

The Paradigm of "Responsible Consumption": Myth or Reality in Modern Conditions

Aleksandr Kiselev^{1,2,*}, Marina Ugryumova¹, Marina Mayorova¹, Aleksandr Sazonov¹, Anna Savicheva¹

¹ Yaroslavl State Technical University, Yaroslavl, Russia

² Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Yaroslavl, Russia

* Corresponding author. Email: aakiselev56@mail.ru

ABSTRACT

Currently, researchers talk a lot about the possible paradigm of consumption development in relation to modern conditions, when in the pursuit of profits, the development of consumption leads to an unjustifiably high use of resources without the necessary replenishment. Wherein, most often, waste recycling is not perceived by large companies as a measure of respect for the resources used. Disposal of waste from the goods used by consumers, produced by organizations, is not considered by them as their problem, since it requires serious financial costs. There are different approaches to compliance with environmental standards in different countries. For example, with regard to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, allegedly "environmental standards" were used simply as a mechanism to slow down its construction. Wherein, in general, the good principles of the model of responsible consumption developed by researchers are not applicable in practice, namely, for political reasons and in favor of large industrialized countries. Wherein, the speech of the US President at the climate summit in Glasgow can be characterized by the formula: millionaires teach the poor how to live modestly. Many researchers and politicians characterize the current situation in the world as a "world war for resources". As a result, the article shows the main approaches to modern consumption as a mechanism of a market economy, but in the face of an increasing deficit, primarily of energy resources and "active littering" of the planet. Undoubtedly, the paradigm of "responsible consumption" is still manifested as a myth, since it is largely determined not by economic laws, but by the political will of industrialized countries and large corporations, which today are trying to play "their game". However, depletion of energy resources and their rapid decrease already in the near-term future, forcing today to take certain measures to improve consumption not only in individual countries, but also at the level of international cooperation. The provisions of the article contribute to the intensification of discussion of the problems identified in it in search of practical ways to solve them.

Keywords: *consumption as a category of economic science, the concept of responsible consumption, the needs of people, the impact of competition on consumption, the profit of organizations, environmental problems of consumption, limited resources, respect for earth's resources, the concept of responsible consumption.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, not only researchers, but even ordinary people are thinking more and more about the fact that there is a rapid reduction of earth's resources and more and more consumption waste appears, which negatively affect people's lives and the environment. A.I. Subetto argues that today "we are talking about the noospheric paradigm of technologism and industrialism, which would ensure the noospheric harmony of a person who

is managing on Earth with biogeocenoses, would ensure the preservation, first of all, of such life-supporting ecosystems as soil, forest, reservoirs with fresh water (for example, in Russia - Baikal, Ladoga and Onega lakes), swamps, the world ocean, especially the near-continental zones of the world ocean, where plankton reproduce – the most important producer of oxygen along with boreal forests" [1, p. 23]. Unfortunately, in practice, the principle that people not only need to take something from nature, but also need to return it wasted,

for example, to develop reforestation on an industrial basis, does not yet "work", since its loss as a resource is catastrophic today. For example, relying on remote sensing methods for surveying the Earth's surface, American scientists have shown that the total area occupied by forests on all continents was 32,688,000 km² in 2000. However, by 2005 it had decreased by 3.1 %. To the greatest extent, this affected taiga forests destroyed by fires (often occurring naturally), as well as humid tropical forests, which are intensively cleared by humans to free up areas for agricultural land [2]. Today these losses are even greater. The situation is similar with regard to the catastrophic reduction with other, first of all, energy resources. As a result, a lot is currently being written in various economic references about the importance of implementing the concept of responsible consumption. However, various researchers give different interpretations of the concept of responsible consumption, which actualize various problems from waste disposal to production of environmentally friendly products. Unfortunately, not all "good" theoretical ideas have the same "good" practical implementation, which applies to modern concepts of responsible consumption. It can be argued that there is still a lot of talk on the indicated problem, but few solutions. Wherein, many ideas of responsible consumption are rejected today, first of all, by industrialized countries and large corporations, since in a competitive environment they need more and more natural resources in order to increase the consumption of their products. According to the president of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems L. Ivashov, "making a profit, and not a reasonable human activity, has become the main driving force behind the development of the human community" [3, p. 155]. Taking all this into account, this article shows the main problems associated with the practical implementation of the ideas of responsible consumption, and outlines possible practical ways to solve them. Wherein, the possibility of using the digital economy to implement practice-oriented ways of solving the problems of responsible consumption is being considered. Therefore, it can be argued that population growth and the high cost of resources are forcing the governments of various countries to look for an alternative to classical technologies. For example, in the Russian Federation, this shall be facilitated by the state program "Digital Economy", which provides for introduction of digital technologies and platform solutions in the areas of public administration and, on this basis, the transformation of priority sectors of the economy and social sphere, including healthcare, education, industry, agriculture, construction, urban economy, transport and energy infrastructure, financial services, through introduction of digital technologies and platform solutions [4]. However, only an integrated approach and the political will of the leaders of large industrialized

