

# **Empowering consumers: Educated choices**

**Consumers learn  
sustainable ways of consumption**

**7 modules of consumer education  
for adults**

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© 2003 **Empowering consumers: Educated choices - Consumers learn sustainable ways of consumption**. 7 modules of consumer education for adults

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**Empowering consumers: Educated choices - Consumers learn sustainable ways of consumption**

is also available on CD-ROM.

In addition to this workbook and as a further result of the project a manual for consumer education (ISBN-Nr. 3-902413-01-8 in German, ISBN-Nr. 3-902413-00-X in English) for adults was developed.



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## Preface

When consumers are expected to "make both ends meet" this sounds like a reasonable request. Yet it has become difficult to subsist as a consumer! On the one hand consumers expect a lot of themselves - they want their decisions regarding consumption to be meaningful and economical. At the same time shopping should fulfil -sometimes quite trivial - needs: food should be tasty, and products we have bought should please us and make us happy. And of course we do not want to pose risks to our health by ingesting or handling harmful substances.

Many people really love to go shopping. And trade and industry appreciate consumers, the more consumption, the higher their yield. Expert financial and intellectual know-how endorses problematic strategies of satisfying needs, which pose risks to our health and entail social and economic consequences. Consumers are permanently targeted by marketing-strategies; an ever-increasing number of short-lived products and a flood of information require high decision-making competencies which we do not dispose of.

An attempt to analyse individual demands shows that "making both ends meet" is insufficient, and that the old type of consumer education, which was focused on the "homo economicus", did not give due credit to the complexity of events related to consumption. While the old ideal of the "homo economicus" consisted in individual, optimal benefit, the objectives of modern consumer education include economical, ecological, and social aspects. The satisfaction of one's own personal needs by goods and services is not all that counts! And the purpose of consumer education is not reduced to offering knowledge. It wants to help consumers to critically examine their own personal ideas and values and motivate them to induce changes of conduct which represent an advantage to society as a whole.

Consumer education sees itself as a complex part of general education which envisions a responsible way of dealing with one's own and others' needs, by using available resources.

This is a manual for training-courses in the area of consumer education, and addresses different groups of instructors of adult education:

- ◆ experts of questions of consumption who are interested in methodical and didactic suggestions which can improve the quality of their work,
- ◆ adult-education instructors who want to link topics of adult education with questions of consumer education, in order to make their learning practical and action-oriented,
- ◆ teachers of secondary education (level 2), and
- ◆ teacher-trainers, who can find methodical and professional support in these materials.

The materials are the result of a project GRUNDTVIG , which was developed by 10 European partner-institutions in 7 countries.

We hope that the learning contents chosen and the methods suggested can help consumers to find relevant information and discern what is useful. They should gain awareness of their role on the global market and realise that consumer attitudes are related to acute world-wide problems. Consumers who are capable of making decisions can help to improve the quality of a product, and also stimulate competition. It is important that all partners in the process of consumption - producers, trade, and consumers, develop a growing awareness of what is meant by a responsible use of resources.

Above all, our training-modules and the chosen methods intend to support the consumers! Conscious and educated consumers have the power to influence our society of consumption in a positive way. In this sense, the presented training-material represents a contribution to political education: it motivates consumers to shape the life of their municipality and of the state as a whole, as active and critical citizens.

*Maria Schuh, project-coordinator*

## **Post scriptum**

We want to express our sincere thanks to the participants of the pilot course on consumer education, where we put to the test the materials and the didactic concept. Their feedback was very valuable!

We take sustainable action seriously. For this reason we have decided to use non-polluting packaging. We assume that you have a folder where you can keep the course-material, and have included material+\*- to typify it.

We try to use language in a non-sexist, gender-neutral way. For reasons of legibility we alternate male and female forms.





## Structure of the manual of consumer education

The manual is organised as a folder which consists of several parts.

**Chapter 1, 2, and 3** discuss the objectives, the target-groups, the necessary preliminaries, and the didactic and methodical requirements for planning a course of consumer education.

