



I. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL QUESTIONS

CONSUMPTION AS A VALUE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

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The article discusses the phenomenon of consumption in the market society. The factors that promote and support the consumption as a value, the lifestyle and the way to success are analyzed.

Myths from consumption society, which promote using, are examined; their impact on individual power and social psychological aspects is discussed. The challenge of using which contributes to the sustainability of society is under discussion. It is shown that these myths help strengthen individual's dependence on the consumption standard, essentially deprive him / her of freedom of choice, they do not encourage the self-activity of an individual and they do not develop responsibility for his / her choices (which is the basis for the stability of democracy). The individual who is constantly guided and habituated to use standardized material and intellectual goods and services, developing dependence on them, readily becomes regulable consumer also in the market of political services. In this way, the assumptions are created for flourishing of controllable democracy. It is confirmed that consumption without control is not a reliable basis for the sustainability of society.

Keywords: business, capital, consumer, consumption, democracy, labor, media, society, consumption standard, value.

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Introduction

Every object, phenomenon or idea gains value and importance depending on significance individual determines to it. So you may say that the value is what a human personally considers as an important matter, he is not able to do without it and he is

ready to advocate it and to defend. So a value for a human “is above all things” (Kavolis 1996: 34).

Human estimates each value personally, but the development of values is collective. This duality of value explains enforcement effectiveness of value as of one of cultural factors: embracing of value symbolizes belonging of an individual to the society. Therefore, the value is not a “thing in itself”, but a correlation with an object, event, and process. According to American anthropologists Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn and Fred L. Strodbeck, value is “the principles complicated, arranged in groups by estimated method, which give orientation to the individual’s thinking and his activities in solving general human problems” (Kluckhohn, Strodbeck 1961: 29).

Similarly, every nation and society have their own approach to the values of ideas, objects, nature, people – both of alien and own nation. On this basis evolves the specific nations, the society system of values and the culture. Value system, in turn, shape patterns of behavior, which regulate daily lives of the members of this nation and society.

The role of value is very important in the life of each individual and nation. Values become immediate and essential stimuli and regulators of human activity, thanks to which the selection of information takes place, social relationships, ways of communication and so on form.

In each culture and society own system is developed; values have a hierarchical order in it. Such system ensures sustainability of the culture and the society, its unique nature, necessary level of order, stability and predictability.

Recognized values – economic, social, cultural – establish foundation of any society (Sachodin 2005: 52–64).

Today, all countries of the old continent consider themselves as belonging to the European cultural and political heritage. They are united by common values, generally indicated here:

- Tolerance (for variable way of life and views – though the boundaries are not clearly specified, and they are a matter of agreement);
- Cooperation (with all that surrounds us and allows to achieve estimated goals, although it is not easy to understand where is the foundation of cooperation and where are the limits of it);
- Communication – the exchange of information and experience, in spite of various benefits after the exchange;
- Solidarity with the minority (ethnic, cultural, religious);
- Protection of environment and of its quality;
- Benevolence to the other way of life and acceptance of it;
- Alternatives as a protection of value;
- Protection of post-material values (spiritual, personal fulfillment) and others.

Implementation of aforementioned declared European values is related with development of democracy and is based on two basic principles of democracy – freedom and equality.

The principle of freedom guarantees free movement of labor and capital in the economic sphere, which in turn facilitates economic development and wealth. The principle of equality provides equal initial opportunities to achieve economic aims, although does not guarantee equal expectative success to everybody.

All the declared European values and their expressions' standards are artificial and preestablished. This means that always, firstly, the debate leads to the interpretation in every particular case, and, secondly, decisive answer how to accept these values, i. e., how to put them into the limits of national culture and of traditional way of life, does not exist.

Consumption is one of these values. In consumer market society consumption is an important factor, which not only creates more or less successful opportunities for all its members to fill their needs, but also creates a possibility to participate in the consumption (Campbell 1997: 42–45). In turn, consumption's accessibility develops solidarity, strengthens confidence and involves in a carousel of consumption: its rotation becomes a sort of a sign of the viability of society and its sustainability.

