

CHANGES IN FOOD CONSUMPTION IN POLAND AND OTHER EU COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the determinants and directions of changes in food consumption in Poland against the background of other EU countries. Presentation the state of scientific knowledge is a baseline for further considerations. The next chapter includes the determinants of changes in food consumption in the countries of the EU over the last decade. Nextly the economic background in EU countries was presented. The next chapter was dedicated to the food consumption patterns in EU countries. A comparative analysis of food consumption in EU countries indicates that discrepancies remain in the level of economic growth within the European Union. Changes in consumption patterns in EU states are of both a quantitative and qualitative character. The present analysis of transformations in food consumption of Polish households shows that the tendency displayed in the results of previous research continues today.

Key words: changes in food consumption, household expenses, consumer behaviours

INTRODUCTION

The globalisation of consumption has unified consumer behaviour patterns on a global scale. Significant changes in the consumption patterns of post-communist countries have occurred over the last decade. Consequently, nutritional needs are now met at a more satisfactory level, while consumption is rationalised to a greater extent.

According to Engel's law, in countries characterized by a relatively high standard of living, food expenditures as a share of overall expenditures are rather low. The pace of growth of real income in individual countries in the EU has varied greatly. The most dynamic growth was recorded in the post-communist countries. A decreasing share of food expenditures in overall expenditures is a significant indicator of growing affluence of the inhabitants of EU member states. While such a decrease has occurred in Poland, the share is still higher than in the developed EU member states That GDP in Poland has reached 70% of the EU average is a good sign indeed, particularly considering that in 2004 it was less than half of this average. The GDP growth can be attributed to high economic growth in Poland over the last eight years [Szwacka-Mokrzycka 2015]. The scale of GDP growth in Poland is consistent with its position in Europe as an emerging market.

THE STATE OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

An interdisciplinary approach to researching the economics of consumption will look at economics, social, biological and agricultural sciences. The contribution of other scientific fields and disciplines is used to create the theory and examine the processes occurring in different areas of consumption. In terms of theory and the ap-

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plication of consumption research, particular attention is given to “consumer behaviour” and its determinants, as well as the decision-making process arising therefrom. The multifaceted approaches used to describe the causative factors of consumer behaviour determine a typology of consumers on the basis of social and psychological conditions. As a result of activities conducted in this area, it is possible to determine consumer “lifestyles”. Another important aspect, from the point of view of research into consumption, is assessing consumers’ satisfaction of their purchasing needs.

The scope of consumption includes both the direct act of satisfying individual needs and human behaviour in the process of producing, exchanging and consuming goods and services. In the macroeconomic approach, consumption is treated as a stage of social reproduction, responsible for the finalisation of the whole reproduction process. This multifaceted approach to consumption indicates its special place in economic sciences. At the same time, it should be noted that under the school of classic economics, i.e. at the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, as well as in pre-classic approaches including mercantilism, Physiocracy and Marxist economics, consumption was pushed to the margins of economic theory [Bywalec and Rudnicki 2002].

Oscar Lange played a key role in shaping views on the role of consumption in a centrally planned economy. According to Lange [1978], consumption was a subject of interest in non-economic sciences. The position of consumption in economic sciences was developed in the 1960s and is attributed mainly to such outstanding scientists as Krzyżewski [1959], Lipiński [1960], Hodoly [1965] and Piasny [1967]. In the 1970s, consumption gained a permanent position in the economic sciences, with Pohorille [1971] and Hodoly [1975], among others, among the prominent contributors.

