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Political Consumerism

Money Talks

BACHELOR THESIS

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Abstract

The political development in the Western world is transforming. Political party participation decreases as well as other non-profit associations. This individualistic development is described as a threat to democracy. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that the political participation is a transformation into a new type of participation that instead could strengthen the democracy.

The political parties are the foundation of the democratic system and they receive their power by representing the citizens in the decision making process. Yet, the parties transform from organisations with a close linkage to their core groups, to catch-all organisations that aim to maximise votes. Since the goal for parties is to attain as much power as possible, new parties and other political actors have effectively been kept out of political system.

The individualistic development is observed through the political consumerism in this thesis. The political consumption is described as a political activity where consuming is used as the mean to impact. To actively select products that represent certain values influence companies to work for those values. It is a free individualistic movement without rules. If asked to describe the typical political consumer it would be a young female with a higher education and thus, an income above average. The political consumer prefers to be involved in issues of personal interest rather than broad party politics. Companies are believed to contain a great deal of power in society and must therefore also obtain responsibility.

The problems associated to political consumerism are connected to poor information. Citizens may make wrong political decisions since the information presented to them is poor or faulty. Another problem is the lack of tools to measure political consumption; we do not know how important it is in comparison to other political activities.

It is difficult to compare traditional politics with political consumerism since they target different issues and work in different ways. However, political consumerism is not a threat to traditional politics and should instead be recognised as a compliment.

Key words

Political consumerism, political parties, individualism, CSR.

Sammanfattning

Den politiska utvecklingen i västvärlden håller på att förändras. Deltagandet i politiska partier och ideella organisationer minskar och denna individualistiska trend anses vara ett hot mot demokratin. Dock finns det forskare som hävdar att det politiska deltagandet påvisar en förändring till en ny typ av deltagande som kan stärka det demokratiska systemet.

De politiska partierna utgör basen för det demokratiska systemet. Partiets makt grundas i att representera medborgarna i beslutsprocessen. Trots det utvecklas partierna från organisationer med en klar koppling till sina kärnväljare till röstmaximerande organisationer som vill attrahera den breda massan. Eftersom partiernas mål är att få så många röster som möjligt har nya partier och andra politiska aktörer effektivt kvarhållits utanför systemet.

I den här uppsatsen observeras den individualistiska trenden genom politisk konsumtion. Den politiska konsumtionen beskrivs som en politisk aktivitet där konsumtion används som påverkningsmetod. Att aktivt välja produkter som representerar vissa värden påverkar företaget att jobba mot dessa värden. Det är en fri och individualistisk rörelse utan klara regler. Den typiska politiska konsumenten är en ung kvinna med högre utbildning och en inkomst över genomsnittet. De politiska konsumenterna föredrar att involvera sig i frågor av personligt intresse istället för bred partipolitik. Företag anses ha mycket i samhället och måste därför också ta ett ansvar.

Problemen med politisk konsumtion är kopplade till dålig information. Medborgare kan ta felaktiga politiska beslut när den disponibla informationen är dålig eller oriktig. Ett annat problem är att det saknas verktyg att mäta politisk konsumtion. Vi vet inte hur viktigt fenomenet är i förhållande till andra politiska aktiviteter.

Det är svårt att jämföra politisk konsumtion med traditionell politik eftersom de jobbar på olika sätt mot olika frågor. Hursomhelst, politisk konsumtion är inte ett hot mot traditionell politik utan bör snarare ses som ett komplement.

Nyckelord

Politisk konsumtion, politiska partier, individualism, CSR.

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1 Introduction

Tendencies in the society point towards a decrease in political participation and that traditional parties loose members and core voters. The voluntary work for non-profit organisations decreases as the Western world becomes more and more individualistic. Some politicians as well a scholars address this as a serious problem for democracy. The parties are the foundation in the democratic system and one may ask, what will happen if they are watered-down and disappear? Who will lead the society, or, what interests will lead the society?

However, we must ask if those claims are true? Has the interest for politics declined? Some studies point in a different direction, arguing that the political participation has moved to the market arena while the interest is intact. Citizens have discovered the power of money and use consumption to make a change.

We – the mass of common men and women in all countries – also compose the world’s market. To sell to us is the ultimate aim of the world’s business. Hence it is ourselves as consumers who stand in relation to all the economics of the world, like a king in his kingdom. As producers we each go unto a particular factory, farm or mine, but as consumers we are set by nature thus to give leadership, aim and purpose to the whole economic world [Peter Redfern, cited in Scammell].¹

The citation indicates that the meaning of consumption has changed in the Western world. Consumption is no longer just focused on fulfilling basic needs, also other requests such as fair treatment of workers and sustainability must be of concern. This has led to an increased importance for consumption. Many of today’s consumers use their purchasing power to impact on companies and this has become an important element in several different sectors.²

This thesis will examine the political system and the political participation with the individualistic trend as the main theme.

1.1 Why Study Political Consumerism?

The political consumption phenomenon is not only worth studying because of its increasing impact on society. It is also interesting since it challenges traditional boundaries within the academic world:

Students of the history of ideas ponder whether political consumerism is a break from the past in our thinking on the separation of the political from the economic sphere.³

Political consumption involves both economy and political science yet several other disciplines, such as history and sociology, are essential in order to understand the trend.

¹ M, Scammell, ‘Citizen Consumers: Towards a New Marketing of Politics?’ in J, Corner & D, Pels (eds), *Media and the restyling of Politics*, SAGE Publications, London, 2003, p. 127.

² D, Shawn, T, Newholm & R, Dickinson, ‘Consumption as voting, an exploration of consumer empowerment’, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 40, no. 9/10, 2006, p. 1050, retrieved 12 December 2007, Emerald database.

³ M, Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/jonhh/Doc?id=10110268&ppg=16>, p. xi.

This makes political consumerism a modern and dynamic subject to study. Nevertheless, it is the economy political mix that makes the subject controversial. Political science is traditionally considering actors such as governments, nations or individuals. Political consumerism adds an actor that essentially belongs to the field of economics, the market. Nonetheless, we can not study political consumerism solitarily with economic means since the core of political consumerism belief is that the individual can affect political decisions with personal choices.⁴

Traditionally, citizens and consumers are perceived as separated and fundamentally different.

*'[C]itizen' and 'consumer' are considered opposite categories, the first outward-looking, embracing public interest, the second, self-interested, inward-looking and private.*⁵

This distinction does not hold in reality since the two concepts constantly overlaps. However, the distinction still functions as a fundamental element in the theoretical discussion and it highlights the difficulty with political consumerism studies.⁶

The political consumption challenges the traditionally separated private and public spheres since politics are not just practiced in political parties. Private acts, such as food shopping, become somewhat public when it takes a political approach. This is recognised as lifestyle politics in contradiction to the more organised party politics. Political participation is traditionally measured by voting, membership in political organisations and explicit political discussions. However, since lifestyle politics is practiced everywhere, the ways of measuring it limited. This is a reason why the new ways of practice politics are commonly overlooked. New measuring tools and more studies are needed in order to achieve a satisfactory picture of the phenomenon.⁷

Micheletti mentions a number of areas within the political consumption movement that ought to be studied in order to increase the understanding of the subject. Still, she notices that it is a great challenge since loose individual networks must be studied and that the means for this kind of research not fully exists, which add to the controversy of the subject. Empirical studies of specific activities are therefore an adequate way of gaining new knowledge. Philosophical and theoretical studies are also very much needed, however, challenging because of the lack of general knowledge in the subject.⁸

The questions specifically revealed by Micheletti are focused upon how the consumers collect the information that lead to the political decision.

- Is new regulatory tools are needed to support consumers with information? Why?
- Could traditional institutions be used to deal with this problem?

⁴ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. xiv, 2-3, 173.

⁵ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 125.

⁶ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 125.

⁷ D, Stolle & M, Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants? Shifts in Political Action Repertoires in Western Societies' in M, Micheletti, A, Follesdal, D, Stolle (eds), *Politics, Products and Markets: Exploring Political consumerism Past and Present*, Transaction Publishers, London, 2004, pp. 272, 274, 276, 291.

⁸ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. 169-270.

- Are the regulatory tools designed in a certain way for some reason, what is the aim?
- The effectiveness of those regulatory tools and information means are part of the core issue. Are they effective in real life and how should it be measured?⁹

Many of these questions are touched upon in this paper from different perspectives. However, the main perspective is comparative, also pointed out by Micheletti as fundamental. It is important to compare and study relevant actors involved in political consumerism such as consumers, government, industry, civil society associations and media. The study should emphasise the role of information technology as a tool to mobilise concerned individuals.¹⁰

1.2 The Research Problem

As the interest for political consumption increases so too does the need for critical academic analyses. The solemnity of political consumption becomes comprehensible when it is compared with other political participation. Many political consumers value the consumption as important as, or even more important than, voting in political elections. It can be recognised as a serious problem for the traditional society when market means are believed to be more effective than the political establishment. The question is how serious this movement is? Can it become an influential political actor or is it just a passing hype?

Despite that the political consumption is increasing, the market share of the overall consumption remains limited. This is partly because of poor labelling of products which force consumers to make choices based on imperfect information. It also exist few alternative commodities.¹¹ This is a problem for the political consumption development. Citizens must be able to find accessible information for their political decision. It becomes a legitimacy problem when the impact of political consumption increases even though the information is not fully trusted.

The information accessibility in the traditional political process is more organised and known. The political parties are the actors and they try to convey their politics and message to the public. The different actors in traditional politics, such as politicians, parties and media, are well known to the public which makes it easier to evaluate how accurate the information is. This is not the case for political consumerism where the individual inhibits a greater personal responsibility to find and evaluate information. The struggle to fill this void is crucial for political consumerism since this is very much the core to the political power. The one who controls the information to the consumers has the power to influence the political consumption.

1.3 Purpose

This thesis will strive to understand the background and features of political consumption in order to analyse where the actual power in political consumption arise.

The purpose is to illustrate and question the new political trends and to find out if a new political movement, such as political consumption, can be considered a legitimate actor.

⁹ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. 170-172.

¹⁰ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, p. 173.

¹¹ Shawn, Newholm, Dickinson, 'Consumption as voting', p. 1051.

Furthermore, discuss if political consumption and the new individualistic trend in the political system can be considered a challenge to the conventional political system.

1.4 Questions

The core of the discussion in this paper asks if political consumption can be an alternative to traditional politics. The starting point is that the political parties are in control of the political power today but the developments in society challenge this control.

The study will discuss if a correlation to political parties exists in the political consumption theory. This will be brought forward by a discussion where the political participation in the past and the future is examined and moreover, what goals different political actors have with their political activity.

1.5 Outline

In the next chapter, chapter 2, the method is explained. This chapter also describes the literature and delimitations used in the study.

Chapter 3 provides facts about, political consumption, Corporate Social Responsibility and political parties.

Chapter 4 analyses the facts presented in chapter 3 with focus on political consumption and traditional politics.

