

# Beyond Green Innovation: The Next Step

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**Abstract:** Sustainable development involves complex issues to be considered, and great challenges to be overcome in the short and long term. Its impact depends on the changes the means of production and consumption of goods have suffered lately. To start with there are important differences regarding sustainable and “green” consumption that should be considered; and yet research on most sustainable consumption is still considering consumption in detriment of its relationship to other relevant frameworks. In addition, these studies emerged from economic and engineering perspectives only, when there is a clear need for a more interdisciplinary approach based on social, cultural, anthropologic, psychological and philosophic foundations. In fact the quest for sustainability needs to consider the basic issue of consumer patterns and hence relates to what is now called green. In the end the final question is: In case Prosperity without growth may be possible, how this may be attained to satisfy global needs?

**Key words:** Green innovation; Sustainable development

## 1 Introduction

Sustainable development involves complex issues to be considered, and great challenges to be overcome in the short and long term. Its impact depends on the changes the means of production and consumption of goods have suffered lately. The search for a sustainable environment is a responsibility of both producers and consumers (MANZINI, VEZZOLI, 2002). It is challenging to distinguish between production and consumption when the sustainability is aimed (RIBEMBOIM, 1999). The interrelation among production, consumption and environmental protection gives rise to a great deal of discussion regarding sustainable consumption.

Furthermore, there is certain conceptual confusion concerning the use of the terms sustainable and “green” consumption. Unfortunately, the preponderance of sustainable consumption investigations considers consumption in detriment of its association with other relevant frameworks. In addition, these studies emerged from economic and engineering perspectives only (HEISKANEN, PANZAR 1997).

There is now a clear need for a more interdisciplinary approach based on social, cultural, anthropologic, psychological and philosophic foundations (CONNOLLY, PROTHERO, 2003). Hence, the objective of this essay is to discuss the structure of a new consumption paradigm, more sustainable and built from a modern consumption benchmark. A concept then arises from a contemporary appraisal of “green” and sustainable consumption. The confusion between the terms “green” and sustainable consumption is also discussed. This essay is organized in three stages to address these issues. The first one refers to the formation of a consumption culture and explores the conceptual grounds of the sustainable consumption. Thus, a historical research of consumption was performed. “Why do we consume the way we do?” (DEFRA, 2003). This is the key-deliberation of session two.

The second part represents the axis of the sustainable consumption discussion. Thus, crucial points are ascertained, such as: “Would it be enough to procure less products or should we generally buy less? Could this situation be overcome? Should overall consumption be stopped? (COOPER, 2002) How to evaluate and include the sustainability

discussion in the consumption culture?

The third stage depicts considerations on whether the consumer would be able to revolutionise the market or not. Would it be feasible to develop a new society model, designed and conducted by the market?

This question leads to the discussion about consumer's power of choice, its influences on society. This debate is drawn from sustainable and "green" consumption contemplations and will be discussed in item 4.1.

## **2 From Buyer to Consumer Status: The Consumption Culture Formation**

The consumption culture was originated from the requirement of buyers to comply with the supply obtained from the industrial increment occurred after the First World War (GORZ, 2005). In this context, workers were converted to the consumer status, consumers who had high purchasing potential. This status became, from that period onwards, related with the ability of acquiring commodities, as opposed to the former competence for producing them. Thus, from the 1920's, the culture of production was transformed in a consumption culture (RIFKIN, 2001).

As a consequence, the new behavioural rule was to fulfil the consumer's role. Is it possible, therefore, to conceive the idea of a "pre-history" from an economic and socio-politic of a consumption culture, perceived from economic and socio-politic angles? The discussion about the consumption mass framework includes two approaches, the so called subjective aspects and the objective ones. Objective views: the agricultural society has suffered a metamorphosis to an urban and industrial society in the USA from 1880 to 1920. As a result, a state-of-the-art society, suitable for a mass consumption process was originated. It was in this historical context that opportune conditions to the improvement of consumption were developed, such as, the popularisation of credit line consumers, the creation of department stores, sales by mail and the reduction of working hours (DURAND, 2003; PEREIRA 2000).

