

POSITIVE PRACTICES IN REORGANISING THE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

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Abstract: *The current rhetoric together with the ecologist practices from the developed societies might give the impression that mankind reached a rather high level of awareness about the risks which the preservation of the consummatory behaviour generates on the rural environment, implicitly on the quality of the global life, reaching both the present generations and the future ones. Can any act of consumption be truly free and unlimited, just in the name of the liberty of manifestation of the person who, at a particular moment, may buy access with the money he/she can afford to pay? Which are, actually, the consequences of consumption acts that may seem insignificant or benign and which the consumer is often unaware of? What are some countries doing to increase the awareness and to decrease the unwanted consequences of some categories of consumption? Such questions and other ones are answered by this article.*

Key-words: *Consumption patterns, responsibility, prevention policies, positive practices*

1. Introduction

For over two decades, our planet keeps launching increasingly clear and alarming signals on the fact that the consumerist orientation of the contemporaneous people can no longer be tolerated without assuming devastating consequences, on unlimited term, for the quality of life as a whole.

And yet, this is not a simple article with ecologic touch, as many others have been written so far (with not much effect); rather, this article proposes the idea that within the current space of ecology and economy there is much rhetoric unsupported by

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real convictions at the level of the political-economic practices of the people which are directly or indirectly responsible for some disasters.

The hypotheses of this article start from the lack of legitimacy and credibility of those pretending that they can pay for some liberties or for the access to different forms of consumption at the expense of the irreversible disruption of the environmental conditions and of the Earth's strategic reserves of natural resources. Economic agents of various sizes are in this position, starting with the large producers of goods and services and ending with the ordinary consumers who have enough money to satisfy, with no limits, their consumerist inclinations.

All this happens under the conditions in which, in some decision-making circles with global impact, it was already known, for a long time, that not everything can be bought with money, when it may affect (by creating a precedent) the general conditions and opportunities for life, present and future.

Starting from the evidences on the current situation of worldwide biodiversity degradation, this article investigates some documents revealing the true costs (sometimes, actually immeasurable) of some acts of consumption that seem common, but which, multiplied at the planet scale create unsustainable long-term premises for the perpetuation of some consumption patterns. Within the context, one must discuss the emergency of initiating measures of consumer education and awareness-raising on the potential consequences of the different consumption decisions beyond the banking and monetary rhetoric of the consumerist age. No matter how much would the politicians like to deny, given the possibility of some countries to print money (under various expressions) unlimitedly, the monetary economy is in open conflict with the real economy, as also shown by the recent financial crisis. The need of the current governments to feed the banks with tons of money speaks for itself of the tendency of the policy decision-makers to flatten the real economy while ignoring its laws which, ultimately, are merciless.

The article shows some initiatives which – although seem feeble and maybe, for the time being, bearing little significance – may counteract by establishing positive consumption practices, the current trends to maintain, in different ways, the legitimacy within the public opinion of the consumerist life style, particularly in the developed countries.

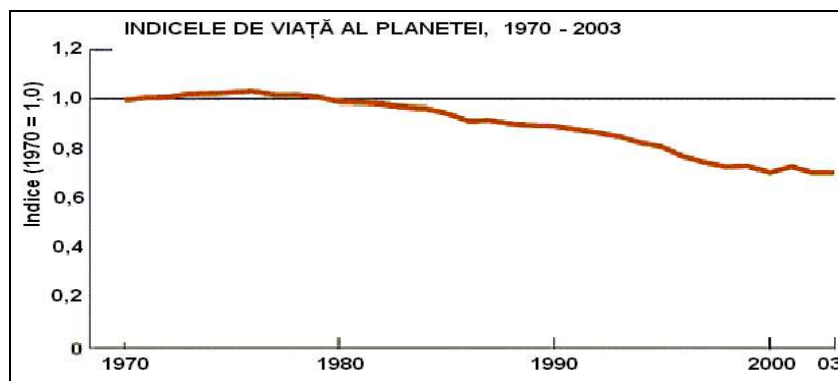
2. Can any consumption of goods and services be free and unlimited?

