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## From Pathogenic Consumerism to Sustainable Consumption

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### 1. The pathogenic and destructive consumption

Many social critics describe the contemporary way of life as a pathogenic one. The psychosocial state of mind and the behavior of the people is marked by a weak self-esteem, compensatory activities, consumption, passivity, bustling activity, chronic depression, boredom, greed, inconsiderateness, thoughtlessness, lack of awareness, idolatry and indifference. If one takes a look at structural backgrounds and the global total situation, there are many problems which attract attention: environmental problems, poverty and hunger, climatic changes, species extinction and irreversible changes of the biosphere. The efforts made within the last three decades are by far not sufficient to pacify the global situation. Still the prevailing economies are based on the idea, the priority has the industrial mass production of goods. The „problem of the production“ unresolved in the industrial development model shows up in continuous crises and imbalances: the energy crisis, the environmental crisis, the health crisis, the global disparities at the distribution of goods and prosperity etc. The worldwide available resources do not allow any continuation or expansion of the industrial mass production with its consumeristic lifestyle. The only alternative which still could prevent an ecological disaster is the choice of a new way of life with a sustainable production and consumer orientation. The basis for this is a radical spiritual and mental change of man.

### 2. Toward a „sane“ and sustainable consumption

Erich Fromm occasionally used the term „the sane consumption“. For such a consumption today the designation „sustainable“ became generally accepted. The sustainable consumption describes a consumption which is not consumeristic, not founded on the *having mode of existence*, but stimulates productive effects which are in no way - neither for any living beings nor for the biosphere as a whole - exploiting and damaging. The sustainable consuming is an approximation to the *being mode of existence*. On the basis of a careful attitude the knowledge can grow how people can achieve the necessary outer changes in interaction with the change of their character structure.

### 3. Sustainable changes of the lifestyle

In 1936 Richard Gregg formulated a new concept of lifestyle, based on the ideal of „Voluntary Simplicity“. This lifestyle strives for a lower level of consumption (of consumer goods, of energy) and prefers values such as independence, self-sufficiency and ecological responsibility. When the common possessiveness is given up, the level of living (oriented towards having) can be restricted which makes at the same time larger clearance possible in other direction (oriented towards being). With the voluntary sim-



plicity and the sustainable consuming a new lifestyle arose, appropriate to the being mode of existence.

The need for money and goods is reduced; in doing so stress and fear of life also becomes insignificant. The available free time increases. The changes of the consumer behavior are central. Status oriented conspicuous consumption and shopping as a pastime are refused. The attitude associated with consumption is based on concrete use value (instead of abstract exchange value). Ecologically cultivated and self prepared foods which are healthy and palatable are preferred opposite denatured food like fast food, the necessity of animal protection is taken into account at the same time (e.g. rejection of putting-batteries with chickens). The compulsion to mobility which is accompanied by increasingly larger distances which have to be covered with cars, trains and airplanes is minimized in the planning of life, profession and vacation.

The avoidance of electro-scrap through prolongation of utilization periods (e.g. for com-

puters) und the rejection of electric toys which extend the garbage heap with the batteries and electronic components would be desirable, apart from the damage which it means for the imagination and creativity of the childlike development.

Advertising is rejected because it is a manipulative instrument to produce artificially new needs. To analyze the role of the mass media - particularly those of the television - and to do without the banality of television consumption lasting for hours, is an important stage on the own way to a simple lifestyle.

For all that has to be taken into account, there is no homogeneous lifestyle standing behind the voluntary simplicity. It serves as a comprehensive and collective concept for a wide spectrum of the behavior of people, who feel a tendency towards a more conscious way of life and begin to organize their everyday life in an ecologically sustainable way. This category of people became larger in the past decades.