The subjective aspects include an ideological transition process which gave rise to an increasing value to happiness and pleasure (RIFKIN, 1995, BAUMAN, 2001). The marketing development had a great influence in the latter aspects. As a result, the flourishing of professional advertisement created a new "ethos" which was vital to the establishment of a consumption culture (DURAND, 2002, 2003). Marketing evolution was indispensable to the construction of the "American way of life", especially during the cold war, when important American brands created a sense of national identity (LAGNEAU, 1981). Hence, some commodities produced at large scale were embedded with cultural importance. Thereby, artists, writers and intellectuals were involved in the creative process of advertising these brands (DURAND, 2003).

The aim of fomenting the consumption was reached through conceptualising the consumption beyond a mere answer to the human's basic needs and rational priorities (RIFKIN, 1995). The intention is to stimulate people's subjectivity, impelling them to accomplish their covered and unjustifiable needs. Therefore, strategic advertising campaigns instigate individuals to become favoured by acquiring new, expensive, better and more selected commodities. In other words, they offer individual solutions to collective problems (GORZ, 2005). Sennett (1988) elucidates how the development of utilitarianism fomented by the widely spread technologic progress, was important to the creation of the consumption culture. This means that the rise of department stores did not happen by chance. Urban areas, collective transport means were transformed in order to enable increasing number of consumers to buy.

However, these aspects do not contemplate the personal and social influences consumers have experienced. Sennett (1988) poses a question concerning consumers' behaviour: "Why did they agree to acquire more than it was actually needed?" His own answer lies on a transformation process occurred in the Nineteenth Century when people were

the actors of the consumption process. The nature of the private changed. Thus, reflecting on the consumption and on the market, both eventually became the mainstay of this process (FONTENELLE, 2006).

The society observed the remodelling of its values during this period. The American society was reshaped on the basis of self-immolation, accumulation and stinginess principles. Protestant ethics were increasingly influencing American life style. Thereby, saving, investing in the future and the search for an abstemious life were cherished. Instant satisfaction, on the contrary, was undermined.

Nevertheless, not long after, consumption was converted from a bad habit to an attribute (RIFKIN, 1995). People's values were, during this period, mostly based on appearances, as a way of manifesting their individuality and also as an object of status (COSTA, 2004). Thus, self-esteem, formerly grounded in religion and gregariousness, become based on the image exhibited to the society. This process occurred due to the fragmentation, caused by a social and geographic manoeuvrability (DURAND, 2002). Featherstone (1991) identifies three main views of consumption culture:

(1) Economic: originated from the development of capitalism and of materialism, and places especially destined to the consumption. As a result, leisure and consumption activities turned into something increasingly relevant.

(2) Sociologic: people make use of goods to establish relationships and infer social dissimilarities.

(3) Psychological: dreams, desires and emotional pleasures are originated from consumption. These three categories are related and are not temporally connected. They coexist, elucidating the structure of consumption culture and are associated by the utility of the commodity. The main aspect of consumption culture is that the concept of purchasing goes far beyond the product's utility. This means that, owing to its holistic frame, consumption culture should be approached from economic, sociologic and anthropologic grounds (CANCLINI, 2006).

### **3 May the Environment End up Imposing Limits to Consumption**

In spite of most nations, especially the developing ones, aim for an individual consumption status, there are certain historic-structural barriers that prevent its accomplishment. Therefore, the consumption standard followed by prosperous countries could never be extended to other countries. The latter's environments simply would not be able to cope with the repercussion of this embracing (FURTADO, 1974, CONSTANZA, 1991, LEIS, 1999). As a matter of fact Nicolas Georgescu in the 70's working at Harvard University already suggested the need to transform the field of Economics into Bioeconomics, due to basic entropic limits to growth and consumption (CECHIN, 2010). Actually in the 70's the Club of Rome warn us about The (Population) Limits to Growth than now we are in need to revisit; in fact an updated version focused on the particular importance of global pollution (TURNER, 2008), and more recent clear warnings about climate change are becoming a basic consideration for economical strategic planning.

A process of awareness of this fact has brought about an increasing deliberation (CONSTANZA, 1991). There is an enormous general concern regarding the diminishing natural resources caused by production and consumption activities (LEIS, SEROA DA MOTTA, 2002). The consumption society has been criticised by imposing a threat to the natural resources for more than three decades (SHOVE, WARDE 1998). Furtado (1974) strongly disagreed with the generalization involving consumption issues, prevailing in developed countries. "This walk of life is so environmentally harmful that any attempt of propagating it, would make the world to fall apart (...)" (p.75).