The assumption of *responsible consumption patterns* at the society level presumes considering that many acquisitions of goods and services are unacceptable from the perspective of their environmental impact and implicitly on the quality of life. Most

European economies have consistent experience in the matter of *regulating the limits of acceptability for consumption* of some products. In the countries where this is not yet up to the level of the social expectations, the population itself by its consumption decisions aims to block some initiatives of the producers, particularly when their interest to increase the profit is in clear contradiction with the public interest. Such initiatives should have led in time to a *new ethics of the production of goods and services*. However, given the current data on the rate of deterioration of the geoclimatic state, on the rate of exhaustion of some strategic resources of raw materials or on the rate of the global consumerist phenomenon, it seems that beyond the ecologist rhetoric and some practices, the new ethics of the production and consumption of goods and services, still has to wait for a while.

Starting from the evidences on the *speeding global degradation of biodiversity* and from the current parameters of the *ecological prints of the European states*, the economic analysts and the ecologists are rather sceptical on the probability and sufficiency of the *higher sustainability of the consumption of goods and services*, just by the natural evolution of population's purchasing decisions. Consequently, most specialists point to the *need for clear economic policies*, strongly committed to actually redirect and reduce the size of the global consumption. Even as early as in 1980, the impact of the human activities outmatched systematically the capacity of natural regeneration of the biosphere (Chart 1). Therefore, the *life index of the planet* which evaluates the *mean dynamics of the biodiversity* is a downward slope descending even below the critical level of the unit (showing the limits of the natural regeneration of the biodiversity) (** WWF, 2006).

Chart 1
Life index of the Earth, 1970 - 2003



Source: WWF, The Global Conservation Organization, Living Planet Report 2006

Even from 2001, the *demand for biocapacity* of the world population amounted to 13.7 billion gha, meaning 2.2 gha/person, exceeding by 0.4 gha/person (23%) the limits of the natural renewable resources (11.2 billion global hectares – gha). Within this context, the *average ecological footprint of Europe* was more than double compared to the continental biocapacity and almost 8 times higher than that of some developing countries.

Under such circumstances, the sustained activism within the civil society for the wider assimilation of *positive consumption practices* – meaning a clear ecologic and economic consumption – is expected to go beyond the mere state of desiderate or of optional ideal. Only the large, global social scale assimilation of positive consumption practices may determine, at the same time, a stronger social cohesion in the industrialized countries while supporting the integration of the poorer countries within the existing areas of welfare.

The main purpose of any act of consumption aims the general field of welfare, conditioning the prosperity, good disposition, cleanness, elegance, emotion or pleasure, by meting the different needs of the consumers. However, almost every act of consumption may be accompanied by several undesirable consequences, by the fact that it generates, one way or another, wastes, pollution, tasks of recovery or reconditioning of some economic or environmental resources. Similar consequences also appear along the cycle of production, storage, transportation, distribution or sale of the consumption goods and services. This is why *discussing the legitimacy of the different consumption practices* aims not just the economic, ecologic, medical-sanitary or soil-climactic fields, but also that of the rights, liberties and responsibilities of the different economic agents or of the nations.

The *legitimation of consumption* may take several forms. Although not in all cases one may reach social consensus, there is a trend to determine *limits for some categories of unacceptable goods and services*. The consumption of many of them is restricted or regulated to some extent by the public authorities in order to guarantee that they are manufactured under strict control, just by particular companies. The main underlying justifications of the governments for the restricted production of some goods and services regard the protection of the public health and safety and from other reasons pertaining to the public interest too.

For instance, 15 grams of aluminium are used to produce a bottling can for soft drinks. Multiplied millions of times, the daily consumption on the planet, this means 15 tons of aluminium which has to be extracted from 60 tons of bauxite which, in turn, is obtained from a mass of ore 27 times larger (***) *Wuppertal Institute, 2003*, in *Gesualdi, 2008, p.58*). The storage of this ore requires large areas – maybe forests are cleared or properties are expropriated for this. Aluminium processing releases a range of toxic pollutants into the atmosphere, among which sulphur dioxide, dust,

