

Reflections on green and sustainable consumption in contemporary society

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Abstract

The main objective of this essay is to reflect on the interrelations between the concepts of green consumption and sustainable consumption. Having in mind the existence of a widely disseminated environmental discourse in society, as well as the centrality of consumption in this same universe, one can perceive the existence of two opposite models concerning the forms of thinking and acting. While the former is configured as a model of consumption imposed by capitalism itself, and essentially resigns its practices and adopts a discourse that is to some extent convenient, the latter positions itself in a critical way and counts on essentially transformative logic. This reflection, however, does not deal with a comprehensive or definitive view on the subject. It is an exercise that starts from an interdisciplinary reading about the main points shown in the literature. Thus, the texts chosen for the preparation of this work serve not as a systematic review on the subject but, as it were, as inspirers of a reflection that seeks to better understand the issue of consumption in our contemporary society. The points of convergence and divergence in the chosen texts will be duly pointed out in the sense of drawing a path that highlights the understanding of the nature of consumption, especially sustainable consumption.

Keywords: Sustainable Consumption. Green Consumption. Environmental crisis. Symbolic Consumption.

Reflexões acerca do consumo verde e sustentável na sociedade contemporânea

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta reflexões acerca das inter-relações entre os conceitos de *consumo verde* e *consumo sustentável*. Tendo como pano de fundo um discurso ambiental amplamente disseminado em nossa sociedade, bem como a centralidade do consumo nesse mesmo universo, percebe-se a existência de dois modelos totalmente opostos no que diz respeito às formas de pensar e agir. Enquanto o primeiro se configura como um padrão de consumo imposto pelo próprio capitalismo que, essencialmente, ressignifica suas práticas e adota um discurso até certo ponto conveniente para seus propósitos, o segundo se posiciona de modo crítico e aposta em uma lógica essencialmente transformadora. Nossas reflexões não constituem uma visão abrangente ou definitiva. Trata-se de um exercício que parte de leitura interdisciplinar dos principais pontos indicados na literatura pertinente. Assim, os textos selecionados para a confecção deste estudo não servem como uma revisão sistemática acerca do tema, mas como inspiradores de uma busca para melhor compreender a questão do consumo em nossa sociedade contemporânea. Os pontos de convergência e divergência nos textos selecionados são devidamente apontados, com vistas a traçar um caminho para a compreensão da natureza do consumo, especialmente o sustentável.

Palavras-chave: Crise ambiental. Consumo sustentável. Consumo verde. Consumo do simbólico.

Reflexiones sobre el consumo verde y sostenible en la sociedad contemporánea

Resumen

El presente ensayo tiene por objetivo principal realizar algunas reflexiones acerca de las interrelaciones entre los conceptos de consumo verde y consumo sostenible. Teniendo como telón de fondo un discurso ambiental ampliamente diseminado en nuestra sociedad, así como la constatación de una centralidad del consumo en ese mismo universo, se puede percibir la existencia de dos modelos totalmente opuestos en lo que se refiere a las formas de pensar y actuar. Mientras que el primero se configura como un modelo de consumo impuesto por el propio capitalismo, que esencialmente ressignifica sus prácticas y adopta un discurso que le es, hasta cierto punto, conveniente, el segundo se posiciona de una manera crítica y apuesta en una lógica esencialmente transformadora. Esta reflexión no se trata, sin embargo, de una visión completa o definitiva acerca de la temática. Es, tan sólo, un ejercicio que parte de una lectura interdisciplinaria de los principales puntos señalados en la literatura pertinente. Así, los textos escogidos para la confección de este trabajo sirven, no como una revisión sistemática sobre el tema sino, como inspiradores para una búsqueda para comprender mejor la cuestión del consumo en nuestra sociedad contemporánea. Los puntos de convergencia y divergencia en los textos escogidos serán debidamente indicados con vistas a trazar un camino hacia la comprensión de la naturaleza del consumo y, especialmente del consumo sostenible.

Palabras clave: Crisis ambiental. Consumo sostenible. Consumo verde. Consumo simbólico.

