



Assessing Information as Consumer Citizens

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE CONSUMER CITIZENSHIP NETWORK

5-6 May 2008

Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia

"Paradoxically knowledge has made us more uncertain"

Jose Joaquin Brunner



CONSUMER
CITIZENSHIP
NETWORK



“More is not always better when it comes to consumer information.”

Marike Kompus van der Hoeven, Deputy Secretary General, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication, Estonia

The fifth international
Consumer Citizenship Network
conference

*Assessing information
as consumer citizens*

dealt with how consumers and citizens deal with the information which they encounter daily and how critical assessment of information can be taught. Acquiring, evaluating and applying information are three keys to consumer citizenship. Scientific fact, moral principle and emotional reaction combine to influence the decisions the consumer citizen makes. We are all challenged with the increasingly complex task of integrating information into meaningful units of understanding which can then motivate our behaviour.

130 persons from 32 countries attended



“It is essential that curriculum development which strengthens consumer citizenship education takes place nationally and internationally on all levels including that of teacher training.” Kjell Erik Øie, State Secretary, Ministry of Children and Equality, Norway

The conference focused on:

- What information consumers want and what they need
- Which information goods and services improve market transparency
- What information scientists, producers, governments, media, teachers and interest organizations should provide to enable consumers to make responsible shopping decisions
- What is necessary for information to be effectively and reliably transmitted and analyzed
- To what extent does consumers’ trust in prices and labels as valid indicators of quality encourage or undermine the consumers’ interest and ability to acquire information
- How consumer citizenship education can deal with the cognitive, emotional, social and economic influences on consumer’s capacity to process information
- How consumers can break codes and identify hidden messages in commercial information



“Governments and companies should ‘edit choices’ by removing the least sustainable products and services before sale thus making the ethical choice an easier choice.” Bjarne Pedersen, Consumers International

“Policymakers need to know the specific needs of consumers in order to develop strategies and programs for consumer education.” Yuko Ueno, OECD

A progress report about OECD’s survey on consumer education was presented by Yoko Ueno.

“It is important that educators emphasize what is feasible in relation to sustainable lifestyles and not only what is desirable, but unrealistic.” Suzana Piscopo, Malta

“Advertisers use symbols to boost imaging. Consumers need to confront the nice pictures with reality.” Ulf Schrader, Germany

“Young people are more familiar with the media but not necessarily more sophisticated in their use of it.” Ron Byrnes, USA



“Consumers are no longer dealing with food as food, but with food as a part of an industrialized sector whose goal is to make money.” Luisa de Silva, Portugal



*“There are nested levels of information assessment:
 - global assessment upon which intergovernmental action is based;
 - national environmental footprints (the country as a consumer);
 - local/community assessments in relation to Agenda 21;
 - individual assessments as consumer citizens;
 and there needs to be coherence and mutual reinforcement between these levels.”*
 Arthur Lyon Dahl, International Environment Forum

Among the various multimedia approaches to the conference theme several short videos were shown which were a part of Consumers International’s “Marketing Overdose” campaign.



Gustavo Morales provided a fascinating advertisement on film for a new product “Nothing”! Other videos and examples of relevant “consumption” art were also shown during the breaks.

“The key to reducing the information overload for consumers seems to be to make information as simple (prices, labels, etc), as timely and as highly relevant to the consumer as possible. In other words, it needs to fit into the window of the consumer’s social context.” Victoria W. Thoresen, Norway



The Tower Person Awards for Consumer Education were presented at the conference. Rosella Bannister, USA, received the international award for 2008 and Mike Kitson from The United Kingdom received the European Topace award for 2008.



36 presentations and posters were made at the conference dealing with such topics as:
 Information overload
 The quality of information
 The role of the media
 Cultural differences in assessing information
 The right to be informed
 Democracy and the consumer assessment of information
 Implementation of consumer citizenship education
 Indicators for sustainable consumption

A panel debate was also held on the topic of: Hidden information and righteous rage

“Consumer citizenship education contributes to an enhanced symbiotic relationship between different human beings or organizations that depend on each other for their survival.” Rieko Hanashiro, Japan.



There were interesting displays from the Humanities Archipelago of thematic Networks, the EU Safe Foods project and the Ubuntu project on education for sustainable development from Ireland.





The conference also contained quizzes, the first CCN student essay competition award and social events etc.



“Nowadays, media, including youth magazines, play a significant role in the formation of the value orientation of young people. (Examination of one such magazine in Latvia shows that) the real experience of an adult person’s life is presented only partially – focusing on earning money by working. At the same time, such daily necessities of everyday life as unavoidable everyday expenses (not entertainment), duties, responsibility, and planning one’s future are ignored.” Inese Jurgena, Latvia



Both task group 4 and 8 members extended their stay one more day. Task group 8 held a seminar for Tallinn student teachers

The conference was organised by The Consumer Citizenship Network, an Erasmus thematic network of educators and researchers. The conference was coordinated by the Hedmark University College, Norway and hosted by the University of Tallinn, Estonia. The conference was made possible with the support from the SOCRATES programme and the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and Ministry of Education.



This is a brief summary of the fifth international CCN conference, “Assessing Information”. A more detailed report will be forthcoming and a selection of the presentations will be published. A CD of the complete proceedings will also be made available. The content of this project does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Community, nor does it involve any responsibility on the part of the European Community.

