

*Aleksandra Burgiel*  
*Izabela Sowa*  
*Jolanta Zralek*  
*Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Katowicach*

## **VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY – SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE TO OVERCONSUMPTION**

*Voluntary simplicity (VS) fits well the category of sustainable consumption because to its principles include: creating economically sustainable future, shaping balanced relationships between humans as well as building and maintaining close ties to the nature. Therefore the first aim of this article is to characterize VS as a lifestyle that constitutes the sustainable alternative to overconsumption. The second objective is to determine attitudes toward overconsumption and on this basis to answer the question if Polish consumers are willing to accept the idea of voluntary simplifying their lives. To attain these purposes we defined VS, described its relationships with sustainable consumption and also characterized consumers who adopt simple lifestyle. The primary data come from two qualitative research projects using individual in-depth interviews that were conducted in years 2013 and 2014. The main conclusion of the analysis is a statement that presumably Poles are not ready to consciously and voluntarily limit their consumption yet.*

**Keywords:** simple life style, voluntary simplifiers, downshifter, sustainable consumption, consumer behavior

### **Introduction**

A proliferation of materialistic lifestyle in the well developed countries has resulted in overconsumption which means a consumption which is not justified neither by biological nor by social-economic considerations<sup>1</sup>. In the long term a significant effect of overconsumption is quality of life deterioration confirmed by wellbeing paradox observed in industrialized countries<sup>2</sup>. According to this paradox the sense of happiness doesn't rise proportionally to the increase in income. It results from the fact that beyond a certain level of welfare the further income growth generates additional nonmaterial costs like overwork, stress, permanent hurry, lack of time to rest and to cultivate family and social relations. When an individual accepts current deficiency of life satisfaction trying to secure their own future and expecting to be happy in retirement thanks to their current sacrifice the "Deferred Happiness Syndrome" occurs<sup>3</sup>. This in turn leads to the observation that at some point the relationship between income level

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<sup>1</sup> A. Dąbrowska, M. Janoś-Kresło (ed.): Konsumpcja w krajach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. PWE, Warszawa 2007, p. 52 [in Polish].

<sup>2</sup> T. Jackson: The Challenge of Sustainable Lifestyle. [In:] State of the World 2008: Innovations for a Sustainable Economy. The Worldwatch Institute 2008, p. 45-60, [https://www.worldwatch.org/files/pdf/SOW08\\_chapter\\_4.pdf](https://www.worldwatch.org/files/pdf/SOW08_chapter_4.pdf) [accessed on July 28, 2014].

<sup>3</sup> P. Gershwin: Simplicity and the City: Understanding the Voluntary Simplicity Movement in Melbourne. Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection Paper 867/2010, [http://digitalcollections/isp\\_collection/867](http://digitalcollections/isp_collection/867) [accessed on Dec. 1, 2014].

and a quality of life considered on a macro scale starts to be negative<sup>4</sup>.

Consumers who feel a burden of the abovementioned costs, often look for an alternative to materialistic lifestyle. The gradual changes in their value system frequently result in conscious reduction of consumption which in turn leads to adopting simple living rules which is also called voluntary simplicity (VS).

The most significant increase in academics' interest in the simple living was noted in Western societies in the 70s and then later in the 90s of the 20th century. Also nowadays the conditions and manifestations of VS are being researched mainly in these countries where negative consequences of hyperconsumption are the most visible. In Poland the VS movement hasn't been widely discussed yet and a lack of primary research on this topic makes it impossible to say how Poles evaluate simple lifestyle and to what extent, if at all, they adopt VS rules. Through this paper the authors wish to stimulate a discussion about the possibility of simplifying Polish consumers' lifestyle and to encourage research in this field. Therefore the first aim of this article is to characterize VS as a lifestyle that constitutes the sustainable alternative to overconsumption. The second objective is to determine Polish consumers' attitudes toward overconsumption and, on this basis, answer the question if they are willing to accept the idea of voluntarily simplifying their lives.

