

the
New
Consumers

The Influence of Affluence on the Environment

Norman Myers
Jennifer Kent

About Island Press

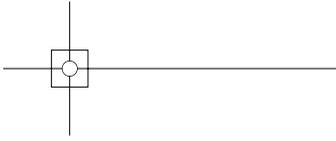
Island Press is the only nonprofit organization in the United States whose principal purpose is the publication of books on environmental issues and natural resource management. We provide solutions-oriented information to professionals, public officials, business and community leaders, and concerned citizens who are shaping responses to environmental problems.

In 2004, Island Press celebrates its twentieth anniversary as the leading provider of timely and practical books that take a multidisciplinary approach to critical environmental concerns. Our growing list of titles reflects our commitment to bringing the best of an expanding body of literature to the environmental community throughout North America and the world.

Support for Island Press is provided by the Agua Fund, Brainerd Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Educational Foundation of America, The Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation, National Environmental Trust, The New-Land Foundation, Oak Foundation, The Overbrook Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Rockefeller Foundation, The Winslow Foundation, and other generous donors.

The opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of these foundations.

The New Consumers



The New Consumers

The Influence of Affluence on the Environment

Norman Myers and Jennifer Kent

ISLAND PRESS

Washington • Covelo • London

Copyright © 2004 Norman Myers

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher: Island Press, 1718 Connecticut Ave., Suite 300, NW, Washington, DC 20009.

ISLAND PRESS is a trademark of The Center for Resource Economics.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data.

Myers, Norman.

The New Consumers : the influence of affluence
on the environment / Norman Myers and Jennifer Kent.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55963-997-0 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Economic development—Environmental aspects.
2. Consumption (Economics)—Environmental aspects.
3. Sustainable development. 4. Environmental responsibility.

I. Kent, Jennifer. II. Title.

HD75.6.M48 2004

333.71'3—dc22

2004004202

British Cataloguing-in-Publication data available.

Printed on recycled, acid-free paper 

Design by David Bullen

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To those many colleagues who inspired the authors along their way,
and to all those who would like to keep on consuming indefinitely
rather than over-consuming for a short while.*

Contents

List of Tables and Figures xi

Preface xiii

- I: Who Are the New Consumers? 3
 - II: Cars: Driving Us Backwards 25
 - III: Meat: Juicy Steaks and Hidden Costs 38
 - IV: Further Resource Linkages: Household Electricity,
Eco-Footprints, and Human Numbers 51
 - V: China: A Giant Awake and Roaring 66
 - VI: India: The Second “Biggie” 82
 - VII: The Big Picture of 20 Countries 93
 - VIII: Sustainable Consumption: Where Do We Find It? 120
 - IX: Sustainable Consumption: How to Get from
Here to There 132
- Appendix A: GNI and Its Shortcomings* 147
- Appendix B: Four Outlier Countries* 149
- Notes* 151
- Index* 191

List of Tables and Figures

- Table I.1* The World's 20 Largest Economies in 2002 9
- Table I.2* The New Consumers in 2000 17
- Table II.1* The New Consumers' Cars in 1990 and 2000 27
- Table III.1* Meat and Grain in 2000 43
- Table III.2* Grain and Meat Demand 1997–2020 44
- Table IV.1* CO₂ Emissions in 2001 from Fossil Fuels 53
- Table IV.2* Ecological Footprints in Global Hectares (GH) 60
- Table IV.3* Population 63
- Table VII.1* Five Economic Superpowers 112
- Table VII.2* The New Consumers in 2000 and 2010 113
- Table VII.3* TVs and Personal Computers in 2000 (millions) 115
-
- Figure I.1* Income Distribution in the Late 1990s 12

Preface

THIS HAS BEEN quite the most complex and taxing of all my eighteen books. Or rather, all our recent books because the cover features the name of my co-author and partner Jennifer Kent. Without her, there would simply have been no book. Jennie has dug out most of the statistics, she has analyzed them into shape, she has Googled all manner of other information and insights, she has read and re-re-read chapter drafts, and she has kept a firm hold on the entire exercise when it wanted to turn into a dozen jellyfishes. All I had to do was to write the book, which was quite straightforward as compared with my co-author's role. And she has proffered mountains of patience while dealing with my impatience. Ah, what it is to live in a world with miracles.

