



Consumer Citizenship: A Pathway to Sustainable Development?

Keynote at International Conference on Developing Consumer Citizenship,
April, 2002, Hamar, Norway

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2002

For the first time, citizenship is being found in consumption. It is no longer possible to cut the deck neatly between citizenship and civic duty, on the one side, and consumption, and self interest, on the other . . . Consumption, if not anti-citizenship, seems at best a hollow consolation for the absence of a real political autonomy (Scammell, 2000). She tenders the intriguing idea that, when transnational corporations (TNC) flouted their ability to escape state regulation, they inadvertently highlighted their own responsibility for good and bad (now called the corporate social responsibility movement). Scammell also suggests that the phenomenon of TNC social responsibility has triggered the *politicization of consumption*, meaning that groups concerned with environmental, social justice, rights, labour and gender issues have become political participants in the marketplace, something they did not do before! There is a fledgling movement toward seeing the consumer as a concerned citizen, being a citizen first and a consumer second - and that movement is what this conference is about!

The first part of this paper will discuss the familiar concepts of consumption, consumerism and sustainable consumption. The second part will provide a discussion of the familiar concepts of citizenship, sustainable development (especially human and social development) and the newer notions of consumer citizenship and global citizenship. The final section will tender the recent idea of *participatory consumerism* as a way to pull all of these diverse ideas together for the betterment of the human family and its home, the earth.

Part One

Consumption, Consumerism and Sustainable Consumption

Consumption

McCracken (1988) defines consumption as the processes by which consumer *goods and services* are created, bought and used (including disposal). Campbell (1987) defines consumption as the process through which economic resources are used up in the satisfaction of human wants. Durning (1992) notes that consumption is almost universally seen as good in today's consumer society. Ekins (1998) explains that consumption is viewed as synonymous with human welfare and, hence, has become the prime objective of modern consumer societies; the goal of economies is to increase consumption leading to individual material happiness. As is evident, consumption is a concept which has many meanings. From the 1300's to the late 1800's, the word *consume* had negative connotations, meaning to destroy, to use up, to waste and to exhaust. When the meaning of consume shifted, in the early 1900's, to encompass pleasure, enjoyment and freedom, consumption moved from a means to an end in its own right. Living life to the fullest, more and more be damned the consequences, has become synonymous with consumption, with many of the negative consequences we see today (Bouchet, 1996; Goldsmith, 1996). Indeed, "in the late twentieth century, the word 'consumer' is regaining its older, destructive connotations (Gabriel & Lang, 1995, 26).

Consumerism

Gabriel and Lang (1995) recognize that the concept of consumerism means different things to different people in different contexts but it is possible to identify at least five different approaches. They propose that (a) consumerism is the essence of the good life and a vehicle for freedom, power and happiness. Consumers have the ability to choose and enjoy material objects and experiences (services). (b) Consumerism supplements work, religion and politics as the main mechanism by which social status and distinction are achieved. Displaying all of the goods

accumulated gains one prestige and envy - the ideology of conspicuous consumption. (c) Consumerism is also seen as the pursuit of ever higher standards of living thereby justifying global development and capitalism via trade and internationalism of the marketplace. (d) Consumerism is a social movement seeking to protect the consumer against excesses of business and to promote the rights of consumers (concerns for value for money and quality of goods and services). Finally, (e) consumerism is coming to be seen as a political gambit to gain power. States (governments) are moving away from the paternalistic mode of service provider and protector of citizens to privatization of services that can be bought in the private market from corporations.

Leaving off the phenomena of state privatization and the social movement, I am defining consumerism as the misplaced belief (the myth) that the individual will be gratified by consuming. Consumerism, in this sense, is an acceptance of consumption as a way to self-development, self-realization and self-fulfilment (soon to be discussed under human development). In such a consumer society, an individual's identity is tied to what s/he consumes. People buy more than they need for basic subsistence and are concerned for their self-interest rather than mutual, communal interest or ecological interest. Whatever maximizes individual happiness is best, equated to accumulation of goods and use of services (Goodwin, Ackerman & Kiron, 1997). Consumerism, thus constructed, is "economically manifested in the chronic purchasing of goods and services, with little attention to their true need, durability, origin of the product or the environmental consequences of manufacture and disposal" (Verdant, 1997, web citation).

Sustainable Consumption

To be fair, Campbell (1987) observes that "it is not consumption in general which poses special problems of explanation, so much as that particular pattern [of consumption] which is characteristic of modern industrial [consumer] societies" (p.39). The movement against excessive consumerism or negative consumption has been labelled "anti-consumerism" (Collis et al.1994). This movement is gravely concerned with the sustainability of current levels and patterns of consumption. They are concerned with the environmental, economic, political, labour, personal, societal and spiritual impact of excessive, run away consumption. They define consumerism as a social and economic creed that encourages people to aspire to consume more than their share of the world's resources, regardless of the consequences. In a consumer society, one can never have enough and this mind set is not sustainable; as a caveat, not all consumption is bad; the goal is balanced, sustainable consumption.