Chapter 3 and 4 should be considered the main chapters of this thesis and chapter 5 provides a discussion of the study.

2 Method

This chapter will introduce the reader to the method used to produce the results of this thesis. It starts out by describing the general way of thinking from the qualitative perspective. The problems associated with motives in relation to material will be discussed next and the chapter ends with an explanation of how the material has been collected.

2.1 Qualitative Method

A dilemma for the researcher in the field of social science is objectivity. The researcher is a part of the society he or she is about to describe and therefore unable to obtain a totally objective standpoint. This is an issue without any easy solutions or clear procedures and the reason why a description of the research methods is particularly important. The reader must be able to detect when the researcher makes a subjective claim. It is further crucial that the researcher is aware of this objectivity issue during the research work. Since it is impossible to be objective, it is crucial to *know* that one is subjective so all aspects are included in the discussion.¹²

This thesis uses a qualitative method where focus is of the contents of the material. To analyse texts is known as a core activity for researchers within the social science field. The qualitative method aims to observe the overall picture and the actual message in a text. This ought to be put in contrast to the quantitative method where the frequency of observations

¹² T, May, *Samhällsvetenskaplig forskning*, Studentlitteratur, 1997, p. 10.

is central.¹³ This makes the qualitative method less restricted and gives better opportunity to find underlining messages in the text. However, it also demands more from the researcher in form of interpretation.¹⁴

To study political trends with a quantitative method is possible and, from one perspective, gainful. Data that describes citizens' values about consumption and political participation would back up the argumentation. The problem is the measuring process. Researchers are not sure how to value the opinions about political consumption contra traditional politics; this issue is raised further later on.¹⁵ The research problem of this thesis does not create a need for a quantitative method since it is the overall trends observed by other researchers are analysed.

The liberties given by the qualitative method makes it important to ask critical questions associated with the research problem to the text.¹⁶ In this thesis, the questions have aimed to illustrate if there are tendencies in today's Western societies that confirm the political consumption theories.

It is not always worth striving for, or even possible to come up with, altogether new research problems for a subject. Whatever may be the case, it is again crucial to inform the reader if the research problem is recycled or not. A common situation is that part of the research problem is recycled or restyled as is the case for this thesis. The main ideas are adopted from Michele Micheletti, a productive Swedish researcher on the subject of political consumerism. Micheletti's main thoughts on the subject of political consumerism, as a product of the individualisation trend, are implemented but with an improved focus on the relation to the political parties. It is an essential part of the text analysing to detect aspects that is not fully covered in the material and to find out why.¹⁷ This thesis claims that the central power position of political parties is disregarded in the argumentation about political consumption. The starting point of this study is therefore the weakening of this party system.

A source of problem has been the definition of political consumption. Because it is such a new research subject, there exists several different definitions and different terminology is used for the same definition. A key part of the work have been to detect the features of the definitions to find out if they consists with the one used in this thesis.¹⁸

2.2 Motives

Motives have a key function in the political consumption concept since the question of *why* a certain product is consumed is of decisive importance. The motive, or reason, must be distinguished from the motivation, or the statement of one's reasons. The motives explain what the aim with the behaviour is, to encourage fair-trade or to simply enjoy a great cup

¹³ P, Esaiasson, M, Gilljam, H, Oscarsson, L, Wängnerud, *Metodpraktikan, Konsten att studera samhälle, individ, och marknad*, Norstedts Juridik, 2002, p. 233.

¹⁴ May, *Samhällsvetenskaplig forskning*, p. 232.

¹⁵ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', pp. 272, 274, 276, 291.

¹⁶ Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wängnerud, *Metodpraktikan*, pp. 234-235.

¹⁷ Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wängnerud, *Metodpraktikan*, pp. 239-241.

¹⁸ Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wängnerud, *Metodpraktikan*, p. 248.

of coffee. The motivation, on the other hand, must further explain, or justify, the background of the behaviour. One must contain some more profound knowledge in order to present a good motivation.¹⁹ The motive is closely linked to the discussion about what goals the different political activities strive for.

It is tempting to adopt an economic approach to the motivation discussion since an essential part of the study revolves around consumption. The economic theory states that the citizen vote, and act, in the way that best favours the personal economy. However, this theory is tested against other theories that claim that diverse preferences are affecting the citizen's behaviour. A reasoning discussion is used to distinguish the motives and find out what seems most sensible.²⁰

2.3 Literature

The information used in a study very much affects the result. A study based on primary sources can result in a diverse conclusion to a study based on secondary sources.²¹ This thesis uses secondary academic information, the few newspaper articles referred to have the purpose of illustrating the contemporary public attitude. The primary information in this study consists of discussions with people around me and has most likely affected my personal thoughts of the subject. However, this information and sources are not considered scientific enough to be presented in the thesis.

Primary sources, such as surveys or interviews, are not used because of the difficulty to gain comparable data. This opinion is based on the results from surveys and interviews in secondary literature. Scholars emphasise the problems associated with a subject closely connected to personal values. It is difficult to construct questions that generate comparable answers.²² Further, the research problem is constructed in a way that favours secondary information. The overall tendencies are better observed through the studies of other scholars that are independent of each other since the value issues are reduced in this way.

It should further be known that the information obtained about political parties is selected from a vast collection of literature. The titles selected are meant to not only illustrate the general features of parties but more so the development of the party system. The information about political consumption is of a different kind. Because it is a new academic subject the amount of literature is limited. Much of the information used in this thesis is gathered from academic articles. The political consumption subject has noticeable less research to rely on and the information is more speculative than the literature about the well studied party subject.

2.4 Delimitations

Every study leaves out several aspects since it must be concentrating on some features of the subject. The delimitations of this study consist of the focus on individualisation in the Western world.

¹⁹ Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wängnerud, *Metodpraktikan*, pp. 318-319.

²⁰ Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wängnerud, *Metodpraktikan*, pp. 322, 330-331.

²¹ Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wängnerud, *Metodpraktikan*, pp. 246-247.

²² Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', pp. 272, 274, 276, 291.

The subject open up for the studying of several different developments of the political system other than the individual development. However, the attention will be on this particular trend since I believe it illustrates a great transformation of the traditional political system.

The other delimitation is more practical. The issue with political consumption and traditional politics can only appear in a society with a stabile democratic system such as the one existing in the Western democratises. There is no need to more specifically clarify exactly which countries are included because it is a general trend of the system that is studied not the trend in specific countries. It should, however, be mentioned that the trend take somewhat different approach in different societies even though the broad trend is the same.

This paper focuses on the relationship between consumers, civil society associations and government. Yet, the government is substituted with political parties and the civil society associations are recognised as standard setting organisations named Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the thesis. The reason is that most standard setting organisations are NGOs. However, is must be made clear that NGOs will not relate to other possible features otherwise connected to the expression. NGOs are solely known as standard setting organisations in this thesis.

3 Research Objects

This chapter will provide facts about political consumption, Corporate Social Responsibility and political parties. It presents the background and specific features that link the research objects of this study to each other. Each section is divided up to put focus on the specific characteristics of each concept.

3.1 Political Consumerism

This section will provide the central features and conditions related to political consumption since it is a new and, somewhat, unknown expression in political science. Theoretical and practical problems associated with political consumption are also discussed.

3.1.1 Definition

As this thesis approach the subject of political consumerism and political consumers, a definition is needed. The definition however, is not very clear, a problem shared with many other new expressions used within unexplored fields of politics.

Micheletti provides this summarising explanation what political consumerism is all about:

[Political consumerism] represents actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. Their choices are based on attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, or noneconomic issues that concern personal and family well-being and ethical or political assessment of favorable and unfavorable business and government practice.²³

²³ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, p. 2.

Solidarity is important for those consumers, to take responsibility for one's personal actions in regard to other people. It is therefore easy to believe that political consumption only concern about the conditions when the products are produced. However, another important part is the actual product that ought to be healthy for the consumer. An important component is, consequently, to demand nutritious groceries etc.²⁴ The political consumers are very demanding and aware of the political power that is linked to consumption.

Some characteristics are linked to political consumerism despite its identification as a free and individual movement, without demands and regulations associated with conventional organisations. Three conditions must be fulfilled for the consumption to be political:

- First is behaviour. A citizen must actually make consumer choices, buy or boycott specific products, in order to be labelled political consumer.
- Second is awareness and motivation. It must be a political or ethical thought behind the choice of product. One might buy fair trade products because of the taste of it and this does not make the person a political consumer.
- The final condition is frequency and habit. Political consumerism is not just a single act but a repeated regular behaviour. A spontaneous act to buy fair trade may be important for the cause but must be distinguished from the political consumption movement.²⁵

The political awareness, that one must genuinely believe in the political activity one take part in, is important. Political consumption must be a commitment on the same level as other political participation. This is of course hard to distinguish since it depends on values, which levels are valued the same?²⁶ Nevertheless, the knowledge and conviction, that one participates in political consumption and not just ordinary consumption is central for the definition.

3.1.2 Background Political Consumerism

There are no absolute facts around political consumerism since it is a movement that can not be categorised within the traditional political thinking. What can be stated is that political consumerism clearly symbolise globalisation, individualisation and post modernisation, processes that restructuring the way of governance.²⁷

The ideas to use consumption as a mean to impact are not new. It first appeared in the early twentieth century. The expression *political consumerism*, however, was first used in Denmark in 1990s during a boycott of Shell Oil. After this, the expression has been used and analysed more frequently and connected to further occurrences. What is new about the

²⁴ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, p. 11.

²⁵ D, Stolle, M, Hooghe & M, Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket, Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation', *International Political Science Review*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2005, pp. 254-255, retrieved 12 December 2007, Sage Premier database.

²⁶ JG, Andersen & M, Tobiasen, 'Who Are These Political Consumers Anyway? Survey Evidence from Denmark' in M, Micheletti, A, Follesdal, D, Stolle (eds), *Politics, Products and Markets: Exploring Political consumerism Past and Present*, Transaction Publishers, London, 2004, p. 206.

