sites which suffer the real impact of their jobs and lifestyles. The problems of vegetation clearance, biodiversity loss and soil degradation are primarily due to broad-acre land clearing for export-oriented agriculture – something for which the majority of Australians who live in cities can feel little responsibility or take any effective counter-action (Yencken and Fien 2000).

In view of this, some important questions need to be asked:

- Why should 18-25 year-olds be a special 'target group' for sustainable consumption programmes that address such structural problems in the economy, population distribution and government policy?
- What can the individual consumer do about such problems, especially if initiatives to encourage sustainable consumption are not embedded within their cultural interests and priorities and do not require similar responses by government, business and industry?

■ Political and socio-economic factors

The levels of consumption in Australia are among the highest in the world (Department of Environment, Sport and Territories 1996). Australia's political and economic agenda is, and has been one of unfettered economic growth. The present conservative government is committed to economic growth and increased consumption. The

primacy of the growth model is reflected in Prime Minister John Howard's address to the 1998 World Economic Forum (Davos, Switzerland), in which he stated that "the overriding aim of our agenda is to deliver Australia an annual (economic) growth rate of over 4% on average during the decade to 2010."

Despite the apparent primacy of economic growth, there is increasing concern amongst the Australian public about the quality of life. Increasingly, there are signs that the uncritical acceptance of the need for economic growth held by leaders of government and business in Australia does not represent the views of the majority of Australians. A major study by the Australia Institute on the public perceptions of the quality of life in Australia revealed that only 38% of Australians rated "having more money to buy things" as very important. This was far lower than the 75% of Australians who regarded spending more time with family and friends as very important to improving personal quality of life, or the 66% who rated "having less stress and pressure in your life" as very important. Summing up these findings, Eckersley (1999) stated that:

A wide gap remains between Australia's economic performance and public opinion about Australian society and the direction of change.

Mackay (1999) captured the growing undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the quality of life amongst Australians when he wrote:

People believe that Australia's future is bright, but they are troubled by the feeling that so much emphasis is placed on the need for economic growth – and personal wealth – that quality of life is often a casualty.

The general trend of disenchantment with the direction of Australia's economic arrangements was also demonstrated in action recently when, on 11 September 2000, Australia hosted the World Economic Forum of Heads of State and the CEOs of some of the world's largest corporations. For many Australians, this meeting symbolised a furthering of global corporate interests at the expense of the quality of life for ordinary Australians and also for the quality of life of workers in developing countries. The high level of opposition to the Forum was evidenced in the street demonstrations by thousands of people. Organised under the banner of the 'S11' (September 11) campaign, a major blockade to the Forum received extensive national media coverage for several days, in spite of the euphoria over the Olympic Games in the Australian media at the time.

Despite the imperative for economic growth, national and international recognition of the need for environmental sustainability has prompted the development of some major policies, which address ways of moving towards sustainability. Perhaps the most significant action in recent years has been the agreement by the leaders of all the state governments and the national government for a range of common approaches to environmental management. This began in 1989 when the Australian Government proposed to develop a National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (NSESD). The process was extensive and, over a period of two years from 1990 to the end of 1992, involved consultations and negotiations between key interest groups from the community, from industry, conservation groups, scientific organisations and all levels of government. Significantly, youth was not a sector represented in the conference. Indeed, no social sectors, such as women, Aborigines, or ethnic groups were represented.

Working Groups in nine key areas were established: manufacturing, mining, agriculture, forests, fisheries, energy production, energy use, tourism and transport. Each Working Group developed a comprehensive report that fed into the National Strategy based upon five key principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development:

- integrating economic and environmental goals in policies and activities;
- ensuring that environmental assets are properly valued;
- providing for equity within and between generations;
- dealing cautiously with risk and irreversibility; and
- recognising the global dimension.

The significance of the NSESD, however, is that it was adopted by the Heads of Government of Australia's three tiers of Government – Commonwealth, State and Local. Implementation of the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development has involved the development of a range of detailed policies, usually through co-operative mechanisms similar to those used to develop the National Strategy itself. For example, a National Greenhouse Response Strategy was developed in parallel with the Ecologically Sustainable Development Strategy and was also adopted by all levels of government in December 1992 (although many Australians are concerned about the reversal of this policy by a new conservative government in 1996 which led to disappointing inputs at the Kyoto Conference in 1997). National level strategies now also exist for Forests, Rangelands, Coasts and Seas, Oceans, Biodiversity and Waste

Management, and all are consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

Significantly, education to reduce consumption impacts was the only reference to education in the entire NSESD but this is ignored in all the related strategies which, instead, focus on legislative and technical solutions to environmental problems. One benefit of this essentially top-down approach to change is that it has encouraged significant initiatives in the areas of cleaner production, recycling infrastructure, alternative energy research and environmental 'repair', especially of the natural environment.

Despite such initiatives, a national ethos of materialism has favoured consumer-oriented lifestyles over environmental considerations. This does not mean that Australians, at large, are not proud of their environment, especially the natural environment, or keen to see it managed wisely. Rather, their concern has been compromised by the failure of environmental management to involve individuals in recognising their responsibilities for the present condition and the future of the Australian environment. An over-reliance on top-down, expert-led and economically motivated technological solutions to environmental problems has disempowered the vast majority of Australians, and resulted in powerful feelings of ambivalence to environmental problems (Connell 1998). Australians may be aware of the problems, and, when reminded, are very concerned about them. However, they know very little about what they can do and feel little responsibility to act because the government indicates that they have things under control.

However, there are signs that another ethos is emerging, an ethos that has much in common with the way in which Aborigines perceive the environment. This ethos sees people and the natural environment as one, and questions whether the environment should be perceived solely in terms of resources to be exploited for economic growth in order to raise material standards of living. This "ecological" ethos advocates conserver rather than consumer values and anticipates a conserver society which values the intrinsic ecological, aesthetic, scientific and spiritual values of the landscape as much as its economic potential.

This conserver ethos is manifested politically by the 10-15% of people who vote for 'green' or similar parties at most elections, with popular media and environmental figures prominent in green politics. For example, the lead singer of Midnight Oil, one of the most

popular bands in Australia, is Peter Garrett, who is currently the President of the Australian Conservation Foundation and prominent political campaigner. The lyrics of many of their songs focus on issues of peace ('When the Generals Talk'), Aboriginal rights ('Beds are Burning'), the environment ('Wakaruna'), social justice ('Read About It'), and consumption ('There is Enough'). However, there is no evidence that enjoyment of pop-music is translated into political action either in the public domain or personal lifestyles (only 10-15% vote 'green' while many more buy Midnight Oil CDs).

This section raises some important questions also:

- Why is ambivalence the dominant environmental response in Australia?
- What is the relationship between the government preference for top-down, expert-led and economically motivated technological solutions to environmental problems and the antagonism of all major parties (both centre-left and right) in Australia to discussions about communality v. individualism, quality of life v. standard of living, 'enoughness' v. materialism, and conserver v. consumer values?
- Who gains and who loses by such social, economic and political alliances?
- How are the interests and priorities of young adults shaped by and integrated into such alliances, and might they learn otherwise, if they want to?
- Where are the voices of resistance to the alliances and how are they marginalized and/or silenced?
- What roles can young adults play in questioning the alliances, and how can they learn to do this?
- What learning experiences are essential before young adults turn eighteen?

■ Knowledge factors

Knowledge is a problematical area in environmental decision-making and behaviour. A Commonwealth Government report in 1995 pointed to the fact that people need to be informed about different rates of energy usage in order to make changes to their consumption patterns. For example, a survey by the Australian Consumers Association found that most people regarded refrigerators to be low – rather than high – energy users. As the Commonwealth Government report stated, "Without better understanding of the relative amounts of energy consumed by different household activities, there is unlikely to be

emphasis placed on the energy performance on major energy users” (1995). In addition, the report suggested that Australians do not understand the importance of buying products made from recycled materials.

The report also indicated that there is a lack of understanding amongst the majority of Australians about the environmental consequences of everyday/individual actions. For example, the greenhouse effect and ozone depletion are commonly confused. Also, few Australians make the connection between household energy use and greenhouse emissions. Indeed, a common perception in Australia is that energy use is ‘clean’ – perhaps because most people live in cities, away from coal mines and power stations. The report argued that education and information campaigns would increase understanding of the relationship of energy use and environmental consequences.

However, it could be that this research and the assumptions behind the policy and programmes for awareness raising that ensued were based upon false information. People may be aware of the need for energy and other conservation practices, but may lack knowledge on how to take action. If this is the case, the government remedy – more programmes of information dissemination (not education) – could be based upon false assumptions about the relationships between knowledge, attitudes and behaviour (see Fishbein and Azhen 1975). It is possible that prescriptions failed to take account of the fact that people need education to help them develop the critical capacities and the action competence (Jensen and Schnak 1997) necessary to act on their awareness. As a result, government programmes to ‘educate’ for sustainable consumption via information programmes are not very successful, unless they are accompanied by a range of cross-sectoral policies and legislation which provide a supportive context for people to act on the lessons of education programmes (OECD 1998).

Some more important questions:

- Why do government communication and education staff think that social change is a process of offering more and more accurate information?
- Why is their work framed within advertising and marketing discourses rather than educational and community development ones?
- What processes of education for personal and community empowerment are attractive to young adults?

■ Socio-psychological factors

Young adults occupy a potentially significant position in Australian society. They are in a position to influence the environment as citizens via the decisions that shape their consumption patterns and lifestyles (Segger 1999). Although young adults represent a distinct group in terms of consumption, there is great diversity in their patterns of consumption and in their environmental values (Said 1997). Thus, in addressing the topic of youth consumption in Australia, it is important to acknowledge that 18 to 25 year olds are probably as diverse in their views, values and consumption patterns as any other age group.

Having said this, however, there are some features and patterns that transcend individual differences. As an aggregate, this group has great potential for changing consumption patterns for three main reasons. First, they have high levels of concern for the environment (ABS 1998). While the relationship between environmental concern and behaviour is, at best, tenuous, high levels of concern for the environment combined with an emerging environmental ethic at least predisposes young adults to the adoption of more sustainable consumption patterns. Second, whilst many patterns of behaviour have already been established during childhood, youth is generally regarded as a period when young people establish their identity, their values and seek the 'group' with which they identify. Lifestyles and consumption patterns are integrally linked with the establishment of identity and values. Since social and cultural conditions in western countries such as Australia have extended the period of 'youth' (Lury 1997), this allows for an extended timeframe in which to explore a range of lifestyle patterns – and for expanded opportunities for change. Young people's preoccupation with becoming part of a group may also be an important 'lever' for sustainable consumption initiatives. In other words, young adults may be able to make sustainable consumption 'fashionable' (Segger 1999). Third, young people in Australia are highly media literate, which may, to some degree, offset the influence of their immersion in consumer culture. They have daily exposure to a wide range of mass media that play an important role in promoting and reinforcing consumer values. However, rather than being passive recipients of media culture, young people demonstrate high levels of media literacy and routinely reconstruct media messages (Hopkins 1997). This suggests a certain degree of reflection concerning their social environment. For these reasons, young people are more likely to be open to change

than other age groups and, thus, be potentially willing to reshape their consumption patterns.

The environmental concerns of young Australians are shaped by both international capitalism and international environmental debates (Yencken & Fien 2000). Some of this concern is channelled into purchasing 'green' products, (less chemicals, more natural ingredients, less packaging, recycled materials used). In a recent market segmentation study of green market attitudes, *Green Australia: Mapping the Market* (1997), substantial differences in the levels of environmental concern, knowledge and behaviour or behavioural intent were identified amongst the general population. These were profiled as six groups that were distinguished by different levels of environmental knowledge, concern, and related consumer behaviour. This study found that at least half of the Australian consumer market has already made substantial behavioural changes for the environment and intend to make more – including their shopping and selection of products (Said 1997).

Young people were distributed throughout all segments of the market, ranging from those who are highly concerned about environmental problems and highly motivated to act to reduce environmental impact, to those who have little concern and little inclination to change their consumption behaviour. However, the largest numbers of 'green' consumers were consistently located in the 30 to 49 age bracket, while the least number of people in these groups were aged 50 and over. Younger people (under 29) were located between these two.

As mentioned earlier, young people in Australia are a wide and varied group (e.g. see Bessant, Sercombe and Watts 1998) with a range of values, concerns and behaviour in terms of the environment and consumption. However, there are signs of an emerging environmentalism amongst young Australians. High levels of concern for the environment have been identified in a number of surveys of young Australians. For example, an Australian Bureau of Statistics survey in 1998 revealed that 74% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 rated their level of environmental concern as 'high' or 'very high' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998). Similarly, a recent survey of over 5,500 young Australians aged 14 to 17 years found that young people overwhelmingly supported the need to protect the environment over and above economic growth, and held beliefs that strongly favoured ecological rather than technological or economic priorities (Sykes, Yencken, Fien & Choo 2000).

The great majority of young people in the study did not understand that the influence of social structures and institutions on shaping people's values also contribute to environmental problems. Instead, Connell et al. (1999) recognised that Australian young people tend to use an 'individualistic framework' to understand the causes of environmental problems. Yet, despite this individualistic framework, most young people did not appear to understand how their own behaviour contributed to environmental problems (Connell et al.1999).

As a result, these young people were extremely pessimistic about the future and had a very low sense of self-efficacy for helping bring about positive change (Yencken & Fien 2000). For example, in a focus group interview, one young person lamented:

I feel really helpless. What can I do? I'm a 16-year-old kid in a classroom, I've got all these views, but what can I do about it?

(Connell et al.1999).

Studies by Gerlach (1998) and Venton (1999) indicate that the year following secondary school is one in which environmental concerns are of extremely minor significance in the lives of young adults. Instead, becoming independent of parents, study and career needs, financial survival, owning a car, social experimentation and, very significantly, alcohol, are the major individual concerns.

The important questions resulting from this section include;

- What is the relationship between knowledge, attitudes and consumption?
- How do young Australians learn to identify the self with consumer symbols?
- What opportunities are there for the processes of social learning to encourage young adults to think otherwise?

Supply-side factors influencing consumption

■ Consumer culture and advertising

Increasingly, consumer culture is playing a significant role in defining the sense of self at an individual level, and at a societal level. Thus, young people's interaction within a consumer culture not only shapes the social, economic, and domestic aspects of their lives, but also affects the formation of personal identity (Lury 1997). This is part of a broader western materialistic culture that values the consumption of goods and services (Segger 1999).

Media and marketing have a major role in shaping the lifestyles of young people. As Cannon (1994) states,

Invasive media has been used to promote brand names such as Benetton, Hagen Dazs, Nike, Esprit and Windows, which are now part of the everyday language of Generation X around the planet. Described by some as the first global generation, they are joined together not by a common ideology but rather a sophisticated knowledge of consumer products.

Young adults' identification with popular culture through mass media is arguably the most significant influence on their cultural identity and lifestyles. Hopkins (1995) contends that the pervasive influence of popular culture on the lives of young people is such that they have been defined "not by depression, war or social revolution, but by media culture". These young people are faced with the challenge of finding ways of constructing their identity from "a chaotic mix of consumer goods, advertising appeals and media clichés" (Hopkins 1995).

■ Media and marketing in schools

Corporate sponsorship in Australian schools and universities is making the avoidance of consumer culture even more difficult for young people. In the face of diminishing governmental support, funding is increasingly sought from private enterprise with corporate logos appearing on school reports and letterheads and one school even having McDonald's logos on children's uniforms (Bednall 1996). Corporate sponsored and produced curricular materials are increasingly present in Australian schools. Even State government education departments have worked with business groups to produce these

materials although corporate input of these materials has been criticised among other things for downplaying environmental issues and presenting the corporate view as fact. (Isles 1989).

Following trends in the US and Britain, a number of corporate sales, promotional and advertising schemes have entered Australian schools. For example,

- A leading computer company provided computers to schools in exchange for a number of receipts from a major supermarket chain. Over 6000 schools took part in the scheme.
- Major fast food outlets donated a portion of their profits to schools.
- Major fast food outlets offered free meals as a learning incentive. Over 400,000 children took part in this scheme (Beder 1997).

Clearly, the youth market is seen as a lucrative one. Australians under the age of 18 spend an estimated A\$31.60 each week (Beder 1997). The importance of advertising and marketing for children in shaping consumption behaviour in later life is of utmost importance and children develop brand loyalty very early in life (Raphael 1993).

■ Green marketing

Green marketing grew out of a response by the business sector to create new markets and capitalise on people's heightened environmental awareness. However, the green consumer movement has been severely criticised. Implicit in the advertising of 'green' products is the message that all environmental problems can be solved in this way. However, marketing 'green' products does little to address the problem of excessive consumption in industrialised nations like Australia. Rather, it perpetuates high rates of consumption by offering an expanded market through redirecting consumer choices towards 'green' products. As Beder states

Green marketing provides a profitable outlet of expression for guilty consciences. Those who do the right thing in the supermarket alleviate their concerns and may even believe that their actions are all that is required to protect the environment (1997).

The need to change attitudes towards consumption, values and institutional structures has largely been ignored. As Plant notes:

Because the commodity spectacle is so all-engaging, 'light' green business tends to merely perpetuate the colonization of the mind, sapping our visions of an alternative and giving the idea that our salvation can be gained through shopping rather than through social struggle and transformation. In this respect, green business at worst is a danger and a trap.
(Plant 1991).

■ National public policies for environmentally sustainable technologies and methods

Australia has no policy dedicated specifically to sustainable consumption. This means that no priority areas for changing consumption patterns have been identified and there are no agreed indicators to measure progress towards sustainable consumption (Department of Environment, Sport and Territories 1996). However, there are a number of Government strategies which address ESD, the greenhouse effect and urban development, and these all have implications for sustainable consumption (Department of Environment, Sport and Territories 1996).

In 1996, the Commonwealth Government of Australia published *More with Less: Initiatives to Promote Sustainable Consumption*, which reported on more than 350 initiatives divided into six categories: (1) Information and education, (2) Communication and promotion, (3) Incentives, (4) Obligation and coercion, (5) New or modified products or services, and (6) Infrastructure reforms (Department of Environment, Sport and Territories 1996). However, it should be noted that few of these initiatives have been targeted specifically to Australia's youth sector.

Several interesting examples can be cited:

The Australian Bureau of Consumer Affairs hosted a 'Young Consumers Forum' in 1995. It was an opportunity for youth representatives to express their concerns in relation to consumer issues. The forum called for education programmes aimed at "improving awareness of the current representative structures, individual rights and consumer responsibilities". One of the major priority recommendations was to develop consumer education programmes for the national school curriculum as well as a central information service. Despite these recommendations, education for sustainable consumption has not been included as part of the curriculum in Australian schools. However, the new Studies of Society and Environment

(SOSE) curriculum, developed for Queensland schools, includes a unit that offers young students the opportunity to critique aspects of consumerism.

Smogbusters is a national community project funded by the Federal Government, which aims to raise community awareness about the harmful effects of motor vehicle emissions, and encourages reduced car usage in order to reduce Greenhouse emissions. A Smogbusters project officer is employed in each capital city of every state in Australia to coordinate a range of education and activities that promote a reconsideration of the consumption of resources associated with car usage. Two programmes are of particular interest here. These are Smogbusters' *Way to Work*, and *Way to School*. Smogbusters' *Way to Work* is a programme which is undertaken by a workplace with the aim of reducing vehicle trips and promoting more sustainable travel alternatives. The project officer works in collaboration with workplace staff to develop a 'Green Transport Plan'. Since the project was trailed in 1998, many firms and workplaces have reduced their rates of car usage by an estimated 35% in number of kilometres travelled (Smogbusters 1999). Smogbusters project officers visit schools to promote the aims of the Smogbusters project. The *Way to School* programme encourages students, teachers and parents to reduce car trips by promoting awareness and seeking alternatives, such as car-pooling, taking the bus, walking and using public transport. Schools that have undertaken this programme have substantially reduced vehicle travel, with some schools organising their own car free days. One Adelaide primary school reduced car travel by 1047 kilometres in just one day (reducing carbon dioxide emissions by over 200 kg) (Smogbusters 1999).

Eco-Labeling: Australia does not have an eco-labelling system, and all industries except the manufacturers of domestic electric appliances have resisted government attempts to develop partnerships with industry to establish them. Among the more successful labelling schemes have been: energy ratings on refrigerators and washing machines, labelling of phosphate content in washing detergents, and statements of recycled content on packaging and products.

Lead free petrol: In 1994, the Commonwealth Government implemented an initiative designed to encourage motorists with pre-1986 vehicles to change to using unleaded petrol. Excise tax on leaded petrol was increased nationally, with the increase paid for by this group of motorists. This was accompanied by a major public awareness campaign. The increase in switching to unleaded petrol was

significant and directly attributable to the initiative, even allowing for the purchase of newer cars. Although this initiative was considered to be highly successful, it was questionable in terms of equity, as a large proportion of people who own older cars have lower incomes.

■ Non-governmental organizations

Non-governmental organizations have been very strong in mobilising support for issues associated with consumption patterns. These include the campaign opposing genetically modified foods, fair trade campaigns, trade union anti-sweatshop campaigns, particularly in the clothing industry, industrial human rights monitoring (Australian Asia Workers Links), animal rights campaigns (e.g. anti-battery hen) and public transport support groups (e.g. Smogbusters). Many of these initiatives have involved alliances among movements for consumer rights, environmental protection, the fight against social inequalities, and children's rights.

The Australian Consumers' Association (ACA) is an independent, non-profit organization that publishes information, tests products, lobbies and campaigns for various issues concerning consumers. It also produces a wide range of publications including a monthly magazine as well as educational kits and other information. The ACA has recently been involved in lobbying for adequate labelling on genetically modified food products. This lobbying was instrumental in the 1999 decision by the Federal Government to establish a system of labelling on genetically modified foods (<http://www.choice.com.au/articles/a100658p1.htm>).

Several NGOs have sponsored curriculum development initiatives in the area of sustainable consumption for schools and published innovative educational materials. However, these are not for 18-25 year olds, and even though they are prepared for school students, they are not part of the set curriculum, and so their usage has not been widespread. Examples of these are provided in the following paragraphs.

Recently, a WWF-USA funded project, *Learning and Teaching for Sustainable Consumption*, has been implemented by the Centre for Innovation and Research in Environmental Education at Griffith University, Brisbane. This project involves a group of primary and secondary teachers in Australia in a participatory action research

project to explore teaching opportunities. As well as providing valuable research findings and guidelines for other teachers, the lessons developed will be published as a book of case studies. A similar project in the USA will provide an international perspective on this work.

A World of Texts: Global Understanding in the English Classroom is a resource for teaching English to Australian secondary students (aged 13-17 years). This resource was supported and produced in 1995 by the Global Learning Centre and English education associations. It provides students with opportunities for analysing tourism, teenage cultures and consumerism, human rights, grassroots politics, language, knowledge and power. Of particular relevance to sustainable consumption is the unit, *The World's Your Oyster*, which analyses the issue of tourism in South East Asia and the Pacific Islands by Western tourists as an act of consumption. In another unit, called *Planet Teenager*, students examine magazines, advertisements and articles about teenage consumerism from different cultures and viewpoints. By deconstructing these texts and reflecting on their own experiences of teenage culture and marketing influences, students can come to understand the impacts of global teenage marketing on cultural and personal identity, the distribution of wealth and social cohesion of youth in Australia and other cultures.

Eco-Consumers: A Primary School Teaching Guide was written by the Centre for Innovation and Research in Environmental Education, at Griffith University, Brisbane. This publication consists of six modules, which provide sample activities designed for 8 to 12 year old children. The modules present a range of activities which aim to educate children about environmentally friendly products, to understand and apply concepts such as life-cycle analysis and the '5 Rs' (reuse, reduce, recycle, rethink and refuse) to household items, to develop media literacy skills, to develop understanding of eco-consumer issues through use of a reflective diary, and to become more informed about their future purchases. The modules employ innovative teaching and learning strategies including visiting a shopping centre, role-plays, analysing television commercials, and an action research project on improving their school's consumption sustainability. The activities are supported by handouts and overhead transparencies, which are intended to support in-service training on teaching about sustainable consumption.

The questions resulting from this consideration of supply-side processes and initiatives include:

- Why have government and NGO programmes not focused on consumption patterns of young adults?
- Are any consumer practices unique to 18-25 year olds? If so, what are these, and do their impacts impede sustainability?
- What type of education and community development processes related to these consumer practices are likely to be of interest to young adults?
- What might motivate young adults to become involved in NGO campaigns for sustainable consumption?
- What short- and longer-term effects will the NGO consumer education projects for school students have?

Recommendations

A number of research and educational needs emerge from the overview of supply and demand-side issues discussed above.

■ Issues related to the characteristics of young adults in Australia

The primary need must be to recognise the characteristics of young adults in Australia, and to recognise them as a range of special groups for whom the messages of sustainable consumption is very pertinent, given the associations of advertising and consumerism in the identities of *Generation X*. Research is needed to ascertain to what extent 18-20 year olds are preoccupied with their studies and careers, financial survival, owning a car, social enjoyment, alcohol and independence from their parents. Do these concerns change across the 20-25 year age range?

Images of the individual promoted in cultural and media texts are unrepresentative of Australia's ethnic and class diversity, as is the portrayal of national identity. Therefore, much work remains to be done to recognise different consumption needs, motivations and patterns before appropriate education programmes can be undertaken.

■ Theoretical issues

Strong suggestions have been made in this paper about the possible misperception of young adults as a particular ‘market segment’ to ‘target’ for sustainable consumption campaigns. Factors that led to this suggestion were the lack of homogeneity amongst members of the age group, their diverse geographic and social location, their general lack of money – and often time – for discretionary spending and the potential of more focused educational programmes for younger people. So, what is the case for singling them out – and would 18-25 year olds accept the arguments?

Analysis is also necessary to determine the extent to which it is valid to separate demand-and supply-side factors, especially in a neo-liberal economy such as Australia. With a culture of individualism and ‘blaming the victim’ strong in Australian neo-liberalism, will government, industry and media support educational programmes which adopt comprehensive, cross-sectoral approaches addressing both supply and demand side factors, promote the social justice and ecological aspects of sustainability equally, and focus as much on structural as individual changes? What are the opportunities for resistance and learning how to live otherwise in such a society and how can they be identified and encouraged?

■ Educational programme issues

The relationship between education and community also needs to be recognised so that formal education can provide a sound basis in understanding appropriate concepts and issues which can be consequently reinforced by community education initiatives.

Given the cultural saturation of media images in Australia, it is imperative that young people become literate in their ‘readings’ of advertising and popular culture. Education should therefore foster the development of skills in “decoding and encoding” such cultural texts (Lury 1997). As young Australians are highly familiar with images and signs of popular culture, it would be quite possible to develop this knowledge into resistance against unbridled consumption.

The potential for developing initiatives that combine media education with environmental education has not been fully recognised by

mainstream environmental education approaches because of their association with science and geography. Educational programmes which integrate cultural studies with environmental education need to be developed.

What aspects of formal education and popular culture help young Australians recognize their own materialism and environmental ambivalence? How can they learn their way out?

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Youth action and learning for sustainable consumption in Canada

3

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We are simultaneously rational and irrational; we can both consume and reject what we are consuming; desire permeates everything but is by definition never fulfilled

Mica Nava, 1992:194

Consumerism has become a powerfully evocative symbol of contemporary capitalism and globalisation. Indeed, in light of the growing environmental crisis and social transformations worldwide, it is increasingly visible. Economic growth, lifestyles, and modern identities are, in some way or another, tied inextricably to consumerism. Yet intellectually and morally, consumerism is not easy to make sense of and a number of questions or challenges have arisen.

Past and present production and consumption practices in Canada have revolved around both the extraction and sale of its vast quantities of “renewable” natural resources and the development of a market-driven global “consumer society”. The educational system often mirrors, or perhaps perpetuates, this vision of the New World. In fact, it is argued that one of the deepest and most pervasive educative processes at work over the past decades has been teaching and learning to consume (Clover, 1999; Welton, 1997).

Quality of life, human social relations, and environmental and human health are becoming increasingly unstable and vulnerable as consumerism in Canada escalates. Consumerism is multifaceted: it is the cornerstone of the capitalist system, taunting society with scarcity, appealing to competitiveness, and mimicking tensions of seasonal rarity (Griffiths, 1996). It is a discourse through which power is both exercised and contested. It is about production and

seduction, representing a crisis of values, creativity, and meaning. It is a gendered and racial practice.

Consumerism is a deeply ingrained ideological and structural problem given strength through advertising and marketing, the pervasive informal learning process that creates need and orchestrates ignorance. Like everyone, young people are influenced to establish their identities through the ways in which they consume. In order to develop new policies and educational processes, consumption and production must be understood as a political and collective problem and not simply an individual or behavioural one.

In Canada, present unsustainable practices of consumption and production are important issues to which governments are beginning slowly to respond. Young people, however, are responding quickly and with determination. Many young adults understand the hollowness, fundamental inequity and unsustainability of contemporary consumerism. They are convening throughout Canada via teach-ins, protests, workshops, research, community projects and so on to confront and design alternatives to economic globalisation, cultural homogenisation, media manipulation, and corporate rule.

