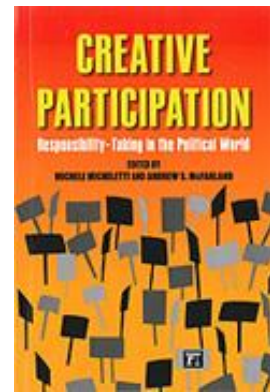
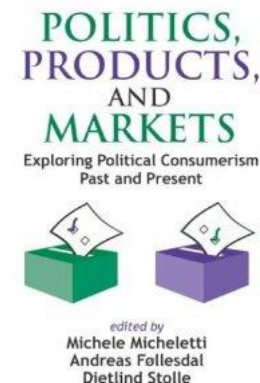


# Political Consumerism: Globalized Responsibility in Action?

1. Research focus – little history
2. Theorizing political consumerism
3. Results from some recent research
4. On-going research



Stolle, Hooghe,  
Micheletti "Politics in  
the Supermarket..."  
2005



# Why Focus on the Market as Arena for Politics

## Political Consumerism/Consumption

**Societal changes:** Globalization, individualization, neo-liberalization processes

- *Governance* limits of & challenges to governmental model (Ruggie, Young), shifts focus from state to others as regulatory institutions & mechanism
- *Economic globalization*: Corporations *more important* as political institutions
- *Neo-liberalization*: Market-orientation; enhanced role of choice mechanism
- *Individualization*: looser politics with more spheres & targets
- Citizenship in practice (“subpoliticians,” “citizen-consumers,” “sustainable citizenship”)
- Other reasons?

# Other reasons

**Postmodernization / post-materialism**: transformation of individual values from materialist, physical & economic to others less concerned about physical security & more about autonomy, self-expression (personal social identity)...

**Risk society**: uncertainties & new risks that government might have difficulty controlling (Beck)

**Ecological modernization**: ecological restructuring of production processes & consumption – pro-growth strategy

## Overconsumption



## **More other reasons: Some scholars focus on *Responsibilization***

1. Offloading of responsibility to solve problems on individuals & other “non-state” actors
2. Part of governmentality discourse (Foucault & others)
3. Part of neo-liberalization & moralization of economic activity
4. Spheres of responsibilization: health, education, climate change, crime prevention. Role of shopping choice here
5. Self-interest orientation – need to take care of yourself & your own community
6. Advantages & disadvantages for societal development???

*From perspective of citizens & political participation*

## ***Individual* responsibility & responsabilization for societal matters**

Individual considerations about the societal effects of one's actions (other-oriented motivations & interests)

Individual considerations about importance of taking care of oneself (self-interest oriented motivations and interests)

## Role of choice: consumption, lifestyle, other areas



# Individualized responsibility-taking: Definition & attributes

Definition: *Reasonable* individual choice involving considerations about the societal effects of one's actions.

Normative element: individuals should engage in reasonable choice-making even when they are not required by law to do so, when it goes against social conventions & can mean suppressing private interests & changing private lifestyle habits.



# Privately- and Publicly-Oriented Consumer Virtues

## Issue of reasonability

**Public virtue tradition in political philosophy 1—**  
doing the good thing (defined as ethical **outcomes**)

Good for the environment, good for animal welfare,  
good for other humans....

Calculate consequences -- *consequentialism*

What ought I do (the right thing) as acting to  
maximize the good



# Privately- and Publicly-Oriented Consumer Virtues

## Public virtue tradition in political philosophy 2

*Deontological* or duty-based approaches

Your actions are judged by their adherence to universal “rules”, norms, guidelines

E.g., concerning climate change (scale back energy consumption, meat eating, driving), global human rights (clothing purchases...)





# Problems with both public oriented shopping virtue theories



1. Require loads of information
2. Too demanding practices: both in terms of calculation & choosing
3. Don't capture complexities & dilemmas of moral action – even when it comes to a dedicated vegan (soya vs. rain forest)
4. Demand too much self-sacrifice (happiness of many over our own happiness/"egoistic morals")



## Sum-Up: Critical views of these virtue theories

Too demanding about self-sacrifice

Require too much information & rational calculation by ordinary people

Unrealistic & incomplete models of personal choice

Fail to register many motivations behind much consumer behavior

Argue that self-orientation/interest can play a role in making the good life

**Other theoretical approaches?**

# Virtue ethics

What sort of person sought I strive to be, how this sort of consideration shapes our actions & lifestyles

Enlightened self-interest in caring for others, personal excellence, societal flourishing, connecting individual to moral self

“**Responsibilization sensitive**” – got to take care of myself & family (spill-over effects)

Consumption = aspect of any social practice



# What is reasonable? Who decides this?

Iris Marion Young's answer about the distribution of responsibility among actors:

**Actor** size & resources matter. Bigger & more = larger degree of responsibility.

Micheletti & Stolle: **Structure** also matters.