²⁷ Micheletti, Follesdal & Stolle (eds), *Politics, Products and Markets*, p. xvi.

phenomenon is that the citizens' concerns have moved from health issues and environment to human right issues. Some scholars argue that the foundation and popularity of political consumerism is related to the problems we face today that cannot be solved by the nation state. AIDS, smuggling and trafficking are examples of issues that the state struggle to solve and that has made the weakness of the state visible. This suggests that people are looking for other ways and new tools to solve issues that are considered out of the state's control. It can be understood as a reaction to the failure of traditional institutions and a path towards post modernisation.²⁸

Even so, the greatest change, related to post modernisation, is information. Internet has made it easy to, with small resources, dissemination reports about companies' behaviour. Increased media coverage has also fuelled the popularity of political consumption. The access to information has transformed political consumption from being mainly used by activists to a mainstream behaviour.²⁹ The political consumption has proven to be effective. Examples of successful pressure actions are those towards Nike and Gap usage of sweatshop labour. The boycotts resulted in the establishment of labour issues on the companies' agendas and permanent codes of conduct.³⁰

The market has by tradition been an arena where everyone can participate and no one is left out. Hence, the market has often been a tool to fight for equal rights for people who stand outside the society in one way or another. Today when more and more politics and decision making takes place on the international arena and the ways for citizens to influence are considered complicated and ineffective, the market have come about as a possibility to impact.³¹

The reason why political consumerism appears more clearly now is because of the globalisation and the increased trade. The information technology makes it harder for companies to avoid inspection from international movements since information is spread so fast on the Internet.³²

Well applied tools, used in many ways in history and known as an important for change and development, are strikes and boycotts. Nevertheless, strike is a production oriented tool and not so much connected to consumerism. Boycott on the other hand is consumption orientated and is consequently linked to political consumerism.³³

Boycotts of entire states have become widespread in resent years. Some people consider this as the only way to influence world politics when the distance between politicians and citizens increase. A problem that enhance with this kind of large scale boycotts is that wrong targets are affected. A large scale boycott against a state will affect innocent citizens. The state orientated boycotts can also turn threatening and, more or less, out of control.³⁴

²⁸ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. x, 5-7, 10-11.

²⁹ Shawn, Newholm & Dickinson, 'Consumption as voting', p. 1050-1051.

³⁰ Shawn, Newholm & Dickinson, 'Consumption as voting', p. 1052.

³¹ Micheletti, Follesdal & Stolle (eds), *Politics, Products and Markets*, pp. x-xi.

³² Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, p. x.

³³ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. 37-38.

³⁴ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. 58, 66-68.

A recent example is the boycotts and protests against Denmark that followed the Muhammad caricatures.

A more targeting tactic is *buycotts*. The idea behind buycotts is to encourage people to purchase goods that follow an established standard or set of criteria.³⁵ Labelling is a common way to guide consumers to buy the 'right' product. This is a type of positive political consumerism where the consumer encourage the companies that follows wanted standards instead of active punish the companies who does not.

3.1.3 The Political Consumption Movement

It is useful to underline the differences and similarities between the political consumer and the more traditional political participant in order to gain enhanced understanding about political consumption. This section will further describe the political consumer and the political consumption movement.

Political consumption is characterised as a reformist movement rather than revolutionist. A slow moving change is emphasised where globalisation and capitalism is accepted as part of the world although the negative effects are not consent. The solutions presented by political consumers are widespread and include international law, governments, civil society and political consumption.³⁶

The awareness of consumers has increased in the past years. A large part of the population believes that political consumption can impact on the society and that corporations have responsibility for the development of society.³⁷ In the same time, political consumerism is poorly spread in the Western world. This highlights the problem with measuring political consumerism. Citizens does not pay for membership to join political consumption, this is an individual movement with collective elements. It is the action not the membership that is political and therefore impossible to measure with conventional methods.³⁸

A political consumer makes a statement or express political action by consume in a particular way. The main concern is not the price or the looks of the product but the politics and values that comes with it. The political consumers use tools such as time, money and civic skills to achieve political goals. They are connected through loose networks and often communicate through the Internet.³⁹

Political parties are seen upon as too bureaucratic and hierarchic. People therefore turn to other movements where they can participate on equal conditions and work for a cause important for the individual more than the party.⁴⁰ These kinds of organisations became common during the twentieth century when many people wanted to participate and impact on society. Nevertheless, also those organisations have grown and become too general for

³⁵ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, p. 50.

³⁶ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', pp. 297-298.

³⁷ M, Micheletti & D, Stolle, 'Konsumtion har blivit politiskt medel', *Dagen Nyheter*, 13 May 2003, retrieved 16 November 2007, PressText database.

³⁸ Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket', pp. 248, 250, 254.

³⁹ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, p. ix, 23.

⁴⁰ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. 24-25.

people. An organisation has several issues on its agenda that the member must agree upon. This has created individualised collective action, a form of loose linked individuals that go together to face a particular issue and nothing more. They create a new political home where all effort is focused on this special issue. This kind of involvement does not demand anything from its participants in form of political views.⁴¹ Political consumerism is a product of this development.

The typical political consumer is a citizen below middle age with a higher education and with an income over the average. It is more women than men that consume political and this is interesting since men are overrepresented in all other political contexts. Why women tend to chose political consumption more than men is unsure, an idea is that the absence of political hierarchy appeals to women. The political consumer distrusts traditional institutions but trust the people. This does not mean that the traditional political involvement is put aside. The political consumption is instead recognised as a supplement to the ineffective conventional politics.⁴²

So the political consumer is politically interested but what else is significant? Studies observe a higher education level as the most striking. Aspects such as age and gender have only minor significance even though the political consumer more often is a younger woman than an older man. The income level seems to have an impact though it can not be confirmed as necessary. The individualisation is essential and can be linked to the overall tendencies in the society today. Political consumption is an individual form of political participation in contradiction to collective participation such as demonstrations.⁴³

Another indication of the political consumption's individualistic approach is the diversity of the movement. It is not a united organisation that works together, different fractions use different means to reach a somewhat common goal. While some NGOs coordinate boycotts others sign cooperation agreements with multinational companies. This diversity makes the political consumption broad and trustworthy.⁴⁴

Who is responsible in society is a fundamental question within politics. The typical political consumer is interested in traditional politics although lack trust in the effectiveness of political organisation and institutions. The traditional model to change something in a Western democracy expects the citizen to lobby politicians who in turn do something about the problem. This is often a long process including bargain and an unclear outcome. The political consumer recognises consumption as a shortcut and more effective method to influence companies' behaviour.⁴⁵

The size of many companies today justified political consumption. Those large companies have turnovers larger than many countries and therefore possess a significant amount of power. The larger the company is the more can be expected from it by the society. The

⁴¹ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. 26-29.

⁴² Å, Gabrielson, 'Shopping som politik', *VI*, 11 November 2004, p. 202, retrieved 12 December 2007, PressText database and Micheletti & Stolle, 'Konsumtion har blivit politiskt medel' and Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket', pp. 250, 258, 261, 263.

⁴³ Andersen & Tobiasen, 'Who Are These Political Consumers Anyway?', pp. 209-210, 212-213.

⁴⁴ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 128.

⁴⁵ Shawn, Newholm & Dickinson, 'Consumption as voting', pp. 1056-1057.

philosophy or strategy of political consumption is easy, a company is dependent on its income and that is where consumers can impact. This idea of consumption suggests that the individual is perfectly free to make any wanted choices. However, political consumption does not appear as straight forward if one considers the individual as manipulated and trapped in a system ruled by the companies. Anti-consumption has appeared as a response to the manipulative consumerist society. This is not the same as political consumption since one believes that no consumption at all gives the best result.⁴⁶

[W]hile many in the anti-consumption movement view marketing and capitalism as part of the problem in over-consumption, many consumers are using that very market system to influence producers and suppliers and find solutions.⁴⁷

Political consumption is believed to be effective by those who participate in it. Even though to vote in elections still is considered to be the most effective way of participating in politics, political consumption is ranked higher than traditional political activities such as contacting a politician or demonstrating.⁴⁸

Consumption is recognised as a way to exercise citizenship which indicates that consumption is part of the very core of the Western society. People act as consumers, activists and citizens at the same time when they practice political consumerism. The citizen is personal responsible for what is consumed.⁴⁹ The link between being a citizen of the society and consumption is important to keep in mind.

The political consumption is generally described as a shift towards the post modern values. Those values are distinguished by the informed individual who independent chooses among products, services and political action. It is the sovereign individual that is in charge.⁵⁰ The individual approach is somewhat complicated though. The consumer is the one with the full responsibility and the one who make personal choices in political consumerism. However, it is also a movement that recognise that the strength of consumption only appears if many come together and act collectively. Individual action improved by the power of many. It sounds like a contradiction, however, is known as *individualised collective action*. The participants are not members of an organisation that carries out their action, rather members of loose linked communities of likeminded people. This community often exist on the Internet without any demands, merely common consciousness about a particular issue. A distinctive difference between the political consumption community and a more traditional organisation is that political consumerism wants will and action to be carried out by the individual. In the contrary, the traditional organisation aims at *organising* will and action.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Shawn, Newholm & Dickinson, 'Consumption as voting', pp. 1052, 1054-1055, 1062.

⁴⁷ Shawn, Newholm & Dickinson, 'Consumption as voting', pp. 1056.

⁴⁸ Andersen & Tobiasen, 'Who Are These Political Consumers Anyway', p. 211.

⁴⁹ Shawn, Newholm & Dickinson, 'Consumption as voting', pp. 1054-1056.

⁵⁰ Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket', p. 252.

⁵¹ D, Shaw, 'Consumer voters in imagined communities', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, vol. 27, no 3/4, 2007, pp. 137-138, 141, 146, retrieved 12 December 2007, Emerald database.

3.1.4 Problems Related to Political Consumption

The importance of political consumerism is not unquestioned. Critics argue that consumers can not act without the support from governments and institutions. The political consumption movement is not stable enough to be relied on as a political phenomenon here to stay. Since no ideology is connected, it is unsure how the movement react if the economic situation in the world changes. Too much is built upon individualism and free choice.⁵²

It is a problem to distinguish between political consumerism and normal consumerism. How can we know if the decision to buy a particular packet of coffee is because of political conviction or just simply of taste preferences?⁵³ Still, this is merely an academic issue since the individual is satisfied as long as he/she knows that the act is political. Yet, it illustrates the complexity of individualism and political consumption.

An important element is information. The individual consumer necessitates as correct information as possible in order to make the right political choice. It is hard for the individual consumer to separate marketing from information in the shop, it exists many different types of labels which make the consumer confused. It can be a serious problem if citizens make their political decisions based on incorrect or imperfect information.⁵⁴

The information consumers can rely on today is the labelling on products in the shops, media reports and their own research. The labelling that exists today is not universal and not controlled by any independent institution. The result is several different organisations that put their label on different products. It is hard for the consumer to know what is behind the different labels, what they stand for.⁵⁵ The uncertainty of labels and information has resulted in claims that rules and codes around fair trade should be regulated by the government or some international institution.⁵⁶ This would push political consumption back into the system the movement is a reaction towards. The relation between political consumption and conventional politics will be discussed later on.

Related to the labelling issue is the fear that corporations will exploit the confusion around labelling schemes. If a company learn to understand the culture around political consumerism they could manipulate consumers and use the knowledge for marketing purposes. Nestlé is an example of this involvedness since the company after years of critique now has introduced 'ethical' products. This could on the one hand be a great success for the political consumption movement after years of boycotts and other pressure methods. It could on the other hand be recognised as a failure, that an 'unethical' company has found a way to appear 'ethical'.⁵⁷ The imperfect information opens up for this kind of mistrust towards the labels on the market.

⁵² Micheletti, Follesdal & Stolle (eds), *Politics, Products and Markets*, p. xv.

⁵³ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', pp. 278-279.

