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Marketing and sustainability from the perspective of future decision makers

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Contemporary research on sustainability is fragmented between multiple disciplines and areas, with on-going debates about methodological as well as practical issues. The core value of sustainability is embedded in the long-term maintenance of quality of life and contains environmental, economic and social components. Business organizations have a substantial responsibility for preserving the quality of life for future generations, as a result of the role they play in transforming natural and societal resources into goods and services. The marketing function is a major force in strategic decision-making in contemporary organizations. With its arsenal of tools for influencing (managing) consumption patterns, marketing must take responsibility for sustainable behaviour of both organizations and consumers. This article discusses the role of marketing in facilitating sustainable behaviour. Contemporary marketing education may not prepare students to use marketing's influence to support sustainability. This study, using senior level Marketing students, assesses the perceptions, opinions and attitudes towards sustainability at three different universities in Austria, Portugal and Serbia. These students represent future decision makers shaping marketing and business strategies. The results of this research inform the marketing academic community about its ability to build contemporary curricula, as well as marketing professionals who seek justification for sustainable marketing strategies. Business schools, in their role of educators, should assume more active role in shaping students' attitudes towards sustainability.

Introduction

Concern about consumer culture and societal consumption patterns is not new. As early as the 1950's, political theorist Hannah Arendt "...warned that advances in technology and the increase in free time were providing humankind with the opportunity to consume the whole world" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000: 267). A major question emerges as to what extent is marketing responsible for the development of the contemporary consumer society, in which, according to Varey (2010: 116) "...consumer, person, or citizen is used as virtually synonymous term". Can this responsibility be attributed solely to the consumption or to the production side? Dolan (2002) does not see dilemma here, because production and consumption do not exist without each other, whereas Csikszentmihalyi (2000: 271) is more circumspect, stating that "the imperative to produce is dictating the need to consume".

Businesses' responsibility for transformation of natural, social and economic resources into products is self-evident (Brown, Dillard & Marshal, 2009). We argue that the pivotal role of marketing makes it at least partially responsible for influencing consumption patterns, which then mobilize production. Contemporary businesses operate according to an uncompromising growth paradigm – a growth strategy is (for most businesses) considered the only viable business strategy. This perspective has been under scrutiny by numerous researchers (Dolan, 2002; Shankar, Whittaker &

Fitchett, 2006; Eitzen & Sartorius, 2011; Varey, 2012). As Featherstone (1990: 6) argues, "...the object of all production is consumption"; consequently, growth in production will lead to necessary growth in consumption, resulting in materialism and the phenomenon of a consumer society. Marketing, as a mainstream business function, carries great deal of the responsibility for bridging production and consumption spheres, and therefore is drawn into the spotlight of societal activists' criticism.

Available literature shows a long history of marketers contemplating the consequences of consumerism. Polonsky (2011: 1311) cites academic papers as early as the 1970's raising questions about the relationship between human societies and the natural environment, targeting the source of environmental problems as "...consumption and over-consumption". Kotler (2011) states that there were voices in marketing field dealing with sustainability issues as early as 1960's. From the book "*The Limits to Growth*" from 1972, to more recent articles, it is evident that this topic is relevant and important. Achrol and Kotler (2011) investigate the frontiers of marketing in the third millennium, placing significant emphasis on concept of sustainable marketing and questioning the viability of the continual growth paradigm. Overconsumption threatens to push humankind over the limits of the environment's carrying capacity – resources will be depleted and the sustaining environment destroyed (resources capacity), resulting the inability of future

generations to sustain current consumption levels (market capacity).

The United Nations Brundtland Commission's Report of 1987 defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987: 41). The environmental dimension of sustainable development can be addressed by environmental management and management of human consumption. The importance of managing consumption to prevent, or limit, further environmental deterioration in areas such as food, transportation and energy was the focus of numerous authors (see Michaelis & Lorek, 2004; Belz & Schmidt-Riediger, 2010; Assadourian, 2010). We argue that marketing has a significant role in shaping consumption patterns, and therefore can be employed in pursuit of more sustainable business practices (supply side) and the more sustainable consumption and the life-styles (demand side).

