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Framework model for consumer choices: the interplay of social identity, trends, norms and values¹

Model ramowy dla wyborów konsumenckich – wzajemne oddziaływanie tożsamości społecznej, wartości, norm i trendów

1. Introduction

The scope of the paper is **to construct an alternative framework model** of consumer choices regarding the role of identity, culture, values, norms and current global trends which may be adapted for sustainable policy. Why do we need such a model? The neoclassical understanding of consumer choice which is focused on utility and omits the role of culture, values, norms and identity doesn't explain sufficiently why consumer choice changes and doesn't offer satisfactory instruments to impact on this reality *via* the policy.

Although many studies highlight the role of social norms, values, institutions, culture, and trends, we are still missing a framework model of the interrelations between them. These issues are usually treated separately. The efficiency of a policy requires considering their interplay. In particular, we shall focus on **individual and social values, and norms on the one hand**, and the **current global challenges** on the other hand. The latter are embedded in different cultures which produce various institutions. Institutions regulate the relations between people and are the setting for human decisions.

A framework model will help us to understand the theoretical and empirical relationship between these concepts. Moreover, we may apply it to designing future economic policy whose effectiveness depends on the context. In this

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context, individual and social values and norms play a key role. Additionally, they create the changing current environment. This paper explores the relations between segments of such a meta-model in reference to existing theories. Also, it presents empirical evidence between various components of this model. Finally, it contains a descriptive analysis of various discussed phenomena.

2. Where to start? *Homo oeconomicus* versus the embedded concept of human nature

To start with the framework model, one has to decide an ontological question: what do we assume about economic reality and the economic agent? We have to answer the question: – what concept of human nature is best suited for our scope. Firstly, I will show, why I don't apply the *homo oeconomicus* concept, and then I will give reasons for adapting the embedded concept of human nature for my model.

The concept of human nature used to explain consumer choice in standard economics is *homo oeconomicus*. Consumer choice is here an outcome of individual preferences. The trends and social norms may put certain restraints on them and cause changes in preferences (so-called *tastes*).

However, this concept reveals some problems:

- It does not answer the questions of how and why the social norms and trends impact individual choices. Maybe some people continue with their own preferences and in some other cases the people change them according to fashion.
- It is based on the vague concept of a utility that does not have any reference to human nature. Is this a pleasure or satisfaction or the effect of calculation? Is the sensation of pleasure something that depends on individual preferences, or on the social situation (context-dependent)? What if I buy a car or dress which I like, but which everyone else finds funny or weird? Will I be happy about that?
- This does not allow us to explain the processes taking place in the whole of society, for example in relation to consumption (especially when we adapt the concept of Pareto optimality). Is the proposed economic policy regulation limiting the utility received by the person through imposing taxes acceptable? Can the government impact on our tastes and attitudes?

For these reasons, I would rather opt for the **embedded concept of human nature**. This concept permits creating a link between the individual and society.

It brings us closer to the question posed at the beginning, about the role of the society together with its culture, institutions, various norms and values and trends in making consumer choices. The social embeddedness of a person has a long tradition, and it has attracted the institutionalists. An interesting analysis of this concept can be found in Granovetter (1985). He reviewed classical economics, neoclassical economics, new institutional economics, transaction cost economics, and sociology, finding out that social relations affect people's behavior and that **economic actions are embedded within social relations**. But embedding takes different shapes in the different theories. It may refer only to the direct social relations of the individual or all social processes which are evolving and co-evolving.

Adopting such an embedded concept of human nature as a starting point requires a reversal of the mindset from focusing on the individual to society (or, as ecological economics suggests on a society embedded in nature) that encompasses all individuals. So, the ultimate criterion for human decisions should be the survival of humankind, life or the own gen. Therefore, what counts is not only the development (which is more than wellbeing) of an individual but of all actually living and future beings.

Such a concept is based not on the individual but on a *holon*. A holon is interconnected and interwoven with the existing reality – both society and nature. So, if we even take out and characterize such a human actor, we cannot understand the reason and meaning of such a description without a context. Such a person acts as a part of society. His/her choices result from the interplay between a person and his/her environment (social and natural). In addition, we assume that such an environment is changing, which means that it is not only the person who needs to adapt, but also larger groups, creating a direct environment for other people.

However, there are **many ways to explain such a connection between an individual and society**. Even if we recognize that a person is part of society and their interest is the survival of a society that provides them with support to meet their needs, the question remains: how does society make individuals consider the interests of society or at least some sections of society?

1) Firstly, we can explain the influence of society on individual (consumer) choice via the concept of **rationality**.

What we experience as limited individual rationality is often a consequence of being embedded in living social systems, which make us behaving according to some norms, or rules, which have their place in culture and in institutions. Sometimes people may be conscious of these processes, but many of them are

not even realized. The social and communicational context makes the person go beyond the individual rationality calculation towards macro-rationality, which contains the interest of society.

Bolis, Morioka and Sznelwar (2017) suggest redefining the concept of rationality so that it may contain something which we can associate with group-rationality or macro-rationality. The authors are differentiating between various forms of rationality (instrumental, bounded, communicative and substantive). Each of these forms shows a different level of interconnection between what is rational for one person and rational for others. Whereas the instrumental rationality is oriented on self-interest, the other forms of rationality considering values, norms, or relations with others amount to broader concepts of rationality (considering the embeddedness of the individual) (Bolis et al., 2017, p. 312).

- **Instrumental rationality**, which is oriented on maximizing utilitarian value. In this kind of value, we have a unique way of impacting on their change (via financial incentives like Pigou taxes). The decisions are consequent on a utilitarian calculation and pragmatically oriented by individual interests. Authors relate this form of rationality to Weber's practical and formal rationality; Habermas' 'social system' rationality and Simon's perfect and substantive rationality.
- **Bounded rationality** is based on a structured procedure for the decision-making process to ease human cognitive limitations. The decisions here are not optimal but satisfying. People decide in conditions of uncertainty and lack of information and under the influence of institutions. This kind of rationality applies to Simon's bounded and procedural rationality.
- **Communicative rationality** is based on reasoned arguments, consensus and cooperation deriving from intersubjective communication. Actors involved in the decision accept these decisions. This concept relates to the 'lifeworld' rationality of Habermas.
- **Substantive rationality** (see: Weber) is based on value-oriented rational action. The decisions relate to personal values and beliefs.