⁵⁴ Shaw, 'Consumer voters in imagined communities', p. 137.

⁵⁵ Gabrielson, 'Shopping som politik', p. 202.

⁵⁶ M, Micheletti, & A, Follesdal, 'Shopping for Human Rights. An Introduction to the Special Issue', *Journal of Consumer Policy*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2007, pp. 171, 174, retrieved 16 November 2007, SpringerLink database.

⁵⁷ Shaw, 'Consumer voters in imagined communities', pp. 144, 147.

Information is a serious problem but it is a practical matter with possible solutions, such as international regulations. More complicated issues are related to the actual legitimacy of the phenomenon. Since the heart of the movement is consumption political consumption is accused for being an elite activity. Fair trade products are often more expensive than the average alternative which makes it hard for citizens with financial straits to participate.⁵⁸ It implies that richer citizens have more power since they have a superior possibility to consume the products.⁵⁹ Lack in democracy is exposed since all participants in political consumerism can not be valued the same, money is crucial.

A major shift from voluntary participation towards financial or knowledge-based participation would, therefore, lead to a drastic sharpening of political inequalities... the problem is that this activity might be a privilege only of those who have education, knowledge, and information, and those who possess financial resources.⁶⁰

Political consumerism is recognised as a life style attribute rather than a genuine political standpoint by some scholars. An indication of this elite behaviour is when consumers pick and chose between products that they consider worth consuming political and products they are not prepared to give up or pay extra for. Genuine political consumers are needed in order to build a trustworthy legitimacy for the phenomenon. The involved citizens must have a deeper interest in fair trade and political shopping or the movement will be dismissed as a hype or marketing trick.⁶¹ The mainstream consumer does not only demand a fair product. Price, taste, shopping location etc becomes important and the political consumption becomes a part of the ordinary market competition. The dilemma is that increased mainstreaming results in increased ability to put pressure on corporations at the same time as the 'ideological' soul, or the ideas behind political consumption, risk being lost.⁶²

Also in the bigger picture is political consumerism questioned as legitimate. Fair trade products are a luxury demanded by the Northern consumers without backup from producers in the South. Some argue that it fortifies the unequal relationship between North and South since products from the South with wrong label are considered unethical and not political correct. To certificate products as fair trade is rather costly and a large investment forced upon a small producer.⁶³ The political consumption may have opposite impact in some cases.

⁵⁸ Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket', p. 258.

⁵⁹ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, p. 1052.

⁶⁰ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', p. 277.

⁶¹ C, Strong, 'The problems of translating fair trade principles into consumer purchase behaviour', *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1997, pp. 34-36, retrieved 12 December 2007, Emerald database.

⁶² Micheletti, & Follesdal, 'Shopping for Human Rights', p. 171.

⁶³ Micheletti & Follesdal, 'Shopping for Human Rights', p. 170 – 171.

3.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

An important feature of political consumption is Corporate Social Responsibility and this section illustrates why. The actors, in form standard setting organisations and companies, are studied and the section's last part presents some of the critic towards Corporate Social responsibility.

3.2.1 Definition

CSR stands for Corporate Social Responsibility and is a concept or strategy for companies, organisations and other actors in the market to act in a, for the society, sustainable way. This is a vague definition because it does not really state the expression's contents. The most, if not all, players on the market could declare that they aim for a sustainable society.

This conveys that one of the major problems concerning the research of CSR is the definition. This concept is blurry and it is hard to find two similar definitions. Companies and organisations come up with their own definitions since an official description does not exist. Nonetheless, there are three main elements in CSR to hold on to:

- Human rights
- Environmental sustainability
- Rights of labour⁶⁴

The environmental component of CSR is somewhat debated because environmental standards have traditionally been labelled independently without concern of the other two elements. The trend is, however, that the environmental labelling is moving towards the CSR field and including human rights and rights of labour⁶⁵.

Nevertheless, many definitions occur. Carroll's CSR Pyramid recognises four areas of responsibility for a company. The foundation of the pyramid is the economic responsibility towards shareholders. A company must make profit in order to function at all. Next level is the legal responsibility, that the company must follow the laws. The third step emphasise the ethical responsibility. The company must be a good member of society and act according to its norms and values, even the ones not stated in laws. The top level of the pyramid consists of voluntary social responsibility. Not just follow the norms and values but actually work active in the interest of society and not only the shareholders.⁶⁶

A second definition is the Implicit and Explicit CSR which describes two different factions of CSR. The implicit CSR is regulated by norms and values in the society, a rather imprecise definition often found in Europe. The explicit CSR is regulated by the interests of diverse organisations such as environmental organisations or human rights

⁶⁴ M, Jutterström, *Corporate Social Responsibility –the supply side of CSR-standards*, Score & Stockholm centre for organizational research, 1995, p. 2, retrieved 7 December 2007, <http://www.score.su.se/pdfs/2006-2.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Jutterström, *Corporate Social Responsibility*, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Å, Helg & M, Vakoufari, *Från ord till handling – Tio steg mot lönsamt samhällsansvar*, CSR i Väst and Västra Götalandsregionen, Göteborg, 2007, p. 16-17.

organisations. The explicit CSR gives a more precise definition and is more common in North America.⁶⁷

The last example is the Triple Bottom Line definition which implies that not only profit must be the purpose of a company, also to uphold a social and environmental responsibility is important. This definition argues that the company are just as responsible towards the shareholders as to the stakeholders. It further indicates that lobby organisations have a rather good chance to make an impact since the company must listen to all parties involved.⁶⁸

In common for all definitions of CSR is the voluntary aspect. Companies must act in a way that is sustainable and beneficial for society not because regulations tells them but because it is the right thing to do. Nevertheless, an including factor is that CSR is something different to charity; it ought to be profitable for the company in the long run.⁶⁹

What complicate the CSR concept further are that other classification standards that are aiming towards the same means as CSR. Examples are Social Responsible Investments, Business Ethics and Corporate Citizenship. Different names are used even though the content is more or less the same. The situation is similar to that of the political consumption. However, this paper will use CSR when referring to this occurrence⁷⁰.

Some argue that CSR is a marketing trick. The social responsibility companies are expected to live up to is already stated in the laws. This argumentation declares that the laws are enough; if a company follows them they take social responsibility. This argumentation does not truly live up to the ideas behind CSR. The thought is that CSR should go further than the law. Everyone must follow the laws as the least one can do. CSR on the other hand takes one step further by setting standards for companies who wants to give more back to society and work for our common future, it is voluntary⁷¹.

Much is required by the CSR definition and much of the requirements seems as paradoxes from a traditional point of view where the only profit that counts is the profit made in money. Nevertheless, as next section illustrate, the ideas have been around for quite some time, an indication that the concept must work, at least to some degree.

3.2.2 Background CSR

CSR is a very pressing issue right now with a boom of new organisations who work to spread the concept. Nonetheless, it all started in the 1970s with a small number of organisations concerned about CSR issues. The process was slow but steady until the late 1990s when the number of involved organisations exploded and the interest is still increasing⁷².

⁶⁷ Helg & Vakoufari, *Från ord till handling*, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Helg & Vakoufari, *Från ord till handling*, p. 18.

⁶⁹ Helg & Vakoufari, *Från ord till handling*, pp. 16-21.

⁷⁰ Jutterström, *Corporate Social Responsibility*, p.3.

⁷¹ Jutterström, *Corporate Social Responsibility*, pp. 4-5.

⁷² Jutterström, *Corporate Social Responsibility*, pp. 8-16.

An important stage for the development was the United Nations Human Rights Declaration from 1948 that function as the foundation of the whole concept. Further is the ILO's (International Labour Organization) Declaration on Fundamental Principles at Work from 1972 another important steps in the development process. The efforts from officials can today be represented by the EU who recognises CSR as an important element in the effort to create the strongest knowledge based economy in the world.⁷³

3.2.3 CSR Standards

Standards are important for political consumption as a source of information since, as stated earlier, information is crucial in order to make the right political choice.

The origins of standardisation come from France and production within the industrial sector. The first standards used as means to sell products was by the France gas standards that was used to demonstrate that gas was no more dangerous than electricity. Before this, standards were only used in production to make sure that competition between companies was fair.⁷⁴

From the very beginning standards have been a subject for debate according to what the actual meaning of the standard is. For example, the standards from the gas companies guaranteed safety although consumers believed it guaranteed quality.⁷⁵ This can be related to today when there are several different standards and labels present on the market, all with specific information and background. It is not easy to know what a specific label actually stand for.

This confusion around standards was a reason why the government involvement was important in the early days of standardisation. Consumer organisations wanted to include the government and make it responsible in the process. This as the government was recognised as objective and trustworthy.⁷⁶ This attitude has changed over the years. As been observed, a prominent aspect of the political consumption movement is the distrust and negative view of the state and government.

The traceability demands were an essential component in the standards journey to become crucial for political consumption. The traceability demands asks for the origin of a product, for example where the beef comes from. As how the product is made becomes central, the knowledge about child labour, working conditions and environment also becomes important. This strain of standards has further developed into a strong awareness of values connected to products and the importance of material standards has decreased.⁷⁷

⁷³ Helg & Vakoufari, *Från ord till handling*, pp. 12-14.

⁷⁴ F, Cochoy, 'The Industrial Roots of Contemporary Political Consumerism: The Case of the French Standardization Movement' in M, Micheletti, A, Follesdal & D, Stolle, (eds), *Politics, Products and Markets: Exploring Political consumerism Past and Present*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, London, 2004, pp. 146-147.

⁷⁵ Cochoy, 'The Industrial Roots of Contemporary Political Consumerism', p. 147.

⁷⁶ Cochoy, 'The Industrial Roots of Contemporary Political Consumerism', pp. 152-153.

⁷⁷ Cochoy, 'The Industrial Roots of Contemporary Political Consumerism', pp. 156-157.

This history of standards, as a tool for consumers to gain information as well as a mean for companies to sell, has today found its way into the political consumption movement and is frequently used by NGOs.

3.2.4 Standard Setting Organisations

Labelling create public opinion, gives information to consumers and monitor and evaluate companies performances. The monitoring and evaluating is an increasingly important function of labelling schemas.⁷⁸ The power of standard setting organisations, here known as NGOs, has improved with the increased popularity of CSR and political consumption.

During the 1980s the number of NGOs skyrocketed and since then, the numbers has multiplied many times. The NGOs has become the foundation of political consumerism because they can impact on companies in a way no one else can. The pressure has been so strong and threatening that issues about social responsibility has moved from the marketing department all the way into the board room, these issues are today in the very centre of companies agendas.⁷⁹

NGOs have not been around long enough to be considered as significant actors in the development of the global political and economic arena. What can be observed is that they heavily have influenced companies' behaviour and this is central for political consumption.⁸⁰

Political consumption accounts for a rather small section of the overall consumption but is on the rise. This rapid growth is important since the tough competition result in big impacts also on small changes in sales. It is extremely costly to loose costumers and even more expensive to be forced to rebuild a damaged reputation.⁸¹

3.2.5 Critic Towards CSR

The contemporary discussions about CSR take a positive standpoint with very few objections, a full on argumentation that object the CSR concept is almost impossible to find. Professor David Henderson, former at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is an exception. He express sharp critic to the, in his eyes, anti capitalistic movement.