Over the past decade, the consumption sciences have developed significantly, alongside changes in the world economy brought about by the processes of integration and globalisation. A large number of researchers have weighed in on the topic of new trends in consumption and the creation of a new consumer culture [Komor 2000, Mazurek-Łopacińska 2003, Bywalec 2010, Tkaczyk 2012, Koszewska 2013, Dąbrowska et al. 2015, Małysa-Kaleta 2015]. The position of consumption in food economy was developed in the 1970s and is attributed to Zielińska [1978], Janoś-Kresło [1989], Szwacka-Salmonowicz, Zielińska [1996], Żelazna [2000], Szwacka-Salmonowicz [2003], Gutkowska and Ozimek [2005], Urban [2005], Szwacka-Mokrzycka [2015], and other scientists.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

A wide range of information has been used for this article because of the many areas it touches upon. It relies on research from Eurostat Data and data from the Polish Central Statistical Office. With the research done for the years 2007–2014, the sources for the comparative analysis of food consumption in EU countries were real adjusted gross disposable income of households, final food and non-alcoholic beverage consumption expenditures, and the subjective evaluation of household income in 2005–2013 was based on questionnaire research in the form of a direct interview with households.

CHANGES IN FOOD CONSUMPTION IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE EU

Numerous factors determine the direction and nature of changes in consumption. Research conducted by a range of authors shows the changes that have taken place in the EU over the last decade have involved both the level and structure of consumption [Bywalec 2010, Małysa-Kaleta 2015].

These changes are the result of many processes, some extrinsic and others rooted in the internal conditions of development and civilization of societies integrated within the EU. As for the external conditions, economies being internationalised in the global dimension and, consequently, globalisation, are of the utmost importance here. In the global scale, technological change, the development of information technology and cultural change are all likewise important.

The processes of globalisation do not affect all European countries evenly. They may take the form of standardised actions, or adapt themselves to local environments. This heterogeneity of responses is attributable to the diversity of EU countries, resulting from the significant polarization of the level of economic and social development of member states and the experience of economic transformation. With regard to internal determinants, economic factors, including the level of income and purchasing power of consumers, are of key importance, as are non-economic factors including demographic, cultural, social and psychological ones [Mazurek-Łopacińska 2003, Małysa-Kaleta 2015].

In the scientific community, the prevailing view is that the spread of new consumer trends is the result of both external and internal factors [Koszewska 2013]. There is today a growing consensus about the importance of certain factors influenced by new trends in consumption. Demographic, cultural, technological and economic conditions should all be considered. Changes in these conditions contribute to the emergence of the “new consumption” and a new consumer culture [Bywalec 2010]. The most advanced European countries, which point to model solutions in this area, may be looked to for a benchmark for determining the pace and scale of transformations.

Research done on Europe looks at consumer typologies based on the concept of lifestyle, or gaining insight into the motives and values of the consumer. These methodologies are based on the notion of a Euro-consumer, the standard buyer of standard products [Komor 2000, Szwacka-Mokrzycka 2013]. In light of the various statements on existing consumer typologies, it can be concluded that a truly European buyer profile does not emerge from among other lifestyle-based profiles [Tkaczyk 2012]. On the other hand, segments of consumers behaving similarly and exhibiting similar values can be distinguished, irrespective of their country of residence.

Globalisation today is reflected in the unification of consumer behaviour patterns on a global scale. In the light of the transformations, consumption is recognised as a process that promotes the product range available on the world market. This is conducive to convergence in consumption patterns and consumer behaviour. Among the factors influencing the globalisation of consumption, there are those which promote and those which inhibit its development [Mazurek-Łopacińska 2003]. Those which promote it can be found on both the demand side and the supply side. Global consumers acquiring products and increasing their spatial mobility promotes globalisation from the demand side. Supply-side factors include stronger competition, enterprises pursuing economies of scale, production factors flowing freely and the development of new technologies. Growing competition and companies searching for new markets internationally have further promoted globalisation.

Changes in consumer needs and their hierarchisation occur under the influence of both external and internal factors. Many authors point to the fact that demographic and socio-occupational changes are central to the process of shaping consumer needs, and in particular affect the change in hierarchy and level of demand, determine the creation of new needs, change the ways and means of addressing them, and change the course of consumers’ decision-making processes. At the same time, within the EU Member States, there is considerable variation in the determinants that influence the transformation process in the needs and ways of meeting consumer needs. This is due to the uneven level of economic development in the Community, the different levels of market economy experience and cultural differences. Economic factors are considered to play by far the most important role in modeling consumption (With regard to its level and structure across EU countries).