Reasonable = assume as much responsibility as your “situation” (personal means, societal context etc) allows. Some individuals can be given more responsibility than others. Which ones?

# Examples of structural conditions

- *Available sensitizing information* – individuals can find it (information-seeking) & use it to make choices (“choice editing”)
- *Reasonable choice architecture* to perform / act out informed choices
- Platforms & institutions where “choice editing” can be performed
- Examples: “buycotting” labeling schemes, corporate information, buying from green markets, ethical clothing stores .....



Scottish  
Fair Trade  
Forum



# Where do motivations come from?

## Forms of political consumerism



Consumer interest & choice of producers & products based on political, environmental and/or ethical considerations

### Four Forms

- Boycott
- Buycotts
- Discursive political consumerism
- Lifestyle politics of consumption



Don't be a mug - give Nescafé the boot  
Stop bottle baby deaths - boycott Nestlé



Visit [Baby Milk Action](#) for  
news and campaigning  
resources



# Not always democracy- promoting



# Actor perspective

## Individualized responsibility-taking

### Typical individual prerequisites in participation study

Individuals need to feel motivated to seek (sensitizing) information, consider choice editing & use choice architecture. Why they consider doing it. What kind of *motivations*? (other- & self-oriented)

*Individual sense of agency/empowerment:*

- *personal background* (SES, demographics, gender, attitudes, values) tend to matter
- a sense of *internal efficacy*: “you matter” belief, your actions, practices, choices matter. Can understand & participate.
- internal v. external efficacy (output efficacy): responsiveness of “target” to actions. EFFECTIVENESS. Real change agent.

