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Growth strategies and consumption patterns in transition: From Fordism to finance-driven capitalism

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1. Introduction

Two centuries of capitalist growth in Western societies have coincided with significant increases in objective and subjective well-being. Yet these increases have come at a price: the thresholds for specific biophysical processes such as climate, biodiversity and the nitrogen cycle being approached or crossed (Steffen et al., 2015). Attempts to decouple gross domestic product (GDP) growth absolutely from the ecological footprints of production and consumption have not been successful to date (Pichler et al., 2017). Since the material welfare standards enjoyed by rich countries cannot be generalized to the rest of the planet, these countries would thus need to review their production and consumption patterns and ‘degrow’ to make their economies and societies compatible with planetary limits (D’Alisa et al., 2014; Koch and Mont, 2016; Spash, 2017). Indeed, if planetary boundaries are to be taken seriously, only the satisfaction of basic human needs, and not much more, could be assured in the rich countries for the time being (Koch et al., 2017). This chapter seeks to contribute to an institutional understanding of consumption governance through an analysis of how consumption practices are linked to production norms in specific capitalist growth strategies.

Theorizing consumption – including in growth-critical discourses – is at times hampered by what Shove (2010) referred to as the ‘ABC formula’, where A stands for attitude, B for behaviour and C for choice. In such approaches, social inequality, power structures and the ways in which these are perceived tend to be neglected, while the responsibility for sustainable consumption is shifted onto individuals and private households. This obviously applies more to what Lorek and Fuchs (2013) refer to as ‘weak’ rather than ‘strong sustainable consumption’, which explicitly contributes to ‘degrowth’ thinking. Yet not even the latter formulation systematically considers the structural links between capitalist growth economy and consumption patterns. This chapter suggests that a combination of the regulation approach and Bourdieusian sociology could contribute to providing the required analytical tools. In particular, it attempts to reflect the fact that acts of consumption are neither ‘spontaneous’ nor ‘individual’, but rather are influenced by the imperatives of wider strategies of capitalist growth and by structural factors such as social inequality

and state strategies – which consumers and consumption industries are normally unaware of. In fact, growth-oriented contemporary production and consumption patterns tend to be perceived as the ‘natural’ state (Koch, 2018).

This chapter first introduces the regulation approach as an institutional attempt to link analyses of production patterns to those of consumption. The focus will be on the institutional particulars of how *longues durées* of capitalist growth take the form of compatible commodity streams of production and consumption. Second, the chapter argues that the regulation approach is compatible with Bourdieusian sociology of consumption. Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’, in particular, can be used as an analytical bridge between ‘objective’ social structures, including patterns of inequality, and allegedly ‘subjective’ and ‘individual’ lifestyles and cultural practices. Taken together, the regulation approach and Bourdieu’s cultural sociology provide a novel analytical tool for the understanding of consumption patterns within wider capitalist growth strategies. Third, this concept will be applied to a comparison of the two main growth strategies after World War II: Fordism and finance-driven capitalism. The conclusion summarizes the argument and delineates future research avenues.

2. The regulation approach

Structural contradictions between the capitalist growth economy and the ecological system must remain within certain limits so that the legitimacy and maintenance of the overall social order are not fundamentally undermined. Tensions and contradictions between these two take on different forms, presenting themselves as continuous development or as rupture, depending on diverse types of institutional regulation (Koch, 2012; Paterson and Laberge, 2018). An institutional attempt to link analyses of production patterns to those of consumption has been proposed by the regulation approach, which – at least in the Parisian version – continues key insights from Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy*, such as ‘modes of production’ and ‘social formations’, and complements them with ‘intermediary concepts’ (‘accumulation regime’ and ‘mode of regulation’). These concepts express the largely non-variable conditions of agents involved in the relations of production and exchange, as well as the historical changes that these relations undergo during different phases of capitalist growth (Boyer and Saillard, 2002). While the abstract features of capitalism are seen as largely transhistorical, both crises in the accumulation process and phases of expanded production are addressed in the context of their institutional embedding. The regulatory settings required for continued and expanded capital accumulation are socially, culturally and politically constructed and contested within a myriad of societal struggles, in which relations both within and between social classes play a prominent role. The notion of ‘intermediary concepts’, in particular, emphasizes that the articulation of a given social formation in time and space corresponds to particular structural features and institutional forms. ‘Accumulation regimes’ are associated with certain historical phases and development paths or growth strategies, which take the form of compatible commodity streams of production and consumption, reproduced over a long period