**Chapter 4** deals with consumer-relevant topics and substantiates the choices which were taken. It also offers introspection into timing and methodical organisation. Subsequently we illustrate the different phases of each instruction-module by a didactic guide.

**Chapter 5** consists of the practical part and presents the different modules of consumer education. The modules are independent units, and their sequence can be chosen as a person wishes. They all follow the same structure. At first, the necessary information is given. The second part contains the didactic presentation.

**Chapter 6** consists of the didactic annex and a guide for evaluating the course.

## 1. Objectives

The material offers suggestions regarding the presentation of information and learning-contents for specific target groups, and the use of methodical and didactic strategies.

The training modules for consumer education want to encourage instructors of adult education to integrate contents of consumer education into their own classes/courses:

- ◆ a computer-course can be combined with information on e-commerce and internet-security;
- ◆ a cooking course can point out the importance of choosing recipes and food according to their effects;
- ◆ a language-course can establish a connection to the students' everyday life by making consumer rights a topic;
- ◆ a yoga course can gain from showing in which way health and lifestyles are interrelated.

The material of the modules want to enable the students to prepare on their own a course on a specific aspect of consumer education.

Students shall realise that orientation on sustainable, sensitive lifestyle is a basic principle of consumer education, and an important dimension which shapes their personal lives.

The training modules shall make the students see in which way consumer education can improve quality of life and increase independence.

## 2. Target-groups who may want to use the manual

- ◆ instructors of adult education in all areas ("Volkshochschulen"\*, agriculture, political education,...)
- ◆ political representatives, and
- ◆ teachers of secondary schools (level 2), vocational training, and agricultural schools
- ◆ teachers who train future teachers, at teacher colleges

## 3. Topics chosen for the different modules

We chose different topics as examples which permit us to demonstrate a wide range of methods, and also point out general and topic-specific questions with regard to consumption and consumers.

## The modules and their contents

### module 1 Consumers learn to consume in more effective ways!

Basics of efficient consumer education

### module 2 To have or to be?

Orientation regarding a sustainable lifestyle

### module 3 Caught in the spiral of consumption?

Analysis of consumer attitudes, influences on consumer attitudes

### module 4 Plenty of covers - textiles, our second skin

### module 5 Sure as eggs is eggs? A critical look at food

### module 6 Feeling well inside the home

### module 7 How to use new communication-technologies safely!

## General and specific consumer-relevant topics

The modules 4-7 give information and didactic suggestions which help to find solutions for 4 consumer-specific topics (textiles, food, health, telecommunication), while the modules 1-2 deal with general aspects of consumption. Module 3 wants to prepare future instructors of consumer education for their task.

### General consumer-relevant topics

- ◆ principles and problems of consumption
- ◆ problem-areas created by new forms of consumption
- ◆ value and protection of privacy
- ◆ basic skills which safeguard general consumer rights
- ◆ securing privacy and personal data
- ◆ defining and expanding own knowledge regarding questions of consumption
- ◆ verification and evaluation of information
- ◆ validity and consequences of economical balance sheets
- ◆ development of criteria regarding quality
- ◆ personal responsibility - reflecting our own lifestyle
- ◆ reflections on how consumers tend to mix materialist and psychic needs
- ◆ reflections on forms and quality of communication in our personal life-context
- ◆ personal advantage of sustainable action in everyday life
- ◆ interrelations of chosen lifestyle, well-being, and sustainable economy and politics
- ◆ finding areas of potential change regarding personal forms of consumption

### Specific consumer-relevant topics

#### 1. Textiles and food

Food and clothing constitute basic needs.

◆ For this reason the chosen topics may be applied to all target-groups. They can lead to an understanding of the slogan "sustainability", and help us see in which way it can influence our daily life. Food and clothing



are also typical examples of a mixture of material need and psychic want. Understanding the difference can make us aware of a margin which allows for changes.