# Who are Political Consumers

## Actor focus

Gender

Age

Socio-economic characteristics: education; income

Political preferences: left-right

Values: postmaterialism/materialism

Interest in politics

Urban vs. rural

Religion

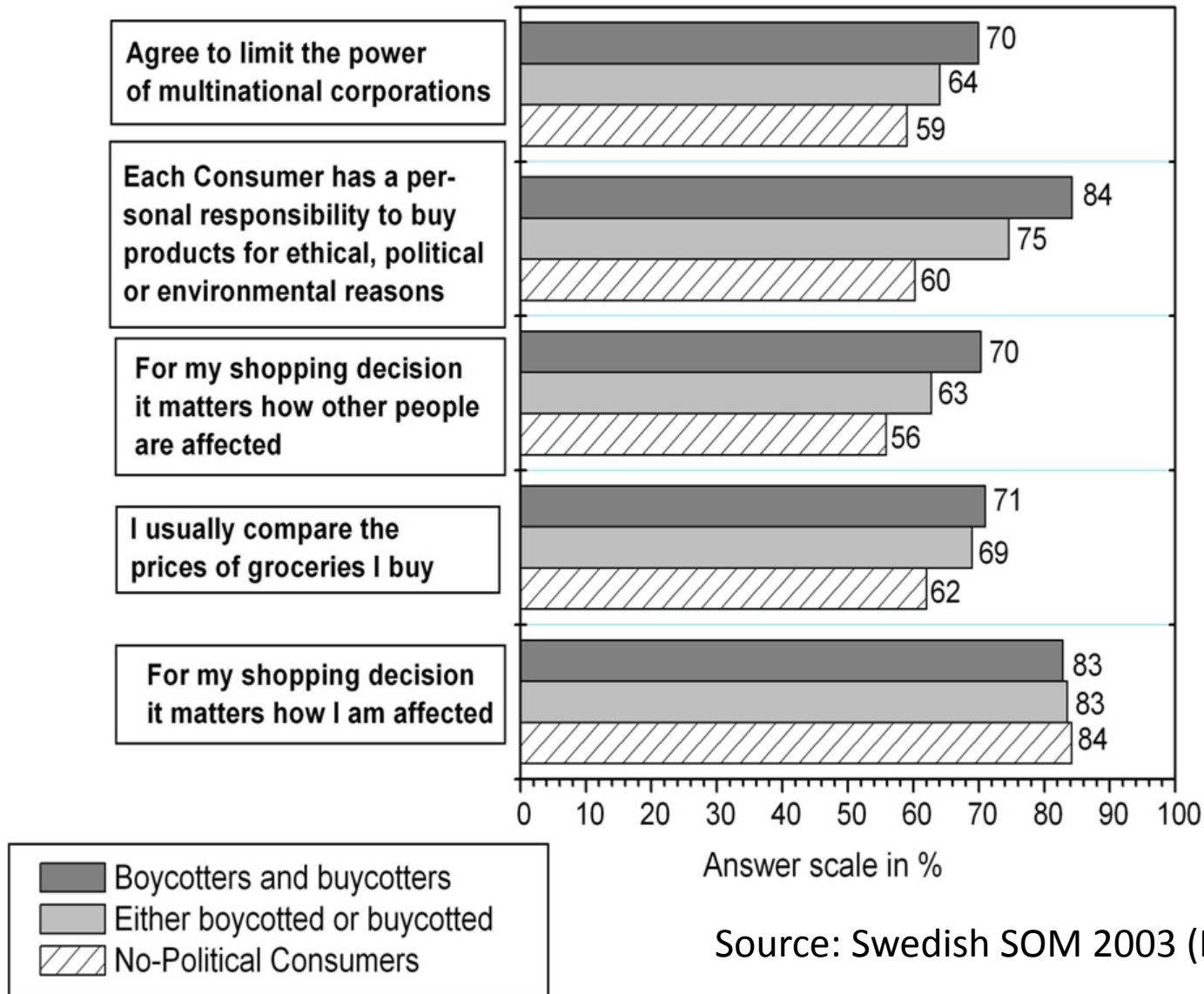
Demographic spread

Etc.



# Figure 2

## Orientations and Values of Political Consumers



Source: Swedish SOM 2003 (N=1,673)

**Table 14.1: Parents and Sustainable Toy Shopping, 2013**

There are many reasons for choosing to buy one toy over another. How important are the following reasons when choosing which toy to buy? Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unimportant and 5 very important.	All	Mothers	Fathers	Gender Significance
Valid N				
Whether they break	93.9	95.8	91.2	***
Whether they are safe	88.9	91.1	85.7	***
Price	84.0	87.7	78.6	***
Educational value	64.1	67.7	58.7	***
Corporate social responsibility of toy company	49.6	59.0	35.9	***
Environmental consequences of toy production	47.8	54.3	38.3	***
Toys my child convinced me to buy	34.1	32.4	36.6	
Special brands	25.5	26.9	23.6	
Toys that keep my children entertained	23.6	24.7	22.1	
Gender neutral toys	17.3	21.0	11.8	***
Those promoted in children's books	11.8	13.9	8.6	**
Those advertised in films	11.3	10.9	11.8	
Toys that the friends of my kids have	6.2	5.5	7.1	
Toys advertised	4.7	4.7	4.7	
Valid	1,002			

Note: Cell entries are percentages of groups of people mentioning these considerations sometimes or often when shopping for toys. The grey shaded cells indicate measures of strong forms of sustainable toy consumption. The item on CSR reflects the interaction between the economic and two strong elements of sustainable development, while the one on gender neutral toys is more an indication of concerns about social equity broadly-speaking. Statistical significances between fathers and mothers are indicated by p values: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

# Why more prevalent in certain European countries?

Socio-economic resources & postmodernization

Economic openness

Price premiums

Political consumer infrastructure – nudging

Political and institutional factors

Social capital (e.g., family & friendship networks)

Religion



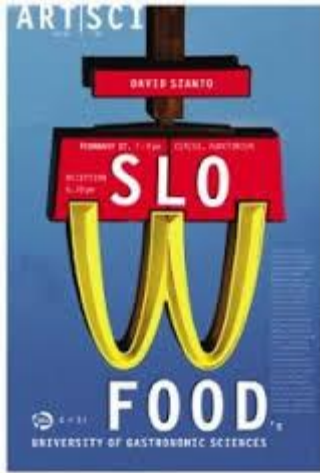
# Life politics & lifestyle politics: Sustainable Citizenship in practice?

**Reflexive modernization** - process of modernization that is characteristic of risk society whereby progress is achieved through reorganization & “reform” (Beck)

**Life politics** - political decisions flowing from freedom of choice as transformative capacity; creation of morally justifiable forms of life that will promote self-actualization in the context of global interdependence; ethics concerning the issue “how should we live” in a post-traditional order (Giddens)

**Lifestyle politics** – politicization of everyday life choices, one’s everyday decisions have global impact & global considerations should affect lifestyle choices