I shall shortly complete my seventieth circuit of the sun, and I have spent nigh on thirty of my years in developing countries. I have watched them develop until certain sectors of certain countries have become distinctly middle class. Sizeable numbers of their citizens have left behind the abject poverty that still afflicts most of their compatriots, and these “new consumers” are transforming the economic and social landscapes of their countries. They are also transforming the political landscape of the global order. If, for instance, China keeps up its twenty-year-long achievement of record-breaking economic growth, we shall soon—within less than twenty years—see

it as the biggest economy as well as the biggest populace in the world. By that time too, China and just another four new consumer countries could account for fully one-fifth of the global economy as measured in terms of “purchasing power parity.” Truly, the world it is a-changin’. It will be a-changin’ too in environmental senses. The new consumers can eat meat every day at least, instead of once a week at most, and feedlot production methods are placing heavy pressures on supplies of grain and water. The new consumers are also buying cars in large numbers, with all that means for pollution both local and global. For sure, the new consumers should enjoy their new found affluence to the hilt, provided that does not mean unsustainable demands on environments, hence on economies too, of many a sort. In turn this means there is all the greater urgency in establishing what is known as sustainable consumption, especially on the part of the long-rich consumers in developed countries—who could thereby pave the way for the new consumers.

I have thought that it would be worthwhile to describe this new consumer phenomenon in a book. At first I found few people interested. Manila, is that simply a kind of envelope? Jeddah, is that a new sort of dessert? But then I came across Jonathan Cobb at Island Press, and he instantly took me on. Throughout a protracted and convoluted process, he has helped me untangle one problem after another after another. Many thanks, Jonathan.

Earlier on, the basic idea was welcomed too by Wren Wirth of the Winslow Foundation, who encouraged me to research the issue and write up my findings in a report that her foundation funded. Without you, Wren, the whole thing would not even have got onto the start line. I am specially grateful for your once-again support.

I also appreciate the efforts of my literary agent, Ginger Barber. This is the umpetty-eth book she has handled for me, and she has done it in her invariably proficient fashion. I have long been fortunate to have such a fine colleague to bear my banner into the publishing lists.

Finally, here’s a thought from my co-author Jennie. “This is to be my final book (I said that three books ago). It has been a long and

arduous task, with mountains of background research, analysis, editing, and endless re-editing. I hope the result fosters better all-round futures for those who will be around to experience them, among the most important for me being my sons Mathew and Andrew. I hope too they will finally understand what my efforts have been all about. It has taken me several decades to learn the true value of my life, and ever-more consumption—it isn't even a starter.”

Norman Myers and Jennifer Kent

December 2003

The New Consumers



Who Are the New Consumers?

WE ARE WITNESSING one of the biggest revolutions in history. Something hugely important is afoot in the world, yet many people seem little aware of it. It makes few headlines on television or in newspapers. It does not advertise its arrival, even though it will markedly affect all our lives in both economic and environmental senses.

It is the biggest consumer boom ever known in such a short time. It is not occurring, as might be supposed, in the long-rich countries, but in certain developing and transition countries where over 1 billion people now possess the financial muscle to enjoy a consumerist lifestyle. This is not to overlook that there are also 2.8 billion people in the world who subsist on less than \$2 a day, 1.2 billion of them on less than \$1 a day. Poverty remains the lot of almost half of humankind. But now, and for the first time, there is a sizeable community of people outside the long-rich countries who have clambered up the ladder into the middle classes and are enjoying a measure of affluence.

Consumption: it's what we want, all of us. We follow a deep-seated tradition that began 10,000 years ago when people moved on from a hunter-gatherer existence and settled in villages where they began to find ways to expand their lifestyles. It has been a realistic tradition. Until a century or two back, virtually all people have been preoccupied from dawn till dusk and from birth till death in keeping body and soul together. Since they have found it hard to meet even the most