## Research methods

Secondary data used in this paper come from the literature and international studies regarding VS. Primary data were obtained during two qualitative studies conducted in 2013 and 2014. In both cases a method of in-depth interview was used, and both studies were realized in the Silesian voivodeship. In the first project data were collected from 15 adult respondents aged from 21 to 77, representing relatively affluent households (see details presented in Table 1). The same size of a sample was used in the second study. The respondents were between 19 and 69, and the majority of them were professionally active. They represented households of diversified material situation (see Table 2).

During the interviews conducted in 2013 the topic of overconsumption was examined by word association test (associations to word "overconsumption" were sought) as well as by direct questions about buying more things than the consumer really needs. Respondents' opinions about a statement "The more a person can consume, the happier they are" were also discussed. In 2014 respondents were asked i.a. to assess Poles' consumer behaviors from the perspective of their rationality. A need to change these behaviors and the factors that could prompt Polish consumers to reduce consumption were also considered.

**Table 1.** The first study sample characteristics

<i><u>Gender</u></i>	<i><u>Age</u></i>	<i><u>Education level</u></i>	<i><u>Household size</u></i> <i><u>(number of members)</u></i>	<i><u>Income</u></i> <i><u>(subjectively assessed)</u></i>
Female	24	Higher	2	average
Female	31	Secondary	3	Slightly below average

<sup>4</sup> R. Veenhoven: World Database of Happiness. Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands, <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl> [accessed on July 29, 2014].

Female	38	Secondary	4	Definitely above average
Female	41	Higher	4	Slightly above average
Female	44	Higher	4	Average
Female	51	Secondary	2	Definitely above average
Female	51	Higher	4	Average
Female	72	Secondary	2	Definitely above average
Male	21	Secondary	6	Slightly below average
Male	22	Secondary	3	Average
Male	29	Secondary	4	Slightly above average
Male	40	Higher	3	Slightly above average
Male	48	Higher	4	Slightly above average
Male	64	Higher	2	Slightly above average
Male	77	Higher	2	Definitely above average

Source: primary research results.

**Table 2.** The second study sample characteristics

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education level</i>	<i>Professional status</i>	<i>Household size</i>	<i>Subjectively estimated material situation of a household</i>
Female	19	Secondary	Studying	4	Good
Female	26	Higher	Working	4	Average
Female	34	Secondary	Working	2	Average
Female	37	Secondary	Working	2	Average
Female	38	Secondary	Working	5	Bad
Female	42	Secondary	Working	4	Very good
Female	43	Higher	Working	4	Good
Female	43	Higher	Working	3	Good
Female	69	Higher	Retired	2	Good
Male	19	Secondary	Studying	4	Good
Male	40	Higher	Working	4	Bad
Male	41	Higher	Working	4	Good
Male	43	Higher	Working	3	Very good
Male	44	Higher	Working	4	Very good
Male	44	Higher	Working	4	Good

Source: primary research results.

## Theoretical background

### Defining voluntary simplicity

In the most general way the essence of VS has been described by D. Elgin in a subtitle of his book where he introduced the concept of “outwardly simple and inwardly rich” way of living<sup>5</sup>. According to A. Etzioni<sup>6</sup> VS refers to the choice out of free will

<sup>5</sup> D. Elgin: Voluntary Simplicity. Toward a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich. Second edition, Harper Collins, New York 2010.

<sup>6</sup> A. Etzioni: Voluntary Simplicity: Characterization, Select Psychological Implications, and Societal Consequences. [In:] B. Hodgson (ed.): The Invisible Hand and the Common Good. Chapter 16, Springer 2004, p. 379.

rather than by being coerced by poverty, government austerity programs, or being imprisoned, to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services, and to cultivate non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning. S. Alexander<sup>7</sup> notices that VS is an oppositional living strategy that rejects the high-consumption, materialistic lifestyles of consumer cultures and affirms what is often just called “the simple life” and involves providing for material needs as simply and directly as possible. This generally means accepting the lower income and a lower level of consumption, in exchange for more time and freedom to meet these life goals achievement of which doesn’t depend on the amount of possessed money. Thus VS represents both a system of views and the practices that arise from beliefs that personal satisfaction, fulfillment and happiness result from a commitment to the nonmaterial aspects of life<sup>8</sup>.