## Examples of lifestyle politics



# RETE GAS LAZIO

Rete dei Gruppi d'Acquisto Solidale di Roma e Lazio



*cittaslow*



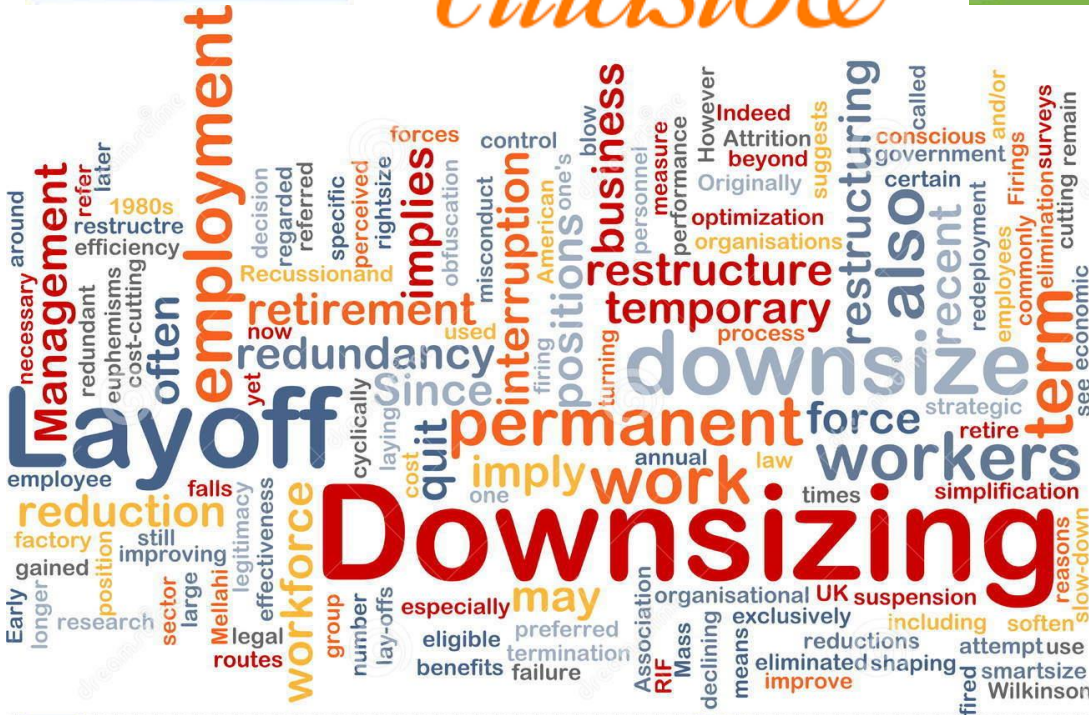
CHOOSE A LIFE OF  
CONSCIOUS SIMPLICITY  
(SIMPLE MEALS, WALKS  
OUTSIDE, MEDITATION,  
COOKING WHOLE  
FOODS) AND YOU'LL  
FIND MORE FREEDOM IN  
YOUR LIFE.

AMIE VALPONE

**simplicity**

less stuff. less work.  
less expense. equals.  
more money. more  
time. more joy.

less equals more



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**Dreamstime.com**

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# Barriers for sustainable lifestyles & individualized responsibility

**Collective action-oriented barriers:** sense of lack of empowerment; free-riders. Helplessness (**actors**)

**Economic & market barriers:** availability, price, quality (**structure**)

**Lifestyle barriers:** habits, routines, time crunch (**resources at actor & structure level**)

# Other barriers

**Social barriers:** family & groups pressures, identity shopping, conventions, conformity, need for belonging, conflicting identities

**Moral licensing:** engage in other-oriented practices in one sphere; off the hook in others (self-oriented splurge) (no much studied)



# Ongoing research & on the research agenda

**Oxford Handbook of Political Consumerism: M  
Boström, P Oosterveer, MM)**

7 sections, some are:

Theory & Designing P.C. Research

Its Industry Sectors (weak & strong)

Geographic Spread & Practice Globally

Democratic Paradoxes & Challenges

Problem-Solving Potential & Successes

(mobilization, targets, governments, outcomes)

# **Democratic Paradoxes & Challenges: History & Today**

Use in religious, racial & inter-ethnic struggles

Contemporary examples of undemocratic use

Sensitive cases

Use in nationalistic struggles in Europe, North America, etc.