Imbedding sustainability principles in business and marketing strategy is a complex process. In order to facilitate this process, student need to gain an adequate knowledge of sustainability, and furthermore, believe that sustainability can contribute to a company's business and marketing goals. Our research addressed these issues by approaching senior level Marketing students and investigating how comfortable they are with sustainability ideas and how they perceive the impact of sustainability in creating marketing strategies in their respective countries. The shift towards more sustainable business practices is unlikely to be linear; different societies will likely show different sensitivities towards sustainability and, most likely, different behaviours. The research was conducted in order to identify the relevant factors for change in adopting sustainability as a salient component of the marketing paradigm and practice at three universities in Austria, Portugal and Serbia. We investigated students' perception and attitudes, recognizing that these students come from nations with different levels of economic development, have different business curricula, and different social infrastructure to support sustainable behaviour. Last, we address the transformational potential of marketing from the perspective of future marketers – can marketing philosophy and management help alleviate the consequences of unsustainable business and consumption practices?

Literature review

One of the key questions in the sustainability discourse is the nature of sustainability motivation among companies/organizations. Sustainability is considered to be somewhere between a "feel-good buzz word" and a genuine attempt to save mankind's future, between a genuine marketing doctrine and a mere "sales-pitch-trick". Most, if not all, of our consumption is socially driven (Dolan, 2002; Michaelis & Lorek, 2004; Assadourian, 2010; Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012b), and marketing plays an important and active role in establishing consumer cultures and consumption patterns. The following discourse aims to

establish a framework for and give overview of major ideas that connect marketing, consumption and sustainability.

Marketing and sustainability

Marketing responded to the emerging trend of sustainable discourse quite early. We will briefly address dominant areas of research of sustainability from the marketing perspective, the origin of interest in sustainability, as well as the practice of misplacing sustainability idea in pursuit of short-term business goals. These three perspectives offer an understanding of the challenges facing more sustainable business practices.

Chamorro, Rubio and Miranda (2009) summarized sustainable marketing research conducted by different authors in the past two decades. While the terminology and emphasis was slightly different, most researched topics are concentrated in the following areas: sustainability concepts and strategies, green communication, green consumerism, recycling behavior and macromarketing. For Varey (2012), the macromarketing perspective is the most productive route, since it rises above the routine managerial approach. Kotler (2011) advocates transition towards sustainability-oriented marketing, abandoning dominantly marketing management perspective of continual growth. He advocates moving away from the traditional marketing management perspective of continual pressure to meet sales and profit goals, privileging short term business gains over the long term benefits for the society.

Some thought-leaders argue the need to abandon the dominantly anthropocentric view of the world (Alroe & Kristensen, 2003; Polonsky, 2010; Sadler-Smith, 2013). In order to make sustainability part of the contemporary business doctrine, society must accept that our ethical responsibility transcends the care of "human and human only" (Achrol & Kotler, 2012). These ideas led towards intense environmental consciousness, to which marketing responded with numerous products that are labelled eco-, bio-, green-, enviro-, or fair-trade as an answer to social responsibility. Companies responded by introducing design for sustainability, seeking alternative technologies and materials, opting for resources and energy savvy processes in manufacturing and distribution, and devising "reduce-reuse-recycle" mottos to include sustainability through the post purchase and the end-of-the-life-cycle phase. Kotler (2011) introduces the term *Marketing 3.0* – a shift in marketing paradigms/practices as a response to the new-found consumers interest in companies' social responsibilities.

Specific issues regarding the relationship between marketing and sustainability relate to questionable marketing practices, which sometimes use sustainability as a sales pitch or as a tool in achieving traditional business results. Woods (2010), in her book *Essential Guide to Marketing Planning*, advises marketers to address sustainability goals "...because they indirectly help the company strengthen ties with customers (achieving marketing objectives) and maintain or increase sales (achieving financial objectives)" (Woods, 2010: 101).

In an overview of several articles Polonsky (2011) confirms that concerns about environment/sustainability are often the result of attempts to better target market segments, induce loyalty, relax price sensitivity or simply enhance communication with customers. Delmas and Burbano (2011) researched “greenwashing” – a practice of companies that have poor sustainability practices and yet communicate positive results. Such practices fuel further controversy over marketing as an unfair and unsustainable business practice that is obsolete in the new reality. Deceptive marketing practices fuel antagonists that unselectively target the entire marketing doctrine and practices.

Research data published by Seth and Sisodia (2005: 160) show the negative image of marketing in the eyes of a substantial proportion of customers and “the rising hostility that consumers have toward the ways that marketing is conducted”. Heath and Chatzidakis (2012a, 2012b) showed strong negative attitude towards marketing and the respondents predominantly blamed marketing for excessive consumption. Following this discourse, two questions came to forefront:

RQ1: How do students perceive the importance of sustainability to business decision makers in their countries?

RQ2: How do students perceive the potential of the marketing discipline/practice to transform unsustainable behaviors of businesses?

Furthermore, the origin of unsustainable consumption and lifestyles is often attributed to marketing activities (Kjellberg, 2008; Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012a).