greenhouse gases, polyfluorocarbonates, etc. Therefore, the consequences of a mere and minor act of consumption on the environment and on the life of people are extremely tough, even dramatic. There are many such examples. The most insignificant good or service, used by the current consumption of the population worldwide, determines incredible and sometimes immeasurable expenditures of raw materials, work and time, often causing irreversible deterioration of the environmental conditions. For instance, in order to produce 1 kg of plastics used to make PET bottles for soft drinks, there is need of 5 kg crude oil, 300 litres of water and 3,700 litres of air necessary as auxiliary agent within the chemical process and for combustion. The plastic persist hundreds of years in nature before degrading. Currently, the global production of plastics consumes 8% of the world production of crude oil. The recycling of one ton of plastic may save 1.8 tons crude oil and 6 cubic meters storage space in the wastes dump. A recycled PET bottle saves the energy used by a light bulb for six hours, and the plastic can be recycled several times. Presently, the PET wastes account for about 3% of the total package wastes worldwide. According to the European Association of the Plastic Producers, 1,296,000 PET bottles are recycled each hour in Europe. In Romania, the plastic wastes remaining over one year weight about 331,000 tons. Of this amount, by 2013, Romania must be able to recycle 22.5%, according to HG. 621/2005 (<http://www.infocuratenie.ro/colectare-si-reciclare-deseuri-si-ambalaje-pet.html>).

Due to such causes, the industrial sector is currently accountable for about 23% of the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere (^{***} *World Resource Institute, 2007*). Such long, very noxious cycles of consequences determine not just the processes of production of goods and services, but also the thousands of billions of consumption acts taking place worldwide on a daily basis. For instance, the consumption of population generates in average about 537 kg household wastes per person in the European Union (Eurostat 2005 processed by the Italian Agency for Environmental Protection and Technical Services), the peak production of wastes being in Ireland, 869 kg per person (*Gesualdi, 2008, p.59*). The widest used methods of managing the household wastes are the garbage dumps (it's cheaper) or the incineration; each method also has several disadvantages for the environment (release of noxious matter into the environment – CH₄, CO₂, etc. degradation of the water table due to toxic infiltrations; if the contaminated water is not purified before use, some dangerous bacteria may contaminate large areas of soil) and implicitly for the quality of life.

It is therefore necessary that besides the establishment of comprehensive processes of recovery and recycling of the materials resulting from the household or productive consumption, measures must be taken to re-educate the consumers to the spirit of adopting as rational as possible consumption patterns, of *establishing a responsible consumption* and of reducing the waste of goods. Such examples may be the self-

introduction by each consumer of a *day with no purchases* (already used in Canada since 1994), with the purpose to make the people aware of the need to reduce the consumption of goods and services. The consumers may want to prefer bulk goods instead of packed goods, glass bottles for their drinks, instead of bottles made of PET or aluminium, etc.

Overabundance is noxious not just for the body but also for the mind of people. This presumes more working time to earn more money needed to buy more expensive and more sophisticated goods, in larger amounts. A 1997 study of the *Wuppertal Institute* (published in 1993) showed that a west-European household owns 10,000 objects in average, while an Indian Navajo household used just 236 objects (*Gesualdi, 2008, p.61*). For each of the 10,000 minus 236 objects, the households members worked more in order to spend more, they spent more hours to maintain those objects or to clean them, thus generating additional wastes which are usually more difficult to reintroduce in the normal natural circuit than the wastes of an Indian household. Therefore, besides exacerbating the inclination of the people towards consumption and focusing of the social life on the material values, the promotion of consumption in the western societies aims to persuade the people to work more, with more profit for the employers. The spiritual life goes in the background or is cancelled all together. Those who promote the *excessive consumption* create thus the *illusion that people happiness depends strictly on the material abundance, for which no sacrifice is big enough.* Hence, *eight hours of work a day is not enough for many people.* Most of the employees, particularly in countries such as Romania, where the appetite for large incomes is a widespread characteristic particularly during the past two-three decades of continuous economic crisis, spend their entire active life at the office, with too few hours of leisure or of reflection on the true meaning, purpose and values of life. On the other hand, when they get to have a holiday, they usually spend it outside their own home, in luxurious locations, expensive and atypical, night clubs, exotic voyages etc. Thus, the adults have less and less time for them, to consolidate truly constructive relations with the other people, with their children, or to spend time with their parents, old people. And this is because, usually, all the economic activities must be done against the clock, even if often superficial and simplistic. Such life leads most time to insomnia, family troubles, loneliness and alienation, excessive alcohol consumption, over-feeding, drug addiction or excess of medicines. On such background of life, about 56% of the Europeans stated that they return to work after vacation and leisure time with a feeling of unfulfillment, disappointed and depressed (*Capper, 2003*). This certainly leads to *higher aggressiveness and crime rate* among the young people and even among the minors, *higher rate of abandoned children, of the children left home alone, of the TV-addicted children.* According to a study conducted in Italy, in 2007, the minors spend in average 1 hour and 36 minutes in front of the TV every day, one hour and five minutes in front of the computer and 55 minutes playing video games (*Gesualdi, 2008, p.61*). This is because raising a child