This chapter discusses consumption and production in Canada and how young adults and the government of Canada are responding to this issue. It does not pretend to be an exhaustive and comprehensive analysis of all the diverse components of the issue of consumption, nor of the policy and young adults' activities being undertaken across the country. Given that the issue is so broad, this paper is necessarily tentative and exploratory. It examines Canada through a resource and social policy lens, and begins with a discussion on the overall concept or category of "youth", as this can help to inform policy/research discussions. It then explores a variety of factors which motivate and perpetuate unequal and unsustainable consumption patterns, and the policies and/or initiatives being undertaken by the federal government, non-governmental organisations and young groups to strengthen public learning and action. Highlighted throughout is the gendered nature of consumption and production practices and discourses, an element which must be central to policy reform and research. To conclude, some recommendations are made for new research areas, a platform from which to embark upon a new journey.

The complexity of “youth” as a category in Canada

The youth identity approach may be inhibiting the emergence of a cohesive environmental and social justice platform.

Jacinda Fairholm, 1998:9

Attempting conceptually to frame the category of “youth” in Canada poses an interesting challenge, because it is so difficult to “fix the parameters” (Geggie and Fairholm, 1998:15). Most often, “youth” is perceived to be people aged between 13 and 18 years. The majority of youth within this age range are out of primary or public school, but are still in high school. As youth cannot legally leave school until age 16, those in the 13 to 16 year age bracket are set apart from the 17 and 18 year-olds. Yet another differentiating factor is that this younger age category cannot vote, nor can they legally drive an automobile.

Once people turn 18 in Canada, they legally become “young adults”. They can take part in the electoral system of the country and have, according to Canadian law, the “political power” which differentiates them from the rest of the “youth” category. The need for this distinction is argued by youth themselves.

Much of the focus on [young people] in the past several years has been on young adults, those over 18 years of age. This has meant that youth have been excluded. Youth ... are people between the ages of 13 and 18.

Dougherty, 1998:17

A “young adult” may be at university/college or in the work force. A combination of the two is most likely today. She or he may also be underemployed, unemployed or even living on the street. Youth underemployment and unemployment are very high in Canada. “While a few are able to get high tech jobs, the vast majority are relegated to low-paying service jobs ... many more find themselves underemployed, unable to use the skills they have learned in the work they do” (Clarke and Dopp, 2000:23). The majority of those who fall into the ‘un’ or underemployed and less educated categories are women, First Nations peoples and people of colour.

Jacinda Fairholm (1998:9) is a former member of Youth for Habitat II. She claims that young activists have been quite successful at creating a political space for themselves on the “board of directors of

private foundations, on government advisory bodies such as Environment Canada's Youth Round Table and as official delegates to United Nations Conferences." She also argues that there is much demand for "youth activists" to "educate the public on strategies for youth inclusion and 'youth-friendly' processes in NGO, government and business structures" (Ibid.:9). She cautions, however, on this "identity-based" approach which constitutes "actions around a particular sense of self" for three reasons. First, she argues that "age as a vehicle for social action" is limited by its fluid nature. Age, she says, is constantly in transition; jockeying for representation tends to fragment youth activists into younger and older youth categories. Second, in terms of building partnerships for social change, it tends to create a false dichotomy by rendering "any other groups or individuals, even if they are allies, as the oppressive 'adult' other." Third, by marginalising themselves from others, Fairholm expresses concern that youth "risk being co-opted; political space has been opened on the basis of age rather than on the basis of alternative environmental vision" (Ibid.:9).

Perhaps the most telling statement of all, and one to which those of us working with the issue of "youth" in Canada must listen, can be found in the country's largest alternative weekly magazine, *Now*. This magazine is run, written and produced almost entirely by people in their early and mid twenties. In an article titled "Homo History", 22 year-old Glenn Sumi (2000:68), begins his article with the following statement: "Imagine this. You're a young person or what's embarrassingly referred to as a 'youth' ..." Food for thought.

UNESCO's working definition of "youth" is people aged between 18 and 25 years. This is the age group which will be focussed on in this discussion, although I will also use the term "young adult", since this is how young people in Canada commonly refer to themselves. When working within this complex focus in Canada, and possibly other industrialised countries, we need to pay attention to how we target these young people given their diversity of locations. It is also important not to think of them as a single or homogeneous unit, for there are vast differences in terms of gender, race and class. Corporate media understands this and has developed diverse predatory strategies to work within these dimensions and categories.

Youth Demographics

Canada, like many other industrialised countries, has an ageing population. The table below provides a breakdown of males and females in Canada (as of 1 July, 2000) between the ages of 15-19 and 20-24, the official categories used by Statistics Canada.¹

1 Information provided by e-mail from Statistics Canada, September 2000.

TABLE 1

| <i>Age Group</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Percentage of Canadian population (30,737,179)</i> |
|------------------|---------------|-------------|---|
| 15 – 19 years | 1,007,290 | 1,063,401 | 6.7% |
| 20 – 24 years | 1,015,798 | 1,061,028 | 6.6% |
| Total | 2,023,088 | 2,124,429 | 13.5% |

The number of “youth” in Canada is only 13.5% of the total population. Approximately 60% of these young people live in urban areas.

Resources, Land and Social Policy in Canada

Canada is a massive and diverse country. A single lake – the Great Slave Lake in the North West Territories – is a third the size of England, and yet the population is a little over 30 million. The City of Toronto, the largest city in Canada with a population of approximately 3 million, or 10% of the population, has been deemed the most multicultural city in the world. Although French and English are the two official languages of Canada – an uneasy partnership indeed – they are not necessarily the predominant languages spoken on the streets of Canada’s largest cities.

Canada is resource-rich. Bordered by three oceans teeming with fish, crustaceans and a variety of sea mammals such as whales and seals, the land, lush with hard and soft wood forests and grasslands, is home to wildlife such as bear, moose and beaver. Drenched in 10 times the fresh water supply of all other countries in the world combined, it is bursting with mineral, ore, uranium and petroleum

deposits. It is with these resources that Canada has built its wealth: the extraction and sale of primary materials has been the cornerstone of the Canadian economy since the coming of the French and British over 500 years ago. For example, Hudson's Bay Company, the first company established in Canada in 1670, became rich by harvesting and marketing animal skins to the European market (Burton, 1958) and is still functioning today, although it has been through several changes. Two of Canada's largest and most profitable (for a small minority) industries today are logging and mining.

Canada also has a long tradition of socialism, building itself on the idea of collectivism rather than individualism. Over the years, Canadians have worked to establish "the most generous and open-handed benefit provisions to be found anywhere in the world" (Clarke, 1997:17). They have created a welfare state that includes a social safety net for employment, universal health care, strong labour laws, sewage and clean water systems, huge parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Together, the vast renewable resource base and benevolent welfare policy should have been able to create and maintain a just and sustainable social, ecological and cultural environment for all Canadians. But for some this was never the case and now, for a growing number, it is no longer the case.

As a result of the interweaving ideologies and practices of capitalism, globalisation, corporatisation and cultural imperialism, today's young adults face growing socio-environmental instability and decline. Unfortunately, although this is not of their making, it is a very real problem that they need to help to correct.

"Collapsing fish stocks, ozone holes, rising carbon dioxide emissions, wild weather events, melting permafrost, overcrowded parks, timber shortages – such things have become the daily headlines in Canada" (Rees, 1998:32). First Nations across Canada have been pushed or bought off their land to make way for logging enterprises, petroleum extraction and the development of hydro-electric dams. This has increased the problems of alcoholism and suicide, particularly among the youth. Another major issue is urbanisation. More than half the population of Canada now "lives in urban areas and this proportion is steadily increasing" (Clark, 2000:19). With increased urbanisation has come the suburban sprawl. Each year, more and more farmland is eaten away by development. Rather than

building sustainable communities, our designers, developers, builders, planners and bankers appear to be stuck in a destructive and costly paradigm ... of car-dependency, traffic jams and identical homes on characterless

streets with names like 'Forest Lane' and 'Woodland Trail' – streets named without the slightest hint of irony after the natural features that were destroyed in order to build them.

Lister, 2000:1

Nina-Marie Lister (Ibid.:1) argues that the suburbs of contemporary Canada or the “sprawling ‘edge cities’ [are] exclusive enclaves of private splendour [and] the ultimate reflection of our consumer-driven narcissistic obsession with the private realm.” As people cocoon themselves in these somewhat artificial spaces, they are better able to disengage from collective civic life and ignore the myriad of social ills such as environmental degradation, poverty, and homelessness which fill the urban scene.

While socio-environmental problems escalate in Canada, governments cut back on ministries and budgets. For example, the Conservative Government² in Ontario cut the Ministry of the Environment budget by 45% and its staff by 32%. At the federal level, “the Natural Resources Ministry’s budget has dropped by 19% with a 30 % loss in staff” over the past few years (Clarke and Dopp, 2000:63).

² The mantra of the Conservative government of Ontario is fiscal responsibility, less government, down with collectivity, and ever more tax cuts.

Consumption, Production and Homogenisation in Canada

The term ‘consumption’ has both English and French roots. In its original form, [the verb] to consume meant to destroy, to pillage, to subdue, to exhaust. It is a word steeped in violence and until the present century had only negative connotations ... Today, many in the Western countries have more than doubled their consumption ... The metamorphosis of consumption from vice to virtue is one of the most important yet least examined phenomena of the twentieth century.

Rifkin, 1996:19

■ Cultural and Historical Values

Cultural questions in Canada are seldom (except by some artists) understood in organic, ecological terms. The land has seemed forever condemned to perpetuate the compelling urban logic ... The issue then becomes whether culture can exist solely within extensions of the metropolitan order

and as a parasite on wilderness, or whether wilderness, protesting its own diminishment by limiting our materials, is demanding a voice which we ignore at our peril.

John Wadland, 1995:12

In the 1950s, Canada saw the unprecedented growth of a consumer society; a term which signifies not just affluence and the expansion of production and markets, but also the increasing penetration of the meaning and images associated with consumption into the culture of everyday life. During this period, the free choice of goods came to symbolise freedom, affluence and the good life (Nava, 1992). The more people consumed, the higher their standard of living, and by association, their quality of life. In fact “forced consumerism was extolled: things had to be consumed, burned, used, replaced and discarded at a constantly accelerating pace” (Lahaye, 1995:60).

Hutchinson (1998:16), a professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, argues that “economic patterns of overconsumption and degradation of the environment have their roots in specific cultural assumptions.” These particular assumptions, he explains, serve as root metaphors or belief structures “which are mythic in origin but aim to provide the human with a functional context for relating to the natural and physical worlds.” Among others, the root of these assumptions is materialism, reductionism, fragmentation, progress and compartmentalisation.

All that exists in the global capitalist system is quantifiable because it can be reduced to a statistical fact and a commodity. One can argue that today human happiness has become basically conditional on the expansion of ownership of material goods. How we see ourselves in Canadian society is often directly proportional to how much we own. Commodities have begun to take on almost mystic powers of intrinsic value. The commodity itself arouses an unusual display of devotion or belief that the object has extraordinary values.

What also makes the idea of consumerism so problematic is that it is more than simply an economic activity. The advertising and marketing world fully understands this. As noted in the introduction, identity, lifestyle and even imagination are inextricably woven into consumerism. The media, which will be discussed in more detail later on, sells not just products, but ‘lifestyles’ and ways of being in this world. They entertain, capture imagination and create specific identifiable needs (Nava, 1992). Powerful marketing practices confuse ‘want’ and ‘need’: what is fundamental to life, such as food, love

and shelter, and what is not, such as increased technology and materials goods. Consumerism in Canada is a political, ideological and structural problem, not an individual behavioural one. Focusing solely on the individual (although I do feel consumers have a certain degree of power) depoliticises and privatises a political and public issue. Labelling it within an individual or private framework also ignores the gender politics of consumerism (Seager, 1994).

Thanks to the major efforts by the environmental and women's movements over the years, the Canadian government now recognises that

consumption practices in Canada (along with geographic and climatic factors) make us one of the largest per capita consumers of energy and generators of waste in the world ... Consumerism promotes unsustainable lifestyles and products.

FAIT³, 1997:3

³ FAIT is the acronym for Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

However, there can be little doubt that consumption is the engine powering the economy in Canada, and many other parts of the industrialised world. It is based on demand, but there is also the problematic question of supply. Does demand create supply or does supply create demand? We need to examine these in terms of their relationship to the media, globalisation, corporatisation and the role of the State.

■ Globalisation and Corporatisation

Globalisation and corporatisation are terms that have become entrenched in the vocabulary and lives of Canadians. For some, this process, or ideology, has been fruitful. It has meant an opening up of world markets for a 'freer' form of trade. Freer trade means the ability to export commodities and services as well as ideas, beliefs and cultures without restraint. Globalisation has made a few people very rich and some people better off. But the repercussions of globalisation for the vast majority, and in particular for women, have not been good. It has resulted in the shirking of responsibility by governments, growing unemployment and underemployment, environmental deterioration and the chipping away of or re-creation of new culture and identity.

Educator/activist Tony Clarke (1997:5) argues that

it is probably fair to say that there was a higher degree of political literacy in Canada about corporations and the power they wield 25 years ago

than there is today. Back then, the press and air waves were filled with lively debates about foreign ownership ... In more recent years, however, there has been surprisingly little analysis done on the political influence of modern corporations over governments today and about what to do about it.

Contemporary forces of free trade and globalisation have not only found ways to blind the public, (this will be explored later) but have in many ways limited the effectiveness and power of national governments. A case in point is a statement of defence by Jean Chretien, Prime Minister of Canada, on the CBC Evening News in May 2000. Chretien said that he could do nothing about the rise in the price of oil and diesel fuel because the price of this commodity “is globally controlled and regulated.” An important question here is: Is globalisation something which is divinely inspired and which moves along by its own inertia while the world’s citizens and governments stand helplessly by, powerless to stop its spiralling trajectory? The answer, of course, is both yes and no.

The Canadian government has played a role in nurturing business through reducing taxes, retaining capital allowances that “allow corporations to write off the depreciation on their equipment and buildings”, establishing a “free trade pact with the United States”, and side-stepping labour laws from time to time.

Clarke, 1997:16

Corporations have become lobbying gurus. With the assistance of a very right wing media system, large numbers of newspapers across Canada are now owned by a few with vested interests (shall we call them special interest groups?). They are able to maintain a certain amount of public control, by hiding and/or depoliticising their activities, and covering up pollution and human rights abuses. The present day situation in Canada is that the economy is dominated by large transnational corporations which are able to control costs, prices, labour and materials through long-term planning and generate internal capital. This means they “can ignore government efforts to fine-tune the economy through traditional monetary and fiscal policies” (Clarke 1997:16).

Although downstream activities often attract the most attention, it is the upstream activities, the production that also needs a close examination.

Villeneuve, 1995

■ Production

Contemporary processes of production tell us something about the ways in which humans interact with each other and the environment. Pre-capitalist economies in Canada revolved around use-value: people engaged in production activities as direct reciprocal, personal relations and not as activities controlled by the relationships between their products. These economies were often referred to as the “feminine” economy. They were based on the philosophy that “those who need, receive, and those who can, give, without close reckoning ... There were no poor and needy in comparison with other members and likewise, no wealthy and privileged” (Villeneuve 1995:56). Everything produced was for the use of the entire community, for subsistence. Humans today continue to interact with each other in order to produce things, for “as individuals [they] cannot produce a plastic bowl from some oil, but socially, collectively, [they] can” (Pepper, 1993:67). The difference is that the interaction is based primarily on producing items of exchange value. Capitalist production is about changing ‘raw’ materials, or elements of the rest of nature, into usable, saleable products. Social life is reduced to competition and all relationships amongst and between humans and the rest of nature become economic relations. Even the word ‘economy’

was defined to exclude all forms of work or production not intended for the market, and the consumer became invisible. This meant, for example, that all unpaid work done by women in the home was contemptuously dismissed as non-economic.

Alvin Toffler, quoted in Rowe, 1993:54

Both human value and the intrinsic value of the rest of nature are excluded from the capitalist framework. They both are inherently tied to what they can produce. Berger and Mohr (1992:25) describe it like this:

What has been achieved is the unprecedented scientific and technical progress and, eventually, the subordination of all other values to those of a world market which treats everything, including people and their labour and their lives and their deaths, as a commodity.

There are also a number of gendered implications to the issues of production and consumption. In particular, there are the *representations and theorisations of the (female) consumer, and the male producer. The activity of the consumer is likely to be constructed as impulsive*

and trivial, as lacking agency whereas the work of the producer tends to be 'hard', 'real' dignified, a source of solidarity and a focus around which to organise politically.

Nava, 1992:190

■ Cultural Homogenisation

Globalisation and corporatisation have also created a juggernaut process of cultural homogenisation. This process is a very important factor in sustainable consumption, but one which often goes unexplored. Although it is often joked that Canada is a country with too much geography and not enough culture, the speed of foreign take-over of small business enterprises by large businesses is staggering. Hectares of fertile farmland and local shops are giving way to foreign megastores such as Wal Mart, Toys R Us, Office Depot and Home Depot. The amount of packaging, waste and items in these enormous city-block stores is astounding. In addition, it is easier and more profitable in Canada to purchase a franchise of McDonalds than to open your own hamburger shop or restaurant. Banks lend money to “sure things”, not to small business people with creative ideas. Fast food chains are sure things. In the mega “help yourself” or “cash and carry” super stores, forming unions is deeply discouraged and often people are not really required. For example, on 2 August 2000 the first “high-tech, self-serve, supermarket check-out in Canada was installed ... The U-Scan Express self-checkout system makes customers their own checkout clerks.”⁴

⁴ “Robotic checkout clerk on the job in Toronto”, Metro, August 2, 2000, p. 1.

If Canada wishes to begin to deal with the issue of over- and unhealthy consumption, it cannot continue to ignore the fact that *U.S. culture has been taking over ... Coca Cola, hamburgers, Barbie dolls and Superman have become international. For profits, the U.S. companies have pushed junk food, junk drinks, junk culture everywhere ... It is not a cultural exchange, but one-sided cultural dominance.*

Bhasin, 1992:30

Homogenisation destroys diversity, creativity, imagination and memory by creating a world where spaces, people, foods and ideas look, taste, smell, feel, sound and act the same.

■ Creating ‘consumer kids’: the role of corporate media

The classroom is targeted [by corporations] as an environment that ‘students love and adults trust.’

Clarke and Dopp, 2000:24

“There are over 600 commercials on TV everyday” (Nava, 1992:171). The streets of cities and towns and the sides of buses and schools in Canada are littered with billboards and other advertisements. Each time someone logs onto the Internet, they are bombarded with advertising messages: ‘things’ and words dancing across the screen which encourage them to shop and consume more. Academic and advertising analysts have been concerned about the possible negative “effects of a constant diet of television programmes and commercials, particularly on young viewers who are considered to be the most at risk of being corrupted or duped by entreaties to buy” (Nava, 1992:172). And like all parts of the complex issue of consumerism there are diverse opinions on the role of media and its impact on young people.

Nava argues that often the discourses around consumerism and the media are problematic and partial. They tend to conjure up the image of undereducated, indiscriminating and undisciplined young people who are addicted to TV and who mindlessly imbibe the advertisers’ messages along with the materialist values of the consumer society ... Youth are considered to be more vulnerable, more gullible and more inclined to be persuaded to buy totally useless things (Nava, 1992:172-173).

She suggests that in fact, young adults today have special “decoding skills” they use and are not taken in or manipulated by media advertisements. For this reason, they are “not so easily duped” by advertising. Advertisers, she argues, view “young people as the most literate sector of their audience” and must respond to their “sophisticated critical skills” by themselves becoming more and more sophisticated and diverse “regardless of what is being sold” (Ibid.:193).

Although the amount of critical awareness emerging from young adults in Canada supports her argument to a certain degree, there is much proof that the media must share in the blame of creating Canada’s consumer culture and that in particular, it ruthlessly targets with an intent to manipulate and coerce. For example, a 1995

interview with Jacques Duval,⁵ an advertising executive in Montreal, raised a number of important points. When asked about the role advertising plays in developing new consumer markets Duval noted that “our work more often than not boils down to boosting sales of a product in a particular market, and thus to encouraging consumption ... to claim otherwise would be a lie”. He agrees that advertising unabashedly contributes “to the consumer society. That’s the whole point of our business. Our clients seek to promote consumption of their products and services.” Duval in particular, and the advertising industry in general, believes that “human beings enjoy consuming. The act of consumption is an act of power” and therefore, marketers simply give people what they want. Duval concludes the interview by arguing that “it would be a mistake to impose a professional code of ethics on any advertising field whatsoever. It would stifle creativity which is the driving force in our profession”.

For advertisers, particularly when reaching out to young people and women, it is often the selling, not the product, that is its central purpose of advertising. Advertisements attempt to provide moments of “intellectual stimulation, entertainment and pleasure” (Nava, 1992:181) that revolve as much around selling an image, dream and/or lifestyle as the product itself. In Canadian society, “youth-oriented magazines and advertisements glorify the accumulation of consumer goods, promoting over-consumption, and a throw-away society” (“Media Collective”, FAIT, 1997:3).

Clarke and Dopp (2000:32), claim that

Canada’s youth market is valued at \$1.5 billion annually ... Canadian kids in turn influence the spending of another \$15 billion. For a rapidly increasing number of corporations, this burgeoning youth market represents an untapped source for expanding profits. ‘Kids are more giving’ (than adults) declares one market guru. ‘They’ll give you more profits.’

The youth market is often viewed “as a common consumer culture. What unites [them] on the planet, say market gurus, are the logos of brand name products like Nike, Levis, Coca Cola and the NBA all rolled into one” (Ibid.:32). It is still understood, however, that women are the primary shoppers, and the vast number of commercials on Canadian television are directed at women. For example, there is an increasing amount of household products (i.e. the anti-bacterial brigade) today and 95% of the propaganda ads include women. There is also a huge increase in fashion and product info-mercials, again primarily directed at women. Even automobile advertisements,

once the bastion of maledom, show women behind the wheel, using every ploy from child safety to sexual equality in their need for speed and freedom.

The media, in carrying out the wishes/needs of corporate Canada and the dominant ideology, actively manipulate in a coherent and often unfractured fashion. The development of the consumer society and cultural sameness, or homogenisation, by corporations in Canada has relied, to an unprecedented degree, upon the media. “If the purpose of advertising is the manipulation of the mind, and deception its common thread, then corporate advertising in schools could be well on its way to becoming state of the art” (Ibid.:32).

■ Marketing in the Structures of Education

*Where once the student was taught that the unexamined life was not worth living, he [sic] is now taught that the profitably lived life is not worth examining.*⁶

Clarke and Dopp (2000:24), write that

One of the key marketing strategies used by corporations in Canada is to develop educational products designed in such a way as to get their advertising messages directly to students in the classroom. Increasingly, curriculum units and lesson plans are now being designed by corporations for direct use by teachers.

For example, a US company, Lifetime Learning Systems, develops educational programmes for corporations in schools throughout the U.S. and Canada. It has an industry advertisement which shows a crowd of students clutching fistfuls of money with the caption: “They are ready to spend and we reach them” (Ibid.:25). Another example comes from an Ottawa high school. To supplement the study of Shakespeare’s play, *The Merchant of Venice*, American Express has provided a “travel and tourism” course which encourages students to explore the best overseas routes, seat sale prices, and hotel rooms, if one were travelling to “virtual Venice” today (Ibid.:25). There are numerous other examples of this type of predatory behaviour in schools. Often, government actions ensure that it will not only continue, but escalate as well. For example, the Ontario Conservative Government has cut back considerably on the amount of preparation time teachers can have. Clarke and Dopp are quite certain that *it stands to reason that there will be increasing dependence on the use of video education products designed to promote corporate interests.*

⁶ This quote by Benjamin Barber appears at the conclusion of the e-mails by IConario which revolved around setting up protest activities during the meeting of the Organisation of American States held in Windsor, Ontario in June.

Furthermore, it is quite likely that more and more corporations trying to tap into the 'consumer kids' market in Ontario will be turning to companies like Lifetime Learning Systems to produce educational products for use in the classroom.

By moving into schools, “marketers ensure that vital messages can be delivered where they most effectively change behaviour and attitudes” (Ibid.:24). I raise this point because today’s school children become tomorrow’s adults and one must always, when implementing any type of research or educational process, be aware of history, of past influences and experiences which can continue to affect contemporary behaviour. Schools are where it begins but I hope we realise it does not stop there.

The information centre of the biggest library at the University of Toronto, Robarts, is now named after the Scotiabank. The vast majority of the food services available on university campuses are health-numbing fast food chains with disposable cutlery and plates. Members of major corporations often sit on the governing boards of universities across Canada, or have centres and even buildings named after them, by way of the substantial contributions they make (Ibid.:2000).

As mentioned above, young people are also bombarded with advertising each time they log onto the Internet. Items can be bought and sold without ever having a conversation with another living being. The isolation of young people in front of the computer screen seems to be highly relevant to increased consumption and indeed should merit some further investigation. But perhaps more insidious is the fact that the Internet itself will soon provide corporate marketers with the technology they need to track the consumer tastes and choices of children and teens by monitoring the ‘mouse droppings’ of individual users. This will allow them to determine not only how well their advertising is received, but also how to [better] target personal produce messages [directly at individuals] (Clarke and Dopp, 2000:32).

The learning environments of both youth and young adults are saturated with corporate propaganda, unhealthy food and excessive waste. Perhaps young people, as Mica Nava argued, are not “dupable”, but if that were the case – many would argue it is not – it would certainly not be for lack of trying. Like everyone else, young people today are enfranchised into the new market economy. What

they learn in their pedagogical institutions can set a “lifetime precedent of buying products that harm the ecology and humanitarian principles around the world” (“Media Collective”, FAIT, 1997:3).

Canadian government policy and youth initiatives on consumption

At present, a Canadian firm that invests in cleaner production techniques could see its tax on capital increase because of this investment.

Marjolaine Naud, 1995:63

The position of the Canadian government around the issue of consumption and production is difficult to uncover, as it varies from document to document and from day to day. In 1997, the Canadian government argued that

a consumer culture influences youth to ‘go shopping’ as a form of regular activity. The creation of an automobile-based society has helped lead to common urban problems such as air pollution, urban sprawl, widespread loss of native habitat, and the disconnection of people from nature.

FAIT, 1997:2.⁷

⁷ The document is titled “Canadian Youth Perspectives on Sustainable Development.” It is part of Canada’s participation in the meeting of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in April 1997.

A government document published on the Internet in 2000, “What is the Sustainable Consumption Challenge” argues that

Canada consumes at a rate that is four times higher than what can be sustained. If every country consumes as much as Canada we would need three more planets to provide us with the resources ... In order to meaningfully address environmental issues in ... countries like Canada ... it is important to address our consumption patterns. This is because perceptions of desirable consumption patterns will greatly affect the future patterns of production (2000:3).

Yet at the July 2000 meeting of the G-8 in Okinawa, Jean Chrétien, while actively promoting the need for wealthy developing nations to agree to a substantial debt relief to the developing world, urged the others to “see aid to the neediest as a smart economic policy.” He argued that by assisting these other countries, “we will be creating consumers for the future. If these people, rather than make \$1 a day, were to make \$5 a day, they would become consumers more than they are today ... not only will it alleviate poverty but it [will] eventually [provide] customers for our goods and services” (Whittington, 2000:2).

These are indeed mixed messages. On the one hand, Canadians are expected to consume less in Canada, which is an excellent idea even if, once again, it focuses solely on the individual. On the other hand, they are also perpetuating the idea of a consumer culture or society elsewhere – a society with western ideals rather than its own. It supports the ideology and practice of economic development rather than life-centred development.

The fact is that each quarter, the Canadian government measures the effectiveness of its policies according to the rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Villeneuve, 1995:4). The unemployed are promised jobs, not if corporations and industries are forced to use more labour intensive practices and fewer labour eliminating technologies and toxic chemicals, but rather, if consumption increases and thereby “spurs a recovery” (Ibid.:4). Given this, there can be little doubt that although Canada purports to want to see a new “sustainable future”, economic growth and increased development are still more highly valued and sought after.

■ The use of economic instruments in Canada

There are critics of all proposals to use market forces to phase out environmentally damaging products ... The nature of vested interests makes it inconceivable that the true [pollution] costs will ever be reflected.

Marie-Christine Lahaye, 1995:62

Marjoline Naud (1995:63) notes that “Canada makes insufficient use of its tax system to integrate economic and environmental policies.” In terms of the area of consumption, “there are no specific measures encouraging Canadians to consume less polluting goods and services.” There are only a few examples of specific levied taxes that would bring about change, and many of these are eroded by incoming provincial governments. For example, the New Democratic government in Ontario in the early 1990s, “introduced a special tax on automobile purchases, with the amount varying according to the vehicles’ fuel consumption.” The election in 1995 of the Conservative Party, however, saw that tax reversed, along with several other environmental policies.

