International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences
ISSN: 2278-6236
Impact Factor: 4.400

THE "TRANSITION THINKING" AND 50PLUS GENERATION THOUGHTS OF SUSTAINABILITY IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES (CASE STUDY IN HUNGARY AND SWITZERLAND)

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Absract: *"Transition thinking" is a normative and practice oriented approach on sustainability development, which implements the knowledge of different fields of science, extended with practice experience. The main goal is to invigorate society by establishing new communities, partnerships and social networks. This social cooperation helps put appropriate pressure on decision makers and political groups, through which we can make sure that transition processes have the proper long-term orientation and goals. In case of the generally aging European society, the question if the 50 plus generation is merely affected by, or involved in the transition process is gaining a decisive importance, since this generation has a more and more important role in shaping the standards of consumer systems, and accelerating or hampering the processes aimed at sustainability. In our thesis, we introduce the attitudes shown by the 50 plus generation regarding their view on the sustainable values, and the transition to sustainable consumer systems on the different levels of the European society.*

Keywords: *50plus generation, transition thinking, low-carbon life, transition management, Switzerland, Hungary.*

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INTORDUCTION

The basic idea behind the "Transition thinking" and "Transition management" concept is - also related to research on complexity concept and ecosystem-concept - is that sustainability includes fundamental, and system-wide changes, which are independent of multiple actors. To develop a low-carbon (low material- and energy-requirement) society - the actual birth of which is considered to be one-two generations later - may create the balance of different statuses in society, which can also be seen in the mechanisms of our ecosystem. This concept is combined with the multi-actor network ideas and multi-level process management of the transition management process (Multi Level Perspective).

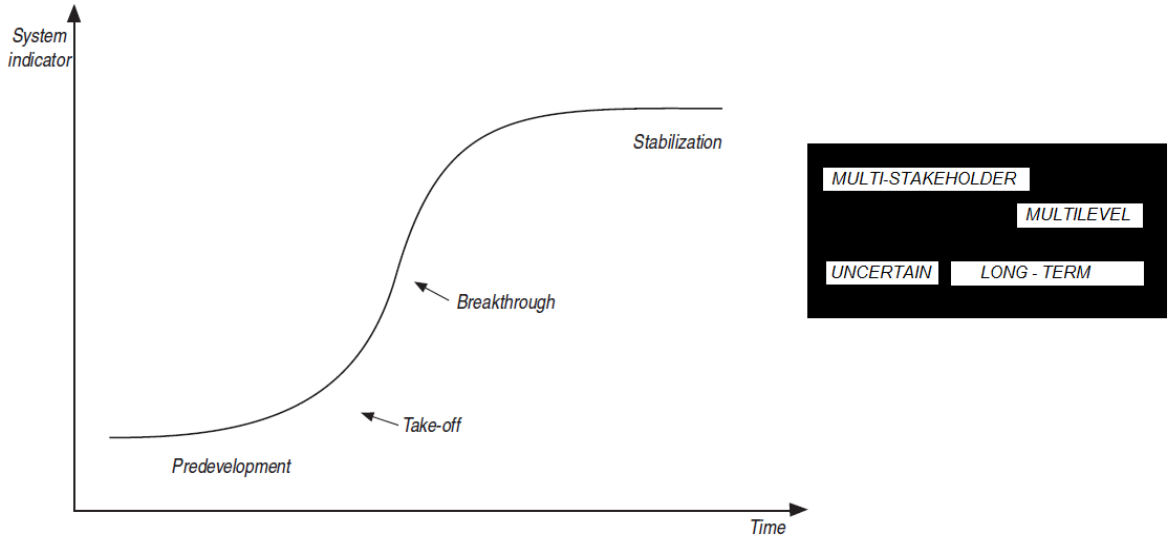

Figure 1: Phases of transition management

Source: based on Loorbach (2007)

Transition management basically distinguishes between states during the process: starting stage, acceleration stage, stabilization stage (the new state of balance), which can be seen on Figure 1. The fundamental questions in transition management are as follows: how can the currently unsustainable attitude of society become sustainable, and how can we measure this change. The answer for the first question is hard to get, since the set of sustainability criteria contains lots of elements which are hard to properly interpret. The non-general lifestyle at hand is based on: if the participants, actors are knowledgeable on the repercussions of their actions, which are related to the developments on society's different levels, and if their actions are in accord, well-structured, and lead towards a well-thought transition route (Roorda et al. 2012).