### **Voluntary simplicity and sustainable consumption**

The idea of simple lifestyle is nothing new to consumers. The majority of pre-industrial societies used to live in a very simple way. But it was the kind of involuntary simplicity caused mainly by the poor economic and social situation of a given person and, sometimes, resulting from their religious beliefs.

The first postulate of voluntary come back to the simple life occurred in the late of 19th century in H. D. Thoreau writings<sup>9</sup>. This statement found its formal legitimization in 1936 when the social philosopher R. Gregg introduced the name “voluntary simplicity” and described its concept stressing its religious and spiritual bases<sup>10</sup>. The next surge of interest in this topic emerged in the 70s along with the conviction that there was an urgent need to find a cure for a rising overconsumption problem. Such a necessity occurred in relation with the discussion caused by the report “The Limits to Growth” published in 1972<sup>11</sup>. Simultaneously ecological and social dimension of simple living became one of the bases of counterculture of the 60s and 70s. The academic research in this field was also intensified at this time. D. Elgin and A. Mitchell were the first to describe a specific segment of consumers who for whatever reasons choose to live with less and whom they labeled “voluntary simplifiers” (VSS)<sup>12</sup>.

The real revival of the VS idea was noticed in the 90s when the anticonsumption movement occurred in the developed countries. VS was noted to fit well the concept of sustainable development and sustainable consumption<sup>13</sup>. The latter is defined as the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of

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<sup>7</sup> S. Alexander: The Voluntary Simplicity Movement: Reimagining the Good Life Beyond Consumer Culture. *The International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic & Social Sustainability*, vol. 7 iss. 3/2011, p. 134.

<sup>8</sup> S. Zavestoski: The Social-Psychological Bases of Anticonsumption Attitudes. *Psychology & Marketing*, vol. 19 (2)/February 2002, p. 149.

<sup>9</sup> H. D. Thoreau: *Walden, czyli życie w lesie*. Dom Wydawniczy REBIS, Poznań 2010 [in Polish].

<sup>10</sup> S. Zavestoski: The Social-Psychological ..., op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> Club of Rome <http://www.clubofrome.org/?p=375> [accessed on Dec. 29, 2014].

<sup>12</sup> M. Craig-Less, C. Hill: Understanding Voluntary Simplifiers. *Psychology & Marketing*, vol. 19(2)/Feb 2002, p. 188.

<sup>13</sup> J. Kronenberg, N. Iida: Simple Living and Sustainable Consumption. *Problems of Sustainable Development*, vol. 6, no. 2/2009, p. 67-74.

future generations<sup>14</sup>.

At present the VS movement gains an additional importance because limiting consumption becomes a point of special interest in times of economic downturn. The recession not only forces consumption reduction but also stimulates deeper deliberation about the necessary shifts in individuals' values system. Thus crisis may work as an "alarm clock" that motivates consumers to simplify their lives<sup>15</sup>.

### **Voluntary simplifiers**

On a macro scale as well as in case of an individual behavior, simplifying is a slow, evolutionary process<sup>16</sup>. It requires learning new behaviors and adhering to the values that are different in several ways from those of the consumer society. It involves among others diminishing of the importance of material concerns and limitation of work time to a reasonable number of hours in order to focus on those aspects of life that are intangible and thus are deemed as more essential<sup>17</sup>. Not everyone is able to make such a reevaluation of life in one step, so while describing VSS one can define their different types.

The most popular classification of voluntary simplifiers is the one introduced by A. Etzioni who has distinguished downshifters (DS), strong simplifiers (SS) and holistic simplifiers (HS)<sup>18</sup>. The first group includes economically well off consumers who voluntarily give up some consumer goods (often considered luxuries) because they feel trapped in the vicious circle of work and spending, and simultaneously they lack time for themselves and for celebrating family life. Becoming a DS is often the first step to more advanced consumption limitation which is typical for strong simplifiers. This group encompasses people who resign well-paid, stressful jobs to live on less income but have more peaceful life as well as consumers who voluntarily chose early retirement. HS constitute the group of people most devoted to the idea of VS thus willing to change their lifestyle in the most radical way. Their entire life is focused on simplicity in its most ethical and spiritual form<sup>19</sup>. They often manifest their beliefs by moving from big cities to the rural areas. HS are also socially engaged, attempt to create communities and popularize VS.

