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## IS CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM POSSIBLE IN A GLOBALISED WORLD? – CONSUMER DILEMMAS IN THE SILESIA VOIVODESHIP

### Introduction

We have been observing a process of shaping a new type of society for the last several dozen years whose frameworks are determined by globalisation. This term is used in a very broad way, including almost all spheres of social life. Together with extending the scope of globalisation in a practical dimension, numerous scientific concepts emerge, trying to give reality a theoretical basis. Nowadays, globalisation appears in the context of technology, the sphere of finance, governing and legal regulations, strategic activities, perception and consciousness. Regardless of new propositions to globalise more and more areas of the world, the core of globalisation includes three elements: economics, politics and culture. Therefore, moving within framework of economic and cultural globalisation is a return to roots; we must remember that such a context appeared in the first attempts to define globalisation (Waters 1995, 2).<sup>1</sup>

Economic and cultural globalisation have, of course, different dimensions (e.g. the globalisation of markets, ownership of capital, lifestyles or cultural identity); however, what is key in the context of the subject of this thesis, is the globalisation of consumption. The attempts to diagnose the essence of this phenomenon are doomed to fail. Globalisation of consumption has the same number of supporters and opponents. A positive aspect of globalisation is associated with the transnational market, which enables to sell and purchase products, regardless of the place of production and intended use. The possibility of using the offer of global consumption met with the approval of people, who belong to the group

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<sup>1</sup> According to data, the notion of globalisation appeared in 1959 with reference to the “globalised number of importing cars.” In 1961, the concept of Marshall McLuhan gained publicity, who treated globalization in a broader manner, creating the basis for the expression “global village,” which is still relevant. Therefore, the roots of globalisation refer to economic and cultural sphere.

of the so-called “citizens of the world,” supporting idea of cosmopolitanism, free of all political, territorial or economic divisions, and also the average “Smith,” for whom an opportunity to purchase products of global brands has become a way to manifest progressiveness, ability to make use of modern technology and confirm his/her participation in the functioning of the global society. A consequence of such state of affairs is a resignation from domestic patterns of behaviour in favour of adopting Western models of shaping consumer identity,<sup>2</sup> often accepted in an unreflective and uncritical way. In the European dimension, it results in the emergence of a purchaser – the “euroconsumer,”<sup>3</sup> with homologous attitudes, needs and preferences. Therefore, this standardisation of consumer space proceeds in two dimensions: on the one hand, the offer of goods and services is standardised, whereas, on the other hand, the taste and preferences of a consumer are not. It is dictated by a number of social and economic factors, the following ones in particular:

- social and demographical factors (aging of society, migrations and emigrations, changes in population density in particular regions);
- economic factors (disproportions between incomes, economic crisis, long-term unemployment);
- cultural factors (new trends and patterns of behaviour of a consumer, changes in the ways of managing of holiday and free time – foreign travels, global communication, popularisation of the English language);
- technological factors (Internet, mobile devices).

The above factors that favour globalisation of consumption do not exhaust the subject; “identical or similar patterns of consumption on a transnational scale are spreading now, creating the so-called global consumer culture” (Bywalec and Rudnicki 2002, 136–137).

Although, there are justified reasons to expand the impact of globalised consumption, the consumer sphere of European Union is not homogeneous. As Tomlinson rightly observed, “international airports can be gates to cultural diversity” (Tomlinson 1999, 83). However, Tomlinson himself is rather sceptical about the possibility of overcoming globalised thinking because the very space of an airport offers mainly “global brands and cultural icons;” yet, the emphasis that

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<sup>2</sup> Reference to more and more popular concept emphasising considerable influence of consumer culture on creating human identity. The propositions that appear in scientific literature (Bauman 2001, 29, Bauman 2006, 59–60, Jawłowska 2001, 57, Hoffman 2000, 277) enable to formulate a thesis that, nowadays, human identity is in fact an identity of a consumer, which is shaped on the basis of his/her patterns of consumer behaviours, which is a basis for classifying and identifying an individual in a society.

<sup>3</sup> In a scientific literature concerning globalisation and regionalisation of consumption, the notion of an euroconsumer appears as a proposition of defining the consumers, who are characterised by similar behaviour within the scope of purchasing and using goods and services on European scale. This concept, although it has some theoretical basis, its conceptual framework has not been developed yet, therefore, each use of this term is put in quotation marks.

the consumers put on their identity, as well as an attachment to local products, produced in their mother country, is becoming more and more popular. Such a view is consistent with the visions of further expansion of globalisation, which can be found in scientific literature. In accordance with the available theories, we have four options to choose:

- pernicious globalisation (emphasising the negative effects of globalisation on human development and functioning of environment);
- inclusive globalisation (emphasising the integrating function, focusing around positive aspects of a phenomenon);
- regional competition (orientation towards the co-existence of globalisation and glocalisation);
- a post-polar world (lack of dominant culture) (Kozłowski 2002, 14).