- ◆ The ecological balance (sum of all non-polluting and polluting influences of a product) of textiles is intelligible, and easier to understand than the ecological balance of other products.
- ◆ For this reason the topics "textiles" and "food" are suited to illustrate what "sustainability" means, - what effective and sustainable action in everyday life looks like, and in which way it can improve the quality of life.
- ◆ The topics are also suited for discussing consumer rights.
- ◆ The topic "food and nutrition" permits the course-leader to choose from a large selection of available information.
- ◆ For this reason the topic is suited for presenting methods which help us to deal with information, to evaluate information, and to develop own criteria of quality.
- ◆ The interrelation of lifestyle, personal well-being, sustainable agriculture, and agrarian and food-politics can well be demonstrated in the context of this topic.

## **Basic questions regarding textiles**

- ◆ Which successive steps form the life-cycle of a piece of clothing? (raw material, production, intermediate trade, transportation, sale, use, recycling, waste management)
- ◆ Which criteria (regarding social aspects, health, and environment) must textiles fulfil in order to be sustainable and effective?
- ◆ Which ways of using textiles are sustainable, and which are not?
- ◆ Which benefits for the consumer can be derived from textiles produced in a sustainable way?

## **Basic questions regarding food and general well-being**

- ◆ What do I eat when and why?
- ◆ Which effects regarding my own well-being, the living conditions of the producers, and the environment, does my decision to buy something bring about?
- ◆ How is food produced?
- ◆ What are the consequences of my decision to buy an article from a social and ecological point of view?
- ◆ What are criteria for a sustainable consumption of food?

## **2. Health and well-being**

The subject health concerns everybody, but as the health-sector is strongly institutionalised, not everybody is aware of the possibility to make decisions regarding his own health. We have not learned to accept responsibility for our own health by avoiding harmful attitudes.

- ◆ For this reason dealing with the subject health in the context of consumer education answers the need for developing personal responsibility. It permits to reflect one's own lifestyle and to discover and explore possible strategies.
- ◆ It permits to show the importance of analysing one's own (housing-) environment regarding factors which further or jeopardize health.

## **Basic questions regarding health and well-being**

- ◆ Which values are associated with questions of personal health?
- ◆ What are the rights and duties of patients, what are the possibilities of patients and clients of health-relevant services to assert their rights?

- ♦ Which role does one's personal lifestyle play in relation to one's personal concept of health?
- ♦ Which are personal and social health-risks; which aspects stabilise health?
- ♦ Which aspects of our personal lifestyle can we change in order to strengthen health?
- ♦ Terms like wellness, fitness, and health are often part of successful marketing concepts. Which information is serious and correct, what is only publicity?

### **3. New technologies of communication and privacy**

Telecommunication, with its different forms of communication and new possibilities to partake of available information, has changed the everyday-life of most people. Products offered in the sector of telecommunication are short-lived, hardware and software are quickly outdated, it is difficult to evaluate quality, and sometimes not easy to profit from it. Questions of security and social consequences of the new technologies are central focal-points.

- ♦ Thanks to new possibilities of communication, reflections regarding the value of privacy and its protection, and the quality of telecommunication, can take place in the context of everyday life.
- ♦ Telecommunication renders possible new forms of consumption, and thus creates the need for the acquisition of basic competencies regarding general consumer rights, evaluation of information, and securing private data and privacy in general.
- ♦ Own knowledge regarding technical infrastructure, security, and consumer rights can be evaluated and expanded.
- ♦ Methods to verify the credibility of information can be developed.
- ♦ The topic "internet-shopping", or "the use of mobile phones" overlaps with the field "personal financing" and "indebtedness".
- ♦ The topic is thus suited for working out general principles and potential dangers of consumption.

#### **Basic questions regarding telecommunication**

- ♦ How can I protect my privacy in the world-wide web?
- ♦ What must be paid attention to when shopping by internet?
- ♦ In which way can politics safeguard the privacy of consumers?
- ♦ Which consumer rights regarding consumer-protection in the www do exist?
- ♦ Which criteria must be labelling by secure electronic transactions (SET)?
- ♦ In which ways can consumers help to avoid computer-misuse (hacking, pirate software, dissemination of viruses, computer-fraud)?
- ♦ Which importance do global regulations and laws (regarding help, protection of privacy, shopping, and data transfer) acquire for users of new communication technologies?

