

## **CHANGES OF CONSUMPTION DIRECTIONS WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON FOOD CONSUMPTION**

**Joanna Bednarz\***

### **ABSTRACT**

Within last 30 years, in the modern societies, especially those more wealthy ones, relatively deep transformation took place in respect of purchasers' preferences and expectations as well as the values presented by them. These changes also apply to foodstuffs. Food products belong to the ones bought regularly and they take an important position in the structure of household expenditures. The article concentrates on the presentation of changes taking place in the European societies in respect of consumption, with particular stress on the foodstuffs. An attempt was also made to show the specificity of food producers' activities being the response to the current changes.

**Keywords:** *consumption, consumption development, needs, purchasers' preferences and values, foodstuff, food industry enterprises, strategy*

## **CHANGES OF CONSUMPTION DIRECTIONS WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON FOOD CONSUMPTION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Within last 30 years, in the modern societies, especially those more wealthy ones, relatively deep transformation took place in respect of purchasers' preferences and expectations as well as the values presented by them. After satisfying the basic needs, these societies turn more and more towards higher values: they expect ensuring their feeling of safety. They demand the rights for acceptance of interests of individual social groups, self-realization and participation in decision-making process. The example may be consumers' expectations regarding safety, which stress that the enterprises aiming at reaching their own objectives solely, would not act to

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the disadvantage of the consumers. This means establishing conditions in which the purchasers may influence the course of economic processes in such a way that their interests were fully incorporated in the policies realized by the manufacturers. These activities assume the permanent informing of the consumers about: products' characteristics and packing, conditions of their manufacture, selling strategies – what results in rational consumption both in the individual as well as social scale (Kramer, 1997).

Foodstuffs are the goods purchased regularly and they take an important position in the structure of households' expenditures. They are of a key meaning for people as they allow them satisfying not only the basic needs. Doubtless, they are one of the factors contributing to health preservation and to a balanced physical and mental development. They are also the way of expressing care and love towards others. Last but not least, they can also be the source of pleasure and the tool of acceptance, or even a way to distinguish oneself in the surrounding, as they allow attaining recognition and prestige (Senyszyn, 1995).

Food market in European countries is characterized with a high supply which allows full satisfaction of the people's buying needs and it creates conditions for diversification of the nourishment ways. Almost all European countries, including Poland, reached a high nutritive level which, compliant with the FAO classification, is defined as the absolute overconsumption (an average 24-hour consumption is over 3000 kcal per person) (Rosiak, 2007).

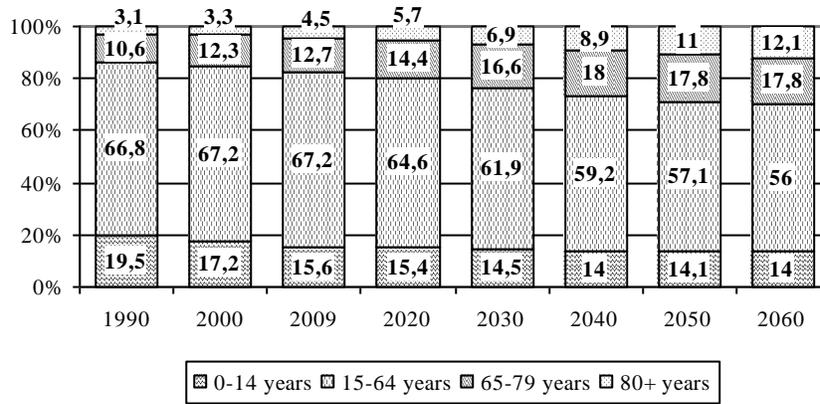
This article aims at the presentation of changes taking place in the European societies in respect of consumption, with particular stress on the foodstuffs. An attempt was also made to show the specificity of food producers' activities being the response to the current changes.