Yet, the unsustainability of global consumption is stark. More than a billion people are living at a material standard of living that is supposed to be able to support only 400-800 million people and another five billion people aspire to this standard of living, maintained through unsustainable consumption patterns (Jernelöv & Jernelöv, 1993). The richest 20% of the world's people account for 80% of the world's total consumption; conversely, the other 80% of the world accounts for only 20% of total world consumption. Global consumption of goods and services has topped \$24 trillion dollars, annually, but it is not even. A thousand Germans consume about 10 times as much as 1000 Egyptians and produce that much more waste ("Red and green", 1998). A child born in North America or England will consume, waste and pollute more in a lifetime than as many as 50 children in a developing country (Commission on Development of the World

Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), n.d.). The WCRP admonishes citizens to avoid consumption that is destructive to the well-being of others and to be socially responsible and sustainable to future generations and the environment that support the world; that is, they are calling for fair and sustainable consumption in the global village.

Although individual citizens have been writing about the implications of unsustainable consumption patterns for almost 30 years (e.g., Dammann, 1972 cited by Lafferty, 1994), the term sustainable consumption was not popularized until the last decade. Like the concept of consumption, sustainable consumption has multiple definitions, so much so that the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) (1999) is compiling a range of definitions associated with sustainable development and consumption. One such definition is that sustainable consumption addresses the demand side (versus sustainable development which addresses the supply side) and looks at how the goods and services required to meet basic needs and improve quality of life can be delivered in such a way that reduce the burden on the Earth's carrying capacity and do not impact negatively on intra and inter-generational equity. As an aside, Consumers International (CI) also supports a shift from the supply side (production) to the demand side (consumption) as a way to ensure sustainability. The demand side focuses on consumers' choice of goods and services to fulfil basic needs and improve quality of life while the supply side focuses on the economic, social, and environmental impact of production processes (Hurtado, 1997; United Nations, 1998). IISD clarifies that inter-generational equity is the principle of equity between people alive, today and in future generations; that is, consumption in one generation should not undermine the basis for future generations to maintain or improve their quality of life. Intra-generational equity is the principle of equity between different groups of people alive today; that is, consumption in one community should not undermine the basis for other communities to maintain or improve their quality of life.

CI (1997) explains sustainable consumption as the fulfilment of basic human needs without undermining the capacity of the environment to fulfil the needs of present and future generations. Lafferty (1994) suggests that sustainable consumption encompasses sustainable management of resources, considerations for the natural environment and societal processes of change, the promotion of human dignity, quality of life and the perspective of interdependence referring to the interplay between people and environments and the relationships between economies, nationally and internationally. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published a report of sustainable consumption and production in 1997 that strongly urges that the links between consumerism, economic growth and individual welfare receive deeper and more synergetic analysis if OECD countries want to curb the current unsustainable consumption patterns of member countries. What is disappointing about the OECD report is that it recommends that changing consumption patterns "start with practical measures without aiming to influence deeply-held values" (web site citation).

The global movement for sustainable consumption was formalized in 1992 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro. Participants at this United Nations conference developed Agenda 21, the Summit's action plan and major policy document. These participants included more than 175 governments, many transnational corporations, and more than 30,000 delegates representing the disenfranchised and the environment. Hawken (1993, 216) convincingly argues that the official Earth Summit was

less than a success because the UNCED was unwilling to question the (a) desirability of economic growth, assuming that it is an admirable goal; (b) market economy versus a moral economy; and, (c) development process itself in relation to the desirability of economic growth and technological progress at any expense. His critique is central to the premise of this paper - not challenging capitalism leads to the sanction of relentless consumption, a practice that is not sustainable. In its preparations for the Johannesburg 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the UN notes that "despite gaps in implementation, Agenda 21 and the UNCED principles remain as valid as they were in 1992. However, the context has changed" (UNESCO, 2001, P.5).

Part Two **Citizenship**

The first part of this paper developed the familiar concepts of consumption, consumerism and sustainable consumption. This next section will flesh out the newer notions of citizenship, sustainable development (economic, human and social), consumer citizenship and global citizenship in preparation for introducing the idea of participatory consumerism.

Citizenship is defined as the ongoing contribution of citizens to solving community and public problems and creating the world around us (Boyte & Skelton, 1998). Learning and citizenship are life long activities that extend far beyond the formal educational setting (Crews, 1997). Citizenship education contributes to the vision of a transformed world.

Abala-Bertrand (1996) identifies two different sources of the concept of citizenship. First, republican citizenship stresses three main principles: the sense of belonging to a political community, loyalty toward one's homeland, and the predominance of civic duties over individual interests. Second, the liberal tradition of citizenship focuses on individualism and the central idea that all individuals are equal and have inalienable rights (e.g., human rights) that cannot be revoked by the state or any social institution. Both views prevail today and will be reflected in this discussion.

There are three elements to citizenship education: the civil, the political and the social (Abala-Bertrand, 1996; Kerr, 1998). The *civil* refers to community involvement, learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of one's community, including learning through community involvement and service to the community. The *political* refers to learning about, and how to make oneself effective in, public life. This learning encompasses realistic knowledge of, and preparation for, conflict resolution and decision making, whether involving issues in local, regional, national, continental or international affairs. The *social* refers to social and moral responsibilities wherein people learn self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour at work, play and at home - behaviour toward those in authority and toward each other.