of time. They differ historically, for example, as to whether intensive or extensive, export-oriented or import-oriented forms dominate, or vice versa. All accumulation regimes are associated with a specific industrial paradigm, a dominant principle of division of labour, an energy regime and a corresponding 'mode of consumption'.

In contrast to neoclassical economics, consumption is not viewed as an isolated or behavioural phenomenon – as the result of autonomous individual choices – but within its social genesis and context. Aglietta (1987: 154) conceptualizes consumption as 'an organized set of activities, which – while predominantly private – became subject to a general logic of the reconstitution of energies expended in social practices and the preservation of abilities and attitudes implied by the social relations'. What and how much we buy and consume is of the greatest relevance for ecological issues such as the carbon cycle, since these decisions are normally bound to matter and energy transformations that more often than not necessitate the burning of fossil fuels. The regulation approach insists – contradicting the predominant notion of *Homo economicus* in the neoclassical perspective – that purchase decisions or the 'demand side' of economics are neither 'formally rational' nor 'autonomous', but instead are greatly influenced by structural factors such as income inequality and corporate sales strategies. This approach agrees with sociological and anthropological research that point out that purchasing things is not in the first place about the goods themselves but rather about the symbolic messages that purchase acts express and mediate (Boyer, 2008).

A 'mode of regulation' comprises an ensemble of social networks as well as rules, norms and conventions, which together facilitate the seamless reproduction of an accumulation regime. The term 'mode of regulation' stresses the fact that capitalism does not reproduce itself only upon the basis of the immanent logic dealt with Marx's *Capital*, for example, but that its stabilization also requires institutional forms: these comprise the wage relation or 'wage-labour nexus' (Bertrand, 2002); the enterprise form; the nature of money (Guttmann, 2002); the state; and international regimes (Aglietta, 2002). Critical geographers have complemented these institutional forms with a notion of geographic scales, which determine the main spatial boundaries within which structural coherence is sought (Brenner, 2004). Regulationists view the institutional forms that help stabilize capitalist development during particular growth periods as the hard-won products of social struggles and diverse and often contradictory interests. Regulation in its concrete forms is, hence, not simply the product of the strategies of the dominant classes, which themselves are divided by different competitive interests, but always reflect a degree of compromise with dominated groups. Modes of regulation and patterns of governance vary considerably depending on the nature of such institutional compromises.

3. Bourdieu's sociology of consumption

Regulationists and Bourdieu share the basic hypothesis that 'life in society is made possible by the way in which institutions are constructed, just as economic activity

is organized by the mode of *régulation*' (Boyer, 2008: 348). Hence, both object to what Bourdieu (2005: 7) calls the 'scholastic bias' in economics and social sciences. This bias consists in the tendency to construct increasingly abstract models 'which leads the scholar to project his thinking into the minds of the active agents and to see (his own representations) as underlying their practice'. Far from being an anthropological constant, the ascendancy of an aptitude for rational behaviour in production and consumption is, for example, the result of long historical processes, during which it was inscribed in people's social and cognitive structures, practical patterns of thinking, perception and action. Regulationist research has furthermore turned to Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' as an alternative to the theory of rational choice, and as an analytic bridge between 'objective' social structures, including patterns of inequality and consumption, and allegedly 'subjective' lifestyles. As an internalized product of the social structures that conditioned it, habitus supplies us with a sensibility towards these structures and the options they include and exclude. This *amor fati* supplies a sort of social orientation, by which the occupants of a given position in social space are guided towards socio-cultural practices that suit them and befit the occupants of their social position.

