

## ***Different roles of consumers***

When thinking about the motives for consumption it is worth being aware that the individual who stands in the background of the purchase and other consumption decisions has many alternative and overlapping roles. Gabriel and Lang (1995) have presented many of them, of which the most prominent ones regarding green consumption are presented here by utilising also the article “21st century consumers” (New Internationalist 2006).

Altogether, consumers’ different roles set challenge to the management and design of a social campaign in which focus the consumer is. It is difficult to foretell what appeals consumers and motivates them to take action. Nonetheless, each of these roles depicts naturally one kind of generalised image of consumer. In reality, an individual consumer is a mix of different aspects and different roles are activated in different situations. But still when thinking about green consumption, these may give some food for thought for marketing managers.

### **Citizen – consumer**

There is a powerful tension between the concepts of citizen and consumer, people acting in double roles: as consumers and as citizens. People’s acts as consumers cannot be detached from their actions as citizens especially when it comes to sustainability. In brief, people, as consumers, act with a short-term orientation looking for the direct fulfilment of needs and wants without considering sustainability. As citizens their actions are guided by a long-term orientation, where the individual takes into consideration environmental matters and also shows responsibility towards others. The concept of a citizen implies both control and balance over rights and duties and active participation as members of society. Moreover, in the role of citizen, individuals are supposed to take a moral standpoint when making their choices.

In recent years the re-emergence of the idea of citizen has been applied, not surprisingly, in the context of environmentalism. Environmental citizenship entails the emergence of exactly the kind of individual described above, an active individual that feels no fear to defend the rights of the majority and who carefully evaluates different alternatives and moral questions when making decisions. He/she also knows, cares and acts with responsibility towards the environment. Environmental citizenship calls for individuals, for example, to take part in government-directed top-down informative campaigns that strive for a better environment via the activation of consumers, such as the campaigns to reduce climate change that were topic in many case studies.

Currently, political culture is poised between giving primacy to voting or shopping. Since the late 20th century, consumerist values have spread and mutated throughout society. They have turned politics into a spectator sport and politicians into competing brands. They have eroded welfare systems and promoted the achievement of freedom, happiness, good health and education through individual choice exercised through the market.

The concept of citizen-consumer was pondered over in some case studies. In Greece's case (Gr 1) the campaign leaned quite heavily on the citizen. The campaign goal was to create informed and aware citizens of 6-12 years old children who, when adults, will seek the best means to use energy.

Likewise, in one UK case the activities had "the dual objectives to engage and inform citizens about how they can live lower carbon lifestyles as well as providing them with practical help and solutions on a range of measures which can be taken in the home."

### **The chooser**

Choice is a core value at the heart of consumerist culture. The underlying rationale is 'the more choice the better' for consumers, the economy and society. But it has its limitations. Choice without information is not real choice, yet how can consumers get all the facts they need? Choice is also not absolute. 'I choose to drive to the supermarket in my car' can close off other options such as: 'I choose to buy all my food from locally owned shops I can walk to'. Much so-called 'consumer choice' boils down to relative trivialities, compared to matters of life and death, political and civil rights, or the future of the planet. Surely choice should not just be a matter of which product to select, but also of whether and how to consume.

These issues were maybe not so visibly seen in the case studies, although some of them discussed, for example, the importance of freedom of choice. The Spanish case on salesman training for white goods (E 8) paid attention to delivering information to consumers in order to help them to make environmentally better choices.

### **The activist**

A long tradition of individual and collective consumer activism across the world has taken many forms: campaigns, legal cases, education, whistle-blowing, direct action. The Irish gave the 'boycott' its name, but Americans practised it much earlier against the British in the struggle for independence, as did the people of the Indian sub-continent following Gandhi's lead. The 20th century co-operative movement enabled some consumers to take control of production. In the US, consumer advocate Ralph Nader rallied activists to fight against corporate greed. Today a new wave is bringing together different existing strands of activism and trying to restructure consumption completely, on more ethical and ecological grounds, exposing and rejecting exploitative conditions, unfair trading relationships, pollution and waste