### **DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE ACTIVITY OF CONSUMPTION GOODS' MANUFACTURERS**

Societies undergo demographic, social, cultural, and economic changes. Among the demographic processes, one should note that population is getting older what is the effect of the decreasing number of births and longer life-average (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

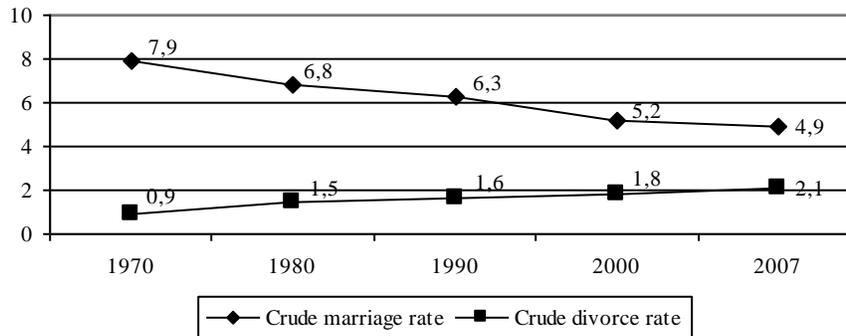
A basic consuming unit – a family – is being essentially transformed, too. This is an effect of transformation of the traditional family model, increase of women's and older persons' professional activity, decrease of the number of children and a decisive change of their role in the process of making decision about the goods' and services' purchase. The phenomenon of solitude becomes more and more frequent, due to the growing number of one-person households, what in turn is the result of a substantially decreasing number of marriages and increasing number of divorces (see Figure 2).

**Changes of Consumption Directions with Particular Emphasis on Food Consumption**



**Figure 1: Population Structure by Major Age Groups, EU-27 (% of total population)**

Source: Eurostat



**Figure 2: Crude Marriage and Divorce Rate, EU-27 (per 1000 inhabitants)**

Source: Eurostat

**Table 1: Population age by major age groups (%)**

	0-14 years old		15-64 years old		65 years old or over	
	1990	2009	1990	2009	1990	2009
<b>EU-27 (1)</b>	<b>19,5</b>	<b>15,6</b>	<b>66,7</b>	<b>67,1</b>	<b>13,7</b>	<b>17,2</b>
Belgium (2)	18,1	16,9	67,1	66,1	14,8	17,1
Bulgaria	20,5	13,4	66,5	69,2	13,0	17,4
Czech Republic	21,7	14,1	65,8	71,0	12,5	14,9
Denmark	17,1	18,3	67,3	65,8	15,6	15,9
Germany	16,0	13,6	69,2	66,0	14,9	20,4
Estonia	22,3	14,9	66,1	67,9	11,6	17,1
Ireland	27,4	20,9	61,3	68,0	11,4	11,0
Greece	19,5	14,3	66,8	67,0	13,7	18,7
Spain	20,2	14,8	66,3	68,6	13,4	16,6
France (1)	20,1	18,3	65,9	65,0	13,9	16,7
Italy	16,8	14,1	68,5	65,8	14,7	20,1
Cyprus	26,0	17,1	63,1	70,1	10,8	12,7
Latvia	21,4	13,7	66,7	69,0	11,8	17,3
Lithuania	22,6	15,1	66,6	68,9	10,8	16,0
Luxembourg	17,2	18,0	69,4	68,1	13,4	14,0
Hungary	20,5	14,9	66,2	68,8	13,2	16,4
Malta	23,6	15,9	66,0	70,1	10,4	14,1
Netherlands	18,2	17,7	69,0	67,3	12,8	15,0
Austria	17,5	15,1	67,6	67,5	14,9	17,4
Poland	25,3	15,3	64,8	71,2	10,0	13,5
Portugal	20,8	15,3	66,0	67,1	13,2	17,6
Romania	23,7	15,2	66,0	69,9	10,3	14,9
Slovenia	20,9	14,0	68,5	69,6	10,6	16,4
Slovakia	25,5	15,4	64,3	72,5	10,3	12,1
Finland	19,3	16,7	67,4	66,5	13,3	16,7
Sweden	17,8	16,7	64,4	65,6	17,8	17,8
United Kingdom (2)	19,0	17,6	65,3	66,3	15,7	16,1
Iceland	25,0	20,8	64,4	67,5	10,6	11,6
Liechtenstein	19,4	16,4	70,6	70,7	10,0	12,9
Norway	18,9	19,0	64,8	66,3	16,3	14,7
Switzerland	17,0	15,3	68,4	68,1	14,6	16,6
Croatia	:	15,4	:	67,3	:	17,3
FYR of Macedonia	:	18,1	:	70,4	:	11,5
Turkey (2)	35,0	26,3	60,7	66,9	4,3	6,8