Bourdieu's sociology of consumption demonstrates that there are few things less 'individual' than taste or consumptive practices. The latter are instead socially conditioned and maintained by dominant groups to enforce their distance or distinction from the sphere of material necessity and, hence, from other societal groups. Understood as 'social necessity made second nature' (Bourdieu, 1984: 476), taste becomes an efficient weapon in the social struggle about resources. In matters ranging from food and drink, cosmetics and newspapers to art and music, taste and distinction define and delineate the 'high' from the 'low', the sacred from the profane, and the legitimate from the illegitimate. The cultural space is subdivided into a range of fields such as cinema, theatre or computer games, which are themselves constituted by specific power relations, strategies and interests, in which an actor's coordinates are a reflection of his or her economic, cultural and social 'capital'. In the sphere of consumption, different class cultures develop different tastes, so that even the perception and appropriation of one and the same cultural product by different classes follows different social patterns and yields different amounts of symbolic capital. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu empirically demonstrates the correspondence between socio-economic positions, education levels and taste. Both dominating and dominated groups live in specific social circumstances that condition them to develop and 'prefer' lifestyles that are homologous with those positions. Legitimate cultural practices such as museum attendance, theatregoing, recreational reading of 'the classics', the development of interests in cinematic genres and directorial styles, foreign travel and a liking for avant-garde music have become largely reserved for the dominant class.¹

Fields within the space of consumption resemble other societal fields, that is, the rules of the game reflect power relations within which 'cultural capital', both in its institutionalized and embodied forms, serves as a currency to classify the actors and their practices into a hierarchy of lifestyles. Yet cultural or symbolic goods differ

from material goods in that one can consume them only to the extent that one understands their meaning, and requires adequate schemes of appreciation and understanding – a capability, however, that is unequally distributed across social space. Class-specific socialization in families and the school system ensures that a disproportional number of those attaining high educational credentials will enjoy a relationship of comfortable familiarity with the legitimate culture. This process of ‘cultivation’ through which cultural capital is accumulated begins in the family, and takes the form of an investment of money and time (either of hired specialists or the parents’ own time), which, if successful, returns dividends in school, university, social contacts and the marriage and job markets.

In essence, in the sphere of consumption, social differences are reproduced and even appear as natural since ‘legitimate’ taste is the farthest from the sphere of necessity. Due to this objective distance, consumption appears to be built upon an ‘ethos of ease’, of ‘casualness, grace, facility, elegance, freedom, in a word, naturalness’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 339). As mentioned before, purchasing things for individual consumption is not, in the first place, about the goods themselves, but rather about the symbolic message that the act of purchase conveys. Both the acquisition and possession of use values symbolize much of our social standing in society, our identity and our sense of belonging. If, however, the rate of production of new, fashionable and desirable goods is high and accelerating, continuous efforts must be made by all social agents to re-establish or improve their original social position and to distance themselves from other people. Yet there is always the danger of vulgarization, of devaluation through emulation and generalization of certain cultural practices that once held an aura of legitimacy. This process accelerates the never-ending cycles of the avant-garde’s definition of taste and the mainstream’s ‘keeping-up’ strategies. This cycle plays into the hands of diverse culture industries, yet contradicts the principal reproductive needs of the Earth as an ecological system, because, all other things being equal, increases in commodified consumption are accompanied by greater matter and energy throughputs, which lead to environmental degradation.

4. From Fordism to the finance-driven growth strategy

The regulation approach refers to a historical situation, in which a regime of accumulation including the consumption norm and the mode of regulation are sufficiently complementary as a ‘growth strategy’ or a ‘mode of development’ to secure an extensive period of economic expansion and social cohesion. The stability of such a growth model is further enhanced when shared values and norms help to bring about a ‘common-sense’ value system subscribed to by members of all social classes. The correspondence between growth strategy and ideology frames and gives meaning to people’s day-to-day beliefs and social practices – including cultural practices – thereby providing relatively high levels of social inclusion. Fordism and finance-driven capitalism are the most recent historical examples of such growth strategies.