Marketing and consumption

Dolan (2002: 171) states that global capitalism “has inherent logic of increasing production of both commodities and desires”. Marketing’s responsibility for communicating and shaping both desires and products cannot be denied. Shankar *et al.* (2006: 490) discuss the contemporary consumer culture and the role of marketing in a world where “...functional and utilitarian needs were met long time ago”, thus marketing, serving as a tool of a market economy and neo-classical economic theory, fuels the “desire to desire” as a constantly moving target of perpetual economic growth. Assadourian (2010: 187) argues that “...perhaps the biggest business tool for stoke consumer cultures is marketing”. Heath and Chatzidakis (2012a) find that customers believe that excessive consumption is predominantly due to marketing, and they further express concerns about the possibility of marketing losing credibility among customers – mainly losing ground on sustainability issues by promoting materialism (Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012b). Furthermore, sustainability issues are threatened by the dominant logic of pursuing/maximizing individual interests. What is good for an individual is not necessarily good for society. Sustainability is systemic, whereas business decision making is oriented to pursuing individual (or closed group) goals. Can

marketing be responsible for conveying a desire for more sustainable results (Brown *et al.*, 2009)? Can it be responsible for sustainability encompassing societal goals? Marketing is already responsible to a great extent for economic indicators. Brown (2001: 87) criticizes Philip Kotler for convincing “...managers that marketing is the backbone of business and must integrate the work of all other functions.” And even the distinguished marketing scholar admits that “...marketing has well-known negative impacts” (Achrol & Kotler, 2012: 35). If there is little integration of topics about sustainability in traditional business areas (according to Thomas, 2005), we propose that marketing can take responsibility for integrating sustainability idea through organizations, in the same manner as it is responsible for conveying a consumer orientation.

The dark sides of consumption – the questionable enhancement of the quality of life through consumption (Csikszentmihalyi 1999; Mick, Broniarczyk & Haidt, 2004; Shankar *et al.*, 2006; Assadourian, 2010) – speaks volumes about the misplaced quest for a better/happier life of contemporary society. Varey (2012: 427) concludes that money does not buy happiness – “...once we are affluent.” Escaping from materialism is advocated by economists, sociologists, activists of all professions, who are dominantly coming from the affluent, lulled West, they call for “...more in our lives, but less of it in material form.” (Varey, 2012: 428). The real peril to global action for more sustainable development can be recognized in various indicators showing rise in inequality, i.e. the Human Development Index (2010), leading to more economic polarized world. Today’s world is polarized between those who still look upon consumption as a route to happier, more fulfilled, meaningful life (third world countries), and those who found out with dread that consumption did not bring expected satisfaction (developed world). No meaningful action in preserving the world around us, and us in this world, would come from fragmented approach, more sustainable world requires equal commitment of both third world countries and developed nations.

Significant amounts of research provide theoretical support for revising marketing’s role in driving consumerism and unsustainable lifestyles, i.e. Dolan (2002), Shankar *et al.* (2006), Kjellberg (2008), Mari (2008), Peattie and Peattie (2009), Assadourian (2010), Griskevicius, Cant and Vugt (2012), Varey (2010; 2012). This raises the following research question:

RQ3: How do students perceive the potential of the marketing discipline/practice to influence change in the behavior of the customers towards more sustainable consumption and life-style?

Sustainability as a part of business curriculum

With understanding the origins of sustainability and its relationship with marketing discipline and practice, as well as understanding the impact of marketing on forming consumption patterns, a logical consequence is to search ways to increase awareness and the consequent actions of marketing decision makers. Mulder (2014) expresses fear that

integration of sustainable development topics has not been flawless, and very often it depends on the interest of the individual lecturer. Doh and Tashman (2014: 140) express similar ideas and conclude that sustainable development has been implemented in business schools curricula "...with uneven records of adoption and diverse methods of implementation by faculty". Cordano, Ellis and Scherer (2003) show that introducing environmental topics in a business schools' curriculum induces greater levels of environmental concerns among students. But we have to be aware, as Thomas (2005: 188) argues, that addressing students' sensitivity to environmental issues does not necessarily lead to changes in behavior "...the student might be sensitive, and even sympathetic, to the need for environmentally responsible management practices, but still may consider them peripheral, or even antithetical, to the success of the firm."