Furthermore, we must take into account the difference between 'micro-rationality' and 'macro-rationality' that affect the consumers choice and result respectively from individual and collective/social values/norms (see: Table 1). Micro-rationality is referring to individual rationality. The rational choice is the one in which a person is considering only own individual goals (material one, or values and norms which are counting to one's 'preferences'). Macro-rationality refers to collective rationality, group rationality, or the hypothetical choice of

the whole society or choices where the collective, group or society goals, values, and norms come to the fore.

Both, micro- and macro-rationality are hypothetical constructs. It is difficult in the real-world to separate them because they build two parts of one consumer choice. Only by adapting the *homo oeconomicus* concept are we able to separate them, but we then lose the link to reality. So, for instance, “Many of the limitations of neoclassical economics spring from the underlying model of rational choice or business decision making, with no meaningful analysis of the institutional environment in which business and policy decisions are taken” (Foxon, Koehler & Michie, 2013). In such a neoclassical model, the individual makes the optimal choice maximizing his/her utility. When all people in a given society make decisions in this way, the result for the whole society will be optimal (when, of course, we overcome market failures and externalities). In this sense, the concept explains the relations of the individual to other human beings only in terms of competition via exchange mechanisms occurring in the market. The choices based on the principle of individual rationality offer the best result for the whole society. However, sometimes they require a correction because of external effects and other inefficiencies of the market. In this model, if society made a decision, it would be a decision in favor of the market and its rules. The effect would be optimal, because the basic value of such a hypothetical society is efficiency.

If we adapt the **socially embedded concept of human nature**, the **individual rationality** will not refer to the optimal maximization of individual values any longer, when 1) it is bounded by existing institutions, rules; 2) it is also considering the values of the society because of the identification process. We perceive here the person as **an integral part of society**. The individual has some mechanisms which allow them to act for the sake of the whole society, taking into consideration peers, social group, or the society. People making decisions do not have only their individual goals in mind. Because of the identification process, individual goals are embedded in those of the social groups, to which the person belongs. Due to the identification process, society is imposing various groups of goals on the individual so that the individual is pursuing not their goals only but those of a particular group of the society or the whole society. The individual taking the decision is not acting for their sake only but for the sake of the society or a group. It's important to know that the interest of a particular group is not always in the interest of the whole society. It is not only the market but norms and values, and institutions that regulate this decision process. **Identification** allows us to understand how this process happens and what consequences it

has for understanding what is rational and what is not for a person. A person who wants to buy something which fulfills their personal needs, is often acting in relation to society. They buy some status products, big cars, or big houses, to maintain the status of their own social group.

Similarly, macro-rationality refers to goals relating to social norms, and values which are changed over a long period due to participation processes. Now, the agent is a collective actor – within the enterprise, organization, a city, village, region, country or a world. Such an actor takes decisions, and, in taking these, these must consider various interests that go beyond individual interest but cannot, due to their complexity, consider all interests equally. Such an actor also has the goal of the interest (or needs) of a particular group of persons (at least in theory). If it were not so, the agency of individuals and groups would lead to their changing. So, this may happen to the neoliberal values of society. According to the latter, the goal of society is defined by the growth of GDP, which is interpreted as the necessary condition of the wellbeing of society and its members and its efficiency-based redistribution, which challenges the society to be more and more competitive. However, ecological catastrophes and discrepancies in the society, migration crises, and other problems may arise leading many groups to question whether the GDP-growth and the free market are really in their interest. Although many people, due to the individualization of society and its economizations (the so-called expansionism of market values), still identify with such values as affluence, many groups are already criticizing such a value-monopoly. The influence of these groups, due to their politicization, protests, and other collective actions, may lead to changes in these 'mainstream' values. This process may be faster if participation mechanisms rise. The modified values may then be part of individual choices due to identification processes. This process may be accelerated by formal and non-formal rules and institutions.

Let's take as an example the sustainable movement whose new face is Greta Thunberg from Sweden. This movement may cause many people to see their core values threatened (access to water, clean air, security). This is the first factor in undertaking any action. The second factor favoring change will be the perceived chance for success for planned legal regulations and institutions. The further factor facilitating such change will be the presence of cross-identities. This is the case when the persons already protesting share some vital characteristics with the individual. This process may lead in the end not only to changes in policy but enforce other mechanisms. The society may become more demanding towards the free-rider, in this case people causing the CO₂ emissions. Additionally, society may introduce other informal sanctions, leading to 'flight shame'. So, people who

buy a plane-ticket may soon be shamed, like people smoking in public in some societies. Namely, they will be seen as somebody who threatens the health of other people and of society. So, even if these mechanisms may act in the wrong direction, they often allow the introduction of large processes that again help humanity to overcome the difficulties which could ruin it.

Table 1. Rationality and choice

	Rationality	Decisions, choice	Social approaches to economics	Neoclassical approach
Micro-level	Individual	Individual	The individual choice is biased by the impact of the society (bounded rationality)	The individual choice is reflecting the preferences of the individual (formal rationality)
Macro-level	Collective	Collective	The collective choice is the result of social processes	The collective choice is result of market forces

(Source: own compilation).

2) **Secondly**, we can apply the concept of **identity** to explain how people integrate the values of the society or a particular group of the society as their own.

Identity is a concept which comes with many adjectives, like a collective, individual, personal, group, social identity. To make my argument clear, I'm going to explain and differentiate between these concepts.

One of the important differences is the one between personal and individual identity. The **personal** identity concept has its basis in first-person singular speech, and **the individual** identity concept has its basis in third-person speech (Davis, 2009, p. 88). Whereas the personal identity of an individual refers to a single perspective, the individual personality refers to many perspectives. According to Davis (2009, p. 90) **social identity** is a link between the first-person and third-person points of view and links individuals' personal identities and individual identities. Social identities of individuals may lead to a conflict between their personal and individual identities.

Social identity theory and identity theory (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995) answer the question about what social identity is, differently. However, these differences go beyond language, orientation, and coverage (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 224).