countries will make it possible to solve all the emerging problems. Today they cannot be solved only with some one-off action, similar to the Glasgow climate summit in 2021. This process will be lengthy. However, today the time has come to take certain practical steps in this direction, justified from a scientific standpoint.

2. STUDY METHODS

To study the problems outlined in the article and determine the directions for the practical implementation of the ideas of responsible consumption, we used the method of inclusive observation in the study of scientific and practical problems of the development of consumption in modern conditions, interviews with specialists on the problems of modern consumption, scientific publications of researchers on the problems of using resources in the interests of economic development and pollution of the environment with consumption waste, as well as processing the information from the questionnaire survey of specialists in the field of digitalization of the economy from the standpoint of the possibility of implementing the measures to improve consumption in practice. Study materials on this topic were repeatedly submitted for discussion at various scientific and practical conferences and forums.

3. STUDY RESULTS AND THEIR DISCUSSION

At present, researchers and practitioners are increasingly beginning to raise the question that the resources of the Earth are not infinite and today we need to think about their rational use and replenishment. Much testifies to the urgency of this problem. So, for example, in May of 2021, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation.

Kozlov in an interview with RBC said that "Russia at the current levels of fossil fuel production will have enough oil reserves in 59 years, natural gas — at 103 years" [5]. The World Wildlife Fund Report (WWF) called "Living Planet Report 2008" shows "a gloomy picture of the future: if the current level of consumption of natural resources remains in the world, then even before 2035 a person will theoretically need another, additional, Earth." Indeed, in such a situation, the total need for food, energy and living space existing in the world can be satisfied only in this way "Indeed, in such a situation, the total need for food, energy and living space existing in the world can be satisfied only in this way" [6]. From the example of the gas crisis in Europe we can see that developed European countries not only do not reduce, but, on the contrary, increase their gas consumption. Wherein, countries cannot agree on reducing resource consumption to the detriment of consumption development. An example of this is the Glasgow Climate Summit in October of 2021, at which major coal-using countries, including Canada, Poland,

Ukraine and Vietnam, announced that they would gradually phase out the use of coal for power generation. This assumes that larger economies will do this in the 2030s, and smaller ones in the 2040s. However, some of the largest economies in the world that depend on coal, including Australia, China, India and the United States, did not accept the terms of the agreement, that is, they do not want to reduce coal consumption at the expense of developing their economies and increasing consumption [7]. Wherein, the researchers considered that air pollution from burning fossil fuels leads to the premature death of more than seven million people every year, and the deterioration of natural conditions on Earth provokes an increase in morbidity due to poor quality of food, water and air [8]. As a result, the President of the Russian Geographical Society, Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation S. Shoigu said that, in his opinion, today "mankind is heading towards its own destruction by leaps and bounds; and the reason for this is the unrestrained urge to consume". In his words, the time has come to understand "that it is time to stop this insane race of consumerism" [9]. There is something to think about.