Abala-Bertrand (1997) identifies four other dimensions of citizenship education: human rights; democracy; human development and a sustainable development ethic; and, peace at the national and international levels. The inclusion of a human rights component in citizenship education is based on the assumption that all humans are created having equal dignity; all humans have the right to belong to a social and political community; and, that all rights - political, social, civil, cultural and economic - are universal, indivisible and interdependent. Educators should include the dimension on democracy in citizenship education because any

legitimate political power emanates from individual citizens, more so if they have been socialized in the skills of preparation, enforcement and improvement of the rule of law (political, legal and judicial institutions). Citizens need to be exposed to skills suitable for their personal, social, economic and political development if human rights and the rule of law (democracy) are to be sustained. Finally, human rights, democracy and sustainable development of humans cannot be attained if peace is not in place, assured and nurtured.

The ultimate educational objective of citizenship education is an increased rate and higher quality of social participation. The main task for democratic citizens is to deliberate with other citizens about the nature of the public or common, collective good and how to achieve it (Newmann, 1989). Other tasks of citizens in a strong democracy should include debate, deliberation, agenda setting, making public judgements, performing community service by serving in civic and political offices, supporting and working for public interest groups and political parties, and least of all, voting (Barber, 1989). The result should be education that prepares *citizens* to forge agreement in pursuit of the common good rather than participation to advance private, individual self interests, especially via consumption.

Consumer Citizenship

Interestingly, when the idea of *citizen* crops up in a discussion of consumption, it can take on one of two meanings. Some interpret it as the consumer having a vote in the maintenance of the market structure; each time they purchase, they cast their ballot (Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Mayer, 1991). Conversely, a citizen is "a responsible consumer, a socially-aware consumer, a consumer who thinks ahead and tempers his or her desires by social awareness, a consumer whose actions must be morally defensible and who must occasionally be prepared to sacrifice personal pleasure to communal well-being"(Gabriel & Lang, pp.175-176). The concept of consumer citizenship will now be discussed.

Kerr (1998) recognizes the signs of alienation and cynicism among people about public life and participation, leading to possible disconnection and disengagement from it. This disconnection and alienation can transfer to the other roles of the person, including their role as consumer. It is much easier to ignore the impact of one's consumption decisions on other people and the environment if one is disengaged from life and politics in general. If one feels disconnected, feels alone, lacks direction and meaning in life and feels out of control, one will make very different consumer decisions than one who feels part of a larger picture, a connected whole, a global community. Tyack (1997) notes that when citizens lose the sense they can shape institutions, it is no wonder they participate less in civic affairs. This line of reasoning can be extended to consumption - if consumers lose the sense that they can shape the marketplace, it is no wonder they become apathetic and participate less critically in the market. Imagine what can happen if people feel lost in both roles - consumer and citizen! People need to fight their feelings of powerlessness and disconnectedness by developing their sense of community and their confidence that they can make a difference in the world (Berman, 1990), especially in their role as consumer. People need to see themselves as *consumer-citizens* in a life long learning process, with "citizen" meaning a responsible, socially aware consumer willing to make reasoned judgements and sacrifices for the common good (McGregor, 1998).

Kerr (1998) refers to "political literacy" and Bannister and Monsma (1982) refer to "consumer literacy." Why not combine them and strive for a new goal - "consumer-citizenship

literacy? It would then be incumbent on consumer educators to blend concepts from both citizenship education and consumer education leading to a powerful synergy and learning experience. People could be socialized to see the links between being a good citizen and being a good consumer. Actions taken in the marketplace would be construed as impacting democracy and citizenship and vice versa. Different consumption decisions would be made and decisions would be made differently. I equate consumer-citizenship with the challenge facing all nations, how to prepare and equip people for the incredible pace of change in modern society and in the global marketplace and its impact on various aspects of their lives, the lives of others and the environment. The role of consumer-citizenship education would be to help people appreciate their roles and responsibilities as individual consumers at the same time they think about the consequences of their actions on other citizens, communities and societies (adapted from Kerr, 1998). Paraphrasing Berman (1990), curricula could be designed for the development of *consumer-citizenship consciousness*. Becoming socially responsible means using this consciousness to intervene to improve one's ability to live, spend and work together.

Furthermore, each person develops a relationship with society, the world and the marketplace. The way each person gives meaning to that relationship determines the nature of their participation in the society, the world and the marketplace. Berman (1990) eloquently notes that relationships are important because people do not make moral decisions in isolation. This insight has implications given the current isolation and disconnectedness people feel in relation to each other and the market. Moral decisions taken as citizens or consumers lose their meaning in such a barren environment. Such moral free market decisions lead to infringements on the environment, future generations and those living in other countries. If people were sensitized to see themselves as consumer-citizens, a sense of morality, ethics and community could emerge again in the world. A community is a group of people who acknowledge their interconnectedness, have a sense of their common purpose, respect their differences, share responsibility for the actions of the group and support each other's growth. Community is part of citizenship education. If citizenship education becomes associated with consumer education, then it makes sense that consumers become concerned for the welfare of the global community and the impact of their individual and collective consumption behaviour. If there is no civic virtue among people, but only personal and private virtue (Parker, 1989), then consumption may never take on a global perspective wherein people are sensitive to the impact of their decisions on others and the environment. The author agrees with Abala-Bertrand (1996) who said that "social cohesion needs a renewed image of citizenship which is not based simply on economic considerations" (web citation). By extension, consumption behaviour needs a renewed image of consumerism which is not based simply on economic considerations.

