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## Contemporary Determinants of Sustainable Consumption

### Summary

At the time of growing social awareness, the operation of modern enterprises amounts to a range of pro-social and pro-ecological activities. Such an attitude, connected with the implementation of the principles of sustainable development, results from the fact that the present-day consumer is the one making decisions with consideration of the principles of sustainable development, being aware of the consequences of their own decisions, in other words, the responsible consumer. Therefore, it is important to examine both theoretical and practical aspects of sustainable consumption with reference to the sustainable attitude of both the consumer and the entrepreneur. In the paper, there has been used the available domestic and foreign literature in the field of sustainable consumption, with a particular emphasis on responsibility in purchasing decisions, supported by the conducted survey.

**Key words:** sustainable development, sustainable consumption, ecological awareness.

**JEL codes:** M14, P36

### Introduction

In response to the occurring ecological crisis and the related slowly depleting natural resources, the problem of sustainable development, on the one hand, has become a dominating issue in the business world and, on the other, one of the contemporary paradigms of socio-economic development. The emergence of the concept of sustainable development is, therefore, the response to unfavorable changes, which take place in the conditions of human life, as well as business activities people run (Adamczyk and Nitkiewicz 2007; Brendzel-Skowera 2009; Tomski 2012). It can be said that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the age of sustainable development, the age in which socio-economic development will satisfy the needs of the modern generation without losing opportunities for development for future generations to satisfy their own needs (Chabowski et al. 2011, p. 55). In such a context, the basic assumption of the concept of sustainable development is to promote the harmony – the human being, the economy the natural environment, by means of simultaneous achievement of economic, socio-ecological goals. It should be noted that the area of interest of economy-society-environment-oriented economists has switched from the concept of economic growth to the paradigm of sustainable development which opens up new possibilities for various observations and analyses (Paluch, Sroka 2013). In practice, this means to run a business activity aimed at long-lasting improvement of the quality of life of contemporary and future generations through simultaneous activities focused on the behavior which does not result

in reduction in natural resources, brings about an increase in financial performance, simultaneously, taking responsibility for the impact towards the society where companies operate (Bansal 2005; Briceno, Stagl 2006). Therefore, the primary objective of sustainable development is to provide the appropriate quality of life whereas the quality ought to be “sustainable”. This means that it should skillfully combine the quality of “to have” type (the material sphere) with the quality of “to be” type (the psychological, emotional and mental sphere) (Kryk 2013, p. 6). In such a context, the interest in the level and quality of people’s life in combination with both the consumer lifestyle and sociably responsible lifestyle, compliant with the principles of sustainable development, becomes increasingly important. The interest results from greater people’s awareness of threats caused by the progress of civilization (Gotowska 2013). According to Voine and Filip (2011), the awareness of negative consequences should lead to the change in the field of production and consumption of goods and services for more sustainable and responsible. Therefore, after Kryk (2013), it can be concluded that the achievement of sustainable quality of life requires sustainable consumption which, in turn, is correlated with responsible behavior of consumers and their awareness in this field. However, sustainable consumption is the consumption in the framework of which individual people are able to satisfy their basic needs while keeping up specific ecological and socio-economic standards, which are necessary for human development and bring about the improvement in the quality of life in both short-, medium- and long-time perspective (Kronenberg 2007; Dobson 2007). In such understanding, sustainable consumption refers to conscious, rational and responsible use of the available natural resources by all market participants (households, communities and local communities, business environment, local government etc.) while not limiting consumption opportunities of future generations (*Przez zrównoważoną konsumpcję ...* 2012, p. 2-3). Thus the problem of sustainable consumption may be considered in relation to individual households, regions or countries, while its level is influenced by the behaviour of individual market participants (Boczar, Błażejczyk-Majka 2015).

Pro-ecological activities of modern enterprises have positive impact on sustainable behavior of consumers. Therefore, managers are required to take activities based on the sustainable paradigm, combing the economic interest (profit) with social or ecological interest. As Fuller (1999) rightly notices, traditional and non-sustainable products are unrealistically cheap and their prices do not reflect most environmental costs connected with their production. According to Juscius and Sneideriene (2013), the necessity to consider them brings about that they are more expensive, which does not negatively influence their eagerness to purchase. Moreover, the responsible consumer is willing to pay more for the sustainable product since they are aware of their choice of goods and services. Therefore, it can be concluded that the most desirable aspect of sustainable consumption is ecological awareness, i.e. responsible attitude of the human being towards the natural environment and the motivation to keep it unchanged (Kobyłko 2007).