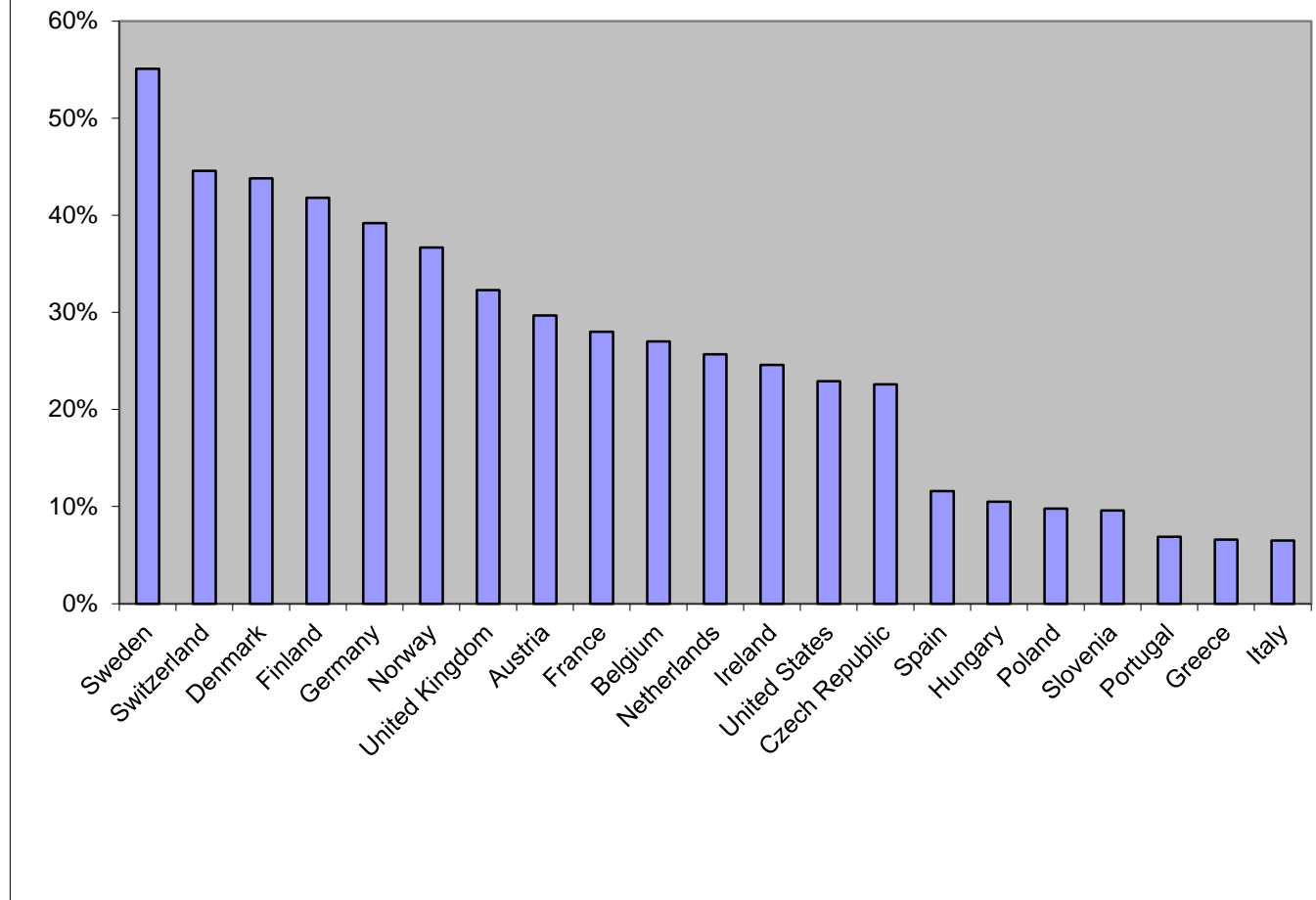
# Sensitive, dilemma-ridden cases

Clear corporate target but diverse mobilizers & messages

DBS movement with clear target & message but support comes from diverse sources

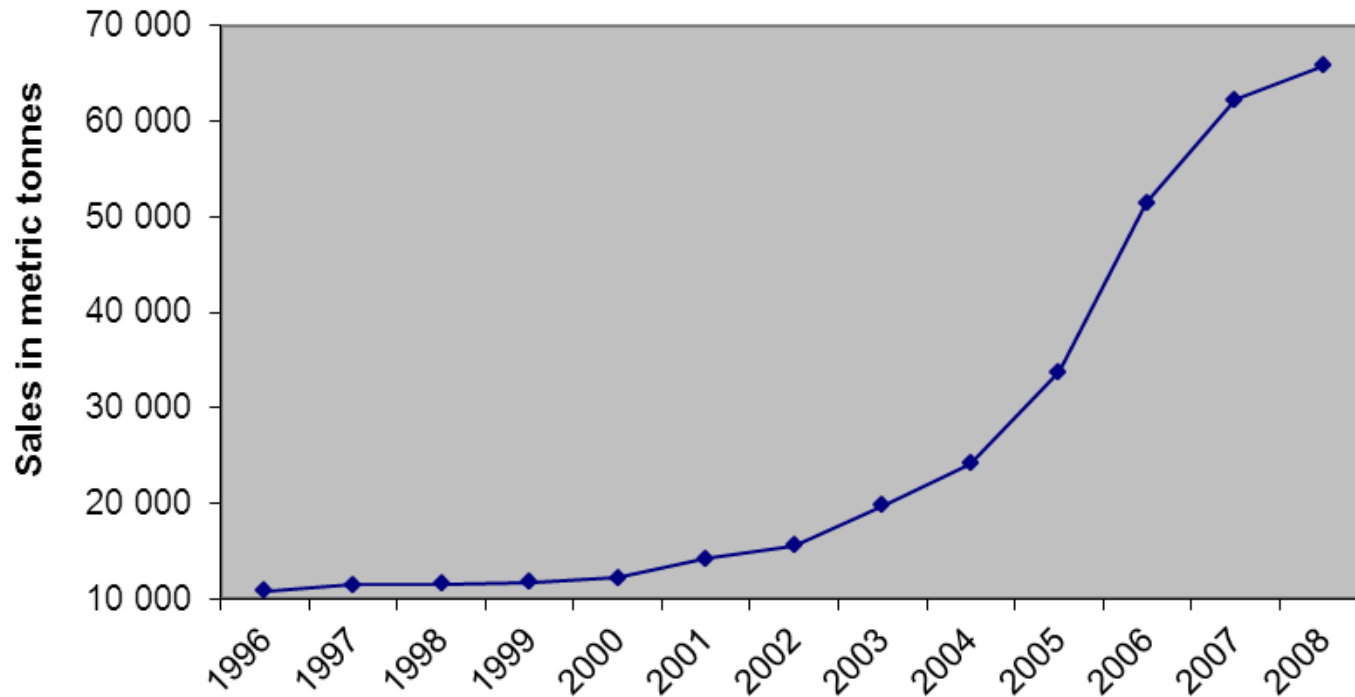