Different societies also have different beliefs and behaviors regarding sustainability principles, as well as different levels of knowledge. Without understanding the benefits (and necessity) of sustainable behavior, as well as its relation to business results, paradigm and praxis shift can be jeopardized, leaving sustainable behavior merely a topic of academic and salon talks. Assadourian (2010: 189) evokes the necessity for change of the consumer culture paradigm by mobilizing institutions capable of inducing change of that magnitude "education, business, government, and the media, which have played such powerful roles in driving consumerism, plus social movements and sustainable traditions, both old and new." Business schools are called to take responsibility for developing sustainability marketing practices on a number of grounds. Even in the relative absence of research on introducing sustainability to business school curriculums, sustainability is an important topic "since the business world is moving forward on these issues regardless" (Doh & Tashman, 2014: 140). With ongoing debate of the importance of inclusion of sustainability topics in business schools curriculums, a decision was made to investigate:

RQ4: To what extent are the courses/topics of sustainability included in their business school's program?

RQ5: How do students evaluate their own understanding of sustainability?

Empirical study

Data and measures

Data collection was conducted in three universities: the Upper Austrian University of Applied Sciences, Steyr, Austria; the Lisbon University Institute, Portugal; and the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. The convenience sample comprised 182 respondents, all senior level marketing students at the three business schools. The sample included 72 students from Austria, 45 from Portugal, and 66 from Serbia. Their experience with each school's curriculum and

practices made them appropriate respondents for research. Most will enter the workforce very soon and some had experienced the business climate in their environment through internships.

The research instrument was devised in order to capture answers on research questions. Scale items are developed with theoretical substantiation, and attitudes were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree):

The first factor was identified as **"sustainable driven life-style"**. Items in scale are condensed from multiple scales used to measure different aspects of environmental attitude and behavioral component related to sustainable behavior (See Table 1). The first two items represent acknowledgment of the environmental problem, followed by the third item, which represents personal feeling of necessity to act more sustainably, followed by two items that show action towards sustainable behavior and readiness to punish non-sustainable practice by boycotting products of irresponsible companies. These five items define a pro-active sustainable oriented individual by triangulating behavior with following aspects:

- awareness of the problem of sustainability;
- perception that individual behavior can make a difference; and
- active engagement in sustainable practice.

Table 1: Sustainable driven lifestyle

Code	Item	Previous research
I.4	We, as a society, should radically change our way of living to offset dangers of unsustainable life-style and consumption patterns to our world.	Kagawa (2007)
I.5	The earth resources are limited and if we continue to use resources in unsustainable way the world might not survive.	Iyer and Muncy, (2009)
I.6	I feel personal obligation to engage in sustainable practices.	Stern, Dietz, Kalof, Guagnano and Abel (1999)
I.7	I try actively to contribute to sustainability by changing consumption patterns and life-style. (Preferring to buy/eat/support organically grown and local products, recycling, saving water and energy, changing my habits in transportation, conserving nature and/or actively learning, advocating, sustainability, etc.)	McDonald and Oates (2006); Kagawa (2007)
I.8	I would avoid buying products from companies that engage in harmful, unsustainable business practice.	Kagawa (2007)

The second factor represents **"perception of personal responsibility"** (See Table 2). The intention was to measure the extent to which respondents perceive sustainability as their own responsibility (first two items), or transfer

responsibility to others – institutions or developed nations (third and fourth item). The last item measures the extent of pessimism – agreement with this statement would suggest respondents' lack of trust that the problem can be solved.

Table 2: Perception of personal responsibility

Code	Item	Previous research
II.9	My individual contribution to the sustainability is too little to be meaningful.	Heath and Chatzidakis, (2012)
II.10	The solution to sustainability problems is not in the hands of the common citizen.	
II.11	It is the responsibility of developed countries to solve the environmental problems of the world.	Uitto, Juuti, Lavonen, Byman, and Meisalo (2011)
II.12	Sustainability problems should be left to the experts.	
II.13	Environmental problems make the future of the world look bleak and hopeless.	

The third factor was named *“sustainability from businesses perspective”* (See Table 3). This construct was devised to capture students' perception on legitimacy of including sustainability topics in profit oriented endeavors. Students had to evaluate their perception of the extent to which companies acknowledge sustainability as an important issue, to which extent they follow it in creating business strategies and the extent to which it contributes to achievement of business goals. The fourth item measured perception of damage to a company targeted by public because of unsustainable practice.

Table 3: Sustainability from business perspective

Code	Item	Previous research
III.14	Sustainability issues are very important to companies in my country.	Thomas (2005)
III.15	Sustainability concerns in my country are very important to executives when companies develop and implement their strategies (investment, product development, marketing, etc.) in my country.	
III.16	Following sustainability practices can help companies in my country to achieve their goals or obtain benefits from sustainable conduct.	
III.17	If company in my country uses unsustainably practices and gets under public scrutiny for environmental or social unacceptable behavior extent of damage to its business (sales, profit, image) would be substantial.	