presumes giving up the career, wage, free time, independence. Presently, in Romania, very many parents go abroad for better paid work.

These are just few reasons why the currently widespread concepts on the excessive consumption of goods and services must be reviewed fundamentally. Consumption must ease man's life, must free him/her of servitudes, must not complicate, make it more difficult and even make a caricature of his/her true life.

3. The excessive consumption is a problem

The developed countries of the world are very far from the time when the material welfare of the population was a problem. Most of the British population, for instance, owned since 1954 enough material resources (food, clothing and dwelling) allowing a decent standard of living; the amount of goods from the British households increased two times from 1954 to 1994. In such countries, the overwhelming majority of the population consumes constantly over 3,200 calories per person and day and has unlimited access to drinking water. Each family consumes around 300 kg paper and the equivalent of 10-20 barrels of crude oil per year. In almost each household there is at least one car, a TV set, a refrigerator, a laundry washing machine. Presently, about 800 million people (about 14% of the planet's population) consumes about 70% of the world paper resources, 60% of the crude oil production, 60% of the mineral production and 40% of the world meat production (*Gesualdi, 2008*).

On the other hand, however, World Bank experts estimated, in 2011, that of the total population of 7 billion people, about 1.3 billion people live in poverty on just 1.25 US Dollars a day. Poverty caused the death of at least 5 million children worldwide each year.

However, the people living in abundance for many decades are not yet ready to acknowledge that *sometimes enough can be too much* and continue trying to increase and diversify their consumption of goods and services. There are plenty of causes and explanations associated to this phenomenon starting with the key-factor – the advertising industry – and ending with the so-called necessity to integrate the population living on rather high incomes within the cultural and economic-social patterns of the most prosperous world with sophisticated and extremely costly life styles. In such a world, the adults don't feel well if they don't travel in a particular brand of car, if they don't live in the most privileged residential areas of the towns (usually, they provide a higher level of comfort, leisure, cultural and touristic objectives, etc.). The young people feel excluded if they don't change their clothes at increasingly shorter intervals, or if they don't buy *en vogue* clothes, if they don't buy the latest *Apple* products, if they don't go to particular clubs etc.

Starting even from the pre-modern age, the ethnologists and sociologists showed that many of the material possessions operate as symbols of the cultural affiliation and identity in the life of people. What may symbolise a particular good or service is often even more important than its useful characteristics, having the role to convey particular messages in the social environment about the specific buyer. Nevertheless, even such values can undergo radical mutations, provided the young people receive an intelligent education (the example of the more mature generations speaks for itself), rather than discretionary, moralizing limitations as those used presently by the educational system; the same result can also be achieved through the intended or implicit pauperization of the young labour force, as it currently happens – the unemployment rate being the highest for the young people, in almost all European countries and not only.

The *excessive consumption* is sometimes a way of *psychological refuge* for the people needing more self-assurance, or for the people experiencing various states of dissatisfaction. Such consumers (*frantic consumers*) may want at some moment to devour the entire world (*Fromm, 1955*) in order to alleviate their *atavistic fears* (fear of death, fear of poverty, fear of failure, fear of old age, fear of solitude, fear of competition etc.), which marked the human psychic since the ancient times, of lack of safety and of goods, when the struggle to survive was a perpetual concern for most people. In those times, the more goods owned a person, the more defended, safely that person felt. Can such a principle still be active these days in the case of some highly socially elevated communities, or for the populations living in the economic opulence of the western countries, for instance? Of course, whatever the answer, it will take pro or against comments, which make today's world a deeply split and rather unpredictable world.