### **4. General prerequisites for teaching the training-modules**

Courses for adults in the field of consumer education promise success if they pursue several goals:

- ◆ improvement of consumer-relevant knowledge
- ◆ strengthening of the consumers' self-confidence and autonomy
- ◆ development of awareness of the necessity of active participation on the market
- ◆ reflection of own value-systems which on an unconscious level influence consumption-related decisions and, if necessary, introduction of changes



- ◆ demonstration of the necessity of a sustainable and effective lifestyle, and setting respective individual steps

While acquiring consumption-related knowledge is comparatively easy, we encounter problems when approaching and pursuing the other goals.

For this reason the training-modules for consumer education are conceived as idea-workshops, forums where we are confronted with our own consumer attitudes, and socially, ecologically, and economically important contexts of consumption. Our everyday life, including irrational and unconscious strategies we use to cope with it, leads to a confrontation with realities and consequences of consumption. This very same confrontation is addressed in the course, and becomes thus an essential part of the educational process. The objective of the course is to accept responsibility for these realities and their consequences.

The training modules are conceived as holistic, - they can be translated into action, and what was learned can be integrated into everyday life. For this reason the topics are oriented on everyday-needs and common daily experiences of adults. In order to prepare their work efficiently, the instructors also must pass through the same process.

We have already mentioned that the different phases of each module are centred on specific focal points which want to create awareness of our personal consumer attitudes, - this is considered a prerequisite for independent, responsible action. Taking initiative and accepting responsibility are important objectives all through the course. It is a basic principle of action-oriented learning that methods which directly involve the participants are given preference to.

The modules point out that the way towards a sustainable, effective lifestyle leads from information and subsequent motivation to action, that the way is not always clearly seen, that it can be strenuous, and that it is difficult to change own consumer attitudes effectively. This means that we must first gain clarity on what happens in the different areas of our everyday life as consumers.

The course-folder offers us the possibility to get to know all known methods of instruction. This means on a practical level that different methods are used for each module. In order to stimulate communication it is desirable that different groups mix together.

The individual modules are complete units, from a didactic viewpoint as well as regarding contents, and it is thus possible to use only one, or choose and combine them as preferred.

## 5. Evaluation

*Evaluation is the systematic and data-based description  
and qualification of programs and projects.*

Evaluation procures useful and secured information for the participants. It encourages the course-leaders to gradually improve the quality of their courses and evaluate them. The experience of evaluation can lead to deeper insights, a sharpening of methods, and an amelioration of practical circumstances. Evaluation is more than data-collection. It wants to support social and pedagogical practice before, during, and after the collection of data, and make it attractive for all target-groups.

### 5.1 What is evaluated?

- ◆ the concept of the course (especially objectives, expectancies, requirements, clarity of objectives)
- ◆ the structure of the course (equipment, legal regulations, frame-conditions, prerequisites)
- ◆ the process, meaning the realization of the pedagogic event, the reactions of the participants, the impact on the target-group, - can a process be discerned?

- ◆ The results - meaning learning-effects in the target-group, performances and effects, - were the objectives reached?

## 5.2 Methods of evaluation [1]

1. Formative evaluation: helps to improve the program while it is running.
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
  - How do the participants evaluate their learning-progress?
  - Which interventions lead to which degree to the desired results?
2. Summary evaluation: happens at the end of the program.
  - Does the program reach its objectives to a satisfactory degree?
  - Are the means used efficiently?
  - How does the program come off when compared to other initiatives?

