

Ecological consumption in Romania

Abstract

While in some parts of the world, strategic resources are scattered, in others people can not even satisfy their basic needs. Changing consumer behavior is a process that requires a large number of social groups, specialists, institutions, industries, and so on. In addition to private households, one of the major consumer groups, there is the economy, institutions, armies, authorities, non-governmental organizations and many other groups, of large direct or indirect consumption of natural resources. We present some of the research data: 'The Ecological Dimension of Consumption of Goods and Services' carried out by a group of researchers of the Institute for Quality of Life structured in the knowledge of the products and ecological services; consumption behavior; attitude towards ecological issues.

Keywords: ecology, consumption, behavior, attitude

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Introduction in ecology

The term ecology has gradually become the focus of international public opinion since the second half of the twentieth century, with the widespread awareness of the new requirements imposed on economic development through the limits of the world's raw material and energy reserves. Ecology is one of the basic habits of the habitat that studies the interactions between living beings and their environment. Within these interactions, activities whose direct purpose is the consumption of goods and services of the population - activities that change the environmental characteristics, on the one hand, by impulsion in certain directions of the production of goods and services, within the meaning of the exploitation of natural resources and, on the other hand, the degradation and pollution of the environment with household waste.

Man is the only being who, through the activities he carries out for various purposes, altering irreversibly the quality of the environment in which he lives. The causes of this are complex, but at their core are the serious educational deficiencies, if not the total absence of education in terms of the value for life of an environmentally balanced environment. Practically, unconsciousness, carelessness, and lack of responsibility (and accountability) make man the greatest natural enemy of the planet and of life. In fact, the quality of the environment in which every human community lives speaks of the real degree of civilization and the chances of its succession through descendants.

Sensitive amplification of the effects of environmental pollution, the disappearance of some fauna and flora species, the emergence of global climate problems, the reduction of ozone in the stratosphere are all signs of the global ecological crisis. Numerous specialists say that the main causes of these phenomena would be to restrict the forested areas globally (especially to the tropics), to determine the disappearance of species by human impact; and pollution / poisoning of air and water through industrial activities.

Some indirect causes invoked by specialists in explaining these phenomena are the demographic explosion (every 10 years the world population increases by about 1 billion), the technical progress that allows man to exploit exponentially, unprecedented nature and, last but not least, mentalities predominantly parasitic of man in his relations with the environment.

Under such conditions, environmental protection has become a key concept of quality of life. Experts interested in environmental protection operate with net differences in priorities, in the sense that atmospheric pollution is by far the biggest current problem threatening

the future of the planet itself. The problem of residues, acid rain, the greenhouse effect - the melting of glaciers and prolonged droughts are all the global problems generated by the ill-willed desire of the overwhelming majority of people to accumulate as much material as possible.

Many modern societies are about to collapse. Too few governments are making changes to stop the harmful, threatening development trends on the grounds that taking ecologically strong measures in the production of goods and services is extremely unlikely in the short and medium term. Moreover, over the last decades, most of the developing nations have also aspired to build energy-intensive economies based on the unrestricted exploitation of fossil fuels, both pollutants. Basically, there are not yet genuinely sustainable society models from an ecological perspective.

Knowing the environment means acquiring power. Man is deeply dependent on the natural environment, through his attributes of consumer and "disciple". For besides satisfying a great deal of needs by using resources in the natural environment, man is always ready to take from it various models. As N. Georgescu - Roegen states, what man now understand by science has emerged precisely as a result of the human instinct to research the environment. Throughout its history, man has learned that knowing the environment means acquiring the power to survive in time, to control and dominate the Earth. But man can not act on the long-term on environment and on a global scale, ignoring his essential laws and balance, without risking his own existence. Ignoring environmental problems in most of the world's countries in the medium or long term has transformed the natural environment into a rare resource. The thirst for power and domination of man is today more than ever confronted with the limits of the possibilities of regeneration of nature.