The fourth factor examines *“perception of marketing's role in driving consumerism and unsustainable consumer practices”* (Table 4). The factor tends to measure feelings towards marketing as a discipline and practice. Items address some of usual common negative perceptions towards marketing as promoting consumption as an avenue to

increasing quality of life, inflated expectations and pressure to purchases beyond utilitarian needs.

Table 4: Perception of marketing's role in driving consumerism and unsustainable consumer practices

Code	Item	Previous research
IV.18	Marketing played important role in promoting consumerism and unsustainable life-style.	Acrol and Kotler (2012)
IV.19	The satisfaction obtained after the purchase of a product rarely equals the expectation created by marketing techniques	Heath and Chatzidakis (2012a)
IV.20	Advertising and other marketing techniques lead people to buy things they do not really need.	
IV.21	Marketing has a negative image among most of customers.	

Lastly, we posed two questions related to the perceived *“ability of marketing to serve as change agent”* in shifting away from consumerism and unsustainable business practices. The first question addressed the ability of marketing to influence business decision makers to shift towards more sustainable business practices. The second question measures ability of marketing to influence consumers' change towards more sustainable consumption patterns and life-style. These question should bring clear understanding whether future decision makers perceive that marketing can take an active role in transforming businesses and consumption sphere towards more sustainable.

An additional block of questions was used to test the spectrum of environmentally friendly activities of respondents in their daily lives. The intention was to relate their general attitude towards sustainability and real behavior. The first four items in this block relate to consumption patterns from general consumption, energy and water use, to the change in transportation habits. Additional items access the respondents' active learning process and gathering knowledge about sustainability, while the last two items measure forms of political activism and activities in conservation of nature. Items were based on the research of McDonald and Oates (2006) and Kagawa (2007).

The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) (2012) was used as measure of a country's sustainability practices, allowing an understanding of overall attitudes towards sustainability in targeted countries with different development levels. According to this index, countries are positioned in the five distinctive groups. Austria belongs to the top-tier described as “the strongest performers”, overall ranked as the 7th in the world. Portugal belongs to the second group of “strong performers” and is ranked as the 41st, whereas Serbia falls into the fourth category of “weaker performers”, ranked as the 103rd in the overall ranking. We expect that in more affluent economies marketing managers should be more aware and knowledgeable of the benefits of sustainable conduct and hence incorporate sustainability in the marketing doctrine of organizations.

Method

The research was conducted during spring of 2013. Data from the Austrian sample were collected using on-line survey platform, a result of excellent student database system of Upper Austrian University of Applied Sciences. In Portugal and Serbia, a survey was administered during classes, by paper and pen method. After coding, all answers were loaded into Excel spreadsheets, and then transferred to SPSS.

The first three research questions called for identification of statistically significant differences between opinions and attitudes among students from three countries in research focus. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post hoc analysis (LSD) with multiple comparisons enabled us to evaluate differences between Austrian, Portuguese and Serbian students related to importance of sustainability from the perspective of businesses in respective countries, as well as the transformational potential of marketing discipline regarding changing businesses practices and consumers' life-style.

The last two questions – measuring perception of knowledge about sustainability and inclusion of sustainability topics into business schools programs – were addressed with basic descriptive statistics allowing us to assess personal perception of familiarity with sustainability as concept, as well as students' perceived inclusion of sustainability topics in three different universities.

Discussion and results

The actual behavior of the students when they enter work force and start making decision related to marketing tactics and strategies will be influenced by their perception of what is expected from the businesses in terms of the sustainable behavior. Our starting premise is that decision makers from less developed countries, with lower levels of knowledge about sustainability will place less emphasis on sustainable business practices. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied as reliability assessment, resulting with Cronbach alpha value .675, which is acceptable; literature suggests the threshold level of 0.6 or more stringent 0.7 (Davicik, 2014). CFA proves that items in our scale positively correlate with latent variable we identified as "Sustainability from business perspective". ANOVA test, ($F=14.266$, Sig. 0.00, df 3) and

post hoc analysis (Least Significant Difference, LSD) with multiple comparisons enabled us to identify statistically significant differences between students' opinions from three countries. (see Table 5)

The post-hoc analysis uncovered several statistically significant differences, allowing some conclusions related to the first research question (*RQ1*). Austrian and Portuguese students place more emphasis on the necessity of sustainability conduct of companies in their environment, compared with Serbian students. The Austrian students believed that sustainable practices contribute to business goals and results, as compared with other two groups. These findings can be related to the achieved level of economic development, but also to the general environmental attitudes, as shown by the Environmental Performance Index, where Austria scores highest. This finding supports the perspective that developed countries are in the forefront of pursuing sustainable practices, where businesses recognize that sustainable goals are not opposed to achieving business goals.