The theoretic results and practice experiences of the last few decades on transition management show that there are four different management processes being outlined, if we take the behavior of the actors into consideration in the context of social transition:

Strategic: processes happening on a social level, which have a long-term actualization result, are related to structuring complex social problems, and make up an alternative outlook on the future.

Tactical: activities being implemented on a sub-system level, which are related to the construction and deconstruction of the system's structure (institutions, regulations, physical infrastructures, monetary infrastructures, etc.)

Operative: processes related to short-term and daily decisions and actions. On this level, the actors either re-establish the system's structure, or decide if they need to be re-structured or changed.

Reflexive / feed-back: the multi-level evaluation of the existing state of affairs, and its detrimental relations. The social cases are structured through debate, structured evaluation, analysis and research, while the problems are re-thought and managed.

"Transition management" assumes that these actions should show specific attributes regarding what kinds of actors take part in the processes, what kinds of processes are they related to, and what kind of product they transport, which allow for specific system tools and process strategies to be made. As an example, we can offer the selection of participants (the designation of the target group), the defining of the challenge regarding specific transitions, the types of necessary processes, and the use of different processes, and process tools (Loorbach et al. 2008; Loorbach 2010). Therefore, in order to know the attitude of the generally aging European society towards sustainability, and understand if these processes help, or hamper the work of society related to the general implementation of sustainable systems and low-carbon lifestyle according to their consumer habits, we researched two different development groups of the European consumers. We chose the 50 plus generation as a focus of our analyses, which has the greatest impact with their consumer habits on the process of the development of sustainable consumer products, and birth of sustainable services. The goal of our research was to determine the nature of the transition into a sustainable consumer structure in case of the 50 plus generation, which show what kinds of transition management strategies we can assort to the found system

processes (strategic, tactical, operative, reflexive), and if we can determine through the different consumer systems of Europe (using two extreme examples - Switzerland and Hungary) if this transition management process can have different solutions, and basic differences.

METHODS

For testing and determining the correctness of our theoretic model, and the fine-tuning of interpretation, we used qualitative techniques.

Table 1. – Summarization of research methods

Research method	Research date	Research location	Research focus	Sample
Secondary research	2008	HU, CH	Conceptualisation, interpretation of concepts	Related specialized literature
Pair interview	2010	HU: Gödöllő, SZIE laboratory	Consumer habits: monetary resources / conversion of consumer goods, values of sustainability	50+ age bracket, 1 male, 1 female
Focus groups	2013	HU: Gödöllő, SZIE laboratory	Relations of environmentally aware consumer habits, and sustainability values vs. fixed habits, economic decisions.	50+ age bracket, 1 male, 3 female
Deep interviews	2014	HU: Pest County	Level of awareness regarding values and attitude of consuming	50+ age bracket, 2 male, 6 female
Deep interviews	2014	CH cantons: Zürich, Basel, Luzern	Level of awareness regarding values and attitude of consuming	50+ age bracket, 2 male, 10 female
Questionnaire	2013	Hungary	Sections used: G1 – Values G11 – Respecting traditions G2 – Worries of sustainability G4 – Foodstuff expectations G6 – Consumer habits Demographic identification	Sample is nationally representative. Full sample: 1039 50+ bracket: 411
Questionnaire	2014 April – June	Switzerland	G1 – Values G2 – Worries of sustainability G4 – Foodstuff expectations G6 – Consumer habits Demographic identification	Full sample: 202 head 50+ bracket: 202 head

Source: self-made

The qualitative phase of data gathering was organized into four steps, three in Hungary, and one in Switzerland, assisted by the participation of interviewees' of the 50 plus generation. The quantitative data gathering happened during two projects, different both geographically and time-wise. The data gathering in Hungary was done by Szent István University's Marketing Institution during an omnibus research with 1039 participants, 411 of

whom were eligible to the 50 plus criteria of our research, therefore, our analysis included the answers from this segment. The relevant question groups of the Hungarian research were used again, with unchanged form and conditions during the Swiss quantitative research, with a sample of 202 participants. The complete process of the research can be seen in Table 1.