The 2006 international forum in Istanbul, which gathered politicians and scientists worldwide to discuss the problems of the excessive consumption and of the abundance/waste of products, revealed that the number of obese people triples compared to 1980.

Half of the adult population of the world weighs more than it should, and different proportions of the population of individual countries suffer of obesity (8% of the adult male Russian population, 24% of the adult male Finish population, 36% of the adult female Polish population). One child of five weighs more than normally and 4-13% of the children already are obese.

The *excess of body weight* and *obesity* cause serious problems (diabetes and other nutrition diseases, cardiovascular diseases, blood hypertension etc.) reduce the quality of life and the life expectancy. In Europe, each year over one million people die because of diseases correlated to overweight.

Each year, in Europe, *obesity consumes 2-8% of the resources allocated to the health-care services* (***)*WHO, 2006*).

The excess of weight appears when the number of ingested calories (due to the consumption of foods with a high content of fats and of drinks with a high level of sugar) exceeds the number of calories consumed during the run of the normal daily activities. From 1970 to 2001, the daily intake of high-sugar drinks increased two times in the USA (reaching 185 litres per person), while the intake of milk decreased by 30%. This also decreased the supply of calcium among the teenagers, this decrease being three times higher for the obese people (***)*World Watch Institute, 2004*).

The nutritionists recommend several radical changes of the modern feeding behaviour, aiming to eliminate from consumption those goods produced rather for the profit of the traders than for the benefit of the consumers – such as the soft drinks – which are deeply harmful due to their high content of synthetic sweeteners and colorants. Another problem is the bottled water which is many times taken from the same source as the public supply network, with the difference that it is much more expensive due to the bottling costs (it also presumes a huge consumption of crude oil to make the PET bottles) and transportation costs. Another product to be removed in any type of civilise trade are the snacks. They also are deeply unhealthy for consumption because they have a lot of sugar and oversaturated fats, and they are very costly in relation with their supply of nutrients. Additionally, the feed additives used for these products generate addiction, particularly among the children. Such products are still strongly promoted in mass-media, manipulating thus a wide range of consumers, particularly those with little information and rigour, not to speak of the children. Of course, the place of such products could be taken with little additional effort by a multitude of drinks and even snack for adults and children, prepared according to recipes closer to those used in households.

Of course, the doctors recommend the general increase of the physical activities in the daily life, but can't it be done something more by giving up to the so-called means of faster travel of short distances? In the modern civilisation, even the children are travelling less and less on short distances by their feet. Most prefer, even during the time of playing, to use bikes, rollers, small cars etc. Thus, from very little age the children are educated to give up walking and use, when mature, a car.

The car is usually associated to the fast and comfortable travel on rather long distance. Nevertheless, increasing number of adult people would not leave the car, even to travel very short distances. They also contribute to an already huge consumption of fuel, to more pollution and to worsening health problems due to sedentary life lacking physical activity.

In 2002, there were 216 million vehicles in the European Union and the figure increased by 3 million cars each year (Eurostat, 2006). Therefore, in 2006, in the EU there were in average 472 cars for 1,000 inhabitants (187, in Romania). Although their average speed is 100 km per hour, in London, for instance, the average travelling speed of the cars decreased to 11.8 km/hour (lower than the average speed of the horse carts) because of the excessive number of cars on the roads. The average speed was slightly higher in other European capitals – 15 km per hour in Berlin, 18.7 km per hour in Rome and 19.8 km per hour in Paris. This velocity took 60% of the urban area and 9% of the available time of the people travelling under these conditions. (***)*WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2006*).

The overall image becomes really dramatic if we also consider the huge yearly number of casualties due to road accidents – 43,000 people died on European roads in 2004 (***)*Eurostat, 2006*).

It is no accident that in the western countries *some companies started to sell fresh air* (enriched in oxygen) in spray containers which are much appreciated by the people having breathing difficulties, particularly by those living in the strongly polluted urban areas. The car transportation generates 10% of the worldwide toxic CO₂ emissions, 20% of it coming from the motorcyclists (***)*World Resources Institute, 2007*).