Canada does, all the same, have a goods and service tax. This is a tax paid by consumers at the point of purchase. The main problem with this tax is that there is no penalty at the point of production. In other words, the “external costs resulting from polluting activities

are born not by those who are principally responsible for those activity but by the other members of society” (Ibid.:64). Although those companies and industries “who pollute [should] bear the costs of the pollution” (Ibid.:64), the reality is, as mentioned previously, that corporations and industries rule in Canada. When confronted with any environmental regulations, industries simply state that they will pull out of Canada, which would result in the loss of often hundreds of jobs. In addition, Canada is mired in trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Any internal attempts to change policy or tax systems would be subject to a trade assessment by the World Trade Organisation, an organisation Canada whole-heartedly engaged in setting up.⁸

8 To date, the only winner in any of these trade disputes between Canada and the United States has been the US, which surprises no one around the world except the government of Canada.

The World Trade Organisation’s mandate is, “to promote global free trade by working toward the elimination of all tariff and non-tariff barriers to the free flow of goods and services across borders” (Clarke and Dopp, 2000:77). Problematically, it

has been given legislative as well as judicial powers which means, in effect, that unelected trade officials have the power to override national laws, policies and programmes that contravene the global trade treaty (Ibid.:77).

It is certain that the adoption of environmental taxes at the point of production would greatly benefit Canada, even though it would have an impact on its economy. However, it would take creativity, imagination and a strong commitment to socio-environmental change. Canada has the creativity and capital to make this change.

■ Youth Focus

The Canadian government has placed a strong focus on youth in terms of consumer education. It recognises “the importance of involving young Canadians in environmental issues and empowering them to engage their voices in the environmental policy-making process (FAIT, 1997:5). This is because ‘youth’

make up a distinct consumer category. As well, a large portion of family consumption is directly or indirectly influenced by youth. Youth must be considered as tomorrow’s consumers. The consumption patterns and desires youth acquire today will influence their adult lifestyle and consequently, future global consumption patterns (Ibid.:3).

The government of Canada has put several initiatives in place to work with and support youth, in terms of sustainable consumption.

Here I will mention only a few. One initiative has been to set up the National Youth Round Table. Young people are brought together to provide information which the government sees as “crucial to effective policy development” (Ibid.:5). A second initiative, led by Environment Canada, is to involve young Canadians in international meetings as journalists. In the past years, there has been a lack of materials available to youth in a language that is both familiar and motivating. Youth journalists attending the international events are in a good position to communicate the knowledge gained to other young people both in Canada and internationally (Ibid.:6).

A third initiative is EcoAction 2000. This is a Community Funding Programme “that provides financial support to community groups for projects that have measurable, positive impacts on the environment” (Environment Canada, 2000:1). Priorities are given to projects that achieve results in the following areas: Clean Air and Climate Change, Clean Water, and Nature (Ibid.:1). This is an excellent programme for NGOs and community and youth groups across Canada. One problem, however, is that any idea of a critical education is neglected as their outcomes are simply not measurable and would simply stimulate debate and challenge the status quo. A second problem is that the environment is viewed solely in its physical or natural form rather than within a cultural and social context. For example planting trees is applicable, discussions on poverty are not.

Environment Canada also publishes a document, “An Environmental Citizen ... Who Me?”. This is a type of test to see if a person’s lifestyle or daily activities are environmentally friendly. It asks questions such as, “Did you know that ... a tap that drips once every second wastes about 10,000 litres of water per year?” and so on. Although quite useful in one way, it is very much individually focussed and is geared toward behavioural change rather than stimulating critical thinking around root causes and political structures. Perhaps other questions could be included, which would ask: What are the largest polluting industries in Canada? How many are Canadian-owned? What responsibility do they have to the Canadian public? How much do the Chief Executive Officers make? What is the profit/tax ratio? Given the secrecy surrounding this information, much investigation would be required to find out the answers.

A final activity I will mention here is the Sustainable Consumption Challenge. This project, run by the Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is taking place in Canada. It calls on youth (ages 15-30) to “tell us what

they are doing to make consumption in Canada more sustainable. Whether it is a current activity you are participating in, a project you are working on or just an idea, we want to hear from you.” (p. 1).⁹ Again, this is an important initiative, in that it supports the ideas and work of young people across Canada. It is, however, set up in a framework of competitiveness through the concept of “best practices”. Although I could be wrong, and would be pleased to be proven so, the schemes suggested seem quite bland. They include activities such as car pooling or cycling to work or school; harvesting and utilisation of porcupine, caribou, fish and other forms of wildlife (targeted specifically at First Nations cultures), and creating posters about consumer culture. I am quite sure that the Teach-Ins and acts of civil disobedience undertaken by literally thousands of young Canadian adults against, for example the meetings of the Organisation of American States in Windsor and Quebec, would not make it into the “Step Lightly: Youth Action on Sustainable Consumption” book.

⁹ All quotes are from the “Canadian Package”.

■ Youth views on government efforts

On 25 July 2000 I engaged in an interview with Sarah Dopp of the Polaris Institute in Ottawa. She summed up how the vast majority of young people in Canada feel about the effectiveness of the government to bring about the profound changes required to create a just, healthy and sustainable country:

young people do not see the political system as having any bearing on them. [Those] who engage in activism do so because they sense the powerlessness, the limitation and the corporate perpetuation of the government. Most question why they should vote when ‘it won’t change anything’.

Many young people, Dopp argues, believe that governments have stopped responding to their concerns and that there is a real need to “examine what is at the root of government actions and how transnational corporations control things behind the scenes.” This means that many believe the only real way to bring about change is to develop their own critical education activities and materials.

A new wave of activism and adult learning and education is emerging in young adults across Canada. This wave [is] “loosely defined as the ‘sustainability movement’, [because] it embraces a wide variety of issues” such as poverty, environmental destruction, and deteriorating communities (Greggie and Fairholm, 1998:10). Activists in the

sustainability movement see in these issues a common factor and this is “unequal power relations among people, and between people and the natural world” (Ibid.:10). It includes everything from Teach-ins to building partnerships; critically focussed workshops to boycotts; popular theatre to the development of educational materials and participatory research projects. This movement simultaneously critiques and challenges consumer culture and its root causes, while recognising “the power of consumer pressure as a tool for change” (Buckthought, 1998:27).

■ Youth initiatives on sustainable consumption in Canada

Jacinda Fairholm (1998:9) argues that in Canada

most youth are not activists. In reality the voice of the ‘youth’ activist is a marginal one. The average Canadian young person is more concerned with social status and peer acceptance than issues of representation, the environment or social justice.

As there have been no in-depth quantitative or qualitative studies in this area in Canada, there is little way of gauging the validity of this statement. However, Fairholm does acknowledge that “youth are in a position to raise awareness of the effects of the market economy, not only on ecological integrity and resource use, but also on social justice concerns”, such as food, accessibility, poverty and consumption (Ibid.:9).

In terms of educational practices and opportunities, and given the politics of environmental problems, it seems that the development of yet another awareness raising campaign that targets youth will, in the long run, be totally ineffective. No-one can begin to compete with the systematic targeting practices of corporations and the media. We therefore need to develop educational programmes that engage young people critically, actively, creatively and from their knowledge and understandings in debate and analysis rather than assuming that the issue is a problem of awareness and “telling” them through posters or other such means of imparting information. It is hands-on participation that helps people to move towards the development of concrete solutions, not further information. In fact, this type of educational process has been emphasised for over 40 years or more by UNESCO through its numerous publications, “Connect” being a case in point. Again, “telling” people is the least effective

way of reaching the adult population, which in Canada includes 18-25 year olds.

Many young adults in Canada have been, and will continue to be, “actors for social transformation.” They work together to break “through barriers that have in the past prevented them from sharing their vision and ideas for action” (Geggie, 1998:17). One of the main barriers has been geographical distance which is now largely overcome by the use of electronic communication. According to Nava (1992), “western consumerism contains more revolutionary seeds than we have hitherto anticipated” (Nava, 1992). It has already generated new youth activities, making way for a different economic, political, ecological, social and creative activism in society. The full scale of youth power and organisation in this area has yet to be imagined.

To demonstrate the diversity of creative, participatory, democratic and engaged learning activities being undertaken by young adults towards sustainable consumption, a few examples are given below. They highlight the interconnections between activism, partnership building and education. Almost all the information came from websites and/or e-mail messages, or from cyberspace education and activism. There are a number of national examples of activities and alliances amongst movements for consumer rights, environmental protection, and social equality.

Clayoquot Sound (CS) is an area of coastal temperate rainforest located on the west coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia (B.C.). The forests are also home to many of Canada’s aboriginal peoples who have never ceded their territories and still maintain their ties to the land through activities such as fishing, hunting and trapping. Effects of clear cut logging activities – a partnership between the government of B.C. and the MacMillan Bloedel (MacBlo) corporation – have degraded ecosystems, undermined the integrity of the forests and destroyed traditional economies, further contributing to the impoverishment of First Nations peoples.

In the early 1990s, an ad hoc group of young people including artists, NGO workers, students and First Nations peoples came together to block MacBlo logging operations. Run predominantly by young women, the efforts attracted the attention of thousands of people who flooded to the Sound to join the protest. It became the largest civil disobedience action in Canadian history. The blockades were coupled with educational workshops, teach-ins and the broad

dissemination of literature, as well as a very successful boycott (Clover, 1995). Young people travelled throughout Europe and Canada, asking businesses not to purchase old-growth forest timber or products from Canada. The boycott by many European companies was so successful that MacBlo, in order to attempt to save its reputation, took out a full-page advertisement in the national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, arguing that these actions were jeopardising jobs. They lost, and today Clayoquot is the site of an innovative native-local-forest-industry experiment.

On 11 November 1999 the “Youth and Student Teach-in on the WTO”, was held at the University of British Columbia. It brought together youth activists, students and NGO members to discuss a strategy for the WTO meeting in Seattle. It also used the opportunity to explore a number of issues such as Genetically Modified Foods, Using Art for Revolution and Direct Action, Trade and the Environment, Jobs and Young Workers, The History of Free Trade, the Military and the Corporate Complex and other issues of democracy and social change.

Similarly, in preparation for the June 2000 OAS Conference in Windsor, Ontario, a number of young people came together in an educative-action process designed to “shut down the Organisation of American States (OAS)”. From June 1-3, this OAS organising coalition held a teach-in, “Convergence and Teach-In: Civil Disobedience Training”. The teach-in consisted of a number of activities. The first was to brainstorm “tactics/techniques that could be used to shut down the OAS”. A second was to develop a statement of principles by which they would work. In addition, a number of sub- or working groups in the areas of Media, Outreach and Training, Fundraising and Logistics were created. These were in charge of everything from “creating propaganda, liaising with mainstream media ... and distributing propaganda to regional/local collectives” to training in the areas of non-violent resistance, legal rights/jail solidarity, and police brutality.

The Polaris Institute in Ottawa is designed to enable citizen movements to re-skill and re-tool themselves to fight for democratic social change in an age of corporate-driven globalisation. Operation 2000 is a project developed to support young people in fostering leadership and in challenging and confronting corporate rule and economic globalisation. Members of Polaris work with “young people in high schools, universities, workplaces and communities in Ontario. The objectives are met through workshops on issues such

as consumerism, international trade, and corporatisation of post secondary education.” Used in these workshops is a remarkable book developed by the Institute, Challenging Corporate Rule. Divided into three parts, the book helps participants to explore a diversity of elements of corporate rule from schools to other public institutions around the world. It also provides skills and tools “that can be used to further develop leadership capacities for economic justice” (2000:4). The book is accompanied by a video, “Beyond McWorld”, which documents youth activism and challenges to corporate rule across Canada.

Again in Ottawa, a coalition of NGOs currently host an “Ottawa Organic Picnic”. The purpose of the picnic is to demonstrate how “It’s easy to live pesticide-free!” Free organic food and information such as the “Organic in Ottawa” booklet, which includes information on organic food suppliers, lawn and garden care, organic producers, and other links, are available.

“GeneAction Monthly Meeting and Information Session” features discussions, presentations and workshops” on various aspects of Genetic Engineering (GE) and Genetically-Modified Organisms (GMO’s). The purpose is to provide much needed information about this important area of bio-manipulation, to consider its possible affects on humans and the biosphere and collectively discuss what can be done about it (Ontario Environment Network Listserv, September 2000).

The Great Plains Ecosystem Education project, a component of the yearly conference of the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication, took place in Manitoba in July 2000. It offered the opportunity for students and environmental educators to explore what they referred to as “the way we were, the way we are, and the way we learn about our environment in order to discover enduring pathways into the future.” Activities included formal presentations, workshops, panel discussions, outdoor activities and field trips (Ontario Environment Network Listserv, September 2000).

“Sustainable Sanity Youth Week” is an “8-day experience of holism and interconnection for youth (ages 15-25) environmentalists and activists with passion and energy for effective action in the world. Travelling together, young people participate in hands-on workshops on permaculture and sustainable systems design, organic and biodynamic agriculture, compost toilets, green energy, green/global economics, deep ecology, holistic body health and nutrition, yoga,

movement and ritual. It also includes time for being together, swimming, writing, drumming, dancing, and relaxing” (Ibid.:2000).

The “Wild Seed Collecting: Start Your Backyard Tree Nursery” is a programme designed to teach young people new skills. Participants are provided with the opportunity to locate tree seeds and “learn to recognize the right maturity”, clues on how to read nature’s ways, and how and when to plant the seeds (Ibid.:2000).

Another skills training event focuses on learning to build with cob and straw bales, while helping to create a medical clinic in the rolling hills of the Canadian Shield. Cob, a mixture of sand, clay, and straw, is hand sculptured into a monolithic mass which hardens like soft concrete to create sound, organic, healthy buildings, garden walls, ovens and a variety of other things (Ibid.:2000).

The Growing Jobs for Living Coalition in Belleville, Ontario, organises critically focussed workshops in areas such as GM Foods, poverty, and women and health. It also provides young people from the local college with the opportunity to work on organic farms and acquire skills in organic growing, marketing, accounting and so on. One of the primary purposes of this activity is to try to prevent young people from migrating to the cities by demonstrating that there are work and opportunities in the rural areas.

■ Pedagogical Institutions

Far from being on the cutting edge for change, many pedagogical institutions, as was mentioned earlier, have been co-opted by corporations and engaged in a process of maintaining the status quo. There are, however, some programmes and activities taking place in colleges and universities which are worth examining.

Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) are found on each university campus across Canada. Student-funded and volunteer-based, this programme “promotes and engages in action, education and research on a wide range of social justice and environmental issues.” The PIRGs also offer the opportunity to build a wide range of skills while working for meaningful social change.” The diversity of issues which the PIRGs take on include action against sweat shops; challenges to the commodification of education and corporatisation of the campus; anti-poverty work and enhancing skills in participatory research. Some have taken on a major role in the organisation of

Environment Weeks. These Weeks provide the opportunity “for students and community members to learn more about the environmental issues” relevant to the campus, city, and ecosystems around the globe. The Week’s “activities demonstrate what environmental initiatives are taking place and how we can all contribute to solutions.”

Footprints International is a project run by the University of Calgary’s Division of International Development, Department of Education. The primary objective of this programme is to improve students’ skills in using popular theatre as a critical yet creative entertaining educational tool. It also seeks to examine issues of consumerism, sustainability and the exploitation of natural resources. In the first year, the project was called “Tales for the Sari-Sari” (Keough, 1995). It linked Canada and the Philippines, developing performances held in community centres, church basements and school auditoriums across the two countries.

A course at Loyalist College in Belleville on Community Development and Adult Learning uses the community as a space in which to explore a diversity of issues. For example, students are taken to mega-stores such as Wal Mart and Toys R Us, or to large chain grocery stores to discuss everything from waste and packaging to gender socialisation, cultural homogenisation and food and nutrition.

In all of these activities, the educational component is central. Through creative and critical processes of adult education, these young adults are learning and teaching for change.

■ Conclusion: Recommendations for Priority Research Areas

In this text, I have attempted to demonstrate the complex and diverse discourses around the issue of sustainable consumption. I have also tried to show that the term “youth” encompasses a vast range of people with very different ideas, beliefs and activities.

The Canadian government is providing opportunities for young people to demonstrate their efforts and become part of the political process. In addition, young adults across Canada are building partnerships, engaging in direct action and creating their own learning and educational opportunities. If governments really want to help, they must recognise that for these young people, social change means addressing the root causes of an overall paradigm: a system

of power and control that is having detrimental effects on communities and on the Earth's natural ecosystems.

The least effective educational strategies are “public awareness and behaviour[al] change” programmes. The lead must be taken from youth themselves, fashioning educational work upon their ideas, which are progressive and politically focussed. Youth strategies overlap and intersect across a broad spectrum of issues. Common among them is the strong educational focus, the systematic analysis of social, economic and ecological issues, and the need for alternative forms of political participation. Collectively, young people have the skills, energy and will to work towards a fundamental change in society through the power of renunciation, resistance and renewal.

In conclusion, here are some recommendations for research and education:

- 1) Complement the UNEP study with a qualitative and quantitative study of young people's “activist” activities for social justice and environment. In particular, document and analyse the successes and challenges of youth activism and activities aimed at challenging trade agreements and corporatisation.
- 2) Develop “social categories” for youth such as income, gender, ethnicity, and location, and analyse the differences in lifestyles and habits.
- 3) Further investigate the ways in which marketing is targeted at women, and the impact it could have, or is having already, on possible progress towards more sustainable consumption patterns. Conversely, investigate the emergence of women-specific environment and consumer groups and their particular strategies.
- 4) Organise a series of conferences on “youth” (ages 18-30) and sustainable consumption in Canada (and other industrialised countries). Papers presented at the conferences could be compiled into a book or anthology.
- 5) Using a gender approach, investigate the educational component of the work of youth groups and organisations across Canada. This study would examine the diversity of educational practices within a framework of critical adult education.

- 6) Explore the possibility of developing more learning activities in the workplace for both young and old.
- 7) Study the number and content of courses in universities and colleges across Canada which examine issues within a consumption and production framework.
- 8) Develop a study of university/community projects which critically and creatively engage people in a process of learning for sustainable consumption.
- 9) Using a gender approach, study the diversity and effectiveness of cyberspace activism and educational activities by young adults in terms of sustainable consumption.
- 10) Explore the ways in which youth organisations and coalitions are developing partnerships with others in North America and around the world (youth-to-youth, etc.).
- 11) Fully explore the process of cultural homogenisation and its impact on developing a diverse, healthy and sustainable society.
- 12) Develop a study that examines youth isolation time on computers and the possible link to increased consumer activity.

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Raving hedonists or environmentally concerned? Youth in Norway

4

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What are young people today really like, and what will this generation bring to the future? Are they only interested in satisfying their own needs by buying new things, or do they care about the future and the environment? How is this reflected? Are they willing to do things that interfere with their everyday life, or are the worries and changes tied to more remote issues that may not affect them directly, but should be characterized as state and legal affairs?

In recent decades, prosperity has increased and most people have improved their standard of living. But maybe we have become too rich? It takes a strong back to carry the burden of success, says an old proverb. Over the past ten years, Norway has seen economic growth and a marked increase in private consumption. In the wake of this development, a number of social ills have emerged: status seeking, consumerism, self-indulgence and environmental destruction. Such symptoms of prosperity are difficult to reconcile with the ideal of a good future for everybody. In the general debate, these social ills are often associated with youth; young people are presented as self-indulgent hedonists, while their parents are perceived as more sensible. The purchase of ever bigger cars and houses are regarded as investments, while buying a pair of jeans is seen as wasteful.

The framework around today's youth is dramatically different from that in which their parents grew up, and this creates a sense of insecurity in the parent generation. The world has opened up, youth culture has become more international, and influences from all over the world are broadcast through the mass media. Young people are faced with completely new opportunities and choices. Prosperity has

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increased, and with prosperity comes the commercialisation of child and youth culture. Children and young people no longer live in a protected childhood world, but are the target of marketing and consumerism; they are confronted with the invitation to consume at every turn. In advanced capitalist markets, where there is a need for rapid consumption of goods and services, children and young people quickly become important consumers. Each market segment is defined by its size and purchase power, its needs and desires for a product and its willingness to spend money on it. Once children and young people – largely financed by their parents – started to fit the criteria of a market and became consumers in their own right, marketing was directed at them (Pecora 1998). Moreover, children and young people, as well as adults, have a high level of consumption.

In an increasingly individualistic society, young people are engaged with consumer goods to the extent that they can be an integral part of the presentation of the self. The individual defines him or herself through the signals that are transmitted via material carriers; consumer goods become stage props for the part that the individual wants to play (Goffman 1992). For some people the use of such props is problematic, either because they are unable to afford them, or because they see negative consequences of increased consumption.

Young people are not a homogenous mass – they differ in terms of economic power, where they live, what they do and their attitudes. Even the kind of stimuli that they are exposed to may affect consumption patterns. We have mentioned the media and advertising as possible influences. Research also shows that peer groups have considerable impact, and that peer group cultures are hierarchical. Styles and consumer patterns are therefore believed to trickle down (McCracken 1988). Do young people in big cities set the standards, and are they ideals for other youths? If so, what are young people in big cities interested in, and how do they feel about their own consumption and questions related to this issue?

This chapter attempts to answer some of these questions in relation to young people in Norway, their patterns of consumption and the environment. First, we will discuss Norway, its economy, different structural conditions and the most widespread attitudes in the population. Second, we will describe the characteristics of young people today and what factors contribute to their consumption patterns. Third, we will describe some aspects of young people's interests and consumer patterns based on a recent survey from Norway, as well as their attitudes towards consumption and the environment. Finally,

we will take a closer look at a handful of youth organizations that are concerned with consumption and the environment, and discuss some possible alternatives for the future.

Norway and the Norwegians

Norway is a northern European country, with about 4.5 million citizens (1999). Every year about 60,000 children are born in Norway. In 1990, 72% of the population lived in the most densely populated areas of the south (SSB1999b) whilst in the northern regions where the climate is cold and the soil is poor, the population is sparse.

■ Norway – a rich country

Norway is a rich oil-producing country built on the welfare state. Materially, a large part of the population has a high standard of living. In 1994, 3.6% of households had an income below the poverty line, poverty being defined as households with an income that is less than half the average income (Johannessen 1998). The poor people are few, but they are mostly young. Poverty seems to be a temporary state in life, and most young people today will have a better economy in the course of time. The welfare state is based on the idea of collectivism, where a considerable share of public resources is spent on securing a certain standard of living for the population. The state takes responsibility for the well being of its citizens in a number of areas, such as education, family, health, labour etc. The goal is to reduce social differences. However, in recent decades the development has been towards greater differences between the rich and the poor.

■ Norway – a country with a high consumption of energy

Due to the large number of waterfalls, electricity is the main source of energy in Norway, and it is inexpensive. Houses use a lot of electricity, first, because of the cold climate, and second, because houses are large and comfortable. The average size grew from 101m² in 1981 to 122m² in 1997. Among families with the youngest child in the age group 7-19 years, almost half lived in houses of 160m² or more. The consumption of energy is not only connected to the growing size of houses, it is also connected to an increase in sanitary rooms and an increase in household appliances. Every third household has

two bathrooms. This depicts a lifestyle in which walking bare foot and wearing a T-shirt is normal, even though the outdoor temperature is far below zero. In 1999, the consumption of electricity increased by 8% (Økologisk Utsyn 1999).

Norwegians also use a lot of energy driving cars. Driving is important in the organization of everyday life. In 1996, 73% of households had a car (including one-person households, many of which do not have a car). Among couples whose youngest child is 7 years old, 35% of households had two or more cars in 1994. One reason for this is that Norwegians are not very urban. Most prefer living in detached houses in the suburbs. The 1997 study of living standards shows that 80% of the population live in small houses and that there has not been any increase in the number of people living in apartment buildings. The urbanization process mainly consists of a growth of the suburbs which involves driving to work, to the shops, to children's activities and so on. People use the car more often, and they drive longer distances. One of the main political issues in Norway, as well as in the rest of Europe, is the price of fuel. Action to lower the price of fuel is spreading to many European countries.

The new technological possibilities for working at home encourages the development of the family with two homes. About 20% of households have holiday homes, (Frønes og Brusdal 2000) and their upkeep demands a great deal of energy, as does transport between the two.

■ Norwegian people's relation to nature and the environment

About 3.2% of the country is arable land and garden, tilled fields and meadows. Forests cover 21.7% of the country. This means that Norway is a country with much untouched nature, and a certain amount of wildlife which a large part of the population is in favour of protecting. However, there are conflicting views over the protection of certain animals, for example, livestock farmers would like to kill the wolf.

Norwegians like walking in the forests and in the mountains. Over a 12-month period, 70% of the population aged between 16-79 years had taken walks in the forest and 52% had taken walks in the mountains. The young are more active than the adults in many respects, but not when it comes to walking. In particular, highly educated

people go walking. Cross-country skiing is also quite common; about half the population went skiing in 1999, on average 12 times a year (Sosialt Utsyn 2000).

As illustrated by the way they spend their holidays, nature is important to Norwegians. An investigation of holidays carried out by the Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics (SSB 1999a) indicates that the number of outdoor activities and nature experiences increased from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s. Measured by the number of participants, long one-day walks in the mountains have increased most, and the number of participants in activities like fishing, picking of berries or mushrooms or bathing (swimming-pools excepted) also increased. Only 10% of the adult population does not participate in outdoor activities during the year. This percentage remained the same from 1986 to 1999. An important reason for this stability is probably that the interest in outdoor activities is rooted in the majority of the adult population, and has become a habit.

One third of households now own (alone and together with others) a holiday home or a cabin, and there has been a considerable increase in this number during the last 13 years. During this period there was no nation-wide trend towards luxury in new holiday homes, since the majority of the new owners acquired cabins without a shower or water closet (SSB 1999a). However, this trend seems to be changing. In recent years, large areas with cabins have been built in the Norwegian mountains, with a standard that is far from moderate. In 1999, the cabin areas in Hafjell had an annual consumption of about 10.5 kilowatts per hour (Toldnæs 2000). At the same time, cabin rental agencies report that the Norwegians' demand for comfort and luxury also applies to their rental market. The popular cabins have a standard like that of a normal Norwegian home, and in addition there is a wish for swimming pools by the cabins in the southern part of the country and Jacuzzis in the mountain cabins, among other things. (Toldnæs 2000). To sum up, one might say that simple accommodation is still the norm for cabins in Norway, but there might be a change coming.

Norwegians today spend a lot of time outdoors, even more than before. However, concern for environmental damage and interest in environmental issues is changing. Ten years ago most Norwegians were very concerned about the state of the environment and the development in Norway and the rest of the world (Samfunnsspeilet 1999). 1989 was a peak year for environmental concern in Norway, and the green party was victorious in the parliamentary elections.

Today, there is much less concern for the environment in general as well as for special problems. Many investigations strongly indicate that private concern and the spirit of self-sacrifice in relation to environmental problems decreased over the 1990s. Yet statistics show a reversed tendency concerning actual behaviour, as environmentally friendly action has increased. This could be because environmental considerations are becoming more deeply integrated in political decisions and in the direction of large companies. At the same time, this can make people feel that measures are being taken for the environment and that private concern is less decisive.

The conflict between the consideration for nature and the environment on the one hand, and human encroachment and control on the other, can be illustrated by the debate over predators, especially the debate over wolves that has been going on in recent years in Norway. In 1999, there were about 80 wolves in southern Scandinavia (Larsen 1999), and as wolves wander across very large areas, many of them can be found in the southern border districts of Norway and Sweden. Wolves pose a threat to farm animals, especially sheep and tame reindeer. About 2 million sheep are let out to graze each year in Norway. 6.4% of the sheep disappear, and it is assumed that about one fifth of these are killed by predators (Jahre 1999). The debate is whether predators should be killed to protect human, or more specifically, farming interests, or whether they should themselves be protected as a species.

Because of this conflict between industry and nature, the industrial interests in the districts, i.e. those of the farmers and the hunters, strongly oppose those of the supporters of environmental protection and of the preservation of the biological diversity (Agnar Kaarbø 1999). If there is to be a strong wolf population in Scandinavia, this will necessarily affect the care of farm animals, because they can hardly live side by side (Larsen 1999).

To summarize, one might say that Norway is a country with high energy demands because of its cold climate and because of the Norwegians' expensive way of living. The Norwegians can also be described as being fond of nature. In relation to environmental issues, the Norwegians show low concern for environmental problems but a stronger participation in environmentally right behaviour.

Being young in Norway

The circumstances in which young people today grow up will have an impact on the future. In order to envisage how this future may be, it is necessary to consider what it is like to grow up in a small country on the outskirts of Europe, with a relatively large elderly population, and where only 544,000 individuals are between the ages of 15 and 20, that is, 12% of the total population.

■ Commercialization and globalization

In the consumer society, not only do individuals own a lot, but consumer goods have a central place in every person's life and values, and in how they present themselves. The consumer society is also reflected in what is produced, and how one uses both resources and the environment.