To process and visualize the data of our research, we used Microsoft Office 2013 and IBM SPSS Statistics 21 ran on Windows 8.1 operating system. The process of the qualitative research can be seen in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2.: Hungarian qualitative research

	Location	Date	Sex		Age
			Male	Female	
Pair interview	Gödöllő, SZIE laboratory	2010	1	1	50+
FFocus group	Gödöllő, SZIE laboratory	2013	1	3	50+
Deep interview	Pest County	2014	2	6	50+

Source: self-made

Table 3.: Swiss qualitative research

	Location	Date	Sex		Age
			Male	Female	
Deep interview	Switzerland, cantons: ZH, BS, LU	2014	2	10	50+

Source: self-made

MEASUREMENTS

Researching attitude related to sustainability

In the following part, we will analyze the characteristic worries of the 50 plus generation regarding sustainability. The importance of the question is supplemented by the fact that worries, as emotional tools, can subconsciously provide negative motivation to, and on a cognitive level, influence our decisions simultaneously. The research was basically oriented to explore the worries of the senior Hungarian consumers. For the objective evaluation, we analyze and use the markings of the Swiss target group's worries, and then explore if the Hungarian 50 plus population's formula of self-conscious consumer habits have any relation to their worries regarding their environment and health. The research was done using personal interviews (pair interview, focus group and deep interview), and a questionnaire.

In the case of the Hungarian questioned, the outlook on the world which can be seen from the interviews of the qualitative research seems to be a bit introverted. The questioned understand the problems of the world mostly subjectively, and through their effects on their

personal life, and if the topic has no such projections, the questioned keep a farther distance from it. This, in some cases, was seen via them saying they're either not well aware of, or not interested in some topics:

- "*I think that the freshwater-resources is, or will be somewhere else, but there won't be any problems.*" (male, 60 years old*)*
- "*I hope that enterprises take care of hazardous materials, and the state oversees them too.*" (female, 52 years old)
- "*They're working on hazardous emission, so that it's not as hazardous. "* (female, 55 years old)
- "*I don't really think about over-population, since there's not too many of us here in Hungary.*" (female, 57 years old)
- "*I don't believe that illnesses spread by animals to humans is that much of a problem.*" (female, 57 years old) "
- "*Fair trade? Don't even know what that is.*" (female, 52 years old)

However, the moment personal involvement comes into play, the opinions regarding the topic become immediately more profound:

- "*When I was a child, everything was more healthy, there were no admixtures or anti-fouling materials.*" (female, 57 years old)
- "*Due to my health problems, I'm trying to lower my consummation, and sugary, fatty food.*" (female, 55 years old)

The picture of personal focus and distance is overshadowed by the fact that the questioned defined the absence of a proper answer in many different ways. Some negatively stressed their helplessness and vulnerability towards consumer environment, which doesn't take the interests of the consumers and the world properly into consideration:

- "*I don't buy Chinese stuff, but if they re-package it, there's no way I'll ever know.*" (female, 55 years old)
- "*There's always a new alternative, it's just not in use.*" (female, 55 years old)
- "*Sadly, locally produced products can never be checked. "* (female, 57 years old)
- "*They want to sell everything now. "* (female, 57 years old)
- "*I don't have the liberty of buying products made of free range animals. "* (female, 57 years old)

- "*China and the US are the two most polluting countries. No matter what smaller countries do, there will be big problems.* " (J.)

In spite of the above mentioned absence of information and distance, almost all questioned participants mentioned a factor related to consuming, which they find important, and try to include into their personal consuming structure. Since these, in many cases exit from the zone of personal involvement and interests, we believe that it betrays the fact that the interest in global effects of consumerism is on the rise between members of the 50 plus generation as well:

- "*Lately, I've been thinking what a waste wrapping paper is.*" (Gy.)
- "*We sort trash selectively where I live, and my daughter-in-law is peculiar about that.*" (M.)

However, the can also see that the drive behind this appears in their consumer habits and behavior through avoiding risks and the motivation to lower uncertainty:

- "*I don't eat gene-manipulated food, and food from unknown sources.*" (female, 55 years old)
- "*I don't really buy Asian stuff.*" (female, 57 years old)
- "*I usually drink tap water, I rarely buy mineral water.*" (female, 57 years old)
- "*Sadly, climate change creates extreme footings, that I feel on myself as well.*" (female, 55 years old)
- "*I cook using cleaned water.*" (female, 55 years old)

Summarized quantitative research on Hungarian seniors, based on questionnaire

The quantitative research using questionnaire made it possible to measure and numerically display the target group's worries regarding global sustainability. All of the questionnaire's question groups regarding this are put into words negatively, moreover, all of them are independent of the questioned participants (Figure 2.)