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INTRODUCTION

This article presents reflections about the interrelations between the concepts of *green consumption* and *sustainable consumption*. Against the background of an environmental discourse widely disseminated in our society, as well as the centrality of consumption in this same universe, it is possible to see the existence of two totally opposite models regarding the ways of thinking and acting. While the former is a pattern of consumption imposed by capitalism itself, which essentially re-signifies its practices and adopts a discourse to some degree convenient for its purposes, the latter is critically positioned and bets on an essentially transformative logic.

However, our reflections do not constitute a comprehensive or definitive view on the subject. It is an exercise that starts from an interdisciplinary reading of the main points indicated in the pertinent literature. Thus, the selected texts for this study are not a systematic review on the subject, but as inspirers of a search to better understand the consumption in our contemporary society. The points of convergence and divergence in the selected texts are duly pointed out, in order to chart a way to understand the nature of consumption, especially the sustainable one.

This brief study follows a trail. Besides the introduction, we present a theoretical discussion about the relations between the processes of production, commerce and consumption. Next, we discuss aspects related to the nature of the symbolic consumption and its relations with the contemporary society. Thus, we discuss the main differences between the concepts of green consumption and sustainable consumption. Finally, we present our conclusion.

PRODUCTION, COMMERCE AND CONSUMPTION

Currently, we live in a society that can be characterized as highly consumerist, both regarding its most varied products/items as their various spaces. Such reality is related to the fact that we are inserted in a capitalist economic system that seeks the profit - using diverse strategies and action sectors.

In this way, we walk on an inseparable triad, essentially based on the processes of *production*, *commerce* and *consumption*, which, from the beginnings of humanity, has established close relations. Particularly, with regard to commerce, Cleps (2004, p. 120) points out that:

Commerce, understood as an urban function, in which goods are exchanged, has its origin linked to the own history of humanity. It arose and developed from the moment when there was a surplus of production, as a result of the development of the productive forces, which led to the trade system. Thus, the improvement in the means of production, generated by the improvement of new techniques, increased the production and, consequently, intensified the commercial activity.

According to the author, the origin of commerce assumes a prominent role in history, because it stems from the close relation between production, commerce and consumption, mediated by other needs.

It should be noted that, in this context, the consumption of individuals was mediated by primitive needs, that is, the exchange of products of basic necessities (such as food). Another important point is that the commercialization did not start from the establishment of an exchange value, but from use value before capitalism was structured as an economic system.

Over time, in different countries and regions, many transformations have occurred and the way in which production, commerce and consumption are treated by society has changed, especially based on the development of new techniques and technologies.

Although discussions about consumption are concentrated in the contemporary period, ahead of its intensification and the changes in its contents (BOURDIN, 2005), it is worth mentioning that, throughout history, consumption has assumed an extremely relevant role in society. In this sense, Vargas (2015, p. 3) points out that:

The human society has its base of growth in the consumption, being present in different forms in the course of the history. First, it was survival consumption, harvesting, hunting, fishing, only what was necessary for the maintenance of life. With technological advances, the invention of money as a market order, the Industrial Revolution, consumption has been changing until becoming a mandatory of economic growth, based on utopian needs, the pursuit of universal happiness.

Consumption, therefore, began to play a central role in society by improving the techniques and development of the capitalist economy. It is necessary to understand that the technological advances introduced by the industrial revolutions have caused significant changes in the social life of individuals, since they have given rise to leisure time - which has become increasingly associated with the time destined for consumption, as Cleps presents (2004, p. 125):

The new technological forms, highly sophisticated, made possible and increased the leisure time. By requiring fewer work forces and, at the same time, reducing the possibility of exploitation of the surplus value from the worker, leisure time becomes fundamental for the reproduction and accumulation of capital. In this sense, from the communication means to advertising and publicity, as well as the dissemination of new ideas, have come to widely influence the current socioeconomic context, provoking the emergence of consumer society.