Because of the abovementioned diversity of VSS there is no possibility to ascribe a finite set of typical behaviors to all the simplifiers. The most common micro-strategies of VS refer to changes in food/diet and transportation habits, lengthened products life span, recycling and avoidance of waste, as well as buying sustainable

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<sup>14</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development, Oslo Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption <http://www.iisd.ca/consume/oslo004.html> [accessed on Nov. 20, 2014].

<sup>15</sup> F. Schneider, G. Kallis, J. Martinez-Alier: Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 18/2010, 511-518; D. E. Wu, J. Boyd Thomas, M. Moore, K. Carrol: Voluntary simplicity: The Great American Apparel Diet. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, vol. 17, no. 3/2013, p. 294-305.

<sup>16</sup> M. E. Huneke: The Face of the Un-Consumer: An Empirical Examination of the Practice of Voluntary Simplicity in the United States. *Psychology & Marketing*, vol. 22 (7)/July 2005, p. 532-533.

<sup>17</sup> L. Boujbel, A. D'astous: Voluntary simplicity and life satisfaction: Exploring the mediating role of consumption desires. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 11/2012, p. 491.

<sup>18</sup> A. Etzioni: Voluntary ..., op. cit., p. 380.

<sup>19</sup> T. Jackson: The Challenge ..., op. cit.

products<sup>20</sup>. Among the particular VS behaviors one can mention e.g. buying sustainable food<sup>21</sup>, vegetarianism, own food growing and processing, limiting or resigning driving own car (also not having one), repairing and modernizing used items, making clothing and household furnishing, thrifty media usage, green packaging, buying energy-efficient home appliances, common consumption with its various manifestations<sup>22</sup>, buying fair trade products<sup>23</sup> etc.

## Research results and discussion

Associations with word „overconsumption” indicated by consumers interviewed in 2013 can be divided into three groups: negative statements describing particular behaviors, overconsumption conditions and exemplary brands or places connected with overconsumption (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Associations with overconsumption

No.	Group of associations	Examples of statements
1.	Negative descriptions of behaviors	wastefulness, life beyond means, greed, throwing out products, excessive appetite, overstatement, unnecessary expenses, squandering of money, storage the items, wasting time, continuous shopping, dissolution
2.	Conditions of overconsumption	wellbeing, high income, wealth, bourgeoisie, food surplus, rich offer
3.	Brands and the places of overconsumption occurrence	McDonald's, Mercedes, Biedronka, palace, large stores, hypermarkets, shopping centers

Source: primary research results.

Subsequently the current market offer and the possibilities of needs satisfaction were discussed. While referring to this question respondents on their own initiative mentioned the common problem of buying useless things and they were relatively unanimous on this matter. They recognized overconsumption as a widespread phenomenon and admitted that it occurs even in case of consumers with limited incomes: “[...] *the majority of people buy items which they don't really need or things that meet the artificially driven needs. And what is even worse, people who have no*

<sup>20</sup> D. Shaw, C. Moraes: Voluntary Simplicity: an exploration of market interactions. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 33/2009, p. 216; C. Bekin, M. Carrigan, I. Szmigin: Defying marketing sovereignty: voluntary simplicity at new consumption communities. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 8 no. 4/2005, p. 415.

<sup>21</sup> Sustainable food is produced locally, organic, free from GMO and preservatives.