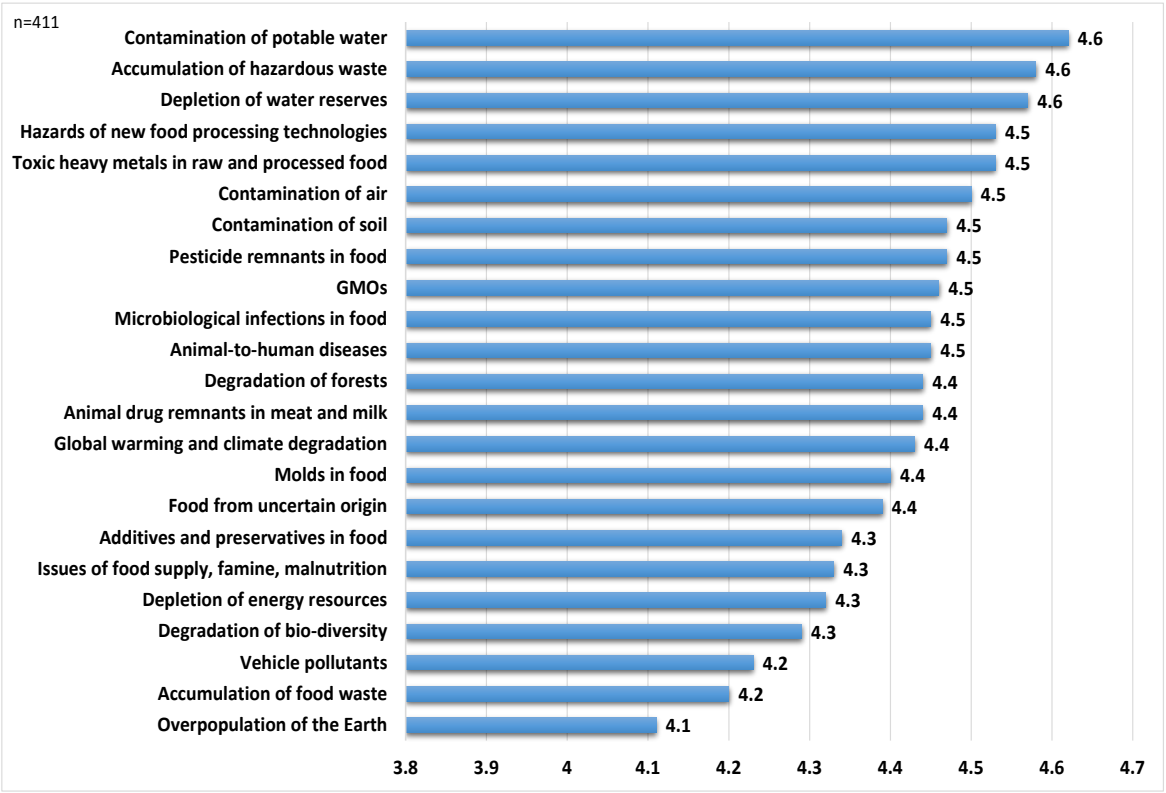

Figure 2: Fears of the Hungarian Target Population (Averages)

Source: Based on Database of Sustainability Research Hungary, 2013

Due to this, it's no surprise that most of the questioned participants happily used the higher end of the scale, by which they could show their worries without cognitive dissonance. Therefore, all the topics researched got a mark between very narrow margins (4,1 - 4,6 / 5), meaning that the relative positions, and comparison with the Swiss sample have more inherent information than the absolute numbers.

As shown by the qualitative research, personal involvement seems to raise worries more substantially. Therefore, topics like water (*Contamination of potable water*: 4,6 / 5; *Depletion of water reserves*: 4,6 / 5), air pollution (*Contamination of air*: 4,5 / 5), and food safety (*Hazard of new food processing technologies*: 4,5 / 5; *Toxic heavy metals*: 4,5 / 5, *Pesticide remains in food*: 4,5 / 5, *Genetic manipulation/GMOs*: 4,5 / 5) have a prestigious rank between the worries. Partly due to this, the question groups regarding pollution also got a 4,5 / 5 rating. On the lower end f the worry-hierarchy of the questioned 50 plus generation, the problems which have a greater indirect impact popped up, like *over-population, species extinction, malnutrition,* and *the aggregation of foodstuff waste*.