Henderson states that the CSR phenomenon is a new way to attack capitalism. As even the advocates of plan economy realises that market economy is superior, new ways of condemnation is necessary. The tactics used are CSR, to demand more responsibility from the companies, and it has come off well. A green paper from the EU advices more responsibility and control over the companies. In the same time, EU does not recognise any problems with CSR at all and does not carry out any critical examination of the

⁷⁸ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', p. 293-294.

⁷⁹ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', pp. 123-124.

⁸⁰ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', p. 294.

⁸¹ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 124.

concept. Henderson notices that everything that involves CSR is accepted as entirely good.⁸²

The social responsibility in the society must not be put upon companies. It is the government and the institutions in the society that contain this responsibility and should keep containing it. Different sections of the society are superior in different fields. Companies are superior when it comes to create economic growth not to uphold social responsibility. Henderson are aware of the problems that can occur in less developed countries and agree that companies in some distinguished situation may be required to take an increased responsibility for outsized parts of the society. However, this must be exceptional cases and not part of standard corporative behaviour.⁸³

The destructive consequence that follows from CSR is worse than the negative impact that follows from company activities. The increased responsibility results in a loss of focus on the main issues for companies. Time and money must be used to present satisfactory CSR results which takes focus from the main business which in turn lower the economic results.⁸⁴

Henderson does not advocate ruthless companies who do anything for profit. He argues that companies do what they are best at since this is beneficial for the whole of society. The standards and regulations promoted by CSR advocates impede the company activities and the economic development since the market economy is based on freedom and flexibility. Different rules apply to different markets and this must not be constrained by regulations. An example of his argumentation is low wages. If companies are forced to pay higher salaries than what the market demand, this results in worse condition for the poor individuals. Less people can be employed and less people attain a possibility to rise from poverty. The best way to improve society is to introduce company friendly regulations since the whole society is dependent on the companies' achievement.⁸⁵

Observable with Henderson's argumentation is that he not only issue critic towards the NGOs that go in front of the CSR movement, he also criticise the companies for complying. Both companies and the public are somewhat manipulated when they demand more social responsibility. Most company executives agree that they must take a broader responsibility and therefore cooperate with NGOs instead of argue against the CSR arguments with market economic principles. Companies that do oppose standards face so heavy critic from media and the public that stay out of it is not an option.⁸⁶

The termination of Henderson's argumentation is that standards and regulations restrain the free economy and the economic growth. Companies are most beneficial for society when they are allowed to concentrate on what they are best at.

⁸² Henderson, *Missriktad välvilja – Falska föreställningar om företagens samhällsansvar*, Eil Heckscher Papers No. 4, Timbro, Stockholm, 2002, pp. 7-9, 178-179.

⁸³ Henderson, *Missriktad välvilja*, pp. 7-9, 11-16.

⁸⁴ Henderson, *Missriktad välvilja*, pp. 11-16, 140-144.

⁸⁵ Henderson, *Missriktad välvilja*, pp. 139-140, 144-147, 153-155.

⁸⁶ Henderson, *Missriktad välvilja*, pp. 11-16, 152-153, 167-181.

3.3 Political Parties

It is crucial to understand some basics about political parties to understand the current development with individualisation and political consumerism. Political parties are the only acting institutions that can obtain political power in society although this is a situation that may change with political consumption. This last section will provide a discussion on the parties' position in society, their goals, their source of power and their development.

3.3.1 Background Political Parties

Political parties developed during the nineteenth century when the second transformation of democracy took place. What characterises this transformation is the idealistic thoughts about direct democracy were abandoned for the more realistic thoughts of representative democracy. Political parties were founded both among the members of parliament and externally among groups in society that found themselves poorly represented and unfairly treated. A comprehensible example is workers that organised themselves at an early stage in order to reach more influence in society and more power over their own lives. Parties were important during the democratisation process of the nation state that took place during the twentieth century. They were given a key role as the institutions responsible to represent the people.⁸⁷

To gain a deeper understanding of political parties and how they act we need a definition. The first fundamental part of the definition is found by the very establishment of political parties as the representatives for specific groups in society. Conversely, there exist many organisations in the society that represent different groups and interests. It is important to distinguish a political party from, for example, a labour union or an interest organisation for cancer patients. Many existing definitions fail since they give too narrow explanations that exclude, for example, local parties. A suitable definition explains a party as a political group with an official designation, that takes part in general elections and use the general election to appoint candidates to public positions. The most elemental in this definition is that the party must take part in general elections.⁸⁸

So why are political parties so important for the society? What is the reason that they are fundamental for the democracy? It all comes down to the representation; parties must represent the citizens since power in a representative democracy must derive from the people. This representation is not needed in a society without democracy or with direct democracy. The *raison d'être* for parties is to act as intermediary for the citizens and to communicate the will of the people to the leading elite. The parties ought to be the link in a representative democracy, and this linkage function is why parties got such a central role in the democratic society.⁸⁹

The linkage the system demand from the parties can be carried out in different ways. For example, the participatory linkage contributes to true democracy, as in rule by the people.

⁸⁷ GÓ, Erlingsson, A, Håkansson, KM, Johansson & I, Mattson, 'Partistyre', in GÓ, Erlingsson, A, Håkansson, KM, Johansson & I, Mattson (eds), *Politiska Partier*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2005, pp. 9-11 and A, Håkansson, 'Vad styr partiers agerande?' in GÓ, Erlingsson, A, Håkansson, KM, Johansson & I, Mattson (eds), *Politiska Partier*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2005, p. 64.

⁸⁸ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁹ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, p. 12 and Y, Choe, *Valsystem och de representativa demokratierna*, Liber, Lund, 2003, p. 78.

The clientistic, or reward, linkage, on the other hand, contributes to uphold the parties' power and this can work for or against democracy. This indicates that the way in which parties carry out the linkage between citizens and rulers affect democracy in different ways.⁹⁰

Linkage is a clever tool for seeing the presence or absence of democracy. It is a lens that forces into open view the connections on which power depends, and the connections that power builds to extend its domain. If we use it well, it becomes a special, full-length mirror that we can hold up to the powerful: What is your relationship the people over whom you rule?⁹¹

The parties have responsibility as institutions that sense popular opinions and developments in society, to create the political agenda after this. One of the challenging but also important roles for the parties is to represent those new opinions. Parties have been criticised for not accomplish this role with satisfaction. The political parties must be able to communicate and mediate both with the decision makers and with the citizens. Another difficult task for the parties is to explain and find acceptance for the political decisions. In the same time as the parties must function as a link, they must also function as institutions for debate, institutions that generate reflection amongst the citizens.⁹²

The parties are the institutions that have the responsibility to find, recruit and train the future leaders. This is a fundamental role since no other institution can produce the political leaders.⁹³ To carry out this assignment has become more difficult in the later years since the number of candidates decrease when parties' loose members.

3.3.2 Goals for the Party

It is not unproblematic to comprehend what goals a political party has since there are a few different ideas with different approaches.

The traditional theory with parties as representatives for different groups in society is well linked to the history and development of parties, firmly discussed in the prior sections. This theory may be recognised as the official explanation since the parties' goals are to act and work for the interests of the social groups the parties represent. The party program is constructed to best fit these groups' interests. In short, the parties have the same goals as the groups they represent.⁹⁴

This theory is also known as a structural theory; the party is not an actor by itself but an outcome of the developments in society. The structure of society decides how the party best represents its interest groups. This is a structural explanation that does not fully apply to any existing political party. It becomes hard to argue that the parties represent any

⁹⁰ K, Lawson, 'Linkage and Democracy' in A, Römmele, DM, Farrell & P, Ignazi (eds), *Political Parties and Political Systems: The Concept of Linkage Reversed*, Praeger, London, 2005, pp. 162-163.

⁹¹ Lawson, 'Linkage and Democracy', p. 164.

⁹² Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, pp. 12-13.

⁹³ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, p. 13.

⁹⁴ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, pp. 18-19 and I, Mattson, 'Vad gör partier i staten?' in GÓ, Erlingsson, A, Håkansson, KM, Johansson & I, Mattson (eds), *Politiska Partier*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2005, p. 107.

special group in the society when the number of members decreases. This becomes a problem since the goal can not be to work for a group's interests when the party does not represent a group anymore. The structural theory is an explanation that is abandoned by many scholars today.⁹⁵

The structural theory may have functioned well with the conditions that occurred when the parties started to develop but is out of date in today's individualistic society. The next theory claims that the parties are controlled by elite of politicians that aim to collect as much power as possible. The only way for a party to achieve power is to collect votes, the party programme is therefore constructed to maximise the number of votes.⁹⁶

As a consequence, parties care to represent the will of citizens only up to the point that this is the best (easiest) way to keep their votes and thus maintain themselves in power.⁹⁷

The methods used by the parties in this theory can be recognised in the way political parties act today. The loyal core voters become fewer so the parties can not rely on them to attain power. The tendency is that old values are abandoned a more mainstream ideas are promoted. However, neither this theory is fully applicable in reality. The elite in the parties can not just decide on a new program; the rest of the organisation must be convinced that this is the right way to go.⁹⁸

Scholars have put down much effort to find empirical evidence for the vote maximising theory. To prove that governments manipulate the economic cycle in order to reach as favourable starting point for the election campaign as possible would be solid evidence. Nevertheless, these kinds of evidence are yet to be found which weakens the vote maximising theory.⁹⁹

The active members of a party can be described as activists and this group consists of two fractions, the believers and the careerists. The believers are the grassroots in the organisation, the fraction that make sure the ideological values endure and is articulated. The believers are devoted to the party's official values and goals and are not ready to abandon them for a couple of extra votes in the election.¹⁰⁰ The believers will in some issues restrain the careerists.

The believers belong to the core voters and can be recognised as the most important supporters for the party as organisation, they involve in networks to talk to people and defend the ideology and they carry out significant voluntary work. The goals set up by the party are important for the core votes. If the party fails to reach the goals or if the goals for

⁹⁵ Håkansson, 'Vad styr partiers agerande?', pp. 63-68.

⁹⁶ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, p. 19.

⁹⁷ P, Ignazi, DM, Farrell & A, Römmele, 'The Prevalence of Linkage by Reward in Contemporary Parties' in P, Ignazi, DM, Farrell, A & Römmele (eds), *Political Parties and Political Systems: The Concept of Linkage Reversed*, Praeger, London, 2005, p. 22.

⁹⁸ Håkansson, 'Vad styr partiers agerande?', pp. 70-73.

⁹⁹ L, Lewin, *Det gemensamma bästa: Om egenintresset och allmänintresset i västerländsk politik*, Carlssons, Borås, 1995, pp. 83-94.