**Percentage of Individuals who Buycott, 2002**



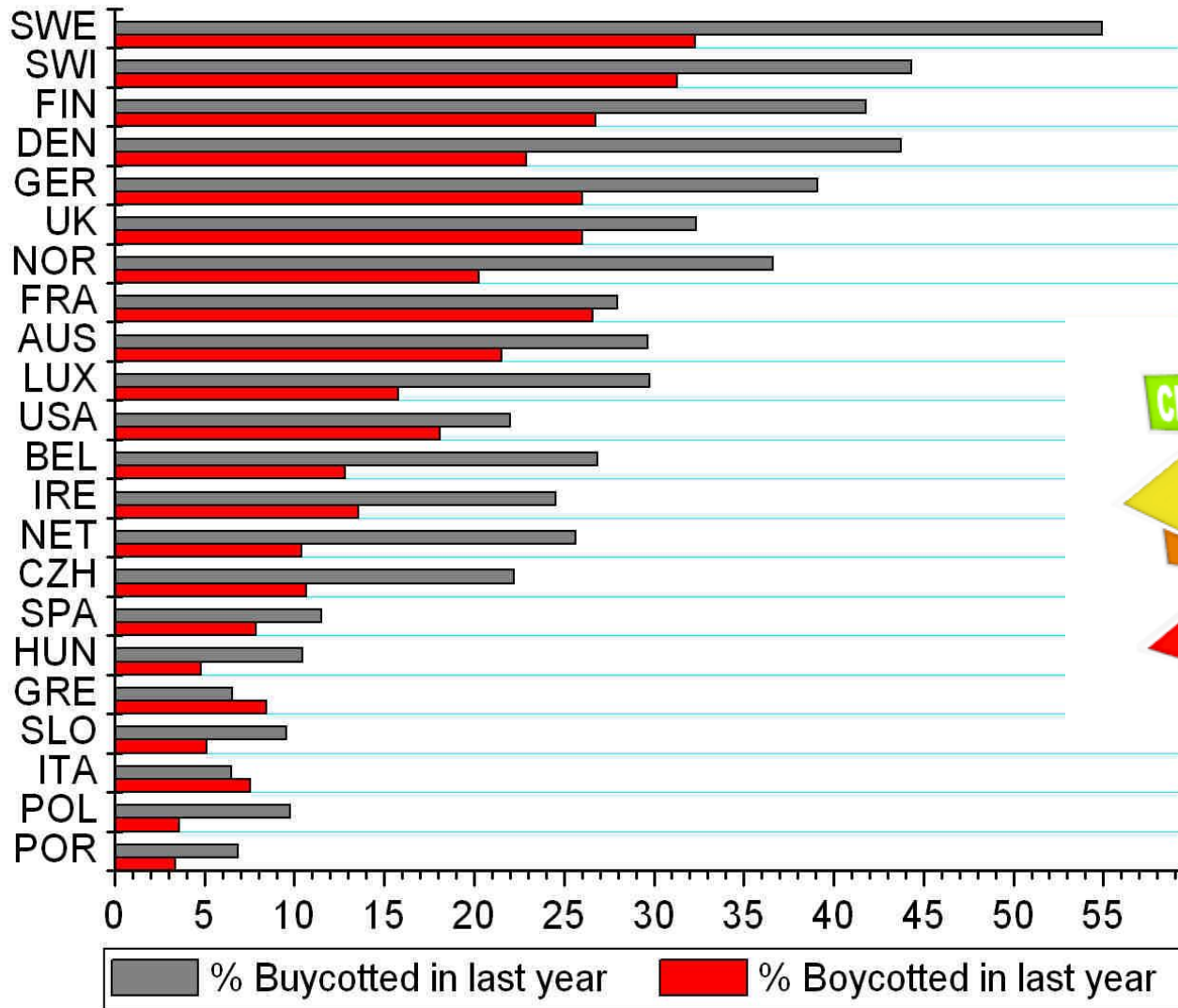
ESS data 2002. Question on whether people have deliberately purchased products for ethical, environmental or political reasons in the last 12 months. Definition of buycott