<sup>22</sup> Collaborative consumption is an economic model based on sharing, reselling, exchange, borrowing, lending and renting goods and services between consumers, valuing access to a product more than its ownership. R. Botsman, R. Rogers: *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption*. Harper Business, New York 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Fair Trade is an alternative approach to conventional international trade. It is a trading partnership which aims for sustainable development of excluded and disadvantaged producers. It seeks to do this by providing better trading conditions, by awareness raising and by campaigning. Fair Trade in Europe 2001, Jan 2001. EFTA – European Fair Trade Association, <http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org/efta/Doc/FT-E-2001.pdf> [accessed on Jan. 15, 2015].

money to satisfy their basic needs also buy unnecessary things” (M, 77, H)<sup>24</sup>; „Often happens that although financial position of a given person doesn't allow to satisfy their primary needs, the person acquires products not connected with these needs, so buys totally unnecessary things, like a new cell phone, or new shoes, and then suffers from the lack of money for necessities. I think that such behaviors are common... Nowadays they concern all Western civilization, I mean Europe, the US and even China. Simply wherever so called 'capitalism' grows the irrational consumption occurs” (M, 40, H). Only one respondent linked overconsumption solely to behaviors of the wealthiest consumers. Importantly, it was a person evaluating his own income as relatively low.

Simultaneously interviewees indicated two groups of factors fostering materialistic lifestyle. On the one hand respondents mentioned external factors, connected with marketing actions undertaken by producers and sellers, e.g.: “I personally think that it arises from bad practices of all those price promotions. They tempt people very much, but in my opinion it is one great hoax [...] A consumer, attracted by promotions, comes into the shop supposedly to buy only one thing and then comes out with two big bags full of commodities.” (M, 22, S). On the other hand respondents noticed internal factors connected with the lack of self-control and insufficient consumers' awareness, e.g.: “I think that one needs a lot of self-control to refrain from buying still new things, or rather from feeling that one has to buy them” (F, 41, H), „[...] it is also a problem of a particular person. After all everyone has the right to refuse participation in all of this [intensive buying]. Everyone can tell oneself “Stop, I don't need to have this thing”. Only it requires high awareness and ability to deny oneself [different things], and contemporary consumers don't have these abilities because they are not being taught this” (F, 44, H).

Among all participants of interviews conducted in 2013 only one consumer directly agreed with a statement that “The more a person can consume, the happier they are”. He concluded that: “[...] money indeed doesn't bring happiness, but things you may buy for it actually do so” (M, 21, S). In case of other respondents further discussion revealed the differences in their approach to this opinion. There were three points of view:

1. the level of consumption doesn't directly translate into happiness, but it is one of wellbeing ingredients: “To some extent someone may feel happier if he has money and can shop. But it isn't the only ingredient or the vital one to feel happy. It depends on the particular consumer” (M, 77, H);
2. consumption is just a source of temporary satisfaction, but not happiness: “Buying is an ingredient of satisfaction rather than happiness. Happiness derives from other dimensions of life, e.g. from a fact that someone has a successful marriage, happy family and so on” (F, 38, S);
3. increasing consumption not only doesn't lead to happiness, but quite opposite it can make people unhappy (since it provides only an illusion of happiness): “I think that by unlimited buying a consumer is even able to make himself unhappy because after some time it turns out that he has spent everything and is left with no money for

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<sup>24</sup> Symbols in brackets offer basic information about the statement's author: the first letter (F/M) represents respondents' gender (female/male), the number – respondent's age, and the second letter – education level, where S represents secondary and H higher education.

*further living.” (M, 48, H); „Such a person who is ‘aroused’ by consumption will feel more and more lost. It means they will think they need more and more of newer stuff to be happy but they won’t find the happiness this way. If they allow to be dominated by consumption it will in fact increase their impression of lack of deeper meaning in their lives.” (M, 40, H), „[...] just the opposite, I think that the less someone consumes, the more they appreciate what they already have and they focus more on the really important things [...] so they seem to be happier” [F, 31, S].*

Respondents’ opinions about the Poles’ consumption behaviors collected in 2014 were more positive than negative. Only two people stated that Polish consumers are “wasteful” (F, 19, S) and “rather willing to yield to temptation” (F, 69, H). Slightly more numerous were the opposite opinions, according to which Poles are reasonable, and above all frugal consumers. Yet, the majority of respondents declared that it is impossible to present any generalized opinion because Poles are different: “[...] on the one hand they are very thrifty and looking for occasions, and at the same time - because it refers to the same people - they happen to ‘go mad’ while shopping, are influenced by promotions, and spend large sums on some gifts or novelties, e.g. home theater systems” (F, 43, H). They also added that the behavior of a particular person depends primarily on their financial situation.