It shall be understood that economic theory considered and considers consumption as one of the main mechanisms for the development of any economy. In general, in economic theory, consumption is understood as use of a product in the process of satisfying the needs of people and acquiring certain goods or services by them. So, for example, J. M. Keynes, in his concept of consumption, proceeded from the hypothesis of absolute income, based on the fact that subjects form their consumption depending on their current income. There were also other approaches to the problem of consumption. For example, M. Friedman offered the hypothesis of permanent income to explain consumer behavior. Wherein, by permanent income, he meant the income expected by the consumer over a long period of time (several years or the whole life). Based on this, he believed that subjects form their consumer spending depending not on current, but on permanent income, striving to ensure a stable level of consumption throughout their lives. Developing these provisions, F. Modigliani offered a theory of consumption, which he called the "life cycle" theory. According to F. Modigliani, both income and consumption, inextricably linked with it, fluctuate during the course of a person's life stages, and etc. All these theories remain relevant today. However, with development of social production, the development of consumption has become one of the goals of producers, since an increase in their profits depends on this. This required the use of various mechanisms for development of consumption through the activation of consumer demand of people. In the end, development of consumption organically "fit" into the "race" of organizations for profit and toughening of the competition. As the French ecologist F. Senk-Mark

fairly wrote, "man destroys nature because he earns on it, and often earns a lot" [3, p. 158].

However, what should be understood today by responsible consumption from the standpoint of science? Here the researchers are already faced with the problem of defining the paradigm of responsible consumption. Analysis of various studies shows that they do not have a common understanding of the essence of responsible consumption. For example, E.A. Mitina notes that various researchers give different understandings of the essence of responsible consumption: from waste disposal to the production of ecological products. Wherein, she concludes that "in the modern scientific references, the aspects of responsible consumption are not fully disclosed" [10]. Wherein, E.A. Mitina, speaking about the development of a model of responsible consumption, "sees" the emerging areas of responsible consumption: ecological (do not buy goods, the production of which affects the environment); social (avoid buying products from companies that have a negative impact on public welfare); ethical (a conscious and deliberate choice in favor of responsible consumption based on personal and moral convictions); and rational (voluntary reduction in the level of individual consumption). However, it is not clear how this can be done in practice. Considering any product, we can assume that its production is not ecological. Even bread needs to be baked using various oven fuels. "It is not written" on the bread on which oven the bread was baked from the standpoint of ecological standards. Any car emits exhaust gases when the engine is running. Could this force the consumer to abandon such purchase? Even electric cars are not a way out of this situation, since they require electrical energy to charge batteries, which must be obtained from the operation of various power plants. Which companies should be identified as having a negative impact on public welfare. Sometimes they include companies in the military-industrial complex. However, any society and state can only then develop successfully if it can defend itself. Wherein, such companies provide jobs for society and are often at the forefront of technological development and creators of new technologies and new products for society. For example, this is the construction of civilian aircraft and ships, in the production of which technologies developed by companies of the military-industrial complex are used. Speaking about the ethical aspect, it can be noted that each person may have their own preferences in the purchase of goods. The main thing is that they meet the requirements of society. For example, smoking is not a prohibited social norm. If a person does not smoke, then he/she will not buy cigarettes anyway, since this is contrary to his/her beliefs. However, if a person smokes, then he/she will definitely buy them, despite the opinion of other people. As another characteristic of responsible consumption E.A. Mitina sees a rational approach, that is, "reducing the level of individual consumption", which shall not be associated with the fact that a person, for example, ate worse (did not finish eating), did not

follow fashion, and etc. However, this is absurd, since, on the one hand, there shall be mandatory restrictions on consumption, and on the other hand, there shall not be any. For example, a person has a new demi-season jacket. However, fashion changed in the spring. What should he/she do with his/her desire to be in fashion: buy a fashionable jacket or walk in one that is out of fashion, but in good condition. Or drive a car for 20 or more years, until it rusts at all, but you don't want to buy a new car, although you want to. Probably, in modern conditions it is necessary to understand that responsible consumption shall not be associated with mandatory restrictions. Wherein, it is important that consumers not only use the purchased products correctly, but also, most importantly, properly dispose of them or the waste left over from their use. For example, the owner of an out-of-fashion jacket shall not throw it into the trash, but must transfer it to where it will be used as intended as clothing or recycled and turned into raw materials for production of new products. The owner of an obsolete car must, when buying a new car, hand over the old car for metal recycling. Wherein, product manufacturers themselves shall be interested in using environmentally friendly technologies and using secondary raw materials in their activities.