Democracy relies on strong, active citizenship inside and outside of government. As well, the economy depends on strong, active consumption behaviour. Both of these, democracy and the economy, are dependent on institutions. The resounding response to the failure of these institutions to deal with common social problems and living conditions has been to restructure or reinvent the institutions. What is needed instead is to reinvent citizenship (Boyte & Skelton, 1998) and, within the argument developed in this paper, reinvent consumers. Citizens and consumers tend to see themselves in narrow roles, not as public actors nor as global consumers, respectively. Boyte and Skelton claim that narrow conceptions of politics and public affairs limit

the roles people can play in public life. In close parallel, the narrow conceptions of the market and the economy limit the roles people play in their consumer life. Few would claim the title of citizen because its meaning has become thin and weak but everyone claims to be a consumer, even though its meaning has become thin and weak as well (Gabriel & Lang, 1995) (some will contest this latter point). The time is right to merge the notions of consumer-citizenship leading to an opportunity to socialize people to be responsible, socially aware consumers willing to make reasoned judgements and sacrifices for the common good. Cotton (1997) notes that the people concerned with the common good possess compassion, ethical commitment, social responsibility and a sense of interdependence between people and between people and their environments.

Citizen behaviour affects the public life of a nation and consumer behaviour affects the nature of the marketplace, locally and globally. From a citizenship perspective, a good consumer would think twice before making a consumption decision that impacted negatively on the life of citizens in other countries. Conversely, from a consumer perspective, a good citizen would think twice before acting in such a way that their voice in the democratic process is lost or compromised. There is profound interdependence between the political, social and economic spheres. Consumer-citizenship can balance this relationship in synergistic ways. It would enable students to gain an appreciation of the links between the values and principles of the market economy and the values and principles of a democracy, often seen to be at odds with each other.

The Centre for Civic Education (1997) recently developed a conceptual framework for Education for Democratic Citizenship comprising five elements: (a) the world, (b) the people, (c) the polity, (d) the government, and (e) the citizen. The citizen is expanded to include relations with the first four elements and with other individual citizens. There is no mention of people in their consumption role. Kroll (1991) provides an intriguing view of the consumer and places them in a citizenship role. He explains that the consumer interest needs to be expanded to include perceiving the consumer as a citizen concerned with the public good. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on how this role can be enhanced or facilitated by consumer education. I propose that merging these two areas of study is a productive way to make a consumer-citizen perspective a reality. Even more intriguing is the notion of participatory consumerism, a notion that I will discuss after I explore, briefly, the concept of sustainable development in relation to consumption.

Sustainable Development

Evans (1994) clarifies the difference between development and economic growth. He claims that development often is brought in from the outside while economic growth is usually initiated from within a country. Construed most broadly, development refers to the goal of improving the general conditions in which human beings lead their lives (eliminating poverty, reducing illness, improving infrastructure, etc.), thereby promoting human well-being. Development initiatives strive for sustainability, institutional capacity and capability, poverty reduction, empowerment, gender relations, environmental protection, feasibility, good governance, dialogue and participation (Mikkelsen, 1995). If done properly, attempts to stimulate economic growth can facilitate development. Sustainability is an economic state where the demands placed upon the environment by people and commerce can be met without reducing the capacity of the environment to provide for future generations (Hawken, 1993).

Sustainable development is defined as a pattern of social and structured economic

transformations (i.e., development) which optimizes the economic and societal benefits available in the present, without jeopardizing the likely potential for similar benefits in the future. A primary goal of sustainable development is to achieve a reasonable and equitably distributed level of economic well-being that can be perpetuated continually for many human generations (Bruntland Commission, 1987). From a narrower perspective, sustainable development ensures that the maximum rate of resource consumption and waste discharge, for a selected development portfolio, would be sustained indefinitely, in a defined planning region, without progressively impairing its bio-productivity and ecological integrity.

The primary objective of the sustainable development is to reduce the absolute poverty of the world's poor through providing lasting and secure livelihoods that minimize resource depletion, environmental degradation, cultural disruption and social instability (Barbier, 1987). To be sustainable, development must improve economic efficiency, protect and restore ecological systems, and enhance the well-being of all peoples (IISD, n.d.). Introduced in 1990, by the United Nations, sustainable human development is development that not only generates economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably; that regenerates the environment rather than destroying it; that empowers people rather than marginalizing them. It is development that gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing for their participation in decisions that affect their lives. It is development that is pro-people, pro-nature, pro-jobs and pro-women" (UNDP, 1994, p.iii). Taking direction from this definition, I extend the idea of sustainability to be a moral and ethical state, as well as an economic and environmental state, wherein sustainable consumption patterns respect the universal values of peace, security, justice and equity within the human relationships that exist in the global village. Put more simply, not only should consumers be concerned with the impact of their decisions on the environment but also on the lives and well-being of other people.

This line of thinking enables us to bring human and social development into the discussion. There are parallels, but distinctions, between the notions of social development and family and human development. While social development is concerned with promoting social progress relative to economic progress, human development is concerned with the empowerment of individuals and family units that make up society and are the backbone of the economy. In order to have social development, we have to have human development and vice versa - they operate in concert and are hard to distinguish but the following section will attempt to do describe each one.