4.1 Fordism

Fordist production techniques initially emerged in the United States in the 1920s and subsequently became the cornerstone of a new accumulation regime in a range of countries including in Western Europe, Australia and Japan. This regime was stabilized by a mode of regulation that enabled a high level of demand for mass-produced and standardized goods such as cars, radios, televisions, washing machines and refrigerators for example, by means of Keynesian social and economic policies. The growth of the Fordist production–consumption nexus was due to the availability of cheap fossil fuels such as oil, and the corresponding environmental consequences (Koch, 2012). At the same time, the demand for (fossil) mineral resources turned many developing countries into ‘extraction societies’ – and this structurally undermined their ability to benefit from the economic growth associated with the Fordist accumulation regime. It is not coincidental that the increase in greenhouse gas emissions and climate change after World War II coincided with the growth in and generalization of the Fordist production and consumption norm in the Western world and the simultaneous establishment of an international division of labour in industrialized and extraction societies.

Unlike the 1930s, when solvent consumers were scarce, during the era of post-war reconstruction, there was stable and expanding demand for both consumer goods and the means of production to build them. Since most Western European households did not yet own durable goods such as household appliances, mass production could become the technological basis for the rapid generalization of their consumption. The turnover of fixed capital was accelerated by the continuing increase in the number of products, which reduced the costs of individual products. Profits were supported by consumer demand that, in turn, was based on increasing real wages, which were usually determined by collective agreements and tied to expected growth in productivity. Wage labourers working in a factory could be mobilized in trade unions relatively easily. Their rising negotiation power was not only reflected in systems of company level co-determination, but was increasingly recognized in society in general, leading to forms of centralized collective bargaining either at industry or national level in most Western European countries (Boyer and Saillard, 2002). Fast growth rates in GDP and productivity meant real wages rose and employment moved towards full capacity. High levels of domestic demand promoted full employment and led to an unparalleled investment boom in Western Europe.

The lowered price of industrial products raised the purchasing power of wage labourers, thus increasing both employers’ profits and employees’ real wages. The state benefited from this favourable situation and used the growing income from taxation for the expansion of a welfare state system, which, in turn, guaranteed a minimum standard of living and material consumption for those who did not – for whatever reason – participate in the labour market. The introduction and generalization of Fordism qualitatively adapted the conditions under which the worker’s individual reproduction took place and loosened the ‘ties of family, or bonds of

neighbourhood proximity or supplementary activity' that had linked them to a 'non-capitalist environment' (Aglietta, 1987: 153–4). With the enormous reduction of prices in essential consumer goods, the conditions for what Burghart Lutz (1989) called the 'internal takeover' (*innere Landnahme* in the German original) of ever more spheres of life by capitalism: the participation of wage earners in commodified forms of consumption, which – hitherto monopolized by the dominant classes – signified a substantial improvement in their material standard of living. However, taking out mortgages and consumer loans made the wage labourer's existence further dependent on continuing participation in the work process and made rebellious behaviour against the dominant production and consumption model increasingly difficult to afford.

The spheres of work and non-work became closely linked in novel ways; two areas of peoples' private lives came to be particularly affected by the Fordist consumption norm: housing and the rise of a suburban lifestyle based on individual mobility. Standardized housing 'put an end to [the] unhygienic and unsafe interiors' that had characterized pre-Fordist housing among the working class, and 'permitted the installation of household appliances that saved domestic labour' (Aglietta, 1987: 160). Housing became also a symbol of status since housing could be bought rather than simply rented. Mass-produced prefabricated housing reduced costs to a point where, extended over the overall term of payment, it was, as Aglietta observed, less of a 'burden on the working-class wage of the 1950s than were the rents extorted by landlords of the inter-war years' (Aglietta, 1987: 160). Yet the rationalization of housebuilding brought with it a parcellation of households so that traditional 'proletarian' working class milieus were gradually replaced by a homeowner culture. The new homes were either flats or, in the case of the upwardly mobile, semi-detached or detached family homes with functionally differentiated 'departments' for eating, sleeping, and children (Hirsch and Roth, 1986).