In the context of the above considerations, there occur the following research problems: while facing the implementation of pro-social and pro-ecological activities, will consumers be more willing to purchase ecological products?; are the contemporary consumers aware of

their choices?; does ecological behavior of Polish consumers reflect sustainable consumption? The aim of the paper is the presentation of the research results concerning the images of responsible consumption as sustainable consumption. On the basis of the above, there has been formulated the thesis that the behavior of consumers and the formation of sustainable imperative is strictly correlated with ecological awareness and sustainable activities of enterprises.

## Source Material and Research Methods

The presented conclusions have been formulated on the basis of the survey conducted in September/October 2015 on the sample of 324 respondents enrolled for courses such as: management, spatial development, logistics, finance and accounting, public health, mechanical engineering and construction at Czestochowa University of Technology. The research tool used in the research was the structured survey.

The characteristics of the respondents indicated that 167 females and 157 males took part in the study. The students of non-technical fields amounted to 54% whereas the students of technical courses amounted to 46%. The analysis of the respondents proved that the respondents are individuals up to the age of 25 (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Detailed characteristics of the respondents**

	Technical courses – group A			Non-technical courses – group B				$\Sigma$
	L	B	MiBM	Z	FiR	GP	ZP	
Female	15	18	5	31	42	30	26	167
Male	34	35	42	13	12	18	1	157
$\Sigma$	27	49	53	44	56	48	27	324
	129			175				
L – Engineering Logistics, B – Construction, MiBM – Mechanical engineering, Z – Management, FiR- Finance and accounting, GP- Spatial development, ZP – Public Health								

Source: The author's own research based on the survey.

It should be pinpointed that the conducted research was fully anonymous and the participation was voluntary.

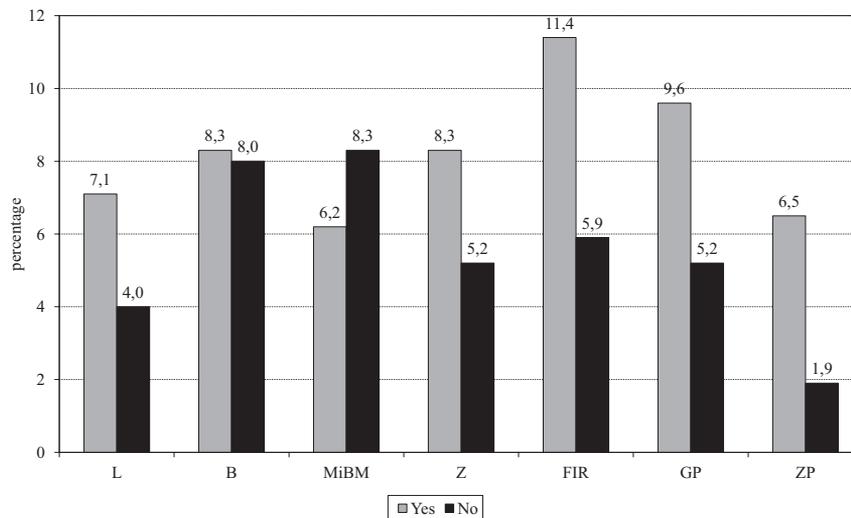
## Results and Discussion

In the first part of the research, the respondents were asked if, according to them, the present condition of the environment is the reason for fear and anxiety (Graph 1).

The analysis of the research material indicated that every other respondent sees the problems of the natural environment resulting from running a business by them. Therefore, in the further part of the research, the respondents were asked to indicate the fields of the environment which should attract the greatest attention. The respondents from both Groups - A and B indicated that the main area which should receive the attention is deteriorating quality of life.