It should also be emphasized that, not completely dissociated from technological developments, the upsurge of the social division of labor, resulting from the processes of industrial revolution and consequent urbanization, allowed the emergence of social classes dissociated from the productive universe, but that would be directly related to the universe of consumption. This reality, pointed out by Durkheim (1999), makes clear the centrality of consumption in social classes or groups - it is a defining element of their identity and, why not to say, of their tastes (BOURDIEU, 2011).

According to McCracken (2003), the history of the revolution in consumption has important contours in the late eighteenth century, as it becomes more active and formal, becoming a central element of the historical stage. For the author, aspects such as the emergence of new marketers ("marketing professionals"), as well as a whole new communication media, made the number of available goods for consumption considerably expand, being possible to acquire them, more and more, in several commercial establishments. Such a reality led McCracken (2003) to point out that at the end of the nineteenth century the consumption revolution was already consolidated as a permanent social fact, and even, having its own institutional locus (department stores).

In this sense, for Baudrillard (1972) and Lefebvre (1991), regarding contemporaneity, the relations among production, commerce and consumption could be re-qualified in the constitution of the so-called "consumer society". It is characterized much more by *the desire to consume a certain product* than by *the need to obtain it*, that is, the act of consuming would go far beyond the purchase of items strictly necessary for the survival of the individual. In this way, consumption becomes a central element in people's lives. Ortigoza (2010), in studying the consumption practices of contemporary society, emphasizes the fact that we consume not only because of necessity, but to satisfy a desire that sometimes becomes uncontrollable ahead of the logic created by capital to strengthen and increase the consumption pace.

Thus, once is this desire, once is this need of individuals to consume that dynamizes and strengthens the sectors of production and commerce, expanding its action forms with the diversification of products and the massive publicity of advertisements, always aiming to create new "necessities".

About this aspect, Padilha (2006, p. 85) points out that "[...] consumption is determined both by a complex constitutive process of human desires and by the production logic, that is, by the profit logic".

Therefore, in capitalism, the processes of production, commerce, and consumption are the paths that must be traced and perfected in pursuit of profit. For the individual, the consumption of certain products goes far beyond the product itself - seeking what it means, represents, that is, the values that are added to the product from the subjective point of view. Such a point, moreover, is an essential aspect in the next section, to be precise, the understanding of the concept of consumption of the symbolic as well as its importance in contemporary society.

THE SYMBOLIC CONSUMPTION

Several authors have studied the behavior called *symbolic consumption* (LEVY, 1957; ROOK, 1985; MCCRACKEN, 1986; SCHOUTEN, 1991; GAINER, 1995; GRUBB and GRATHWOHL, 1967). According to Rocha and Rocha (2007, p. 72), for such studies, “every consumption act is seen as impregnated with symbolic meaning, being the locus in which are reaffirmed, among other things, identity, belonging, hierarchy, status and power”. In this sense, for the authors, meanings overlap the functional, material and economic dimensions of consumption.

Corroborating this perspective, Willems (2013, p. 141) states that:

At first glance, consumption seems to be an exclusively economic phenomenon, related to satisfying needs, mostly biological. A more accurate examination, however, reveals the cultural conditioning of consumption: the quantity and quality of the consumed goods, the way of consuming them, but above all, the associations that connect to certain forms of consumption point to cultural dependencies.

According to the author, one can understand that the forms of consumption are closely related, essentially, to the cultural aspects and that the symbolic consumption could then be mediated from this aspect, that is, from a cultural dimension.

In line with Sarreta (2012, p. 24):

Consumption can be defined as an ideal that goes beyond the relation with objects and individuals, extending to all historical and cultural records. Logic is not guided by presence; it is in the imaginary of the human being. This way, the act of consuming is an act of satisfaction, of reaching desires that produce intense sensations. Symbolic goods of cultural nature can be, for example, cinema, music and theater, while others are (physical) goods.

In this perspective, the act of consuming would be related, above all, to the satisfaction, the realization and the sensations that the symbolic goods would provoke and expire in individuals.