THE ECONOMIC BACKGROUND IN EU COUNTRIES

A macroeconomic measure that can be used to show a population’s standard of living is gross disposable income per capita in the household sector. Disposable income is designated for financing consumption and for savings. The value of income is calculated on the basis of the purchasing power parity and expressed in the common conventional currency – Purchasing Power Standard (PPS). The Data presented in table 1 show

that in 2007, the highest disposable income in the household sector per capita was attained by Austria, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France and Italy. The income of these countries greatly exceeded the EU-28 average (from 10 to 24%). In Poland, meanwhile, real disposable income in the household sector was 45% lower than the EU-28 average (Table 1), while Bulgaria and Romania's incomes were far below that of Poland.

Table 1. Real adjusted gross disposable income of households per capita in EU in 2007–2013

Specification	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU-28	19.145	19.392	19.125	19.585	19.940	20.277	20.311
Austria	23.722	23.884	23.384	24.218	24.469	25.325	24.923
Belgium	21.077	21.657	21.472	22.278	22.716	23.141	23.069
Bulgaria	6.519	7.352	7.153	7.512	8.155	8.475	8.921
Croatia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Cyprus	18.700	20.581	19.535	20.116	19.313	18.299	17.749
Czech Republic	14.070	13.497	13.850	14.191	14.672	14.892	14.954
Denmark	18.871	19.067	19.288	20.446	21.042	21.634	21.368
Estonia	10.777	11.710	10.924	11.066	11.753	12.243	12.844
Finland	19.641	20.521	20.462	21.323	22.081	22.837	23.015
France	22.015	22.083	21.800	22.651	23.083	23.328	23.265
Germany	22.836	23.122	22.438	23.981	25.052	25.859	25.897
Greece	18.277	19.161	18.845	17.761	16.480	15.790	14.797
Hungary	11.279	11.293	11.182	11.717	12.503	12.526	12.762
Ireland	20.349	20.269	19.552	19.794	19.163	19.230	19.233
Italy	20.972	21.385	20.402	21.131	21.200	20.627	20.578
Latvia	11.338	11.843	9.829	9.893	9.893	10.575	11.760
Lithuania	11.369	12.486	11.622	12.444	13.144	13.795	14.839
Luxemburg	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Malta	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Netherlands	23.135	23.267	22.725	22.405	22.725	22.813	22.436
Poland	10.456	10.828	11.351	12.319	12.777	13.540	14.030
Portugal	15.814	16.050	15.924	16.489	16.214	15.997	16.855
Romania	7.308	8.518	8.039	8.500	8.698	8.813	–
Slovakia	11.918	12.822	12.846	13.847	13.966	14.192	14.755
Slovenia	15.755	16.197	15.363	15.706	16.099	16.004	15.972
Spain	18.309	18.641	18.732	18.232	18.417	18.318	18.507
Sweden	20.611	21.194	20.944	21.240	22.210	23.088	23.226
United Kingdom	23.104	22.329	22.153	21.626	21.250	21.998	21.782

Source: Own elaboration on the base of *Europe in figures* – Eurostat yearbook from 2015.

The situation changed dramatically in 2013, when the difference between Poland and the EU-28 decreased to 31%. The condition of households in Bulgaria and Romania likewise improved, with the share of disposable income among inhabitants of those countries constituting 44% and 43% of disposable income, respectively. The distance between these countries and the EU-28 decreased by 5% and 10%, respectively, while in 2007 Bulgarians and Romanians had much less gross income per capita at their disposal. Real disposable income per capita was higher in most EU member states in 2013 than it was in 2007, though the pace of the rise had varied by country. The post-communist countries – Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania and Estonia – underwent the most dynamic growth (34, 30.5, 36.8, 20.5 and 19.2%, respectively, Table 1). The rest of the countries in this region saw stable growth. A significant increase in real income per capita was also observed in the most developed countries of the EU. From 2013 to 2007, Germany’s grew by 13.4%, followed by Denmark at 13.2%, Sweden at 12.6%, and Belgium by 9.5%. In the remaining EU member states characterised by the highest level of growth, the income level was stable (Table 2). At 20%, Ireland and Greece posted decisive decreases in their disposable income per capita over the period.