¹⁰⁰ A, Panebianco, *Political Parties: organization & power*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 26-27.

some reason loose credibility, the incentives of ideology, identity and solidarity to the party weakens. This is a serious situation for the party since the ideology often is used as a means to justifying underlying interests.¹⁰¹

The careerists represent the forces that make the organisation progress. They observe opportunities for future careers within the party and are more searching for power than the believers, they want to develop. It is in the careerist fraction the future leaders are to be found.¹⁰²

The maximising tendency results in parties with similar programmes and few key beliefs and where the marketing becomes increasingly important. The parties act more like corporations, where the parties chase voters the corporation chase consumers.¹⁰³

The last theory disengages the parties from both the original interest groups and the elite politicians. This theory argues that the goal for the parties is to survive as organisations and nothing else.¹⁰⁴ This theory implies that the power relations and other conditions within the party decide what the party programme should include. Since the goal is to survive that is all that really matters, what the party do outside the organisation, in the society, is of less interest with the consequence that the parties develop away from the society. Professionals run the parties with the organisation in mind, not the original ideology or core values. Individuals are given little room to act independently as the party become less of an active part of society and more of a passive survivor.¹⁰⁵

The three theories give very different pictures of the party. Some empirical evidence can be found for all of them and this make it difficult to distinguish what the actual goals for the political parties are. This is perhaps a part of the reason why the parties find themselves struggling, they are unsure of the purpose with the activity themselves.

3.3.3 The Developments of Parties

A common view is that the political parties find themselves in a stage of crisis and that this crisis can be linked to the political consumption movement. However, the development of the political parties comes up with several possibilities to the crisis worth consider before analysing a link to political consumption. This section will describe three stages in the party's development, the traditional party, the catch-all party and the cartel party.

The parties were founded by different groups in society and this is where the foundation of the party organisation rest. The traditional organisation is stabile and built on a large number of party members who carry out much of the work voluntary. Another feature of the traditional organisation is loyal core voters that belong to a well distinguished group in society. The society where the traditional party organisation belonged, and played a crucial

¹⁰¹ Panebianco, *Political Parties*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰² Panebianco, *Political Parties*, p. 27.

¹⁰³ Håkansson, 'Vad styr partiers agerande?', p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Håkansson, 'Vad styr partiers agerande?', pp. 79-81.

part, does not exist anymore. Working conditions has changed and with those group belongings, the current society is based on individualism not collectivism.¹⁰⁶

The issue is that the parties are somewhat stuck in the traditional organisation and do not adjust to the new society situation. The parties loose the foundation in society when members abandon the organisations which result in diminishing overall trust. These developments are indications of a movement in crisis.¹⁰⁷

The scholars that argue against a crisis claim that the parties do develop with the society. The organisations have changed from being member focused to be broader catch all organisations, definitely in phase with the individualistic society.¹⁰⁸

As organisation strategy, the careerists are more likely to approach the catch-all model. More concern about the large electorates and wide issues that appeal to many voters and less focus on traditional ideological issues. Another indication of a transformation into a catch-all party is loosening relations to traditional associates such as unions and religious groups. The trend is further that more focus is on the leaders in the party and less power is given the members. The members are further undermined when financial support is found outside the organisation.¹⁰⁹

An important component for the development toward professional catch-all parties is improvement of communication technologies such as television and the Internet. The need for the party members has decreased because the technology render possibility to reach larger electorates along with that professionals are necessary to master the communication technologies.¹¹⁰

A significant part of the election campaigns are carried out in the media and are taken care of by professionals, the focus is on charismatic individuals from the parties' top. This generates superficial campaigns with no time for analyses or more fundamental discussions, the campaigns become well edited happenings. The party members' voluntary work is still important but not as significant as the campaigning on air.¹¹¹

Technology point out the direction of the development, although, what truly triggers a change in a party is more absolute. A poor election result together with internal preconditions, such as a generation turnover, is events that can start the transformation.¹¹²

The power conflicts that occur within the party can be out of two kinds, horizontal or vertical. The horizontal conflicts occur between different elite groups that struggle for

¹⁰⁶ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, pp. 13-16.

¹⁰⁷ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁸ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁹ Panebianco, *Political Parties*, p. 263.

¹¹⁰ Panebianco, *Political Parties*, p. 266.

¹¹¹ G, Gidlund, 'Folkrörelsepartiet och kunskapssamhället' in O, Ruin (ed.), *Politikens ramar och aktörer: Femton uppsatser om vårt politiska system tillägnade Ingvar Carlsson*, Hjalmar & Högberg, 2004, pp. 154-155.

¹¹² Panebianco, *Political Parties*, p. 243.

dominance. The vertical conflicts occur between the members and the leader and are often of fundamental ideological kind.¹¹³

An effect of the catch-all trend is that parties become weaker institutions in comparison to the traditional parties. The catch-all organisation is closer linked to the state which results in less independent parties and a larger gap between politicians and citizens.¹¹⁴

*Less and less do parties perform their old brokerage function of bridging citizens and the state: they are now biased toward the state, in the sense that they are increasingly part of it, even nurtured by it.*¹¹⁵

This tendency is recognised by some scholars as a different type of party model named cartel party. The cartel party is a further development of the catch-all party where the party organisation has developed a stronger relationship with the state. Old sources of power such as education of citizens and strong ties to the community are abandoned in favour of the power associated with the state. Members are not needed to the same extent and membership in shape of a check is more appreciated than voluntary work.¹¹⁶

In reality, the distinctions between the models are less obvious than in theory. No party belong solely to the traditional, the catch all or the cartel definition. Also the catch-all and cartel organisations require some kind of foundation with dedicated members even if it is a loose foundation.¹¹⁷

Parties are the core of each democratic process; they are the institutions that are responsible for the communication between citizens and the rulers in society. This implies that political parties have an important role to play in the democracy. Since parties are so central in the democratic system the state is forced to provide means to protect them.¹¹⁸ The consequence is that parties do act in a rather protected environment and we will find that this has a significant impact on the political system's development.

3.3.4 Why do New Parties Develop?

It is hard for new parties to establish. The political arena is already occupied by strong actors that oppose new competitors. From the 1920s to the 1970s, the political parties have stayed rather stabile, new parties have not been able to establish during this time. New parties did not start to establish until the 1960s and the question is why? One theory claim that the transformations in society have triggered this development and that the new parties are a verification of the distrust of traditional parties. The citizens look for different values today when the materialistic needs are satisfied, post material values. This theory is most likely a part of the answer but it does not explain the fact that only a small number of new parties has managed to establish. More so, no parties fully established in the time up to

¹¹³ Ignazi, Farrell & Römmele, 'The Prevalence of Linkage', p. 26.

¹¹⁴ Panebianco, *Political Parties*, pp. 263, 267.

¹¹⁵ Ignazi, Farrell & Römmele, 'The Prevalence of Linkage', p. 21.

¹¹⁶ Ignazi, Farrell & Römmele, 'The Prevalence of Linkage', pp. 21-24.

¹¹⁷ Panebianco, *Political Parties*, pp. 243-245.

¹¹⁸ Ignazi, Farrell & Römmele, 'The Prevalence of Linkage', pp. 17-18, 25.

1970 even though society went through great transformations during this time.¹¹⁹ If the development and transformations in the society were the reason that new parties is found then more parties would have been established over time. Or else, practically no development would have taken place in society during the period between 1920 and 1970 and we know that is not the fact.

There are three basic explanations why parties were created during a short intense period during the early twentieth century and after that accomplished to stayed stabile for so long time. First, the traditional parties were the first players on the arena. An uncomplicated, although, important reason. Second, the parties managed to find groups in society that identified with the parties. This created a loyal foundation of voters for many years. Third, given that they were the first players they could make up the rules so that it suited them. The traditional parties had the possibility, and still do, to manipulate the conditions for the party system so that new competitors are disadvantaged. An example is the financial support that favour established parties.¹²⁰

One theory believes that the election system have an impact on the prospect that new parties establish. In short, an election system based on majority provides two large parties while a proportional election system allows a number of parties and therefore gives the citizens more freedom of choice. There are one mechanical and one psychological reason for this. The mechanical obstruction contains of the rules that stop small parties to gain seats in the parliament, for example, a party must receive over a certain percentage of the total votes. The psychological obstacle is a product of the mechanical. The citizen hesitates to vote for the party in favour since it is obvious that it will not gain any seat in parliament. As a consequence, the voter instead votes for one of the large parties even though this party does not represent the voter's values.¹²¹ Although the election system theory may give an explanation where new parties are most likely to establish, it does not clarify why new parties did not develop until the 1960s. The election systems have been untouched for many years and nothing significant happened in the 1960s.¹²²

Research confirms that a majority system reduce the number of parties in parliament, however, it has only negligible effect on the number of parties that candidate. The conclusion is that the election system does have some affect on how the party systems develop though it is does not provide a comprehensive explanation.¹²³

Next theory argue that new, post materialistic, values interest the citizens more seeing that the educational level has increased. The traditional parties have not abandoned the old left right issues and are considered old-fashion. Neither does this theory provide adequate empirical evidence to claim a reason for the development of new parties.¹²⁴ However, the

¹¹⁹ Erlingsson, Håkansson, Johansson & Mattson, *Politiska Partier*, p. 22.

¹²⁰ GÖ, Erlingsson, 'Varför uppstår nya partier?' in GÖ, Erlingsson, A, Håkansson, KM, Johansson & I, Mattson (eds), *Politiska Partier*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2005, pp. 152-155.

¹²¹ Choe, *Valsystem och de representativa demokratierna*, pp. 78-79, 81-82.

¹²² Erlingsson, 'Varför uppstår nya partier?', pp. 158-159.

¹²³ Choe, *Valsystem och de representativa demokratierna*, pp. 83-85, 87, 92.

¹²⁴ Erlingsson, 'Varför uppstår nya partier?', pp. 159-160.

theory is interesting in the political consumerism context and will be further discussed in the analyse chapter.

So, the actual reason why new parties are established is hard to find. A general explanation, however, is that new parties are founded when the old ones fail to follow the transformations in society. The inertia to the party system is believed to be a major cause, although, more precise explanations are still to be found.¹²⁵

4 Analysis

This chapter will link the traditional political system, the political consumption and the individual trend together and question their relation. The parties, the individual and the NGOs will also be examined. It will analyse if it exist any conflict between the different concepts and actors by a discussion about their goals, financing and power balance. The chapter start up with the contemporary situation and wound up by analysing the future development.

4.1 Contemporary Situation

It is an interesting time for the political participation. The trend is points towards many different directions and we can not be sure where to end up. What is known is the contemporary situation where traditional believes and old habits are challenged.