The aim of the article – to discuss, what means consumption as a value in a market society, what myths exist supporting the consumption, helping to strengthen dependence of an individual on the using of standards, and finally, to find out, whether consumption and promotion of it is a reliable way to ensure the sustainability of society.

The article consists of three parts: the first part deals with the main goal of the consumer society – a promotion of consumption, the second is about the myths which support the consumption and their social and psychological aspects of suggestion, the third discusses the consumption appeals that support the sustainability of society.

The main aim of the consumer society

The main aim of the consumer society is promotion of consumption. Diversity of consumption services and focused support of the consumption helps to promote it. Consumer standard is established in such a way. Value of the individual's of consume in a society is associated with the ability to buy necessary goods and services. In other words, if individual is able to purchase and consume more and more goods and services, individual is more valuable in the eyes of the consumer society. In turn, the extent of consumption shows not only the individual's opportunities to acquire (his financial situation), the desire to meet existing consumption standard, but also to change it. An environment perceives and values a consumption accordingly.

In this way, the individual's value and importance as of consumer in society is measured on the basis of the two criteria.

First, it is measured by the quality, quantity and diversity of consumed goods and services; and, secondly, it is measured by the frequency and intensity of consumption.

Individual's inclusion into the carousel of consumption – the main objective of consumption in the society. However, it is necessary to prepare and to educate an individual in order to drag him into smoothly and painlessly. The essence is that the

consumer market needs not only the ordinary consumer, but the consumer which is dependant on market and is governed by it. Thus, the main task of the consumer society is to bring up the “obedient” and receptive to proposed innovations user (Bauman 1995: 25–31). The best way to achieve it is to foster the dependence of the individual on consumer proposals, to make him obedient and acquisitive towards them. In other words, it means fostering the consumer’s dependence on the existing consumption standard in the society.

Supply of goods and services in a consumer society is oriented to the specific buyer and to the reckoning that someone will buy them. Of course, in the first place to those consumers, who really need these goods and cannot do without them. However, there is a number of people who are interested in these goods also, but they are not able to buy them because of different reasons: not enough money, those goods are not vital to them at the moment and so on.

Therefore, they are not prepared to become active customers, but remain just passive observers. Conversion of passive consumers to active is one of the consumer market goals, which spare no attention and no efforts. Especially on the condition that there is a background to accomplish it. By Jean Baudrillard, in consumer society individual is “disinclined to self-knowledge, he does not believe his strength, he is inclined to believe that what others believe. He does not want to assume responsibility for his life personally, but believe others”, who know well what can be done about it in order to be safe and successful in this society (Bodrijard 2000: 147).

Informed (business through the media) just create a particular environment, where human is constantly reminded of the opportunity to get everything he wishes, to be successful, “to hit the jackpot”. And success, as is well known, is exactly what most people desire the most and on behalf of this they are ready to act and to sacrifice. In this way an idea is given that everybody may come through (Baudrillard 1988: 138–143). One just needs to trust oneself and become an active user, i. e. to dare to consume what fortunate souls consume.

3 myths are used, which help to develop favorable and dependent consumer. 3 eager advocated myths for success reaching help.

Consumption supporting myths and their social-psychological orientation

The first myth. We can meet all your needs. This creates the illusion that a person can get everything, or at least many things, which he desires. If so, he just needs to try to broaden his as user’s imagination limits to acquire desired things, the purchase of which was delayed all the time. A person should try to change his appearance, body shape, etc.

It does not matter whether he will be able to pay for those things and services in the future. The most important thing is that he will have things that most of individuals have. Over the years a consumer will not be able to reject the comfort of acquired items and services, even if he will not be able to pay for them. This will encourage

all possible efforts to earn in legitimate and illegitimate ways, even criminal, to meet one's levels of consumption. These levels, by which those around him values him, give evidence about him as a consumer of value in the particular society. The loss of this level means decline of human value in other people minds. It is awful for an individual, because there is no other way to evaluate an individual in the consumer society, where the principle "you are valuable as much as you consume" exists. In this way, one becomes dependent on the the existing consumption standard, and this standard becomes the frame of an individual's aim to consume.