**Graph 1**

**Concern about the condition of the natural environment in the respondents' opinion**



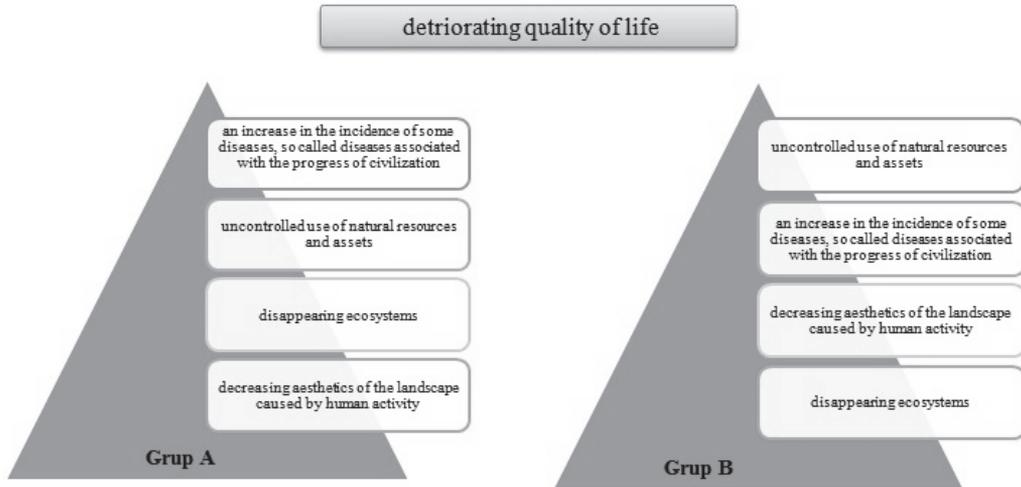
Source: The author's own research based on the survey.

Other areas, indicated by the respondents from Group A, included: an increase in the incidence of some diseases, so called diseases associated with the progress of civilization, uncontrolled use of natural resources and assets, disappearing ecosystems and decreasing aesthetics of the landscape caused by human activity. The answers of the students of non-technical courses are slightly different, which is presented in Graph 2.

On account of the objective of the research, it was essential to ask the respondents about the forms of sustainable consumption, which reflect their concern about the natural environment. The analysis of the research material indicated that the maximum activity in the field of sustainable consumption, both in Group A and B, is manifested in the actions aimed at waste separation, energy and water saving. The detailed listing of the forms of sustainable consumption in the respondents' activities is shown in Table 2.

**Graph 2**

**The opinion of the respondents on the areas of concern for the environment**



Source: like in Graph 1.

**Table 2**

**Forms of sustainable consumption in the respondents' activities**

	group A		group B		total	
	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
While purchasing I pay attention to the type of product packaging	52	97	101	74	153	171
I sort out waste	94	55	116	59	210	114
I save water	98	50	100	76	198	126
I save energy	89	60	121	54	210	114
I buy products from the sales of which the CSR actions are funded (e.g. "Share a meal")	66	93	105	70	171	163
I do not buy products from manufacturers using unfair practices	62	89	73	100	135	189
I buy products of domestic manufacturers	96	56	87	85	183	141
If it is possible I give up driving for the benefit of public communication/cycling etc.	66	93	87	78	153	171

Source: like in Table 1.

While making the assessment of sustainable consumption, the respondents were asked if, facing a wide range of activities in this field, they consider themselves responsible consum-

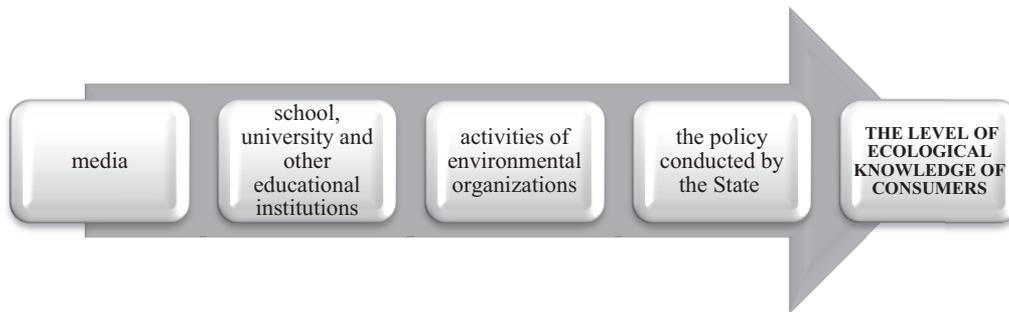
ers. Interestingly, only 29.6% of those questioned acknowledged that their attitude reflects sustainable consumption, whereas such an attitude was reported by 16.6% respondents from Group A and 13% respondents from Group B.

