EMERGING CONSUMER TYPES IN A TRANSITION CULTURE: CONSUMPTION PATTERNS OF GENERATIONAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS IN ESTONIA

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Keywords: consumerism; sustainable consumption; youth; ethnicity; types of consumers

Introduction

The transition of East European societies from socialism to capitalism has inspired several sociological and philosophical analyses of post-Soviet cultural conditions (for example, Kalmus & Vihalemm 2006; Kennedy 2002; Outhwaite & Ray 2004; Sztompka 2004; Vogt 2005). Among them, studies of the emerging consumer culture and the discourse and practices of sustainable consumption (SC) are still scarcely represented (for example, Keller 2005; Keller & Vihalemm 2005). This essay offers an insight into the transitional cultural condition from the point of view of consumption and the environment. The aim of our study is to analyze how different socio-demographic groups in Estonia, particularly people of different age groups and ethnicities, vary in terms of their attitudes and practices in these areas. We also investigate if and how Estonian people can be divided into types of consumers based on indices of consumerism and sustainable consumption. Our analysis is based on data from the representative population survey Me. The World. The Media (Mina. Maailm. Meedia), carried out in Estonia in November 2005.

The broadest concept informing our study is the notion of ‘transition culture’ developed by Kennedy, meaning a framework of values, beliefs, symbols, etc. through which actors interpret the transformation of political and economic systems and
undertake actions under new circumstances (Kennedy 2002, pp. 8–9). Our focus, however, is on analyzing the life-world and mentality of people representing different social groups of the Estonian population. Therefore, we also rely on the concepts elaborated by Sztompka (2004), who argues that the cultural context of transition is ambivalent: the symbols, values and identities brought about by new cultural flows exist in parallel with old traditions, narratives and values. Members of society who are faced with the challenge of coping with the ambivalence of a new situation may refer both to old and new cultural resources (Sztompka 2004, pp. 176–7). Furthermore, Sztompka notes that different social groups may ‘pick up’ diverse symbols and narratives. In particular, Sztompka emphasizes differences between generations in a transition culture (p. 193).

Secondly, we draw on earlier studies of post-socialist consumer culture (Keller 2004) in which today’s ‘Western’ consumer culture is contrasted with its Soviet counterpart of forced homogeneity and ‘dictatorship over needs’ (Feher et al. 1984). Thirdly, and without discussing further the definitions of sustainable consumption – this is beyond the scope of this essay – we give an overview of how SC is contextualized in the practices of post-Socialist Estonia. The emphasis is on the interrelationships between the Soviet legacy and the ‘translation’ of Western sustainable practices and policies into the Estonian context. Our theoretical section concludes with a brief overview of the specificities of consumption related to age and ethnicity.

After the theoretical section, we describe our data, method and techniques of analysis, followed by a presentation of empirical findings. The latter mostly offers a presentation of data without extensive interpretation, and is divided into three sub-sections: first we look at different age groups, then at the two major ethnic groups, ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians, and finally we present an analysis of the consumer typology. Explanation and discussion of the results, in the light of theoretical approaches and earlier studies, is given in the conclusions and discussion.

Consumer Culture in Transformational Society

The Soviet heritage

Consumer culture in today’s transformational Estonia must be analyzed against the background of the Soviet heritage. It still powerfully occupies the memories of the older generations (see Keller & Vihalemm 2005) and its disappearance explains, at times, the contrasting values, practices and orientations of the younger generations. The Soviet time was characterized by a shortage of goods and a forced homogeneity of lifestyle. However, the scarcity was, to a large extent, experienced collectively. The inability to consume like people did on Finnish TV, regularly watched in northern Estonia, was not a private failure; instead, the state was to blame. Many current portrayals of the consumer culture of the 1960s–1980s show it through the prism of a desire for freedom and consumer sovereignty, which embodied a mundane form of civic freedom.
In spite of all its deficiencies, the Soviet consumer culture is often represented in the accounts of the elderly as a time of solidarity and a more respectful relationship between consumers and things, subjects and objects. Since there was no market economy-based cycle of fashions and quick obsolescence of things, there was less waste and ‘colorful cheap trash’ (see Keller & Vihalemm 2005). Thus, people were, either consciously or unconsciously, ‘sustainable’ in their everyday consumption practices.

‘Western’ consumerism and transformation

A Western consumer culture started to develop in Estonia at the end of the 1980s. The 1990s saw a rapid influx of new cultural forms, such as advertising, branding and recreational shopping. Volumes of consumption increased, and by 2006 the Estonian Eurostat Index of Actual Individual Consumption had reached the level of 65, compared to an EU27 average of 100 (Svennebye 2008).

Today’s consumer culture in Estonia has reached a certain stage of maturity; it is no longer eagerly aspiring to re-Westernization as it was in the early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, a turn towards aestheticization, post-materialism and an increasing sophistication of consumer culture could be observed (Keller 2004). On the one hand, consumers are offered a range of possibilities of symbolic consumption oriented at lifestyle and identity-building that may result in the successful re-appropriation of objects by subjects, and genuine self-actualization and self-expression through material culture, as described by Miller (1987). On the other hand, consumers face many different scarcities today – based on a lack of money, specialty goods or quality of service or on a breadth of choice – which are primarily perceived as private matters. This, in turn, may at times cause strong disappointment and dissatisfaction, which results in indifference and estrangement.