(1) excluding French overseas department

(2) 2008 instead of 2009

**Source:** Eurostat

## **Changes of Consumption Directions with Particular Emphasis on Food Consumption**

The above mentioned demographic changes influenced to a considerable extent the modifications of enterprises' marketing strategies. In the field of product strategy, a greater meaning is ascribed to products for older persons. This pertains to unprocessed and diet food, natural cosmetics, adequate models of apparel, and special services. The distribution policy and communication ways take into consideration the expectations of the elders. When making purchase decisions they follow their habits, value a direct contact with the shop assistants and they expect them to "take care" of elder purchasers. Deep changes took place also on the market of children's products. Smaller number of children in the family causes that the parents are prone to buying more expensive products, often of famous brands. Moreover, the fact that the children play a great role in the purchase decision-making process made the manufacturers send special advertising information just to them. Besides, the growing number of singles living in the societies caused that the manufacturers' market offer was broadened by luxury and snobbish products whereas the service providers developed special cultural and leisure offers.

Substantial changes in distribution result from a higher level of activity (mainly the professional one) of societies. The speed of shopping became the main factor of development of the assortment (comfortable products) and form of sales (mail-order sales, home deliveries) as well as of the factor for choosing shops located conveniently, with extended working hours, ensuring complete shopping possibilities and speed payment systems (hypermarkets, commercial centres). The demographic processes influencing the goods' distribution development encompass also the changes of population distribution. They are related to the assumptions of the spatial development plans. At present, two tendencies are visible. On one hand, a part of inhabitants decide to live in small towns at the distance of 20 – 30 km from cities, where they work. On the other hand, young people having an extensive sociable and professional life prefer more luxurious places to live in, located in the city centre. Both trends result in decreasing frequency of shopping, but in a greater volume at one time, and this requires an adequate adaptation of distribution solutions.

### **DIRECTIONS OF PURCHASERS' PREFERENCES AND CONSUMPTION DEVELOPMENT**

Specific features of the contemporary European societies are also social, cultural and economic transformations, being reflected, among others, in the consumption values presented by the purchasers. The most important are:

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- rejection of the '70s 20<sup>th</sup> century consumption civilization based on the quantitative consumption growth – in order to underline the qualitative consumption aspects which ensure higher life-standards,
- increasing number of critical attitudes and uneasiness related to efficiency of the realized economic policy, functioning of political and economic institutions; as well as ability of solving social problems and anxiety about the future, lack of security,
- striving for individual development and full realization of an individual,
- greater meaning of the free time as an important component of life, which allows attaining individual targets and values,
- change of women's social situation seeking self-realization outside home rather than within family bonds,
- greater meaning of values such as youth, health, good appearance, and physical condition; realization of these values is aided by looking for "healthy", safe, and natural products,
- awareness of the ecological threats.

When making purchase decisions, the purchasers are often driven by the following motives of selection of goods and services:

- prestige – in certain circles, possessing of defined goods is "compulsory",
- ecology – the "comeback to nature" trend,
- variety – consumers like frequent changes, sometimes even extreme ones,
- dynamics – nowadays, the life-style fixes the border between youth and maturity,
- self-realization – consumers are very versatile, education does not determine the job possibilities and the work performed does not decide about the kinds of leisure activities,
- disloyalty – consumers less frequently pay attention to the brand, they like trying, taking advantage of offers and promotions,
- haste – determines the life-style of the majority of consumers,
- telephones, computers, internet – often, the consumer does not have to go out to buy all products that he needs.

The directions of consumption values' development mentioned above force the economic producing and trading entities to act in such a way as to face the customers' new requirements. One of them is the necessity of adapting the qualitative offer to the purchasers' expectations. Simultaneously, it should be stressed, that consumers are less and less stereotyped, they show active attitudes, are critical towards the enterprise activity and products offered. It is more and more difficult to satisfy them, because they have strictly defined needs and expectations which are their attitude in respect of transformations of the surrounding world. Moreover,

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they more and more often make decisions in a rational way, although they are also changeable as far as making decisions and market behaviour are concerned. Quality, and mainly the quality-price relation of a given goods became a decisive factor of competition. This is supported by tailored and ingenious promotion campaigns, as a better educated and prepared consumer will not be seduced by emotions – he expects reliable information on the product, which would make his choice easier.

Striving for higher life quality, the consumers become more sensitive to original, unique character of the products which they buy. Demand for products and services which make personal development possible and which allow expressing individuality is growing considerably. What is more, the modern buyers suffer from lack of free time and more and more often they look for products and services which are time-saving. That is why the manufacturers and traders who formulate marketing strategies must know the day/week points on the customers schedule when time-saving is extremely important for them (meal preparation, for instance) as well as fields constituting the sources of personal satisfaction on which they want to spend more time (for example works at home interior, tourist activities, participation in sports and cultural events). An offer matching these fields should take into regard diversified consumers' expectations and increasing level of their education.