Not only participation in political parties decline, all kinds of voluntary associations struggles. A reason why this is considered to be a major problem is that the civic engagement is recognised as a help to stabilise democracy. However, the empirical evidence to that support stabilisation of democracy is weak. In the same time as some civic involvement decreasing, new ones expand.¹²⁶ It is problem that the new participation is left out because it provides a false picture of the contemporary situation.

Studies prove that political participation in fact increase but in diverse arenas. The individualistic movements focus on other issues than the traditional parties and must not automatically be understood as a threat to the political system.

The effects of political consumption on political participation are considered differently by various fields within political science. Some argue that an overall decline in political participation occur by pointing towards the decline in traditional political and institutional participation. Others argue that the political participation is actually increasing due to new political movement such as political consumption.¹²⁷

Decline in traditional participation is not a threat to democracy but could instead be beneficial for the democratic development. The strong institutions were necessary during the build up period, however, the new mass democracy is better assisted by looser forms of political participation. Young people, who have less trust in traditional political parties and

¹²⁵ Erlingsson, 'Varför uppstår nya partier?', pp. 161-162.

¹²⁶ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', pp. 268-270.

¹²⁷ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', pp. 265-266.

institutions, demonstrate stronger favour of democratic values. This could indicate that the new looser form of political participation is part of the democratic development.¹²⁸

By viewing businesses as political actors and as new alternatives to political parties and interest groups, citizens articulate and promote their interests to society, businesses, and government through the market.¹²⁹

Young citizens do not participate politically in a traditional manner. They see the political involvement as a part of their everyday life just like work, shopping and entertainment. Therefore, those individuals are also more likely to demand that politics should be visible in the overall life. Consequently, citizens start to demand market behaviour from the traditional political sphere, like more choices in health care, education etc. This result in citizens that become consumers and the relationship between citizens and representatives develops into a market relationship. The parties adjust to this and present less collective solutions in favour for the individual good. This phenomenon is described as ‘the supermarket state’.¹³⁰

The development of more overall demanding citizens challenges the conventional political system. However, the supermarket state theory illustrate that parties are perhaps not as slow-moving as it appear. The power exists in the parties and this is a great motivation to develop and meet challenges.

4.2 Political Consumption versus Traditional Politics

Much is pointing towards a relationship between political consumption and traditional politics where they complement each other rather than compete. However, as long as political power is involved competition will be there.

The transformation from a society based on industry to the present, based on knowledge, has contributed to changed living conditions and increased individualism. This transformation has also resulted in changed values, more professionalism and undermined party presence.¹³¹

The extension of consumer action beyond governments and into spheres of international political economy suggests the emergence of a global political order no longer occupied just by states, international organisations and NGOs, but by growing numbers of global citizens who are making their presence felt by corporations and trade regimes.¹³²

¹²⁸ Stolle & Hooghe, ‘Consumers as Political Participants?’, pp. 274-275.

¹²⁹ Micheletti, Follesdal & Stolle (eds), *Politics, Products and Markets*, p. xi.

¹³⁰ WL, Bennett, ‘Branded Political Communication: Lifestyle Politics, Logo Campaigns, and the Rise of Global Citizenship’ in M, Micheletti, A, Follesdal & D, Stolle (eds.), *Politics, Products and Markets: Exploring Political consumerism Past and Present*, Transaction Publishers, London, 2004, p. 103 and WL, Bennet, ‘Lifestyle Politics and Citizen-Consumers: Identity, Communication and Political Action in Late Modern Society’ in J, Corner & D, Pels (eds.), *Media and the restyling of Politics*, SAGE Publications, London, 2003, p. 141.

¹³¹ Gidlund, ‘Folkrorelsepartiet och kunskapssamhället’, pp. 149-151.

¹³² Bennet, ‘Lifestyle Politics and Citizen-Consumers’, p. 145.

The political participation in the Western world is believed to decrease and people care less about common issues and more about personal achievements. This is what many studies observe and what can be measured in the traditional participation. However, recent studies suggest that overall political participation is in fact increasing if the new forms of participation are included. Conventional participation and voluntary activities are replaced by new less formal participation. This new political participation is neglected in many studies; the result is faulty reports about the citizens' political interest.¹³³

The measure standards used are designed for traditional participation, to measure members in political parties etc. Political consumerism is more complicated since it must be distinguished what consumption is political and how this should be compared to other political participation. Further, political consumerism does not necessarily target the government or the decision making institutions. Much of these activities are aimed towards companies and international organisations, out of the traditional politics sphere.¹³⁴

The political consumers prefer to face certain problems by themselves without involving the traditional decision makers. One use means and methods not accessible for politicians and one do it without a traditional organisation. This behaviour confuses researcher since the political activities for so long followed certain outlines and this results in scepticism.

That consumption is not understood as an acceptable way to participate in politics might be associated with the academic separation of political science and economy. The market as an arena for politics is rather new and unexplored and we are often doubtful towards the unknown.¹³⁵ However, Micheletti have listed a number of reasons why political consumption is justified.

- Political consumption is an access point to the political arena for people that have problem to enter the traditional political arena; it brings larger diversity and a new dimension to politics.
- Companies have so much political power today because of the globalisation and increased trade that it is acceptable to influence the companies as one way to reach political change.
- Consumption is to set the political agenda. It forces otherwise unlikely actors to the negotiation table, it becomes too costly to ignore.
- Consumption becomes a useful political tool to impact on not only companies but also governments and institutions. This because we rely so much on the market today.
- The new global political arena makes it harder for common people to participate in the politics that involves them. This new political landscape demands new ways to impact and participate, consumption is one way.¹³⁶

¹³³ Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket', pp. 249-250.

¹³⁴ Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket', pp. 250-251, 254, 263.

¹³⁵ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, pp. xi, 3.

¹³⁶ Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, p. 15.

This argumentation claims that political consumption opens up for citizens that usually are kept outside the political world. It makes politics more accessible and multifaceted and it is further established when the political consumers are examined.

A much larger part of the people who consider themselves as very interested in politics take part in political consumption than the people who is not interested in politics. Further, the political consumers trust political institutions more than normal consumers. This does not imply that political consumers are uncritical of the institutions' work, however, one still find trust in the actual system.¹³⁷ This is an indication of the political interest since political consumers seem to be able to distinguish between the system and the concrete work carried out by the system.

All this is good tendencies, nevertheless, problems do exist. Politics is not just about power and decision making it also includes responsibility. Political consumption transfers the responsibility from the elected politicians to companies and the individual. Since the political system is bypassed in the decision making process they must also be cleared from responsibility if something goes wrong. The political consumerism fails to present a satisfactory explanation to this issue.

4.2.1 Altered Interests

The power aspect, that was touched upon earlier, is central in this discussion. All movements, political parties as well as political consumers, have some aim with their activity and it often comes down to power.

The answers provided by traditional political parties and ideologies are not seen as enough and comprehensive, the result is a search for alternative political solutions.¹³⁸ The vast increase in products and producers has created a situation where the competition about the consumers has been so tough that the consumers contain increased power. Consumers know this and demand more from the producer. Not just a low price but also the values behind the producer and other attributes.¹³⁹

The increased power of the consumer has been transferred to NGOs that gain great power by gather the opinions of many individuals.

The goal for NGOs is to influence companies to that extent that they become what are called 'corporate citizens', that the company should be a part of the society and feel responsibility for the society, like a citizen.¹⁴⁰

The aim for the political consumers can not be presented as a whole since every one have personal thoughts about what the political consumption may achieve. The only overall goal that can be distinguished is a fairer world, too unspecific to be helpful.

An essential element of the political consumption is the companies that are influenced to practice CSR. The main interest for a corporation is to make profit, with or without CSR. The question is if this main interest can be combined with political consumption interests?

¹³⁷ Andersen & Tobiasen, 'Who Are These Political Consumers Anyway', pp. 207, 211.

¹³⁸ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', p. 267.

¹³⁹ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', pp. 119-121, 124.

¹⁴⁰ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 124.

A new study confirms that this is the case. Companies that practice CSR are more profitable than comparable companies without this profile.¹⁴¹ This indicates that the interests of the political consumption movement can be consistent with the corporate interests.

The parties cover several goals and ambitions within their organisations. As been discussed earlier, the goals for the party are not always the same as the interest in the background. Even though politicians claim that they have the common good in interest they are really just vote maximisers who try to reach as much political power as possible. This idea is closely linked to the economical theory that citizens are profit maximisers that foremost care about their private economy.¹⁴²

The party is an actor with a lot of freedom to manoeuvre and is not locked to the interests of a certain group. Since the goal for the elite politicians that run the party is to achieve as much political power as possible, this is also the goal for the whole party organisation. It is important to gather as many votes as possible to reach the governing position, not to follow an ideology or the interests of one group. In this spirit, values can be changed and promises broken as long as it results in more votes.¹⁴³

These economical theories must be questioned. The research in this paper present the individual as opposite the profit maximiser, as an actor that rate other values higher than the private economy. Since this standpoint is obtained, the vote maximiser theory must also be questioned because the foundation origins from the profit maximising ideas.

The conclusion is that parties have other goals than to maximise the votes. Traditional values such as ideology and loyal core voters are still important for the party organisations, however, not as central as earlier.¹⁴⁴

The market economy makes it possible for individuals to engage in specific political issues in a way not possible before. The unique feature of political consumption is that the goals are extremely unspecific. An overall ambition is a fairer world but this is vague and invites diverse interpretations that could perhaps conflict. Nevertheless, this unregulated impreciseness could by itself be considered an aim for the political consumption movement, as a contrast to the organised traditional politics.

4.2.2 Finance

The interests in the background can be further illustrated by the way the movements are financed since the one that pay for something have some kind of thought behind the support.

The parties' responsibility in society is to be institutions that finds and train future leaders. The organisations must also attract voters, market themselves as well as act in the role of

¹⁴¹ NO, Ollevik, 'Företag tjänar på ett rent samvete', *E24 Näringsliv*, 14 January 2008, retrieved 14 January 2008, http://www.e24.se/samhallsekonomi/sverige/artikel_189777.e24.

¹⁴² Lewin, *Det gemensamma bästa*, pp. 81-83.

¹⁴³ Håkansson, 'Vad styr partiets agerande?', pp. 68-70.

¹⁴⁴ Lewin, *Det gemensamma bästa*, pp. 96-97.

opposition or implement the politics in the governing position. All these duties demand an extensive organisation with significant economic means.¹⁴⁵

Since parties become more professional and rely less on voluntary work, their activity turn more costly. Financiers are therefore crucial for their very existence. However, it is difficult to find investors that do not expect something in return and this is why the state allowances are essential.

The major financial support is provided by the state and this support increases the more successful the party is. The member fees are only of minor importance, the consequence of the system is that the incentive for the parties is to chase new voters and not new party members. This is one reason why the parties focus is turned away from the members in favour for the voters.¹⁴⁶

On the whole, parties are more powerful because they get more resources from the state thanks to their more extensive control of it. Such resources- more funding, state-supported personnel, availability of appointments in the public administration, and so forth- maybe considered legitimate as long as they are conceived as a means by which parties perform their democratic function of linking citizens and the state, and therefore necessary for the democratic process.¹⁴⁷

The funding from the state is justified by the fact that the whole political system is built upon parties, if the parties disappears the system collapse. The state funding is further evidence of the strong linkage between the state and the parties.