Of course, the global financial crisis substantially impacted household incomes. Before the crisis – in years 2007–2010 – real gross income had increased significantly in the EU-27 (by more than 2.5%). In this period, Poland posted a sizable increase (12.4%), though even that paled in comparison to Bulgaria’s (20.5%). In Latvia, Lithuania and Greece, on the other hand, real incomes decreased by 20% and 11%, respectively (Table 1).

The share of expenditures for food in overall expenditures of households can be examined to estimate the purchasing power of inhabitants of EU countries.

Engel’s law holds that in countries characterised by a relatively high standard of living, food expenditures as a share of overall expenditures is rather low. Therefore, an obvious indicator of rising affluence of the inhabitants of the EU – as elsewhere – is a decrease observed in the share of food expenditures in total expenditures. This applies to Poland as well, though it still spends more of its income on food than

Table 2. Expenditure on final food and non-alcoholic beverage consumption (current prices)

Country	Food and non-alcoholic beverages in % of total expenditure		
	2005	2010	2013
Austria	10.1	9.9	10.0
Belgium	13.4	12.9	12.9
Bulgaria	20.3	18.2	18.7
Croatia	nd	nd	nd
Cyprus	13.2	12.1	14.2
Czech Republic	14.8	14.1	15.7
Denmark	11.0	11.3	11.2
Estonia	nd	20.0	20.7
Finland	12.0	12.1	12.8
France	12.8	12.9	13.4
Germany	10.8	10.3	10.4
Greece	17.2	17.2	17.2
Hungary	16.5	16.9	18.3
Ireland	9.3	9.7	10.6
Italy	14.8	14.4	14.4
Latvia	21.4	20.0	19.1
Lithuania	25.3	24.0	23.8
Luxemburg	8.8	9.4	9.6
Malta	14.0	13.5	13.0
Netherlands	nd	11.1	11.6
Poland	21.1	19.3	18.1
Portugal	15.9	15.8	18.0
Romania	29.8	27.0	29.7
Slovakia	18.0	17.2	17.6
Slovenia	14.8	14.6	15.3
Spain	13.1	12.6	13.1
Sweden	11.9	12.2	12.4
United Kingdom	8.5	8.8	9.1

Source: The author, on the on the basis of Annual International Statistics 2015..

do more developed EU countries. In Poland, income and prices still determine the level and structure of food consumption. In 2010–2012, however, consumer food expenditures as a share of the overall value of household expenditures stabilised around 25%. The higher level of expenditures in the analyzed period was associated with inflation, and did not indicate an improved standard of living. The food consumption indicator showed that similar trends prevailed in Slovakia, while the figures were slightly lower for Portugal and Greece. In the developed EU member states, the share of food expenditures in total expenditures came to approximately 10–14%. The countries with the lowest (8.5–14%) share of food expenditures to total expenditures include the United Kingdom, Luxemburg, Ireland, Austria, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Malta, Spain, France, Italy, and Cyprus (Table 2).

The countries with a medium share of expenditures on food to total expenditures (above 15–20%) include Slovenia, Czech Republic, Greece, Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Portugal, Bulgaria, and Hungary. The highest level of food expenditures to total consumption expenditures occurred in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania, the countries with the relatively lowest standard of living (Table 2).

CHANGES IN FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN EU COUNTRIES

The extent to which changes in consumption are consistent with the direction and magnitude of the changes in food consumption is essential to the issues discussed in this paper.

As research conducted in Poland and other post-communist bloc countries has shown, significant changes in food consumption have occurred as a result of the integration of Eastern European countries [Kwasek 2012, Szwacka-Mokrzycka 2013]. At the same time, research shows that while consumer behaviour patterns from Eastern Europe have gradually converged with those of more developed Western European countries, a great distance still separates these countries. Foremost among the reasons for the differences is the purchasing power of consumers and a lower level of experience in implementing and operating in a market economy on the part of the countries of Central-eastern Europe, where basic goods are in far higher demand, and significantly lower saturation has taken place.