4. Public policies limiting some consumption decisions ██████████

The general increase of the educational level and the higher range of available goods and services, the consumers of the modern world are increasingly aware of the consequences of the consumption decisions of the quality of their life. Within the increasingly wider access of the population to an immeasurable number of goods and services, following the increase of their incomes, limits have to be set, however, based on various criteria, to the universal access to some products.

Presently, the governments of the industrialised countries have quite an experience in the field of *regulating the limit of acceptability for consumption of some goods*. In some situations, however, when the governmental initiatives do not meet the social expectations, the population itself, through its consumption choices, manages to put a hold to some tendencies of the produces, if their main purpose is to increase their profit and if they are interested only residually or maybe at all of the consumer welfare or of the regulations for ecological production. Such initiatives – of the governmental authorities, or from the sovereignty of the consumers to decide what to buy – lead to the *development of a new ethics of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services*, particularly in western countries, where the positive practices of consumption had a longer period of time to manifest and consolidate in the public consciousness.

Legitimation, like the restriction imposed on some consumption practices, may take different forms. Although not in all cases a social consensus is reached (regarding the legitimacy or limitations), there are trends to delimit the different categories of goods and services that are considered unacceptable for mass consumption. The consumption of different goods and services can be restricted or regulated at different intensities by the national regulating bodies, starting with the guarantee that the products are manufactured under close control, only by some companies, and ending with the specification of the principles of consumer eligibility. The main justifications of the governments to restrict the production or consumption of some goods and services may rely on health care and public safety, as well as on other reasons of public interest.

Most specialists are sceptic, nevertheless, about the chances to improve the sustainability of the consumption of goods and services, just due to the effect of the normal manifestation of the feeling of responsibility of the producers of goods and services, or due to the selection made by the consumers. The true solutions aim rather the tighter, better targeted regulation of the access of particular categories of population to specific products, and the change of the technical and economic characteristics of the goods and services by reducing the material costs and by increasing their value as value of utilization.

Under such circumstances, the sustained activism of the civil society, by the assimilation of *positive consumption practices* – meaning a clear ecologic and economic consumption – is expected to go beyond the mere state of desiderate or of optional ideal. Only the large, global social scale assimilation of positive consumption practices may determine, at the same time, a stronger social cohesion in the industrialized countries while supporting the integration of the poorer countries within the existing areas of welfare.

Outstanding initiatives to influence consumer choices are the policies adopted by the producers or traders which, due to various reasons, decided to stop producing or distributing anything else but the *fair products* in terms of *quality-price-conditions (ecologic) of production*. Such commitments existed, for instance, in several supermarkets from the United Kingdom, after 2000, which sold only some sorts – the fairest ones – of bananas, tea, coffee, sugar etc. (Cooper, 2008, p.81). Such shops announced that *their entire commercial activity* will turn *fair trade* after 2009.

The activism of the consumers was also noticed due to the adoption of *responsible consumption patterns*. For instance, Lang and Gabriel (2005, in Cooper, 2008, p.81) revealed several such initiatives. The establishment of some cooperatives in the United Kingdom (starting in 1844) was motivated initially by the production at much lower prices and at higher quality standards, of products (of lower quality – or even falsified foods) which other shops sold at higher prices. The *Union of US Consumers*

has been established in the 1930 years, a similar institution being established in Europe too, after the World War Two. It played and still plays several roles of education and protection of the consumers and to correct the possible abuses of the producers or traders in their relations with the consumers. Such evolutions have been followed by *Naderism* (from its initiator, Ralph Nader who started a public debate on the odds which the isolated consumers have, in case of litigation, against the influential commercial companies). A rather recent trend is that of the *green consumers* who are trying to alleviate the environmental impact of the production of non-ecological goods and services, by making as responsible as possible consumption choices, well informed and with a strong ecologic orientation.

Despite the numerous examples of governmental intervention in the regulation or restriction of specific categories of consumption, at the global level, a specific reticence of the governments to get involved in the hypersensitive areas (eccentric preferences of the consumers on extremely high incomes) of consumption can be noticed. The intervention of the regulating authorities becomes, however, indispensable when the access to goods and services can generate risks to the public health and security. Usually, the governments or their specialised agencies are empowered to regulate the organisation of the production, storage or distribution of all the goods and services that raise problems related to the public health and security (*Cooper, 2008, p.79*). Although a broad social consensus cannot be reached in all cases, some psychological outlines have already been established for some categories of goods and services, meaning that the consumers from many societies regard them as unacceptable (illegal drugs, the licence to carry a gun in the private life, some categories of medicines etc.).