A commercializing process takes place, where profit characterizes consumption that was once free. Profit becomes important for production. Recently, children and youth have become an important target in the market, and consequently much advertising is directed towards them. The child thus learns of the importance of consumption through media and different forms of advertising.

The media sell their viewers to different producers who again adapt their commercials in order to correspond to their viewers' tastes. In addition, the media carry hidden messages. Children learn early on that the good things in life are not free of charge, rapidly developing their role as a consumer: one is what one has. And often, young people all over the world have the same things.

The world has become smaller and Norwegian youth are a part of a common global youth culture in which, to an increasing degree, they listen to the same music, see the same movies, the same TV-shows, eat and drink the same food and are occupied with the same sport events. They are in many ways living in a society characterized by foreign cultures, especially in big cities, such as Oslo. Ironically, meeting other cultures should make them broader minded and less constrained to fixed positions.

Young people travel more than before. Inter-rail has linked youth within Europe, and international flights have enabled them to venture

out of Europe. Many Norwegian students study in other countries, mostly in Europe, but there has been a boom in students going to Australia. Finally, the Internet has made the world smaller and made it easy for young people in different countries to communicate cheaply and without effort. To grow up today means that you are a part of the common global culture, but at the same time there are national differences that affect the every day life of young people.

■ Education – a necessary qualification

Norway is a modern industrialized country, and the new advanced technology of modern society demands highly competent employees. Education is, to a larger extent, a necessary qualification to enter the labour market, and the duration of education has increased considerably.

The number of young people being educated is increasing. By the mid-1960s, one in ten 24-year-olds was still in education. In 1992, the figure was about one in four. Every second 19-year-old was in education in the early 1990s (SSB 1994).

Today, school in Norway is obligatory for ten years. However, many young people in Norway continue their education after these ten years. As many as 93% of all Norwegians in the 25-34 age group achieved at least an upper secondary education. In this age group, Norway and Japan have the highest level of education in the OECD. In the OECD, an average of 72% in the 25-34 age group have at least an upper secondary education. There is a similar tendency in relation to those who are educated at a university or post-graduate college level; in Norway the number of people who have a university or college education is above the OECD average (SSB 2000b).

Until the mid-1980s, there were more men than women among the university students. In the 1990s, the proportions changed. 60% of the first-year students at the University of Oslo were women (Berg 1997). In 1997, 53% of university students were women (SSB 1999). In the 25-34 age group, 31% of women were educated at a university or college, whereas the corresponding percentage for men was 24%. These numbers show that Norway is far above the average OECD level of education for women. One fourth of the Norwegian women have a university or college education, compared to one tenth in the OECD.

■ Economy – work and borrowing

51% of students take out a full student loan from the State Education Loan Fund, 31% have a smaller loan, and 18% have a scholarship. The same investigation shows that about half the students (52%) work for money, but according to the distribution of income few work very much. Some get financial support from their parents and can thus take out smaller loans, but this is true for only one third of students. Most students are deeply in debt when they finish their studies (Berg 1997).

The number of working activities among young adults is relatively high, reflecting the fact that many either work or are actively seeking work during their education. The labour market also seeks unskilled labour, and it is possible for young people to earn money from early on to supplement school or studies.

- In 1998, 48% of those between 16 and 19 years worked, and 75% of those between 20 and 24 years did so (SSÅ 1999). More men (80%) than women (70%) worked (SSÅ 1999).
- In 1998, 66% of the men in the age group 16-24 years worked, compared to 61% of women ((SSB 1999b).

During their long period in education, Norwegian students often combine work and study. An investigation by the survey institute MMI in January 2000 shows that part-time work is relatively common among young people aged between 15 and 24. 42% had a part-time job and 38% wanted a part-time job. This means that 8 out of 10 young people have, or want, a part-time job. According to the investigation, a slightly higher number of girls had acted on their wish for a part-time job. 46% of girls had got a part-time job, compared to 37% of boys. Both young people and their parents found it positive that young people learnt how to earn their own money early on (MMI 2000).

The MMI investigation showed that young people's main motive for having or wanting a part-time job, is earning money. Only a small group (7%) mention work experience as a motive. The investigation indicates that the young have a high level of consumption or a strong wish for consumption, and that many pay the price by taking part-time jobs.

In today's society, school and education is important and a little over half of parents and young people express a concern that part-time

work might come at the expense of homework and school work. At the same time, many young people start working because of the strong pressure of commercialism.

There might be both positive and negative consequences of this. Those who perform well academically may manage, and get both competence and experience, whereas for those who struggle academically, time spent working may absorb valuable study time, affecting their exam results, which are so important in today's society. We must also be aware of the fact that earning money might be so important for some people that they totally lose interest in school. However, a certain participation in working life might encourage discipline and personal development, whilst offering the possibility to buy things or participate in activities.

The main motive of earning money from part-time work does not stem from a necessity, but rather from a desire for certain consumer products. The young like money and they want more (Brusdal 2000). They are attracted by a type of consumption typical of young people wherein the symbolic dimension is crucial (Lynne 2000).

■ Marriage, cohabitation and births

In the field of social relations, such as marrying and settling down, there have also been great changes in the last decades. The average age of women and men who got married for the first time in 1998 was 28.6 years for the former and 31.1 years for the latter. The age for marrying has never before been this high. This is an increase of more than three years during the last two years. In comparison, in the 1960s and 1970s the average age for first time marriage was 26 years for men and 23 years for women (SSB 2000a).

- In 1999 there were about 289,000 persons between 20 and 24 years, of whom a little less than 16,000 were married (1999).
- In 1997, the average age for getting married was 33.7 years for men and 30.7 years for women.

Even though young adults get married relatively late, cohabitation is more common than before. In 1999, 39% of men between 25 and 30 years lived with their girlfriend, and the corresponding percentage for women was 42%. In comparison, 15% of men and 30% of women in the same age group were married.

Before two people start living together, they are a couple. However, the period before they move in together is not long. An investigation in 1994 shows that half the couples living together moved in together after having been a couple for less than one year. Only one tenth of the women born around 1970 chose marriage the first time they moved in with a man. The rest chose simply to live together, according to 1997 figures (SSB 2000c).

This way of living is less binding and less formal for the couple. In general, the risk for breaking up is 4-5 times higher for people living together than married couples in relationships where there are no children. The risk is 3 times higher for people living together with children than for married couples. The absence of formality might be a reason for the high frequency of splitting up among people living together. Most cohabiting couples have no written agreement on what will happen if they split up or if one of them should die. In 1997, 13% of the cohabitants aged between 20 and 34 had such an agreement (SSB 2000c).

The absence of formalization among couples living together also reflects the fact that this way of living is less established socially. The families on both sides are not necessarily introduced to each other. On holidays, like Christmas, many cohabiting couples celebrate with their separate families. It also seems as if young people living together are often free to be with their own friends and take part in leisure activities.

The standard of living for cohabitants is not very high, and they often live in small flats. Among the rest of Norwegian households, about 80% own the home they live in. The fact that cohabitation is less binding might help explain why the standard of living is lower in this group than in the rest of the population. In general, settling down is more difficult for younger couples since there are few small houses to let.

Among Norwegians, births are also postponed. This means that mothers are getting older. In 1995, half the mothers in Oslo giving birth for the first time were over 30 years old. The fertility among women under 25 years is less than half that of the period of 1955-1975, when fertility among younger women was very high.

■ Individualism, self-realization and icons

A final element in our description of modern society is the emergence of the individual (Ziehe 1987, Beck 1992 and Giddens 1997). Bonds and traditions do not restrict the individual in the same way as they did previously. The development of one's social identity is not only a possibility, but also a demand. This does not mean that social differences disappear. It means that they take other shapes, and that the demands on the individual are stronger when it comes to developing oneself. In the development of social and cultural identity, consumer goods are central and safe, and often symbolise the gateway to lifestyles and patterns of activity.

Today's society is characterized by the search for meaning. One should not only achieve certain benefits and positions, one should also realize oneself. This is an inner matter, although it often takes the shape of outward success. Self-realization is strongly associated with the experience and development of one's inner possibilities. This can be found in education and work, but there is often something more to it – like travelling to exciting places that offer adventure. To many young people today, this means travelling around the world for half a year, searching for the untouched fishing village, the Himalayan monastery, or other authentic places that can develop one's potential.

Self-realization has many icons. In modern society, when one introduces oneself in public, cultural cues are important. To the young who are not settled in permanent homes, the icons will differ from those which were established in the fifties such as the ownership of houses, cars, cook books and modern kitchens. One can also find self-realization in subcultures, where one experiences the negation of material benefits and lives in accordance with nature. However, this way of life will have its icons too, in its dress codes, and ways of living, etc.

Self-realization has to do not only with activating inner values, but also with status, and with demonstrating to the world that you are a person who has activated his/her inner potential. However, young people do not necessarily talk about values and lifestyles in an open and direct way. This makes the signals you send out even more important. Self-realization has its icons that are often materialized by consumer goods. Consumer goods can have other functions, too. To

understand why so many people demand consumer goods, one must take a closer look at the meaning of consumption.

Participation

Consumer goods have a basic user aspect whereby they provide the necessary tools for participation in a particular activity. To be able to participate you need access to the activity, and you need the equipment that the activity demands. The commercialisation process is constantly working to extend the limits of what is “necessary”, making it increasingly expensive to participate and thereby marginalizing those with low purchasing power.

Another aspect is the *function* of the product. When things are used for special tasks or activities, their function is distinctive. In modern societies, the dynamics of function often propel consumption because the products and their function level are developing. The PC is a good example: because of its functional potential, it must be replaced continually, or “the quality of the products must be improved”. New products are continually made better: a bike is no longer a bike, but consists of types covering different functions. A large part of consumption develops skills, which are important values in the knowledge society.

The symbolic aspects of consumption

The development of society is characterized by individualization, and consumer goods and practices often help define one’s self (Veblen 1979, Bourdieu 1986, Goffman 1992). Consumer goods act as props which make it easier for young people to play the role they choose (Goffman 1992). That is, for those who can afford them. They make differentiation possible, and at the same time they express equality and community with others (Simmel 1990). This is what Hebdige (1988) describes as “Hiding in the Light”, in which one dresses according to the dress codes of the group whilst hiding one’s private identity. Consumer goods can also show which social category you want to belong to. To have and do the same things as one’s peers makes it possible to keep a common basis of beliefs, ensuring social belonging (Douglas and Isherwood 1979).

Status and power

Consumer goods can signal status and power. Status consumption takes place in vertical structures where the lower classes want to imitate the upper class. Amongst young people, there is often a hierarchy, but it is not static – it is possible to climb up by imitating those above, and consumer goods can be used to this end.

Many theorists (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, Bourdieu 1984 and McCracken 1988) suggest that the arenas of consumption should not be seen only as arenas for peaceful self-realization. It is possible to use techniques of exclusion and expulsion in order to climb social hierarchies, and although the products alone may signal position and identity, they are often connected to social rituals that are directed towards inclusion/exclusion.

Adventure and pleasure

Consumer products have aspects of both utility and pleasure. The use aspect is related to which functions the consumer product should fill, and how. However, one can also enjoy consumer goods. According to Campbell (1987), there are two types of consumption – traditional consumption, and modern hedonism. The traditional reflects physical experiences, whereas modern consumption reflects emotional experiences. The modern customer is a person who likes adventure, entertainment and recreation and is interested in self-realization. In the society of abundance, one is not concerned with need, but rather with pleasure, and more specifically, symbolic pleasure via items such as clothes.

Conclusion: Modern urban young adulthood

In earlier periods in history, responsibility increased linearly with intellectual and physical maturity. Today, children are physically mature earlier than before, but they reach adulthood later in life (adulthood in the meaning of having a home of one's own and providing for oneself). The knowledge society influences the organization of the stages of life, and getting an education and being settled in the labour market takes more time for young people today. This results in a new period in life, called young adulthood. It begins in

the teens and ends near age 30. Long education makes adolescence last longer, and creates a period in the life cycle with single or cohabiting young people who are interested in finding themselves, in getting an education and finding their position in relation to profession and love. Personal freedom is important to young adults.

The high demands for education have led to an increasing number of students. As educational institutions are in the urban centres, young adults, i.e. people between 19 and 30 still studying and working and without children or an established lifestyle, dominate the cities. This group's lifestyle is more external and directed towards friends than that of the other groups. This has led to a dramatic increase of the number of cafés and restaurants in Oslo over the last decades. Among the older groups in Norway, there are few urban traditions, and this means that the young adults dominate urban life in many ways.

This phase of life also has a certain pattern of consumption. Most people are half settled, some live with their parents, some in rooms in collectives, etc. They are not settled in a home of their own yet, and they live much of their social life outside their home. Friends are important, and they often meet in cafés, clubs, organizations, etc. This stage of life is also characterized by self-realization, and the main project is finding oneself. This is expressed by an emphasis on adventures, often in connection with travelling. To many young adults, travelling around the world for a long period, and thus breaking the routines and commitments, seems to be an ideal and a natural part of becoming an adult.

This semi-established way of life where the individual and his/her friends occupy centre stage, to some extent means that young people live on the outside of established society, a fact that is also reflected in the low voter turnout for this group. Being an outsider implies a certain degree of disfranchisement, but also a sense of structural exclusion where one is deprived of a range of choices, and thus also of responsibility. For instance, there are certain structural preconditions for particular environment-friendly behaviour, e.g. storage space for recycling. Therefore, young people should not be expected to participate in these kinds of activities to the same degree as the more established households.

Young people and consumption

■ Young people's attitudes towards consumption and the environment

Several studies have looked at environment-friendly behaviour in Norway (Lavik, Randi 1997, Nyberg, Anders 1999, Skoglund Ramm 1997). In these studies, four main dimensions of environment-friendly behaviour have been established: environmental activism, shopping behaviour in grocery stores, recycling and energy efficiency.

The studies have concluded that there is only a weak relationship between these four main dimensions. It is not the same people who participate in the different environmental activities. A more general finding in the study is that people regard themselves as environmentally conscious consumers. The relationship between age and commitment to the environment appears to vary depending on which of the four dimensions we study.

Young people have the highest representation when it comes to political activism. Young people are more likely than other age groups to take part in unconventional forms of political activities on behalf of the environment. They participate in demonstrations, sign petitions, donate money and boycott products out of concern for the environment. Environmental activists are probably more ideologically oriented. In this group, we are likely to find environmental protectionists (Lavik 1997:69).

Age also plays a role when it comes to environment-friendly behaviour such as recycling or looking for environmental information when shopping. As for recycling, in Norway the older you are, the more likely you are to recycle (Enger 1995, Skoglund Ramm 1997, Nyberg 1999). However, recycling is not only an environmental issue for the consumer, it may also be a convenient way of getting rid of trash. However, the probability of recycling may also be explained by frugality rather than commitment to the environment; older people tend to make better use of the resources and thus to have less environmentally harmful consumption patterns. Older people are also better at energy efficiency than younger people are. However, energy efficiency often has economic motives and energy efficiency is more profitable in households with many people than in

small families or in the case of young people, not yet settled down (Lavik 1997:57).

With regard to the Norwegian population and their environmental behaviour, it seems that while older people are more environmentally conscious consumers, young people more often participate in political action on environmental issues.

■ Some facts about young people's consumption patterns

As mentioned above, environmental consciousness may be expressed through a variety of activities. We have mentioned recycling, political activism, energy efficiency and shopping habits in grocery stores. What factors are decisive for young people's consumption patterns? Is it the extent to which they can afford to buy things, or is it their interests and concerns? We have already suggested that there may be a number of motives for acquiring a particular object: it may be the user aspect, it may be the symbolic value, it could be desire or need for integration etc. Objects may send signals about values, they may tell something about who you are or who you want to be, they may say something about status and power, and they may be integrative. However, consumption is also contextual, i.e. the situation in which one finds oneself will influence consumer patterns. In the following section, we will present some figures from a study of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 in Oslo conducted by Gallup in the summer of 2000. The selection consists of 253 young people who were stopped randomly in Oslo's main street. 70% of them had full- or part-time jobs. 39% answered that they were economically independent of their families. Of the remainder, 31% were in part economically independent of their family, while 31% felt that they were completely dependent on their parents.

Most of them were in school or already highly educated.

25% were still in high school

20% had finished high school

40% were at the university

10% were doing post-graduate studies

4% had already finished their university education

The arena on which one's every day life is acted out is thought to influence one's consumption and also to influence one's attitudes towards the environment. Parts of the conduct affecting the envi-

ronment are tied to activities in the household. It may therefore be worth remembering that

- 36% live with their parents
- 20% live with friends
- 17% live with their boyfriend or girlfriend
- 17% live alone
- 3% live in student apartments

In line with what we mentioned earlier, we see here a highly educated group of young people among whom few have settled down in their own apartment. The biggest group live with their parents, some live with friends and some in student apartments. Some of them admittedly live with their boyfriend or girlfriend, but we have pointed out earlier that this is a fragile form of cohabitation. This can mean that many of the Norwegian youths do not have the opportunity to participate actively in environmentally oriented activities because they are, in many consumer areas, part of their parents' consumption.

We will look more closely at what the main concerns of these young people are, and whether they possess certain consumer goods. Then we want to see whether attitudes or economic situation best explain variations in the consumer patterns.

■ Youth interests

A whole range of different areas of interest were presented, and respondents were asked to answer, on a scale from 1 to 5, to what degree the different themes were of concern to them. Figure 1 shows that hanging out with friends is the interest that scores highest. We mentioned earlier that this young-adult phase is oriented around friends, which these findings confirm. Another noticeable characteristic of today's society is its emphasis on education and competence, and this is mirrored in the fact that most young people are concerned with their education and future careers. Indeed, the young people in the sample group were highly educated.

However, they were also concerned with other issues. Music and dancing seem to be a relatively central part of being young. Similarly, sports are of great interest and experiencing nature scores relatively high. These are followed by some areas of general interest such as watching TV, shopping, politics and society and reading books.

Cultural activities like visiting museums are not of great general interest, neither are working with computers or video games.

The extent to which young people are interested in different topics

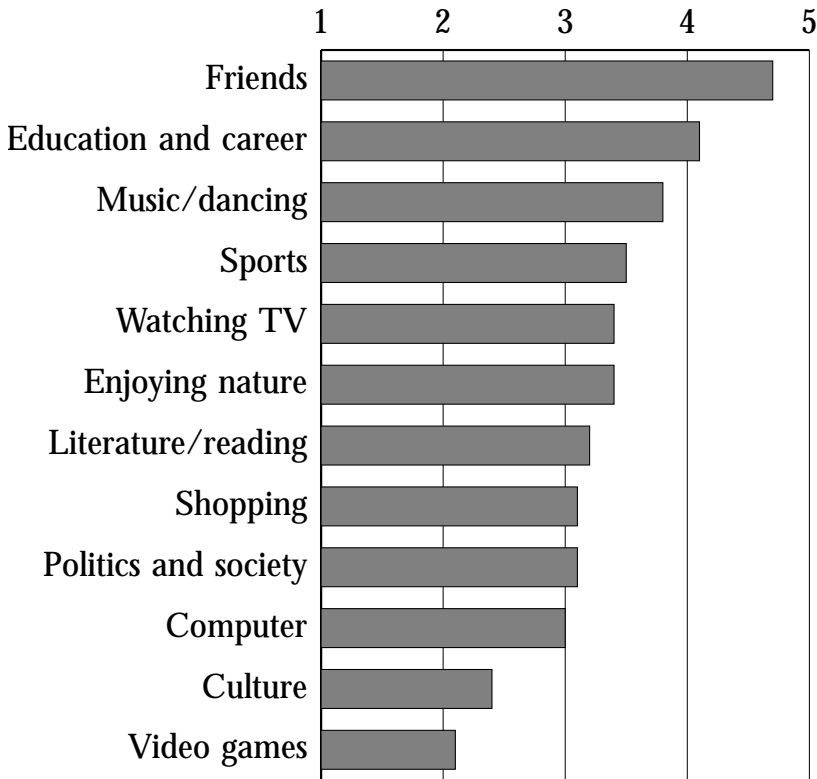


FIG. 1: FIELDS OF INTERESTS AMONG YOUNG NORWEGIANS.
 Mean scores. (1= not very interested and 5=very interested)
 N=253

In this survey, as in many others, it turns out that girls and boys are not interested in the same things. Shopping is something that is first and foremost an interest for the girls, which coincides with a whole range of other surveys that show that girls are more concerned with shopping and their looks (Brusdal 1991, 1997, Lynne 2000). On the other hand, sport, computers and video games are more popular with boys, whilst girls are more interested in friends, reading books and music and dancing. There is relatively little difference between boys and girls when it comes to interest in politics and society and in watching television. Finally, girls seem to be more oriented towards enjoying nature.

The extent to which boys and girls are interested in different topics

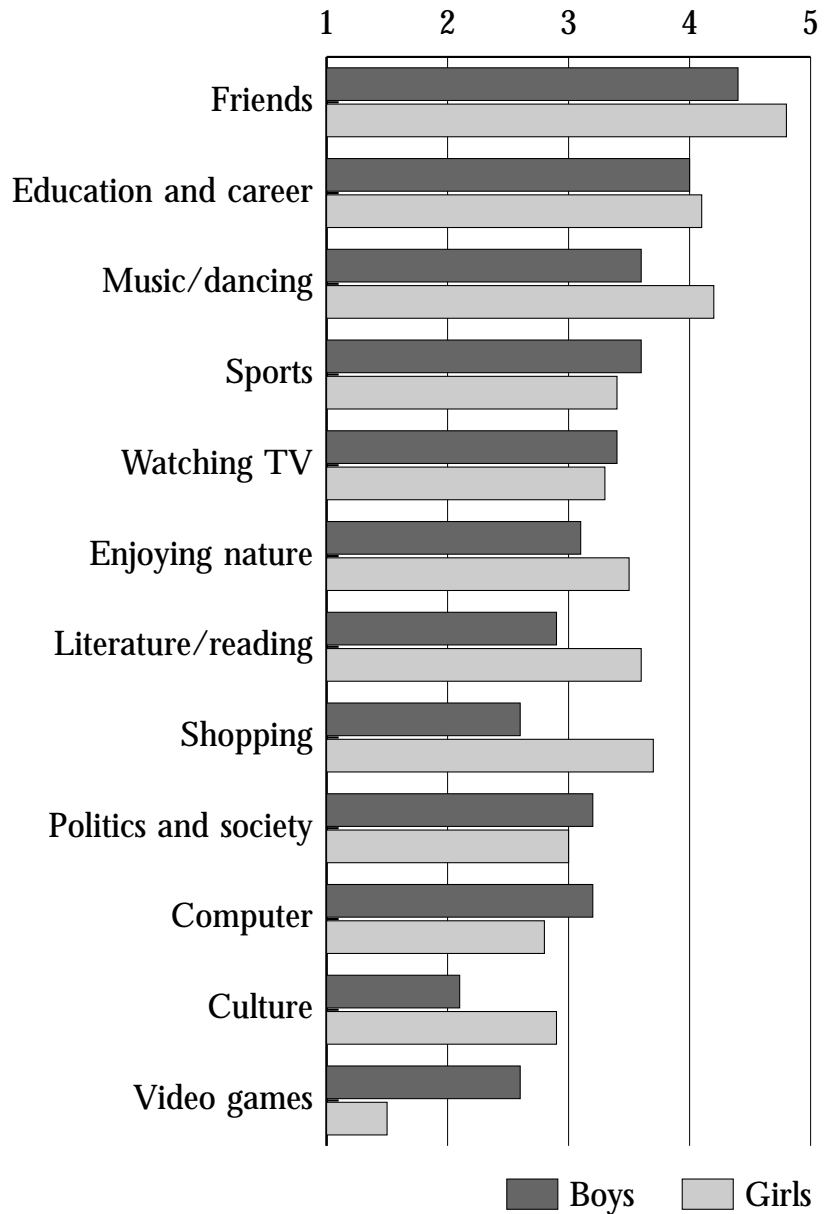


FIGURE 2: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS AND THEIR INTERESTS IN DIFFERENT TOPICS (1=not very interested, 5=very interested). N=253

One's interests may also indicate one's values. We wanted to see to what degree one's interests were connected with items owned. As young people do not have the same interests, and in order to make the presentation easier, an exploring factor analysis was conducted to identify clusters of interest areas. This analysis is a statistical technique used to identify a small number of factors that represent several dimensions of different areas of interests. This analysis identifies the underlying explanation of the correlation between two or more indicators. The factor score (the figures in the table), shows the strength between the factor and the indicators. The correlation can be both positive and negative.

The analysis came out with four factors, which give a general idea of what these young people have their interests associated with. All in all, they explain 55% of the variations in the material.

TABLE 1: FACTOR ANALYSIS: DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS
IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTERESTS

| | <i>Factor 1</i> | <i>Factor 2</i> | <i>Factor 3</i> | <i>Factor 4</i> |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Sports | - 0.534 | - 0.006 | 0.067 | 0.347 |
| Music/dancing | 0.191 | - 0.016 | 0.598 | - 0.253 |
| Shopping | - 0.142 | 0.006 | 0.738 | 0.153 |
| Hanging out with friends | 0.042 | 0.022 | 0.538 | 0.301 |
| Politics and society | 0.588 | - 0.090 | - 0.186 | 0.544 |
| Literature and reading | 0.781 | - 0.112 | 0.199 | 0.123 |
| Culture/ visiting museums | 0.738 | - 0.124 | 0.238 | - 0.024 |
| Watching TV | - 0.163 | 0.616 | 0.024 | 0.300 |
| Using computer | - 0.024 | 0.818 | 0.080 | 0.064 |
| Education/ my future career | - 0.025 | 0.093 | 0.106 | 0.722 |
| Video games | - 0.074 | 0.798 | - 0.191 | - 0.218 |
| Enjoying nature | 0.214 | - 0.061 | 0.483 | - 0.032 |
| Of the total variance the four factors explain 55% | 20% | 14% | 11% | 10% |

Factor 1 tells us about a person who is interested in politics and society, literature and culture. Two of the indicators put the focus on culture, but another indicator tells of an area of interest that expands towards society and politics. These youths are not interested in sports.

Factor 2 tells us about those who are interested in different media. These media are traditional media like TV, but these youths are also interested in computers and video games. While factor 1 rather characterized those who had interests beyond their own everyday lives, these youths emerge as more limited in the sense that they are concerned with a smaller aspect of everyday life.

Factor 3 is in many ways the factor we turn to when the hedonistic sides to today's youth culture are to be described. These are youths who are interested in shopping, friends and music and dancing. This kind of orientation may indicate a strong foundation in the consumer culture, and it is plausible to assume that these youths will have more consumer goods than others, or that they to a lesser extent are interested in reducing consumption. But perhaps more surprisingly is the fact that this factor also shows a relatively strong interest in enjoying nature.

Factor 4 characterizes those who are concerned with their own education and career. This is not strictly a factor in the sense that it only consists of one indicator. This one also has a high score on politics and society, but not as high as factor 1.

What do these young people possess?

More than half of Norwegian youth have their own stereo, bike, telephone (usually a mobile phone) and radio. This does not necessarily mean that those who do not have these consumer goods do not have access to them. In the vast majority of cases there is one or more of these items in the household. Only 4% of these young people do not have access to a TV or a stereo, and only 2% do not have a telephone. There are also few people without access to a radio, only 7%. A bike and a computer are relatively easily accessible to most of them. There are 18 and 19% respectively who do not have access to these items. This means that the user aspect of different consumer goods is covered for the vast majority, even if it is not they themselves who own the item. This probably means that

they do not have any expenses in connection with this type of consumption. (Table 2).

TABLE 2: PROPORTIONS OF PEOPLE WHO POSSESS THEIR OWN CONSUMER GOODS VS. THOSE WHO SHARE GOODS IN THE HOUSEHOLD (%) N=248

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Do not have</i> | <i>My own</i> | <i>One or more in household</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N=</i> |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Stereo | 4 | 54 | 42 | 100% | 252 |
| Car | 48 | 10 | 42 | 100% | 247 |
| Scooter | 91 | 2 | 6 | 100% | 245 |
| Bicycle | 18 | 53 | 30 | 100% | 248 |
| Telephone | 2 | 52 | 43 | 100% | 249 |
| Computer | 19 | 26 | 56 | 100% | 248 |
| Television | 4 | 39 | 58 | 100% | 251 |
| Radio | 7 | 54 | 39 | 100% | 250 |

The factors that determine whether one purchases or does not purchase different items are multiple. Our study of this subject will be limited to analysing the relationship between the ownership of certain items and the interest orientation and financial situation of the owner.

The factor analysis brought out four orientations. These were converted to indexes, which in turn were dichotomised into high and low orientation. In table 2 we have taken those with a strong orientation along the different dimensions as our point of departure, and then seen how large a proportion of these people own the different items. We also wanted to see whether a strong orientation towards nature had an influence on consumption. This variable was therefore also dichotomised and is part of Table 2. In addition, we wanted to look at the degree to which financial capacity had an impact. We accordingly divided people into two groups; those who asserted that they were financially dependent on their family, and those who were financially independent of them.