A conclusion can be drawn by cross-referencing findings on "sustainability from business perspective" with students' responses to the statement "I would avoid buying products from companies that engage in harmful, unsustainable business practice." The Serbian students are less likely to penalize a company that does not adhere to sustainable practices by boycotting their products. Post-hoc analysis also shows a statistically significant difference between the Serbian sample and students from Austria and Portugal (see Table 6). Serbian students acknowledge that companies that do not adhere to sustainable practices should be penalized for their behavior, yet themselves are not so sure of their own reaction and willingness to take a stand against "rogue" companies. Civic reaction is also part of being aware of sustainability issues and recognizing the role of individual (consumer/stakeholders) in taking an active stand, which comes with better understanding of the problem. Attitudes towards the sustainability were generally positive and yet the activities assessment showed an inconsequential level of environmental conduct in the everyday lives of our Serbian sample. A conclusion is that the respondents were expressing socially desirable behaviors and not necessarily actual behaviors. In the case of Serbia, a plausible assumption of discrepancy between expressed attitudes and behavior could be that there is no infrastructure or civic movement that supports/promotes sustainable behavior.

Table 5: Post-hoc test: LSD multiple comparisons “sustainability from business perspective”

Construct: Sustainability from business perspective	(I) country	(J) country	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.
Item 1: Sustainability issues are very important to companies in my country.	Austria	Portugal	.300	.291	.304
		Serbia	1.278*	.261	.000
	Portugal	Austria	-.300	.291	.304
		Serbia	.978*	.296	.001
	Serbia	Austria	-1.278*	.261	.000
		Portugal	-.978*	.296	.001
Item 2: Sustainability concerns in my country are very important to executives when companies develop and implement their strategies (investment, product development, marketing, etc.) in my country.	Austria	Portugal	.169	.297	.569
		Serbia	.514	.266	.055
	Portugal	Austria	-.169	.297	.569
		Serbia	.344	.302	.256
	Serbia	Austria	-.514	.266	.055
		Portugal	-.344	.302	.256
Item 3: Following sustainability practices can help companies in my country to achieve their goals or obtain benefits from sustainable conduct.	Austria	Portugal	-.626*	.236	.009
		Serbia	-.493*	.212	.021
	Portugal	Austria	.626*	.236	.009
		Serbia	.133	.240	.579
	Serbia	Austria	.493*	.212	.021
		Portugal	-.133	.240	.579
Item 4: If company in my country uses unsustainably practices and gets under public scrutiny for environmental or social unacceptable behaviour extent of damage to its business (sales, profit, image) would be substantial.	Austria	Portugal	.267	.291	.360
		Serbia	.101	.261	.699
	Portugal	Austria	-.267	.291	.360
		Serbia	-.166	.296	.576
	Serbia	Austria	-.101	.261	.699
		Portugal	.166	.296	.576

* The mean difference is significant at the level of 0.10.

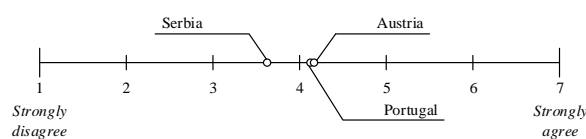
Table 6: Post-hoc test: LSD multiple comparisons

Construct: Sustainable driven lifestyle	(I) country	(J) country	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.
Item 1: I would avoid purchasing products from companies that participate in harmful unsustainable corporate practices.	Austria	Portugal	.072	.302	.811
		Serbia	1.078*	.270	.000
	Portugal	Austria	-.072	.302	.811
		Serbia	1.006*	.307	.001
	Serbia	Austria	-1.078*	.270	.000
		Portugal	-1.006*	.307	.001

* The mean difference is significant at the level of 0.10.

Before presenting questions related to the transformational change of marketing, the perceived image of marketing practice was addressed. There are no statistically significant differences among students in three countries regarding the statement that “Marketing has a negative image among customers”; students in the sample recognize that the image of marketing practice is somewhat questionable given the fact that they neither agree nor disagree with this statement.

Marketing has a negative image among most of customers.