Proceeding from the above, one of the central building blocks of our study is consumerism as a phenomenon. We have operationalized it in our study by drawing on Bauman (1992, p. 223), who claims that consumerism means ‘manipulation of signs for various ends’ and ‘production, desire and consumption of “symbolic goods”’. The determination of which consumption practices are more symbolic than others is of course arbitrary. However, our index of consumerism (for details see Data and Method), which is comprised of practices that we consider more meaningful and revealing in the Estonian context, has proved to have a considerable explanatory force, as our earlier research has demonstrated (Keller & Kalmus 2004, forthcoming). Also, Lauristin (2004) has shown that the Estonian people’s subjective self-positioning on the social ladder is directly associated with their levels of consumerism.

Consumerism and Sustainability

The turn to the individual

The ‘sustainable development’ approach, which gained ground at the end of the 1980s in the ‘developed West’, shifted the emphasis of the responsibility for the environment from the system level to the local and individual level. The concept
of SC emerges from the understanding that sustainability no longer belongs to a counterculture type of environmentalism: ecological discourse is normalized and belongs to everybody (Eder 1996). This new development-centered environmentalism is a matter of individual interpretation. Beck (1995) has even called this tendency ‘organized irresponsibility’, as instrumentalization of life-worlds has exhausted familiar meanings of the environment and environmental protection, shifting the burden of defining and executing sustainability from the system to individuals. Individualized environmentalism is mainly rationalized as a certain mode of consumer-behavior. Sustainable consumption, which initially was meant to challenge expanding consumerism (see WSSD 2002), has become an object of it, and environmental identities develop within the framework of consumer culture. This is also a reason to take a closer look at the relations between consumerism and sustainable consumption, as both opposing and interlacing phenomena.

Environmentalism and transition

It is interesting to note that in the Soviet era, the importance of environmental problems was de-emphasized, or referred to as something peculiar to the ‘degraded’ West (Kiisel 2005). The discursive trend towards individualized environmentalism found no remarkable reflection in the Soviet environmental protection discourse. During the Soviet period, environmental problems received little criticism and analysis due to controlled information and the censored media. This legitimized environmental problems as a normal part of the life-world (Kiisel 2005). Individual responsibility was basically limited to ‘no littering or dumping’. Practices such as the collection of used glass containers and paper were not actualized as pro-environmental behavior, but as complex practices with different motives (economic incentives, traditions of the natural economy, scarcity, etc.). The configuration of the latter, however, fell apart at the beginning of the transition.

The transition society inherited the environmental problems and risks created by the totalitarian system, which were initially perceived as nobody’s responsibility as there were neither appropriate institutions nor practices at that time. As the Estonian freedom movement of the 1980s developed out of opposition to Soviet proposals for extensive mining of phosphorite, environmental problems were directly associated with the Soviet system. Therefore, in the early years of independence, individuals were left with the impression that threats to the environment had vanished along with the wasteful industrialism of the Soviet era, and a natural vacuum of environmental concern was created. At a time when environmentalism was becoming instrumentalized in the Western world, Estonia (in fact, the whole of the Eastern bloc) was ‘plunged into modernity’, which destroyed previously existing social norms and frames of reference (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). An ongoing silence on environmental problems and an extensive growth in consumption (which was not associated with environmental issues at that time) from the start of the 1990s onwards was accompanied by an overall aspiration for a Western-style consumer society. In Estonia, remnants of the traditional nature-related lifestyle are still interwoven with traces of the Soviet mentality – which denies individual responsibility – and modern pro-environmental practices acquired during the transition years, once more referring
to the existence of parallel ‘old’ and ‘new’ symbols and value orientations theorized by Sztompka (2004).

A remarkable change towards individualized environmentalism has occurred since 2004, when Estonia joined the EU [see Lauristin and Vihalemm (2009) for an analysis of the external and internal agenda in Estonia after accession]. Since 2005, SC (mainly the topic of recycling) has actively occupied the public agenda. Sustainable practices still struggle with an incompatible infrastructure, low access to services and products (both in terms of availability and price), and a lack of collective sources of meaning.

As noted above, the context of the transition adds its specific ambivalences and tensions to society. Soviet norms and value systems, still alive at least at the level of memory, clash and compete with (late) modern symbols and practices characteristic of the Westernized consumer society, in which consumerism as one of the building blocks of self-expression is exercised in the context of abundance, quick obsolescence of goods complemented by the ever-growing normative rhetoric of ‘down-shifting’ (i.e. consuming less) and eco-friendly consumption. In this context, we cannot forget the inherent ambivalence and tension within Western late modern consumer society itself.

As Campbell has theorized in his seminal study (1987), the hedonistic or romantic ethic has become the main engine of contemporary consumerism by making the pursuit of pleasure through goods of primary importance. This, in turn, is in continuing conflict with the puritan ethic of frugality and restraint and the utilitarian ethic of rational satisfaction of needs, forcing consumers to constantly face moral dilemmas in their everyday consumption decisions. But what does the new ethic of sustainable consumption consist of? We may assume that it is a complex mix of the puritan ethic, based on the idea of restraint and thrift, which considers all types of excess and waste reprehensible (as epitomized in the ‘consume less’ slogan). However, this time it is not from the viewpoint of individual morality but for the sake of the planet. On the other hand, there is an element of the romantic ethic in the discourse of sustainable consumption, which seeks pleasure in the idea of ‘green goods’ being pure, wholesome and benevolent in their potential for benefiting the planet and human beings, which is particularly prominently expressed in the growing popularity of goods, ranging from organic local foodstuffs to eco-labeled household cleaning products and clothing. Our objective is to inquire as to how these different orientations to consumerism and sustainability exist side by side in the attitudes and practices of Estonian consumers who live in a rapidly developing consumer society, in which the memory of the Soviet time is still vivid.

Age and Ethnicity in the Context of Consumption

As mentioned above, our particular interest in the context of consumerism and sustainability lies in age and ethnicity, i.e. how and why consumption patterns of different age and ethnic groups stand apart.