On the other hand, much discussion and pondering has been done on the responsible

consumption issue (MANZINI, VEZZOLI, 2002). This debate engenders a crucial issue: the relationship between social welfare, productive system and their outcome (a pool of products and services) (p.80). This, according to authors above, is an essential matter, from which feasible strategies for sustainability will originate from.

A global production based on sustainable consumption is a complex process to be carried out in the long run (BREZET, 1994). However, it is very challenging to have sustainable innovations inserted in an economy concerned with demand and profitability, rather than with the environment (FREEMAN, SOETE, 1997). Coase (1960) asserts the expenses for environmental damage and scarcity of resources have to be paid by consumer. That is, it is the polluter who should be responsible for paying for it. In this context, the prices paid by the consumer should also reflect the environmental depredation.

Nonetheless, market prices are originated from short term processes, contemplating mainly the social costs. Therefore, crucial long term matters, such as environmental costs, are left out of the equation. Taxes should be used to reverse these long term impacts (FREEMAN, 1996). Actually, the relationship between ecology and economy, its causes and consequences were not comprehended until recently (CONSTANZA, 1991, FREEMAN, 1996). Therefore, there has been a concern that ambience harm could constrain the economic development (CMMAD, 1991). Hence, the maintenance and the recovery of urban, rural and natural resources is not an aspect exclusively considered by few researchers anymore. It is in this circumstance that the need for sustainability discussions addressing these environmental problems raises. This plight should be considered thoroughly. Solutions undertaken detachedly are not satisfying. Revolutionised life styles are required to tackle environmental issues (SACHS, 2005, 2008, AFONSO, 2006). Thus, reasoning out this issue: “Would sustainable and “green” consumption be the answer for this?”

#### **4 Sustainable and “Green” Consumption: Contradictions and Dilemmas Regarding Basic**

There is a profuse confusion regarding the use of terms sustainable and “green” consumption. In fact, sustainable consumption relates to the sensible use of resources attending to the contemporary generations’ needs, without compromising the future ones. (HEAP, KENT, 2000). Cooper (2002) defines sustainable consumption as the employment of natural resources aiming to answer people’s basic needs deteriorating minimally the environment. For this reason, in order to obtain a sustainable consumption, consumption must be reduced worldwide, regardless the socio-economic levels.

According to the Consumer International (1998, p.48) there is an increasing awareness around the need of changing consumption patterns. The dawning of a “green” consumption framework is an example of this. Thus, the simple act of purchasing goods, independently on whether they are luxuries or not, it is seen as environmentally harmful (CONSUMER INTERNATIONAL, 1998)

“Green” consumers consider an environmental aspect of the product as one of the criterion of their choice. In this context, environmentally friendly products are preferable (MAKOWER, 1997, PORTILHO, 2005). From this viewpoint, “green” individual actions seem to address appropriately the environmental problem, achieving an environmentally sustainable society (EDEN, 1993, ELKINGTON & HAILES, 1991, HALKIER, 1999, PAAVOLA, 2001, STERN 1997).

Nevertheless, Connolly and Prothero (2003) infer something different: consumers do not establish any parallels, whatsoever; between their daily consumption and the environment (p.289). The “green” manifest highlights the consumer potential for altering the demand of products, either changing their brand preferences or simply by stopping buying certain products. Internationally, some effects of the “green” manifest can be seen as a form of

boycotts, such as the one against CFC-emitting products, by switching to ecological products and putting big corporations under pressure in order to oblige them to endorse practices which are suitable to the environment and society (HARRISON et al, 2005).

The main repercussion of “green” consumption in Brazil is reflected on the launch of environmental educational campaigns addressing recycling and reducing wastage (PORTILHO, 2005) and on the introduction of “green” products in the market. However, the high price of these products has been discouraged most consumers to buy them (CRESPO, 2002, FELDMAN, CRESPO, 2003). Lately in Brazil a Green party is becoming more popular, and important green leaders are assuming a stronger position.

