

THE NECESSITY OF CONSUMERS ORIENTATION TOWARDS ECOPRODUCTS

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In most of the cases the ecological attributes are intangible, invisible and present a secondary importance for the consumers. They do not reflect the main benefit, the immediate one, which is in fact the main motive for which the product is brought. Better said, these characteristics reflect the needs of ecosystems on a long term, and generate the increase of the quality of life for the consumers. The consumers do not know or aren't even interested by these ecological attributes, because they aren't integrated in the product's shape and don't influence its functioning.

We can say that from this point there is generated one of the most important problems to resolve in the domain of ecological marketing, more specific, the need to educate the market, the consumers oriented towards obtaining short term, immediate benefits, bond with the long term benefits that are brought by the ecological attributes of the products.

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Creating a product is the beginning step in generating ecological problems. This is the stage in which there are taken decisions regarding the type of resources and the transforming processes that will be used, and this determines the volume and characteristics of the waste material flow.

An ecological process **“posses ecological attributes, which are nothing else but factors that will lead to improvement of waste material management deliberately created through: the decisions taken when manufacturing the products, their components, their functioning algorithm, their time of utilization, their way of being distributed, their usage methods and their way of being eliminated when the utilizing and consuming processes are over. These decisions put in application the pollution prevention strategies (P2) and the resources recovering process (R2), and, by this means, lead to reducing ecological costs”** (Fuller, 1999a).

The **“ecoproduct”** may be considered **“the product that responds to the demand of consumers and, in the same time, harmonizes their short, medium and long time interests”** (Iosif, 1999a) or **“the product or service whose performances**

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regarding the environment and the society, in general, are significantly better than the ones of a conventional product” (Peattie, 1992a).

Anyhow, for the vast majority of ecological products these short term interests are not visible, do not exist or cannot be comprehended. In most of the cases **the ecological attributes are intangible, invisible and present a secondary importance for the consumers.** They do not reflect the main benefit, the immediate one, which is in fact the main motive for which the product is brought. Better said, these characteristics reflect the needs of ecosystems on a long term, and generate the increase of the quality of life for the consumers. The consumers do not know or aren't even interested by these ecological attributes, because they aren't integrated in the product's shape and don't influence its functioning.

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Divided by their nature, the ecological attributes can be classified in **specific attributes of the product and specific attributes of the processes,** (Fuller, 1999b) **both of them contributing to what we call the dematerializing process.**

“The dematerialization” is linked first of all to preventing pollution, but also to recovering resources, being a result of studies in this direction. It regards utilizing less resources for the same benefits obtained, generating a positive effect to the environment. Thinner paper sheets, lighter vehicles, energy saving, etc. are only some examples.

We are talking about an innovating concept, that is presented by some specialists of the field, Amory and Hunter Lovis, Paul Hawken, Ernest Ulrich von Weizsacker, that have promoted Factor no. 10 – “politics that intend to offer the same volume of products and services, with the contribution of 10 times less material” (Halweil, Mastny, 2004a).

The key to applying “dematerialization” is the idea that the consumers search for benefits and not products in their physical form, so that, in order to develop the best products the marketing specialists have to understand the benefits that the consumers look for.

A series of important motives, which lead to putting in practice the “dematerialization”, are necessary in this context, as following (Halweil, Mastny, 2004b):

- **“Un-intensifying” all products/ wrappers,** which is traduced in a lower quantity of utilized materials for producing a merchandise (represents a major application for preventing pollution);
- **Influencing the costumer's buying and consuming/utilizing conduct** for passing from single utilization products to durable products and respecting certain principles, even if we are talking about single utilization merchandise (for example, buying products that have lower wrapper quantity, or products in their concentrated form). We must specify that we are talking about a redirection in the buyers decision towards modifying the criterion based on which the evaluation and selection are made in order to reach a durable consumption (Polonski, Mintu-Wumsall, 1995). The consumer will have to be convinced that changing the mode in which the benefit is offered and the modality of consumption, might be less an advantage on a short term but certainly it will be in his favor.

- **Transactions for durable products should change their form from property transfer to rent or leasing.**

“Conceived for being compatible with ecosystems (CCE)” is another concept that aims at the package of ecological attributes which make the product compatible with ecosystems and “represents the modality by which considerations regarding environment protection are integrated in the product and the process of its accomplishment” (Gatenby, Foo, 1999). Because all products involve usage of resources and energy in order to be created, leaving by this mean a mark on the environment, the CCE concept should represent a matter taken into consideration when manufacturing any product.

Of course that the products have to be obtained having in mind, first of all, the aspects that offer benefits to the consumers and that make them, in the same time, profitable for the producers. The role of the “conceived for being compatible with ecosystems” model is that, simultaneously with the attributes that satisfy direct, immediate interests of the consumers and the producers that sell them on the market, should be added those attributes that decrease the negative effects of the environmental impact, which in fact generate the compatibility with the environment – concern that should represent the common interest on a long term of the consumer, the organizations, and the society in general (Keolian, Koch, Meneray, 1995). And even more, when at the company level the reasoning is made through this concept there has to be taken into consideration the extension of the decisional context, so that the objectives of pollution prevention and resources recovering are included. In the cycle production-consumption **the ecosystems have to be included as a part, a subject, at the transaction**, part of who’s needs and interests have to be satisfied together with the ones of the costumers, the producers, the distributors, other organizations.