Bourdieu uses the French housing market in the heyday of Fordism as an example of the increasing links between the spheres of production and consumption and, at the same time, provides a fundamental critique of the neoclassical notion of viewing individual consumption acts or purchasing goods as 'individual choices'. In *The Social Structures of the Economy* Bourdieu (2005) empirically demonstrates that economic choices such as whether to buy or to rent or whether to buy an old house or a new one are far from 'individual' or even 'natural', but, instead, depend on the socially constituted economic dispositions of the agent (the 'demand' side), and on the supply of dwellings. Contrary to neoclassical economic theory, which treats both supply and demand as 'unconditioned givens', Bourdieu (2005: 15) argues that they are both shaped, more or less directly, by state socio-economic and, especially, housing policies. Though the extent of state activity in social housing differed from country to country, it nevertheless played – and continues to play – a crucial role in determining the conditions for owning, renting, constructing, and defining regulations on taxation and the qualitative standards of housing. In the French case, state housing policy became more oriented towards homeownership from the 1960s, resulting in a diminishing supply of accessible rented property and thus redirecting

a section of potential tenants towards ownership. Among homeowners, social differences based on economic and cultural capital were reproduced in the process.

Defining living in cities as blighted, and in rural areas as backward, New Deal programmes in the USA intended to produce a society of almost inconceivable homogeneity by modifying the physical landscape through the creation of new environments 'fit for life and the living'. Suburbanization led to increasing demand for geographic mobility, and this, in turn, began to undermine local, municipal and neighbourhood relationships. Workers' housing estates and working-class areas, with the once typical atmosphere of practical solidarity were displaced and gradually replaced by dormitory towns. Suburbanization was thus tantamount to an extension of the Taylorist time-space matrix to the individual or private sphere: as more and more people no longer lived where they worked, inner cities became deserted immediately after shopping hours. Alongside electric power, which made the benefits of city life available in suburban areas, it was the car and individual mobility that enabled the decentralization of the population intended in New Deal programmes. While in pre-Fordist periods, suburbanization had been constrained by the need for public transport and had congregated along tram and railway lines, the spread of cars 'enabled urbanites to flee inner cities and settle wherever there were roads' (Marcus and Segal, 1989: 269). Public and collective transport systems were among the main casualties of this development. Public transport vehicles that generated economies of scale by carrying many passengers on regular routes at scheduled times were faced with fewer passengers due to cars.

Still another factor that helped to make production and consumption norms compatible was that many services and activities that had been done at home were now commercialized and bought and sold on markets. For example, the use of dishwashers and washing machines replaced manual washing, vegetables were now bought in shops and supermarkets instead of being grown in kitchen gardens. Ready meals often replaced home-cooked meals. At the same time, the relative importance of personal services was reduced in the overall employment system and instead became a recruiting ground for industrial employment. The percentage of wage labour within all types of economic activity increased to the same extent that services and products took the form of commodities: dependent employment and the corresponding income increasingly became the requirement for the acquisition of indispensable goods and services.

In summary, the expansion of the Fordist mode of consumption took place against a background of the dismantling of traditional social situations and lifestyles, and was characterized by suburbanization, the modified role of the family as a socialization agency, increased individual geographic and social mobility, as well as by an increase in state regulation in areas such as welfare, social protection and education. Despite the fact that 'objective' social differences, particularly those of class, were not evened out in this process, the combination of reduced working hours, made possible due to the enormous increase in labour productivity, and the increasing strength of organized labour were perceived as a 'surge in individualization' away

from traditional collective networks (Beck, 1992). This surge, however, also featured elements of social isolation and societal disintegration, which were accompanied by the beginnings of what Hirsch and Roth (1986: 58) identified as 'precarious subjectivity'. Social homogenization and individualization in combination with the emergence of forms of everyday culture such as television, which brought together masses of people who had previously led different, class- and group-specific lifestyles, crucially contributed towards a decrease in the subjective perception of class.

