

NESI FORUM MÁLAGA 2019

CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

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The Nesi Forum has been confirmed as the meeting point for people and organizations that want to create an economy at the service of people and the planet. This second edition has been devoted to analyzing how we can get a 2030 in which the Sustainable Development Goals have been reached. The thoughts have focused on six main tracks: energy and resources, food, textiles, finance, urban and work. In all the tracks of the NESI 2019 Forum, the topic of conscious consumption has been discussed in depth.

The power of citizens as individual consumers goes far beyond buying a product or service. Our habits and **lifestyles** are decisive for changing the economy. The variety of the actions we can do has been demonstrated: to consume less, share, collaborate, repair, rethink what is important, produce at individual level, or empower local communities, are main areas to go towards an economy at the service of people and the planet, as anticipated in the [OCU&NESI research "Otro consumo para un futuro mejor"](#) ("A different consumption to enable a better future").

Education is at the heart of the change. We need more education and awareness at all levels, in school, on TV, through documentaries, in public campaigns, from consumer associations and from the media. It's essential "to move from the society of misinformation to the society of understanding" ¹. We should let citizens understand that our consumption decisions have certain impacts, and there are alternatives with more positive impacts. The Sustainable Development Goals reflect this need through goal 12.8 "By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature."

Information is crucial. Once we have the concern to consume in a sustainable way, we need information to make informed decisions and choose the best options. The information currently available to consumers is partial, no comparable and often biased. Many systems and certifications have been thought from the logic of companies and large corporate clients, but they are not so useful to guide consumers to make informed decisions. Information should improve, in line with the recommendations from the [UN Guidelines for providing product sustainability information](#). And in parallel will appear new systems such as peer-review and citizen-guarantee mechanisms, that are closest to the reality of people.

Our **consumption culture** is connected to our general understanding of life. There is a lot of potential in thinking about what really matters and redefine the concept of "success". Then, we could develop mechanisms that measure it in depth and communicate it in a simple way.

¹ Nacho Cardero, director of the Spanish newspaper "El Confidencial"

The price is a relevant tool to modulate consumer preferences. It's important to explain the true cost of things, and that many costs are paid by all society to allow some products to look like "low cost". Negative externalities should be integrated into the price of products, to ensure that those who base their low prices on externalizing pollution, job insecurity or financial abuse, are regulated and have to pay for the reparation of their negative impacts. It's not natural that products that are good for people and the planet are more expensive. If we are committed to a sustainable economy, incentives, subsidies and other positive taxation mechanisms should be applied to help consumers make the most sustainable choice.

But among all the debates, the newest and more motivating was the recommendation to **humanize the economy**. We must work on its principles and values, as well as the personal relationships that support it. To achieve this, it's essential to connect with our **local communities** and create a more human economy at local level in our neighborhoods, towns and communities. We will weave more significant human relationships, focus on care and generate resilient communities. Because it's from the local where the change towards a more human economy is built. An initiative supported globally by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance network that has created a hub for citizens around the world: the [We All Citizens](#).

By sectors, we have also drawn interesting conclusions about how conscious consumption will be key to move towards a more sustainable model.

In the **fashion industry**, main changes will come from consumers, who will think twice what they really need and will question impulsive and compulsive consumerism.

The main message is "consume less and better".

Consume less, because we don't need to buy so many things, because the fast fashion industry doesn't not respond to real needs and because its negative impacts are huge: massive consumption of water, generation of waste that we can't control, contamination by pesticides, CO₂ emissions by the transport of a globalized industry, precarious jobs...

And consume better, because there exist options to choose garments that are designed to last longer, without toxics, with materials that don't exhaust the environment and can be circulated.

There are alternatives such as second hand, leasing, repair or customization. And we already have experiences to relaunch locally the clothing and footwear sector, generating quality local employment.

In **food** we confirmed that information leads consumers to a better and more conscious consumption.

Good habits are generated in schools (kitchens in school canteens, healthy snacks...), from home (with our example) and from the neighborhood (consumer groups, urban gardens ...).

The information is essential, and it's urgent to identify the origin of the products.

We should act to reduce food waste, explain the value of ugly food and visualize positive initiatives where the consumer is the protagonist, as the [Network of solidarity fridges](#), [Nice to eat you](#), etc.

We talked about the strong relationship between our lifestyles and our way of consuming. A slower way of living, connected to ourselves and the environment allows a more conscious consumption. We also discussed how the pressure of food lobbies on governments and the European Union slow down progress in research and information on sustainability.

One of the main conclusions is that the change starts from the local, from the cooperatives and consumer groups that allow us to live the change.

The **future of work** is usually addressed from the internal logic of organizations, but not from the conscious citizen's approach. We can contribute to the development of fair and sustainable organizations through our support from consumption. Education is crucial.

The management model that we know most is the one that concentrates power and hierarchy as a form of control. Labor relationships and the distribution of benefits are central issues to change organizational models. We have to think about how to open the distribution of power between the property and the workers and how to distribute equitably profits and losses.

We need more visibility to have references, and evaluations made by consumers. Traditional models tend to cause problems of communication and empathy, but spaces of care and dialogue can be opened between people in the organization. This should be visible to allow consumers make a choice in agreement with their values.

Labels and certifications are not the only possibility to distinguish companies that redistribute value. A very interesting initiative was presented from Mendoza (Argentina) in which the citizens value "[the most beloved company in their city](#)"

In finances, we aspire to a system that generates shared social, environmental and economic value. To achieve this, financial education is essential, even for families and children. And in parallel, we must intensify education in values for managers, bankers and politicians.

We must improve transparency. It's desirable that citizens become involved in deciding where to invest, but we also perceive a lack of interest from them. Crowdfunding is interesting in this regard, because microfinances allows us to get involved and decide what to finance, but it's not enough, and we mustn't forget the great investments that generate major impacts.

Other interesting tools will be ethical banking, cooperatives, the development of social currency, time banks and a collaborative blockchain.

Finally, it was also considered the need to guarantee a minimum subsistence for the most disadvantaged groups of the population.

In the sector of **energy and resources**, many of the issues that have already been mentioned were addressed. We urgently need to reduce our level of consumption so it's key to minimize what we consume. In the field of energy, we can use self-generation as a way to get our energy. It's necessary to explain the true cost of things and help people know how to reduce their ecological footprint so that they can improve their "environmental performance". We need a cultural redefinition of success, which leads us to look for intrinsic rather than extrinsic values and work on "positive discipline" that helps us develop habits that go beyond our immediate comfort.