Ecological products are considered both the ones that contribute to improvement of the environment quality and that can be considered “absolutely green products”, for example, equipment used for reducing industrial pollution, and the ones that contribute to reducing current or future damage made to the environment, that can be named “relatively green products” (Peattie, 1992b).

Obtaining new products, “ecoproducts”, together with their performances are extremely important since Romania’s adhering to EU. Our country will have to respect more requests related to products quality; also, Romania will have to respect the restrictive EU legislation in the environment protection and pollution prevention domain.

The approach of the ecoproduct cannot be made only at the level of one stage of its cycle of life; the approach has to be a unitary, complex one, which should start from the moment of the sketching the new ecoproduct and finish when it reaches the stage of waste product and recycling. In this context, all type of services that companies (producers, distributors, commercial) or the market can offer the consumers are extremely important, so that the consumption of ecoproducts is encouraged and stimulated. And we are referring here, mainly to communication (between all involved actors) and to emphasizing, by the means of communication, the advantages and benefits that an ecoproduct can offer.

The ecoproduct is the product that responds to the demand of consumers, and, in the same time, harmonizes their interests, on a short, medium and long term. The ecoproducts are:

- products that are obtained by efficiently using the resources engaged in their manufacturing process;
- products that permit, in a larger or smaller proportion, their recycling;
- products that utilize disposable, available resources or raw material instead of rare, hard reachable ones;
- products that because of their characteristics lead to reducing the dump material resulted after their producing or consuming (Iosif , 1999b).

Within a company an “ecoproduct” can be either an advantage or a disadvantage, as following: in case the firm manages to enter a market (or a certain segment of a market) where there can be found the need, the demand for that specific ecoproduct, after confronting the demand with the supply, the company will have an advantage compared with the concurrence; in case there cannot be found a well delimited demand for the ecoproduct, as a result of its high price compared to the concurrence’s products, and an inefficient promotion activity of ecological products as well as not delimitating correctly the advantages of consuming such a product, the company will lose.

Developing and stimulating the demand for such products is realized by making the consumers aware, through a permanent communication process between the company and the market, so that, step by step, the consumer changes its regular behavior and becomes a responsible consumer. We often encounter lately the notion of social utility of the consumer, defining by this term the present and future responsibility of the individual, in its consumer hypostasis.

A possible classification of ecoproducts could be made taking into consideration the following criteria:

- after how can the ecoproducts respond or satisfy the demand;
- after their capability to protect the environment.

For being able to approach the problematic of ecological products, specially the agro alimentary ones, it is necessary to make the clear distinction between the ecological products that are the object of the present writing, and the natural or conventional products.

An ecological alimentary product is obtained from ingredients resulting from ecological agriculture in proportion of minimum 95%. Agro alimentary ecological production has as a purpose the development of durable agricultural systems, diversified, equilibrated and assures protection of natural resources and consumers health. The impact of the ecological production process over the external background is minimum.

Taking advantage of the press campaigns that presented the “E-s” as dangerous substances for our health the ecological products (also known as organic or biological products) have gained more and more terrain. Ecological aliments are diversified products, healthy, free of diseases and pests, free of noxious residues, with equilibrated bioactive substances and mineral content. They come as a result of ecological technologies that do not utilize chemical fertilizers or pesticides. All these bio-ecological technologies play the part of putting at disposal for the consumer and the transforming industry natural products free of chemical residues and special technologies meant to contribute to safeguarding the agricultural ecosystem.

For preparing ecological aliments it is necessary to renounce at additives and any other substances incorporated. Commercialization of these products is made mainly in specialized shops, or even in the producers “yard”. Certified ecological products are

marked and labeled according to the legislation in the field. Ecological products are considered only the ones that have a quality certificate and have marked on their etiquette the sign of The Certifying Organism and not any product that is sold under the mark “natural”, “rustic”, etc... They are not distinguished from ordinary products, but their quality, their taste and their natural virtues can represent a motive for being chosen.

The mention “ecologic” is opposed to chemical or synthetically elements. Usage of pesticides is strictly forbidden in the process of making bio products, residues on the plants surface are inexistent, the principle of genetically modified products is also applied, and fertilizers used are natural, even if the protein content is higher in the case of conventional products, as a result of nitrogen contained by fertilizers rich in essential monoacids, vitamins and minerals. Also, the blind tests for diary products, groceries, and fruit have proved that ecological products are generally more tasty. If the product is one that doesn't contain any kind of alimentary synthesis additives, and the raw material is coming from conventional agriculture, it will be called a natural product. So, the difference from conventional products is made by the origin of the product or the raw materials, for processed products, and the presence or absence of synthesis substances or artificial additives. In Europe we encounter an institutional and legislative frame by which the mode of production and the producers are verified. The products are guaranteed using the terms of supply homologated by certified institutions.

We can observe another aspect regarding alimentary products: the point of view that stands against the usage of genetically modified organisms. EU sustains that there are health and ecological risks associated to genetically modified organisms. In this matter, there have been adopted specific rules in July, 2003, by which there is requested that all the aliments and products used for nourishing the animals that have a higher than 0.9% content of genetically modified organisms to be labeled as such, and all alimentary products that are genetically modified to be clearly distinguished. Regarding this subject, USA and Canada have a different opinion, considering that genetically modified organisms do not represent a threat for our health, and there is no scientific base to demonstrate this (Halweil, Mastny, 2004c).

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