**Figure 1: Respondents' perception on the image of marketing**

Source: Authors

Questionable reputation of marketing expressed by students in our sample has significant influence on the second and third research question, related to the transformational potential of marketing, ability of marketing to serve as a change agent. Intention was to evaluate students' perception of the ability of marketing to imbed sustainability as guiding principle in devising marketing strategies and tactics (**RQ2**), as well as ability to influence change in consumption patterns towards more sustainable life-style (**RQ3**). Change is possible only if those who are responsible for the change believe they have adequate tool to make change happen. We claim that marketing could be this tool with its navigational role in business decision making. Mean values suggest that there is a consensus among students from three countries about ability of marketing to influence the shift towards sustainability of both businesses and consumers (Table 7).

Table 7: Mean values for statements measuring the transformational potential of marketing

Ability of marketing to serve as change agent	Mean values and (standard deviation)		
	Austria	Portugal	Serbia
Question I: Marketing possesses internal potential to act as an instrument of change, as changing marketing doctrines and practices makes it possible to encourage change in business practices towards more sustainable.	5.431 (1.059)	5.556 (1.013)	5.303 (1.381)
Question II: Marketing possesses internal potential to act as an instrument of change, as changing marketing doctrines and practices makes it possible to encourage change in customer behaviour and consumption patterns.	5.437 (1.143)	5.511 (0.944)	5.439 (1.217)

Post-hoc analysis confirmed that there are no statistically significant differences between students in Austria, Portugal and Serbia related to the transformational potential of marketing discipline in both explored dimensions (Table 8). Regardless of level of development and external assessment

of sustainable practices (represented by Environmental Performance Index) students in all three groups have similar perception related to the possibility of marketing to transform business and consumption practices.

Table 8: Post-hoc test: LSD multiple comparisons

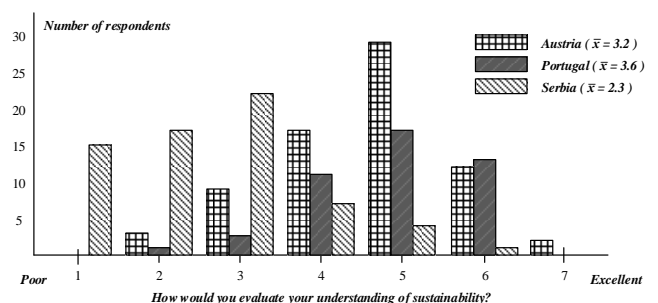
Ability of marketing to serve as change agent	(I) country	(J) country	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.
Marketing possesses internal potential to act as an instrument of change, as changing marketing doctrines and practices makes it possible to encourage change in business practices towards more sustainable.	Austria	Portugal	-.125	.223	.576
		Serbia	.128	.200	.525
	Portugal	Austria	.125	.223	.576
		Serbia	.253	.227	.268
	Serbia	Austria	-.128	.200	.525
		Portugal	-.253	.227	.268
Marketing possesses internal potential to act as an instrument of change, as changing marketing doctrines and practices makes it possible to encourage change in customer behavior and consumption patterns.	Austria	Portugal	-.074	.215	.729
		Serbia	-.003	.193	.989
	Portugal	Austria	.074	.215	.729
		Serbia	.072	.218	.742
	Serbia	Austria	.003	.193	.989
		Portugal	-.072	.218	.742

The overall results suggest that sustainability should be incorporated into the marketing decision-making. Additionally, students believe marketing has the ability to influence its customer base by promoting values of sustainable behavior and consumption. Different countries have different infrastructure and general level of support for sustainable behaviors, but there is a comfort in the fact that on different levels of economic development (which is the case between three countries in our focus) there might be a next generation of marketing managers similarly expressing concerns for the environment and believing in the transformational necessity and potential of marketing to lead businesses in to the era of more sustainable development and consumption. Although we do not imply that changes in education for sustainability will solve all the problems, it is an important step.

The final two question related to perception of the extent of inclusion these topics in the business schools programs (RQ4), as well as students' evaluation of their own understanding of sustainability (RQ5). Respondents assessment of inclusion of sustainability topics in their business education (Austria $\bar{x} = 3.2$; Portugal $\bar{x} = 3.6$; Serbia $\bar{x} = 2.3$) reveals that students in the three countries do not perceive that business schools put significant emphasis on educating future marketers on sustainability. However they

rate their familiarity with sustainability issues slightly higher (Austria $\bar{x} = 4.6$; Portugal $\bar{x} = 4.8$; Serbia $\bar{x} = 2.5$) suggesting that this knowledge comes from sources outside the educational system.

It is evident that students from Austria and Portugal assess their knowledge about sustainability higher than students from Serbia do (Figure 2). This confirms our premise that higher level of development corresponds with increased interest and knowledge about sustainability issues.