Sustainable Human Development

Sustainable human development is a process that enhances the capacity of people to share visions and values, to deliberate together on the common good, to define goals collectively, and to build strategies to reach them. At its heart is the belief that human beings are the agents of change -- that people must define their own development. Sustainable human development is thus rooted in people's active participation -- not just to fulfill their economic and social needs, but to voice their concerns and perspectives on their society and government, to contribute to shaping their destinies. Building sustainable human development will require considerable changes within our own northern societies and governments. We must affect trade and finance flows, consumption patterns, regulation of transnational companies, immigration and refugee policies, and our own use of the global commons (Canadian Council for International

Cooperation, 1996).

The concept of human development has two sides: (a) formation of human capabilities (human capital) and (b) use of those capabilities to lead a long and healthy life, be educated, enjoy a decent standard of living, gain political freedom, and secure human rights and self respect (Doraid, 1997). Human development is a way to fulfil the potential of people by enlarging and enhancing their capabilities and their choices and this necessarily implies empowerment of people, enabling them to participate actively in their own development. Human development is also a means since it enhances the skills, knowledge, productivity and inventiveness of people through a process of *human capital* formation broadly conceived. Thus, human development is people centred not goods centred or production centred. It can be seen as an end and as a means to an end. It is about enriching lives and human well-being beyond the notion, within consumer societies, of material enrichment. Investing in the formation of human development should result in more sustainable development. It is important to note, however, that the stock of human capital (knowledge, etc. possessed by human beings) will deteriorate if not maintained and that is where social development comes in (Griffin & McKinley, 1992).

Sustainable Social Development

Social development is more than creating human capital (the objective of human development). Social development refers to the context within which human development occurs and

implies, not only that individuals gain improved skills, increased knowledge and higher levels of physical well-being [human development], but also that they enjoy equal opportunity to employ their skills productively, and a sufficient degree of economic security to make possible stability and satisfaction in their lives. Similarly, social development is related to political freedom and stability, but is much more than formal constitutional democracy. Social development implies not only that people have a voice in government, but also that they enjoy certain basic human rights, that they live in equitable and just societies, that they are free to make choices in their personal lives, and that they are able to carry out their daily activities free from fear of persecution or crime. (UNRISD, 1993, web citation)

The World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/thematic.htm>) says that *social* development is development that is equitable and socially inclusive; promotes local, national and global institutions that are responsive, accountable and inclusive; and, empowers poor and vulnerable people to participate effectively in development processes. Table One profiles the aspects of daily life that have to be taken into account in order to ensure social development.

<p style="text-align: center;">Table One - Dimensions of Social Development</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">as set out in the 1969 UN Declaration on Social Progress and Development, the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Plan of Action, and the Geneva 2000 Summit (Eurostep, 2000)</p>
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- " access to basic education, completion of primary, and closure of the gender gap
- " a life expectancy of no less than 60
- " reduced mortality rates of infants and children under five
- " reduced maternal mortality
- " food security (access, safety, quantity and cultural relevance)
- " reduction of malnutrition
- " primary health care so people are healthy enough to lead socially and economically productive lives
- " productive employment in equitable and favourable conditions of work
- " income and wealth distribution
- " access to family planning and child care facilities
- " reduce malaria mortality and morbidity (occurrence and death)
- " elimination and control of major diseases
- " increase adult literacy, with emphasis on gender
- " access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation
- " affordable and adequate shelter for all
- " provision of community services
- " comprehensive rural and urban development to ensure healthier living conditions
- " transportation and communication systems
- " reduce discrimination against women
- " reduce poverty

Most documents generated around the Geneva 2000 World Summit on Social Development (five year follow up to the 1995 Copenhagen Summit) tendered long lists of initiatives related to achieving social development but none referred to consumption activities of citizens. In fact, the final document that was released from the Summit (available at <http://www.iisd.ca/wssd/copenhagen+5/index.html>) sets out 10 Commitments for future action in Part III. As expected, there are sections on poverty eradication, employment, social integration, gender equality, education and health. The section on a Commitment for an Enabling Environment, within which social development can be achieved, is quite revealing. There are 21 recommendations, one being the encouragement of corporate social responsibility. There is **no** mention of consumer social responsibility (see <http://www.iisd.ca/vol10/enb1063e.html>). Indeed, even though the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development recognized that, within the Commitment to Social Integration, there is a *crisis of responsibility*, it did so in relation to institutions, not individuals (UNRISD, 1993).

Interestingly, the discussion around the Geneva 2000 Commitment to Social Integration is quite relevant to this conference, since it refers to stable, safe, peaceful and just societies based on inclusiveness, citizen participation, solidarity, cooperation and dialogue. I think it would be quite easy to introduce the notion of consumer citizenship in conjunction with a discussion of social development but this is somewhat compromised by the perspective taken at the Summit in regards to the role of markets. Participants recognized the role of a dynamic, open and free market to help people attain social development (access by Majority consumers to the Northern

markets for products and trade) but it did not appear to address the role of the consumers in the North and the impact of their consumption decisions on Majority citizens and the environment.

None of these three types of development - economic, human and social - are sustainable in a consumer society where few people give thought to whether their consumption habits produce class inequality, alienation, or repressive power. They are concerned with the "stuff of life" rather than with "quality of life, least of all the quality of life of those producing the goods and services they consume. A consumer society is one in which discretionary consumption has become a mass phenomenon, not just the province of the rich or even the middle class (Schor, 1999). Consumption in a consumer society leads to materialism, defined as a culture where material interests are primary and supercede, are even subservient to, other social goals (Friedman, 1993). Durning (1992) claims that people living in a consumer culture attempt to satisfy social, emotional and spiritual needs with material things. When this happens, the role of being a citizen is superceded by consumer activity driven by selfish acquisition, or worse yet, uncritical acquisition, naive to the consequences of consuming behaviour.