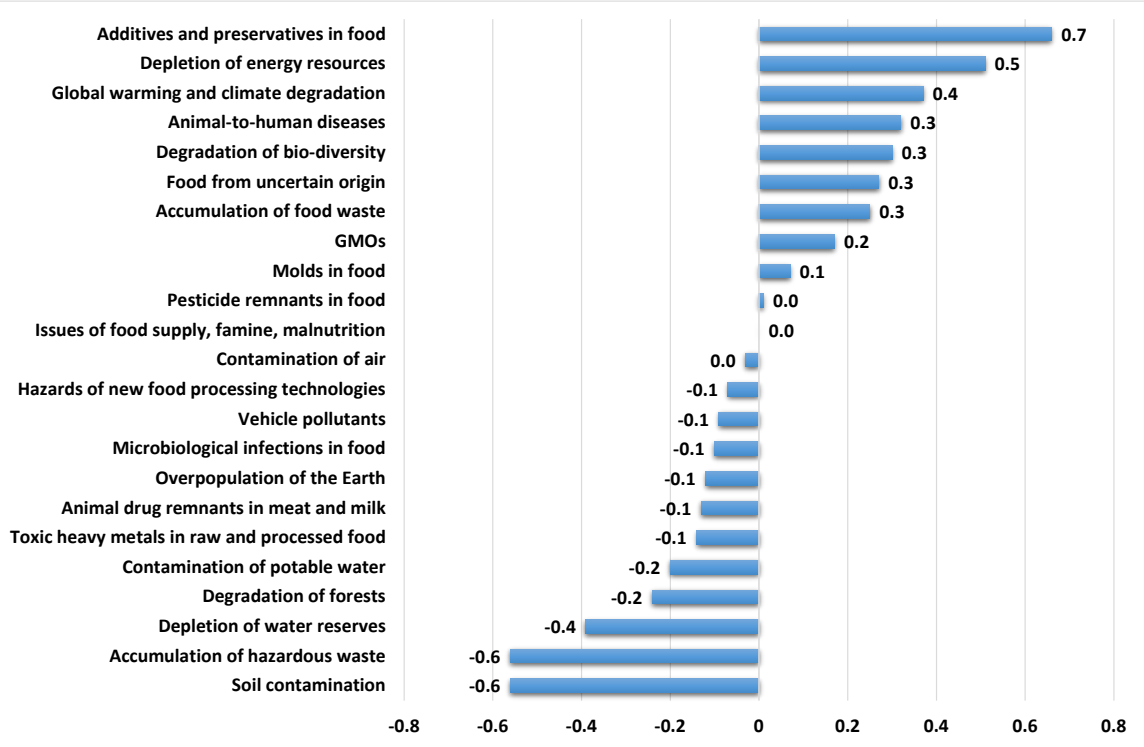

Figure 3: Fears of the Hungarian Target Population – Comparison to Swiss Seniors (Averages)

Source: Based on Database of Sustainability Research Hungary, 2013

Firstly, we can say that the closer the personal involvement is to the crisis factor, the more important the topic / item will become. Comparing the Hungarian and Swiss samples, we can also say that the Hungarian 50 plus generation stresses abstract problems relatively more, compared to the western group said to have a more developed thinking. They also rate the problems of *Global warming* (+0,4 / 5), the *Depletion of energy resources* (+0,5 / 5), and the *Animal to human diseases* (+0,3 / 5) higher than the Swiss questioned participants did. According to Figure 3, we can say that the overall pollution, for example air pollution, and food reserve worries don't really distinct between Hungarian and Swiss consumers. However, there is a distinct difference on worries about the topic of local environmental attributes. These worries have a stronger effect on Swiss consumers (*degradation of forest areas, depletion of water reserves, accumulation of hazardous waste, pollution of soil*), which can be linked to the worsening, or detrimental change in the state of the local environment. However, the Hungarian seniors are more touched by worries regarding global warming, depletion of energy reserves, or extinction of species.

Researching attitude towards consuming

During the *qualitative interviews*, we extracted the values of the Hungarian target group regarding foodstuffs, and their acquisition. According to the opinions of the questioned participants, we identified two distinct and well-defined approaches, with the criteria of how much they've distanced themselves from the quasi-traditional eating habits towards the environmentally-, or health-aware consuming. One of the extremes is, in essence, the fixed habits regarding eating.

Those who advocate traditional consuming habits are practitioners of the classic thought that the importance is given to the enjoyment factor of foodstuffs, and secondary or related effects are not really of concern:

- "*I don't really care about healthy eating. Foodstuffs should be tasty and fresh.*" (male, 60 years old)
- "*I never buy bio- and fair trade foodstuffs.*" (male, 60 years old)
- "*I always hear about genetically modified foodstuffs, but I don't know them.*" (female, 52 years old)
- "*I don't care about the acquisition costs of products.*" (female, 52 years old)

The other extreme of the opinions is not the deep end of awareness as we assumed prior to obtaining the results. We can see here, that even for the more self-aware questioned participants, the abandoning of traditional patterns is linked to some other reason or impulse. The need to offer an explanation which can be felt shows that for the target demographic, a complex system of expectations didn't become natural and fixed yet:

- "*I'm eating less because of my blood pressure problems.*" (female, 57 years old)
- "*Due to my health problems, I'm trying to lower my consummation, and sugary, fatty food.*" (female, 55 years old)

Also, parallel to this, we can definitely feel that the expectations regarding foodstuffs keep expanding. During the qualitative research, a good number of participants said that regarding foodstuff enjoyment, they want more than just an experience for senses. We can say that looking beyond the wrapping and interest in the source of the product is typical:

- "*I find the inherent attributes of foodstuffs important.*" (female, 55 years old)
- "*I never buy foodstuffs from unknown sources.*" (female, 55 years old)
- "*Don't judge food by its wrapping.*" (female, 55 years old)

- *"I don't really buy Asian stuff."* (female, 57 years old)

The picture is also divergent according to acquisition and production. There are many signs implying a level of self-awareness, but we can feel the impact of price on decisions substantially more. It's important to note that the importance of acquisition costs and the cost of the product are visibly divided in the head of consumers; while they have a definite idea about the actual price (mostly that it's high), they have a harder time understanding the acquisition costs:

- *"A golden mean in foodstuff prices would be nice."* (female, 57 years old)
- *"Foodstuffs in Hungary are really expensive."* (female, 55 years old)
- *"I don't care about the acquisition costs of products."* (female, 52 years old)

The results of the *quantitative research* using questionnaire both underline and lightly shade the picture depicted by the interviews (Figure 4).

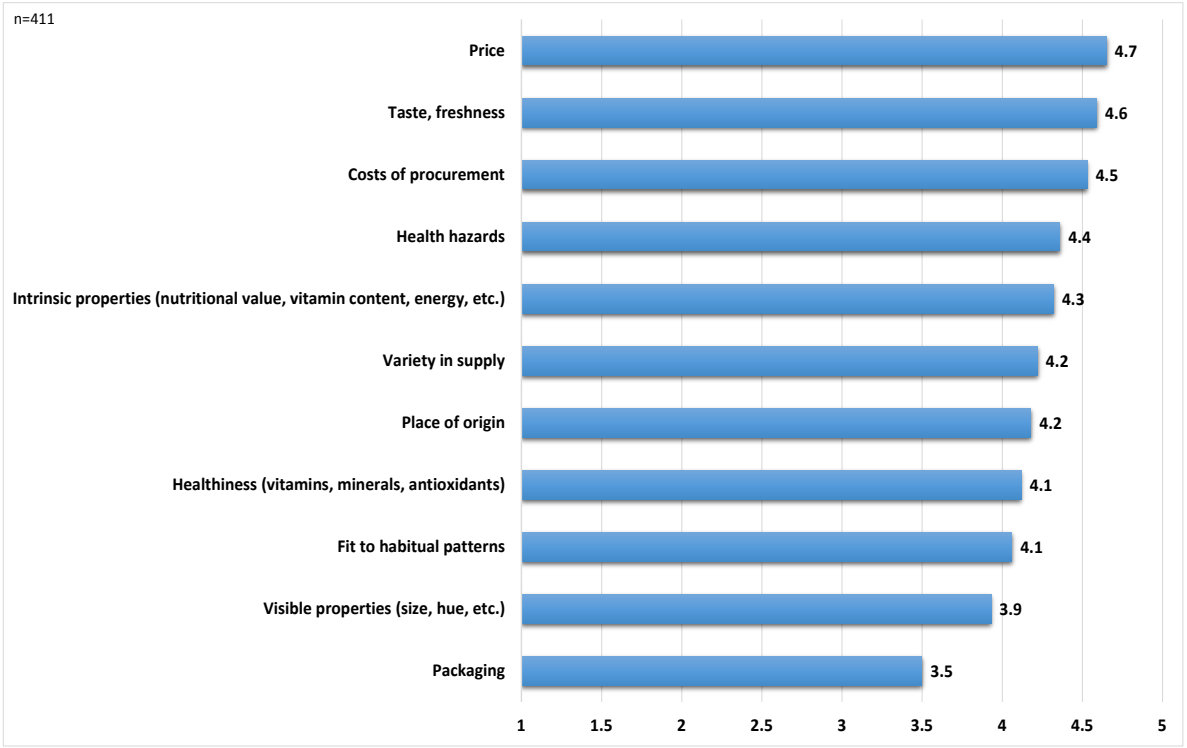

Figure 4: Expectations Regarding Food in the Hungarian Target Population (Averages)

Source: Based on Database of Sustainability Research Hungary, 2013

Price (4,7 / 5) is definitely the most important factor, and even though the qualitative phase shows the lesson that the *Cost of procurement* (4,5 / 5) aren't clear to many, I believe that during filling in the questionnaire, they simply considered it to be a price-type term / item, which is why they rated it so highly. Even when comparing with the Swiss sample, the

importance of the price is valid, since the actual prices of foodstuffs was rated an entire level higher (+1,0 / 5), and even the related cost of procurement were rated higher (+0,6 / 5) in the Hungarian sample.