After analyzing the current situation, it can be assumed that responsible consumption shall be considered as use of a product in the process of satisfying the needs of people and acquiring certain goods or services with the simultaneous correct disposal of products that are unnecessary to the consumer or their waste after use. The main goal of responsible consumption will be to qualitatively meet the needs of people and prevent environmental problems. Wherein, responsible consumption can be characterized as reasonable consumption. In simple words, responsible consumption is the economical use of resources given to mankind by nature in limited quantities, as well as the work to restore them in a timely manner. Wherein, in general, all researchers agree that modern approaches to consumption shall be considered from the standpoint of five principles: give up excessive consumption (REFUSE), reduce consumption if possible (REDUCE), use (REUSE) again, use for other purposes (REPURPOSE), recycle (RECYCLE). Therefore, responsible consumption must be based on these principles of prudent consumption.

Unfortunately, this is not easy to do today. Especially at the global level. So, for example, in practice in a competitive environment, an environmentally friendly enterprise that does not damage the environment is often economically less profitable (making a profit, income) than one that more actively exploits natural resources without worrying about their replenishment [3, p. 158]. As a result, it can lose its market positions and go bankrupt.

As a result, the important thing in implementation of the ideas of responsible consumption at the present time will be, firstly, the "political will" of industrialized

countries. However, it is quite difficult to do this today. For example, former US President Donald Trump made a decision disregarding the opinion of his European partners from the agreement on greenhouse gas emissions, since, in his opinion, this is detrimental to the American economy. However, only in 2015, USA carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere exceeded 5.1 mlt. The kilotonne is more than the figure for all 28 states of the European Union [11]. Wherein, he signed a decree in support of the commercial development of resources on the Moon and other celestial bodies, formally "appropriating" the resources of the Moon in favor of only one country. [12]. This suggests that politicians are not ready to stop the "economic war" for resources, which are fought both by political means and by the military ones. Take, for example, the USA war against Iraq. The reason for the war with Iraq, publicly designated by the United States, was linked to the destruction in Iraq of an authoritarian regime capable of using weapons of mass destruction – chemical weapons. However, as a result of the war, no chemical weapons were discovered, the new "democratic order" brought to the country by the United States led to the destruction of the country's state structure, the collapse of the economy and the deterioration of the lives of ordinary Iraqis. However, in reality this was done to solve two problems. First, Russia, which actively interacted economically with Iraq, lost this market in favor of the United States. Second, the United States gained access to a "cheap" resource for itself – Iraqi oil. The United States did everything to preserve access to "free" oil in Syria. To this day they leave their troops without the official consent of the Syrian authorities in the territory of a foreign state, which are trying to preserve the ability to pump out Syrian oil for their needs. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation has been consistently pursuing a policy of rational use of natural resources, thereby setting an example for other countries. The state program Digital Economy is one of the mechanisms for introduction of digital technologies to make it possible to transform priority sectors of the economy precisely from the standpoint of implementing the ideas of responsible consumption [4]. Indeed, the time has come to think not how to take more resources from the Earth, but how to use them wisely, thinking not about the present day, but about what will happen next, solving the issues of replenishing natural resources. It will not be possible to overcome this problem for one country, including the United States, which is striving with all its might to maintain its position as a world leader. As a result, it can be considered that today the problem of responsible consumption goes beyond the economy and is already becoming a political and even geopolitical problem. However, for now, the big powers intend to solve it at the expense of developing countries, including to the detriment of their economies, as well as through the creation of production of their products in the territory of other countries and implementation of "disposal" in their territory of hazardous industrial waste, for example, radioactive waste received in their

territory. This is due to the fact that "subsurface storage facilities guarantee safety only for about a hundred years, and waste will become inactive only after a few million years" [13]. However, as history shows, this cannot continue indefinitely, and it will soon be impossible to solve the problem of using resources at the expense of others.