Therefore, a symbiosis between homogenisation and heterogenisation of consumption is possible. What is more, this cooperation seems to be wholly justified also in the context of the reasons which generate both phenomena. For there is the peculiar fact that the elements supporting the processes of globalisation are also responsible for the diversification of the consumers. They include:

- social and demographical factors (the influx of immigrants, the situation and the social and economic activity of women);
- economic factors (diversifying incomes, structure of consumption);
- cultural factors (religious practices, customs, tradition);
- technological factors (communication practices).

To the group mentioned above, we must add geographical factors (climate, location of a country, atmospheric conditions, land form).

These digressions let us propose a thesis that, although the contemporary consumer of goods and services makes use of global consumer culture, however, he/she cannot be treated as a homogeneous, transglobal euroconsumer. Despite a strong conviction that this thesis is right, the author does not feel entitled to judge if the fact that people seem to be bored with globalisation is an effect of the activities of the producers, interested in protection of domestic products and services, or of the growing awareness of the consumers; I leave judgment about this phenomenon to the readers.

However, we may agree with the words of Vaclav Havel, who said that: the “global civilization, [...] despite its omnipresence and universality has a character of merely an epidermis of general consciousness of humanity [...]. Therefore, modern worldwide and almost homogeneous civilizational ‘epidermis’ obscures the unique diversity of cultures, nations, beliefs, historical traditions and life attitudes. However, what is “under the sun,” together with the development of civilizational epidermis demands voice and a right to live” (Havel 1996, 16–17).

This “epidermis” is becoming more and more aware; more and more often selects these elements from consumer offer, which only meet his/her needs, but also (and maybe, above all) people around him/her. Therefore, there is more

and more interest in eco-consumption, homocentrism, balanced consumption, deconsumption. And finally – consumer ethnocentrism.

### **Consumer Ethnocentrism – Terminology**

The notion of consumer ethnocentrism has many propositions. However, the popular meaning is very simple. It can be described as consumer patriotism, manifesting itself in a tendency to buy products produced within a given country or region. There are more difficulties in specifying whether preferring domestic products is conscious or not. It is also not specified, whether consuming home-made products is dictated by ethical and moral sense of necessity to propagate domestic products or a conviction about their uniqueness and quality.

Academic digressions solve, at least partially, the above-mentioned dilemmas. The word ethnocentrism arose in Sumer's works, who said in 1906 that it is "the way of seeing the world, in which one's own group is perceived as a centre of the world, and everything around is assessed and classified with reference to it" (Khan and Rivizi 2008). This notion, although correctly diagnosed, had no economic dimension. It has appeared in the concepts of Shimp and Sharma, who are precursors of research about ethnocentrism, adding a second element to the term – the "consumer." They gave us a draft of theory, of which basis is a sentence that it is a "conviction shared by the consumers about obligation and morality of purchasing domestic goods" (Shimp and Sharma, 1987).

Current research concerning consumer ethnocentrism are now a permanent part of academic activities; research tool designed by them (Shimp and Dharma 1987) enable to control behaviours of the consumers within this scope.

### **Polish and Silesian Consumer Ethnocentrism**

Whereas in the European countries, such as Germany, France, Austria or Spain (Khan and Rizvi 2008; Luque-Martínez, Ibáñez-Zapata, and del Barrio-García 1998; Sinkovics 2002) observation of consumer ethnocentrism is conducted in a relatively continuous way, in Poland, it does not have a long tradition. Such a need emerged in the moment of the accession of Poland to European Union, what does not mean that this subject was not raised earlier, in the 1990s. Developed at the beginning of 19th century, the theoretical basis of Polish consumer ethnocentrism was dictated by the necessity of taking actions that prevent importing a

mass of products to the country, stimulating also interests of domestic producers in the opportunities that transglobal market offers them. From the point of view of market economy, a chance of making use of globalisation to develop local enterprises emerged, according to the concept of a “process of merging trade economies, manifesting in dynamic growth in trade, international service and capital movements, being an effect of growing tendency to treat the whole world as market” (Bukowski 1999).

Good conditions to expand ethnocentrism emerged at the end of the first decade of this age. The economic crisis strengthened the need of consumer patriotism, presenting protection of local or domestic businesses in a category of fight for the country and opposition to the slow loss of control of the economy as a result of importing goods. The following fundamental reasons contributed to the formulation of a Polish variant of the phenomenon: growth of local/national awareness, stopping negative consequences of economic crisis, protection of interests of domestic society, xenophobic tendencies, sense of superiority and taking care about Polish values and cultural goods, as well as an acknowledgment of tradition and history (Figiel 2004, 16–30; Romanowski 2013, 67).