The tendency to be closer to nature opens possibilities not only in the branch of healthy food and apparel made of natural raw materials, but also in various fields of human activity (such as gardening or spending time outdoors). Care of health and outer appearance carries with it the propagation of the modern world diseases' prophylaxis and a growing demand for health services. This contributes to an exceptional development of "health marketing" (Mazurek-Łopacińska, 1998; Garbarski, 1998).

### **SPECIFICATION OF FUNCTIONING OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY ENTERPRISES**

Food products belong to those bought regularly and they take an important position in the structure of household expenditures. The barrier restricting demand for foodstuffs is first of all the population income. It should be noted however that the feature characteristic of the globalization era countries is stratification of people, in respect of the incomes, and consequently – of the level and structure of consumption (Gulbicka & Kwasek, 2006). The wealthier a given country's society is, the higher the level of its food needs satisfaction. The consumption level is growing, its quality is improving and the structure of consumers' expenditures is

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changing. As a rule, after having satisfied the basic food needs (physiological ones, compliant with Maslov's hierarchy of needs), new ones appear, related to satisfaction of mental and sociological needs. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that in the food industry the Engel's law is valid, according to which, parallel to the growing incomes of people, the income portion allocated to purchases and consumption of foodstuffs is decreasing. Instead, the level of expenditures for industrial goods and services is growing. Hence, enterprises interested in expansion on foreign markets should analyze, among others, the level and rate of the GDP growth in a particular country. When the income grows, the consumers' buying capacities grow too, along with the possibilities of selling of the enterprise products and offering more specialized foodstuffs.

The food sector presents two contradictory processes – unification and diversification of food consumption. The manufacturers tend to unification because of financial benefits – standardization of products contributing to cutting of production and sales costs. In case of food, the process of consumption diversification is also important. It is meaningful mainly for that part of consumers who prefer products from their own country and manufactured by domestic enterprises. A possible solution of this dilemma is the so called globalisation which consists in production and sales of global products adapted to the local tastes and preferences. In general however, it could be said that consumption globalization leads to making the consumption models and consumers' behaviour similar to those originating in developed countries, all over the world. Occasionally only and usually for a short time trends appear which are related to imitation of behaviour standards of consumers from other countries, such as Chinese or Japanese cuisines.

The most important factors influencing consumers' behaviour on the foodstuff market encompass also the following factors: economic, demographic and social, cultural, biological and ecological. Among the economic factors, the crucial role is played by the afore mentioned incomes of people as well as prices of consumer and non-consumer goods and services and the possibility of substitution of one article for another one. The demographic factor number one is the problem of societies which grow older. It is true for the majority of European states. As follows from the K. Krot's and E. Glińska's opinion, the elders allocate a greater part of their financial means for food purchase than other members of the household. Due to limited financial resources they take into regard mainly the price. Moreover, important for them are the following product features: quality, convenience and functionality, reliability and usability. Making purchase decisions, they also follow habits, comfortable localization of the shop, personalized service (they like the feeling of being taken care of by the shop assistants) and the

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possibility of social contacts (e.g. with a polite servicemen) (Krot & Glińska, 2011).

Producers of food articles have already noticed the need of food market segmentation, both in respect of the people's age and specific needs of particular groups of purchasers. People who work, whose income is high and who do not have time for meal preparation often use semi-products, whereas older generation expects that the consumed products will help them maintain good physical and mental state and health. Despite the population decline, the market for children food semi-products is developing dynamically. Parents are prone to buy such products as this is convenient and saving the time of meals preparation, the assortment is rich and allows diet diversification, the quality and nutritive value are high what evokes the feeling of trust and safety of the children's health and development. On the market, there are also products of special character, addressed to defined groups of purchasers, i. g. sportsmen and people suffering of various diseases (diabetes, for instance) and of intolerance of certain food ingredients (like gluten, etc.). Demand for products containing pro-health or dietetic ingredients is growing too (vegetable sterols in margarines to aid the consumers in maintaining a proper level of cholesterol as well as magnesium and pro-biotics in dairy products).