Secondly, development of technologies in modern conditions leads to the fact that large companies want to produce more and more new goods and, using new and aggressive forms of product promotion, stimulate consumption in order to increase their profits due to this. Wherein, there is an active search for new, cheaper materials, which in fact then turn into garbage that pollutes the Earth. So, today "new types of materials have been developed, for example, plastic, which decompose for hundreds of years or do not decompose at all. As a result, they rot in landfills, releasing a whole bunch of toxins" [14]. In the Pacific Ocean there already exists a giant island of garbage, which is already being named: Great Pacific Garbage Patch, Pacific Trash Vortex, Pacific Garbage Island, and etc., which is growing at a gigantic pace, since every day about 2.5 million pieces of plastic and other garbage are dumped into the ocean from all continents. Wherein, such a "garbage island" causes irreparable damage to the environment, since birds, fish and other inhabitants of the ocean take this plastic for food. This has already caused the death of more than 100 thousand individuals of marine mammals and the annual death of more than a million seabirds [15]. Wherein, even large companies do not want to dispose and recycle waste from manufactured products, since this requires serious costs. Without countries developing common legislative rules for disposal of industrial waste and use of waste for recycling, today it is not possible to implement the concept of responsible consumption.

Third, a few decades ago, consumers did not have a "fashion" for such a quick replacement of newly purchased goods. Today, in landfills, you can see many goods that could still work, for example, TVs, refrigerators, clothes and much more, which were produced not so long ago, but have lost their attractiveness to consumers and have been replaced with newer ones.

Therefore, what is needed is not prohibitive measures, but well-thought-out measures for collection and processing of waste of disposable products. For example, today "there are waste processing plants in Russia. However, their quantity is not enough for disposal of waste, where we are all producers. In addition, the fate of some processing enterprises in our country is extremely unfortunate. Therefore, development of small and medium-sized businesses in the waste processing industry is extremely relevant for Russia" [16]. In many countries such factories do not exist at all. Unfortunately, we see that the reform of the separate collection of waste, even in Russia, is "slipping". So, for example, multicolored bins were

installed for people to collect different types of garbage, and a car that drives up to take out the garbage often dumps everything into the general container of the car. Consequently, recycling of waste of unnecessary products shall be solved consistently and comprehensively, so that it is profitable for people to hand over it for recycling, and the business that processes products receives government support.

Fourth, as a rule, those researchers who deal with the problems of responsible consumption write that one of the universal tips for those who want to become a rational consumer is to try to avoid disposable goods (except when they are necessary, for example, for medical purposes). Wherein, they believe that if people do not develop such a habit, they will continue to waste useful resources, pollute the environment, which will ultimately lead to problems with their health [Scopus]. However, a modern person is already "accustomed" to many disposable things, ranging from wet wipes to cups of coffee, which frees him/her from the need to maintain and store them, since they are convenient for him/her at home, it is easier to throw them in the trash and when the need arises purchase new ones. Therefore, it is impossible to resolve the issue of preventing consumers from buying disposable products. Moreover, manufacturers of disposable products are not ready to give up making a profit from the sale of such products and will continue to actively promote their consumption. Therefore, it is necessary to oblige companies to produce disposable products of materials that could be conveniently processed or used by humans after consumption. For example, ice cream in a waffle cup will be completely eaten by a person together with a cup, but from the ice cream in a plastic cup, garbage will remain in the form of plastic (a cup).

Fifth, today there are many risks to implement the ideas of the concept of responsible consumption, primarily those associated with the possibility of bankruptcy, which companies and organizations are not yet ready to take on.

Therefore, the main question arises: "Is the implementation of the concept of responsible consumption a myth or is it reality?" The analysis allows to believe that the solution to the problem of responsible consumption, which today more and more from theoretical aspects is moving into a practical sphere, in the long term solving the problem of human survival on Earth. The task of economic science today is already to give practice-oriented recommendations on how to combine the interests of producers from different countries and consumers in order to put into practice the "good" principles of the concept of responsible consumption.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The ideas of the concept of responsible consumption are the requirements of the modern world economy. However, it is difficult for scientists today to offer

practical ways of its implementation, since in many respects they depend on political decisions of both states and large companies. As a result of this, the provisions of many scientists are still only declarative in nature. This situation on the issues of responsible consumption can be characterized as follows: there are many conversations – few solutions. Nevertheless, the time has come to make a fairy tale come true, when these issues will become relevant for everyone: both consumers and producers. Wherein, today scientists shall develop a certain scientifically grounded paradigm of responsible behavior, which in the future would become in demand by practitioners. Wherein, scientists of different kinds shall already now offer for implementation certain measures as preparatory measures that can be implemented within the framework of the national economy. The practitioners of organizations shall be ready to find the means and determine the methods of how to correctly implement these ideas of the researchers in the practical plane. We shall be ready for this, since it will not be possible to avoid the need to implement the ideas of responsible consumption, as the modern development of the world economy shows.