However, consumption standards as well as models of physical perfectness and style are changing, and individuals must constantly accomote themselves to them, to seek for the new possibilities, to keep up and at the same time to search for the new ways to earn enough money to keep with those standards.

In this way, the dominant standard for consumer society starts to shape standard needs of consumption, which are necessary to an consumer for the satisfaction. Individual needs of a person lose their importance and value – there is an attempt to standardize them in a variety of ways. The slogan – "We can meet all your needs" really means: "We do everything to standardize your individual needs". In this way, to make you more dependent on consumption standard, to manage you.

The second myth. We know best what you need. Consumer market offers to an individual a multitude of goods and services, about which he knows very little or nothing. Individual surrounded by a plethora of proposals is disoriented, it is difficult to choose and not to miss. Here various proponents come as an assistants, who, through intrusive advertising, are ready to impress – to tell where it is the best to spend your vacation, leisure, to invest money and so on. They take the job, which sometimes individual wants to escape from – show initiative and propose to take decisions. Transferring the right to take decisions to others, an individual is accustomed not to choose by oneself, but rely on those who are "the best" and who "know best what one really needs". In this way, individual's dependence, conformity, indecision become features, which are the most needed in consumer market. Those features are the most formed, developed and supported as a means of strengthening the individual's dependence. Such person is required the most in the industry of consumption.

However, "proponents", by claiming that they know best what the individual actually needs, seek for the only thing – to shove the product or service to a consumer, to create a desire to acquire it, giving to this action amagical meaning – if you do not acquire the goods, services, things that many people have, you will be just a loser. In this way, through the purchase of a foisted item a person becomes happy, it appears that it was the only missing thing to complete his happiness. Success, happiness and the balance of spiritual restoration are associated with the proposed new product or item acquisition (Mizinska 2005). (Here different horoscopes step in, which augur a success to the buyers of particular sign, if they will buy a product.) In that way an illusion of success is created, hope is given, knowing that lots of people rely on hope. Appreciating that human is susceptible to new things, this myth

appears quite effective. A man is constantly waiting for new products, which would facilitate his life and would help to solve emerging problems, so with the hope he is waiting for new proposals. Consumer market and the hope in it reinforces the impact on the individual, makes him more dependent, even though it is encouraging the development of illusions and hopes, because the market actually does not know what the individual needs (only individual knows this) – it only offers for the sole purpose – to make benefit.

The third myth. We can meet your needs in the most favourable conditions.

Purchase of goods and services requires paying for them not now, but in the future. Thus, there is an opportunity, on the one hand, to deal not always soundly and in responsible way, without any assessment of one's financial capacities, in accordance with the principle *carpe diem*, but to get what you want and, chiefly, what others around you have *here and now*. In this way, to become the same as "others", not to be different, what undoubtedly provide a psychological comfort, which will be attempted to keep in all possible ways. On the other hand, to become the hostage of an institution, which allowed to an individual to acquire goods or services and which has its own goals and, what is most important, to maintain its influence on him as long as possible, wrapping up with the most subtle long-term contacts and thus to convert into a hostage of artificial prosperity.

As we can see, on the one hand, the myths of success intend to foster the overcome of phobias, inferiority, timidity of consumers, and on the other hand, to encourage the trust in their success and to take the specific steps to reach the established standard.

It is recognized that the myth is quite an effective way to divert public attention from the actual, real problems to things that are not very important. It is no coincidence that the politics and other business structures desire to create the myths in order to foster friendly consumer: the first ones – to the politic affiliations, the other ones – for consumption of goods and services. Although myths help to divert attention from the awkward questions, still they come.

Consumption challenges for society's sustainability

Implanted into the community consumption cult as available possibilities equates all the layers in society and thereby ensures the unity of it – endurance forces to look at the phenomenon of consumption more closely. Is it really true that consumption and its stimulation can ensure the sustainability of the society? What are the risks here?