## 5.3 Principal steps of evaluation

1. What do I want to evaluate?	<p><u>Self-evaluation</u>: evaluation of own course-planning: have I really carried out what I intended? Which deviations occurred? What caused them? How much time did I take? Which resources were at my disposition, and how did I use them? Which unforeseen events can occur/occurred? To what extent have I reached my objectives? Which undesired results can occur/occurred? Which interventions may be/are necessary?</p> <p><u>Product-evaluation</u>: results of the module</p> <p><u>Process-evaluation</u>: individual modules and the realised activities are evaluated by appropriate methods.</p>
2. Which areas should be evaluated?	<p>Evaluation should cover the following areas:</p> <p><u>starting-point</u>: basic planning</p> <p><u>activities</u>: during the process</p> <p><u>results</u>: learning-effects; who should benefit from the results? Self-evaluation and evaluation by other participants</p>
3. Which groups of people are affected by the course? What are their interests?	<p><u>Agents</u>: concept-developers, sponsors</p> <p><u>those who benefit from the course</u>: the participants, certain institutions, contract-partners</p> <p><u>victims</u>: those who registered for the course but could not be admitted, people who for different reasons were psychically hurt during the course (the injured)</p>



<p>4. All hopes, fears, and possible conflict-areas regarding the course are collected. Reflection on possible ways to take them into account by evaluation takes place.</p>	<p><u>Hopes</u>: were the frame-conditions satisfactory? Could the consumers' self-confidence be strengthened? Could we duly estimate the needs of the target-groups?  <u>Fears</u>: is it possible to apply what was learned to everyday professional life; could the participants be bored or feel either overtaxed or not sufficiently challenged; do we duly take into account sex-specific (male/female) interests?  <u>Conflict</u>: course-leaders can not always distinguish fears from hopes.</p>
<p>5. Arrange the multifarious questions resulting from point 4 according to their importance and formulate them adequately</p>	<p>e.g.: for us it is above all important that the course-participants' personal competence as consumers is strengthened.</p>
<p>6. Deduction of questions regarding point 1, 3, and 5</p>	<p>Questions are formulated in ways which capacitate the participants to discover more appropriate ways of action/decision-making: see example in the annex, which demonstrates the process of deducing questions in a way which is intelligible for the course-participants</p>
<p>7. Carrying out the questioning, and setting other evaluative measures</p>	
<p>7. Feedback of results</p>	<p>The results are evaluated and shown/made accessible to the participants and all who are concerned. Necessary organisational steps to translate the results into practice are set.</p>

### **Example of question-deduction for an evaluation-sheet**

We have tried to optimise the planning of our course by a list of questions handed out in the beginning. After the course we want to evaluate our own planning. For this reason we would like to know to what extent the answers and solutions which we had formulated ourselves when planning the course, and on which the course was based, were correct.

Some of the questions we asked ourselves in the beginning were:

- ◆ *"Does the intensity and the quantity of contents accord with the time-plan of the course-leader?"*
- ◆ *"Will the participants have defined their own system of values with regard to the examined topics at the end of the course?"*

The course-participants can tell us whether we have found the right answers when we confront them with the same questions which we asked ourselves during the period of planning.

But it is necessary to ask in a way

- 1) which permits the participants to understand the questions without prolonged reflection, and
- 2) that the chosen questions relate as much as possible directly to what the participants experienced during the course.

For this purpose the questions need to be re-formulated.

The question

*"Does the intensity and the quantity of contents accord with the time-plan of the course-leader?"*

is changed in the evaluation-form to

*"was the pace chosen in the course too fast / too slow / just right?"*



Or

*"the chosen pace was appropriate"*

The question

*"Will the participants have defined their own system of values with regard to the examined consumer-topics at the end of the course?"*

is changed to

*"Will it be easier for you to make satisfactory decisions regarding consumption after the course than it was before the course?"*

Or

*"I have learned to make more intelligent and more sustainable decisions regarding consumption"*

The annex presents two similar questionnaires which show slight differences of style and contents. They illustrate in which way a questionnaire can be developed individually.