According to *social identity theory*, a social identity is **a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group** (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). A social group is a set of individuals who **hold a common identification or view themselves as members of the same social category**. The social comparison process leads to the formation of the **in-group** and **out-group**. Persons similar to one's self are described as the in-group, and others as the out-group (Stets &

Burke, 2000, p. 225). For Hogg and Abrams people are born into existing structures and categories and derive the sense of who they are from the **social categories to which they belong**. For instance, being a woman, teacher, adult, black, or white determines their social identity. In identity theory, the process of creating an identity occurs by **naming**. This process helps the person to recognize others as holding certain positions (roles). The naming process is accompanied by the process of 'giving meaning', in which we form expectations towards ourselves and others (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1980). I call somebody an 'unmarried woman' to know what I may expect from her, and from myself if I'm such a person. Or referring to the main example of this paper, one may call somebody 'green' to know what to expect from him/her in terms of purchasing behavior. Both theories have in common that identities emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular groups or roles (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226). The meanings used for the identification process derive from the structured society. However, government policy may impact on the society and may even lead to the creation of economic identities (Kirman & Teschl, 2004).

We may ask **why the person is creating the identity?** The scope is explained differently by both theories. In social identity theory, people construct identity because of the self-esteem they can feel if their group is valued. As an individual, we cannot receive enough self-esteem. Being part of a group, we gain an increase in esteem. In identity theory, the outcome of identity is the feeling of self-efficacy. People belonging to one role may get the opportunity to control resources (Burke, 1980), and this defines social structure. Therefore, people usually try to protect one's group. This may have an evolutionary explanation- regarding mechanisms that may make us try to protect our own group. The identities are formed by the process called **identification** in identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978) and **self-categorization** in social identity theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987).

Taking and negotiating social identities reveals the socially embedded aspects of human nature. The concept of social identity forces us to think differently about rationality in economics. Rational choice can't refer only to choices focused on the accomplishing of individual goals once the person is also considering the expectations planned by the society towards his/her role and so, by implication, the 'social' goals (expectations planned toward a particular role have to maintain values important for the society). So, if I identify myself with my role as a teacher, my choices consider the expectations of this role, and by implication, the hypothetical choice made by the 'ideal' teacher. My choices and decisions

will also reflect my expectations towards this role and other roles I will bear. So, the decisions of the individual reflect different identities they are holding, which are predominant. Turning back to a leading example of this paper, one may ask– will it be rational for a ‘good citizen’, ‘person who loves a nature’, ‘teacher’ to use an airplane to take part in a conference? The answer to this question may vary, depending on the prominence of one particular identity. In an extreme case, it would be difficult to take a seat in a plane while wearing the label ‘stop CO₂ emissions’ (strong identification), or knowing that my peer group wouldn’t accept such behavior (i.e. if I reveal that I’ve arrived by plane at a sustainability conference). On the other hand, arriving as a leading politician or businessman at the meeting on an over-night bus may be considered by the peer-group as ridiculous or strange.

3) **Thirdly**, we have to consider the **reciprocal influence of the individual on society**, considering the role of agency and participation.

Social norms and values are stable only in the short term. The individual adapts to these norms and values and often takes them as a part of their identity. Especially, when they are part of their social role. For instance – let’s consider the norms and values regarding women which may impact on the actual labor market and decisions which women are taking in relation to it. The research of Codazzi and colleagues shows the **impact of gender social norms, focusing on the prescription that a man should earn more than his wife in** real economic results in Brazil. In only 7% of marriages did wives earn more than husbands (Codazzi, Pero & Albuquerque Sant’Anna, 2018). Similarly, affluence (Hurth, 2010) may determine the consumer choices of the rich social class. They may even be stronger than other values like, for instance, sustainability. However, such norms and values may change. This occurs by means of human agency and their power to impact current norms and institutions due to political processes like **participation**. So, for instance, the impact of the feminist movement on legislation reduced the differences in earnings in many European countries. Similarly, the climate movement, whose face is now Greta Thunberg, may be a part of such changes in social norms and values when supported by changes in institutions and the legal system. This process -when accompanied by a real change in individual values- is called lifestyle politics (Fernandez-Jesus, Lima & Sabucedo, 2018). The latter may take the form of collective action or a protest. Individual values may have an impact on the change of ‘mainstream’ social values due to the higher agency of citizens which results in participation. There is a vast body of literature (within the sociological community) discussing the factors contributing to participation (Kelly, 1993). One factor is the belief that one can

change circumstances by action (self-efficacy). Another important factor is the perception that some important values are threatened – we speak here about ‘threatened identity’). This process occurs parallel to the identification process because identification with particular groups (sharing these values) enforces it. Similarly, the threatened group identity may lead to political protests and radicalization (Klandermans, 2014) and may even cross the dual identities.

In this way, the first segment of the framework is constructed. The concept of human nature – which informs basic assumptions of the economic agent (embeddedness) and the theory explaining such a relation – is bounded by rationality and identity. The reciprocal influence may be explained in terms of agency, growing participation with the aim to change not only current policy, and rules but also implicit norms and values. Figure 1 (below) summarizes the results.

3. Further elements of the framework: Global challenges vs. individual & social values and norms

Further elements of the framework model are discussed in the section before. Adapting another concept of human nature – an embedded one makes it necessary to explain how society has an impact on the individual and so turns our attention to such concepts as rationality, identity, institutions. Two important elements haven’t yet been discussed – the role of **trends** and **culture**. Both of them are helpful to explain the major changes and evolution of society.

Trends explain why and how the whole society is changing – as a reaction to some particular changes in one of the subsystems of social systems. For instance, in the economic system, like a change of technology due to innovations, or in the cultural system as the birth of a particular idea, which changes the way of thinking (eg. tolerance, gender). The **culture** explains the frames of these changes. It makes us conscious that the changes are different among various societies, and even mega-trends (see for instance: Day, Moerschbaecher, Pimentel, Hall & Yáñez-Arancibia, 2014) (like virtualization of life) may take different forms due to the culture.

The emergence of trends may be a result of interaction between the society and nature (like climate change), or between society and technology (like the IT revolution), or a product of certain processes that happen in the society and take a visible form. These are then the setting in which we analyze various problems. In this sense, we treat globalization as a trend. **Trends** refer to major changes occurring in society. Sometimes they may appear in research of macro-systems

as an auto-regulation mechanism, or as the step toward the evolution of the system in a new form. We can consider them as challenges that are caused by some processes described above (interaction with nature, or a particular technological invention), which force adaptation mechanisms on society.