Similar and even more favorable were respondents’ evaluations of their own behavior. Almost all of them said that usually they are thrifty and sensible, they can give up buying different things, e.g.: “I can deny myself and my family something by explaining that we’re saving for something [...] so yes, I can be thrifty and reasonable” (F, 42, S). The oldest respondent indicated the highest degree of rationality of her actions, while the two youngest respondents more eagerly admitted that they happen to have moments of ‘weakness’. Actually the majority of respondents declared that sometimes their self-control ability decreases, e.g.: “I also happen to have such situations, when I just see something extra which I really like but as a matter of fact for the moment I don’t need it...but since I have such a need, and I have money to buy it, so I buy it” (M, 43, H).

This relatively favorable opinion about Polish consumers does not mean that respondents do not see signs of irrational or excessive consumption in their surroundings. On the contrary, many of them (especially those with higher education) notice examples of consumerism, such as:

- acquiring an excessive amount of stuff and replacing old things with new ones without reasonable cause, e.g.: “[People] buy everything what they want” (F, 26, H), “[...] too often they exchange cars and phones that are still good only because there are already better models” (F, 43, H);
- following fashion and high susceptibility to advertising, e.g.: “People buy because something is offered, because it is advertised, because they hear miraculous things about it, and not because they really need it” (F, 69, H);
- imitation and conspicuous consumption, e.g.: “[...] so if their neighbors have something, they [Polish consumers] also must have it - they cannot be worse. Poles really like to prove that they are not inferior or that in fact they are better than others and to surpass others with what they have” (F, 43, H).

Unfortunately, most frequently respondents do not see the need for change neither in others nor in their own consumption behavior. In the first case, interviewees

made an impression as if they had no right to express this kind of suggestion. Therefore they were reluctant to recommend any particular changes even in case of 'lavish' Poles claiming that "[...] *if they are able to pay for their needs and feel comfortable with it, they don't need to change anything*" (F, 42, S). On the other hand not recognizing the need of changes in their own behaviors was justified by the belief that respondents already do what they should or they cannot reduce consumption any further. One of the respondents (declaring poor economic situation), said: "*I really can't [restrict consumption], because there is a level below which you can't go down without damage to the health and comfort, and I already attained this level*" (F, 38, S). Only one person (declaring good economic situation) admitted that there are moments she can actually see possibility of rationalizing her behavior: "*Yes, sometimes... For example when I look at my mother, it seems that she can manage her household much better. Then I have a feeling that I should do something differently but I'm not really changing anything*" (F, 42, S). It appears that consumption patterns available in consumers' environment may be helpful in showing alternative lifestyles but without some additional incentives they are not able to induce any important changes.

This observation is confirmed by almost unanimous respondents' opinion about factors actually capable to force Polish people to limit their consumption. All statements refer to the worsening financial situation (job loss, income reduction, prices rise, high expenses on children education, sickness etc.). According to some respondents financial deterioration is indeed the only factor that is able to cause deeper changes in consumption on a broader scale, while other arguments (ethical, environmental, social) can influence only some individuals: "*because only a few can be convinced by the fact that this [consumption reduction] is actually appropriate, that it's a reasonable behavior*" (F, 43, H).

## Conclusions

As noted by Etzioni<sup>25</sup>, the scope and method of adoption of VS is different in different societies and depends on many factors: economic, cultural, and social. Although VS is usually analyzed in the context of well educated and affluent consumers' behaviors<sup>26</sup> simplifying of life is possible also in case of poorer individuals. The necessary condition to be satisfied with this change, however, is the ability to control one's consumption desires which provides certain kind of 'immunity' to the temptations of the materialistic world<sup>27</sup>.