An increased individual concern related to the ecology has occurred and the consumer is playing an essential role in it, choosing more ecological friendly products and, consequently, influencing the demand, the energetic and the technologic production systems. Nevertheless, it can be very challenging to “buy a better future” (ELKINGTON & HAILES, 1991, PORTILHO, 2005).

Consumers trust that by choosing “green” products and recycling they are providing their contribution. Nevertheless, they do not acknowledge the level of consumption as a problem (CONNOLLY, PROTHERO, 2003).

#### **4.1 “Green” consumption: a limited strategy**

Would be possible that consumers successfully change the production-consumption pattern? This is a polemic question among researchers. Ottman (1998) affirms that consumers may consistently change the demand. Whereas, Scherhorn (2004) reasons that the consumer cannot influence this process alone and effectively. He defends the view that the society, the market and people’s life style’s follow unstable patterns. All this is a part of what is called the prosumer society, that was already foreseen by Alvin Toffler (1974) in it’s classical Third Wave Book.

From the “green” consumption outlook, the consumer plays the main part by increasing the demand of ecological friendly products and, therefore, influencing the production. On the contrary, sustainable consumption is rather more entangled because also engages in technology, culture, behaviour and life in society aspects. “Green” consumption undertakes a much narrower approach, as it tackles solely energy consumption and recycling (COOPER, 2002).

Thus, “green” consumption embarks on technology exclusively, addressing only one side of the issue. Hence, essential concepts such as, production processes and consumption culture are left out of the equation. Irvine (1991) urges that a change in the society consumption paradigm is required. Furthermore, technological, cultural, political and economical improvements are crucial to the appraisal of the environment matter.

Portilho (2005) states that “green” consumption strategies can occur in two ways: (1) from the government to the market, involving self-regulation approaches and (2) from the government and market to the consumers, through their consumption choices. As a consequence, both governors and companies would transfer their responsibility over the environment to the individuals, the citizen.

Deliberations over “green” consumption are merely based on an ecological criterion of choice of brands, rather than on discussion the dilemma about whether consuming or not. This is a much ‘shallower’ approach of the environment problem, as opposed to diminishing consumption which is a much deeper, harder, more complex issue. Elkington (1999) affirms that is not necessary to drastically reduce the consumption, risking losing the comfort of a modern life. It would be acceptable to choose ecological products.

As a consequence, a possible refrain of consumption is not debated, as it is appraised as a too complex matter to be overcome. Consumption is intrinsically related to social and individual identities these days (SAFATLE, 2005). The present consumption culture is deeply

connected with the paradigm of being a source of happiness and human welfare, rather than to a potentially devastating strategy (KILBOURNE et al 1997).

“Green” consumption groundwork is very cautious and conveniently simpler to be adopted by the consumers. Their principles are based on a ‘selective’ consumption, instead of on a more drastic appeal to reduce or even cease the consumption (HARRISON et al, 2005). Therefore, “green” consumption can be considered more as a fashionable concept than a really effective proposition. The adoption of a “green” consumption benchmark does not have an impact on society (COOPER, 2002). The table below demonstrates the main differences between “green” and sustainable consumption.

**Table 1 - Differences Between “Green” and Sustainable Consumption**

“Green” consumption	Sustainable consumption
Consumes alternative products	Reduces consumption
Supports consumption	Disagrees with the consumption beyond the basic needs.
Implies technological changes	Requires changes in consumption patterns and life style
Focus on supplier production	Focus on demand consumers
Consumers answer to appropriate information	Consumers are willing to receive information on alternative acquisitions
Gradual changes	Metamorphosis: crucial and imperative
“Green” development as opposed to na economic growth	High life standard, considering environmental preservation

Source from Cooper (2002)

Paavola (2001), forewarns that “green” consumption accentuates expensive products. With the result that, the less economically fortunate would only consume inferior products. On the other hand, by aggregating the environmental costs to the goods, companies would also transfer the ecological costs to the consumers (MURPHY, 20021, LAYRARGUES, 1998, SEROA DA MOTTA, 2002).