Another issue discussed in the questionnaire was the determination of the level of knowledge concerning the problem of environmental protection. The analysis of the questionnaire indicates that only every third respondent has appropriate knowledge concerning the natural environment. Therefore, in the subsequent part of the study, the respondents were asked about:

- who develops current knowledge in the field of responsibility towards the environment among consumers (Graph 3).
- if education concerning the environmental protection ought to be increased (Graph 4).

### Graph 3

#### The respondents' opinion on the entities developing ecological knowledge



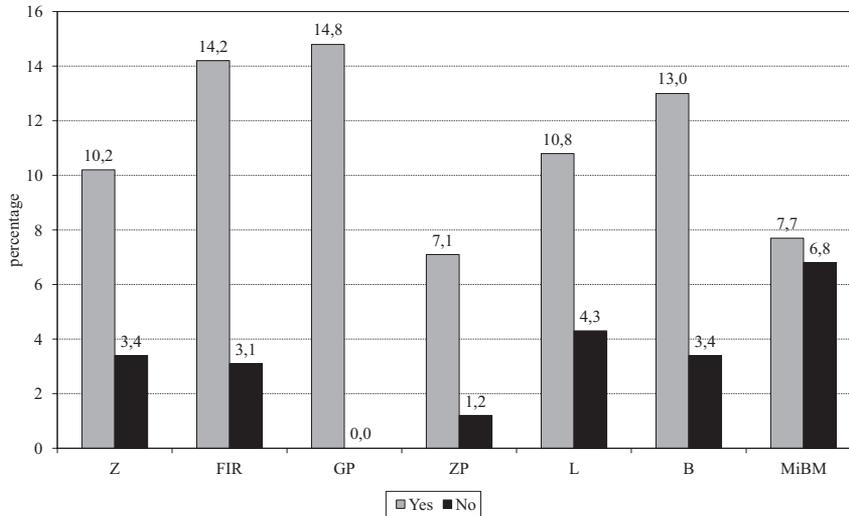
Source: like in Graph 1.

In the light of the conducted empirical studies, it turned out that media, and particularly television, radio, the Internet, are the main carriers developing ecological knowledge among Polish consumers. Such an opinion was expressed by 21.4% of the respondents from Group B and 17.6% from Group A. Subsequently, the respondents in all the groups listed the unit developing this knowledge (school, university) – 33.8 % of the indications.

On the basis of the data included in Figure 3, it can be concluded that in all the surveyed groups, there is an increased need for education referring to both positive and negative impact on the natural environment.

The fact that the respondents from Group B are more aware of buying products having good reputation in the field of CSR - 37.3% of the indications, compared to the respondents from Group A – 21.7% of the indications, deserves a special attention. Therefore, they recommend the products of companies behaving in an ethical and responsible way.

The conducted research has proven that running pro-ecological and pro-social activities by the business sector influences responsible - sustainable consumption, which is confirmed

**Graph 4****The respondents' opinion on the need for education in the field of sustainable consumption**

Source: like in Graph 1.

**Table 3****The value of statistics  $\chi^2$  and  $T$  – Czuprow coefficient for variables characterizing sustainable consumption**

Variable	Value of statistics $\chi^2$	$T$ – Czuprow convergence coefficient
$x_1$	9,30	0,13
$x_2$	1,05	0,04
$x_3$	13,46	0,15
$x_4$	0,20	0,02
$x_5$	8,57	0,12
$x_6$	0,44	0,04

$x_1$  – willingness to buy products of the company implementing pro-ecological or/and pro-social activities,  $x_2$  – the opinion on the companies running pro-ecological or/and pro-social activities,  $x_3$  – the selection of the (socially or ecologically) responsible brand,  $x_4$  – availability of information on responsible behavior of companies,  $x_5$  – awareness of the impact of products/services on the natural environment,  $x_6$  – ethical behavior of companies.  
Source: like in Table 1.

by the examination of the statistical significance indicating if there is relationship between the knowledge of the respondents in the field of sustainable consumption in two groups (the respondents doing technical courses – Group A, and the ones doing non-technical courses – Group B) and pro-ecological or pro-social activities conducted by enterprises.