Even though quantitative levels of consumption remained stratified, the Fordist consumption norm was nevertheless generalized to the entire society as a comprehensive normative orientation. Hirsch and Roth followed from this that both mental structures and social forms of interaction came to be moulded by the consumption of commodities that were themselves produced in capitalist ways. The promise of a constantly growing amount of use values partially compensated for the humiliations suffered by individuals in Taylorist work processes and in other areas of life regulated by bureaucratic structures. Self-perceptions of individual fulfilment and identity became increasingly dependent on the possibilities and the degree of participation in the expanding standards of mass consumption (Hirsch and Roth, 1986: 59). Pre-Fordist collective orientation was gradually removed, and the 'capitalist spirit' began to encompass the entire working class. Yet in contrast to the Calvinist period – when work itself was seen as a fulfilment and perceived as a sign of being part of the 'elect', and consumption was reduced to the absolute minimum (Weber, 1958) – work was now largely perceived as an alienating activity that had to be compensated for by unlimited commodified consumption.

4.2 Finance-driven capitalism

Regulationists have accounted for the tensions inherent in the Fordist consumption norm by indicating that the compensation provided by the consumption of commodities in order to alleviate the sufferings of the production sphere can never be complete. Instead of ensuring personal 'emancipation', when the continuous consumption of ever more commodities asserted itself during the Fordist period, it was sometimes perceived as even greater heteronomy with corresponding losses in individual autonomy and self-determination. At the same time, it became obvious to some that mass consumption systematically produced negative external effects – for example, in the form of traffic jams, environmental problems and disasters, and the degradation of cities – which began to compromise the use values of beloved consumption goods such as the car. Increasing numbers of people began to question the imperatives of Fordist growth and to form ecological movements and later green parties that brought together many of the fragmented political groups from the student revolts of the late 1960s. During the same time period, new women's movements broke with the patriarchal division of labour and thereby weakened one of the cornerstones of the Fordist mode of regulation and societalization: the nuclear family and the male breadwinner model. This, in turn, led to changes in demands for state support, particularly from single-parent families and elderly people. Finally, these changes were accompanied by the readjustment of the spatial

arrangements of Fordism: issues of housing, for example, became relevant since single households were concentrated in urban areas that often had been abandoned by the middle classes. The trend towards suburbanization was partially reversed as a result. However, disruptive experiences with the Fordist mode of societalization and consumption caused only a minority to question their lifestyles. Most people simply increased their work efforts in order to achieve even higher incomes to acquire yet more commodities and to improve their chances in the competition of positional – that is, not arbitrarily – augmentable goods. The spiral of consumption and production continued to accelerate in the post-Fordist period.

A growing number of political economists such as Boyer (2000), Stockhammer (2008) and Krugman (2009) have argued that a new accumulation regime began to emerge after the 1970s that is characterized by transnationalized production and the liberalization of international capital flows *inter alia*. ‘Financialization’ covers a range of phenomena, including the deregulation of the financial sector and the liberalization of global capital flows, significant increases in financial transactions and the proliferation and profitability of new financial instruments and investors such as hedge funds. In addition to the growing influence of financial capital as opposed to industrial capital, the new growth strategy was also built on a structural weakening of organized labour *vis-à-vis* capital in general. Stockhammer (2008) theorizes these processes in terms of a shift from a ‘management–labour’ to a ‘shareholder–management’ balance. Reductions in real wages in the Western world were temporarily compensated by the facilitation of access of the working class to loans and other financial instruments.