Firstly, the expansion of consumption possibilities for various social groups and their availability is certainly an important thing that can improve their material situation, meet the material needs. But at the same time, it develops dependence on the consumption standard, makes it a hostage of artificial wealth which was created in the market. On the other hand, usage of variety of tools influencing consumer behaviour (advertising, etc.) often substantially limits his choices (Hostynski 2005). Freedom of choice becomes the freedom to choose from what is already selected, approved and introduced into the subconsciousness of society with advertising.

Secondly, stimulation of excessive consumption forms the irresponsible attitude to individual's obligations. If the particular business structure constantly offers you to purchase the item by taking the credit, why not. If the bank offers, he knows better – everything is considered. So why even think – simply take. Such a provision promotes irresponsibility of consumer, who eventually becomes a burden for creditors and the society. In this way, availability of consumption as a basis for sustainability and solidarity of the society becomes the reason of its instability. Remember here the realities of today's – reckless consequences in a housing market of USA and other countries. Also in Lithuania.

Thirdly. Orientation to the consumption, primary, of material things, as a particular guarantee of personal success significantly undermines spiritual values and individual's desire to seek for meaningfulness. It also reduces confidence in the creative possibilities of human personality. On the other hand, it forms a new approach to time and its value. The question *how to earn* gets a new dimension. The question *how to earn* transforms into the question of “how long does it take to earn this money”. In turn, this inevitably leads to undervaluation of activities, which require a lot of time, and return for financial reward, is only possible in further future. It is therefore not surprising that in sight of the instability of financial and currency systems that activity which gives quick return, “hot money” becomes attractive.

This activity, associated with the quick investment of funds into short-term projects, ensures quick return of funds and possibility to make large profits. On the other hand, undervaluation of activity which does not guarantee quick earnings, means that an individual who work with a project shall be undervalued too. Whereas you cannot earn, it is not prestigious to work, especially if time consumed is spent irrationally. The time is spent rationally when opportunity to earn is given. Thus time of human life loses quality, which is replaced with the earned money – whether we talk about employee-earned cash, or about a businessman income. It stimulates to reject irrelevant time for reflection, in principle, and time for self-improvement. All efforts must be directed towards the search of these areas, in which your time will be used the most rationally, that is, it will be best rewarded.

This practice of earning of “hot money” fundamentally stirred mindset of society and deformed orientations of value, contradistinguished distinct social groups, emphasizing their unique activities in the areas and vulnerability, when facing challenges of the new time.

And first of challenges is an education. The essence is that the Enlightenment occupies a special place in the public services context. Time is necessary to get education, but it is difficult to measure it by cash, to determine the costs of “education”. However, when earning “quick cash” logic prevailed, approach to education and its services also changed. Time factor acquired new meaning also. Earlier the time of studying was the holy time, respected by all, that was a natural thing, they did not dare to encroach on it. However, the situation is changing. Today, more often education services are taken to measure by time that acquires money value. It results in two fundamental orientations-consequences.

First. Since, under the logic of earning quick money, profit is calculated by taking the time consumed, they try to reduce time for studying in all possible ways, to compress it, and there is appeal to individual study and new educational opportunities. Thus, the time for acquisition of profession, for studies can be reduced, because from the investment in education, as from every investment, quick profit (return) is awaited. (Time reduction of the programs, shortening the studies time, etc.)

Second. The given time for studies must be measured, and compensated by a well-paid job. And a well-paid job is offered only by business organizations, firms that require from an individual not only the much “competence” as particular knowledge, skills and abilities for a given work.

So *universities are increasingly losing academic status as diversified academic studies*, becoming an institution which meets market needs, losing authenticity and becoming more and more integrated to the Almighty business world plans.

In turn, among young people there is a growing trend, on the one hand, to start a professional career as soon as possible and accept the need to spend at work most of the time. At work, for which you are paid and which witnesses the time was not spent for nothing.