Nevertheless, party members are still necessary for the party to appear traditional and solid since the legitimacy of the party system's political power is the member and citizen link. The party can be accused to be just another profit bringing organisation without that link.¹⁴⁸ At the same, since the new political movements move away from the parties, the traditional system must be questioned. If citizens use other political means, is it still justified by the state to support the parties? If the political consumption movement is recognised as significant for the democratic development should also this movement be supported?

These questions are partly answered by the fact that state institutions do support NGOs with financial means. Both national governments and international institutions such as the EU contribute generously to organisations with fair-trade promoting activities. This indicates that conflict between traditional politics and political consumption is exaggerated.

NGOs also receive financial support from private interests, for example from Shell Foundation which is attached to Shell Oil. These kinds of economic relations can be troublesome for a serious and objective organisation. An essential source of incomes is the

¹⁴⁵ Gidlund, 'Folkrörelsepartiet och kunskapssamhället', pp. 152-153.

¹⁴⁶ Gidlund, 'Folkrörelsepartiet och kunskapssamhället', pp. 156-158.

¹⁴⁷ Ignazi, Farrell & Römmele, 'The Prevalence of Linkage', p. 25.

¹⁴⁸ Ignazi, Farrell & Römmele, 'The Prevalence of Linkage', p. 28.

licence fees from the member companies. The company that wish for a fair-trade label on its products must pay the licence fee. It is not enough just to live up to the standards.¹⁴⁹

The problem is that since the political consumption movement is individual and only to some extent carried out through NGOs, it is impossible to directly support the political consumption movement. One solution could be to substitute fair-trade products but that would require an official standard which would bring the political consumption into the traditional system. When the NGOs instead are supported, new political actors are created not necessarily matching the political consumption ideas of individual responsibility.

4.2.3 The Power Balance

Political consumption can be a substitute or a threat to traditional politics, regardless of how the trend is considered, some form of power balance exists given that the power does not exclusively belong to the traditional politics anymore.

When the political interest increases in the Western world at the same time as trust in traditional political institutions and parties declines,¹⁵⁰ it is important to notice that political consumerism target other issues than the conventional politics. A downside of globalisation is that national government loose control over human right issues when much of the production is moved abroad. The national legislation can not reach outside the national borders and to influence other government is a slow and complicated process. The individual consumer on the other hand can target a specific company or a specific issue hands on by not consuming their products. The increase in political consumerism is due to the globalisation and individualism. Globalisation makes it easier to spread information and individualism claim more responsibility for personal action and consumption. The political consumer is an individual problem solver who takes personal action because he/she is aware of the difficulties that exist within traditional politics.¹⁵¹

The political parties try to find ways to make use of the globalisation process yet without success.¹⁵² The new information and communication technology increase the personal freedom and decrease the power of sovereign states. Spaces are created on the Internet that is impossible for the state to control and this has a great impact on the political consumer movement. The Internet also makes the campaigning easier. It is simple to start a campaign towards a specific company and thereafter let the campaign live its own life and become permanent. This is well illustrated by Nike as their logo still is associated with the anti sweatshop campaign.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Fairtrade Rättvisemärkt, *Att märka din produkt*, retrieved 14 January 2008, <http://www.rattvisemarkt.se/cldoc/81.htm> and Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International, *Shaping Global Partnerships*, Annual Report 2006/07, retrieved 11 January 2008, http://www.fairtrade.net/uploads/media/Final_FLO_AR_2007_03.pdf.

¹⁵⁰ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 129.

¹⁵¹ Micheletti & Follesdal, 'Shopping for Human Rights', p. 168 and Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket', pp. 260-261.

¹⁵² Micheletti, Follesdal & Stolle (eds), *Politics, Products and Markets*, p. xii.

¹⁵³ Bennett, 'Branded Political Communication', pp. 105-106.

The legitimacy of parliamentary politics is threatened by political consumerism when responsibility is transferred from the politicians to individual citizens.¹⁵⁴ The political parties can no longer refer their political power to the responsibility for social justice and such since political consumers put the responsibility for the fairness in society on themselves.

*We may be witnessing the rise of a global political movement – one that is driven by the energy of young cosmopolitan generations who are abandoning conventional national electoral politics.*¹⁵⁵

The quote points out an opinion that illustrates a concern that both people involved in traditional politics and some scholars express. Although, the conclusion is not shared with among all authors who instead argue that the political consumption movement increase the traditional political participation since political consumers tend to be broadly political active.¹⁵⁶

There is an interesting relation between higher education, higher interest in politics and lower political party loyalty.¹⁵⁷ These characteristics can also be found for the political consumer and result in a strong awareness of what he/she wants. The party loyalty is not as important as the actual issues; political conviction controls the participation, not old habits.

The political activities previous carried out by unions and such, are today handled by individual consumers. This is possible since consumers today have more money and more access to information.¹⁵⁸ The trend of individualisation and decreased participation in traditional institutions such as political parties, unions and churches is a result of the less fundamental values of today's citizens. The central authority is weakening when people search for the information needed to make choices by themselves.¹⁵⁹

Political consumerism is critical of the ineffectiveness of conventional politics but still recognises the need for it. Traditional voting in elections is acknowledged as the most effective way of impact on society but consumption is used as an additional mean. Many political consumers are involved in traditional politics and try to make a change in society in several different ways. The wanted result is not to crowd out other forms of political movements rather to create a bottom-up power in contrast to the conventional hierarchic organisations.¹⁶⁰

The political consumption movement does not aim for the political power instead to complement it. This implies that the parties can consider it as a mean to develop the political presence in society and not a threat.

¹⁵⁴ Micheletti & Follesdal, 'Shopping for Human Rights', p. 172.

¹⁵⁵ Bennet, 'Lifestyle Politics and Citizen-Consumers', p. 146.

¹⁵⁶ Andersen & Tobiasen, 'Who Are These Political Consumers Anyway', pp. 207, 211.

¹⁵⁷ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 129.

¹⁵⁸ Bennett, 'Branded Political Communication', p. 104.

¹⁵⁹ Bennet, 'Lifestyle Politics and Citizen-Consumers', p. 139-140.

¹⁶⁰ Micheletti & Follesdal, 'Shopping for Human Rights', p. 172 and Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 'Politics in the Supermarket', pp. 260-262.

4.3 Development in the Future

It has already been implied that the parties are too fundamental in the society to be substituted for something else. The future development is instead likely to generate transformed parties with complementing actors.

[P]arties have shifted from society to the state to safeguard their futures, preferring state money and protection to the increasingly difficult task of building and retaining membership, and to insulate themselves from the taint of corruption associated with private and corporate donations. This may work as 'survival strategy'... and it is clear from the example of the US that party labels can continue to dominate even while the organisations are effectively 'empty vessels'.¹⁶¹

This situation creates many problems as the parties separate from the society and become more part of the state. Core voters are abandoned and the voter politician gap increases which in turn results in a legitimacy problem where the voters do not trust the leaders. The trend is that new anti-parties are created from this trust crisis. These new parties claim to be close to the people and a part of the society, not the state. Examples are the nationalistic rightwing parties that arise around Europe.¹⁶²

However, there is another consequence of that citizens tend to turn away from traditional parties and institutions. The general political participation is moving toward new organisations and loose networks that work with a horizontal structure rather than the traditional hierarchic and bureaucratic structure.¹⁶³ The escape from traditional politics gives citizens with other values than wide reaching ideological ideas.

The weakened party identification has not resulted in weakened concern about justice, rights, environment and other public issues. The trend is growing interest where people are likely to act outside the traditional channels in order to reach sought after results.¹⁶⁴

The power struggle that sometimes is described appears fairly distant. Some fractions of the conventional political movement are concerned about the development but without reason. The political consumption movement is too individualistic to become a threat to parties. The parties are, at the same time, too closely linked to the state in order to be forced away from the power. What we can observe is a transformation towards new ways of political participation and the great challenge will be to include them and recognise them as political movements.

5 Discussion

Individualism and political consumption are new trends within the political system and are therefore difficult to relate to traditional politics. This last chapter strives to discuss how such a relationship may look, if it is at all possible.

¹⁶¹ Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 131.

¹⁶² Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers', p. 131.

¹⁶³ Stolle & Hooghe, 'Consumers as Political Participants?', p. 271.

¹⁶⁴ Bennet, 'Lifestyle Politics and Citizen-Consumers', p. 146.

A general reflection is that all political discussion in the literature origin from a traditional standpoint. This is a problem since ideas that are fundamentally new are difficult to understand from this traditional context. The risk is that we overlook new trends since they do not fit into our standards. I believe that individualism is one of those trends.

Political consumption is too vague to be considered a political actor from the traditional viewpoint. It can not find its place in the political system since any structure or organisation can be sufficiently linked to the movement. The paradox is that the idea behind political consumerism is to stay out of the system since it is a component of the greater individualistic movement. It becomes difficult to understand the discussion about political consumption and this is perhaps due to the traditional approach.

One way to enter the problem is to strictly think about political consumption as an element of individualism and to consider the trend a political activity and therefore an actor. The activity it self becomes an actor in this way of thinking which in turn forces us to consider the political system in a new way without actors in the traditional perspective. A system like that brings about a number of problems where the accountability issue is central. In today's society the politicians are responsible to act in the citizens' interest and can loose the power in general elections. The question is- can individualism carry out this power responsibility assignment in an acceptable way? Political consumption suggests that money provides power and wealth requests responsibility. This system functions in a small scale for specific issues but hardly for the whole society. Not many people would like to live in a society where the amount of money legitimises political power.

Nevertheless, the individual trend is clearly a reaction on the current system where parties contain all the political power. For how long can parties justify their power despite a decreasing number of members and weakened faith from the public?

The citizens that take on individualism seem to ignore the political power and step around it. Political parties pay no attention to the society's development and are therefore left behind. Corporations are the ones that hold the real power today and should therefore be responsible according to the political consumption thoughts. It is interesting to notice that corporations are not at all opponents to this development. Everyone appears to agree but what happens if companies start to demand more political power for their responsibility? We may have representatives for the business world in parliament in the future as well as NGOs.

This appears rather unlikely from a traditional point of view but must be discussed as power and responsibility move away from the political parties. The traditional system must be turned upside down if new actors are to be seen as legitimate. The individualistic trend moves in this direction but the traditional system holds back and stops the development.

The argumentation keeps returning to the traditional political system no matter what. If the individual trend is to be a powerful actor, it must fit into the traditional system and this would oppose the actual purpose. The solution, which I have expressed previously, is to consider political consumption and individualism as complements to the political power controlled by parties. The challenge of the traditional system demands some kind of development and it appears unlikely that parties would give up their political power.

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