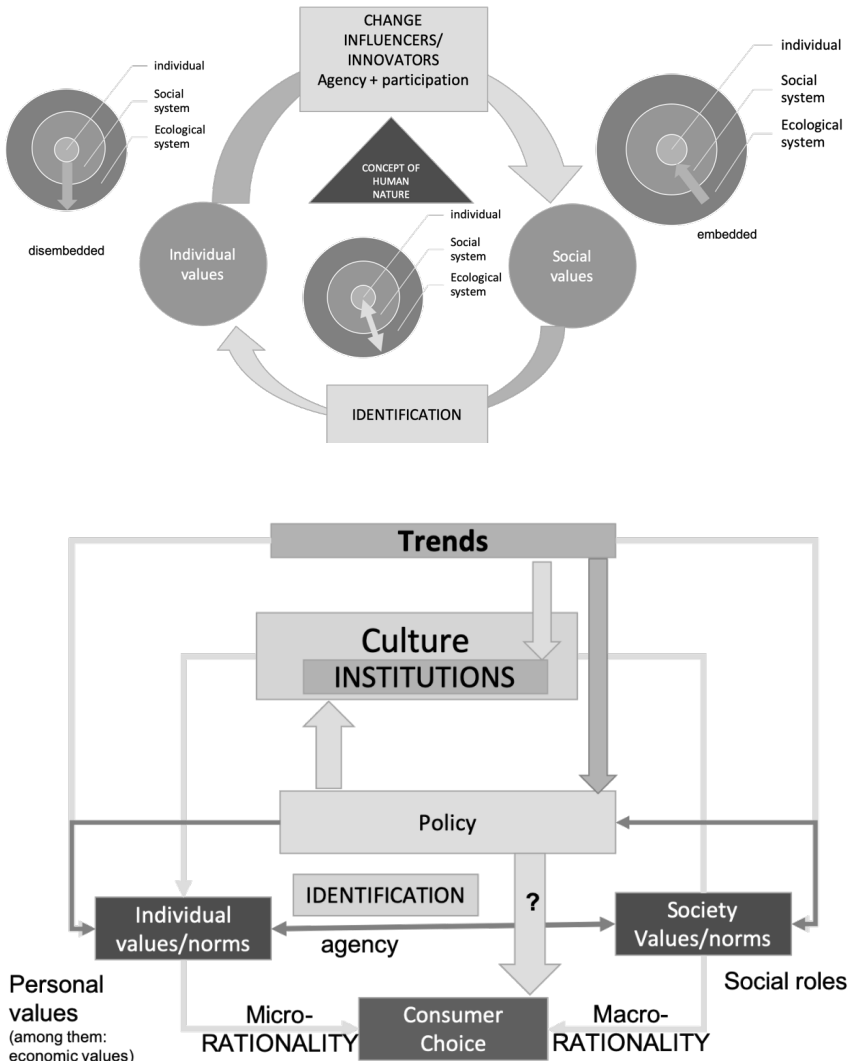
Usually, **trends** are followed by the development of certain **institutions**. For instance, a market appears as the institution which supports the first processes of globalization. Their shape often correlates with certain **cultures**. So, although Islamic banks allow the movement of capital (due to the global trend – globalization), they still don't allow usury. The scope of institutions is to regulate the process initiated by a particular trend (e.g. globalization). So, for instance, anti-global movements try to foster local institutions. Sometimes, the culture is very important for enforcing the functioning of particular institutions. The culture may be helpful for implementing sustainable institutions and rules. For instance, Indians eat less meat and avoid eating cows, Buddhists are vegetarians, and low-income cultures still recycle many objects. Governments, fostering demand, may destruct such cultural capital of the society (leading to changes in habits and tastes), which are difficult to rebuild. So, fostering tourism and mobility in traditional cultures may seem a good idea for economic development, but it ruins cultural capital. The latter is important for maintaining more sustainable consumption patterns. One has to have in mind, that mobility (important for economic development) can be achieved in another (i.e. more sustainable) way, namely by IT technologies. The relation between **institutions** and **culture** is discussed in its historical context by Alesina and Giuliano (2015). Here, I would like to focus on the correspondence and synergetic effect between them which is of importance for sustainable policy. Some research suggests connecting sustainability **values to one's own culture**. This may also have direct effects. Focus on one's own culture, discovering and enhancing its value may lead to behaviors sustaining this culture. For instance, people may consider having vacations in nearby locations, buying local products and in this sense reducing the usage of energy.

A **culture** usually contains norms and values which allow the society to survive. Norms protect the values which are central to society at a certain point in evolutionary development. These norms and values have to respond to the challenges put by certain trends. So climate change which led to the environmental movement can be connected to some common values and norms, like health, the rights of future generations, or of nature. These values may vary from culture to culture because cultures and groups differ in their values. For traditional cultures and groups in which the continuity of family and children

are in focus, the future of the children will be of importance. For individualistic cultures, other values, like the right for one's own health and well being, will have precedence.

Now, let us integrate these elements into one framework model. The result is presented in Figure 2 (below).

Figure 2. The framework model for consumer choice



(Source: own compilation).

Therefore, we have to take one step further and consider the role of the policy. This takes a central place in the framework, because of its impact on consumer choice. In order to design it in an effective way, one has to have in mind its dependence on the existing trends. These trends influenced it in the past, creating a particular political setting and institutions. The policy may impact on consumer choice via institutions and culture. For instance, by preserving cultural capital – which may favor sustainable consumption. Also, the policy may influence consumers, via society's values and norms. For example, by making it easier for the society to participate, by allowing local governments more decisions, and by supporting democratization processes. By doing so, the identification process may mediate the change of some individual values and norms towards social ones.

4. Application of the framework model to sustainable policy design

Leading trends of our times headed by globalization are induced by such problems as climate change, income inequalities (within and between countries and genders) and IT-sector challenges together with artificial intelligence. These trends impact on policy (and its implicit values), which in turn also affect individual values and norms. For instance, the neoliberal policy makes efficiency a prominent value. Consequently, efficiency is applied as a basis not only for government decisions but also for individual choices. Furthermore, trends initiate many processes in society (in interaction with its culture and institutions) leading to changes in their norms and values. For instance, growing sensibility to the environment and animals comes from the spread of vegetarianism and veganism.