On the other hand, prejudice emerges against the requirements to dedicate more time for the one’s cultural education, self-education, which is understood by the most of young people as an additional burden, which will not be compensated *here and now*, as required by the logic of earning of “quick money”. So that time is unworthy. Thus, consumer is developed – pragmatist, oriented to usage of material values. Degree of mental consumption declines, and responsibility for permanent consequences of voracious consuming to nature, environment and individual is going down.

Nature is becoming an inexhaustible granary of resources, which must be used as soon as possible, which leads to ecological crisis. Consumption increases amount of trash – real threat appears, when satisfying needs of universal consumption, to sacrifice all world (eco-world). Finally, consumption ideology promotes disrespect for the man, his life and its value.

Fourth, stimulation of consumption and continuous information support for the consumer deprives him of freedom of choice and responsibility for the choice and for his life. In this way, it increases not the sustainability of society, but its scattering, which requires an experienced manager to manage. Thus conscious participation of citizens and the ability to choose which are necessary to the democratisation are being changed into the managed democracy, which a consumer is prepared to meet.

So, consumer society may be compared with the ship, whose captain is... a cook. He is fully aware of what we, ship passengers, will eat, consume tomorrow, but he does not know where to swim – he does not have clear direction. We all are the passengers of this ship. We look stodgy passengers, because we have a captain-cook. But are we safe? Or is it enough to know what will we eat tomorrow?

Conclusions

Consumption satisfies various needs of the individual and it is a natural thing; however, in consumer society it becomes a fundamental value, and the all efforts of an individual are oriented to it. In consumer society consumption becomes an important factor, which not only creates opportunities for all its members more or less successfully meeting their needs, but also creates enabling united environment. Accessibility of consumption, in turn, promotes the feeling of solidarity, stimulates confidence and the inevitable involvement in consumption carousel.

On the other hand, the involvement in the consumption, always kept by advertising and by myths, which helps to fix individual's dependence on consumption standard, essentially deprives one of freedom of choice, does not encourage the individual's self-sufficient (authentic) actions, does not develop responsibility for his choices.

Namely, those responsible choices is the main reason for developing a sustainable democracy. Individual who is oriented to the consumption of standardized material and intellectual goods and services, developing dependence on them, becomes easily controlled consumer in the political services market also. Thus the assumption of managed democracy is made. Consumption without responsibility cannot become a ground of united society: sustainability of society depends on moderate consumption and responsibility.

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VARTOJIMAS KAIP VERTYBĖ SOCIALINIO STABILUMO KONTEKSTE

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariamas vartojimo fenomenas rinkos visuomenėje. Analizuojami veiksniai, aukštinantys ir palaikantys vartojimą kaip vertybę, gyvenimo stilių ir kelią į sėkmę.

Tiriami vartojimo visuomenėje vyraujantys jį aukštinantys mitai. Taip pat nagrinėjama individualių galių bei socialinių ir psichologinių aspektų įtaka. Aptariamas vartojimo fenomeno metamas iššūkis visuomenės stabilumui. Parodoma, kad šie mitai padeda sustiprinti individo priklausomybę vartojimo standartams, esmingai atimdami iš jo pasirinkimo laisvę – tai neskatina individo autentiškiems veiksams ir nelavina atsakomybės pasirinkimo atžvilgiu (o būtent tai sudaro demokratijos pagrindą). Straipsnyje susitelkiama ties standartinėmis materialiomis ir intelektualinėmis gėrybėmis bei paslaugomis, taip pat išvelgiama, kad nūdien nuolat skatinama jomis naudotis, įtvirtinant priklausomybę. Taip individas lengvai tampa politinių paslaugų rinkos vartotoju. Šiuo atveju kuriamos prielaidos demokratijai klestėti. Parodoma, kad vartojimas be atsakomybės nėra patikimas pagrindas visuomenės stabilumui.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: verslas, kapitalas, vartotojas, vartojimas, demokratija, darbas, medijos, visuomenė, standartų vartojimas, vertybė.

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