### Rise in Global Fair Trade Coffee Sales

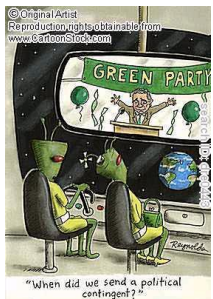


Data represent total volume of fair trade coffee sold each year in selected countries (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States). Source: Fairtrade Labelling Organization International 2005, 2009.

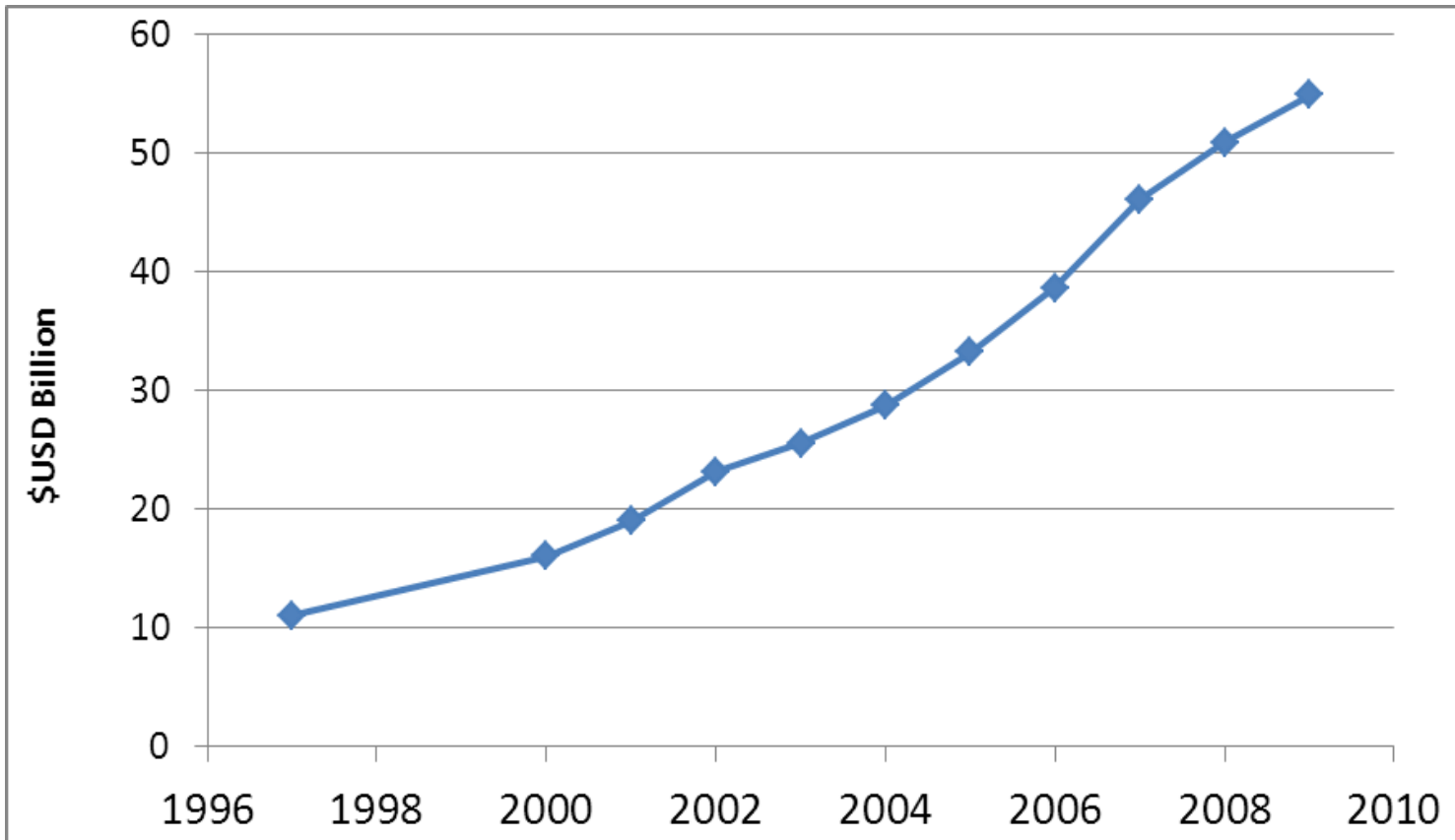
# Buy- and Boycotting in Europe and the US