Research on consumption in relation to children and young people is a fast developing area [for recent studies see for example, Ekström and Tufte (2007)], and it is not possible in this essay to give a thorough overview of this. A large number of
studies on youth consumer culture reveal youngsters as particularly receptive to the (potentially harmful) impact of transnational consumer and media culture. As Langer has put it: ‘Global commercial culture, whether accessed through the media or encountered as part of the landscape of consumer capitalism, is an important source of symbolic material for children as they put together their projects of self’ (2005, p. 264). Thus, there is reason to assume that the youngest age groups in Estonia, like their peers elsewhere, are the most consumerist- and brand-prone in their orientations.

Also, different Estonian analyses of pro-environmental behavior from 1983 onwards (Kaasik et al. 1996; Küsel 2002; Lauristin 1987; Raudsepp 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Sööt 2004) have shown that younger age groups score lowest in pro-environmental behavior measures and nature contacts. Environmental practices tend to increase with advancing age.

Ethnicity is another variable that we find intriguing in the given context. Although approximately one-third of the Estonian population is Russian-speaking, consumption patterns by Estonian Russians are a poorly researched area. In-depth studies on the development of consumer culture (see Keller 2004; Köresaar 2003; Rahu 2004; Rausing 1998) have focused solely on ethnic Estonians.

It is probable, though, that ethnic Estonian and Estonian Russian consumers are faced with a different set of influences in their everyday lives as consumers. Ethnic Estonians experience complicated interrelationships between home culture and transnational consumer and media culture, while in the case of Estonian Russians, a third aspect (Russian home and diaspora culture), combined with their perceived minority status, is added to the configuration of cultural impacts (cf. Askegaard et al. 2005; Campbell 2005). Another important nuance is the different experience of transition in Estonia of ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians, including varying perceptions of cultural disruption (cf. Vihalemm & Kalmus 2008). However, Hamlett et al. point out that ‘Any evaluation of the influence of ethnic identity over consumption must be framed within a wider understanding of the operation of other categories of social identity’ (2007, p. 110).

Several earlier analyses have shown that Estonian Russians estimate their sustainable consumption habits, and especially their readiness to behave in a pro-environmental manner, relatively higher than ethnic Estonians do, with the exception of overall waste and recycling behavior (Kaasik et al. 1996; Küsel 2002; Raudsepp 2003).

Data and Method

Data

Our analysis is based on data from the representative population survey Me. The World. The Media, carried out in Estonia in November 2005. The survey covered the Estonian population aged 15–74, with a total sample size of 1,475. A proportional model of the general population (by areas and urban/rural division) and multi-step probability random sampling was used. In addition, a quota was used to include a proportional
number of ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians in the sample. A self-administered questionnaire, together with a follow-up interview, was used.

**Measures**

The questionnaire included a number of indicators of different consumption practices and preferences, indicators of the awareness and practices of sustainable consumption, oppositional assertions about the importance of brands, assertion pairs representing popular versions of the ‘endangered versus empowered child’ debate in consumer and media studies (for details, see Keller & Kalmus forthcoming), value statements about the environment developed by Inglehart (1997), Rokeach’s (1973) value indicators, etc.

On the basis of single variables we formed several indices. Two indices form the main axes of our analysis: consumerism and sustainable consumption. The index of consumerism measures a more ‘symbolic’ aspect of consumption, i.e. consumption practices and preferences that are more expressive and revealing of people’s identity building and lifestyles. The index of sustainable consumption is comprised of the sub-index of the use of sustainable solutions and five indicators of the awareness and practices of sustainable consumption, presented in Table 3 (an extremely positive answer, for example, ‘always’, added two points to the index; a positive answer, such as ‘sometimes’, added one point). In addition, we used the index of valuation of brands and the index of protectionism of children against advertising and consumption.

**Analysis**

Previous analyses of the same survey data have shown that generational and ethnic dimensions have a considerable explanatory force in interpreting the cultural aspect of individuals’ adaptation to transition in Estonia (Kalmus & Vihalemm 2008; Vihalemm & Kalmus 2008, 2009). Previous analyses also found that, in general, consumerism was very well predicted by age (Keller & Kalmus 2004, forthcoming). We assume that various age groups and ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians differ in a number of ways when we look at their attitudes and practices related to consumption and environment. In the first section of results we compare the mean values of the indices of consumerism, and the valuation of brands and sustainable consumption between age groups, and between ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians.

We proceed from the assumption that orientations to material well being and self-realization as a consumer cannot be unequivocally opposed to sustainable or ‘anti-consumerist’ orientations. These seemingly conflicting sets of attitudes and practices may go hand in hand and form complicated interlacing patterns. To analyze these patterns in detail, we carried out a K-means cluster analysis based on shortened indices of consumerism and sustainable consumption. In proceeding from the two main axes, with the aim of creating an easily interpretable typology, we set the number of clusters at four. Thus, we constructed four consumer types, partly inductively, based on the empirical analysis of the data, and partly relying on the theoretical assumption regarding possible co-variation patterns between consumerist and sustainable attitudes and practices.
The second section of results presents the typology of consumers, consequent from the cluster analysis, and characterizes the types regarding their awareness and particular practices of sustainable consumption, relationship with nature, attitudes towards brands, consumer culture and children, and value orientations, and describes the types socio-demographically (by analyzing relationships with age, gender, education, income, social status, type of residence and ethnicity).

