

# CONSUMERS AND CONSUMPTION IN COMPARISON

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# CONSUMERS AND CONSUMPTION IN COMPARISON

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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**Mikko Laamanen** is a Research Professor at Consumer Research Norway (SIFO). His research focuses on the everyday politics of technology, inclusion and social change; his current projects examine inclusive digital platforms, alternative consumption communities and sustainability in arts. His research has been published in *Current Sociology*, *Information Communication & Society*, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Marketing Management* and *Social Movement Studies*.

**Rebecca O’Connell** is a Professor of Food, Families and Society at the Centre for Research in Public Health and Community Care (CRIPACC), University of Hertfordshire and Visiting Professor at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education. Her research examines the economic, social and cultural determinants shaping what children and families eat and the part food plays in their everyday lives. Recent work with Julia Brannen concerns families and food poverty in Europe. She is currently co-leading a project, *Adapt-Ed*, that is co-designing improvements to food in special schools with children with special educational needs and disabilities, their families and other stakeholders (NIHR163616).

**Christian Poppe** holds a PhD degree in Sociology. He is a Senior Researcher at Consumption Research Norway (SIFO). His research interests include personal finance, borrowing practices, debt problems and debt settlements. He has contributed to the Russia Trust Fund-funded *Financial Capability* project, where he served as a consultant for the World Bank. Poppe managed two projects funded by the Norwegian Research Council: *Financialization of Social Welfare*, and *Debt Problems, Ill-Health and Work Market Marginalisation*. Poppe recently conducted several studies to assess households’ financial well-being during the cost-of-living crisis.

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**Stefan Wahlen** is a Professor of Food Sociology at the University of Giessen in Germany. His current research focuses on food culture and eating in the sense of doing food, as well as organizational and sociopolitical dimensions of food. Stefan is the Coordinator of the European ERA-net project 'FOODIVERSE', which aims to uncover the role of diversity for a more sustainable and resilient food system. He is a member of the steering committee of the 'Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative' in Europe (SCORAI-Europe) and a co-editor of the journal *Consumption and Society*, published by Bristol University Press.

**Ulrikke Wethal** is a Researcher at the Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo. Wethal is a Human Geographer by training, and her research focuses mainly on how to change systems of consumption and production in more sustainable directions, including research projects on meat consumption, circular practices and the role of local governments in promoting sustainable consumption.

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# FOREWORD

Within the social sciences, the study of consumers and consumption has gained momentum these last years. Consumption has been on the radar of sociologists ever since the classics in the later part of the 19th century (more on this in the Introduction). However, as a research field in its own, with its own canon, journals, curriculums and PhD programmes, it's relatively new. It started out in the early 90s within a small network of mostly Nordic and British researchers, confined to European Sociological Associations (ESA) RN5. Famously, in the first interim network meeting in Bergen in 1992, all the participants could be seated in two taxis. This contrasts to the last interim meeting, also this held in Norway (at Consumption Research Norway SIFO, in Oslo), where participants numbered more than 150 and came from all of Europe, and even some from Asia and the United States.

To the contributors to this issue, consumption is a broad phenomenon encompassing activities related to acquisition, modification, use, repair, and finally the disposal of goods and services. As such, consumption is about much more than shopping or choosing products in markets, most frequently in focus in the marketing literature. Moreover, to be a consumer is for us a part-time role where people engage in such activities. In other words, for us – the contributors for this volume – no one is a consumer in essence, but everyone enrolls and performs consumer roles daily.

Consumption and the enactment of consumer roles is currently deeply entangled in all kinds of big social questions. The English sociologist David Evans (2022) writes on connecting consumption and the social.

- Consumption is a key reference point for understanding macro-social processes of organization and change.
- Consumption is a societal phenomenon to be understood through recourse to “social” in contrast to the methodological individualism found in marketing and behaviourism.
- Consumption is linked to today's big societal challenges, like climatic change, health, etc. both as contributor and site for solutions.

Through this volume, we would like to show these three points by means of a set of articles applying a comparative approach to different consumption practices. The various papers compare consumption across nations, and consumption areas, thereby demonstrating the contextual embedding and situatedness of consumption and consumers and the necessity to study them in relation to production, politics and various forms of regulations.

The editors would like to thank the reviewers for their time and friendly advice, and the Editorial Board headed by Professor Emeritus Fredrik Engelstad, both for the invitation to produce this issue, and for support and advice during the process. We would also like to thank the publisher, Emerald, for its professional flexibility, and Consumption Research Norway (SIFO) for offering time and administrative resources. SIFO – for short – is currently the largest European social science-based institute solely engaged with consumer research. It is therefore somewhat appropriate that a large number of the contributors work there.