Regarding the inherent attributes of foodstuffs, it's clear that they have higher preferences than simply being attractive. The most important factor in this regard is *taste and freshness* (4,6 / 5), followed by *health hazards* (4,4 / 5), and *nutritional values, vitamin, energy, etc. content* (4,3 / 5), while less hands-on health attributes, like *anti-oxidant, mineral etc. content* (4,1 / 5) is pushed back into the middle range. As for outer attributes, *packaging* (3,5 / 5), and *visible properties*, *size, color, etc.* (3,9 / 5) can only be considered dead last.

Though the above shown sample defines the structure of the Hungarian opinions, if we compare it to the Swiss population's opinions, it shows that there are additional development expectations in regards to foodstuff awareness. As the following graphs (Figure 5) plastically show, the Hungarian opinions regarding foodstuff awareness are much less polarized than those of the Swiss seniors. This is how it's possible that the packaging (+0,9 / 5) and outer attributes, visible properties (0,7 / 5) rated the lowest in the inner structure of the Hungarian sample can be seen as exceptionally important factors compared to the Swiss sample.

Regarding the sustainable or low-carbon consuming, we can define a substantial difference in the cases of Hungarian and Swiss consumers that the Swiss senior consumers stress the importance of preferring to eat healthy food, while for the Hungarian consumers, this is a less important product value. We can also stress that from the perspective of Swiss seniors, the source of the food is extremely important, where we must also mention that Swiss consumers prefer products originating from Switzerland. Another distinct difference between Hungarian and Swiss consumers is that the Swiss consumer isn't really affected by the price of the product, and its outer appearance (meaning the marketing character of the packaging).

EVALUATION OF RESEARCH

According to the goal of the analysis research, our main objective is to define the strategies in the two consumer contexts (Hungarian and Swiss senior, meaning 50 plus age brackets) which can direct the change and development of consumer systems towards sustainable consuming, and sustainable services.

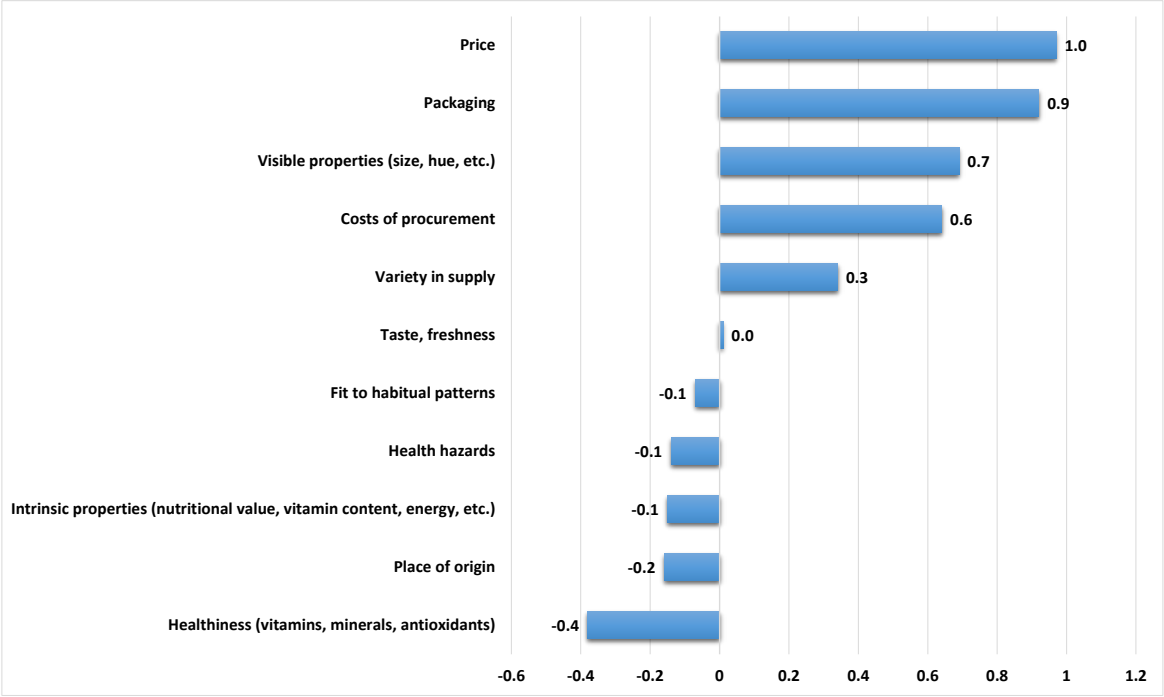

Figure 5: Expectations Regarding Food in the Hungarian Target Population – Comparison to Swiss Seniors (Averages)