Therefore, increasing the quality of life in a sustainable way can no longer occur in the absence of knowledge and respect of the limits of the regeneration of the environment. Between scientific disciplines designed to contribute to building such knowledge, the ecological economy or the eco-economy and, within it, the ecological consumption of goods and services have a decisive role. Among the founders of this discipline we mention economists N. Georgescu-Roegen, K.E. Boulding and H.E. Daly, ecologists C.S. Holling, H.T. Odum and R. Constanza and physicist R.U. Ayres.

Eco-economy, it is an interdisciplinary science that redefines the role and tasks of the economy in the context of man-made generation and management of environmental issues. It sets forth the legitimate

theoretical framework for creating a good balance between the benefits of exploiting the natural environment and the costs of such exploitation.

Today's dominant consumption patterns and, implicitly, certain industrial or agricultural technologies generate many environmental problems through their highly polluting impact on it. For this reason, for many years, UN-led Agenda 21¹ is concerned with changing patterns of dominant consumption in the sense of greening them. Sustainable consumption as well as sustainable development in general - are closely linked to other topics such as global equity of access to development resources.

While in some parts of the world, strategic resources are scattered, in others people can not even satisfy their basic needs. Changing consumer behavior is a process that requires a large number of social groups, specialists, institutions, industries, and so on. In addition to private households, one of the major consumer groups, there is the economy, institutions, armies, authorities, non-governmental organizations and many other groups, of large direct or indirect consumption of natural resources.

That is why authorities need to create the appropriate framework conditions for such a change to become possible, although the process itself must firstly be driven by the initiative and commitment of different categories of consumers. A change in consumer habits implies primarily a fundamental transformation of values and lifestyles. Consumer decisions are and will always be strongly influenced by the legislative and operational framework conditions set by various authorities.

These include political decisions, pricing, available technologies, income and distribution, social norms, and principles guiding different groups in society without neglecting the influence of advertising and marketing.² In order to promote sustainable consumption patterns, socio-economic policy makers need to know why and how consumers come to opt for certain patterns of consumption, knowing that there are alternative, less costly and harmful ways to meet the needs.

Today's urban world is becoming more suffocated by the particularly high frequency of freight and passenger transport activities. Urban design specialists are deeply concerned with the problems of land use and urban areas because:

- i. In 1980-1995, vehicle stocks in European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies countries increased by almost 50%, while they increased by 57% globally.
- ii. The number of passengers using a car increased by 47% in European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies countries and the volume of road traffic increased by almost 84%.³
- iii. Between 1988 and 1994, in China, the number of passenger vehicles tripled and the number of coaches increased by 76%.
- iv. In the period 1960-1990, world air transport has increased 10 times; this sector is in rapid growth.⁴

But taking action to change behavior only at the level of the individual consumer of transport services does not greatly influence the large commodity and passenger flows. There is a need to rethink the transport problem at least at continental level if not global.

A much deeper knowledge is also required in terms of the structure of consumption of other goods and services, given the extraordinary multitude of needs expressed by different categories of consumers. For example, choosing to replace an old product with a new one can be based on a multitude of motivations - the old one

can not be repaired, the new one has superior properties, the habit of making shopping regularly, and so on. The emergence of the era of consumerism in the Western countries was possible precisely because of the special complexity of modern man's consumption behavior and his extraordinary appetite for new.

A consumer good, whose production is heavily dependent on the exploitation of wooded land, is the paper. Consumption of paper clearly reflects the level of civilization and economic development of a country. But the pulp and paper industry is not only the world's largest consumer of wood, it is also the world's third-largest financial industry, and is also one of the top 10 most polluting industries (carbon dioxide methane gas). In 1993, current paper consumption in developed countries was 152 kg / person / year, while in developing countries, consumption amounts to only 12 kg / person / year. This is where more than one billion people are still illiterate, and over 100 million children are still undergoing primary education. As a result, it is expected that in the next 50 years the demand for pulp and paper will double.⁵