While the Fordist mode of consumption was largely built upon the purchase of durable consumer goods, subsequent waves of commodified consumption, which restructured increasingly more areas of life, involved information and communication technologies such as the Internet. Entire new industries opened up in the ‘entertainment’ business, for example, as new generations of home computers, laptops, iPods and smartphones were launched on the market at ever-shorter intervals. ‘Shopping’, be it in malls or online, took on a new quality; in contrast to the post-war period when many of the purchased goods had essential use values (for washing, clothing, mobility, and so on), post-Fordist consumption patterns transcended the sphere of necessity. Following on from Bourdieu, consumer researchers and social psychologists presume that we develop an attachment to the things we own, which causes us to perceive material possessions as part of our ‘extended self’ (Belk, 1988, cited in Jackson, 2009: 64). Some of these possessions are ‘fleeting’ (Jackson, 2009: 64), that is, ‘they burn with novelty momentarily and are extinguished as suddenly something else attracts our attention’. Others are more durable, sometimes providing a ‘sanctuary for our most treasured memories and feelings’. In an increasingly secular world, individual choices of what is ‘sacred’ and what is ‘profane’ are usually no longer made in religious terms – as Durkheim (2001) observed a century ago – but upon the grounds of what Jackson (2009: 64) calls a new materialism that functions as a substitute for religious consolation.

On top of financialization via the indebtedness of private households, in the case of the Western working classes, the demand problem for further commodified private consumption was addressed by exporting the Western consumption norm to other parts of the world including Asia and Latin America. After import substitution ended, the markets of many developing countries were flooded with new media images and foreign consumer goods as a result. 'Western' lifestyles were promoted in advertising and the media, since the markets for consumer goods were not as saturated in the 'emerging economies' of China, India or Brazil whose relative weight and general significance in the world economy has grown over the last decades. Income levels rose for increasing percentages of these populations so that more people could afford consumption patterns previously associated with Western societies. Social structures and lifestyles evolved quickly as a result. Consumption patterns of the emerging urban middle classes started to differ qualitatively from those of the lower classes. The relative weight of necessity items such as food decreased in middle-class households, 'while discretionary spending (such as on recreation and education, transport and communication, housing and utilities, or household and personal items)' (Reusswig and Isensee, 2009: 132) increased. In a similar way to developments in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA and Western Europe, more Chinese people started to acquire the classic 'Fordist' consumer durables such as televisions, private cars and their modern counterparts (PCs, iPods, and so on) and, less often, a family property in suburban areas (Zhang et al., 2009: 145). This is being complemented by other originally Western cultural practices such as tennis or golf. At the same time, attitudes towards beauty contests, fashion shows, sexual behaviour and eating habits started to change and approximate Western patterns (Dittrich, 2009).

The significant relative price reduction for consumer goods for middle-class households and the rapid speed at which consumer markets in Asia and, to a lesser extent, Latin America have developed make it justifiable to speak of a 'second wave' of internal takeover of more and more areas of life by capitalism, following on from the first Fordist wave, particularly in Western Europe. Indeed, at no other point in time have so many people in the world participated in consumption patterns that used to be the privilege of elites. Developing countries, especially in Asia, are not just the 'factory of the world' due to the transfer and offshoring of industrial production from high labour cost countries to cheap labour cost locations. As in Western Europe after World War II, developing countries have become increasingly attractive as purchasers of 'Western' products. This popularization and generalization of consumption practices, previously the monopoly of the few, has rather obvious ecological downsides. Apart from requiring that ever-increasing quantities of the planet's finite natural resources are used for the production of consumer goods, thereby accelerating the greenhouse effect, the spread and intensification of the Western consumption norm has also significantly increased the mobility of many people. The explosion in the number of cars and the increased use of aeroplanes are important contributing factors to the high and growing levels of greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, the dependence on massive quantities of fossil fuels is a structural feature that Fordism and finance-driven capitalism have in common.

Since the heyday of Fordism, this has led to increasing greenhouse gas emissions and the worsening of related environmental issues in most regions of the world.