Source: Based on Database of Sustainability Research Hungary, 2013

According to the base definition of transition management, we can choose from these management routes:

- *Strategic transition management:* can be related to processes and activities on social level, which have a long-term actualization, and are connected to other economic and social development programs.
- *Tactical transition management:* activities being implemented on a sub-system level, the elements of the management program are related to system development and institutionalization (institutions, regulations, physical infrastructures, monetary infrastructures, etc.).
- *Operative transition management:* processes related to short-term and daily decisions and actions, their preference is the goal of the reconstruction. On this level, the actors either re-establish the system's structure, or decide if they need to be re-structured or changed according to expectations.
- *Reflexive transition management:* the multi-level evaluation of the existing state of affairs due to detrimental feedback. The social cases are structured through debate,

structured evaluation, analysis and research, while the problems are re-thought and managed according to the effects observed.

We can see from the results of the qualitative and quantitative research that the Hungarian seniors base their decisions mainly on price, meaning their consumer habits can be changed via this system attribute short- and mid-term. Therefore, their sustainable consumer habits are a process maintainable by *Tactical transition management*. The current practice of influencing consuming structure and consumer habits also uses this method (central price regulations, governmental service system, lowering current expenses) for managing Hungarian consumers. However, we can also say that for the 50 plus generation, these tools cause the strengthening of non-sustainable or non-low-carbon consumer attitude. Usage of energy that is cheap, or getting cheaper raises energy consumption, while the lowering of current expenses brings water wasting into the current practice. The development of transition towards a sustainable economy, and the "transition thinking" can be reached via *Tactical management* tools in case of the Hungarian senior consumers, which mainly requires the effective establishment of central institutions (educational and marketing centers), regulatory systems (price regulation, stimulating and supporting programs), and physical infrastructures (pilot systems).

According to the Hungarian research, we can see that for the Swiss senior consumers, the price of products or services doesn't really have an impact on their consumer decisions, they don't base their consuming on the appearance of products, therefore, they are less influenced by the effects of marketing tools. Their consuming habits are defined by characteristic, short-term, daily decisions, which are influenced by the state of their close environment, and the changes in its attributes. The results of the quantitative research support the assumption that the Swiss senior consumer is basically not price-sensitive, meaning changing his/her consuming habits isn't related to changes in price, and won't follow suit in case of said prices changing. Therefore, influencing their consuming habits with the same tools as those of Hungarian consumers is not possible. We stressed that the Swiss consumer interprets global problems in a surprising manner. They don't stress climate change and the depletion of Earth's energy reserves as much as the Hungarian consumers do. Therefore, expanding the sustainable consuming habits of the Swiss consumer, and leading it towards a low-carbon route can be achieved via *Strategic transition management*

less, and *Operative transition management* more effectively. In case of the Swiss senior population, the need for strong autonomy is typical, meaning that the actors of the system prefer re-defining the structures of the systems in question, and decide if re-structuring is sufficient, or re-constructing is required, going by the changes they bring. A typical example of this is the primary preference of consuming Swiss products, by which they exclude the cheaper, non-reliable products from both the EU and other parts of the world.

RESULT AND CONCLUSIONS

Our hypothesis researched with Hungarian senior consumers, and later expanded to Swiss senior consumers, followed by comparison analysis, is supported by the results which show that there are distinct and surprising differences between consuming habits and expectations towards sustainability in the two countries. We can stress that while Hungarian consumers feel responsible in acting regarding global environmental or climate change questions, the Swiss seniors don't feel the same, and instead are worried about their local environment's state. Another distinct difference of the two consumer groups is that while in case of the Hungarian consumers, the handling of transition and acceleration towards sustainability can be mainly supported by *Tactical transition management* tools (mid-term period 5 - 10 years), meaning price regulations, central or governmental intervention, the Swiss consumers shape their future systems via preferring local values, and influencing the operative machinations of their environmental characteristics. Accelerating and managing the processes leading to sustainability can be effectively managed short-term (0 - 3 years) via the tools of the *Operative transition management*.

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