Cruz (2008, p. 1), in turn, presents the following conception:

Understanding consumption as a dimension of social relationships, it is emphasized that consuming is not limited to buying, enjoying and discarding the product, but it is also linked to information processing that associates social-relational meanings with the marketed product. The buyer looking for a particular product is seeking a solution to his need and believes that a particular product can meet that need. This satisfaction is linked to the relation between created expectations and perceived performance; and consumers base their expectations not only on functional attributes of the product and economic considerations of cost, but also on social identity and norms of social behavior that include it.

Still according to the author, it is evident the strong symbolism that the products carry in themselves, as well as the purchase of such symbols through these products. It is undeniable that marketing has a large contribution to the sale of symbols through products. In this sense, as McCracken (2003) shows, it was through marketing and its professionals that consumption became the guiding element and main definition of modern society. This reality, now fully consolidated, is extremely relevant insofar as it displaces the labor category as the main element of our society, making possible the understanding of social stratification from consumption.

Returning to the symbolism represented by the products, Nogueira, Silva, Lima et al. (2014, p. 2), point out that:

The incentives and impulses given to the consumer for the purchase through the symbology can be represented from the material to the immaterial, from the disposition of a product in the store, to the value that this same product, added to the symbol, that is, what the symbol represents to the consumer individual, which drives the individual in the style or influenced by the environment, culture, whether by personal desire or social influence. Understanding consumer behavior, as well as brand-driven analysis and study, can contribute to the development of consistent marketing action.

For McCracken (1986), however, a major limitation of these studies would lie precisely in the failure to observe that such meanings are in constant flux. For the author, these meanings follow a trajectory that begins with what he calls the *culturally constituted world*, which pass through the consumed products (through the use of propaganda and fashion) and culminate in the individuals that consume (mediated by rituals of possession, exchange, housekeeping and dispossession) – that appropriate from these meanings to define aspects such as identity, position in social space, belonging to groups, status, among many others.

According to the author, the *culturally constituted world* would be the original source of the meanings residing in consumer goods. It is represented by the day-to-day experience through which another world, that one of phenomena, turns to the individual's senses, totally shaped by the beliefs and presuppositions of his culture, determining the coordinates of social action and productive activity (MCCRACKEN, 1986). Among the cultural categories present in this analysis, stand out: time; space; and the collective human creation (distinctions of class, status, gender, age and occupation). Such cultural categories would be important because they determine how lived world is segmented into coherent parts, forming an organized whole.

It is also highlighted, in this *culturally constituted world*, the existence of cultural principles (values, beliefs and ideas) determine how cultural categories are organized, evaluated and constructed. So, certain clothing related to expressions such as “sophisticated” and “delicate” could be associated with upper-class women. In the same way, a song related to a “vulgar” expression could be associated, in our society, with precarious or marginalized social groups.

For McCracken (1986), the meaning present in this *culturally constituted world* is transferred to consumer goods via two instruments: the institutions of advertising; and the fashion system. However, a relational character is observed in these two universes, insofar as the former transfers meaning to the second, while the second also influences the former.

Finally, the meaning would be transferred from consumer goods to consumers through rituals. According to McCracken (1986), ritual would be a type of social action aimed at the manipulation of a cultural meaning for purposes of communication and individual and collective categorization. Thus, it would be an opportunity to affirm, evoke, order, or revise the conventional symbols and meanings of the cultural order. For Rook (1985), the ritual term refers to a type of expressive symbolic activity, built by multiple behaviors that occur in fixed and episodic sequence, and tends to repeat over time. Yet for the author, ritual behavior is dramatically “written” and “enacted” with formality, seriousness, and intensity.

Usually associated with the idea of passage (e.g., the 15-year-old party signaling the end of childhood and entering adulthood, or the trick of freshmen in the universities), rituals are present in modern society in many ways. Examples include: a) media rituals; b) patriotic rituals (flag hoisting or singing the national anthem); c) religious rituals (processions, baptism, marriage, etc.); d) rituals for exchanging gifts (birthday, Christmas, etc.); e) preparation and consumption of food, among others. For Rook (1985), one extremely neglected aspect is the idea that such rituals usually involve the extensive exchange of goods and products that are consumed on a number of occasions.