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF CONSUMER GOODS OWNED
 ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT ORIENTATIONS AND ECONOMIC SITUATIONS
 (N=248)

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Own their own</i> | <i>Factor 1</i> | <i>Factor 2</i> | <i>Factor 3</i> | <i>Factor 4</i> | <i>Enjoy nature</i> | <i>Financially dependent</i> | <i>Financially independent</i> |
|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Stereo | 54 | 52 | 53 | 59 | 57 | 51 | 57 | 49 |
| Car | 10 | 6 | 15 | 13 | 15 | 6 | 12 | 7 |
| Scooter | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| Bicycle | 53 | 48 | 50 | 59 | 59 | 55 | 59 | 44 |
| Telephone | 52 | 46 | 57 | 51 | 58 | 51 | 50 | 54 |
| Computer | 26 | 27 | 31 | 23 | 32 | 22 | 28 | 23 |
| Television | 39 | 33 | 49 | 39 | 43 | 35 | 44 | 31 |
| Radio | 54 | 51 | 56 | 58 | 61 | 49 | 58 | 46 |

If one is interested in something in particular, one's level of consumption in this area tends to be higher. For instance, those who score high on factor 2, which was associated with an interest in TV, computers and computing, also have an above average share of technical gadgets like TVs, computers, radios and telephones. Similarly with factor 3, among those who are interested in music, there is a higher share of people who own stereos and radios. Those who like shopping are also part of this factor, but it does not look like that influenced to any significant degree the number of people who own different consumer goods of this type. Perhaps they are interested in other consumer goods like clothes, for instance, or maybe they just go window-shopping. However, those who are concerned with their own education and career are also those who have the largest share of different items. As expected, we find that those who are interested in nature have less than average share of these types of consumer goods. This indicates that attitudes have a certain correlation with what one owns, even if the differences are not that great.

The table also shows that financial capacity also plays a role. Somewhat surprisingly, those who are financially dependent on their parents are those who possess the greatest share of the different types of consumer goods. This shows that parents contribute in important ways to young people's consumption, which has been shown in other

studies as well (Brusdal 1997). The exception is telephone ownership where the economically dependent are 2% below the average. Maybe they borrow their parents' telephones.

What do young people say about their consumption?

Respondents were asked a number of questions that were to characterize their consumption on a scale from 1 to 5. People agreed most with the statement that *People of my age consume too much (me included)*. The positive and negative effects of consumption is something youth are familiar with, and most of them say that this is not the first time they consider their own consumption. This shows a certain concern about one's own consumption and recognition that this has damaging consequences for the environment. At the same time they assert that "consuming efficiently is part of my values". The pressure from others that one should have the same things to be able to do the same things, have the same status and send the same signals, is something they claim not to take seriously. However, other studies have shown that it is difficult to acknowledge that one is being pressured by others. The answers portray a group of young people who are responsible and who to a certain degree distance themselves from consumerism and peer pressure. This said, there is still relatively large agreement on the statement "Having more would still make me happier". The graphic representation illustrates consequently a dilemma for these young people; they would like to have more, but at the same time they think that they consume too much.

(See figure 3 next page).

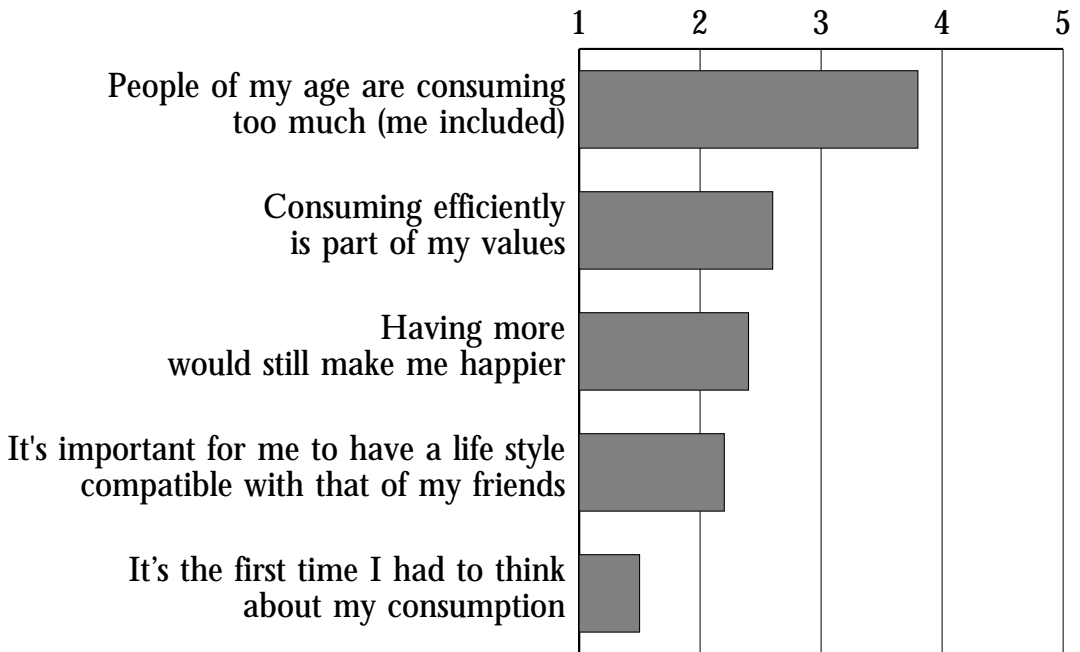


FIGURE 3: TO WHAT DEGREE YOUNG PEOPLE AGREE WITH DIFFERENT STATEMENTS THAT CHARACTERIZE THEIR CONSUMPTION ON A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5. N=248

What will our future challenges be?

Young people generally have good intentions, think about their consumption behaviour and are well informed. In particular, young people in the cities are used to rapid change and are good at adapting to different environments. We can therefore assume that after having been posed these questions by way of introduction, they will be alerted to a concern for nature. However, in contradiction to this, young people would still like to own more consumer products.

When we ask young people what they think will be the biggest challenge for the world in the coming years, reducing pollution (air, water, soil pollution) scores highest. Although all the questions represent good causes, the environment receives the higher score, perhaps because the questionnaire is largely centred around this subject. As far as we are concerned, what is important is that there is a certain level of concern among the young, that they become excited, but as we have seen, this may mean that it is somewhat more difficult to arouse their interest when the problem is their own consumption, or more precisely, their acquisition of consumer goods.

For me the biggest challenge for the world in the next years will be:

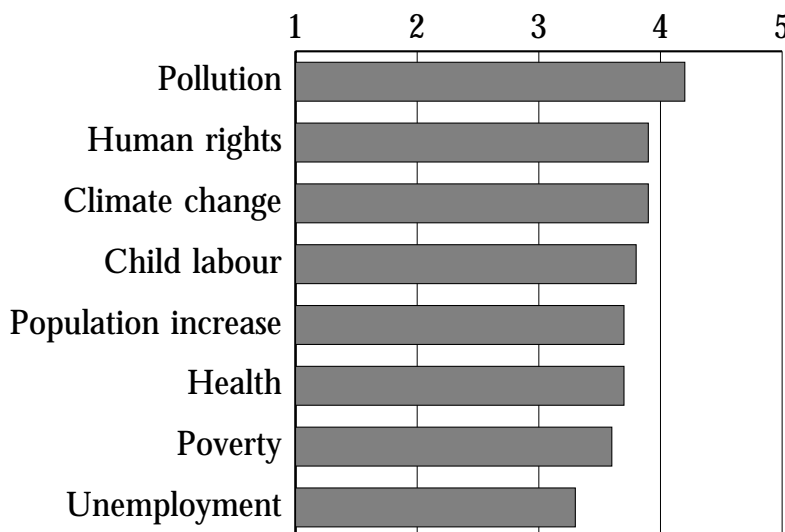


FIGURE 4: EVALUATION OF FUTURE CHALLENGES AMONG NORWEGIAN YOUTHS AGED 18 – 24 YEARS.
 Mean score (1= Not important – 5 Very important) N=248

We saw earlier that young people are active in environmentally oriented activities like demonstrations to protect the environment and wildlife. They also have a strong commitment to the more invisible risks, like the ones Beck (1992) describes: the ozone layer, gas power plants and pollution. Changing their own consumption, however, seems to be less popular. The purchase of durable consumer goods does not seem to be conceived as environmentally damaging. It seems to be easier for the young to relate to more distant issues that do not affect every day life, preferably issues that are immediately visible like the preservation of a green area or an endangered species.

We mentioned earlier that the work to save the environment has become a state issue in the sense that state regulations and preparations are driving forces. In many ways we can say that environmentally oriented activities have been moved away from the individual into laws whereby the Norwegian state, in line with the traditions of the welfare state, is to ensure the welfare of the population. This is an attitude that Norwegian children learn very early (Brusdal 1991).

It is difficult to determine which group is most environmentally conscious, young people in the big cities or in rural areas. Studies suggest that young people in scarcely populated areas have a higher consumption of energy. This is primarily because they spend more on transportation, while big city youths have far better access to public transportation (Brusdal 1995). Young people living in scarcely populated areas also settle down and have children around 5 years earlier than people of the same age in cities (Frønes and Brusdal 2000). This should indicate that they settle down in energy intensive houses, associated with the use of a car, in an earlier phase of their lives. At the same time, however, such an existence should give more opportunity for recycling.

Young people in low-density areas use more energy on housing, while young people in the city seem to have a consumer pattern where the individually symbolic seems to be more prevalent (Frønes og Brusdal 2000) . The power of nuances is important in the big city. Urban youth appear as strangers in many areas, and the symbolic aspects of consumption are important, particularly clothes. The majority of the young people think that clothes express their personality, and that they can see from clothes what a person is like. They also like to have the latest fad. The same study showed a high level of competence when it comes to interpreting different styles in clothing (Lynne 2000).

There are certainly differences in consumer patterns in urban and rural areas, but it is difficult to tell whether big cities' young people represent an ideal for people of the same age in the country. The project referred to above indicates that youth in the big city have a greater need for distinctions in order to stand out, and that the city also provides better opportunities to take on different roles. It is therefore likely that styles and fashions change more often among the young in the city, but it is not necessarily certain that they spend more money on this.

It is hard to tell with any certainty how the future consumption of today's young people will be. It is a generation that is used to high standards of living, used to having modern conveniences and technical gadgets in the house. It is also a reflective generation, which has learnt to adapt to a changing world. Fashions change, and they like to keep the pace. It is also a generation which is not used to postponing things, but wants everything right away. We have seen that today's young people are concerned with friends, and this friendship is possibly something they will take along into the future,

which indicates that with the urban generation, public consumption will be bigger.

A last point that may influence young adults' future consumption, is the large emphasis on self-realization. Self-realization is self-centred. It refers to inner issues in a unique ego, and to the assumption that I live and experience things in line with my innermost self. Self-realization takes time, and the fight for quality time alone will probably lead to a bigger emphasis on the purchase of leisure services. Even if self-realization is concerned with inner issues, it has its icons and symbols. The importance lies in showing the world that one is a person searching to find oneself. These icons can be many different things, expensive equipment for the kitchen, exotic travels, Japanese fish pleasures, designer clothes, etc.

Where this leads, and whether it leads in the direction of increased environmental consciousness or in the direction of increased hedonistic consumption is not easy to say. Many people work towards heightening awareness amongst young people, and in conclusion we will look more closely at the different measures taken and the various environmentalist organizations in Norway.

What can be done – where should we go?

■ Public initiatives and the environmentalist organizations

There are two important factors in relation to how environmental concerns are addressed in Norway. One is the state, which prepares the ground for environmentally friendly behaviour, and the other is environmentalist organizations. Below, some public initiatives directed towards young people are presented alongside the most important environmentalist organizations in Norway. Young people have the highest representation in environment political activism.

People over the age of 18 have the right to vote in Norway. This means that many young people have the power to influence politics. Election turnouts generally declined in the 1980s and 1990s. Preliminary numbers show that the turnout for the local elections in 1999 was 60%, which is the lowest number since 1922. Turnout for the county elections was the lowest ever with 56.3% (Sosialt utsyn

2000). Turnout is particularly low among young men. Less than half the men aged 18-21 voted at the 1997 general elections. In comparison, 68% of women in the same age group voted, and a total of 86% of women in the age group 50-59 voted (Sosialt utsyn 2000).

■ State contributions

As discussed earlier, Norwegians' concern for the environment has significantly diminished over the last decades. At the same time, studies show that environmentally friendly behaviour has increased significantly, but this rather reflects the effective implementation of public initiatives. This is demonstrated by the case of recycling, whereby each household has a state organised system for recycling paper, glass and organic waste. State action is therefore an important agent in the debate on the environment.

The state wishes to be involved in initiatives to increase the level of consciousness and knowledge in the consumer. This target is connected with a wish to make the consumer a stronger part in the market. The Consumer Council is an interest and service organization for all consumers in Norway. The aim of consumer politics is to create a balance between consumer and business interests by the establishment and implementation of rules for joint activities between the parties in the market, and by having well-informed and aware consumers. The Consumer Council makes leaflets and educational material for schools.

■ Increased awareness about consumption, lifestyles and values

State initiatives are also concerned with increasing awareness among children and young people about their own consumption and the intention is that schools should play an important role in the organization of knowledge-gaining activities and projects. The background for this state involvement in the area of children/youths and consumption can be found in an excerpt from the article from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs titled *Efforts for Children and Youths* (BFD 2000):

A lot of children and young people have a high level of consumption and a lifestyle characterized by material values. The Government sees it as important to debate the question of increased consumption with the young

so that they can be more aware of these issues. Parents, schools and voluntary organizations all have the associated responsibility of creating positive role models. The Government will work to prevent commercialization and objectification of the body and sex by promoting respect between boys and girls as an important value in youth culture.

(BFD 2000;31)

The Government intends to achieve this via *Education in Consumer Issues*, wherein the education plan for primary and secondary schools is to contain consumer information. This part of the education plan means that pupils will have the opportunity to study and gain basic knowledge about, among other things, personal economy, consumer rights, influence, consumption and the environment (BFD 2000;31).

A committee is issuing a public report about “the commercial pressure directed towards children and young people and measures that can contribute to decrease it”. In this report, growing marketing and consumer pressure on children and the young are addressed. An important concern is a commercial-free school, where one can fight to make the school a refuge where young people are not exposed to commercials.

■ Network for Environment Teaching

The Government points out that it wishes to give children and youth the opportunity to participate and contribute actively in the shaping and implementation of policies for children and youths on all administrative levels. This is one of the reasons for establishing Network for Environment Teaching, which is a forum where schools, administration, and research institutions can get information as well as contribute their own. Schools are given a chance to cooperate with the local environment administration and research institutions on investigating, preserving and improving the environment in chosen areas in their district. The network is organized into three programs which focus on water-related issues, issues concerning cities and small towns and land-related issues (BFD 2000; 31).

The School is meant to function as an integrated part of the local community. Experiences have shown that schools can contribute in local environmental work, for instance, by providing knowledge about local flora and fauna, measuring the water and the air quality, carrying out culture landscape protection plans, or by participating in the debate in conflicts of interests. Pupils have contributed in

areas like fish cultivation, compost making and energy saving as well as by changing political decisions in regulation plans. The Network for Environment Teaching is to be based locally, and the local district is to be used as the arena for learning. Pupils will go into local environment issues and problem areas and influence the development in their own local community. In order to make environment education oriented towards action, it is important to establish a cooperation between the local school, municipal administration, organizations, businesses, museums, etc. Such a form of education gives pupils the possibility to gain knowledge through activity and participation by interacting with other groups.²

² From
www.miljolare.uib.no
on 01.10.00.

■ The Environmentalist Organizations

Young people's access to active participation in environment issues is also possible through environmentalist organizations. Below, the most relevant organizations in Norway are presented. At the same time, there is a short presentation of other organizations concerned with the protection of nature and the environment.

Nature and Youth (Natur og Ungdom) is the only organization exclusively for young people. The organization has over 5000 members with the upper age limit of 25. The organization has around 100 local groups all over Norway. That is where most of the work is done.

Typical for this type of organization is that environment problems are perceived as both biological and social. Criticism of the industrial society and a global perspective are central elements. The organization is involved in different current issues concerning environment protection. Concrete cases for the year 2000 include, for instance, stopping the planned gas power station in Norway, and reducing car traffic by improving public transportation. More general issues that Nature and Youth work with are farming, forestry and environment problems in Russia.³

³ From www.nu.no
on 21.09.00

Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature (Norges naturvernforbund)

The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature is Norway's oldest and largest environmentalist organization with more than 20,000 members in 1999. The members vary in age, but the majority are between 40 and 50 years old. It is an independent organiza-

tion, but it cooperates closely with The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature. Many young environmental activists are first members of Nature and Youth, and then change over to The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature when they become too old. The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature is a democratic organization where the members decide on the organization's field of work and on its public position on different issues. The members are organized in local and county groups, which engage in environment-related work on a local scale, as well as on a global scale. On the national board one representative from each of the 18 county groups is represented, as well as one representative from the business sector, from Nature and Youth and from Blekkulf's Environment Detectives.⁴ Internationally the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature is connected with the Rain Forest Fund and international organizations like Friends of the Earth (the world's largest environmentalist organization) and IUCN.

The Environmental Home Guard (Miljøheimevernet)

The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature started in 1990, and today 16 nationwide organizations are part of it. The Environmental Home Guard aims to influence individuals in developing better habits towards the environment by, for instance, strengthening the power of the consumer and by putting pressure on producers to make more environmentally safe goods.

The Environmental Home Guard refers to itself as a voluntary work project. The idea is that if everyone contributes a little, we can all together achieve great tasks that none of us could have managed on his/her own. This is not an organization with a wide political agenda. The general politics concerning the environment are left to the other organizations. The organization is centred on five simple goals: less use of raw materials, lower energy use, reduced emissions of environmentally damaging substances, less waste, and saving the environment. The aim is to unite as many "normal people" as possible, convincing them to make an environmental effort in their daily practical tasks. In other words: be an environmental home guard.

Their activity is partly financed through a lump grant from the budget of the Ministry of the Environment. Their activity is, in addition to this, funded by project grants from a whole range of sources.

⁴ Blekkulf's Environment Detectives is the independent children's organisation of the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature. Around 10,000 children were Blekkulf members in 1999. The organisation has many active groups and is in the process of establishing local groups all over the country. Blekkulf's Environment Detectives stimulates children and youngsters to action and strengthens the belief that such work makes a difference.

The primary target groups of the Environmental Home Guard can be found in the adult part of the population. Admittedly, however, the organization has some activities that involve children and youth, for instance through schools and kindergartens. In these cases, the children are considered more of an information channel back to their respective homes than a target group.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

WWF is the world's largest and most influential nature conservation organization. The organization has close to 5 million supporters, a network of 32 national organizations and 22 program offices and around 700 projects on the conservation of nature in almost 100 countries. The Norwegian branch was founded in 1970 with the then Crown Prince Harald as president, and today has around 4000 members. The conservation and preservation of biological diversity is the primary task of the Norwegian branch of WWF, which is, with its 15 employees, the largest research centre on biological diversity among the voluntary organizations in Norway. The WWF in Norway leaves the issues of pollution, consumption and transportation to the other environmentalist organizations. The organization itself emphasizes its strength in relation to the other Norwegian organizations by combining concrete field projects and political lobbying, in addition to the strong international network of contacts. The organization puts great emphasis on promoting solutions through dialogue with the parties involved. Consequently, the WWF has a running dialogue with politicians, businesses and interest organizations. To increase its impact the group has a network cooperation with a range of Norwegian interest organizations.

Current issues in Norway include protecting wildlife areas in Spain and Scotland, where Norwegian greylag geese and barnacle geese can spend the winter. The WWF has also worked to ensure that viable populations of the eagle owl and peregrine falcon prosper in Norway. Other important projects are associated with the white-tailed eagle, golden eagle, Atlantic puffin, wolf, wolverine, and brown bear. The WWF emphasizes that today they are especially strong in the fields of forest management, predator management, marine management and the preservation of biological diversity in the third world.

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Consumption in a rapidly changing society: the Mexican case

5

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Mexico: an overview

A large political, economic and social transition is underway in Mexico. The nation's present population of nearly 100 million inhabitants has grown faster than the GDP for the best part of the last 15 years. Although Mexico is predominantly urban nowadays, thousands of sparsely populated rural communities are scattered throughout the country, many of them in remote, isolated areas.

Mexico is Latin America's first exporter, it ranks fourth as far as biodiversity is concerned and it is the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. Despite this leadership, a large proportion of Mexico's population still lives in poverty, which is often made worse by environmental degradation. In order to remedy this situation, the country undertook to reform its economy in the late 1980s, it signed the North-American Free Trade Agreement as well as the Free Trade Agreement with the European Union, and became a member of the OECD. In 1994, a special ministry in charge of managing the environment and protecting nature was created. The ministry has taken many positive initiatives but most of them are too recent to show long-term results. The present situation in Mexico is radically different from before, as the party that held political power for 70 years was replaced by a new government in 2000. Whatever happens in Mexico during the next few years will have a strong impact throughout the Western Hemisphere. In 2015, it is expected that the country's population will start ageing, slowly at first, but by 2030 the pace will accelerate; therefore, it can count on a 30-year population bonus

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– a period during which Mexico will have few old people, few children, and a large number of working-age citizens. This situation will help free up many resources that can be used to develop the country's human capital. If Mexico succeeds in integrating its young people into a sustained process of development while respecting their diversity and independence, 2030 will not be a year of ageing but one when many fruits will be harvested.

■ The demographic context

At 1.6% a year, Mexico's population growth is thought to be among the highest of the OECD countries. Between 1980 and 1995, the population grew by 36% and became the eleventh largest in the world, with approximately 100 million inhabitants. By 2030, there will be 130 million Mexicans. Life expectancy at birth is 69.8 years for men and 76.1 years for women. The population is relatively young, in spite of an increase in the mean age from 15.7 to 20 years between 1970 and 1992. Internal migration is very significant, especially to the big cities. The growth of the population and internal migration represent major challenges in terms of building an adequate infrastructure for the country's human development.

■ Consumption

The first federal Law for the Protection of Consumers was voted in 1976 and at the same time a Federal Attorney's Office for the Protection of Consumers, the Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Consumidor, was created. Néstor García Canclini, perhaps the leading expert on consumption in Mexico, says that consumption is "a set of socio-cultural processes presiding to the appropriation and use of products". García Canclini says that the main conceptual – and therefore philosophical – difficulty faced by students of consumption is to differentiate the latter from consumerism. Various authors have associated the term "consumer society" with the preconceived idea that consumption consists of a series of needless expenditures and irrational compulsions. As far as García is concerned, consumption is not an ostentatious or superfluous activity because if consumption did not exist there would not be a society. The world's ills are blamed on the poor just because they consume: "They drink Coca-Cola instead of clean water", some say. In fact, it is often easier for poor people to have access to sodas than to potable water. García maintains that such moral and intellectual disqualification often makes it very hard

to speak of a philosophy of consumption. This disqualification, he adds, is usually associated with other preconceptions, such as the alleged omnipotence of the mass media, which supposedly pushes people to feast voraciously and mindlessly on consumer goods.

“I think that looking at the body of research done during the last 20 to 30 years”, says García, “one of the conclusions that can be drawn is that consumption processes are too complex to be reduced to a simple relationship between manipulative mass media and docile audiences ... We should approach the connection between communication processes and consumption processes differently. What does it mean to consume? What is the rationality, as far as producers and consumers are concerned, of the non-stop expansion and renewal of consumption? It is not easy to answer these questions because we still lack a multidisciplinary – perhaps it would be better to say transdisciplinary – theoretical approach.”

The rapid urbanisation process taking place in Mexico is transforming its consumption patterns radically. During the last twenty years at least, urban sociologists have demonstrated that much of what happens in urban life can be thought of in terms of consumption. Youth consumption has changed, too. Some 18 million people live in the country's capital, Mexico City (which includes the Federal District and the metropolitan zone around it). The logic that presides over consumption in Mexico City is not the procurement of goods, as it is in Tokyo, New York or Paris. It is a logic derived from the scarcity of goods and the impossibility or the difficulty for people to have them. As a result, goods confer a distinction to those who can have them. This is a logic that increasingly dominates consumption by young people in Mexico. The heroes of the young members of the large working class are no longer sportsmen or political rebels. Heroes no longer exist as far as young Mexicans are concerned, except perhaps for Vicente Fox, who won the presidency in part because 52% of his voters were young people. Imported sports shoes or state-of-the-art stereo equipment are the markers of distinction among the youth. To be fashionable is the highest necessity, even at the cost of not eating properly or not learning how to read. Consumption does not only generate distinction or differentiation between the members of a society, but also a cold and pragmatic rationality, or probably an irrationality, as the adepts of post-modernism would say. In total, 95% of the inhabitants of Mexico City have television at home, sometimes more than one set per household, and 70% have a video deck. What do people watch on television? Soap-operas, sports, films, musicals and foreign series. People, especially young

people, are trying to escape from the reality surrounding them. They want “to rest”, as they say. Through collective agreements (mostly with other young people and their family), young people select the meanings that regulate their lives. There are many kinds of urban youths in Mexico City, ranging from those who live in the closed-off districts of the upper class to those who survive in the streets as car washers or petty vendors. Yet, for *all* of them, consumption is a ritual that makes it easier to understand a world where everyone’s security is vanishing while risk has become the new god. Rich or poor, young people play at having unprotected sex or going to a bar at night. In this game between what you desire and what is allowed, consumption is what organises the society, for better and for worse. And the consumption of young people is of a more assertive kind than that of their parents, and perhaps even of their older brothers and sisters: young people are not afraid to live their consumption fully. They have heard so much news about the economic crisis during their lifetime that they no longer care about the crisis: they have learned to live with it.

■ Youth and urbanisation

It is estimated that there were 20.1 million people aged between 15 and 24 in Mexico in mid-1998, meaning that a little more than one Mexican out of five is a young person of that age. The present number of young people is the highest in the country’s history and is double that of the young population in 1970. Although the growth rate of this population will diminish during the next few years as a result of the drop in fertility that has occurred over the last two decades, the momentum of past population growth will continue to be felt strongly, so that the absolute number of young people will continue to augment until 2010, reaching a maximum of 21.2 million, and then it will start decreasing.

Because of the process of urbanisation that has taken place in Mexico during the last few decades and because of better education, employment opportunities and living conditions available in the cities, the country’s current population is predominantly urban. Assuming that rural localities have less than 15,000 inhabitants while urban localities have more than 15,000 inhabitants, the proportion of young people living in urban areas is similar to that of the general population, since 61.3% of young people and 59.9% of the general population lived in cities in 1995. Although this similarity prevails in almost every state in the country, it is worth noting that young people

tend to live in cities a little bit more than the general population. In 26 out of Mexico's 32 states, the proportion of young people living in urban settings is higher than that of the general population, and the gap widens as the level of socio-economic development of a state drops. For instance, in the poorer states of Guerrero, Puebla and Oaxaca, the proportion of young urban residents is three percentage points higher than the proportion of the general population living in cities.

There are significant differences between young city residents and young rural dwellers in each state. Leaving aside the Federal District, where almost every young person and every member of the general population is an urban dweller, in some northern states such as Coahuila, Baja California and Nuevo León more than four out of every five young persons live in a city, while in the states of south-eastern and central Mexico the majority of young people live in rural areas, especially in Oaxaca and Chiapas where about three quarters of the young population live in a rural environment, including 66% who reside in localities of less than 2,500 inhabitants.

Following the same pattern of rural-urban distribution observed in the general population, more than half (54%) of the total number of urban young people in Mexico are concentrated in just six states: Estado de México, Federal District, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Veracruz and Guanajuato, while only 31.5% of the total number of young rural dwellers in the country live in those states.

One of the most acute urban problems in Mexico is that 36% of the general population live in cities located 2000 meters above sea level, which entails high costs as far as supplies are concerned, especially of potable water. Many experts think that water will constitute a major social problem in Mexico in the twenty-first century, and many in government circles already view water as a national security issue.

■ Youth and family

The young are notoriously important to the Mexican family. There are young people in 52.4% of Mexican households (53.3% of rural households and 51.8% of urban households). According to the information of the Population and Housing Census, in late 1995 the majority of young people lived in a family-type household and were the children of the head of household. At that time, two thirds

(68.5%) of the young people aged 15 to 24 years lived in a household headed by one of their parents. Additionally, it is worth noting that one young person out of six (16.7%) already had formed his/her own household and had assumed the responsibility to head and support a family, or was contributing to supporting a family as the spouse of the head of household.