Research conducted in Poland shows that, over the past decade, satisfaction of food needs has increased markedly, the structure of the food intake has shifted towards rationalization, and qualitative changes have also taken place. While these tendencies are observed primarily for households with relatively high income levels, the poorest households, where the level of food supply is still relatively low, have not fared as well. The analysis of changes in food needs also shows that qualitative changes are largely due to the intensification of substitution processes between food groups and within these groups.

Over the past decade, changes in consumer preferences have involved a significant polarisation of consumer choice vis-a-vis quality, price and purchasing loyalty. Consumers in post-communist countries have lower brand loyalty than those in EU countries with a higher level of economic development. Significant differences also apply to the distribution of consumer preferences on the basis of consumer age. In Poland, young consumers are highly open to novelties, while older consumers have ethnocentric attitudes. Undoubtedly, the pattern of consumer behaviour in the EU is one in which attitudes constantly change. This is manifested by the increased demand for highly processed products, also known as convenience foods.

A SUBJECTIVE EVALUATION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME SITUATION

The subjective evaluation of the income condition of households, carried out in 2005–2013 (Table 3), constitutes an important supplement to the analysis regarding the share of food expenditures in households' total consumption expenditures. As a general trend, households located in countries with a high standard of living assess their income condition as much better than those in developing countries. However, significant

Table 3. The subjective evaluation of household income situation in 2013 (percentage terms). Households which declared that their present income allows them “to make ends meet”

Country	With great difficulty	With difficulty	With some difficulty	Fairly easily	Easily	Very easily
Austria	5.4	8.6	27.3	29.9	20.3	8.5
Belgium	8.8	12.2	18.8	26.8	27.4	6.1
Bulgaria	32.9	32.3	26.4	6.5	1.5	0.3
Croatia	26.3	36.2	28.6	6.8	1.8	0.3
Cyprus	32.1	27.3	24.7	11.2	4.0	0.7
Czech Republic	9.1	22.6	38.4	21.8	7.2	0.9
Denmark	4.9	7.2	15.9	29.0	25.3	17.6
Estonia	7.5	15.9	44.8	23.2	7.6	1.1
Finland	2.2	4.7	17.0	34.5	26.2	15.5
France	4.5	16.0	41.6	26.3	9.7	1.9
Germany	3.0	6.1	11.8	41.0	28.9	9.2
Greece	39.6	38.7	15.7	4.2	1.5	0.4
Hungary	26.7	27.2	34.6	10.0	1.2	0.3
Ireland	17.4	19.4	36.8	19.2	4.7	2.6
Italy	19.0	22.6	37.5	16.7	3.5	0.6
Latvia	25.4	29.0	30.7	11.6	3.1	0.3
Lithuania	9.6	23.3	51.6	13.2	2.4	0.0
Luxemburg	4.4	9.0	16.9	32.8	28.7	8.2
Malta	15.1	21.5	28.9	27.4	6.0	1.2
Netherlands	3.8	11.7	15.0	14.2	43.6	11.7
Poland	12.7	19.8	38.4	22.3	5.8	1.0
Portugal	24.8	22.1	33.8	19.7	4.1	0.4
Romania	23.4	27.5	36.2	9.3	3.2	0.4
Slovakia	13.3	23.3	42.2	18.6	2.2	0.4
Slovenia	11.2	21.9	39.3	18.8	7.9	0.9
Spain	18.6	20.2	28.2	22.6	9.5	0.8
Sweden	2.9	3.7	7.5	39.9	20.3	25.6
United Kingdom	9.6	11.5	27.3	31.7	12.7	7.2

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of Annual International Statistics 2015.

differentiation is visible in the distribution of the respondents' answers. Approximately 2–7% of declarations provided by households from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany and Sweden fell in the “make ends meet with difficulty” range, while the share of the “make ends meet easily” was similar (Table 3). A completely different situation is typical of the post-communist states, such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Hungary, where the share of both of these replies fell in the 23–30% range. Moreover, there is considerable differentiation here too. Indeed, the relatively highest share of the “make ends meet with difficulty” responses occurred in countries with relatively low growth in disposable income over the analysed period, i.e. in Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, where the share of people indicating they were barely getting by was sometimes above 30%. Finally, it is worrying when the share of responses indicating a deteriorating evaluation of the households' income condition over time goes up. Such observations were made in Greece, Cyprus, Hungary and Croatia, where the share of households' negative evaluations in 2013 increased by nearly twofold over 2005 levels' (Table 3).