The following research on Polish consumer ethnocentrism must be taken into consideration: research conducted by the researchers from Catholic University of Lublin, supported by the scholars from California State University (Falkowski et al. 1996), research testing the level of ethnocentrism among students in Kraków and Rzeszów (Szromnik and Figiel 1996–1997), and also an analysis of main factors determining the choice of domestic or foreign products carried out by research team in Szczecin (Zięba and Retmański 2006). The measurements obtained by the Institute TNS OBOP (TNS OBOP 2004) allowed to gather valuable empirical material, and its keynote was the following statement: “By buying Polish products you give jobs.”

Data concerning consumer ethnocentrism for the Silesian voivodeship are mainly based on observations made by the scholars from the University of Economics<sup>4</sup> in Katowice (Kędzior 2003). The fundamental intention that motivated the authors of research was an attempt to determine whether the fact that a given product comes from Poland has an impact on what consumers buy. The results of research show that there is a huge relationship between a given category of products and ethnocentric attitudes. In the case of household appliances and audio/video devices, cosmetics or articles connected with sport, there is a weak tendency to buy Polish goods. The purchasers more willingly buy food products produced in their mother country. Due to the fact that the above-mentioned research was conducted a long time ago, no numerical data are quoted here because they might outdated.

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<sup>4</sup> Now: University of Silesia in Katowice.

Diagnosing factors, which can be recognised as being in favour or against the process of shaping consumer ethnocentrism of the residents of the region is important.

The culture of the consumers of the Silesian voivodeship is strongly determined by political and historical factors. "In Silesia political (early detachment from the motherland), geographic [...] and socio-national conditions [...] were determining the shape and functions of Silesian culture which did not undergo unification processes associated with the development of capitalism in such a significant degree" (Błaszczak-Waławik 1990, 7). Functioning in a place which often changes the country that it belongs to, in a geocentric structure, made it necessary to live with the participation of polycentrism of administration and social structures. The fundamental determinant of shaping consumer behaviours can be the actual, as well as mental perception of area as a border region between cultures, languages and identities: "it is not only about peripheral geographical location but, above all, about peripheral political and cultural location" (Szczepański 2002, 23). This territorial lack of cohesion, played a substantial role in autonomous and separatist movements of the region, placing emphasis on a division between "us" and "them." This categorisation left its mark not only in a process of shaping political or identification-related distinctions but also in formulating a distinct, narrow identity identifying a resident of the region. On its basis, the sphere of consumer space also has been developed, whose basic elements revolved around values and customs of Silesian workers' community (mainly the miners' community), based on the existence within the circle of family and neighbours, fully assimilated and based on consolidation with the settlers. Wódz sees it in this way: "Cultural specificity of Upper Silesian agglomeration was shaped, to a large extent, under the influence of industrialization – the industry, for many years, was defining the rhythm of life of the local communities, their internal organization, professional rituals, patterns of secular and religious rituals" (Faliszek, Łęcki, and Wódz 2001, 20).

Silesian culture, including also consumer culture, is deeply rooted in tradition and the specificity of the miners' environment. Nowadays, obviously, as a result of the collapse of unprofitable branches of heavy industry (including also many mines of hard bituminous coal), the patterns and ways of selecting particular elements from consumer culture are changing; however, basic elements do not change. The latter include: a chain of intergenerational transmission, gender discourse of social roles, a strong sense of local awareness, placing emphasis on tradition, history, values and norms of the region, and also well-developed local patriotism, which strengthens homogeneous attitudes of the society. We may say that the above-mentioned indicators support an attitude of consumer ethnocentrism.

## Regional and Traditional Products – Potential of the Region

Regional and traditional products are considered as the most characteristic manifestations of consumer ethnocentrism, which are treated as a mark of the region, and which are a source of pride for people living in this region. Both these categories of products are perceived as an alternative for mass production, for a mass consumer. Awareness of the significance that regional and traditional products play (and can play) is successively increasing, what is probably dictated by weariness, and perhaps also some sort of disappointment, resulting from the fact that what is American, European or – in general – foreign, not necessarily must be better. Regional and traditional products are controlled by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. In accordance with EU norms, their scope includes “accepting, assessing and sending applications for registration of the names of origins, geographical signs and guaranteed traditional specialties to European Commission” ([www.minrol.gov.pl](http://www.minrol.gov.pl)).

The producers of goods of traditional method of production, established in a period not shorter than 25 years, can apply for entering to the List of Traditional Products. These products should have unique features and properties, which are result of using traditional methods of their production.