Global Citizenship

Getting people to see themselves as global citizens first, and consumer second, is complicated by the reality that people tend to see themselves as citizens, or members, of one nation to which they feel they owe loyalty and expect protection rather than as a citizen of the world. This particular sense of citizenship has evolved from clear lines being drawn between us (within our nation) and them (outside our geographic boundaries) (Hewitt-de Alcántra, 1997). This insider/outsider dimension of citizenship raises real problems in a discussion about consumer citizenship and is further exasperated by the individualism inherent in a consumer society. And, to be fair, Richard Falk questions whether citizenship is the appropriate concept for building an ethos of solidarity beyond the nation state (as cited in Hewitt-de Alcántra). Falk argues that citizens bond with each other, within their nation's borders, as a way to resist the abusive elements of globalization thereby further alienating them and fostering the exclusive us versus them. This alienation is strengthened in a climate that stresses the *benefits* of competition and individual advancement rather than the *obligations* of citizenship. To further complicate matters, Alastair Davidson (as cited in Hewitt-de Alcántra) confirms that, although the word *citizen* is difficult to translate in many languages, each society has a tradition of civic commitment and this diversity adds to the complexity of this issue. We are fortunate that the notion of *global citizenship* paves the way for the genuine acceptance of the idea of a global society rather than a consumer society.

Andrzejewski and Alessio (1999) suggest that global citizenship refers to understanding one's responsibilities to others, to society and to the environment by: examining the meaning of democracy and citizenship from differing points of view including non-dominant, non-western perspectives; exploring the various rights and obligations that citizens may be said to have in their communities, nations and in the world; understanding and reflecting on one's own life, career, and interests in relation to participatory democracy and the general welfare of the global society; and, exploring the relationship of global citizenship and responsibility to the environment. As well people need to understand the ethical implications and dimensions of their behavior in personal, professional and public life and need knowledge and skills to be responsible citizens at all levels.

Global citizenship nurtures collective action for the good of the planet and promotes equity. As citizens, each person has equal rights. Global Citizenship hinges on people recognizing that they are members of a community of peoples who share a single planet. The challenge is to build people's understanding that they have a stake in the well-being of that planet and its people. Opportunities must be taken to debate issues of collective concern and to participate in meaningful action. As global citizens, people would be prepared to take action in multilateral fora. Moreover, their views and actions on local or domestic issues would be informed and tempered by an awareness of the impact that local action can have on the quality of life in the world at large. People would value justice, fairness, equity and hold a profound belief in the inherent dignity and rights of every human being (Canadian Council for International Cooperation, 1996).

Oxfam's (2000) discussion of a global citizen is very useful. A global citizen is one who (a) is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role in that world as a citizen, (b) respects and values diversity, (c) is willing to act to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place, and (d) takes responsibility for their actions. Bryer (2000) notes that a global citizen knows where and how they fit in the wider world and has the potential to develop the understanding and the skills to make an impact for the better. They are self-aware because of being open and sensitive to others. Their sense of self - of self-identity and self-confidence - is the more grounded because they better understand the whole, and see how they are linked into, and connect to, the world. Their sense of self-esteem will continue to grow because they know they can act to make a difference. He adds that being a global citizen is not just about understanding, attitudes and values; it is about standing up, standing out and taking action - participating in the world as a citizen. This brings me to the idea of participatory consumerism.

Part Three

Participatory Consumerism - A New Consumer Citizenship Concept

Because consumerism sets each person against him/her self in an endless quest for the attainment of material things (Verdant, 1997), it is a real challenge to get people to see themselves as consumer citizens in the global sense. In reality, few people give thought to whether their consumption habits produce class inequality, alienation, or repressive power. They are concerned with the "stuff of life" rather than with "quality of life," least of all the quality of life of those producing the goods and services they consume or of the environment. Durning (1992) claims that people living in a consumer culture attempt to satisfy social, emotional and spiritual needs with material things. Wisalo (1999) suggests that such consumerism occurs because of humans' insecurity in their hearts and minds. Ironically, people allegedly consume to gain this security. He says that people feel they can become a new person by purchasing those products which support their self-image of whom they are, want to be and where they want to go.

Regrettably, this approach to becoming a new person, to developing a sense of self, is unsustainable. People "under the influence of consumerism" never feel completely satisfied because owning something cannot help one meet the security of heart and mind, the deeper needs of humanity. Constantly spending and accumulating only gives short term fulfilment and relief from the need to have peace and security in life. But, I propose that people can't help themselves if they see themselves as just a consumer. People behave as they do in a consumer society because they are so indoctrinated into the logic of the market that they cannot see anything

wrong with what they are doing. Because they do not critically challenge the market ideology and what it means to live in a consumer society, they actually contribute to their own oppression (slaves of the market and capitalism) and the oppression of others who make the goods and of the natural ecosystem. We have discussed this already under the label of unsustainable consumption patterns.