In the following section, I will try to adapt the proposed framework model to sustainable policy. The latter may be understood as a reaction to the trend 'climate change', which challenges economic policy both in practice and in theory bringing, as a result, various forms of sustainable development policy. I will focus here on sustainable consumer choices and ways to activate them by means of policy.

Sustainable consumption can be perceived as an important element of sustainable development and refers to a level and pattern of consumption, which meets the needs of the present society without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, according to the World Commission on Environment Development 1987 (Thøgersen, 2010, p. 171). It can be perceived as

the outcome of a growing consensus in society. 'Altering consumption patterns' is 'one of humanity's greatest challenges in the quest for environmentally sound and sustainable development' (Rio Summit in 1992 – Sitarz, 1994). **Green consumerism** is often considered a necessary element of sustainable consumption. It may be defined as a list of behaviors that are undertaken with the intention of promoting positive environmental effects. We can count here, for instance, buying appliances with energy star labels, buying organic products, or turning off electrical appliances when not in use, and taking shorter showers (Sachdeva, Jordan & Mazar, 2015, p. 60). One of the motives for rich societies and social classes behaving in such a way is probably the 'green' motivation. Poor people and societies may consume sustainably without really intending to be 'green', and this will be discussed later.

Let's start by the **trends** – which may impact on the setting of consumer choices. Not only climate change but other mega-trends have to be considered, as soon as these impact on social and individual values which in turn influence a consumer's choice. One such trend is globalization which influences, in many ways, lifestyles, and social and individual values. It gave birth to some political approaches, like neoliberalism, which in turn deepened the differences between poor and rich in many ways. Free mobility of capital favored developed countries more than developing countries. This caused growing differences and the dependence of the poorer countries on richer. Whereas consumption in rich countries stimulated individualism and was marked by the loosening of many social bonds, developing countries' consumption depended more and more on welfare programs, which constituted a potentially derivational means of control (Gibbs, 1989, p. 453). In this sense, we can understand the words of Saunders (Saunders, 1986, p. 232) who pointed out that previous class division was replaced by 'a division, which cuts right across the class structure, between those with access to individual forms of consumption and those who are reliant on collective provision'. Other research performed by Stonich (1989) revealed that due to such trends as financial globalization and growing external debt, developing countries adapted the Western ways of development. This was the case in Central America, as Stonich's research reveals. However, such a pattern was also repeated in African and Asian countries. This led not only to the impoverishing of vast classes of the society but also to the devastation of the natural environment (like rain forest) and much non-sustainable production and consumption patterns (Lakshmi, 2000). In this sense, debates surrounding resource distribution and the control of population and consumption patterns are often political value positions. The policy which aims to achieve sustainability has to consider the existing political

setting and try to rebuild it. This requires widening the policy-spectrum beyond the national level. Multinational companies acting 'sustainably' in one country may have a completely different face in developing countries. As a consequence, consumers choosing their product may, in fact, consume in a non-sustainable way. So, the policy may have to consider equal rules for companies acting in different countries.

Globalization also has an impact on cultural and social values. We refer here to *sociocultural globalization* which involves the emergence of a 'world culture'. It is evidenced in the processes of the increasingly cosmopolitan character of cultural consumption. This is because the cultural products, knowledge, and lifestyles diffuse across national boundaries (Sanderson, 2007, p. 567). Some of these processes have had a negative impact on some local and more sustainable ways of spending free time. Consider, for instance, how shopping as a leisure activity, and overseas tourism have replaced previous practices such as holding exhibitions (in which people presented their local products) and family visiting. Local **culture** may resist such global trends and in turn support sustainable consumption patterns. Policy may consider the positive impact of the culture and maintain such cultural capital. It may, for instance, evoke knowledge and pride in local tourist places, religious sanctuaries, and natural resources and so redirect the stream of tourism to more sustainable channels.

The existing policy gives signals to the society regarding which values and norms are appreciated and which are not. If the society is 'taught' that only 'money counts', it implies that people are to think only about their own interest. If people can't expect any help from the state or organizations like trade unions, the propensity to engage in such organizations may be limited. Moreover, the policy which proceeded from the necessity to raise the demand for consumption to foster economic growth, for decades discouraged sustainable consumption patterns. Policy may be an important force in reshaping **social and individual values and norms**. It may sanction some unsustainable behaviors, encourage bottom-up initiatives for change, allow for greater participation of citizens, and consider local representatives. All these factors are necessary conditions for collective action. People must believe that their action may end with success before they get ready to participate in it.

The growth-oriented policy, especially under neoliberal auspices, leads to substantial growth of income – a crucial part of 'affluent identity'. The level of income not only rises but shows greater variability between different groups of society. Moreover, income becomes a symbol of personal success, and the dominant way to prove one's own superiority. Therefore people in societies in

which a high income is value as a symbol of success, indicating a higher status in society, tend to display it. So, they consume certain products not out of their needs but as status symbols (bigger houses, cars, yachts, flights) which build a part of their identity – ‘affluent identity’. This is not to overlook the fact that social values and norms vary depending on the level of income and the differing consumer choices. According to a study performed by a Princeton ecologist, ‘the world’s richest 500 million people (roughly 7 percent of the world’s population) currently emit 50 percent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions, while the poorest 3 billion emit just 6 percent’. The same pattern can be found in developing countries like India (Assadourian, 2010).

Let’s move to the next element of the framework. Existing **institutions** build an important element of policy. They may be the consequence of existing **trends**. The leading example of this topic is colonialism. It is responsible for major problems in the development of ex-colonial countries. This is because of colonialism’s impact on some formal and non-formal institutions which hinder development, and the lack of institutions which could help the countries on their way to development. According to Acemoglu and Robinson (2001), colonialism is correlated with indicators of the quality of current institutions. In particular, when it comes to institutions protecting property rights from the abuse of governments. But there is another edge to the sword, for instance, in the free flow of capital, with all its consequences for the growing dependence of developing countries. Or ‘liberated’ international trade, which oils the perfect price-based market system so well: consumers in Italy buy apples imported from New Zealand in their local store, whereas apples from the Trento valleys will find their way to another even more distant country. The ‘free’ market institution makes the price and not local proximity responsible for what product will be sold in the local store. Similarly, the institution of property rights was defined so strictly that this left masses without access to basics. Furthermore, the way of treating ‘free resources’ as free, led to their misuse as in the case of soda production in countries where water is so scarce that it is insufficient for daily consumption.