The analysis of consumption market from the “green” perspective only approaches recycling, handling of clean technologies, reduction of waste and the development of the “green” market. No references whatsoever are made to the decline in levels of consumption. Thus, a “green” consumer could not also be ‘labelled’ as a sustainable consumer (PORTILHO, 2005). The sustainable consumption framework does not imply solely in alterations involving individual behaviour, design of commodities and the advent of services address to the “green” demand. Cooper (2002) infers that a metamorphosis in contemporary consumption, the decrease in consumption, rather than a mere small change in products, is required. In any case there is an increasing stakeholders pressure on organizational leaders to become environmentally responsible (EASTY, WINSTON, 2006).

As a consequence, cultural and structural transformations should usher the technologic evolution (HEISKANEN, et al, 2005, WEAVER, JANSEN, 2000). The pondering over “green” consumption should be expanded to innovative, sustainable strategies of production. It is necessary to reduce consumption, as opposed to only replacing polluting by “green” goods. Environmental confabulations should also raise concerns not only regarding how the resources are used, but also discussion should be carried out about access, distribution and

fairness involving the scarcity of resources (SACHS, 2004, 2008, VEIGA, 2005); moreover there is a need to together, to collaborate if we wish to be effective, and this means a real revolution (SENGE et al, 2008).

## 5 Final Considerations

The contemporary scenario is not the one of unlimited resources as used to be at the onset of the consumer society. At the beginning there was an extra supply of goods needed to be sold. Thereby, goods were employed as a mean of personal expression and to establish social relationships. It was important to transform citizens to consumers (GORZ, 2003), addressing the interests of the population according to their individual desires of consumption. But why do we still consume the way we do?

Consumers normally are considered to be the opposite of citizens. Hence, they should be discordant with social changes and the general welfare (GORZ, 2003). Perhaps, this is the reason why it is so complicated for them to consider compromising some of their personal benefits to help society as a whole these days. This altruism would be essential to the expansion of the sustainable consumption, focused on more open and moral concerns.

Will it be sufficient to consume less environmentally harmful products, or it will be necessary to consume less? How is it possible to insert sustainability in the consumption culture? How can we break the circle? Not consuming at all?

Sustainable consumption will only be possible when technological systems are inherently sustainable as well (BREZET, 1997). Thus, the production of “green” goods not necessarily will lead towards a sustainable society, unless this production would come accompanied by a consumption and life style changing. As a matter of fact we may think on 5 Basic Rules for this purpose : Reduce ( consumption ), Recycle , Reuse, Recover and Rethink ( Mind Setting ).

Therefore, a total reconstruction of social values and behaviour are crucial for a successful progression. Implementing the sustainable consumption’s overtures require a much deeper and complete approach, instead of the much simpler and restricted “green” consumption proposals. It must include considerable communal politic and institutional changes, in addition to the technological, economical and behavioural adjustments (PORTILHO, 2005).

Would it be possible to build a new society project based on marketing alone?

Consumption will only be able to assume a comprehensive value and to produce real social innovations, after concepts such as pluralism and general welfare are reconsidered (CANCLINI, 2006). Consumers need to become active regarding changes needed.

Moreover discussions about sustainable consumption should include all stakeholders and the whole supply chain. If the discussions reach the latter point, this would imply in a behavioural metamorphosis, that would reflect in diminishing of the waste produced, technological development, sharing responsibilities, recycling and especially in transforming the general demeanour of the society.

The ideal path which leads to the transition to a low consumption culture is not acknowledged yet. Undoubtedly, finding a balance between the satisfaction of the individual and the collective needs represent a challenge to be overcome, especially if an economically sustainable society is aimed. The main obstacle to be subdued is to procure a better quality of life without wasting resources and respecting the ecology. Thereby, ideally the irrational exploration of natural resources should be less associated with the consumption concepts.

In conclusion, the sustainable consumption is a process to be carried out in the long term. Therefore, any attempt to change the present pattern of consumption is worth, even though if this has been done, so far, to find alternative goods. Even the most elementar moves can, hopefully, contribute to a sustainable consumption in the future. To summarise,

there is an appropriate statement done by Bauman (2001): “Transformation is performed by walking”. Well, only the future history will be able to reveal us that; and as the Prophet of new times Jeromy Rifkin states on his latest book (2009): “... the central paradox of human existence is, and has always been, the conflict between empathy and entropy”, we really hope that at the end empathy may end winning up the race.

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