**Results**

*Consumption in different age groups*

Table 1 reveals that respondents’ age differentiates significantly between all main dimensions of consumption analyzed in this study. The youngest consumers (aged 15–19) valued expressive dimensions of consumption most. The relation between consumerism and age was strictly linear: more expressive consumption preferences and practices became less prevalent as age increased: in the oldest age group, the index of consumerism was more than twice as low as it was amongst teenagers. It is noteworthy that, in a similar survey carried out at the end of 2002, only 10% of the youngest age group reported ‘very high’ consumerism (see Keller & Kalmus 2004), whereas in this study the same indicator was 23%. Thus, consumerism is growing most rapidly among teenagers, along with the general rise of the living standard in Estonia.

Valuation of brands followed almost the same pattern of distribution in age groups as consumerism. Respondents in their twenties stood out, together with teenagers, as the most brand-oriented consumers.

Sustainable consumption was highest among 45–64 year-olds, and dropped significantly in the group which had reached retirement age (65–74 year-olds). Teenagers showed the lowest levels of sustainable consumption. These results correspond to the findings of a survey of pro-environmental behavior from 1994 (Kaasik *et al*., 1996) and a study of consumption of environmental information from 1983 (Lauristin 1987).

Among the oldest people, the lower index value seems to be conditioned by two factors. On the one hand, this age group showed the lowest level of environmental awareness (for example, 22% claimed not to know eco-labels and 28% could not judge the environment-friendliness of packaging). On the other hand, they lacked material resources (40% were not able to pay more for environmentally sustainable products or services). Teenagers tended not to acknowledge either a lack of awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indices</th>
<th>15–19</th>
<th>20–29</th>
<th>30–44</th>
<th>45–54</th>
<th>55–64</th>
<th>65–74</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism (max 11)</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuation of brands (max 4)</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable consumption (max 19)</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>6.76</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
or a lack of resources (for example, 74% were ready to pay more for sustainable products or services); rather, they did not attempt to hide their careless attitude (for example, 47% declared that they never paid attention to eco-labels when shopping and 38% never tried to select products with eco-friendly packaging).

Consumption in different ethnic groups

Table 2 indicates that consumerist orientation was, in general, significantly stronger among Estonian Russians compared with ethnic Estonians. The most remarkable difference appeared in the group of 20–29 year-olds: young Estonian Russians were significantly more consumerist than their Estonian peers (the index means being 3.20 and 2.76, respectively). Teenagers of the ethnic majority and the minority, however, did not differ from each other in this respect.

The index of brand valuation differed between the two ethnic groups in the opposite direction: ethnic Estonians were significantly more brand-oriented than Estonian Russians, whereas the sharpest distinction appeared between teenagers of the two ethnic groups (the index means were 0.50 among Estonians and 0.22 among Estonian Russians). This difference is largely due to the assertion pair ‘The brands someone consumes tell a lot about the person’ versus ‘One cannot judge people based on the brands they consume’: Estonian Russians, including teenagers, were more inclined to refrain from judging people based on signs of consumer culture.

No significant differences in the overall index of sustainable consumption between ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians, either in general or in particular age groups, existed; distinctions, however, appeared in all particular attitudes and practices. Estonian Russians demonstrated, on the one hand, higher normativity on the macro level: for instance, 18% of Russians (compared to 6% of Estonians) considered themselves to be highly aware of sustainable consumption, and 12% of Russians (compared to 5% of Estonians) claimed that they always paid attention to eco-labels. On the other hand, a larger percentage of Estonian Russians (compared to ethnic Estonians) admitted to a lack of particular knowledge: 23% of Russians (11% of Estonians) were not able to judge the environment-friendliness of packaging, and 13% of Russians (8% of Estonians) claimed not to know eco-labels. In earlier studies, Estonian Russians also reported relatively less personal control (knowledge of what to do and belief in its outcome) over everyday environmental practices (43% compared to 65% of Estonians: Raudsepp 2003).

**TABLE 2** Consumerism, valuation of brands and sustainable consumption by ethnic groups (means)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indices</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Estonians</th>
<th>Estonian Russians</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1475</td>
<td>1033</td>
<td>442</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism (max 11)</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>−2.5</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuation of brands (max 4)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable consumption (max 19)</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.868</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethnic Estonians demonstrated a higher level of sustainable practices: they were more active in recycling and tended to use more technology-based sustainable solutions in housekeeping. An earlier study by Raudsepp (2003), however, shows that the differences between Estonians and Estonian Russians in tradition-based saving practices (for example, repairing old and broken items and buying food products from acquaintances in the countryside) are not that significant.

**Typology of consumers**

A statistically significant positive correlation between the indices of consumerism and sustainable consumption \( r = 0.13; p < 0.000 \) suggests that these two are not mutually exclusive or opposing phenomena. A typological analysis, however, shows a more complicated relationship between these dimensions of consumption. Figure 1 shows four consumer types that resulted from cluster analysis. The largest percentage of respondents (41%) belonged to the cluster which is characterized by a high level of sustainable consumption and below average consumerism. We labeled this cluster the ‘Saving’ type. The second biggest cluster (28% of respondents) displayed low levels of both consumerism and sustainable consumption. This cluster is labeled as the ‘Indifferent’ type (indifferent towards consumption and the environment). A significant percentage of respondents (17%) belonged to the type, which scored high on both dimensions of consumption. They bear the name ‘Green Consumerists’. The smallest share of people (14%) showed a high level of consumerism and a low level of sustainable consumption. We labeled this cluster the ‘Lavish’ type.

The following characterization of consumer types is based on a number of indicators related to environment and consumption, and socio-demographic variables (see Tables 3 and 4, respectively).