Very diverse acts of consumption are restricted by the public authorities by clear regulations in order to guarantee the production and distribution of those products under tight control, only by specific companies and only for specific consumers. For instance, the production, distribution and utilization of military equipment, instruments or warfare are strictly regulated and surveyed in order to ensure public security. Very rigorous standards (licences) are used for car manufacture and for the production of electric equipment, inflammable materials, chemicals, insecticides or dyes, with the view to reduce the risks of accidents that may arise when using them. Special requirements are also enforced for the manufacture, storage and sales of foods, beverages, medicines, toys, cosmetics or of other goods and services for the current consumption of the population.

Specialised public authorities issue ethic decisions by imposing restrictions on the consumption of specific goods and services, if these can bring prejudices or if they affect adversely the quality of life of other people (if they may generate health problems, if they involve social risks, if they affect the normality of the life and activity in some public spaces, if they prejudice the education of children, if they offend the

general norms of the social life etc.). Included in this category are: restricting and limiting the consumption of alcohol; severe limitation of smoking in public areas; regulated consumption of goods and services which are at the border of legality or morality and of gambling; regulated location of shops for the adult people, of pubs, of drive-in cinemas, of zoological gardens, of night clubs etc. Usually, the location of such objectives must meet the minimum consensus and the minimal tolerance of the public opinion, because their mere presence may bring serious prejudices to the liberties and rights of most citizens, or of the citizens dwelling or travelling in the close vicinity of such objectives. Usually, the strict limitation, up to the full prohibition of specific acts of consumption in some cases, is used by levying very high taxes on the purchase of specific products or services, or by imposing fines for breaching the acting regulations

A special category of public policies regulates the production of goods and services on ecological criteria. For instance, a specific category of EU legislation regulates the performance standards regarding the *highest consumption of electric power* allowed for specific categories of electrical equipment or machinery (refrigerators, air conditioners, light bulbs etc.). For instance, in January 2008, the European Parliament proposed to remove from the market those equipment which consume more than 1 Watt when in stand by (***European Parliament, 2008*).

5. Conclusions

The developed world of our days has reshaped in time several consumption patterns that might support the idea that the natural resources of the Earth are unlimited and eternal. The natural resources are definitely not inexhaustible or eternal, which is why a time comes when priorities and criteria (as exigent as possible) have to be set in order to legitimate the exploitation and use of specific natural resources whose availability is extremely limited. Some of the acting regulations on the matters and materials used in various production cycles, or in different stages of consumption, should be reviewed.

This is so because the economic principles accredited from the very dawn of the economic thinking, seem to be accrediting the idea that an economy in which everything can be bought and sell for money, is all right and may lead the world to unthinkable peaks of progress. However, the recent economic and financial crisis has shown rather clear that an open conflict simmers for some time between the real economy and the nominal one; the fact that the politicians ignored it can't lead to anything good for mankind.

On the other hand, the ecologist theories, policies and practices are trying, however, with disproportionately low power, to accredit the idea that the world is aware of the risky and even illegitimate character of many consumption choices of the consumers.

Nevertheless, a lot of demagoguery exists among the people apparently interested by ecology; they are trying to legitimate rhetorically basically illegitimate acts of consumption (for instance, exoneration of some economic agents producing goods or services of any obligations, while ignoring the ecological principles, against a fee). The promotional industries too are using similar practices, not to speak of their action to promote consumption at any prices in societies which already have problems due to the excessive consumption.

The populations using intensely consumeristic patterns too, are not aware of the real dimensions of the inequitable and/or un-ecological character of these patterns, given the extreme difficulties confronting much of the mankind living in poverty, or the emergency to adopt radical measures for wastes management or to educate the people towards reasonable consumption choices.

The literature gives evidences on the imbalanced and excessive consumption of a large proportion of population worldwide, which creates serious and deep medium-term and long-term prejudices which affect directly (psychologically and even axiologically) the people directly involved, not to speak of the very many who have a rather low consumption (living in poverty), or of the high general interest of the present generations or of tomorrow's generations.

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