On the other hand, regional methods can be produced only in a strictly defined, characteristic region. Here we are referring to food products which feature the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). As in the case of traditional products, they must be made with the use of the traditional method of production. Both these categories of products are characterised by special marking, consistent within the whole European Union.

The first products from Silesian voivodeship, which appeared on the List of Traditional Products were: ciulim lelowski, “Herbski” bread, Silesian krupniok<sup>5</sup> and zozworki/imbirki. It took place on February 28, 2006. There is a large interest in the region in formal registration of products and using the marking mentioned above. Certainly, there can be many reasons of that; for example, economic issues and access to transglobal market. The producers from the Silesian voivodeship perform very well because in the last few years traditional and local products from this region were being sold in the whole Europe. They were also warmly received by the consumers from the United States, Peru, Costa Rica, or Lebanon.

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<sup>5</sup> The first description of the product appeared in documents in 1826. Currently, there is no single recipe for Silesian krupniok, but essentially it is assumed that it is a smoked meat product with buckwheat and blood, to which buckwheat or barley, raw fried or roasted onion are added.

Currently, there are 137 products on the List of Traditional Products in the Silesian voivodeship, grouped into following categories: dairy products (12), meat products (12), fishery products (4), fruits and vegetables (9), confectionery and bakery products (32), oils and fats (2), honeys (3), ready-made meals (56), drinks (6), other products (1) ([www.minrol.gov.pl](http://www.minrol.gov.pl)).

## Consumer Ethnocentrism in the Citizen Initiatives

Although consumer ethnocentrism is most often associated with food products, however, its idea goes beyond this group of consumer goods. This concept is very well understood by the residents of the region, who are actively engaged in – whether with the participation of central authorities or non-governmental organisations – the protection of everything that is local. The number of categories in a cyclically organised competition “Brand – Silesian” may prove its multidimensional way of presenting the subject. This competition focuses on the “selection and promotion of products, companies and undertakings, which, due to its quality, unique virtues and connections with the Silesian voivodeship, are outstanding and exemplary” ([www.riph.com.pl/marka-slaskie-edycja2014](http://www.riph.com.pl/marka-slaskie-edycja2014)). The following categories were also taken into consideration: personality of the year, cultural heritage of the region, economy, culture, science, non-governmental organisations, product, social responsibility of a business, sport, tourism and recreation, service, health and media. The project, supported by local authorities is a great success, proving that people are interested in this subject.

This issue is also raised in the environments emphasising a necessity of an active information campaign at all levels of education. These activities, realised, among others, by Klub Gaja ([www.ekonsument.pl](http://www.ekonsument.pl)) revolve around the raising of awareness about the so-called reliable consumption, cycle of conference and workshop meetings “Kupuj Odpowiedzialnie! Twoje pieniądze kształtują świat,”<sup>6</sup> competitions or exhibitions.

A process of shaping ethnocentric attitudes has also its supporters among actions supporting regional civic activity. For example, the Program Fund of Citizen Initiatives the “Silesian Locally,” stimulating local environment in different, not only consumer spheres.

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<sup>6</sup> Buy Responsibly! Your money shapes the world.

## Is Consumer Ethnocentrism Possible? An Attempt at a Summary

Attachment to local values is an essential element of Silesian culture. It is a good starting point to propagate an idea of ethnocentrism among residents of the region. However, to make it possible, strong conviction is necessary that local products and services may compete or exceed quality of Western equivalents. As Sajdakowska claims: “choice of domestic products requires from consumers having some sort of social and economic knowledge, which allows to make a decision about purchase in a well-thought-out way, in accordance with his/her own preferences and feelings” (Sajdakowska 2003, 177–184). Shaping particular components of consumer attitude must start at an early age, hence, further promotion and creating effective programs incorporated into a system of education of youth and children is necessary. However, it does not mean that the older generation is not able to assimilate (and change) new patterns of behaviour. It is not easy; older consumers, with a burden of communism and the Iron Curtain, still rely on the stereotype that Western = better. Therefore, work on breaking this belief is necessary. Perhaps, a helpful thing to know might be that the trend of protecting *regionality* of a product, brand, producer is strongly emphasised in the countries with a high level of economic development, respecting and appreciating domestic products.

To sum up, it is worth taking a position on main question. Is consumer ethnocentrism possible in globalised society? The answer is: “absolutely yes.” Is it possible in Silesian voivodeship? “Perhaps it is”; a lack of solid, statistical data makes formulating unambiguous answer not possible. However, it seems that this region is ready to accept ethnocentric pattern of consumer behaviours. There is also a hope that the academic environment will examine this subject deeper.

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