**The Saving type**

Respondents in this cluster stood out due to their very high extent of sustainable everyday practices: they were most active in recycling and in using sustainable solutions in housekeeping (see Table 3). Also, they tended to display a relatively high level of environmental awareness and related consumption practices. Respondents of this type had a rather active relationship with nature: nearly 60% went hiking or out
### TABLE 3  Characterization of consumer types (% in the type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total N</th>
<th>Saving type</th>
<th>Indifferent type</th>
<th>Green consumerist type</th>
<th>Lavish type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>1475</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% in the population</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicators of the awareness and practices of sustainable consumption**

- Considers oneself aware of sustainable consumption (highly or rather)**: 137
  - Saving: 86.4
  - Indifferent: 44.7
  - Green: 87.8
  - Lavish: 47.6
- Pays attention to eco-labels when shopping (always or sometimes)**: 859
  - Saving: 78.2
  - Indifferent: 31.1
  - Green: 81.8
  - Lavish: 34.2
- Tries to select products with environmentally-friendly packaging (always or sometimes)**: 868
  - Saving: 78.0
  - Indifferent: 30.4
  - Green: 86.7
  - Lavish: 36.0
- Is ready to pay more for an environmentally sustainable product or service (much or a bit)**: 943
  - Saving: 77.9
  - Indifferent: 42.3
  - Green: 84.9
  - Lavish: 52.4
- Separates recyclable rubbish at home (always or at convenience)**: 1111
  - Saving: 90.1
  - Indifferent: 63.8
  - Green: 88.1
  - Lavish: 52.2

**Indicators of relationship with nature**

- Has participated in green activists’ bicycle trips, cleaning away rubbish, etc.**: 291
  - Saving: 21.3
  - Indifferent: 12.3
  - Green: 31.0
  - Lavish: 19.2
- Goes hiking, to the nature (often or sometimes)**: 821
  - Saving: 59.4
  - Indifferent: 43.2
  - Green: 74.4
  - Lavish: 53.9

**Consumption-related indices (mean values)**

- Valuation of brands (max 4)**: 1475
  - Saving: 0.30
  - Indifferent: 0.21
  - Green: 0.43
  - Lavish: 0.45
- Protectionism of children against advertising and consumption (max 6)**: 1475
  - Saving: 2.45
  - Indifferent: 2.01
  - Green: 2.43
  - Lavish: 2.23

**Value statements about the environment**

- Agrees to an increase in taxes, if the extra money is used to prevent environmental pollution**: 736
  - Saving: 59.8
  - Indifferent: 37.9
  - Green: 62.9
  - Lavish: 38.8
- Does not agree that if we want economic development, we can’t pay too much attention to environmental protection**: 1109
  - Saving: 79.9
  - Indifferent: 72.0
  - Green: 86.5
  - Lavish: 72.9

**Selected Rokeach values (max 5, means)**

- Clean environment**: 1475
  - Saving: 4.75
  - Indifferent: 4.61
  - Green: 4.77
  - Lavish: 4.51
- World of beauty**: 1475
  - Saving: 4.36
  - Indifferent: 4.22
  - Green: 4.37
  - Lavish: 4.21
- Wealth*: 1475
  - Saving: 3.90
  - Indifferent: 4.01
  - Green: 4.02
  - Lavish: 4.06
- Comfortable life**: 1475
  - Saving: 3.98
  - Indifferent: 4.04
  - Green: 4.15
  - Lavish: 4.20

**Notes:** *Difference between the groups is statistically significant at $p<0.05$. **Difference between the groups is statistically significant at $p<0.01$. 

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These respondents were not fascinated with consumer culture: their valuation of brands was slightly below the average and they were most protective of children against advertising and consumption. Their personal value orientations were highly post-materialist: they tended to value a clean environment and a world of beauty very highly, and showed the lowest valuation of wealth and a comfortable life. When it came to macro-level value decisions regarding tax-raising and a sustainable economy for the sake of environmental protection, respondents of the Saving type were slightly less post-materialistic compared with Green Consumerists.

### Table 4: Distribution of socio-demographic groups in consumer types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total N</th>
<th>Saving type</th>
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<th>Green consumerist type</th>
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</tr>
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<td>% of the population</td>
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<td>40.9</td>
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<td>16.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Saving type</th>
<th>Indifferent type</th>
<th>Green consumerist type</th>
<th>Lavish type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
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<td>20.5</td>
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<td>20–29</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>23.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>30–44</td>
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<tr>
<td>45–64</td>
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<td>27.3</td>
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<td>55–64</td>
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<td>32.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>65–74</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>46.2</td>
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**Gender**

<table>
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<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Green consumerist type</th>
<th>Lavish type</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>29.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>788</td>
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**Education**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>43.8</td>
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<td>15.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>28.9</td>
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**Income**

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<th>Lavish type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>11.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>455</td>
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**Status**

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<th>Status</th>
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<th>Indifferent type</th>
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<th>Lavish type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>45.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower-middle</td>
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<td>Middle</td>
<td>498</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper-middle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>185</td>
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**Type of residence**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Type of residence</th>
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<th>Indifferent type</th>
<th>Green consumerist type</th>
<th>Lavish type</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Capital city</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big city</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small city</td>
<td>301</td>
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<td>25.2</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>38.4</td>
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<td>14.2</td>
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</table>

**Ethnic groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic groups</th>
<th>Saving type</th>
<th>Indifferent type</th>
<th>Green consumerist type</th>
<th>Lavish type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Estonians</td>
<td>1033</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian Russians</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *Difference between the groups is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. **Difference between the groups is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. into nature at least occasionally and a fifth had participated in events organized by green activists.
Respondents of the Saving type were more often middle-aged or elderly people (more than half of 45–64 year-olds belonged to this type — see Table 4). Males, significantly more often than females, belonged to this type. The Saving type was characterized by the prevalence of people with a secondary education and low or average incomes. When it came to self-estimated status in the social hierarchy, the middle, upper-middle and upper strata were equally strongly represented in this cluster. The Saving type was most common among residents of small cities. No statistically significant relationship between consumer types and ethnic groups existed.