■ Youth and economic participation

Young people make up a significant proportion of the country's labour force. In late 1995, young people aged 15 to 24 years made up 28.3% of Mexico's economically active population. At that time, more than half (51.2%) of the total young population was economically active, and the proportion of active young males (69.5%) was nearly double that of active young females (35.1%). In rural settings, young people, male and female, become economically active earlier than their urban counterparts: at age 15, more than half of rural males and 18% of rural females are either working or looking for a job, compared to a quarter of urban males and 14% of urban females of the same age. The rate of economic participation of males increases as they get older and it is always higher in rural areas than in cities. Thus, in 1995, more than four fifths of rural males and three fifths of urban males were economically active at age 18, while at age 24 the proportion of economically active rural males reached 93% and that of their urban counterparts 89%. Things are different as far as women are concerned. While until age 16 the proportion of working females is higher in the country than in cities, with 25% and 22% respectively, later on in life the relation is inverted: at age 18 one third of rural females (33%) and 37% of urban females were engaged in some economic activity in 1995. From 18 years onward, the rate of economic participation of young rural females remains around 30%. By contrast, perhaps as a consequence of the diversity of opportunities and the larger job markets available to women in the cities, the rate of economic participation of young urban females continues to increase after age 18, and more than half the females aged 23 are working.

■ Legal framework

Article 2 of the Law of the Mexican Youth Institute, which was published in the official journal on January 6, 1999, defines the young population as that aged between 12 and 29 years. According to this definition, the target population of the Institute comprises 35 million people. Since it simply cannot attend so many people with its current resources, the policy of the Institute is to foster the creation of other youth institutes in the states of the Mexican federation. These state institutes attend the young population at the local level, while the Federal Institute engages more in normative work, defining a national policy that can then be adapted to the particular local situation of every state. Although it is up to state governments themselves to decide whether or not they want a youth institute in their jurisdiction, the process is well underway. More than a co-ordinator, the federal Institute endeavours to play the part of a facilitator by looking to strengthen and support the self-organising efforts of Mexican youths and promoting self-management.

The Law of the young men and women of the Federal District, which was passed by the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District on 28 April, 2000, defines a young person as “a person subject to law aged between 15 and 29 years”. Chapter XI of the Law deals with the right to full social and political participation of young people, while Chapter XIV protects the right to a sound natural environment. The Mexican government has pledged to implement Agenda 21, whose Chapter 25 deals with young people’s right to participate in decision-making concerning sustainable development. However, young people are not included as a sector in the National Advisory Board on Sustainable Development, where all the sectors of Mexican society are represented.

■ Impact of the new economics of information on Mexican youth

The rise of informationalism at the end of the millennium goes together with an increase of inequality and exclusion throughout the world, and Mexico is no exception. The advent of this “new economy”, as it has been called, demands levels of education and degrees of specialisation that young Mexicans do not have. 22.9% of all Mexican youths are full-time students who do not work, 6.9% combine work and studies, and 25.2% neither work nor study.

Among young people aged 20 to 24 years, 9.2% study and do not work while 6.3% work and study at the same time. Sociologist Manuel Castells maintains that “social exclusion is a process, not a state. Some will say that children have always been used and exploited for other people’s ends. However, while this is true, it is also true that present abuse is unprecedented.” There is something new in this early stage of the information era, Castells continues: “there is a systemic link between the *present*, out-of-control, characteristics of informational capitalism and the destruction of the lives of a large proportion of the children of the world.” Surely, this applies to young people as well as children. The novelty, Castells says, is the emergence of new forms of destruction.

■ The problem of the environment and population pressure in prospect

The increasing complexity of environmental issues in Mexico, write Lichtinger – the Fox administration’s new minister of the environment and natural resources – and Ojeda in *México 2030*, will demand “an efficient protection of the environment that will require tough decisions to modify the patterns of a growth that clearly continue to be detrimental to natural resources. At the end of the twentieth century, the size of the environmental impact reached 11% of GDP on average. If the environmental conditions observed in the last ten years continue to prevail, 1% age point will be added to GDP every two years on account of environmental degradation between 2000 and 2030. Furthermore, the authors maintain:

“Possibly the strongest economic and environmental effects of excessive urban growth are due to the integration of a large number of people to the pattern of intensive consumption of energy and other manifestations characterising modern lifestyles (refrigerators, television, cars, shopping malls, etc.).”

Experiences of sustainable consumption within organised groups of young people

I. Yucatan State Youth Environmental Network (Red Ambiental Juvenil de Yucatán, RAJY)

The Yucatan State Youth Environmental Network is a statewide, non-governmental network of young environmentalists founded in 1998. RAJY's project is called "Responsible Consumption" and it is implemented under the organisation's three guidelines for action:

- Citizen Participation

Thanks to research conducted in a partnership with the Centre for Sustainability Studies of the University of Jalapa, the capital of Veracruz State (under a covenant proposed when the project was to be presented to the Centre), the RAJY is to obtain the ecological footprint of Mérida, the capital of Yucatan State. The results will show the ecologically productive area needed to sustain the city of Mérida's current consumption levels. This will lead to the identification of the ecological materials and services most consumed by this community and of the possible ecological deficits that are being created inadvertently. The analysis of the results will provide elements to design proposals to be used as guidelines in order to set and rank priorities regarding the efforts to preserve, market and research the stocks identified as having priority in the city. This information will serve as a base for future projects, not only by RAJY but also to design environmental educational material adapted to the needs of the city as well as policies conducive to sustainability in Mérida. The project has become a part of the Mérida Strategic Plan and it has been presented to the municipal authorities, which have pledged in writing to take its results into account in the Urban Planning of Mérida, a city with a high annual growth rate of 4%. In addition, access to the necessary information will be facilitated and the project will be supported.

- Environmental Education

The concepts of Responsible Consumption and Ecological Footprint have been popularised through workshops with a view to raising youth awareness of the environmental, social, cultural and philosophical implications of the consumption patterns reflected in day-to-day habits. The pilot-campaign for the responsible consumption

of paper launched at Universidad Marista, which aims at reusing and collecting paper in order to recycle and donate it to young people, is a practical project to raise awareness among university staff and students. The project is carefully monitored and documented so that graphs showing how many hectares of forest have been saved every semester can be produced.

- **Communication and Linkage**

Articles are published in the press in order to popularise concepts like ecological footprint and responsible consumption so that the community becomes aware of them and understands what the city's ecological footprint indicator is. The aim is to generate ideas among the population on how to participate in the battle for sustainability and quality of life.

RAJY organises forums on individual ecological footprints that help measure the engagement of individuals and share successful strategies to reduce people's individual footprints.

The entire programme of responsible consumption and the research to evaluate Mérida's ecological footprint is being systematised so that young people in other communities may reproduce our local project.

II. Jalisco State Youth Network of Environmental Boosters (Red Juvenil de Promotores Ambientales de Jalisco, RJPA)

Jalisco State Youth Network of Environmental Boosters was set up in 1995 to organise training workshops in responsible consumption and raise awareness of the effects of pesticides on children and young people.

RJPA defines its sustainable consumption project (which won public funding in a contest organised by the Mexican Youth Institute last April) as follows:

“BEWARE CONSUMPTION is a youth initiative to implement a responsible consumption project for young people that includes the publication of a manual of responsible consumption for young people, a series of workshops and media activities.”

This is how the project is described: “Essentially, when we analyse the work we did during those years we conclude that all the problems with the environment revolve around the market and consumption.

At the beginning, it was difficult for us to take such a position, but we realised that behind the preservation of bio-diversity, the rescue of species, environmental education, refuse, water, chemical pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, and many more of the problems that make up the environmental crisis, there are economic interests supported and perpetuated by the culture of consumption. This is why the main problem that we want to address is the culture of consumption; by focusing on consumption, we want to try to modify habits and the dynamics of this problematic environmental crisis... We view responsible consumers as those people who make value judgements about the social, economic, cultural and – of special importance to us – environmental impact of consumption before they consume ideas, products, goods and services. These consumers feel responsible for the consequences of their decisions and are convinced that the market is a power arena from which they can generate political, economic and social change.”

The project itself consists in “developing a manual containing the basic concepts needed to train people into responsible consumption, aimed at young people and which will permit the building of an experience such as to modify their perception as citizens and consumers. At a later stage, this manual will be used to implement other activities, such as workshops and work with the media... In addition, due to the structure of the manual, we bet that the change induced in young people will be the highest multiplying factor... We believe that responsible consumption is not a state but a permanent process that requires us to re-dimension ourselves as living beings. To achieve this objective, we need solid methodologies and strong working materials, especially since young people are the target. We believe that our manual will be a facilitator of this process.”

One thousand copies of the 80-page manual will be published.

■ Sustainable consumption in Latin America and the Caribbean

At the beginning of 1997, thirteen countries in the region had passed laws recognising the rights of consumers and seven countries had enshrined those rights in their respective constitutions. However, this legislation needs to be streamlined regionally and its implementation must be closely monitored.

At Rio +5, the follow-up conference of the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development that took place in 1992, the regional office of Consumers International presented a study which shows that although many regional governments have set up the legal and institutional framework to defend the environment, the Rio accords on sustainable consumption have been insufficiently implemented or not at all. The Consumers International report was presented at the “Rio + 5: from agenda to action” meeting convened by the Earth Council in Rio de Janeiro in March 13-19, 1997.

The research, focused mostly on Chapter IV of Agenda 21 titled “Changing consumption patterns”, analyses the implementation of the Rio agreement from the point of view of Latin American and Caribbean consumer organisations. The study describes the state of the problem in the region and makes several proposals to advance its solution. The study’s results are based on a survey conducted with a dozen organisations of consumers, both governmental and non-governmental, from various regional countries.

Although government agencies have taken initiatives showing that they are concerned, “none of the countries surveyed have a structured and coherent state policy to bring about change in the consumption patterns of their population”, according to one of the conclusions of the research report. The report adds that those government initiatives that have been successful were taken by concerned local governments in communities and municipalities with a view to implementing a long-term policy to address the problem.

Local NGOs assert that it is necessary to use truthful information in educational programmes and to implement an awareness campaign against the use of damageable products (especially batteries and pesticides) and for the recycling of packing materials. These are only some of the proposals made by civil society, according to the Consumers International study. The countries surveyed for the study were: Argentina, Guyana, Paraguay, Chile, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, Bolivia, Uruguay, Granada and Ecuador.

■ Sustainable consumption in industrial North America

- United States and Canada

A vast movement in favour of a more sustainable and responsible form of consumption has gained momentum in industrial North America, especially during the last five years. The Earth Island Institute has campaigned for dolphin-free tuna fish, the Rain Forest Action Network has acted to stop the use of tropical wood, Global Exchange has promoted the consumption of coffee bought through fair trade, and firms have started responding accordingly. However, the organisation that has done the most is a small NGO based in Vancouver, Canada. Every three months, the Media Foundation publishes *Adbusters*, a small magazine that has become the flagship of a vast movement, which went global following the events of Seattle. *Adbusters*'s subtitle is: "The magazine of the mental environment". Its greatest achievement has been to use the weapons that marketing experts apply to sell tobacco or cars in order to sell a different way of thinking. The magazine makes fun of famous advertising icons and asks its readers point-blank: "Do we need all that trash to be happy?" This is precisely what the hero of the Hollywood blockbuster movie *Fight Club* asks himself.

Instead of fighting the government, as would a typical revolutionary, the hero fights large corporations. It must be noted that this cultural frenzy has occurred during the longest economic bonanza in the history of the United States. Faced with an increasing flow of information and a huge range of options, North-Americans are attempting to simplify their lifestyles. This explains why movements like Voluntary Simplicity have become so popular. New products, ranging from the Palm Pilot electronic organiser to software, are sold on the premise of simplicity. Although recycling and clean energies are used increasingly, it does not seem to entail that consumption is becoming more sustainable.

■ Youth and purchasing power in Mexico during the last six years (1994-2000)

To a large extent, the purchasing power of Mexico's various economic agents depends on the monetary policy in force. For the most part, this is due to the inflation variable, which is directly related to the trends recorded by the price index for consumers and producers.

As a result, the inflation variable is directly connected to the purchasing power of consumers because market prices determine whether or not economic agents will be able to acquire the goods and products that they require.

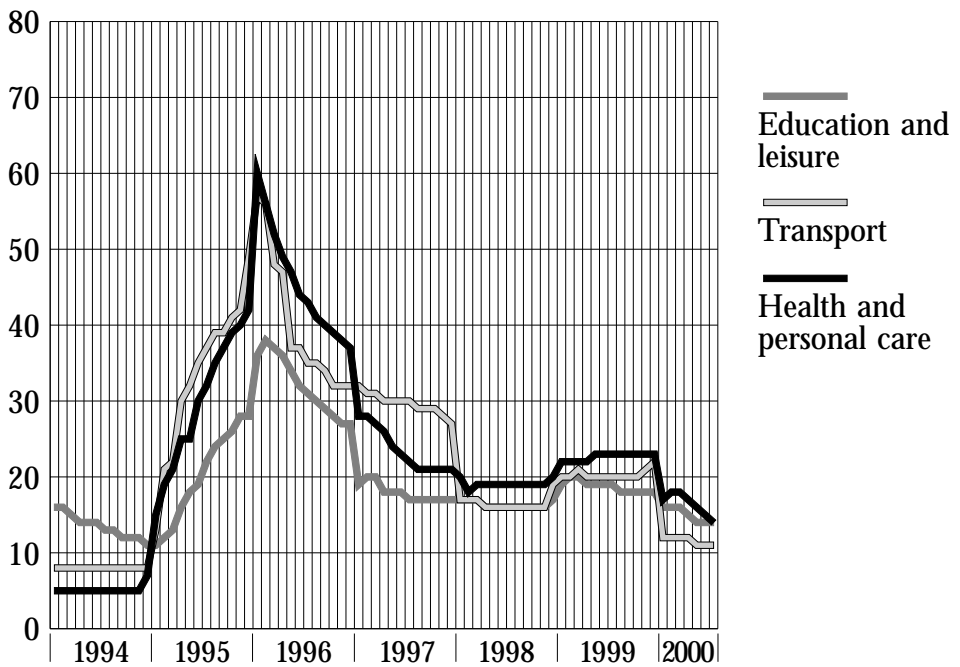
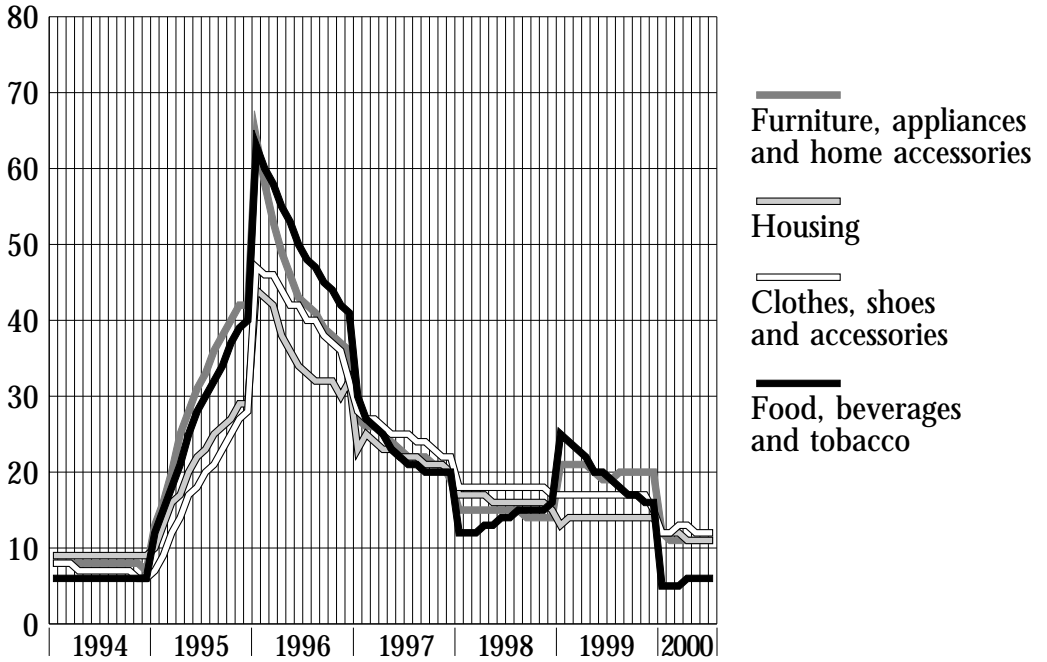
In Mexico, monetary policy seeks to curb inflation in order to ensure that real prices do not fluctuate and individuals' purchasing power remains stable from one year to the next. Inflation has diminished significantly since 1995; it hovered around 10% a year in 2000 (*Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 2000*). This has led to enhanced economic stability, which leads to economic growth. Economic growth pushes GDP and aggregated demand up, leading to more consumption of goods and services.

The economic crisis that hit the country in 1994 and 1995 adversely affected economic variables such as inflation and individual purchasing power. It was only in 1997 that domestic aggregated demand showed a real-term variation of 9.8% in relation to GDP, leading to an increase in the purchasing power of the private sector. In 1999, private consumption went down to 2.9%; however, one of the goals of the current administration was to reach 4.1% by 2000 (SHCP, 2000).

GRAPH 1: PRICES AND INFLATION: DOMESTIC CONSUMER

PRICE INDEX (MONTHLY).

Mean annual inflation: general index and index by type of expenditure



source: www.inegi.gob.mx

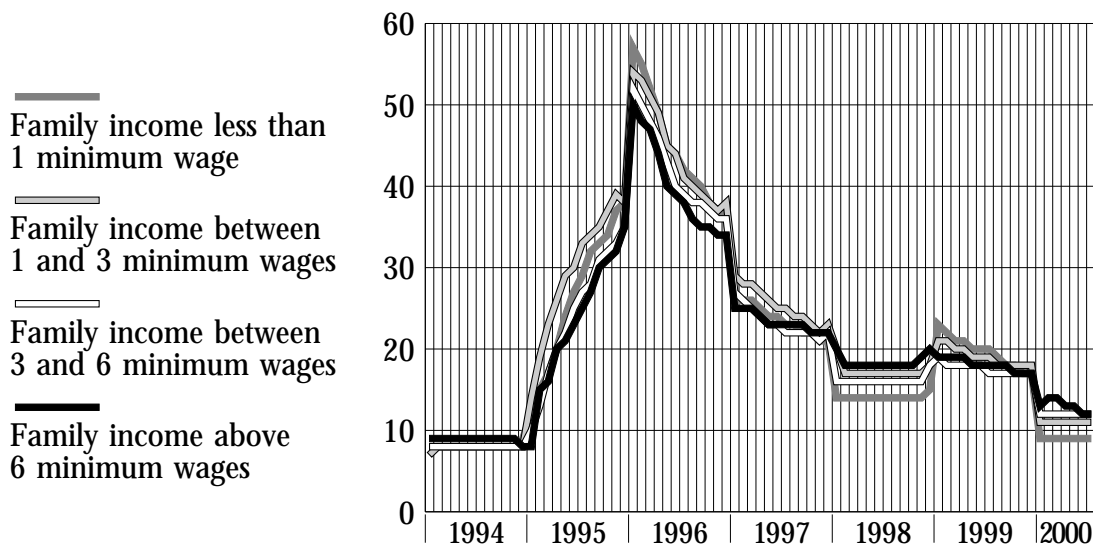
Data range: January 1994-July 2000 - Variation in percentage points

The graph above shows that inflation regarding food, clothes and shoes, home accessories, and housing varied widely between 1995 and 1997. It was not until 2000 that the inflation affecting these goods and services fell below 10%. This could imply that the consumption of these products is increasing because purchasing power has grown. It must be stressed that these goods are those that tend to be consumed by young Mexicans.

Likewise, it is known that inflation has stronger adverse effects on low-income social sectors because it hurts the monetary assets that they usually own. The purchasing power of those with fewer resources is much lower than the rest of society. This is an important factor to take into account because when a drop in inflation occurs while the economy is growing, the consumption of low-income sectors augments sharply together with that of the rest of society.

GRAPH 2: PRICES AND INFLATION: DOMESTIC CONSUMER PRICE INDEX (MONTHLY).

Mean annual inflation by income bracket

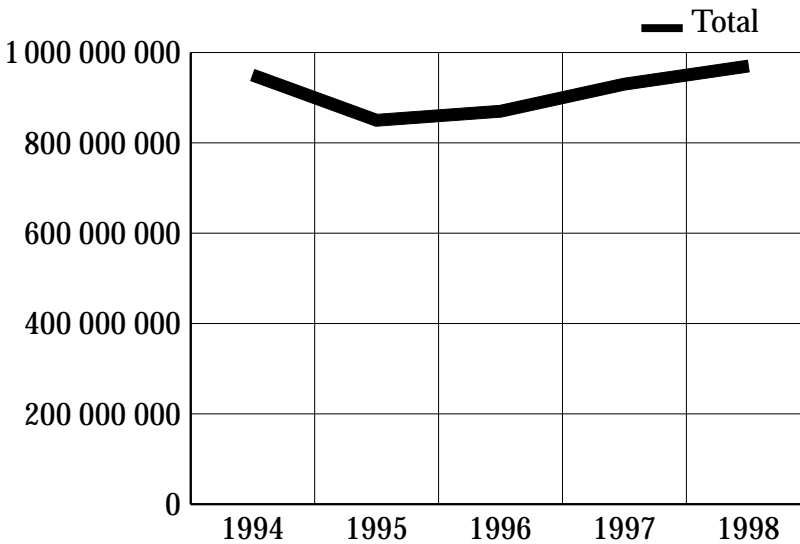


Source: www.inegi.gob.mx

Data range: January 1994-July 2000 – Variation in percentage points

Likewise, when inflation went down between 1994 and 2000, private consumption went up. The following graph demonstrates this. Based on 1993 prices, the graph reports a fall in 1995 because of the recession.

GRAPH 3: NATIONAL ACCOUNTS STATISTICS:
 Mexico's accounting system – goods and services accounts.
 Final private consumer expenditures
 by type of good, at 1993 constant prices



Source: www.inegi.gob.mx

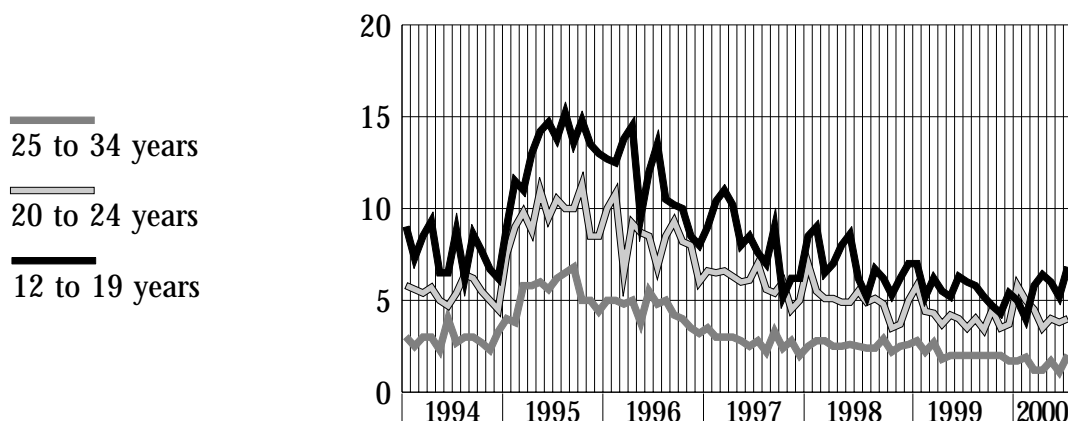
Data range: 1994-1998 – Thousand pesos at 1993 prices

The graph shows that consumer expenditures recovered their 1994 level and began to increase starting in 1997.

According to the data published by the National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Data Processing (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, INEGI) in its economic information database (INEGI, 2000), the type of goods subjected to the highest consumption in current pesos are, in decreasing order: services, non-durable goods and durable goods.

Unemployment is also related to inflation and consumer purchasing power. As the graphs 4 and 5 show, higher unemployment rates occur in years characterised by more inflation and less private consumption. It can be concluded that when inflation and unemployment are high, purchasing power falls.

GRAPH 4: EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT:
UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY GENDER AND AGE GROUP;
MONTHLY; TOTAL; MEN



Source: www.inegi.gob.mx

Data range: January 1994-August 2000 – Unemployment Rate

■ The relationship between the National Income Expenditure of Households Survey (1998) and youth consumption in Mexico

The National Income Expenditure of Households Survey (*Encuesta Nacional Ingreso Gasto de los Hogares*, ENIGH) is published every other year by the National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Data Processing (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática*, INEGI).

“ENIGH – 98 provides information on the amount, structure and distribution of the monetary income and the income in kind obtained by households from work, interests on assets, pensions, and gifts, as well as the destination of the expenditure of households on both non-durable consumer goods and durable consumer goods. ENIGH also provides information on the infrastructure of housing units, family composition and the economic activity of every family member and their relationship with the productive infrastructure”.
(*ENIGH – 98*)

The database containing this information is broken up into six sections:

- Housing
- Persons
- Expenditures
- Non-monetary income
- Monetary income

For the purpose of this paper, we combined the sections “Monetary income” and “Persons”; and the sections “Housing” and “Expenditures”. It must be clarified that some of the results reported below were obtained by the authors’ own calculations while others resulted from the calculations made by INEGI for the purpose of the survey.

In addition, it must be noted that the INEGI database has limitations that make it impossible to combine all its sections with one another because some refer to a number of households nationally while others refer to a number of people nationally. Due to the distinct nature of these variables, comparative calculations cannot be made. For instance, the database does not make it possible to determine what young people (12 to 29 years) spend their money on because the “Expenditures” section refers to household expenditures while the number of young people is displayed in the “Persons” section. The alternative we have chosen in order to circumvent this limitation is to determine the number of households headed by a young person and to work out the expenditures of such households.

For all its limitations, the ENIGH database is a vital source of information as far as this paper is concerned. Indeed, it is the only one available in Mexico that presents such a comprehensive survey of the way and quality of the life of Mexican people and households. There is no doubt that the information supplied by ENIGH is useful to analyse the consumption behaviour of young Mexicans.

Although it is true that what you spend the most on is not necessarily what you consume the most, the calculations made with ENIGH-supplied data do reflect the consumption trends of young Mexicans, and therefore give an idea of the impact of such consumption on the environment.

Characteristics of the income expenditures of young people

According to ENIGH, 32% of the Mexican population were aged between 12 and 29 years in 1998; in other words, the population was young. Of these, 65% were male and 35% were female.

It is important to note that given the number of households that existed in 1998 (more than 22 million), there were nearly two young persons per resident household. This latter figure is significant, especially when it is taken into account that the mean number of occupants per housing unit was 4.42 persons in 2000 (*Preliminary Results of the 2000 Census*). This means that, to a large extent, the survey reveals trends in the behaviour of young people.

In 1998, 12% of Mexican youths were classified as heads of households with an average monetary income of nearly 12,000 pesos per quarter (at 1998 prices). The income of young people represented 34.8% of the total current income of the Mexican population in 1998. In addition, the largest number of young heads of households is to be found in the third decile (see Annex 1), which, according to the calculations obtained from the survey report, contains people with a quarterly current income of 5,800 pesos (at 1998 prices). By current monetary income we mean the income obtained from: employment, own business activity, production co-operatives, property, and transfers. Moreover, the largest number of young people belong to the 25-29 years age group, whose current quarterly income is higher than that of the rest of the young people belonging to the same decile as they do.

In order to work out the expenditures of young people on selected durable and non-durable goods, two assumptions were made:

- The amount of the quarterly current income received by heads of households aged between 12 and 29 years is equal to the amount spent every quarter on the various categories of consumption.
- Based on the assumption above, the proportion of quarterly current income worked out in the various household deciles is constant and equal to the expenditures made in the various consumption categories and in each of the subcategories.

Based on these two assumptions, we worked out that, generally speaking, young people spend the most on, in decreasing order: food, transportation, educational material and services, and, lastly, healthcare and clothes and shoes. Annex 1 details the ranking order of the quarterly expenditures of each head-of-household decile. The categories and subcategories described in Annex 1 are those on which young Mexicans spend the most. Several of these categories have a highly negative impact on the environment. This is the case for washing powders, whiteners, insecticides, car fuel, electricity, and other fuels.

As far as water is concerned, which can be viewed as a natural resource per se, it is important to note that it is one of the categories on which young Mexicans spent the most because it could imply that the high expenditures made on this resource may cause more water pollution. Moreover, because water is subsidised, it is undervalued, meaning that people do not pay as much as they should for it. In spite of this subsidy, water is still the third-largest expenditure in the housing category. Therefore, we can conclude that the daily use of water by households is irrational and excessive, because in spite of its very low price it constitutes a significant expenditure; in other words, the assumption that a large expenditure corresponds to a large consumption is proved true in this case.

Although the calculations regarding the expenditures of young heads of households may be biased due to the aforementioned assumptions, a general notion of the consumption trends of young Mexicans may be obtained from the analysis of the destination of their current expenditures. Although, as mentioned above, what you spend the most on is not necessarily what you consume the most, for the time being there is no other database recording precisely the exact consumption of the various sectors of Mexican society. In fact, ENIGH is the only source of information at national level in this regard and, in spite of its limitations, the only one that provides data approaching the real-life expenditures and income of the members of Mexican households, including young people.

Thus, by eliciting the categories of goods and services on which young heads of households spend the most, their impact on the environment may be inferred by assuming that what they spend the most on is what they consume the most.