5. Conclusion and further research

Consumption is too often misunderstood as the autonomous act of rationally acting sovereign individuals, while the close links between the social structures of production and consumption are not systematically considered. I have here suggested a regulation theoretical view which, in combination with an application of Bourdieusian sociology, can help understand the interlinking of the two spheres. As in all capitalist economies, these are shaped by the growth imperative. Relatively prosperous periods (*longues durées*) of capitalist growth emerge where both consumption and production norms expand in parallel. Concrete adjustments of the two norms vary and differ from one historical growth strategy to the next. The rather strong links between the growth imperative, institutional forms, and production and consumption norms suggest that the feasibility of achieving environmental sustainability via governance forms that exclusively focus on consumption – that is, without at the same time addressing the growth imperative and the sphere of production – is limited. Bourdieu in particular demonstrates that acts of consumption – via taste and distinction – tend to reproduce patterns of social inequality that, in turn, have their origin in the concrete forms of the capitalist division of labour.

From the theoretical point of view taken in this chapter, it would seem that the structural preconditions for any significant limitation to conspicuous consumption are simultaneously attempts to reduce structural inequality and reforms of the division of labour of communal, state and individual property: thus markets would play a significantly lesser role than currently. In this situation it is encouraging that scholars have started to discuss ‘eco-social policies’, which aim to address both social inequality and environmental sustainability issues. Such policies could help bring about a redistribution of work, wealth and pollution rights, and stimulate alternative forms of consumption in policy areas such as macroeconomic steering, minimum and maximum incomes, carbon rationing, the role of commons and the cooperative economy, as well as alternative monetary systems.² Proposals such as a maximum limit on income and wealth policies may facilitate a shift from a growth-oriented production and consumption regime towards one based on the stability of biophysical parameters. However, many of these, partially far-reaching, policy proposals have been developed in an isolated way by different groups without much contact. Future research should be dedicated to complementing and unifying these as yet fragmented proposals and to formulating a coherent strategy for the economic, political and ecological restructuring of rich countries.

Regulation theory and its core concepts such as ‘institutional forms’ have hitherto been successfully applied to understanding the links between production and consumption norms in the context of capitalist growth. Yet in the continuing absence of any empirical indication for an absolute decoupling of GDP growth, resource use

and carbon emissions, future research could ask what kind of institutional forms may facilitate a planned degrowth process where monetary growth is deprioritized and biophysical indicators prioritized, and at the end of which human needs for everyone now and in the future are met within environmental limits. This applies especially to the role of money where local currencies may need to play a much more important role than today, and to that of international regimes and scale where a range of regulatory responsibilities may need to be upgraded to global levels. On the one hand, global governance networks would need to delineate thresholds for matter and energy throughput for production and consumption in accordance with natural science expertise. On the other hand, these would determine the room for manoeuvre within which national and local economies could evolve. Kothari (2018: 254), for example, suggests the assignment of ‘a minimal set of matters’ to the global level, while the bulk of decision-making would ‘go to the most local level feasible’ where he assumes that diverse approaches to meeting collective goals are most ‘accepted and encouraged’.

A final institutional form to consider in relation to a degrowth transition is that of the state. The new division of labour across scales outlined above would in all likelihood mean a lesser role and a stricter regulation of market forces than currently. Without denying the allocative efficiency of markets altogether, these would nevertheless operate in much narrower limits given the primacy of global sustainability and intergenerational justice. Instead, a ‘steering state’ would at various levels be *primus inter pares* in a mixed economy and a governance network of public, collective, communal and private actors. New combinations of state and common ownership may be developed in relation to the governance of socio-natural resources such as energy and water. A concept that appears to be promising in this context and which could guide future research is that of a ‘communal’ or ‘plurinational’ state, with which Kothari (2018) analyses various experiences from Asian and Latin American countries where common values and visions of well-being from indigenous peoples, local communities and civil society have enriched policymaking on national levels.

NOTES

- 1 For a more recent application of Bourdieu’s sociology of culture, see Bennett et al. (2009)
- 2 For thematic overviews of eco-social policies, see Büchs and Koch (2017: 112–23) and Gough (2017: 194–209).

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