In general, the Saving type embodied ideal-typical features of the social portrait of the petty bourgeoisie and the values of the Protestant ethic in their late modern form, specifically molded in transition culture, representing thrift, wariness, mettle, moderation and socially desirable conduct.

The Indifferent type

Respondents in this cluster showed a significantly lower engagement in sustainable everyday practices than those of the Saving type and Green Consumerists, yet they were slightly more active in recycling and in using sustainable solutions than the Lavish type respondents (see Table 3). Respondents of the Indifferent type displayed the lowest level of environmental awareness and related consumption practices. Also, they had by far the most passive relationship with nature: only 43% went hiking or out into nature at least occasionally and 12% had participated in green activist events.

This type of respondent seemed to have the weakest connection with consumer culture: they scored lowest on the indices of valuation of brands and protectionism of children against advertising and consumption (largely because they tended to answer ‘Difficult to say’ to the index questions). Their personal value orientations were relatively materialistic: they gave less importance, compared with Green Consumerists and the Saving type, to a clean environment and the world of beauty, and tended to value wealth highly (probably as a scarcity value). Respondents of the Indifferent type were most materialistic when it came to the macro-level issues of tax raising for the sake of environmental protection and economic development at a cost to the environment.

Respondents of the Indifferent type were most often male, elderly people (46% of 64–74 year-olds belonged to this type; the average age was highest in this type — see Table 4). This cluster was characterized by the dominance of people with a primary education and low incomes. They were most likely to estimate their social status as lower or lower middle. The Indifferent type was most common among people residing in the countryside.

In general, this type represents a lagging behind or withdrawal from new cultural flows of consumerism and environmentalism, and encapsulation in a certain inveterate lifestyle — partly due to lack of resources, and partly because of attitudes of indifference and carelessness.

The Green Consumerist type

Respondents in this cluster stood out as having the highest level of environmental awareness and related consumption practices (see Table 3). Their extent of
engagement in sustainable everyday practices was almost as high as in the case of the Saving type. Moreover, Green Consumerists had the most active relationship with nature: three quarters went hiking or out into nature at least occasionally and almost a third had participated in green activist events.

This type of respondent tended to have a clear opinion about consumer culture: they considered brands relatively important, while being at the same time highly protective of children against advertising and consumption. Their macro-level value decisions regarding tax-raising and a sustainable economy for the sake of environmental protection were most post-materialist; also, they tended to value a clean environment and the world of beauty most highly. At the same time, they considered wealth and a comfortable life relatively important – probably not as scarcity values, but as a means for, and a part of, a consumerist and hedonistic lifestyle.

Green Consumerists were most often younger people (aged 20–44) and predominantly female (see Table 4). This type was characterized by the prevalence of people with a higher education and high incomes. When it came to self-estimated status in the social hierarchy, the upper and upper-middle strata were highly over-represented in this cluster. Green Consumerists were more likely residents of the capital and small cities.

This type can be characterized as one very well adapted to new cultural flows in the transitional society. Green Consumerists were highly reflective and conscious of the potential hazards and negative impact, both for the environment and children, imposed by the emerging consumer society. At the same time, they appropriated commercially produced and branded goods and services as well as related values into their personal life-worlds.

The Lavish type

Respondents in this type stood out for having the most modest engagement in sustainable everyday practices (see Table 3). Also, they displayed a relatively low level of environmental awareness and related consumption practices. Respondents of the Lavish type had a somewhat less active relationship with nature; they were, however, more active than the Indifferent type was.

This type of respondent scored highest on the index of valuation of brands. They were less protective of children against advertising and consumption than Green Consumerists and the Saving type were. This can partly be explained by the high proportion of under-age respondents in the cluster: probably they had no wish to admit to their own vulnerability and manipulability. The personal value orientations of respondents of this type were the most materialistic: they gave least importance to a clean environment and the world of beauty, and valued most highly wealth and a comfortable life. Also, respondents of the Lavish type were highly materialistic when it came to the macro-level issues of tax raising for the sake of environmental protection and economic development at a cost to the environment.

Respondents of the Lavish type were most often teenagers: the largest number of 15–19 year olds (36%) belonged to this type (see Table 4). Also, young people aged 20–29 were highly represented and the average age was lowest in this cluster.
Gender distribution was most even in this type compared with the others. The Lavish type was characterized by the slight predominance of people with a primary education but high incomes per family member, which can be explained by the large proportion of high school students in the cluster. Respondents of this type were most likely to estimate their social status as upper-middle and to reside in big cities. A difference between ethnic groups was notable only in this consumer type: slightly more Estonian Russians belonged to the Lavish type.

Conclusions and Discussion

Our findings confirmed the assumption that the youngest age groups (aged 15–29) would be most consumerist and brand-oriented, offering a sharp contrast to the generations of their grandparents, whose most active ‘consumer years’ fell during the Soviet period and for whom Western consumerism is not the dominant building block of their lifestyle.

The two youngest age groups were born in 1976–1990; thus, their formative years, i.e. adolescence and early adulthood, coincide mostly or entirely with the period of transition. They can be called the generation of the ‘children of freedom’, or the ‘post-revolutionary generation’ (cf. Marada 2004). According to Sztompa (2004), this generation has been basically insulated from the cultural impact of the communist system. Instead they have had, in many ways, a more open and liberal society to grow up in. Obviously, they have been the most receptive to new cultural flows of self-expressive consumerism and the sign system of commercially produced and branded goods and services (Langer 2005).