In general, encouraging demand for goods and services, through the media and advertising industries, plays a crucial role. In particular, advertising industries strongly affect consumers' motivations, shaping consumer patterns and shaping product and service concepts. In 1994, a group of scientists and business people of the international community within the Factor 10 Club¹ concluded that a prerequisite for achieving sustainable consumption/production patterns worldwide is to increase ten times the current productivity of exploiting natural resources in industrialized countries. They say these countries should propose a 50% reduction in the current global level of raw materials and non-renewable materials exploitation in the next 30-50 years.⁶

Some non-governmental organizations have launched the idea of a strategy of sufficiency complementing that of eco-efficiency. They argue that governments should not just set limits for different types of pollution or stimulate the most efficient consumption / production patterns from the resource exploitation perspective but should also limit the total amount of natural resources consumed.

However, it has become necessary to define closely monitored statistics indicators on the total amount of resource consumption and on the intensity of the use of key resources such as energy, materials, water and land in sectors such as consumption of goods and services, leisure activities, transportation, housing construction and food production. This will serve to scientifically substantiate policies of changing lifestyles and consumption patterns of consumerist orientation of the present age. Passenger transport could, for example, be much more efficient from an economic and environmental point of view, if it were to (gradually) give up on private transport (motoring), by rethinking, redesigning and expanding public transport (mass) in decent quality and price conditions. Therefore, an indicator of the share of public transport in total passengers per kilometer could be a type of monitoring in this respect.

¹Factor 10 Club was founded in October 1994 in Carnoules, Provence. The members hail from 12 countries, including India, Canada, Japan, USA, as well as from most western European countries. The Factor 10 Club was called into being because of mounting concerns over the uncharted role of human-induced global material flows, and the ecological ramifications of their unchecked growth. The members wish to draw attention to the need for substantially reducing global material flows in a timely manner. Some of the topics presently on the agenda include: policy and legal approaches to dematerialisation; changes in economic and cultural priorities; increasing resource productivity through lean technology and changing consumption patterns; re-financing national budgets, as well as work in a sustainable economy.

Valorizing the concept of eco-efficiency therefore requires, on the one hand, to formulate and implement policies aimed at the priority objectives of the ecological exploitation of natural resources and the recovery of the already deteriorated environment - policies that impose clear constraints on current consumption patterns, and on the other part, an eco-efficient strategy must be visibly linked to new policies that address other factors that determine consumer patterns such as social well-being, lifestyles, and so on. In recent years, global economic and social policies on the management of the various spheres of demand for goods and services (energy, transport, drinking water, heat, etc.) aim to reduce as much as possible specific resource consumption and eliminating the premise of their waste (of economic resources).

Application

In the following we present some of the research data about ecological consumption of goods and services structured in the following: knowledge about ecological products and services, behavior of ecological consumption and attitudes towards ecological issues.

At the sample was answered by: 67.3% women (33) and 32.7% men (16). As 28.6% are aged 18-30 years (14), 22.4% are between 31-45 years old (11), 34.7% are between 46-60 years (17) and 14.3% have more 60 years old (7). A quarter of the respondents have middle-school occupations, half are with higher education, the rest being students 13.6% and retirees 11.4%. 73.5% come from urban (36) and 26.5% from rural areas (13).

Knowledge about ecological products and services

- a. Lately more and more ecological products and services have spoken. What do you know about them?

Most (98%) responded in the following way: 'Ecological products and services have the role of improving human health and the environment', as well as being 'healthier because they are more natural', are useful and environment-friendly', 'safe for human health', some even said they are "interested in untreated natural products."

- b. What is the difference between ecological and non-ecological products in your opinion?

Ecological products have a sweet taste, are sweet, with good sugar in them, many vitamins and organic salts (95%). Non-ecological products are strong, tasteless and baked. Put a pigment and forcible growth of these products.

Other responses (5%) were as follows: 'Eco-friendly products do not have negative side effects being more close to natural products', 'non-polluting', 'environmentally friendly', 'prolong life'. The organic product guarantees the absence of negative effects, while the other one is not sure.

- c. What is an ecological service?