According to McCracken (1986), there are four types of rituals that convey the meaning of consumer goods to individuals: a) exchange rituals; b) possession rituals; c) housekeeping rituals; and d) dispossession rituals. For the author, exchange rituals would be used to direct the exchange of goods with certain meaningful properties for individuals who, according to the present giver, are “in need” of such properties. In this sense, the woman who receives a particular type of dress as birthday gift is also the recipient of a particular concept of what agents understand about being a woman (meaning). Rituals of possession would be undertaken by the owner of a property in order to establish access to its significant properties. As an example of this type of ritual, one can indicate the actions that individuals establish in order to personalize acquired goods or gains. Housekeeping rituals would be used to carry out the continuous transfer of perishable properties that fade when they are in the possession of the consumer. Finally, the rituals of dispossession would be used to empty the meaning of the goods in order to avoid their loss of meaning or the contagion of their meaning.

According to Rook (1985), there would be 4 elements related to the ritualistic experience: a) ritualistic artifacts; b) script of the ritual; c) roles in ritualistic performance; and d) audience attending and participating in the ritual. With regard to ritualistic artifacts, these could be understood as accompanying or consumed products during the ritual (e.g., candles, food, beverages, jewelry, etc.). The script of the ritual would have the function of guiding the use of the various ritualistic

artifacts; the script would identify not only the artifacts but the sequence and how they should be used. It should also be pointed out that the script of the ritual is performed by a series of roles (e.g., the priest in a wedding ceremony). Finally, the audience is part of the ritual, which watches and participates. In this context, we add to the complexity that involves consumption certain concerns arising from specific or momentary demands. Currently, for example, the dissemination of an environmental discourse has had repercussions in several sectors of society, with fundamental implications in the scope of consumption. With this perspective in mind, we will look at the issue of sustainable consumption in an essentially critical perspective on the next topic.

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND GREEN CONSUMPTION

Talking about sustainable consumption necessarily leads to the discussion about the environmental issue, since it is presented as a “model”, or rather as a form of consumption whose ideal is the environmental conservation.

In this sense, the environmental subject, today, is a debate in the face of consumption, that is, about the consumption patterns of contemporary society, which, in turn, press and overload the use of natural resources. Thus, nowadays, the focus of the environmental crisis would be based on social consumption patterns (PORTILHO, 2005).

However, it should be noted that throughout the discussion about the environmental issue, the focus of the crisis was not always the same. So, it is relevant to take up this history to understand when sustainable consumption has come on the scene in the field of environmental discussions.

As said by Portilho (2005, p. 2),

[...] the political power of the industrialized nations and some scientific groups maintained until the 1970s a narrow definition of the environmental issue. Until then, the crisis was attributed to population growth, especially in developing countries, which would cause great human pressure on the planet's natural resources.

According to the author, the focus of the crisis was initially on the demographic growth of developing countries, which in reality threatened the production rate of the most industrialized countries.

Subsequently, especially after the 1972 Stockholm Conference, it became explicit for developing countries that the industrialized countries were mainly responsible for the environmental crisis, especially because of their production rate (PORTILHO, 2005). In this context, the focus of the crisis has shifted from the demographic growth of developing countries to the production of developed and industrialized countries. There was a scenario of dispute over those blamed for the environmental crisis.

Since then, the environmental issue has definitely been on the agenda in the world's discussions, both for governments as for environmentalists and entrepreneurs, who ended up appropriating from the environmental discourse as a way to increase their products and services.

With the Rio-92 Conference, there was a new paradigm shift around the environmental crisis, as new discussions were taken into account, such as the lifestyle, consumption practices, global environmental problems, among others. Then, there was a change in the crisis perspective, since the production focus is directed towards consumption (PORTILHO, 2005).

Facing this new approach to the environmental crisis, Valentim, Faveri, Kroetz et al. (2012, p. 1) argue that “the aggravation of the environmental crisis has occurred precisely with the globalization and the incentive to consume”; In this sense, the authors point out that “to be able to talk about less impact or sustainable consumption, it will be necessary to radically transform the contemporary way of life”.