As the Czech sociologist Marada (2004) argues, the post-revolutionary generation has also developed a more competitive and less moralistic relationship with the social world. This may explain, on the one hand, the importance of brands as status symbols for these young people and, on the other hand, the more openly careless attitude towards sustainable consumption among a large part of this age group. Also, as Vihalemn and Kalmus (2008) have shown, younger people are more exposed to transnational self-identification and orientation to imagined or virtual communities, largely based on globalizing consumer and media culture, which tends to go hand in hand with certain emancipation from the concerns of one’s immediate social and physical environment. This emancipation can also be explained by the degeneration of a nature-related lifestyle and contacts during the transition (see Kaasik et al. 1996). Raudsepp’s (2001a) analysis has shown that younger people report relatively few nature contacts from childhood. These facts correspond to Beck’s concept of a ‘sudden plunge into modernity’ and a dissolution of traditional meaning references due to that plunge. However, although the ‘children of freedom’ are a substantially different generation from that of their parents since they do not have many active memories of the Soviet time, the attitudes towards consumption and sustainable practices, in particular, are also related to life course. We may assume that when these youngsters establish families of their own, have children and grow older, their orientations may become more environmentally conscious, as the tendency to report more pro-environmental concerns and practices with advancing age has been
predominant in previous studies, from 1983 onwards (for example, Kaasik et al. 1996; Lauristin 1987).

Our results indicated that a consumerist orientation was, in general, significantly stronger among Estonian Russians compared with ethnic Estonians. The latter were, at the same time, significantly more brand-oriented than Estonian Russians. This can be explained by the different set of influences experienced by the two ethnic groups in the transformational society. Among these, the strong feeling of social exclusion by Estonian Russians, extensively brought to light in studies conducted after the disruptive ‘April Events’ in 2007 (see Vihalemm & Kalmus 2009), has to be taken into account. We may assume that a market-based consumer culture, which in its Western definition is, at least theoretically, universal, impersonal and open to all (Slater 1997), is the most neutral, non-discriminating and accessible area where Estonian Russians’ feeling of exclusion is alleviated. In a shopping mall, everybody is treated equally and for window-shopping no money is required (see also Keller 2005).

Studies based on the same survey data (Me. The World. The Media 2005) indicated that the thought pattern called ‘Sub-Cultural Identity and Desire for Capital’, which probably emerged from the opportunities and pleasures of identity construction offered by consumer culture and valuation of the means necessary to afford it, was more widespread among the Russian minority (Vihalemm & Kalmus 2009). In the case of the youngest age group (15–19 year-olds), the difference in consumerism seems to be leveling out due to the increasing influence of the transnational consumer and media culture experienced by youngsters of both ethnic groups. This leads us to hypothesize the birth of a new consumer, for whom the symbolic resources for everyday identity creation and meaning making are, to a large extent, commercially produced on a global scale.

At the same time, Estonian Russians were significantly more subjected to the thought pattern which attaches importance to solidarity with community members and spiritual harmony, and de-emphasizes high social position (Vihalemm & Kalmus 2009). This mental structure probably represents the mixed legacy of the Soviet ideology and the ethic of Russian Orthodoxy, both characterized by ideals of community, unanimity and rejection of economic competition (cf. Chaplin 2004). This deep-rooted ethical maxim helps to explain why Estonian Russians, including teenagers, were more inclined to refuse to judge people based on the brands they consume, which, however says little about their actual brand consumption.

No significant differences in the overall level of sustainable consumption between ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians was shown. The latter, however, declared a higher macro-level normativity, while showing a greater lack of particular knowledge of sustainable consumption and a lower level of engagement in eco-friendly everyday practices, especially recycling behavior. A recent study from 2007 (Kuldna & Kaldaru 2007) shows that this tendency has not disappeared in the recent years of the active introduction of instrumentalized environmentalism. The reasons for lower engagement in eco-friendly consumption and recycling practices among Estonian Russians can be traced to a lower level of knowledge of the environmental impacts of different practices, the lower impact of public information sources on environmental knowledge, and less personal control over environmental behavior. Ethnic Estonians have more active and pragmatic relations with nature than Russians, although there are no clearly discernible
major differences between the two ethnic groups in terms of recreational nature-habits (Enterprise Estonia Tourism Development Center 2007; Raudsepp 2005). Substantially more Russians than Estonians report nature as central to their life-world and define themselves as nature-lovers; they also report more abstract and spiritual relations with nature than Estonians (Raudsepp 2005). This, along with different realms of information and media consumption, may explain Estonian Russians’ greater self-reported readiness for pro-environmental behavior. However, their actual knowledge and behavior may sometimes conflict with their positive attitudes.

The findings of our typological analysis of Estonian consumers lend support to Sztompka’s (2004) thesis of the ambivalence of the cultural context of transition and the parallel existence of old and new ‘cultural templates’. The distribution of various post-materialist attitudes and practices, and different age groups in consumer types suggest that no unambiguously ‘old’ types exist. The higher average age of respondents in the Indifferent type and the Saving type, however, hints that the role of the Soviet heritage is probably greater in the formation of the characteristics of these types, including their lower levels of consumerism and valuation of brands. It is also interesting that in Estonian, SC is translated as süüstev tarbimine, which literally means ‘saving consumption’. Thus, sustainability in this context acquires an additional connotation of thrift, which stems from the puritan ethic of restraint combined with the rational–utilitarian orientation to efficiency and the minimization of waste. Thus we may assume that the Saving type embodies less of the late modern ‘green ethic’ of individual environmentalism for the planet’s sake, and more of an ethic of thrift, intermixed with a certain traditional holistic attitude to nature, which is valued for its beauty, spirituality and totality.