I think a fundamental question that is driving this conference on consumer-citizenship is can they help themselves? Are they too programmed in the consumer culture to change their ways? I think the answer is that it is not too late, that people can be enabled to engage in 'participatory consumerism' in their role of consumer citizens. Hewitt-de Alcántra (1997) declared, the starting point of *citizenship* is the attempt by ordinary people to impose order in chaos, and there is no doubt that their relationship with the market economy is chaotic and in need of rearrangement!

Participatory consumerism would be about personal and social transformation for the liberation of oppressed people in their consumption role. People who are oppressed are being exploited and taken advantage of due to their circumstances and who feel they cannot flee from, or change, what appears to be, irreversible conditions. Strong, unsustainable consumption behaviour patterns develop (behaviour that negatively impacts all three types of development), having been formed and unchallenged over a long period of time (paraphrased from Freire, 1985). Participatory consumerism would involve people creating new knowledge drawn from deeper insights into their mind and their heart about why they are consuming. These insights involve reflection, value clarification and socially responsible decisions that take into account known and unknown social, ecological and generational consequences. Reflection involves exploring one's own experiences in a conscious manner in order to acquire new understandings and new behaviour patterns (Suojanen, 1998). Participatory consumerism would produce a compassionate culture in addition to the existing consumer culture, maybe someday replacing it. The intent of participatory consumerism would be equitable communities and societies that maintain, for the time being, a free market structure characterized by justice, peace, security and freedom. Eventually, those practising participatory consumerism strive for an economy of care, a moral economy to replace the current capitalistic driven market economy (Goudzwaard & de Lange, 1995; Korten, 2000).

People would be the essence of participatory consumerism, not just money and profit. It is recognized that we all have to consume in order to meet daily, basic needs. But we do not have to do this at the expense of our soul, others or the ecosystem. To reiterate, participatory means a state of being related to a larger whole by taking part, sharing and contributing. Consumerism from this perspective would embrace ethical and moral issues, spiritual wellness, ecological soundness and both rights and responsibilities.

Transformational participation entails participation in such a way that sustainable results that will continue when the initiative is completed. Transformational participatory consumerism would involve evolution wherein people would see themselves as world citizens first and consumers second. As Gabriel and Lang (1995) so aptly phrased it, a citizen is "a responsible consumer, a socially-aware consumer, a consumer who thinks ahead and tempers his or her desires by social awareness, a consumer whose actions must be morally defensible and who must occasionally be prepared to sacrifice personal pleasure to communal well-being" (pp.175-176).

Hence, the notion of participatory citizenship is relevant in this discussion of participatory consumerism. Participatory citizenship involves discussion among people about public issues shaped by listening, talking and acting such that the world changes for the better. Applied to consumerism, similar public discourse would involve the implications of current consumption behaviour on the lives of others, future generations and the integrity of the ecosystem. Topics would include human rights, the environment, justice, living and working conditions, peace, security, freedom, and cultural sensitivity. This consumer dialogue goes a long way toward augmenting the current narrow consumer dialogue about how to get the best buy and value for dollar spent and how to protect the rights of the domestic consumer (safety, information, choice, redress etc.) while at the same time ensuring profit for the firm and an appropriate regulatory role for government; that is, how to balance consumer, business and public interests.

Participatory consumerism would involve active reflection prior to, during and after purchase decisions. Reflective participation (Newmann, 1989) entails dealing with uncertainty while knowing that choices have to be made and action has to be taken (this action could be a decision not to purchase). Moral issues have to be dealt with, referring to disagreements people may have about values that justify personal consumption actions. Reflective participation in the marketplace would also involve consciously deciding what one is going to reflect upon, appreciating that the main focus is to formulate a position on a purchase decision and then win support for it, internally and externally. Gaining this support involves being accountable to mutual interests as well as self-interest. Reflection allows one to step back from the immediacy of a situation and examine one's beliefs, attitudes and past behaviours in a dispassionate manner (Jackson, 1990). This detached reflection flies in the face of the need for instant gratification and material accumulation, features of the prevailing consumer society. Nonetheless, participatory consumerism would involve the dynamic process of action-reflection-revised action. The reflective moment may be prolonged for one type of consumer good or service and short lived for another but the mere act of reflection negates thoughtless purchasing decisions.

Ongoing, active participation in consumption would help people to be ever curious, to take risks in their decision climate of uncertainty, to gain a better understanding of complicated realities comprising the global marketplace, and to gain enough power to work for improvement in their consuming role, and by association, the well-being of global citizens (paraphrased from Smith et al., 1995). Indeed, one can be a consumer while disagreeing and criticizing the marketplace in their role as citizen. An increased sensitivity to one's connectedness to others in the world's marketplace could be referred to as conscientization - gaining a conscience. This personal growth involves becoming more fully human, not just a more efficient consumer. To take us back to the beginning, participatory consumerism involves unveiling the world of oppression of the everyday citizen in their consumer role and expelling the market myths created and perpetuated by free market proponents. The results will be a conscientious citizen participating in their role of consumption with the interests of themselves balanced with the interests of society, future generations and the ecosystem. Perceiving citizens as participating consumers is a powerful way to extend the current dialogue around (a) sustainable consumption, (b) the promotion of human dignity, quality of life (human and social development), and (c) the perspective of interdependence referring to the interplay between people and environments and the relationships between economies, nationally and internationally (Lafferty, 1994) (see Table 2

for a summary).