From this perspective, Portilho (2005, p. 3) moves towards the following conception:

The environmental impact of consumption was initially defined within the limits of the notion of “green consumption”, concentrating a little later on the so-called “sustainable consumption”. The emergence of the idea of green consumption, and therefore of a green consumer, was only possible, basically, from the conjunction of three interrelated factors: the advent of public environmentalism, from the 1970s on; the “*environmentalization*” of the business sector, starting in the 1980s; and the emergence of concern about the environmental impact of lifestyles and consumption of affluent societies, from the 1990s. With the combination of these three factors, experts, authorities, politicians and environmental organizations began to consider the role and co-responsibility of ordinary people in their daily tasks for the environmental crisis.

It can be understood that, at first, the issue about the environmental impact of consumption was defined from the limits of the so-called green consumption and later on, move towards sustainable consumption. Regarding the concept of sustainable consumption, Silva (2009, p. 118) states that:

It began to be built from the term “sustainable development”, published by Agenda 21, a document that presents the main actions to be taken by governments to combine the need for growth of countries and maintaining the balance of the environment. Among the main themes of this document is the need for changes in consumption patterns, leading to the conclusion that, or we change consumption patterns, or there will be no natural resources to guarantee the right of people to a healthy life.

According to Portilho (2015), the discussion about green consumption shows that it advanced on the conjunction of three basic factors: public environmentalism (1970s); the *environmentalization* of the business sector (1980s); and concern about the environmental impact of lifestyles and consumption of societies (1990s). Thus, it was from the combination of such factors that the role and co-responsibility of ordinary individuals in their daily tasks became explicit for the environmental crisis.

It could be said that this was a consumption model that sought to involve the public sphere, the business sphere and society. Based on it, all environmental responsibility was directed towards society, trying to achieve, specifically, the individual. Hence, those who practice green consumption would be called green consumers. For Portilho (2005, p. 3), the green consumer is defined:

As one that, besides the quality/price variable, includes in his “power of choice”, the environmental variable, preferring products that do not attack or are perceived as non-aggressive to the environment. In this way, the green consumption movement emphasized the ability of consumers to act together, switching an X brand to a Y brand, or even stopping to buy a particular product, so that producers could see changes in demand. Individual actions and choices motivated by environmental concerns have come to be seen as essential and the consumer as responsible, through their daily demands and choices, for changes in the energetic and technological matrices of the production system.

It is important to say that, in addition to the establishment of a consumption model, a consumer stereotype and a specific product standard that should be consumed were created. The green consumer, with his power of choice, fell into a big trap - from which was made one of the main criticisms to green consumption:

Green consumption would attack only part of the equation, technology, not the processes of production and distribution, as well as the culture of consumption itself. The green consumption strategy can also be analyzed as a kind of transfer of regulatory activity in two aspects: from the State to the market, through self-regulation mechanisms; and from the State and the market for the citizen, through their choices of consumption. Thus, both governments and companies would encourage individual responsibility, implicitly or explicitly, through references to consumer power, to the “good citizen” or to the valuation of one’s personal contribution, transferring responsibility just to one side of the equation: the individual (PORTILHO, 2005, p. 3).

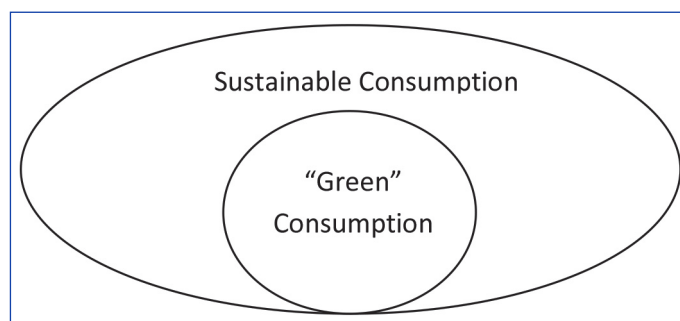
In addition to green consumption reaching only the technological dimension, it also confers all environmental responsibility to the individual (as stressed). By not considering the whole equation, this can be considered one of the main obstacles faced by theorists.