## 5.4 Methods of data-collection which permit further evaluation

**1. Observation:** records, use of cameras, photo-presentations, logbooks, diary, portfolio

**2. The questioning:** flash, feedback by light-signals, critical comments on program, focus-group, questionnaire, interview, program-integrated feedback

### Questionnaire

- ◆ Open questions make sense when not all participants know the majority of possible answers, e.g.: why have you decided to attend a course of consumer education? The questioned persons choose their focal points for themselves. Such questions make sense when one wants to learn more about people's different opinions, or when evaluation should be a live process.
- ◆ Structured questions which demand a certain special answer questions draw the attention of the person who is questioned to a specific direction and leave only limited room for individual decisions. Prerequisite for the use of closed questions is that the questioned persons already know all possible relevant answers.

**3. Analysis of courses and of course-materials:** For this purpose specific focal points need to be determined, which are then evaluated and compared to other material.

## 5.5 Suggestions regarding the process of evaluation

- ◆ It is never too late to start with evaluation, but: the sooner, the better!
- ◆ Questionnaires should show a short headline which explains their purpose and motivates people to cooperate.
- ◆ Test questionnaires on friends/colleagues before handing them out (pre-test).
- ◆ Questions should not have more than 20 words.
- ◆ Questions should be formulated clearly, and not allow for diverging interpretations.
- ◆ Each question should address only one dimension.
- ◆ The questionnaire should be complemented by comments which clearly state what needs to be done, e.g.: mark the answer which applies to you.
- ◆ Avoid yes/no questions, and allow for differentiation.
- ◆ Formulate questions in a positive way, not like the following example: "The contents of the course were not sufficiently adapted to the target-groups".
- ◆ Questions should raise personal interest.
- ◆ Questions ought to be formulated in a respectful and friendly way.





## Further literature and websites on evaluation

[www.univation.org](http://www.univation.org) - Institut für Evaluation und wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung in Köln.

Burkhard, Christoph; Gerhard Eikenbuch (2000): Praxishandbuch in der Schule. Scriptor Verlag, Berlin.

Kromrey, Helmut; Struck, Eckhard (2000): Methoden empirischer Sozialforschung. Verlag UTB/BRO.

Mayring, Philipp (1999): Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung: Beltz, Weinheim.

Marold, Wosnitza; Jäger, Reinhold S. (1999): Daten erfassen, auswerten und präsentieren - aber wie? Verlag Empirische Pädagogik, 2. Auflage, Landau.

## 6. Methodical structure of the manual

- ◆ Information and active participation in the course should be offered on a par. Emphasis should be given to the emotional and intuitive sides of the participants, because they are dominant in situations regarding consumption, and must for this reason be adequately addressed by the modules.
- ◆ Consumer attitudes are learned by action<sup>1)</sup>.
- ◆ It shall be shown that learning and acting are closely interrelated. The subjective and objective needs of the participants ought to be the centre-piece of learning. The learning-process should be illustrated (pin-boards, photo-documentation, portfolio,...)
- ◆ All contributions are equally valuable. Each participant is given the same importance.
- ◆ All essential steps (see module 3, - the didactic steps of consumer education) shall be documented and illustrated.
- ◆ When games are played rules need to be set up.
- ◆ Feedback and evaluation: On finishing a module methods of feedback should be used to give an intermediate evaluation. At the end of the workshop the participants are asked to give feedback on the whole program (see chapter 6, evaluation-helps) [2].

### External conditions

**1. Time to carry out the modules:** Depending on the qualitative depth, each module requires a minimum of half a day (for all modules a minimum of 9 half-days is required. It is also possible to offer parts in the form of blocks).

**2. Rooms:** One large room with sufficient space to place posters should be available, two additional group-rooms are helpful.

**3. Number of participants:** 20 - 25

**4. Course-direction and presentation:** At least one, but preferably 2 persons

**5. Basic equipment for presentation:** square, oval, and round cards, glue-sticks, scotch-tape, felt-tip pens, poster-pens, pin-boards, flipchart

**6. Video-equipment, photo-camera**

**7. Didactic material:** see appendix

**8. Evaluation:** see annex

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<sup>1)</sup> "Teaching oriented on action is a holistic and student-active way of teaching, where the action-products which teacher and students convened on direct the organisation of the teaching-process, in a way that permits to establish an equilibrium of mind-work and hand-work" (Meyer, Hilbert 1987, p. 214)