Such already existing institutions are often an obstacle to the creation of new institutions by means of **policy**. According to the research of Alesina and Giuliano (2015) focused on the relationship between institutions and culture, their effect depends on a particular culture and given context. Moreover, “reforming institutions is difficult because economic institutions are collective choices that are the outcome of a political process. The economic institutions of a society depend on the nature of political institutions and the distribution of political power in society” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2001). This leads us again to the issue

of **participation**, and its role in inducing changes. So, in order to create new institutions, participation enhancing mechanisms should be introduced. This can be done by creating more platforms and space where people can discuss and participate in the decision-making processes. Collective decisions making (on many issues of sustainable consumption) may create new formal and informal institutions. For instance, citizens may decide about procedures that should be observed before constructing new buildings, for instance, regarding their proximity to local infrastructure or how big they are. Such decisions, if not regulated, may lead to involuntary unsustainable consumer choices. For example, if houses are built in places where people have to use cars to bring their children to school or to get to work. Similarly, we may need rules concerning supermarkets which usually tend to sell food which is imported from distant countries (and not from local food producers), again leading to consumers involuntarily, making non-sustainable consumer choices. These examples invite us to think about the suggestions of Ostrom (2010) – to use **the polycentric network** and engage all kinds of institutions (macro- and meso).

Policy, according to the introduced model framework, should also consider the **culture**. So, if we think about public transport as an important condition to limiting the usage of private cars and so the emissions, we need to design it so, that its consideration will be taken to provide sufficient bus stops, at convenient places, with sufficient frequency). Cultural adaptation means for instance that in countries where punctuality is highly valued, the punctuality of buses and trains should be optimized, in order to make the transition to public transport effective. In other cultures, cleanness, commodity or simply cost will be a dominating cultural value². Such a direction for policy action stems from the observation that **green consumerism is a culturally learned, context-dependent behavior**. So, we need further research outside of traditional research populations in order to develop strategies for matching green consumerism **with specific contexts and cultures** (Tallis & Lubchenco, 2009).

The policy may consider the culture by embedding the laws and rules in major common values (like nature conservation, the equality of people, dignity and so on) expressed by the metaphors and values of a particular culture. Tallis and Lubchenco (2009) propose in this context the acceptance of various values, philosophies, and approaches which protect the value of nature. This would mean that the policy should not constrain itself to the temptation to embed its sustainable program in one particular value. On the contrary, the policy should

² For different cultural values see Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1994).

remain open on all culturally shaped values, metaphors and ideas, and remain open to differences across genders, cultures, ages, and values.

Trends also have an impact on **individual norms and values and attitudes**. Here the growing economization of the society leads to the growing significance of economic values through many decisions. What factors might play a positive or negative role when it comes to an individual? And what consequences can we draw from this for **the policy**? Many researchers make the observation that all these individual factors are not likely to outweigh the cost of paying a higher price. Even if many people might have pro-environmental beliefs, few would be ready to pay a higher price (bio-products cost more), sacrificing convenience and ease (finding such a store, or using china and glassware rather than paper at a garden party) in favor of a product's 'greenness' (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2014; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Olson, 2013; Young, Hwang, McDonald & Oates, 2010). So, credits or tax advantages for green investments (purchasing solar panels) may, of course, encourage their usage. In this sense, the policy may be directed to limit the barriers of green consumerism (Thøgersen, 2010). This is so because 'efficiency' often outbids other values because it is seen as more important. It is easier to provide the reason for buying something as relating to price & quality than by using other, still vague, criteria. Some strategies may overcome this difficulty – paying less for coffee by using one's own mug or paying 1 euro for a plastic bag, or banning single-use plates and mugs from the shops. The 'efficiency' value has another face in behavioral economics. It shows us how our brain uses certain strategies in order to take 'faster' decisions (Kahneman, 2011). The brain is 'efficient' because it avoids excessive energy consumption connected with 'slow thinking'. Instead, it uses other 'fast thinking' strategies. One of these strategies is **choice architecture or nudges** (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009), which may be applied in policy making and bring practical advantages. Basing policy on decision-making paradigms, like for instance **status quo bias or anchoring effects**, one may encourage green consumption. In **electricity** for instance, we can choose a default option as a reference point (biased towards a more 'green' solution) which may increase green consumption (Momsen & Stoerk, 2014). Similarly, information feedback and framing of information work – informing households how much more or less energy we use than our neighbors have used (Costa & Kahn, 2013). Similarly, changing the framing in presenting the damages and gains of green choices alters the conceptualization of green consumption (Davis, 1995; Hardisty, Johnson & Weber, 2010).

There are also other values, not necessarily exactly green values which may lead toward green consumption. Here one may count for instance **health, taste,**

quality, or altruistic values such as helping other people in need (like buying FairTrade – Horodecka & Śliwińska, 2019). Some people decide to buy green for these reasons and not for the preservation of nature (Grunert, Hieke & Wills, 2014). Others may eventually decide to buy green, out of fear of climate change (security value) or because they are worried about the **security** of their children (family values).

Nevertheless, in some cases, it is not pecuniary and other incentives, but a **green personal identity** that may be responsible for some types of green purchases (Sparks & Shepherd, 1992). Similarly, ‘environmental consciousness’ has proved to be more predictive of green purchasing intentions than demographic or personality variables (Schlegelmilch & Diamantopoulos, 2012). Sometimes, certain **pro- environmental beliefs** may predict green consumerism but not engagement in other green activities which aren’t part of these beliefs – like recycling or other environment-friendly actions (Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan & Oskamp, 1997). Furthermore, what counts is consumers’ **belief in the efficacy** of their individual behavior (Ellen, Wiener & Cobb-Walgren, 2019). This seems to be the result of generalized internal **locus of control** – a belief that it is not luck and external factors which influence our life, but our decisions (Tucker Jr, 1980). Moreover, what counts may be a **hope**, that there is a solution to the environment problem and the situation is not so tragic that nothing will help, as many media suggest in a very emotional way. Otherwise, the helplessness may block all the trials to consume in a ‘green’ way (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole & Whitmarsh, 2007). On the contrary, constructive optimism, i.e. believing that the future can be positive and there is a way for one to move towards it (Snyder, 2002), has cognitive (like the agency) and emotional (it is associated with positive feeling) perspectives and motivates pro-environmental behavior, particularly among young adults (Kerret, Orkibi & Ronen, 2014).