The following responses to this question were raised: 88% 'activity directly involved in environmental improvement', 'environmental concern', 'non-polluting chemicals', 'non-chemical products', and sometimes they also provide for the recycling of products so that some resources are protected for longer.

Another example was given by the sanitation service that collects and processes household waste in order to protect the environment and the health of the population as well as the water supply service.

Behavior of ecological consumption

- a. If you have a choice between a cheaper product and one that you know is healthier, but is it a little more expensive, what do you usually choose?

Some of the market consumers (31%) are responded that in the wage conditions at the moment would probably choose a cheaper product. In the case of a family, parents with lower incomes would sacrifice themselves for their children, especially when they are young.

Others responded as needed (21%). If we need to buy a healthy product, if not needed, we do not buy. Others appreciate buying the healthiest and most expensive product, because it is more efficient, its quality is superior and can save money for health care 48%. "I prefer a little more expensive, but healthier, that would give good results." Respondents comment that "if healthier means that a number of qualitative standards are respected Ideally, but if you do not have money ... it depends on what money you have."

- b. Do you think Romanian vegetables are healthier than those in other countries?

To a large extent (78%) respondents think yes, some even say that those from other countries are injected with a preservative so they do not break up and thus do not reach their ripening maturity. In the country, the cultivation and maintenance of crops is done without the use of chemicals, fertilizers, insecticides because they are expensive. Romanian vegetables are healthier. Yes, we are among the few countries that have organic food, vegetables, fruit, meat, dairy. They definitely taste better.

Other respondents (22%) say that, unfortunately for Romanian vegetables, it is the same as for foreign ones. Manufacturers (who are sometimes retailers) use chemical fertilizers to make the product (tomatoes, peaches, strawberries, apples, pears etc.) grow bigger and nicer in a short period of time. The difference between a naturally-grown and a forced vegetable is clear. The first is tasteless, not to mention nutritional values that are almost nonexistent, unlike the second that is rich in vitamins and tastier. In the following, I will mention an interesting response by a respondent, "there is a myth on this. Until now, I think they were healthier products, but they have penetrated also the chemicals."

- c. How do you deal with packaging if you eat something on the street and you do not find a garbage bin around?

Almost all of the answers (96%) subscribed to the same ideas: put it in my pocket and throw to the first basket; I keep the bag and then put it to a trash.

Attitudes towards ecological issues

- a. Do you think that environmental issues are important to us or would it be a concern for richer countries?

They are important to all countries. They are also important because they affect our health. Another respondent tells us that in rich countries there are no organic products, and in poor countries that do not have the money to buy chemical fertilizers, the products are environmentally friendly. Environmental issues involve both rich and poor countries, although they are more responsibly addressed by the former.

- b. Why do you think some consumers opt for green products and services?

There are healthier. There are many diseases that come from food (73%). If we refer to organic products (vegetables, fruits, etc.), we must also think about the financial aspect, to those who allow it. Problems may arise due to people's poverty and ignorance (13%). If we refer to throwing garbage into the trash and not the streets, the answer lies in the education received. Generally speaking, ecological services seek to create and live in a healthier environment; people are more responsible for their own health and the environment. Another category of respondents (14%) consider that they consume these

products because they are “better informed” and realize the harmful effect of synthesis products, chemicals, etc. existing products in the market that are not environmentally friendly.

- c. Do you trust the environmentally friendly products that are currently on the Romanian market?

And here the answers are different. Some believe that only 60% are environmentally products, that are on the Romanian market because they are tested, they are not carcinogens, others 20%, I can not say they have a total trust, and others try to follow the label, firm or manufacturers 20%. There have been suspicions about advertising and TV programs that use environmental notions to increase sales, but that does not happen only to us in the country. d. How do you think the problem of garbage on the street should be solved, rather through a better organization of sanitation services or by tightening the fines for those who throw rubbish on the street? Both proposed solutions, as well as population education, consider them good and necessary. Perhaps the second solution it would have a greater effect said 85% from interviewed.

- d. What do you think are the main responsible for pollution in our country?