Due to the fact that in all the cases  $\chi^2 \neq 0$ , it can be concluded that the value of statistics  $\chi^2$  indicates the existence of the relationship between the analyzed variables and the level of knowledge characterizing sustainable consumption (Table 3).

While analyzing the obtained data (see: Table 3), it can be said that the analyzed characteristics showed the existence of poor correlation. The highest value of  $T$  – Czuprow coefficient occurred between the possessed knowledge and the variable  $x_3 - T = 0,15$ , subsequently,  $x_1 - T = 0,13$  and  $x_5 - T = 0,12$ . Therefore, it can be concluded that the isolated three characteristics significantly develop the awareness of consumers in terms of responsible purchase of goods and services. It should be underlined that sustainable consumption is affected by many internal and external factors. However, the examined variables contribute to development of ecological attitudes of contemporary consumers.

## Conclusions

The problem of sustainable development, with particular emphasis on sustainable consumption, is a very important part of the modern economy. Therefore, it can be assumed that sustainable development is simultaneously one of the essential elements of the policy and international regulations, as well as a constant component of the operational and strategic management of the modern enterprise. Moreover, the participation in the market game by a range of its participants, by means of the idea of sustainable development, is not only a need but just necessity. The conducted survey has indicated that the respondents are characterized by relatively poor knowledge of the impact of the purchased goods on the natural environment, though, they take a range of activities in the field of sustainable consumption. Moreover, they care about building the society being aware of its role for the protection of the natural environment. Therefore, in their opinion, the ecological knowledge ought to be increased. It should be noted that the impact on consumer behavior and formation of ecological imperative of actions are lengthy and difficult process. Nevertheless, the vast majority of respondents support the pro- ecological activities in their daily lives, as well as in business operations.

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## Współczesne determinanty zrównoważonej konsumpcji

### Streszczenie

W dobie rosnącej świadomości społecznej o funkcjonowaniu współczesnego przedsiębiorstwa stanowią wiele działań o charakterze prospołecznym i proekologicznym. Taka postawa, związana z realizacją zasad zrównoważonego rozwoju, wynika z faktu, iż współczesny konsument to podejmujący decyzje z uwzględnieniem zasad zrównoważonego rozwoju konsument, świadomy konsekwencji swoich decyzji, inaczej mówiąc konsument odpowiedzialny. Z tego też względu istotne jest podjęcie rozważań odnoszących się do teoretycznych, jak i praktycznych aspektów zrównoważonej konsumpcji w odniesieniu do odpowiedzialnej postawy zarówno konsumenta jak i przedsiębiorcy. W artykule wykorzystano dostępną krajową i zagraniczną literaturę z zakresu konsumpcji zrównoważonej, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem odpowiedzialności w podejmowaniu decyzji zakupowych, popartą przeprowadzonymi badaniami sondażowymi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zrównoważony rozwój, zrównoważona konsumpcja, świadomość ekologiczna.

**Kody JEL:** M14, P36

## Современные детерминанты устойчивого потребления

### Резюме

В эпоху растущей общественной сознательности вопрос о том, как функционирует современное предприятие, решает много действий просоциального и проэкологического характера. Такое отношение, связанное с осуществлением принципов устойчивого развития, вытекает из факта, что современный потребитель – потребитель, принимающий решения с учетом принципов устойчивого развития, сознательный последствий своих решений, иначе говоря, ответственный потребитель. И потому важно приступить к рассуждениям о теоретических и практических аспектах устойчивого потребления с точки зрения ответственного отношения как потребителя, так и предпринимателя. В статье использовали доступную национальную и зарубежную литературу в области устойчивого потребления, с особым учетом ответственности в принятии решений о покупке, обоснованную проведенными зондажными обследованиями.

**Ключевые слова:** устойчивое развитие, устойчивое потребление, экологическая сознательность.

**Коды JEL:** M14, P36

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