Conclusions

In order to conceptualise this complex study, we suggest the following presentation in a table assessing a number of variables in light of the following categories: diagnosis, threats, and opportunities and challenges.

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Diagnosis</i> | <i>Threats</i> | <i>Opportunities and challenges</i> |
|------------------------|---|--|---|
| Economy | Purchasing power is increasing with the recent growth of the economy. Eco-certificates are starting to be used. First- and second-generation reforms have been implemented. | Resistance to the eco-certificate policy. High economic growth. Lack of a market for environment-friendly products. | Second-generation market reforms foster the development of social capital. Enhanced economic growth. |
| Society and Population | Population growth is slowing down. The country is urbanising. Income and expenditures vary widely across regions. | Highly unequal population distribution. Unplanned urbanisation. Ageing in the medium term. | Due to a reduction in the number of children, more resources are freed up for investments in the human capital of the economically active population. |
| Institutional Policies | A comprehensive youth policy is initiated. Incipient general policy regarding consumption. | Lack of progress in the national consumption policy. Emergence of a youth policy viewing the young population solely as receptive and devoid of diversity. | Governmental environmental management systems. “Green” schools. Supporting the initiatives of a diverse and active young population. |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|
| Culture and Education | More consumption fostered by the media and the immigrants returning from the U.S. Incipient environmental education. Catholic faith no longer influences the consumption of young people. More democracy. | Desperation among young people. Radicalism. Higher rate of juvenile suicides. Emergence of urban ghettos and social “apartheid”. | Recent increase in the creation of youth NGOs across the board. Youth networks have integrated very well the concept of sustainable development. NGOs need more institutional (legal, financial, etc.) support. The third sector is becoming increasingly strong in Mexico. |
| Environment | Increased deterioration. Focused policies exist but their results are not consolidated as yet. Consumption is not viewed as the main environmental issue. The young are not represented in the National Advisory Board on Sustainable Development. | National security problems emerge because of the increased scarcity of water and the effects of climatic change. Heavy loss in biodiversity due to the lack of strengthening of territorial environmental planning. | Integrating the consumption variable at every level of environmental and economic policy. |
| Information | Very little information is available on the subjects: consumption, youth and environment. Existing information is contradictory. | Impossibility to design adequate policies. | Research. Creating clearing-houses. |

Recommendations for UNESCO and UNEP to accompany a global policy for sustainable consumption and youth

It is vital for the agencies not to establish a possible strategy on their own. Instead, they should provide concrete instruments in order to reach actual results.

1. Convene forums to analyse concrete tools such as:
 - Environmental management systems;
 - Environmental communication and youth;
 - Green schools. Example: Canada's Green Campuses;
 - Supporting youth environmental networks. Paying attention to what they say.
2. Setting up networks of experts on the issue. A good example is the accompaniment of Canada and Mexico in environmental management systems for the public sector.
3. Facilitate the appropriation of the issue by international organisations, universities, youth NGOs and networks, the media (like MTV). In addition, as more research is vitally needed, we request that the youth units of the UN and IDB dedicate resources to the issue.
4. The issue must be included in the evaluation carried out at Rio + 10.
5. Finally and perhaps most importantly: the global strategy must adopt a differentiated approach towards the problem given the differences of income among countries.

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Consumption patterns of youth: an analysis of the Italian survey

6

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Italy and the Italians

In this first part, we briefly illustrate some general data (demographic, socio-economic, socio-cultural) concerning the national context for the research on young people and models of sustainable consumption in Italy. The data makes particular reference to the age classes which define the survey population.

Italy is a country which is located geographically in the middle of the Mediterranean, with a resident population of over 57.6 million people (January 1999). Of these, 44.5% live in the Northern regions, 19.2% in the Centre and the remaining 36.3% in the South and the Islands (Sicily and Sardinia). The population is 48.5% male and 51.5% female (1999 data) and the 15-24 age group corresponds to just under 7,100,000 individuals, which is equal to 12.3% of the total population. With regards to this last indicator, it should be noted that although the age group is not congruous with that used in the empirical research (18-25 year olds), it is, without a doubt, representative of the proportion of young people in the demographic structure. From the 1997 data we can usefully compare the figures recorded in Italy with those in other European countries and the European Union as a whole. The proportion of young people, 13.29%, is very near the EU average (13%), below that of Spain (16.01%), slightly lower than France (13.56%) and above the United Kingdom (12.36%), Sweden (12.08%) and Germany (11.03%).

Population dimension, structure and distribution depend principally on three significant variables: birth-rate, mortality and mobility. The first two represent “natural movement”, whilst mobility generates “migratory movement”. The last few decades have witnessed significant demographic transformations along with the other equally profound transformations in the socio-economic and cultural structure of Italy, thus bringing the country to assume the characteristics of populations of more ancient industrialisation. The Italian population – although significant differences persist between the different regions – has taken on fully the aspect that demographers define as “mature stationary” (Livi Bacci, 1981), characterised, to be exact, by the stability in the number of inhabitants. However, such stability results from the concurrent phenomena of low birth-rate and low mortality. The existence of these conditions is well documented in the Italian and national statistical yearbooks and in the specific literature (see, for example, Golini, 1994, ISTAT, 1998-b and 1999, Eurostat, 1999).

Consequently, the proportion of elderly people in the population with respect to the younger age classes has increased, and in Italy the phenomenon is seen to be more accentuated with respect to the average in European Union Member States. The ageing index – which is calculated here as the percentage relationship between the part of the population which is more than 65 years old and the part which is less than 15 years old – is a good indicator of the proportion of elderly people in the population. Limiting ourselves to recent years, in as early as 1997, the ageing index was 116.5%, significantly higher than that calculated for the entire EU which in the same year was 91.3%. In 1998, the index rose to 119.5% and almost reached 122% in 1999.

As mentioned previously, profound changes in the socio-economic processes, changes in general culture and changes in the territorial system take place in relation to the transformations in the demographic trends. During the one hundred and forty years since unification, and above all, in recent decades, Italy has passed from a structure characterised by agricultural activity and farming culture, to industrialisation and urbanisation (1950s to 1970s), to the current phase defined as “post industrial”. During this transition, Italy passed, like other advanced countries in the West, the threshold of the phase known as “social complexity”. The essence of this is a lesser ordered social structure with a limited number of simple categories and a trend of independence and self-definition in the sub-systems that compose it. Moreover, it has been suggested

(Bagnasco, 1994) that the particularly “complicated” characteristic of Italian society, a legacy of recent state unification and the still marked regional differences, should be added to the afore-mentioned element of complexity. In other words, the consequences of what an Italian social scientist defined as the “anomalous Italian way, singular mixture of great economic and cultural precocity and of great political delay” (Cerroni, 1998) would appear to persist. In this context, even the principal underlying trends which are characteristic of a large part of the Northern hemisphere, namely, the profound reorganisation of industry, the growth of the “middle classes” (above all, those classes associated with new professions), and the emergence of new forms of social polarisation between “who is in” and “who is out” of the process of modernisation, take on specific characteristics which sometimes become real “complication” factors with respect to the possible solutions for the governance of the transformations themselves.

Turning to a description of some of the economic aspects, we limit ourselves to saying that the composition of consumption and wealth generated corresponds to a post-industrial profile. In 1998, the figure for the Value-added (VA) at market prices in the agricultural sector was circa 2.6% of total VA, that of the industrial sector was 31.6%; whilst the value added in the tertiary sector was 65.8%.

With regards to consumption, the most significant part of final consumption is represented by family consumption which reached 76.2% of total consumption in 1998. Within this category of consumption, the “classic” decline related to the consumption of food-stuffs is borne out. In 1994 this was 17.7% and then declined further to 16.3% in 1998. Conversely, significance is gained in other sectors, such as clothing and shoes (with figures of 9.9% and 9.7% in 1994 and 1998 respectively), transport (12.5% and 13.3% and thus expanding), furniture, household appliances and house maintenance (9.5% and 9.6%), recreation and culture (7.4% and 7.6%), housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (19.6% and 19.2%). The continuing low figures regarding consumption related to education: 1.02% in 1994 and, 0.96% in 1998, should be noted.

Another issue which is pertinent to the description of the socio-economic context is that of energy, both in terms of total production and supply of primary energy as well as in terms of final consumption. With respect to total supply, internal production in Italy is less than that of other large European countries: 16.1% in 1990, increasing to 18.2% in 1996, compared to 53.5% and 54.2% in the

EU, 98.1% and 114.6% in Great Britain, 48.7% and 51.2% in France and 52.2% and 40.2% in Germany. Energy intensity, that is, the relationship between total supply and GDP, is slightly diminishing and clearly lower (about 30%) than the European average: this is an indicator of the economic system's greater energy efficiency, with its additional positive implications for the environment.

It should be noted that, as in the other more advanced countries, in addition to the high levels of energy consumption, road transport has an environmental impact. This is related to the fact that Italy is one of the most intensely motorised countries in the world. With about 34 million automobiles in circulation, to which another three million motor bikes should be added, the motorisation rate in 1997 was 643.22 vehicles per thousand inhabitants. (ISTAT 1999 and ISTAT 1998-a data).

In spite of the fact that recent decades have witnessed significant territorial transformations, the consequence of which is that urbanised areas amount to 13% of the total national territory, the recent development of a policy for protected areas, aimed at the conservation and valorisation of the natural and landscape patrimony should also be highlighted. The extent of the regional natural parks, of national parks and nature reserves is today (1998 data) equal to 10.5% of the entire territory. However, the existence of parks is only a starting point for the complex socio-economic and political-cultural processes, which touch the important subjects of development, of its "sustainability", and the role of the local social systems. For a more detailed account, see recent specialist literature (Beato, 2000).

Finally, it is opportune to present some specific information concerning young people in Italy. First of all, a brief look at the issue of employment. In 1998 the 15 to 24 year age group represented *circa* 12% of the total workforce (*circa* 2,783,000 out of about 23,180,000 individuals). Within this group, 942,000 people, equal to 33.8%, are looking for employment as compared to a general unemployment rate (total people looking for work out of total workforce) of about 11.8%. It should be noted that unemployment is not equally distributed over the national territory and is more accentuated amongst people with a lower level of education. With regard to levels of education, in this article we make reference to only one indicator which concerns participation in university courses.

In the academic year 1997-1998, 1,587,549 students were found to be enrolled in Italian universities, whilst 320,060 were registered in degree and diploma courses. The enrolment rate for “tertiary education”, elaborated by UNESCO (1998, *cit.* in ISTAT, 1999), which refers to university-goers in the 19-23 age group for the academic year 1995-96, is 41.4%. This figure places Italy among the lowest of the EU Member States, much lower than Finland (70.3%), lower than Belgium (54.4%), France (51%), Great Britain (49.5%), and Spain (48.6%), and only higher than Ireland (38.5%) and Portugal (36.8%).

A peculiar characteristic of Italy is the long stay of unmarried adult children within the family: in 1998 the percentage of young people aged between 18 and 34 living with their family of origin was 58.8%. More specifically, 98.4% in the 18-19 age-group lived with their family of origin, 88.4% between 20 and 24, 58.4% between 25 and 29, and, 21.9% between 30 and 34 years old (ISTAT,1999). Difficulty in finding work would seem to be an explanation of secondary importance and is concentrated mainly in the south, whilst primarily motivations relate to the desire to maintain satisfactory living conditions, to a lesser degree, to being a student.

In recent years, in accordance with a general growth in “body culture”, regular sports activities have become progressively more widespread. This is true for all age groups but involves children and young people in a very significant manner. In 1998, 32.4% of young people aged between 18 and 19 and 30.2% between 20 and 24, practised sport regularly. Another 48.9% of the former age group and 47.4% of the second age group practised sport occasionally or at least engaged in some physical activity.

As regards the popularity of different types of entertainment including cultural events, in 1998, the 18-19 and 20-24 age groups frequented the cinema most of all (83% and 83.6% respectively), followed by discos (71.5% and 70.4%), sporting events (50% and 44.2%), “non classical” musical concerts (44.6% and 42.4%), museums and exhibitions (38% and 34.2%), the theatre (24.8% and 19.6%) and, finally, classical music concerts (9.5% and 10.9%). Watching television is very popular in all age groups with no significant difference in behaviour apparent amongst young people: 95.1% for the 18-19 age group and 93.7% for the 20-24 age group. Data relating to who watches TV for at least three hours a day appears to be less evenly distributed: younger age groups and older people have percentages which are clearly lower than those of the previous

groups discussed. These age groups also differ from the others with regard to listening to the radio, in that there are 85.2% of the former and 84.6% of the latter, matched only by the immediately preceding set (15-17 year olds, 86%) and the group immediately following (25-34 year olds, 79.5%), closely followed by adolescents (11-14 year olds 71.3%), while they are clearly distant (by 40 or more points) from the other age groups. The reading of daily newspapers does not seem to be very common in Italy; in 1998 a total of 57.8% of people over 6 years old read a newspaper at least once a week. Young people aged between 18 and 19 and those between 20 and 24, with 55.7% and 63.1% respectively, are positioned around the average. If we look at who reads newspapers at least five times a week, we find the age groups of our survey, with 31.3% and 38.4%, slightly lower than the total figure. However, with 55.8% and 53.3%, these classes behave “better” than all of the others with regards to the reading of books and are surpassed only by the 11-14 age group (57.7%) and, to a large extent, matched by the 15-17 age group (53.8%).

The notion of sustainable consumption

What is sustainable consumption? What social actions are represented by this expression (sustainable), which qualifies and at the same time distinguishes a current and universal practice of human behaviour (consumption)?

In trying to answer this question, it may be useful to take into consideration a few definitions, that, although not exhaustive, might prove to be representative enough of the main semantic nucleus conveyed through the expression “sustainable consumption”.

The most classic, and perhaps most complete definition of “sustainable consumption” was elaborated during a Symposium of OECD Countries held in Oslo in 1994: “The use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic material as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not jeopardise the needs of future generations”.

The above definition makes use of the concept of sustainable development the way it is expressed by the Brundtland Report, which, on one side affirms the possibility for humanity to accomplish the goal

of sustainable development, and on the other establishes a direct connection between sustainability and the achievement/diffusion of need satisfaction patterns without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

In the well-known definition proposed by the environmental economist Costanza (Costanza et al., 1991, p. 8), sustainable consumption is conceived as the “amount of consumption that can be continued indefinitely without degrading capital stocks including natural stocks”.

In a more recent work, by Stern et al. (1997), entitled *Environmentally significant consumption*, a more articulated definition of consumption is presented (page 20): “Consumption consists of human and human-induced transformation of material and energy. Consumption is environmentally important to the extent that it makes materials or energy less available for future use, moves a biophysical system toward a different state or, through its effects on those systems, threatens human health, welfare, or other things people value”.

On the contrary, YAC/UNEP’s definition (<http://www.unepie.org/sustain/youth.html>) is more essential and effective: “Sustainable consumption means desiring, using and disposing of resources in a way that minimises harm to the environment while supporting the well being of people”.

The above mentioned definitions make it possible to point out three thematic and semantic foundations upon which the notion of sustainable consumption is built, the same to which UNEP’s questionnaire on youth and sustainable consumption (whose results are discussed below) makes reference.

The first point to focus on, deals with our Planet’s *carrying capacity*. The above definition by Costanza draws attention to the existence of limitations which affect ecosystems, and which are imposed, on one side, by the number of consumers, and on the other, by the amount of renewable and non-renewable resources provided by the ecosystem, and represented by space, food, water and energy. Since every effort to overcome carrying capacity limitations might trigger a dramatic situation of conflict (a darwinian *struggle for life*), the principle of “sustainable consumption” plays a major, strategically relevant role. As a matter of fact, by reckoning the exhaustion of important natural resources within a century (Durning, 1992), and a

population growth proceeding at a rate of 1.6% a year (Manzini, 1998), it is evident that a balance is needed between biosphere and technosphere, in the direction of sustainability.

The second point, closely linked with the concept of carrying capacity, is known as the *ecological footprint* (Rees and Weckernagel, 1996). This notion is based upon the idea that any product, either a good or a service, derived from a productive process, exerts an impact on the economy and society, and in particular, on the environment.

Such an impact, essentially a biophysical one, encompasses the whole life-cycle of the product, from raw material acquisition, to disposal and waste management. The biophysical impact affects the life of human beings (as pointed out by Stern's definition), triggering second-order consequences that, in turn, affect the organisation of the social structure at all levels. Thus the idea of sustainable consumption emerges here too: if sustainable consumption was able to steer the complex interaction between supply and demand for goods and services, it could contribute to the diffusion of production patterns based on (1) re-use of renewable resources, in order to respect the regenerative capacity of the system; (2) the optimization of non-renewable resources and (3) the reduction of residual materials which cannot be re-naturalized by the system.

There exists, finally, a third dimension, related to the issue of intergenerational ethics. Such a necessity emerges from the above mentioned Brundtland Report, and takes inspiration from an "equal opportunities" principle for representatives of different generations. A more thorough analysis makes it clear that the issue of inter-generational equity is only one side of the problem, represented by the equitable access to positions and opportunities. However, this issue has also an intra-generational meaning, as long as representatives of the same generation who live in different geographical regions of the Planet, characterised by different economic and social standards (i.e., the United States and the European Countries on one side, and the so-called G77 on the other), do not have access to the same resources and means of sustenance.

Therefore, the strengthening of uncontrolled consumption patterns by socio-economically advanced Countries is jeopardising the capacity of less developed Countries to meet their needs. The predatory use of natural resources by G77 Countries might be caused both by a desperate quest for capitalistic wealth, and by the economic necessity to

cancel the debts they owe to industrially developed countries. In this way, an ordinary difference in wealth and resources distribution might end up posing devastating risks to the environment, thus triggering a dangerous spiral of underdevelopment. From this point of view, it will be interesting to highlight the existence (or non-existence) of different values and behavioural attitudes characterising young people from the cities included in the UNEP survey.

Once again, the most reasonable solution to these issues appears to be represented by new social models aimed at recovering environmental quality and managing the consumption of natural resources.

The survey on youth and sustainable consumption

Considering the above, the choice facing young people – whether or not to embrace life styles and behavioural patterns inspired by the principles of sustainable consumption – is of uttermost importance. It is necessary to keep in mind the responsibility of young generations, since they are the future adult society and they represent a sort of “promise”. However, from a more sociological point of view, we should not forget that young generations have historically and socially distinguished themselves by promoting changes and innovative values, sometimes generating social collective movements that have given rise to culturally and socially relevant transformations. This helps understand how they may be considered as a natural and primary target for surveys, campaigns, political action/decisions, cultural initiatives directly and indirectly linked to sustainable consumption issues and environment protection.

The UNEP survey is intended to provide a picture of the youth world from the point of view of patterns of action and underlying conceptions related to the enjoyment of goods and services and their impact on the environment. The work consisted of building a section of the complex “map” of attitudes, behaviour, and expectations of young people, with the purpose of identifying their willingness to start/modify action models in the direction of sustainability, as defined above.

Within this cognitive framework, it is surely worth investigating the factors which may foster/jeopardise the establishment of consumption patterns. The UNEP survey emphasizes the importance of youth’s reference values.

According to the assumptions of the so-called *New ecological paradigm* (Catton and Dunlap, 1978 and 1980), it has been hypothesized that there is a connection between conceptions of the world and value coordinates, on one side, and attitudes and life styles on the other. In other words, sustainable consumption or its opposite, overconsumption, are not merely a matter of attitudes and behaviour, but they might be based on strong and deep-rooted values.

These systems of values are part of an ideal and at the same time complex model whose input variables are campaigns and information, promotion and sensibilization initiatives, and whose output variables are a shift of behaviours and life styles in the direction of eco-sustainability.

In line with this formulation, and going back to Stern's definition of sustainable consumption, it is worth highlighting the dimension – appropriately taken into account by the questionnaire – of risk perception and the specific *value* assumed by the related individual safeguard/risk. In this case, the starting point is represented by the establishment of a direct and close connection between the quality of the environment we live in, and quality of life. A major part of the sociological contributions to this topic derive from the so-called *Cultural Theory of Risk* (see Tansey and O' Riordan, 1999), applied by Mary Douglas in her works (i.e. Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982). The main point of this theory states that risk perception does not result from rational choices by individuals, on the basis of their egotistic interests, but derives from the individual experience of people who belong to different social and cultural spheres, which, in turn, are able to influence attitudes towards risk and behavioural patterns.

Finally, with reference to the Italian section of the survey, the research group took a noteworthy decision in choosing to place great emphasis on the questionnaire's section dedicated to the interviewees' cultural background. In fact, a close connection is assumed to exist between the people's commitment towards respecting the environment and protecting nature, and their cultural preferences. Our purpose was to understand whether, within the wide gamut of objects the consumers are offered, the cultural ones might lead to a classification of environment-oriented actions and social actors (Bourdieu, 1979).

First results of the inquiry

The survey on *Youth and sustainable consumption* carried out in Rome by ANPA (Agenzia Nazionale per la Protezione dell'Ambiente – National Agency for the Protection of the Environment) in collaboration with RiSMoS (Dipartimento di Ricerca sociale e metodologia sociologica “Gianni Statera” – Department for Social Research and Sociological Methodology “Gianni Statera” of Rome University “La Sapienza”), is part of the UNEP/UNESCO Survey on Youth and Sustainable Consumption. The aim of these initiatives is to improve the understanding of youth attitudes towards the adoption of more responsible consumption patterns. It also aims to raise young people's sensibility and consciousness towards environmental issues and how they are linked to everyday actions.

ANPA and RiSMoS carried out 300 interviews with young people in Rome, focussing on action models and their underlying conception concerning goods and service consumption and their impact on the environment. The interviews were based on the questionnaire which was provided by UNEP and translated and adapted to the language and cultural standards of Italy. Some relevant questions specific to the Italian context were also added to the questionnaire. Thus, the nine areas which characterized the original questionnaire (private data; financial and professional situation; personal activities considered most interesting; ownership of technological and communication goods and services; analysis of the impact of specific everyday activities; perception and evaluation of the efficacy of socially and environmentally oriented personal engagement; social, political and environmental issues; consumption conception) were integrated with six other interest areas (the way people travel in town; cultural consumption and reading habits; the inclination to join associations; ideological orientation; the social, cultural and economic situation of the family; comparative evaluation of town problems).

The survey results were aggregated and read in two different ways. The first reading consisted of an analytical reconstruction of the profiles of the 300 young people interviewed based on some of the above-mentioned 15 variables. The second reading interpreted the survey results to evaluate consumer typologies and their attitudes towards the environment and sustainable consumption.

■ Structural data and socio-economic profile

The interviews covered 300 young people in Rome (52.7% male and 47.3% female, mostly still not married, 97.3%), who were divided into three age groups (18-20; 21-23; 24-25) composed of 100 persons each. A similar subdivision was used with regard to education, obtaining three groups: those who finished the compulsory school cycle (8 years), those who finished high school and those still in university. Each of these groups was composed of 100 people as well. Even if 66% of respondents were employed, the great part of them still lived with their parents or at least with one parent and/or relative (85%).

A description of the social status of the families of origin and a summary of the data concerning respondents' parents' educational qualifications, occupations and incomes complete this picture. This index divides the families into three groups characterised by different income: low (41.4%), middle (33.0%), and high (25.6%). This datum, which shows a prevalence of families of rather modest social and economic conditions, leads us to reflect upon the limited possibilities of social mobility for those coming from such families. This is confirmed in the answers by a strong link between family status and the social, economic and cultural characteristics of the respondents.

■ Interests and leisure activities

Table 1 can be considered an ideal “indicator of value” which undoubtedly shows that the prevailing orientation among young people is the “relational and hedonistic” one.

In fact, great importance is attributed to the dimension of friendship. Leisure activities are especially oriented towards disengagement, listening to music, and enjoying nature, sports and shopping.

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS ARE MOST INTERESTED IN (N=300) %

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Hanging out with friends | 92.0 |
| Music/dancing | 80.7 |
| Walking in a park/enjoying nature | 55.7 |
| Sport | 54.0 |
| Shopping | 41.3 |
| Literature and reading | 39.0 |
| Using computer | 37.3 |
| Education | 33.7 |
| Culture/visiting museums | 31.3 |
| Society | 25.7 |
| Watching TV | 25.3 |
| Playing video games | 17.3 |
| Politics | 6.0 |

Exact activities such as studying, reading and culture are, as the data show, of low interest (see Table 1). This is confirmed by the data concerning reading habits, which show that 30.7% of respondents do not read newspapers, while only 21% of them read newspapers every day. As regards the number of books they have at home, 56.7% have a maximum of 30 books, 30.0% a quantity ranging from 30 to 100, while 13.3% have more than 100 books. More encouraging are data concerning magazines, which show that 70.3% regularly read them. Nevertheless, more than 30.0% are female and music magazines, or magazines on health, cars or show business.

The position occupied in this scale of activities by social and political engagement is extremely noteworthy: only 6.0% consider politics interesting, while the percentage rises to 25.7% for social engagement. This is confirmed by the very little inclination to join associations. In fact, only 14.6% of respondents join organisations, some of which (4.6%) are environmental while the remaining have no specific characterisation. As for political and ideological orientation, no response seems to emerge above the others. On the contrary, there is a balance between left and right political inclinations which actually reflects the force political parties have in Italy (16.3% claim to be left whilst 5.7% claim to be right sympathisers; 27.7% claim to

be centre-left whilst 21.3% are centre-right. Finally, 13.7% claim to be in the centre, while 5.3% do not take sides).

■ Consumption choices and evaluation of environmental impact

This is a key area for the survey. We wanted to point out if and how much particular conceptions, values and attitudes towards the environment could influence and divert young people's choices and consumption habits. Therefore, we focussed more on the relative weight of this *choice criterion* in comparison with other possible behaviour oriented by more *traditional* parameters, such as the price and quality of the chosen product and its being trendy or not (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: EVALUATION OF SOME CRITERIA INVOLVED IN MAKING THE DECISION TO BUY (N=300) %

| | <i>The eco-friendliness of the product</i> | <i>What's trendier</i> | <i>Price</i> | <i>The quality of the product</i> |
|---------------------|--|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Not at all/a little | 60.0 | 35.0 | 11.7 | 6.3 |
| Sometimes | 25.3 | 30.0 | 34.0 | 20.0 |
| Often/all the time | 14.7 | 35.0 | 54.3 | 73.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

The above table shows that the environmental impact of the product weighs less on the decision to buy than the other criteria. Thus, only 14.7% of respondents always or very often consider the environmental impact of products, while this percentage rises very much when we consider the price (54.3%) or quality (73.7%) of the product. Now, given the greater importance of traditional parameters in making the decision to buy, what is interesting to point out is the clear and striking dissociation young people make between two conceptual dimensions: quality and environmental impact. Consequently, it is possible to have excellent products with high environmental impact, and poor *quality* products with no *environmental impact*. Technically speaking, within the cognitive system of the subject who evaluates goods there is room for a complex concept of quality, characterised by the absence of the property concerning environmental impact. This mechanism of dissociation concerns also the relationship between

opinions and perceptions on the one hand, and actual behaviour on the other.

The following table (Table 3) shows young people's perception of the impact of four common activities (waste disposal, food consumption, the way people travel into town, the use of energy) in three different areas (economy, society and environment).

TABLE 3: THE IMPACT OF SOME EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES ON ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT (N=300) %

| | <i>Waste disposal</i> | <i>The way I travel into town/ out of town</i> | <i>The use of energy</i> | <i>The food I buy affects</i> |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Economy | 1.7 | 6.3 | 4.3 | 6.7 |
| Society | 2.3 | 7.7 | 25.3 | 31.3 |
| Environment | 84.7 | 60.0 | 42.3 | 10.7 |
| All of the above | 8.0 | 16.0 | 19.7 | 21.0 |
| None of the above | 3.3 | 10.0 | 8.4 | 30.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

The data show that there is a greater consciousness towards traditional problems associated with environmental impact, such as the various forms of pollution linked to town traffic and to waste disposal. On the contrary, consciousness concerning less evident issues such as the individuation and exploitation of new energy sources, as well as the testing in the biotechnology area, on the other, is not so widespread (Table 3).

Nevertheless, if we examine the answers to a direct question on travel habits in town, we can see that only 10% of respondents actually claim that their choice of transport is connected to its environmental impact. Rather, this choice is based on considerations concerning the convenience (40.0%), swiftness (29.3), and cost (5.3%) of the means of transport, but also on evaluations linked to the impossibility of using alternative means of transport (21.7%). These criteria are valid even when respondents chose public transport (34.7%) rather than private solutions: car (22.0%) or scooter (38.0%).

Another gap between opinion and disposition to action, although less evident, can be seen in tables 4 and 5. The first one shows that almost all respondents consider environmental problems extremely important and think that they are some of the principal challenges with which human kind will be compelled to cope in the following years. Reducing pollution – in its various forms: air, soil and water pollution – is considered a crucial question by 94.0% of the sample, while a slightly lower percentage (79.0%) think that global warming and climate change are decisive problems. Moreover, in comparative terms, environmental goals are considered as important as social and political ones, such as human rights, reducing unemployment and child labour, or improving people’s health (Table 4). A lower but still major percentage of youth consider ‘very important’ questions like the reduction of differences between rich and poor (72.4%) and population increase (62.0%).