Separate reference is needed with respect to evaluating the income condition returned by Polish households. In 2005–2014, the poverty zone decreased in Poland, but still encompasses a significant part of society. Low income groups may have more difficulty affording food. As prices for primary foods rise, they become less accessible, especially to families with the lowest incomes (*European Survey on Income and Living Conditions*, EU-SILC). In Poland, only 1.2% of the households that participated in the survey declared that, given their current income, they “make ends meet” very easily, while 6.9% said they do so easily, 23.7% quite easily, 37.2% with some difficulty, 18.9% with difficulty, and 12.1% with great difficulty.

The financial condition of households located in the countryside is more difficult than that of their urban counterparts. Only 0.6% of the surveyed rural households are able to “make ends meet” very easily with their current level of income (compared with 1.6% in the city), 4.8% do so easily (7.9% in the city), 20.3% quite easily (25.4% city), 40.4% with certain difficulty (35.5% city), 21.5% with difficulty (17.6% city), and 12.4% with great difficulty (12.0% city).

CONCLUSIONS

The present analysis shows a clear connection between the level of a country's economic development and the food consumption model. As a result of that correlation, European countries characterised with a high standard of living demonstrate growing satisfaction of their food related needs. In the group of developing countries, which includes Poland and most other post-communist states, that relation still proves true, but the share is still much higher than in highly developed countries. The above translates into development of the food consumption model across EU states. Ongoing changes in consumption patterns in EU states are of both a quantitative and qualitative character. Qualitative changes are clearly reflected in the considerable demand for highly processed convenience foods and organic foods. In Poland, changes in consumption patterns have been occurring for several years now, and concern above all the greater satisfaction of food-related needs and greater consumption rationalisation. Changes in food consumption trends and patterns cannot be discussed separately from globalisation processes. Globalisation helps standardise consumption patterns both throughout Europe and on a global scale but at the same time supports their diversification. As evidenced by various surveys, consumer behaviour diversification supports the development of a food consumption model closely connected with consumer ethnocentrism.

While the prevailing consumption model in Poland is approaching that of other EU countries, there remain important differences. Here, as elsewhere in Post-communist countries, the most important factor behind the

changes in the structure of food consumption is incomes, which have improved the quality of consumption. As evidenced by the desire to rationalise food cons, consumer awareness has also been an essential factor in changing consumer preferences.

While the consumption model in Poland continues to close the gap with other EU countries, significant differences remain. The most important factor in the changes in the structure of food consumption in post-communist countries are incomes, which can help to improve the quality of consumption. As reflected in the desire to rationalize food consumption, consumer awareness also plays an important role in the process of changing consumer preferences.

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ZMIANY W KONSUMPCJI ŻYWNOŚCI W POLSCE NA TLE POZOSTAŁYCH KRAJÓW UE

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule zaprezentowano uwarunkowania i kierunki zmian w konsumpcji żywności w Polsce na tle pozostałych krajów UE. Punktem wyjścia rozważań jest prezentacja stanu wiedzy z tego zakresu. Kolejna część opracowania prezentuje uwarunkowania zmian w konsumpcji żywności w Polsce na przestrzeni ostatniej dekady. Następnie przedstawiono kierunki zmian we wzorcach konsumpcji w krajach UE. Analiza porównawcza wzorców konsumpcji żywności w krajach UE wykazała, że główną determinantą zmian w ich obrębie jest poziom rozwoju ekonomicznego kraju. Zaobserwowana tendencja stanowi kontynuację wyników badań prowadzonych w tym zakresie.

Słowa kluczowe: zmiany w konsumpcji żywności, wydatki gospodarstw domowych, zachowania konsumpcyjne