Our findings arouse skepticism when it comes to assessing the chances of wider VS acceptance among the Polish consumers. Admittedly, respondents' clearly negative attitudes toward overconsumption and their recognition of wellbeing paradox symptoms may promote the process of spreading VS. Yet, one should remember that for Polish consumers materialistic lifestyle is a relatively new phenomenon and as such it is still attractive. Problems of low self-control, high vulnerability to marketing activities as well as the feeling that current level and style of consumption is rational revealed during both

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<sup>25</sup> A. Etzioni: Voluntary ..., op. cit., p. 387.

<sup>26</sup> D. Shaw, C. Moraes: Voluntary ..., op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>27</sup> L. Boujbel, A. D'astous: Voluntary ..., op. cit., p. 492.

studies indicate that consumers lack true willingness to change their current lifestyles. However, one can count on the changes to occur in a longer term, especially among the wealthiest consumers. The lifestyle transformation may be fostered by willingness to imitate anticonsumption behaviors of Western consumers, Catholic character of our country and also by the formal support of the EU for deconsumption activities<sup>28</sup>.

It needs to be stressed that our research was exploratory in its nature thus the presented observations do not aspire to represent any final conclusions. Especially a qualitative nature of research methods used in both projects don't entitle us to draw any conclusions concerning the possible correlations between consumers' demographic or economic features and their attitudes towards VS. Although our samples differed significantly in terms of respondent's wealth – the second sample contained relatively less affluent consumers, and there were statements reflecting negative attitudes toward VS in the second sample, the collected data should rather be treated as an introduction to and inspiration for further, more detailed research. In particular the usage of quantitative methods would be desirable to investigate the features that shape consumers' attitudes towards VS.

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<sup>28</sup> In January 2014 European Economic and Social Committee adopted new opinion on the collaborative consumption and called for further action at EU level. European Commission, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_CES-14-3\\_pl.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_CES-14-3_pl.htm) [accessed on Jan. 5, 2015].

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## Streszczenie

Dobrowolna prostota (VS) dobrze wpisuje się w koncepcję konsumpcji zrównoważonej, ponieważ do jej zasad należy budowanie zrównoważonej ekonomicznie przyszłości, kształtowanie harmonijnych relacji między ludźmi oraz kreowanie i pielęgnowanie więzi z przyrodą. W związku z tym pierwszym celem niniejszego artykułu jest scharakteryzowanie VS jako stylu życia stanowiącego zrównoważoną alternatywę dla nadkonsumpcji. Drugi cel to określenie możliwych postaw wobec nadkonsumpcji i na tym tle odpowiedź na pytanie czy Polacy są skłonni zaakceptować ideę dobrowolnego upraszczania życia. W artykule zdefiniowano VS, opisano jej powiązania ze zrównoważoną konsumpcją, a także scharakteryzowano konsumentów, którzy przyjmują prosty styl życia. Wykorzystane w opracowaniu informacje pierwotne pochodzą z dwóch badań jakościowych przeprowadzonych metodą indywidualnego wywiadu pogłębionego w latach 2013 i 2014. Podstawowym wnioskiem z przeprowadzonych analiz jest stwierdzenie, że prawdopodobnie Polacy nie są jeszcze gotowi na świadome i dobrowolne ograniczanie konsumpcji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** prosty styl życia, konsumenci dobrowolnie upraszczający swoje życie, redukujący konsumenci, zrównoważona konsumpcja, zachowania konsumentów

Informacja o autorkach:

**Aleksandra Burgiel, Izabela Sowa, Jolanta Zralek**

University of Economics in Katowice,

Department of Consumer Research,

ul. Bogucicka 14, 40 – 226 Katowice

e-mail: [aleksandra.burgiel@ue.katowice.pl](mailto:aleksandra.burgiel@ue.katowice.pl)

[izabela.sowa@ue.katowice.pl](mailto:izabela.sowa@ue.katowice.pl)

[jolanta.zralek@ue.katowice.pl](mailto:jolanta.zralek@ue.katowice.pl)