Another criticism related to green consumption refers to the limit of access to green products, since they have a higher cost value, so the access to them is for a small and restricted portion of society (DIAS and MOURA, 2007).

Therefore, green consumption starts to lose space for sustainable consumption, which, in turn, proposes both individually and collectively actions, from the interconnection between production and consumption, seeking to reach a broader field of action - as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Scope of "green" consumption and sustainable consumption



Source: Dias and Moura (2007, p. 5).

In this broader perspective of sustainable consumption, "[...] the environment has ceased to be related only to a question of how we use resources (the standards), to be also linked to the concern with how much we use (levels); therefore, a problem of access, distribution and justice" (PORTILHO, 2005, p. 4). Thus, sustainable consumption starts from the fundamental principle that all parts of the equation must be taken into account.

Regarding the direction of environmental responsibility, it is worth saying that:

If for the green consumption proposals, the consumer was the main agent of transformation - because, as has already been seen, his demands would stimulate the ecological modernization of industries - with the perspective of sustainable consumption, this issue is more complex. If it was possible to say "I am a green consumer", it no longer makes sense to say "I am a sustainable consumer". As has been said before, the idea of sustainable consumption is not limited to changes in the individual's behavior. Nor is it limited to changes in product design or in how to provide a service to meet this new market niche. It is true that it does not fail to highlight the role of the consumer, but does it by prioritizing its actions, individual or collective, as political practices (PORTILHO, 2005, p. 4-5).

It is no longer just an individual but also a collective environmental responsibility - not only with changes in the formats of products and services to reach a specific group, but in the amount in which we consume certain products and resources, seeking to achieve all the equation, and not just a part of it, as in green consumption.

About these aspects, Cooper (2002) presents an analytical proposal (Box 1) set forth in Dias and Moura (2007, p. 7).

Box 1

Approaches to “green” consumption and sustainable consumption

Green Consumption	Sustainable consumption
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consume “environmentally friendly” products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consume less
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essentially positive in relation to consumption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumption beyond basic needs is negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only adjustments in the technological standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in lifestyle and consumption pattern
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the supply side: production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on demand: “end user”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers respond to appropriate information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers want alternatives for acquisition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radical change: urgent and essential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Green” economic growth rather than just economic growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High life quality without environmental degradation (sustainable development)

Source: Dias and Moura (2007, p. 7).

It can be observed from the two models of consumption that they are totally opposite with respect to the ways of thinking and acting. Mainly in the positioning ahead the model of consumption imposed by capitalism, in which green consumption becomes convenient for its purposes, encouraging the consumer to exchange one product for another, while the sustainable consumption seeks, somehow, to assume a more critical position in relation to this model, associating consumption to what is strictly necessary.

Finally, while we recognize sustainable consumption as an advance in relation to green consumption and, above all, as a model of more critical theoretical contribution regarding the patterns of production and consumption imposed by capitalism to the contemporary society, it should not be seen as a magical solution to the global environmental crisis. It should be stressed, however, that sustainable consumption is an important advance that needs to be taken into account.

CONCLUSION

In view of the exposed in this paper, one can notice the existence of a close relation among production, commerce and consumption, in which one generates both direct and indirect impacts over the other. Therefore, these processes are totally interconnected in this new “consumer society”.

Regard to the symbolic consumption, it takes place in the field of various dimensions: economic, social and cultural. In general, symbolic consumption involves the purchase of a particular product by the individual because of the meanings it represents.

About sustainable consumption and green consumption, it was found that, although they are terms that cover the general range of discussions about the environmental subject, they are totally different and theoretically opposed. In this sense, while green consumption prioritizes only parts of the equation in its model, such as the used technology in the production and individual environmental responsibility, the sustainable consumption, on the other hand, starts from a broader vision and action field, considering all parts of the equation, individual and collective actions, as well as the change in production and consumption.

However, although environmental and sustainability concerns are on the agenda of certain sectors, it is worth noting that consumption is now a central element in society, in a context in which people consume much more than the necessary to satisfy desires that support the strengthening logic of the capitalist economy.

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