REFERENCES

- [1] A.I. Subetto, Noospherism as a scientific and methodological basis for solving the socio-economic and technological problems of new industrialization in the era of a great evolutionary turning point, Socio-economic and technological problems of new industrialization as a factor in the advanced development of the national economy: collection of proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference, pp. 15-29 (2019).
- [2] Analysis of satellite images made it possible to estimate the annual loss of forests around the planet. <https://oko-planet.su/pogoda/pogodaday/38224-analiz-sputnikovyx-snimkov-pozvolil-ocenit.html>.
- [3] L. Ivashov, Lost mind, p. 512 (2021).
- [4] Digital Economy of the Russian Federation. Access mode. <https://digital.gov.ru/ru/activity/directions/858/>.
- [5] The Ministry of Natural Resources has calculated how long Russia will have enough oil and gas. <https://news.myseldon.com/ru/news/index/250523952>.
- [6] The problem of lack of natural resources. <http://ultraprogress.ru/problemi-tsvilيزاتsii/problema-nechvatki-prirodnich-resursov.html>.
- [7] Climate summit in Glasgow does not meet the expectations of experts. https://rg.ru/2021/11/04/klimaticheskij-sammit-v-glazgo-ne-opravdyvaet-nadezhdy-ekspertov.html?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop.
- [8] Scientists have warned of an impending disaster worse than the COVID-19 pandemic. https://ria.ru/20211020/katastrofa-1755447209.html?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=lentainform.com&utm_campaign=ria.ru&utm_term=1295701&utm_content=9708702.
- [9] Shoigu warned about the imminent death of humanity due to overconsumption. <https://www.m24.ru/news/obshchestvo/18082021/178532>.
- [10] E. A. Mitina, Theoretical approaches to understanding the essence of responsible consumption, in: Scientific electronic economic magazine Theoretical Economics, 1 (61), (2020), pp. 55-63.
- [11] The USA has formally withdrawn from the Paris Climate Agreement. <https://plus-one.ru/news/2020/11/04/ssha-oficialno-vyshli-iz-parizhskogo-soglasheniya-po-klimatu>.
- [12] Trump signed a decree on the right of the United States to use the resources of the Moon. https://yandex.ru/news/story/Tramp_podpisal_ukaz_o_prave_SSHA_ispolzovat_resursy_Luny--67b949dfe6a4d210f2a13cde2f8c0041?fan=1&from=newswizard.
- [13] Burial of nuclear waste. https://studopedia.ru/5_57885_zahoronenie-yadernih-othodov.html.
- [14] How to solve the garbage problem – harm and recycling. <https://vtorothodi.ru/vse-ob-otxodax/problema-musora>.
- [15] Garbage Island in the Pacific Ocean. http://go.mail.ru/redirect?type=sr&redirect=eJzLKckpKLbS18_JTEtNz8IPStXLSy3RT8rJTty_WT0ktSczMKbbPTLE1MTFIYDA0Nbe0MLU0sjBneHgj8MmeObm3heZt_BH9WJ8JAJFiGp4&src=855fba&via_page=1&user_type=5d&oqid=8a5af58a2257999e.
- [16] Business for the processing of waste and garbage in Russia. <https://vtorothodi.ru/pererabotka/zavody-musora-rossii.html>.
- [17] A.A. Kiselev, The concept of responsible consumption – a hindrance or a prospect for economic development? In: Law, economics and management: from theory to practice: materials of

the All-Russian scientific conference with international participation, pp. 12-18 (2020).

- [18] A. Kiselev, M. Mayorova, N. Shishkina, M. Markin, Solving the problems of conservation and rational use of natural resources as a modern factor in the development of the world and regional economy, in: IV International Scientific and Practical Conference «Sustainable Development and Green Growth on the Innovation Management Platform» (2021).