In the case of the Indifferent type, the high proportion of country people is noteworthy. This may suggest a certain stratification of the Estonian society on the axis of city–country, as well as indicating that for a large number of country people the relationship with the environment is more taken for granted, habitual and pragmatic, and not worthy of special concern in relation to their consumption practices. Also, in the countryside a certain set of attitudes that we may call ‘kolkhoz-mentality’ still prevails. It is a rudiment of the Soviet era, when relationships with the natural environment were exclusively instrumental in the collective farms, where nationalization of land and private property had contributed to dissolving respect for common responsibility. In addition, we may assume that consumerist lifestyle construction, including brand consumption, as well as the normative framework of SD, are perceived as irrelevant, as ‘not for us’, by a large number of people living in the country. Also, at least in some cases, material deprivation plays a role in making consumerist orientations inaccessible.

Two other types, the Lavish type and Green Consumerists, belong rather clearly to ‘new’ cultural templates, representing two different faces of the emerging consumer culture in transformational Estonia. Both of these types are characterized by a high level of appropriation of commercially produced and branded goods and services, as well as the related values in their life-world, and by a lower average age compared with the Saving type and the Indifferent type. Green Consumerists have developed a critical awareness of problems and hazards inherent in consumer society and are trying to adjust their lifestyle and everyday practices to come to terms with
the late modern ethic of sustainability, in which we may imagine a considerable number of everyday tensions and dilemmas, as well as a high level of reflexivity stemming from this. Here we may assume the rise of the new green romantic ethic in which consumer satisfaction is derived from the perceived purity, locality and ‘naturalness’ of goods. They are enjoyed for individual health and pleasure, as well as for the sake of benefiting the planet and future generations. Soper (2007) has referred to this as ‘alternative hedonism’. These people are, however, also active consumers who willingly purchase non-green goods and for whom self-expression and lifestyle are, to a large extent, linked with consumption of goods and services.

Their active relationship with nature resonates with the idea that the growing distance between society and nature, evident in the increasing volume of consumption, may at the same time reconnect people with nature through the re-invention of a natural lifestyle, often in the framework of commodification and campaigning, or at least through a set of behaviors and attitudes that are believed to be environment-friendly (‘the best I can do’). It can be postulated that ‘old’ nature relations, which declined during the transition period, have not been simply reincarnated, but also reinvented and modified in the context of commodification and consumption (see EETDC 2007). This explains the close nature relations among high consumerists, such as the respondents of the Green Consumerist type. We can also say that the perception of the nature–society divide peculiar to the individuals of late modernity has not fully ‘invaded’ Estonia yet, since high consumerism has not displaced uncommodified nature-related habits, that is, traditional lifestyle interwoven with SC practices.

Respondents of the Lavish type, almost equal in number to Green Consumerists and even younger on average, have neither developed discursive consciousness of the problems of over-consumption nor internalized sustainable practices. Young consumers of this type have, in principle, three possible ways of socialization in their future: they may enhance their awareness of environmental issues and join Green Consumerists; they may develop into a type of their own, which would be more prominently represented in older age groups; or, most improbably, they may lose their fascination with consumerism and merge into the Indifferent type.

A more sustainable path of development is clearly not a value-neutral academic concept, but a moral and normative framework, which seems to be at least officially and publicly desirable on the global level. Thus, the question remains as to how (and by whom) today’s youngest consumers can be socialized and influenced in the direction of sustainability. As things stand, sustainability is of low importance to a remarkably large number of this group, who seem to be overpowered by the lure of the attractive commercial symbolism of global popular and consumer culture. Will they become Green Consumerists on their own as they grow older and more experienced, or do we need more conscious and coordinated action to promote what is termed ‘consumer literacy’?

Acknowledgements
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Notes

1. The Index of Actual Individual Consumption, provided by Eurostat, is comprised of household final consumption expenditure, as well as consumption of individual services (for example, health and education).

2. The index of consumerism summarized positive answers to questions on 11 consumption practices and preferences. Each positive answer added one point to the index, with the scale ranging from zero to 11: having clothes tailor-made, preference for certain clothing brands, buying clothing abroad, considering fit of clothing more important than price, considering brand of clothing more important than price, following a specific style of home decoration, having a personal hairdresser, having a personal cosmetician, having a personal masseur, regular gym-going and doing aerobics.

3. The sub-index of use of sustainable solutions summarized positive answers to nine questions on using sustainable solutions in housekeeping. Each positive answer added one point to the index, with the scale ranging from zero to nine: sustainable car fuels, energy-saving household machines, energy-saving light bulbs, recycled paper, ‘Green Energy’ option in electricity consumption, composter, sustainable household chemistry (for example, non-synthetic or phosphate-free washing powder), water-saving mixers (with interrupters) or something else.

4. The index of valuation of brands summarized a respondent’s agreement with two assertions: ‘The brands someone consumes tell a lot about the person’ and ‘It is important to me what impression the brands I consume make’ (the answer ‘I totally agree’ added two points to the index; ‘I rather agree’ added one point; the scale ranges from zero to four).

5. The index of protectionism of children against advertising and consumption summarized a respondent’s agreement with three assertions: ‘Children are defenseless in the face of advertising and it is easy to manipulate them’; ‘Advertising targeted at children is harmful; it increases excessive consumerism’; and ‘Children should be kept away from all kinds of advertising and shopping malls, because consumer society corrupts children’ (‘I totally agree’ added two points to the index; ‘I rather agree’ added one point; the index scale ranges from zero to six).

6. In following normal distribution, the original indices of consumerism and sustainable consumption were reduced to short and comparable scales ranging from ‘0 – missing’ to ‘5 – very high’, in the case of consumerism, and from ‘1 – very low’ to ‘5 – very high’, in case of sustainable consumption.

References


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