Note: Data from the European Social Survey 2003 and the CID USA Survey 2005;  
Countries ordered by frequency of both Buy- and Boycotting



# Rises in organic food sales



Data represent estimated total sales of organic food sold worldwide. Numbers have been converted from Euros to US dollars. Sources: Willer and Yussefi 2003, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011.

**Table 4.6: The International Spread of Market-Based Political Consumer Labeling Schemes**

**Structure focus**

	<b>FLO-affiliated national Fairtrade initiative</b> (Existence as of 2005)	<b>GEN-recognized ecolabeling programs (Number of product categories covered, 2005)</b>	<b>FSC national initiative</b> (Existence as of 2007)
<b>Austria</b>	Yes	19	No
<b>Belgium</b>	Yes	19	Yes
<b>Canada</b>	Yes	39	Yes
<b>Czech Republic</b>	No	24	Yes
<b>Denmark</b>	Yes	40	Yes
<b>Finland</b>	Yes	40	Yes
<b>France</b>	Yes	28	No
<b>Germany</b>	Yes	40	Yes
<b>Greece</b>	No	19	No
<b>Hungary</b>	No	19	Yes
<b>Ireland</b>	Yes	19	Yes
<b>Italy</b>	Yes	19	Yes
<b>Japan</b>	Yes	27	Yes
<b>Netherlands</b>	Yes	31	Yes
<b>Norway</b>	Yes	40	Yes
<b>Poland</b>	No	19	No
<b>Portugal</b>	No	19	No
<b>Slovenia</b>	No	19	No
<b>Spain</b>	No	26	Yes
<b>Sweden</b>	Yes	40	Yes
<b>Switzerland</b>	Yes	0	Yes
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Yes	19	Yes
<b>United States</b>	Yes	19	Yes

Sources: Organic food: Willer & Yussefi 2005.; Fairtrade: FLO 2005b.; Ecolabelling: GEN 2005. Forest Stewardship: FSC 2007.



Country	% boycotting and/or buycotting	Ranking of Political consumerism	Fairtrade coffee: Average per capita consumption in grams	Fairtrade coffee: Average market share	Ranking For Market Share
Cross-National Spread of Political Consumerism					
All countries	30.8		--	--	
Austria	34.5	9	58.55	0.85%	8
Belgium	30.8	10	73.51	0.99%	6
Canada	--		26.69	0.41%	13
Czech Republic	26.3	14	0	0	17
Denmark	47.8	3	120.34	1.34%	5
Finland	47.1	4	26.00	0.23%	14
France	36.5	8	46.00	0.86%	7
Germany	45.3	5	38.43	0.56%	10
Greece	12.0	16	0	0	17
Hungary	11.7	17	0	0	17
Ireland	28.5	11	30.52	1.36%	4
Italy	10.1	19	5.09	0.09%	15
Japan	--		0.42	0.01%	16
Netherlands	28.4	12	186.54	2.88%	2
Norway	41.4	6	66.17	0.72%	9
Poland	10.8	18	0	0	17
Portugal	8.2	20	0	0	17
Slovenia	11.7	17	0	0	17
Spain	13.5	15	0	0	17
Sweden	60.3	1	46.13	0.56%	10
Switzerland	50.4	2	194.19	2.94%	1
United Kingdom	40.2	7	52.06	2.27%	3
United States	28.1	13	23.29	0.56%	10

# Sustainable citizenship

General normative claim - good citizenship requires that people assume **non-reciprocal responsibility** for a series of spatial, temporal & material relationships involved in sustainable development

Give more consideration to universal principles & global commons than to their private desires

**Why????**



Because of developments in the world

1. Temporal dimension of citizenship: reflective thinking forward & backward
2. Material dimension of citizenship: effects of choices in material world on others & nature
3. Spatial dimension of citizenship: outside one's own jurisdiction
4. Some say: it must take place in "every waking minute of everyday"
5. And argue: high level sustainable citizen practice can even challenge & change the underlying structural causes that have led to environmental and social justice problems in the first place