Of course, in order to impact such aspects, we should at first start on educational campaigns, and so change attitudes, and values, despite the risk that such a program might not work efficiently. Why not? Because, even green attitudes and values are always situated in a particular context, and this context (other people, existing norms and rules, social identities) is eventually responsible for the green choice. However, the impact on values and attitudes via education, and reflecting on them, builds a good foundation for other polycentric efforts of sustainable policy. Moreover, it seems that debates that follow information about sustainable consumption and its dangers and possible ways of pro-environmental consumption may be a very fruitful tool (Hendy, Basuray & Smith, 2017). Also, we may include include more reflection in the educational programs giving the

students a chance to reflect on their place in the world (worldview). According to Allen, Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2019) radical 'reflexivity' enables us to appreciate our embeddedness and responsibility for sustainability by bringing attention to the interrelationship between values, actions, and our social and material world.

However, we have to bear in mind that as human beings we are **social beings** and our rationalities and identities, and values are not individual in the sense of unconstrained choices. More importantly, we are a part of society. In this sense, we have to move our focus from the individual consumer and shift it towards small groups such as **the family**, and in further steps toward different social groups, **community** or even more complex social groups. Moreover, we have to focus on some mechanisms which may explain our responsibilities for 'green' behaviour beyond our individual selves..

Social norms count as other factors enforcing green consumption and they **are the next** element in our framework. The salience of such norms may cause people to follow them. Let's take the example of reusing towels which is encouraged by hotels (Cialdini, Reno & Kallgren, 1990; Cialdini, 2003; Goldstein, Cialdini & Griskevicius, 2008). Interestingly, the appeals that **invoked social norms** (which were demonstrated in an appeal: *Join your fellow citizens in helping to save the environment*) were more successful than direct appeals (*Save energy*) or even calls for cooperation (*Join us to help save the environment*). Another direction to impact on green consumerism would be to increase the salience of *green norms* by **peer group behavior**. According to research dedicated to conformity, people often change their own behavior to adapt to **normative standards set by one's social group**. This may lead to **green consumerism** (Biel & Thøgersen, 2007). The probability of adopting pro-environmental behavior (for instance buying *solar photovoltaic cells*) is greater when such technology was already adopted by others in the neighborhood (Bollinger & Gillingham, 2012). So, if our neighbors would practise green behavior and this is obvious, there is greater probability we would behave similarly.

Another important role on the side of social norms and values plays the intermediating factor – **social identity**. However, as Hurth (2010) reveals, people have an environmental identity and this is the case especially in rich countries, or high-income families, which use more energy than low-income groups. Why is this so and what we can do about this? Authors explain that the problem is with another, more dominating identity of wealthy people, namely **affluent identity** which is in contrast to **environmental identity**. There's still a major part of the wealthy society who can't let go of their identification with wellbeing

and affluence (Hurth, 2010). Authors suggest the need to impact on advertising companies's policies, which may re-link the environmental identity with the wealthy class. This may occur by referring to some of their dominant values. There is a problem in moving towards the new values, which is hampered by advertising which associates certain products with this class of society. Without the collaboration of the meso-level of society, the necessary changes may not happen. This can be done if the company will adapt to the current social ideas, which cannot work without the necessary legal and institutional environment designed by the government. This brings us back to our model – the necessity of embedding economic activity in societal values.

There is again another way of inducing green behavior, using role models for this scope. But who will be the role models and why? Some people behave like 'greenies' in order to attain **social status or a prosocial reputation**. 'Conspicuous conservation' behaviors indicate to others that an actor is ready to bear personal costs (paying more than normal for green products) for the sake of society (Griskevicius, Tybur & Van den Bergh, 2010; Grolleau, Ibanez & Mzoughi, 2009; Sexton & Sexton, 2014). This means that green consumerism is often done for public approval. Some research gives evidence of this motivation. If the behavior is public, individuals are willing to pay more to maintain a common environmental resource and show a preference for green products (Milinski, Semmann, Krambeck & Marotzke, 2006). This of course will happen, if somebody revealing such behavior is convinced that this is a good thing socially and/or think that such a value is important for others. Environmental values interact with social signaling. So, the value of a green signal, like the purchase of a distinctive hybrid vehicle, was several times greater in a city with demonstrable green values than in a comparable 'brown' city (Sexton & Sexton, 2014). The policy should, therefore, target less conspicuous conservation investments that will be underprovided relative to those that confer a status benefit.

However, sometimes social processes described above, when not accompanied by strong personal convictions, and reflexivity may lead to completely different outcomes. This may occur due to **spillover** effects (foremost negative spill-over), licensing, rebound or a boomerang effect (Truelove, Carrico, Weber, Raimi & Vandenbergh, 2014). However the spillover effect may not always be negative; sometimes one environmental behavior leads to other positive behaviors or remains neutral. The effect depends on external and internal motivators and on the similarity between initial and subsequent pro-environmental behaviors. However, there is another problem. Even if environmental behaviors may potentially create positive spillover effects on the other hand they may make the

consumers feel morally licensed and subsequently behave in a less green way. For instance, people who were engaged in conserving water increased their energy consumption, and those who recycled were using fewer reusable grocery bags (Della Giusta, Jewell & McCloy, 2012; Tiefenbeck, Staake, Roth & Sachs, 2013). Another study revealed that people who were buying in a green store, in other areas behaved less ethically to earn more money (Mazar & Zhong, 2010).

What can we do to guard against negative spillovers? The research reveals that the most helpful way would be to focus on a long-term commitment, to **highlight identity or societal obligations**, and provide psychological closure (Mitchell, Robitaille & Mazar, 2015; Van der Werff, Steg & Keizer, 2014; Zaval, Markowitz & Weber, 2015). Internalization or integration of one's behavior with one's own beliefs might make positive spillovers dominate. Therefore, the extent to which one focuses **on self-motivated reasons to engage in pro-environmental behaviors** might predict whether positive or negative spillover would occur. And moreover, if somebody behaves pro-environmentally for self-transcending reasons rather than self-interest, this will also increase the green behavior of others (Evans, Maio, Corner, Hodgetts, Ahmed & Hahn, 2013). Therefore, the policy has to act both on individual and social values and norms.