TABLE 4: EVALUATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SOME SOCIAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS, WHICH ARE A CHALLENGE FOR FUTURE YEARS (N=300) %

| | <i>Little/ Not important</i> | <i>Don't know</i> | <i>Important/ Crucial</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Fighting unemployment | 1.3 | 1.3 | 97.4 | 100 |
| Improving respect for human rights | 1.3 | 3.3 | 95.4 | 100 |
| Reducing pollution | 1.0 | 5.0 | 94.0 | 100 |
| Reducing child labour | 2.7 | 4.0 | 93.3 | 100 |
| Improving people’s health | 2.7 | 6.0 | 91.3 | 100 |
| Global warming/ Climate change | 9.3 | 11.7 | 79.0 | 100 |
| Reducing difference between rich and poor | 9.3 | 18.3 | 72.4 | 100 |
| Coping with population increase | 12.0 | 26.0 | 62.0 | 100 |

If we now consider the inclination of respondents to modify their purchase and consumption habits on the basis of specific information regarding the product, we can see that the tendency to change is less evident. Thus, if 94.0% of respondents consider reduction of pollution to be an extremely important challenge for the future (Table 4),

less significant percentages of youth (Table 5) would modify their consumption behaviour if they had more information about the way in which their production affects the environment (62.2%), their use (59.0%), their disposal after use (54.0%), and also on the most efficient way to use them (54.3%).

The data presented up to now put in evidence an objective resistance of youth to assume concrete “politically correct” behaviour towards the environment, and perfectly correspond to the judgements expressed concerning the responsibility for planning and, above all, putting into practice the initiatives which tend to improve general life conditions.

TABLE 5: EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT WHICH INFORMATION ON PRODUCTS HAS ON PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR (N=300) %

| | <i>Little/ Not important</i> | <i>Don't know</i> | <i>Important/ Crucial</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| What's in them | 12.3 | 9.3 | 78.4 | 100 |
| Children made them | 10.0 | 14.0 | 76.0 | 100 |
| How their production affected the environment | 21.4 | 16.4 | 62.2 | 100 |
| What they do to environment | 25.7 | 15.3 | 59.0 | 100 |
| What is the most efficient way to use them | 30.3 | 15.4 | 54.4 | 100 |
| What happens to them after I've used them | 30.3 | 15.7 | 54.0 | 100 |
| The country they come from | 61.0 | 18.7 | 20.3 | 100 |

The data in Table 6 show a latent delegation mechanism according to which responsibility for development plans is mainly attributed to the government (91.6%), followed by international organisations (88.0%), industry (83.3%), citizens (76.0%), young people (74.3%), and finally the respondent him/herself (62.3%).

This attitude, characterised by the *non-acceptance of responsibility* is based, it seems, on the little efficacy which individual actions are believed to have outside the restricted boundaries of one's own

private life. In fact, whereas 81.7% of respondents think that their environmental pro-activity would have a positive impact on their lives, only 35.3% are equally confident when the consequences of their individual actions regard the towns in which they live. This percentage is still lower (16.7%) when the action field extends potentially to the whole world (Table 7).

The most important question for our reflection is the quite clear distinction between private life (which could be defined as the “micro-social sphere”), public life (“meso-social sphere”) and extended public life (“macro-social sphere”). In other words, the consequences that one’s own actions have on the micro-social sphere and that young people consider positive and relevant, do not tend to interest the meso- and macro-social spheres. This seems to indicate that, at these higher and more complex levels, the action and the interaction capabilities of individuals are deprived of effect. At least, they are perceived to be so.

TABLE 6: EVALUATION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTIONS AIMING AT IMPROVING THE WORLD (N=300) %

| | <i>Government</i> | <i>International organisations</i> | <i>Industry</i> | <i>Citizens</i> | <i>Young people</i> | <i>Myself</i> |
|--|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Not/Slightly responsible | 5.7 | 5.3 | 6.7 | 15.3 | 16.4 | 25.7 |
| Don't know | 2.7 | 6.7 | 10.0 | 8.7 | 9.3 | 12.0 |
| Important actor/ Mainly responsible | 91.6 | 88.0 | 83.3 | 76.0 | 74.3 | 62.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

TABLE 7: IMPACT OF PERSONAL ACTIONS FOR A BETTER WORLD (N=300) %

| | <i>What happens in the world</i> | <i>What happens in my town</i> | <i>What happens only in my private life</i> |
|------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| No/Little impact | 57.3 | 41.7 | 11.0 |
| Don't know | 26.0 | 23.0 | 7.3 |
| High impact | 16.7 | 35.3 | 81.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Multidimensional analysis of data

Themes concerning the environment and sustainable consumption have acquired great importance in the last twenty years. A more sustainable lifestyle has become socially desirable and it can be considered like a trend among a restricted but growing number of people. In this part of the chapter, we will try to identify distinct consumer categories and to see whether and in what percentage Italian youth is interested in a more sustainable lifestyle.

On the base of empirical evidence, and after several attempts, we succeeded in individuating four specific questions in the UNEP/UNESCO questionnaire that seem to discriminate clearly the respondents. These questions concern:

- 1) the criteria dictating purchase decisions about clothes, personal care products, food, hi-fi (price, what's trendier, the quality of the product, its eco-friendliness, other);
- 2) the influence that information about the product (child labour, environmental impact of the product, etc.) has in the purchase decision;
- 3) the biggest challenges that the world will face in the next few years (reducing child labour, fighting unemployment, etc.);
- 4) the scope of the impact of one's own actions for improving the world (impact on the whole world, on the home-town, on one's own life).

Combining the answers to these four questions, we were able to identify two major groups of respondents which we labelled as "Interested" and "Not-Interested". Within these two clusters we have highlighted four mind-sets: the aesthetic/conformist mind-set, related to choice criteria (1) above; the willingness/unwillingness to change, related to the information about the product (2) above; the materialistic/post-materialistic mind-set, related to the future challenges for the world (3) above; the responsibility/delegation mind-set (4) above, related to the impact ascribed to one's own actions.

Before starting the analysis of the two clusters and their mind-sets, it is perhaps useful to sketch out their structural characteristics.

The groups clearly differ in terms of their educational qualifications (see Table 8) and political and ideological orientations (see Table 9).

TABLE 8: EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS OF THE TWO GROUPS, FORMED USING CLUSTER ANALYSIS (N=300) %

| | <i>Completed compulsory school cycle (8 years)</i> | <i>Completed High School</i> | <i>In University</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------|--|------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Interested | 21.6 | 35.1 | 43.3 | 100.0 (64.6) |
| Not-Interested | 53.8 | 31.1 | 15.1 | 100.0 (35.4) |
| Total | 33.0 | 33.7 | 33.3 | 100.0 |

P=0.000

The table clearly shows that 43.3% of those who can be defined as Interested in sustainable development/consumption are in University, versus only 15.1% of the Not-Interested. As for the political and ideological orientations, 54.1% of the Interested can be defined as centre-left, and 55.7% of the Not-Interested centre-right.

TABLE 9: POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS OF THE TWO GROUPS, (N=300) IN %

| | <i>Centre-left</i> | <i>Centre</i> | <i>Centre-right</i> | <i>Don't know</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Interested | 54.1 | 15.5 | 26.8 | 3.6 | 100.0 (64.6) |
| Not-Interested | 25.5 | 10.4 | 55.7 | 8.4 | 100.0 (35.4) |
| Total | 44.0 | 13.7 | 37.0 | 5.3 | 100.0 |

P=0.000

With regard to the criteria dictating purchase decisions (1) above, we created an index concerning the choice criterion used for buying clothes and hi-fi equipment (food and personal care products were not considered because they did not discriminate the cases). This index classifies respondents in: instrumental (price), cautious (price+quality), conformist (fashion, trendiness), aesthetic (quality) (see table 10).

As can be noted, respondents are equally distributed: 28.7% follow criteria connected only with the quality of the product (Aesthetic), 28.3% follow a criterion based on a mix of quality and price (Cautious), 17.3% make their decisions almost exclusively on the base of the price (Instrumental), while 25.7% always choose what's trendier (Conformist) (see Table 11).

TABLE 10: CRITERIA ON WHICH PURCHASE DECISIONS ARE MOSTLY BASED, BOTH FOR CLOTHES AND HI-FI EQUIPMENT

| <i>Consumer category</i> | <i>Respondents</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Instrumental | 52 | 17.3 |
| Cautious | 85 | 28.3 |
| Conformist | 77 | 25.7 |
| Aesthetic | 86 | 28.7 |
| Total | 300 | 100.0 |

TABLE 11: CRITERIA FOLLOWED BY THE TWO GROUPS, WHEN BUYING CLOTHES AND HI-FI (N=300) IN %

| | <i>Instrumental</i> | <i>Cautious</i> | <i>Conformist</i> | <i>Aesthetic</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Interested | 16.0 | 31.4 | 20.1 | 32.5 | 100.0 (64.6) |
| Not-Interested | 19.8 | 22.6 | 35.8 | 21.8 | 100.0 (35.4) |
| Total | 17.3 | 28.3 | 25.7 | 28.7 | 100.0 |

P=0.008

The two groups discriminate extremely well the principal criteria followed when buying clothes and hi-fi: the Interested base their purchase decisions especially on aesthetics (32.5%), while a slight percentage of them mainly use a cautious criterion (31.4%). As for the Not-Interested, 35.8% of them base their decisions on a conformist criterion, mainly fashion.

The second mind-set identified was the inclination to change. This is characterised, on the one hand, by the simple distinction between inclination and refractoriness to change, and, on the other, by the difference between the information concerning the use of the product and the information concerning its production. The relationship

between these kinds of information (see Table 12) makes it possible to construct a real index of the inclination to change.

TABLE 12: IMPACT OF THE INFORMATION CONCERNING THE USE OF PRODUCTS ON PURCHASE DECISIONS BY THE IMPACT RELATIVE TO THEIR PRODUCTION (N=300) %

| Impact of information concerning production | | | |
|---|------|------|-------|
| Inclined to change | 46.7 | 11.0 | 57.7 |
| Refractory to change | 15.3 | 27.0 | 42.3 |
| Total | 62.0 | 38.0 | 100.0 |

P=0.000

46.7% of respondents affirm that they would change their purchase choices if they had more information concerning both the production and the use of the product. Therefore, they have a maximum inclination to change. On the contrary, 27% of respondents are totally refractory to any change, while 11% and 15.3% of subjects can be considered of a mixed type. Nonetheless, the first mixed group can be classified as willing to change if the information supplied concerns production, while the second group is inclined to change if information concerns the use of the product. Table 13 shows the positions of the respondents with reference to the inclination to change.

TABLE 13: INCLINATION TO CHANGE (N=300) %

| | <i>Maximum inclination</i> | <i>Inclination if information concerns use</i> | <i>Inclination if information concerns production</i> | <i>Refractoriness</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------|----------------------------|--|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Interested | 71.1 | 18.6 | 7.7 | 2.6 | 100.0 (64.6) |
| Not-Interested | 1.9 | 9.4 | 17.0 | 71.7 | 100.0 (35.4) |
| Total | 46.7 | 15.3 | 11.0 | 27.0 | 100.0 |

P=0.000

In addition, in this case, the groups are extremely different: 71,1% of the Interested show a maximum inclination to change, while, on the contrary, 71.7% of the Not-Interested are totally refractory to change.

The two boxes of mixed inclination deserve a brief comment. If the two extremes are “maximum inclination” and “refractoriness”, the inclination to change due to information concerning the use of the product is closer to “maximum inclination”. On the contrary, the inclination to change supported by the information concerning the *production* of the goods is closer to refractoriness. Two different psychological mechanisms act here. In the first case respondents seem to be led by their sense of responsibility (the way they use the product), while in the second, delegation comes into play (who manufactures the product). These mechanisms – stimulation of the sense of responsibility or of delegation – explain why 18.6% of the Interested refer to the information concerning use, while 17.0% of the Not-Interested refer to the information concerning production.

The same two mechanisms seem to be the base of the mind-sets relative to the identification of future challenges for the world (point 3 above). This index was constructed following the criteria indicated in Table 12. In this case also, it is possible to distinguish, on the one hand, the importance ascribed to some of the challenges the world will have to face in the next few years, and, on the other, the materialistic/post-materialistic nature of such challenges. Here too we could identify two extremes and two mixed positions among the Interested and Not-interested groups. The first extreme includes 55% of respondents who consider both materialistic challenges (fighting unemployment, reducing difference between rich and poor, etc.) and post-materialistic ones (improving respect for human rights, reducing pollution, etc.) to be most important. On the other side, we have those who do not consider these challenges important at all: 22.3%. The two mixed types are composed of:

- a) those who consider post-materialistic challenges extremely important but ascribe no importance at all to materialistic ones (13.3%), and, on the other side,
- b) those who consider materialistic challenges extremely important but ascribe no importance at all to post-materialistic ones (9.3%).

These data are all the more significant if we consider them in connection with the index concerning inclination to change described

above. This shows (Table 14) that 45.7% of those refractory to change in their purchasing behaviour ascribe no importance at all to any of the future challenges. On the contrary, 71.4% of those showing a maximum inclination to change for the sake of social or environmental causes, also show concern for the future challenges the world will have to face.

TABLE 14: IMPORTANCE ATTRIBUTED TO CHALLENGES BY INCLINATION TO CHANGE (N=300) %

| | <i>Maximum inclination</i> | <i>Inclination to change if information concerns use</i> | <i>Inclination to change if information concerns production</i> | <i>Refractoriness</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---|----------------------------|--|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Maximum importance | 71.4 | 54.5 | 52.2 | 28.4 | 55.0 |
| Importance of post-materialistic challenges | 12.9 | 21.2 | 13.0 | 11.1 | 13.4 |
| Importance of materialistic challenges | 7.9 | 3.0 | 8.7 | 14.8 | 9.3 |
| Minimum importance | 7.9 | 21.2 | 26.1 | 45.7 | 22.3 |
| Total | 100.0 (46.6) | 100.0 (11.0) | 100.0 (15.3) | 100.0 (27.1) | 100.0 |

P=0.000

TABLE 15: IMPORTANCE OF FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR THE TWO GROUPS (N=300) %

| | <i>Maximum importance</i> | <i>Importance attributed to post-materialistic</i> | <i>Importance attributed to materialistic challenges</i> | <i>Minimum importance</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------|---------------------------|--|--|---------------------------|--------------|
| Interested | 70.1 | 13.9 | 7.8 | 8.2 | 100.0 (64.6) |
| Not-Interested | 27.3 | 12.3 | 12.3 | 48.1 | 100.0 (35.4) |
| Total | 55.0 | 13.3 | 9.3 | 22.3 | 100.0 |

P=0.000

In addition, in this case, the two groups are clearly characterised (see Table 15): 70.1% of the Interested ascribe maximum importance to future challenges, while 48.1% of the Not-Interested ascribe them no importance at all.

The last mind-set identified concerning delegation (point 4) above, is linked to the impact that respondents attribute to their own actions for improving the world. A group of 46.7% respondents believe that their actions would have no impact at all. 53.3% of respondents are more confident and believe that their behaviour does have a noticeable effect. If we consider the inclination to change and the importance attributed to future challenges, 61.7% of the refractory do not consider their actions effective at all, while 60.7% of those who show a maximum inclination to change also attribute great importance to their actions (see Table 16). Similarly, 55.2% of those who do not consider any future challenge important at all, consider their actions unimportant, while 58.8% of those who consider future challenges extremely important also consider their actions effective (see Table 17).

TABLE 16: SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT BY INCLINATION TO CHANGE (N=300) %

| <i>Sense of empowerment</i> | <i>Maximum inclination</i> | <i>Inclination if information concerns use</i> | <i>Inclination if information concerns production</i> | <i>Refractoriness</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Minimum | 39.3 | 48.5 | 41.3 | 61.7 | 46.7 |
| Maximum | 60.7 | 51.5 | 58.7 | 38.3 | 53.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

P=0.012

TABLE 17: SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT BY IMPORTANCE ATTRIBUTED TO CHALLENGES (N=300) %

| <i>Sense of empowerment</i> | <i>Maximum inclination</i> | <i>Inclination if information concerns use</i> | <i>Inclination if information concerns production</i> | <i>Refractoriness</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Minimum | 55.2 | 53.6 | 50.0 | 41.2 | 46.7 |
| Maximum | 44.8 | 46.4 | 50.0 | 58.8 | 53.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

P=0.19

Table 18 below shows that 63.4% of the Interested consider extremely effective their actions to improve the world, while 65.1% of the Not-Interested consider them ineffective. In this sense, the group of the Not-Interested is characterised by a strong delegation mechanism, while the Interested show a greater inclination towards responsibility.

TABLE 18: SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT FOR THE TWO GROUPS FORMED USING CLUSTER ANALYSIS (N=300) %

| | <i>Sense of empowerment minimum</i> | <i>Sense of empowerment maximum</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Interested | 36.6 | 63.4 | 100.0 (64.6) |
| Not-Interested | 65.1 | 34.9 | 100.0 (35.4) |
| Total | 46.7 | 53.3 | 100.0 |

P=0.000

To summarise the very different characteristics of the two groups, we can say that the Interested and the Not-Interested synthesise very well the four mind-sets highlighted by the UNESCO/UNEP survey.

- The Interested are characterised by higher educational qualifications and centre-left political and ideological orientations. They follow mostly aesthetic (quality) criteria when buying something, show the maximum inclination to change, consider future challenges (both materialistic and post-materialistic) extremely important, and consider their actions effective for improving the world.
- On the contrary, the Not-Interested have low educational qualifications, are centre-right, base their purchase decisions mostly on conformist criteria, are refractory to change, and consider their actions ineffective for improving the world.

Finally, it should be noted that the variables used to discriminate between respondents are limited. Further empirical investigation would be necessary to analyse in more depth the mind-sets of the young public towards their future, and the potential shift to a more sustainable lifestyle.

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Policy recommendations



The following recommendations for further action on sustainable consumption were made during the workshop organised by UNESCO and UNEP in November 2000 (see annex) as well as by the authors of the studies presented in this report.

■ Further research

- Extend the study to younger target groups (8-25).
- Complement the UNEP/UNESCO study with a qualitative and quantitative analysis of young people's activities for social justice and the environment. In particular, document and analyse the successes and challenges of youth activism and activities aimed at challenging trade agreements.
- Develop databases of existing materials, organisations, experts, information on university courses that examine sustainable consumption issues, as well as success stories.
- Analyse differences in young people's lifestyles and habits according to 'social categories' (income, gender, ethnicity, location).
- Promote national case studies on youth and sustainable consumption in other countries.

■ Education

- Introduce sustainable consumption issues into school curricula, materials, and teacher kits.
- Include indigenous knowledge on sustainable development and sustainable consumption, as well as media literacy (the ability to read critically and analyse media, knowing the mechanisms of advertising, etc) into curricula and teaching materials.
- Promote among education experts and governments the potential for developing curricula, which combine media education with environmental education.
- Explore the possibility of developing more workplace learning activities on sustainable consumption for the young and the elderly.
- Identify ways to involve young people in decision-making such as giving them seats on an advisory council of an institution.

■ Awareness raising campaign

- Develop and implement an awareness raising campaign on sustainable consumption and shopping behaviour in collaboration with the advertising industry, UNEP/UNESCO, and youth NGOs.
- Communicate research findings and relevant documents in a more effective way through the media.
- Organise at a national level a series of conferences and events on 'youth' (18-30) and sustainable consumption.

■ Partnerships

- Establish multi-stakeholder partnerships (State, media, industry, civil society and young people themselves) in order to set up public policies promoting sustainable consumption patterns, develop appropriate educational programmes, and help to empower young people to be actively involved.
- UNESCO and UNEP, as well as other international organisations should reinforce their partnerships to ensure that youth and sustainable consumption as a subject is taken into consideration on the international agenda of Rio +10.

■ In collaboration with all the participants of the workshop, UNEP and UNESCO will start to:

- Develop an inventory of organisations, resources and success stories of Youth and Sustainable Consumption.
- Develop a web-site providing a platform for discussion and information dissemination, and collect project ideas.
- Use the research project as a basis to promote further in-depth studies at regional and national levels, as well as specific topics within the issues of youth and sustainable consumption.

UNEP/UNESCO Expert workshop

Annex 1

Youth, sustainable consumption patterns and life styles

6-7 November 2000,
Maison de l'UNESCO, 1, rue Miollis 75015 Paris

Monday 6 November 2000

1. MORNING SESSION "A":9.00-11.00AM

- Opening remarks by UNESCO,
Ms Maria Helena Henriques Müller,
Chief UNESCO UCJ
- Presentation of the project idea,
Isabella Marras (UNEP) and Julia Heiss
(UNESCO)
- Findings of the Youth and sustainable consumption
research project,
Eivind Sto, SIFO
- General debate and discussion on expectations
of workshop participants
- Presentation of working methods,
Carlos S. Milani (UNESCO) and
Bas de Leeuw (UNEP)

Coffee Break 11.00- 11.15 am

2. MORNING SESSION "B":11.15AM-1.00PM

- Group work: Theme I:
Awareness: Young people's knowledge of the concept
of sustainable consumption

Lunch break 1.00pm-2.00 pm

3. AFTERNOON SESSION "A" 2.00-3.00PM

- National case-studies: Mexico and Canada
 - Debate
-

4. AFTERNOON SESSION "B" 3.00-5.00PM

- Group work: Theme II:
Empowerment: Young people's sense of power to change
life styles and promote sustainable consumption
-

5. AFTERNOON SESSION "C" 5.00-6.30PM

- National case-study: Australia
 - Debate
 - First stocktaking session:
Groups report on the first day's activities
-

Tuesday 7 November 2000

1. MORNING SESSION "A":9.00-11.00AM

- Group Work: Theme III:
Cultural differences: Young people's practice and understanding of sustainable consumption in different cultures and countries

Coffee Break 11.00-11.15 am

2. MORNING SESSION "B" 11.15AM-1.00PM

- Group work: Theme IV:
Policy tools: education, research and advocacy policies for youth and sustainable consumption

Lunch break 1.00pm-2.00 pm

3. AFTERNOON SESSION "A" 2.00-3.00PM

- National case-studies: Thailand and Norway
 - Debate
-

4. AFTERNOON SESSION "B" 3.00-5.00PM

- Group work: continuation on Theme IV
-

5. AFTERNOON SESSION "C" 5.00-6.30PM

- Plenary session : Groups, report
 - What's next?
What are the policy recommendations for UNESCO's and UNEP's work on sustainable consumption patterns and life styles regarding the youth?
-

- Closing remarks
Fritz Balkau,
Unit Head production and consumption,
UNEP DTIE
-

Suggested sub-themes for group work

■ Theme I

Awareness: Youth knowledge of the concept of sustainable consumption

1. Definition: What is sustainable consumption? How do we define criteria for sustainable consumption patterns? Do young people know about it? What would be an 'appropriate' definition of sustainable consumption for today's youth (if any)?
2. Perceptions: What are the perceptions and misperceptions of sustainable consumption patterns which are specific to young people? Is there a gender dimension to be considered? What are the effects and what is the role of the media and the market on the young people's sustainable consumption patterns?
3. How can the message on sustainable consumption be conveyed to youth? How have the existing campaigns and educational programmes been effective (or not) in raising awareness? What are the obstacles in conveying the message (ex. peer pressure, individual psychological dimensions, lack of direct social policies on these matters)?
4. Generation dimensions: How different are attitudes towards consumption patterns according to age? How can different generations engage in dialogues on the issue? What is the advantage of intergenerational dialogues?

■ Theme II

Empowerment: Young people's sense of power to change life styles and promote sustainable consumption

1. Individual perspective: What are young people's views concerning their actual potential to change consumption patterns based on their individual behaviour? How can their will and power to change their life style be measured? What could the indicators of change be?
2. Collective action: When and why do young people engage in activities such as waste selection and treatment, environmental campaigns, etc.? What are the articulations between these actions and the regulations by the State? What is the specific role of associations and other non-state actors? What are the linkages between these actions and the private sector?
3. Success stories (1): How successful can youth-led actions be in addressing the global environmental degradation? What are the success stories and why have they been successful? What articulations have they promoted with civil society organisations and the private sector?
4. Success stories (2): How successful can youth-led actions be in addressing the consumption inequalities between the developed and the developing countries? What are the success stories and why have they been successful? What partnerships have they promoted with civil society organisations and the business sector?

■ Theme III

Cultural differences: Young people's practice and understanding of sustainable consumption in different cultures and countries

1. Cultural factors: What does sustainable consumption mean to young people in different cultural/historical contexts? Does the difference also depend on the place of youth in society (their possibility to participate, social hierarchies, etc.)? What is the social value of sustainable consumption patterns in different cultures? What are the generational variations?
2. North-South differences: What are the variations in developed and developing countries? What socio-economic factors (urbanisation, young people's purchasing power, access to information, etc.) influence youth behaviour and attitudes?
3. Globalisation: Is there a common global youth culture associated with standardised consumption behaviour? What are its common values and key characteristics? Are there limits to "globalisation processes and uniformisation standardization of consumption patterns"?
4. The Role of the UN: How to address the cultural/political/socio-economic variations in a global UN programme aimed at promoting sustainable consumption?.

■ Theme IV

Policy tools: capacity-building and research for youth and sustainable consumption

- **Policy-making:** What are the examples of public policies promoting sustainable consumption patterns? How could sustainable consumption be introduced in formal (and non-formal) education policies? How could sustainable consumption be introduced in the science policy agenda? Can sustainable consumption be addressed as a multisectoral policy issue or a sectoral theme (food, energy, transport, etc.)?
- **The message:** What are the policy messages to convey to youth? How is it possible to ensure that sustainable consumption patterns are addressed in both developed and developing countries? How can equity be promoted in setting up criteria of sustainable consumption patterns? Who are the legitimate actors to engage in this debate?
- **Partnerships:** What kind of partnerships would be effective to promote sustainable consumption? Who would the actors be? And what would their roles be? Are there political spheres for a multi-stakeholder dialogue? What are desirable governance mechanisms and structures in order for these partnership schemes to be developed and fostered?
- **Role of research:** What are priority areas for research on youth and sustainable consumption? How could research results be best used for policy making? What are the interests and the roles of the business sector in this domain?

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UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme was launched in March 1994. It was created with the twin goals of (a) improving understanding by generating policy-relevant knowledge, on three major issues of our time: multi-ethnic and multicultural societies; cities; and local and national strategies to cope with global phenomena, and (b) improving the communication between social science researchers and decision-makers.

MOST promotes the use of social science research in policy formulation, and the development of methodological tools for evaluating the impact of social and economic development policies emanating from major UN Conferences. The principal strength of the MOST Programme is its capacity to mobilise networks, co-ordinate projects from headquarters and field offices, provide high level expertise for the upstream preparation of projects as well as their evaluation at both national and regional levels. This support system reflects the viability of the cooperation between research producers and users which UNESCO Member States deem critical for improved development policies.

An Intergovernmental Council and an independent Scientific Steering Committee govern the Programme. Co-ordination is provided by a small secretariat in UNESCO Headquarters and National MOST Liaison Committees (presently established in 53 countries) who assure the link between the Programme and national social science and policy communities.

In addition to policy research, the MOST programme provides expertise for the design of local plans of action to combat poverty and social exclusion. Member States, United Nations Agencies, and Funding Agencies (UNDP, UNFPA) can thus draw on the Programme for increased technical assistance in social policy planning.

For more information, please consult the MOST website at www.unesco.org/most.

This report reflects the results of the UNESCO/UNEP project on “Youth, sustainable consumption and life styles”, which was launched in March 2000. The project was framed around a survey on the consumption patterns of young people in 24 countries and six country case studies. The results of the survey and the case studies were presented and discussed in a workshop held at UNESCO, Paris, on 6-7 November 2000.

The objective of the workshop was to discuss the development of a strategy for UNEP and UNESCO to promote sustainable consumption patterns among youth. The workshop gathered over 50 experts, social actors, youth leaders, researchers, and business representatives. The underlying belief was that youth deserve special attention when considering consumption patterns. Young people are an important target group on the demand-side in this consumer society and play a determinant role in future consumption patterns. However, they should not be regarded as merely ‘victims’ of a contemporary consumer culture. Young people are often very concerned about the future of the earth they will inherit, and their voice should be heard. Moreover, some groups of young people are proposing alternatives to the “consume more” trend. They could be the messengers of a new approach that could involve both their peers and adults.

This report, published by the MOST Programme as one of the partners in this collective endeavour, attempts to understand some preliminary youth attitudes towards consumption, and evaluates the potential role of young people in a transition towards sustainable consumption lifestyles. In particular, it looks at:

- The driving forces of youth consumption and especially the influence of media and globalisation in shaping their aspirations and values;
- Youth perception of sustainable consumption and their role;
- Approaches to consumption issues in different cultural areas.

For more information, please consult:

www.unesco.org/education/youth_consumption/work_report.shtml
and
www.uneptie.org/youth_survey