I believe that this category should include citizens, their indifference in terms of cleanliness. And this “habit” is formed as a result of the education received over time ... “I know projects made by middle-aged children who deal with this problem and propose solutions, but for whom they are now expecting to find sponsors and either accepted and implemented by the mayoralties.” Several hours of organic education should be introduced in schools, in which the risks, but also the benefits of an ecological life, be put in place.

Excessive industrialization, private cars, no catalytic filters, very poor infrastructure from us, excessive use of chemical fertilizers could be some of the main responsible for pollution in our country. As the population density in the cities is higher, and especially in Bucharest, sanitation should come at night to clean and sprinkle the streets, eventually disinfect them. The assumption of responsibility is important also, by the large industrial enterprises - metalworking, chemistry, etc. and by the population through proper behavior towards street cleanliness, by the uncontrolled dumping of waste.

- e. How do you find the generalized practice in many countries to select garbage for recycling starting from households?

Is this a proof of civilization or rather a fad of the rich, who have no more important issues? Yes, it's a necessity (95%). It is a proof of civilization and a genuinely responsible approach. It is well known for Germany, where there are specialized waste bin for glass, plastic, etc. Also, clothing that is no longer used is stored in clean places, specially arranged for it, from where people can take the clothes. No, few respondents (5%).

- f. Would you be willing to make a garbage selection? Do you think this should also become an obligation for everyone?

Yes. It becomes an obligation for everyone (95%) and education should be done in this respect not only to children but also to adults. No, some believe it is not the case, but they are very few (5%).

- g. Do you think it would be important to create more jobs, even if this would increase the pollution?

It is not necessary to sacrifice the standard of living and the liquidation of unemployment only for ecological criteria. What do you do with the fresh air if you have nothing to eat? But if you put catalysts and filters in the chimneys of smoke-producing factories, containers for sterilization and burning of rubbish, would not it be pollution? The rubbish should not be burnt in the open but in special places, so

as not to cause soot, smoke, and scatter. Burning closed. The carpets should be made of metal not to explode. Another respondent is of the opinion that “the increase in jobs must not be at the cost of pollution.” If everyone shall become responsible for their own actions don't be pollution. Each organization/enterprise must operate on the basis of principles that ensure both the optimal operation of the activity and the protection of the environment.

Conclusion

Regarding the consumption of ecological products and services at the 49 respondents, while 93.9% consider that consumption is currently a necessity, 4.1% is a fashion and only 2.0% do not have an opinion, I do not know.

These ecological products and services enter 77.5% of the respondents' consumption habits, while the remaining 22.5% do not have such habits. The frequency with which the population consumes ecological products is 38.7% weekly, 22.7% daily, 18.3% did not respond, 12.1% at least once a month and 8.2% even less once a month.

Reasons why ecological products and services are not consumed would be that they are more expensive and can not afford 16.2%, 4.2% do not like it, 2.3% are not interested in ecology, and most 77, 3% did not express themselves, without answer. Most respondents say 65.5% believe they have a healthy consumption, 20.5% no and 14.0% do not know. More than 70% of respondents consume fruits daily, 81.8% vegetables, over 66% vegetables, slightly less 54% meat and 59% dairy.

Examples of ecological products have been given: untreated vegetables and fruits, those containing no E, organic detergents, cosmetics, herbs, honey, brown sugar, pressed oil, deodorants without freon and to ecological services: the selection of garbage by categories: glass, plastic, household garbage, metal; clean cleaners; the use of natural fertilizers in agriculture; cosmetic factories; ecological toilets; East County Substation Project Health and Safety Program Assessment site; collection of wastepaper, glass and plastic, etc.

Regarding the importance of the price of ecological products and services, 41% said that it is of medium importance and 22.7% very important; the nutrients contained - 56.8% of interviewees responded - that it is very important to know what you are buying and the composition of the product, as far as the lowest fat, salt or sugar content is concerned; 47.8% said it was very important.

The study serves to adopt policies for the production and marketing of ecological products and services and to popularize them, to a greater extent, on the Romanian market.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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