Table 2- Components of a Participatory Consumerism Approach

public discourse - discussions among people about human citizenship issues, discussions shaped by listening, talking and acting such that the world changes for the better - *expanded consumer dialogue*

people seeing themselves as *citizens first* and consumers second

consumers seeing themselves *related to a larger whole* by taking part, sharing and contributing; that is, participating in their world as citizens who consume to meet basic needs

people *creating new knowledge* drawn from deeper insights into their mind and their heart about *why* they are consuming - reflection

equitable communities and societies that, for the time being, maintain a free market structure characterized by peace, social justice, security and freedom - *eventually* . . . strive for an *economy of care* - a moral economy

a dynamic consumption process of *action-reflection-revised action* due to reflective participation in the global village in one's consumption role

people will gain a *citizen consumer-conscience* whereby they become more human citizens not just more efficient consumers

includes: vulnerability, risk taking, uncertainty, trust, cooperation, public discourse, dialogue, openness with healthy suspicion, and patience with your and others' impatience and fear

Conclusion

Recently, the UN recognized the link between consumption, citizenship and development. The 1998 UN Human Development Report was titled Changing today's consumption patterns - for tomorrow's human development. The premise of this report was to make people aware of how consumption patterns affect human development and sustainability. The author recognized the irony in the fact that human life is nourished and sustained by consumption but that our current consumption patterns are not sustaining all human life. The report recommended 4 S's to illustrate how consumption could benefit human and social development: (a) it should be shared, meaning basic needs should be ensured for all (equality); (b) strengthening - build human capabilities; (c) socially responsible so it does not compromise the well-being of others; and, (d) ecologically sustainable for future generations.

According to the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), governments cannot block the import of a product on the basis of how it is produced (labour conditions, rights, social

justice, environmental concerns) BUT consumers can refuse to buy these products (Meadows, 2001). This type of behaviour can be reinforced if we begin to foster notions of citizenship along with self-oriented materialistic views. Citizens do not just consume; they *contribute* from a complex set of rights and responsibilities (Hayes, 1999). By association, we have to get people to change their perception so they see themselves as citizens first, and consumers second. When people stop and examine their lives, they begin to live more consciously - *the conscious consumer*. Guy (1998) poses a very interesting question, how can we infuse into the traditional economic justifications for action, additional dimensions of inequality and community, social justice and liberty, and the normative limits of the market (p.9 of 17)? Her answer to this question is that we foster the empowerment of the *deliberative citizen*. To put an interesting twist on Frideres (1997) notion of civic involvement, practicing being a consumer citizen could generate positive identification with citizens in the global village, a link that is being threatened by the unending stream of products, ideas and values resulting from neo-liberal, free market globalization. Frideres defines civic involvement as the patterning of how we share a common space, common resources and common opportunities and manage interdependence in that company of strangers which constitutes the public. It is an easy leap to see the public to mean the rest of the world rather than just those living within a nation or a local community's geographic boundaries.

The literature on why people become civically active can inform this discussion of consumer citizenship. Basically, there are those who will get actively involved in this movement and those who will free ride. The incentives for beginning to see oneself in the role citizen first and consumer second are likely purposive in nature (bettering the community, doing one's duty and fulfilling a sense of responsibility) while different motives, in addition to (1) *purposive*, come into play if people plan to continue in the role of a consumer citizen ((2) *material* (quality, integrity, etc. of products and services) and (3) *solidarity* (friendship, a sense of oneness, being part of something bigger than you and personal satisfaction)) (Frideres, 1997).

A recent UN study leads me to believe that there is great potential for youth to begin the journey to be consumer citizens and it is up to us to get them to continue on this journey. In 2001, the UN Environment Program (UNEP) and UNESCO released the findings from their study of youth and sustainable consumption, *Is the future yours?* The report reflects the responses of over 5000 youth from 24 countries. The survey did not ask questions directly related to sustainable human and social development but focussed on environmental sustainability. However, in a general question not specifically tied to consumption behaviour, three quarters of the youth agreed that the biggest challenges for the future are reducing environmental pollution, improving human health and respecting human rights (they felt these are crucial). As well, over two thirds felt that reducing child labour and reducing the difference between the rich and the poor was also crucial. Almost two thirds agreed that they were consuming too much, over half said it was not important that they have a lifestyle compatible with their friends and two thirds had already been thinking about their own consumption. Even more encouraging is that almost half (46%) agreed that citizens were mainly responsible for improving the world rather than government, industry or international organizations (UNESCO/UNEP, 2001).

There is a challenge here in that youth from Northern countries did not see themselves as responsible as those in Majority countries, a disconcerting fact given the reality that it is the

Northern consumer who is most responsible for the unsustainable consuming behaviour. On the other hand, at a 2000 workshop related to the project (youths were there in numbers), it was determined that sustainable consumption definitely has social, political and human rights dimensions and that we all have to consume better by choosing products and services that have less impact on nature and others (UNESCO/UNEP, 2001). This encouraging finding brings me full circle back to the title of my talk - *is consumer citizenship a pathway to sustainable development* and it is obvious that the answer is a resounding YES, especially if we can integrate the concepts of sustainable development and consumption, sustainable human and social development as well as economic development, global citizenship and the evolving notion of participatory consumerism. I am eager to hear the other keynotes and to begin the process of pulling all of this together to advance the concept of consumer citizenship.

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