To summarize, we need a policy which considers all of the elements of the framework. Due to the concept of human nature 'embeddedness', and operating with the concept of social identity and communicative/group rationality, we may explain the relations between these factors. Eventually, we may choose an economic policy that influences all levels of this model. It cannot focus only on the direct impact on individual economic values (prices, taxes). We have to understand where these values are rooted. They may be influenced by various **social identities**, which are created on the level of media, enterprises, organizations, by social roles, or due to participation in various groups. Therefore, enterprises play an important role in re-defining the existing social identity in an affluent society in the direction of lower energy use (Hurth, 2010). Meso- institutions can strengthen the links between basic needs, the capacity of individuals to build their future, and general wellness in order to create a more sustainable development. They play a role in the interaction between different entities (farmers, cooperatives, associations, local plants, and NGOs) to reach virtuous circles in development (Baulant, 2017, p. 660). This may not be enough as the companies' actions in the environment created by the policy may bear completely different implicit values.

Companies cannot replace the state in the impact on values and norms existing in society. It's rather difficult to impose on society and individuals a sustainable

way of consuming, taking responsibility for their choices. Especially when implicit values of the government are preaching a completely different story. Rich countries often behave less responsibly than other countries. For instance, they export ecological problems to other countries (e.g. like sending them their waste) or let them produce pollution causing goods. It's difficult to encourage people to dialogue and participation in choices. Especially when a policy is based on the belief, that market mechanisms are the best and don't need to be discussed. So, implicit values and norms of the state which build the basis of the policy also have to be redefined. The idea (even if only in the minds of some politicians) of the state as night-guardian protecting the liberty of the market like ancient Vestals have protected the sacred fire of Vesta in Rome, may probably need to be replaced with another vision of the state. This is probably not the one of a puppet in the hands of a winning party which accomplishes the promises given to their voters. Possibly it should be a **paternalistic** one, which is trying to act in the name of all citizens, by encouraging real dialogue, taking place at various levels of governance, a communication so crucial for Habermas (1979).

5. Conclusions

To summarize, the introduced framework connects the social embedded concept of human nature with consumer choices. The framework describes and illustrates the role of **trends, institutions and culture and individual norms and values which are connected to social norms** (exogenous norms) **via the identity concept** and shows their relation to **rationality**. Such a framework may be applied to design a sustainable policy. In order to influence sustainable consumption, the policy has to consider not only the individual values of consumers but also various social values. Moreover, it has to consider that the latter may already be changed due to past trends and previous policies, the culture and existing institutions. However, the fulfilling of some of the mentioned criteria encouraging citizens' participation mechanisms, may induce the process of changes within social values. The identification mechanisms may then make them a part of personal values and impact in this way on individual consumer choices.

The scope of this paper was 'only' to design a framework model of consumer choice and show its possible application for a policy. The references to empirical and theoretical studies were supposed to facilitate the understanding of relations between them. The application of this framework for sustainable policy design was based on relevant literature revealing various perspectives of

sustainable consumer choice – individual (using the psychological approach), social (applying sociopsychological and sociological approaches), institutional, cultural and political. All these perspectives have to be taken into account while designing a sustainable policy. Altogether, this research is not the last word in the discussion. It is rather the invitation to discuss and deepen the understanding of relations between specific components.

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Summary

In recent years, economists have referred to the socially embedded model of an individual. Also, they have considered the influence of society on individual choices through institutions. Some economists enhance the role of culture as a mediator between society and the individual. Some authors focus on the role of social identities. The latter enable the individual to adapt to a society and follow social norms. However, not all existing social values respond to current challenges of global trends (e.g. climate change) sufficiently. Some social values (like consumerism, for instance) may lead to non-sustainable consumer choices. We must therefore perceive social values and norms not as a final solution but as a successful or failed adaptation to current global challenges. The purpose of the article is to introduce a **framework model**. It aims to explain the relationship between global trends, culture, institutions, and social and individual norms and values in consumer choice. Therefore, it will contain the reference to the rationality which should reach beyond the individual aspect. Such a model can be helpful in understanding the theoretical and empirical relationship between these concepts. Moreover, it can be adapted for designing future sustainable policy with the focus on sustainable consumption.

KEYWORDS: individual values; social norms; individual and collective rationality; global trends; institutions; social identity; sustainable policy

Streszczenie

W ostatnich latach ekonomiści odnoszą się do społecznie osadzonego modelu jednostki. Rozważają także wpływ społeczeństwa na indywidualne wybory dokonywane przez instytucje. Niektórzy ekonomiści wzmacniają rolę kultury jako mediatora między społeczeństwem a jednostką. Inni autorzy koncentrują się na roli tożsamości społecznych. Te ostatnie umożliwiają jednostce dostosowanie się do społeczeństwa i przestrzeganie norm społecznych. Nie wszystkie jednak wartości społeczne w wystarczającym stopniu odpowiadają obecnym wyzwaniom światowych trendów (np. zmiany klimatu). Pewne wartości społeczne (np. konsumpcjonizm) mogą prowadzić do niezrównoważonych wyborów konsumenckich. Dlatego musimy postrzegać wartości i normy społeczne nie jako ostateczne rozwiązanie, ale jako udaną lub nieudaną adaptację do aktualnych globalnych wyzwań. Celem tego artykułu jest wprowadzenie modelu ramowego. Powinien wyjaśniać związki między światowymi trendami, kulturą, instytucjami a normami oraz wartościami społecznymi i indywidualnymi w wyborze dokonywanym przez konsumenta.

Dlatego będzie zawierać odniesienie do racjonalności, która powinna wykraczać poza aspekt indywidualny. Taki model może być pomocny w zrozumieniu teoretycznego i empirycznego związku między tymi pojęciami. Ponadto można go dostosować do projektowania przyszłej zrównoważonej polityki z naciskiem na zrównoważoną konsumpcję.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: indywidualne wartości; normy społeczne; indywidualna i zbiorowa racjonalność; światowe trendy; instytucje; tożsamość społeczna; polityka rozwoju zrównoważonego

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