**Figure 2: Respondents' self-assessment regarding sustainability-related awareness**

Source: Authors

Conclusions

Varey (2012: 424) calls for “nobler purpose [of marketing]”, Achrol and Kotler (2011: 51) advocate a shift in marketing philosophy towards “the well-being of the consumer and society over well-being of marketing management”, Sheth and Sisodia (2005: 161) consider that marketing has to move towards the “Era of Enlightenment”. Kotler (2011: 133) introduces new sustainable practice principles in his recent reflections on marketing: “Quality of life and personal happiness do not always increase with more consumption and satisfaction.” The importance of sustainable consumption patterns and life-styles was acknowledged by a number of critics of contemporary marketing: Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Shankar *et al.* (2006), Varey (2010). The need for transformation of marketing to “enhance the welfare of individuals and society” (Mari, 2008: 5). Numerous authors are actually calling for a shift from an emphasis on marketing management to more a rewarding, and in the long run more sustainable, approach with the intention of enhancing quality of life. This kind of change needs to be imbedded in teaching the marketing doctrine and practice.

Our research results show that there is substantial recognition of sustainability issues among future generation marketers. Regardless of their socio-cultural and economic environment, students from all three groups showed maturity in awareness of the necessity to take action in preserving the world in which they live. This addresses the main point that sustainability issues cannot be researched and addressed from local or isolated positions. However, there are the two sides to this statement, on the one hand sustainability (especially environmental problems) do not recognize national borders (Chernobyl or Fukushima being examples), on the other hand, economic prosperity certainly “recognizes” national borders. Less developed countries have a hunger for higher levels of consumption, achieving what Polonsky (2011: 1316) calls the “western consumer dream”. If the media could become global phenomenon, in the era of the global brands, and times in which we are witnessing global culture – can we incorporate sustainability as a part of global mind-set? Iyer and Muncy (2009) explain that consumption easily relates to lower level of needs according to Maslow, but achieving higher level needs, especially self-fulfilment, cannot be achieved through consumption. Following the same discourse it is easy to understand how less developed nations might prefer consumption over sustainability, and it makes a lot of sense why customers in affluent societies have increased sensitivity for sustainability. Varey (2012: 425) calls for “...ecological (post-industrial) civilization...” *The question emerges – can we insist on such a transition before all humankind enjoyed benefits of industrialization?* On the other hand, if we wait, the cost can be too high and damage irreversible. How do we get to the equilibrium the opposing needs and development levels in such unevenly developed world? Unfortunately, there is much truth in Tadajewski’s (2008: 465) quote of Theodore Levitt: “Our chauvinistic faith in the superior virtues of reason and in man’s capacity for reasonableness need not be fetishized into blind disregard of our less noble capabilities”. The perception of the capacity to

overcome problems also differs across the students from our sample; answers show that students from Portugal and Serbia consider developed countries more responsible than developing countries for solving environmental problems.

More sustainable future calls for deeper, long-range cultural change. Universities, business education and marketing can lead the change by transforming the next generation of business leaders to be more sustainability oriented. On the other hand, business results and the competitive environment has to be kept in focus, and still there is a belief in indisputability of the growth paradigm.

Limitations and further research

Results of this study allow us to overview attitudes towards sustainability, as well as sustainable consumption behavior among senior level students majoring in Marketing at three universities. A major limitation of study is the convenience sample, so it is hard to generalize findings towards the national level. Taking research to national level by accessing students in a number of universities across nations could minimize sampling error. Also, caution has to be employed in recognizing societally desirable behavior versus actual behavior, since respondents are always aware of the social stigma of unsustainable business practices, but studies confirmed that pressured by short-term goals and responsibility towards meeting financial goals might induce undesired, but to these goals instrumental, behavior.

Identification of different factors opens the road to more complex statistical analysis in search of predictors of certain behavior or attitudes. It would be beneficial to study whether a higher sense of personal responsibility and active sustainable consumption behavior induces more stringent standards for sustainable behavior in business realm. Discovering these relations could lead to utilizing knowledge to promote and actively build sustainable perspectives/behaviors with a clear goal on mind, knowing that certain activities can benefit businesses, as well as society in the long run.

Data based on a slightly modified questionnaire have been already collected at Nuertingen-Geislingen University, in Germany, and the data collection process is initiated at Portland State University, Oregon, USA. Further research would be desirable in reaching lesser developed economies, which in general, place lower emphasis on sustainable behavior, primarily progressing towards achieving economy goals.

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