As far as culture factors are regarded, the society can be divided into two groups: the young, well-to-do and active consumers open to foreign culture models and those less wealthy and active who will rather value traditional consumption model based on domestic products. Therefore, it seems that food consumption in the nearest years will split into two ways: highly processed with long expiry dates, so called convenient in preparation and cheap, and the one processed to a minimal degree, obtained with natural methods. One can notice parallel works on elaboration of methods of lengthening the expiry dates of products and launching new and modernized products, but on the other side there are works on development of ecological farming and production of natural foodstuffs. Moreover, the current tendency on the foodstuff market makes the producers manufacture food which is safe, cheap and tasty. In spite of the society resistance and negative opinions of a part of scientists, the works on introducing the GMO<sup>1</sup> food continue. Reconciliation of all these features is impossible.

It should also be noted that a broad and diversified offer of assortments, improvement of food quality as well as various possibilities of the system of influencing the consumer which is constantly being developed and perfected by the traders, give the consumers greater possibilities of

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<sup>1</sup> Genetically Modified Organisms.

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choice, in this way creating the chance for changing their attitudes and preferences (Chechelski, 2008). Therefore, it is worth looking closer at the determinants of choice of food products. M. Grzybowska-Brzezińska states that the determinants of choice of food products can be divided into two groups: technological attributes and market attributes. Making the analysis of the first group, it should be noted that the strong factors taken into consideration when selecting food are its freshness and sensory values. In the consumers' opinion, great meaning is carried by such features as healthfulness and traditional technologies of production. The least important feature is the calorific value, although there is a growing group of consumers who regard this factor as important. The group of market-related attributes which have the basic meaning when making food purchase decisions encompasses mainly the price and food quality perception. This statement was quoted here, as it is not possible to define unambiguously and authoritatively what the purchasers mean under the notion of food quality and what their expectations are, as every one of them individually perceives what is of good or bad quality for him. The most common quality criteria are: freshness (expiry date), good, natural taste, health-related product safety, traditional technology, natural additives as well as an adequate nutritive value which is related to the content of ingredients positively affecting their health condition (Grzybowska-Brzezińska, 2010).

The attributes of food products which acquire a particular meaning are also packing and brand. Optimal food packing should be durable in order to carry the food safely home and to protect it during the storing period, and it should give reliable product information. The packing – often referred to as the "silent seller" should attract the client's attention in the selling place and should distinguish the product among the competitive ones. And the brand is regarded to be one of the key factors influencing the food purchase decisions. From the angle of brands, many purchasers perceive the quality of the product itself and the certainty of receiving products which always have the same characteristics, despite the time and place of purchase. In the food branch, the essential elements are also informative, promotional and prestigious functions of a brand. Creation of a food brand is often subject to the origin of the foodstuff. Although the country of origin itself is not a determinant in food purchases, one can still notice a strong impact of consumer ethno-centrism in the moment of comparing the foreign and domestic products (Baruk, 2010).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Summing up the present deliberations, it is worth stressing the need of getting acquainted with purchasers' preferences and expectations and values appraised by them, particularly in the situation of a spectacular rise of

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exports of Polish food (Domański & Bryła, 2010) and the frequent expansion of Polish food manufacturers on foreign markets. In Europe, Polish food is becoming well known and appreciated. The Germans express positive opinions about charcuterie, goose, sweets, and various brands of vodka. For many Czechs the food symbol of Poland is fudges, although charcuterie, pickled cucumbers and fresh vegetable and fruit are also popular with them. Frenchmen took a particular liking to raspberries. An exceptional situation is in Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany. Together with a quickly growing number of Polish emigrants, the food stores there are now offering Polish foodstuffs. The chains which count on the Polish customers are: Sainsbury, Tesco, Morrison, Spar, Booker, and Loris. On shelves in these stores, the basic Polish products appeared: sausages, pickled peppers, and onions, tripe, bigos, vodka, and beer. Our best-sellers abroad are ready-made dishes and cakes for home-baking (Chechelski, 2009).

A detailed knowledge of the potential purchasers' characteristics and of their specific buying preferences becomes particularly important also because of the fact that the food industry has been undergoing - and it is to continue - an intensive globalization process. This is realized due to the possibilities of relatively cheap acquisition of big enterprises, often with the market shares possessed by them (it is possible in particular in the times of the global economic crisis), high rate of return, and a quick development of the branch, possibility of blocking or limiting the competitors' access to the market as well as efficiency in lowering the production costs because of a cheaper and well skilled workforce and cheap raw materials (Sołoninko, 2008; Stańczyk, 2006).

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