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## Consumerism: a general introduction

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**Consumerism: a general introduction**

*“Consumerism is the equation of personal happiness with consumption and the purchase of material possession. In economics, consumerism refers to economic policies placing emphasis on consumption. In an abstract sense, it is the belief that the free choice of consumers, should dictate the economic structure of a society”* (Wikipedia).

Even if the attitude to consumption is born with civilization, it is only with the beginning of the Mass Consumption that this phenomenon really takes place.

Consumerism was born in the United States at the beginnings of the 20th century following the strong protests of the weakest bands of the American society. Sensitive to this problem the USA, through federal laws, assure some control to consumers goods.

In Europe, the first nations to recognize its importance and develop the theme of the consumerism have been, around the fifties, the United Kingdom and Danimarca.

Particularly England holds rightful for the protection of consumers to form an organism of guardianship, the Consumer Advisory Council. Also other European countries, such as France and Sweden, followed the way traced by English and Danish people.

In 1975 the European Community with the first Program of Action, traced directives and precise objective to extend the concept of consumer, emphasizing the importance of it in the politics and economy of the European Union. In 1993, the Essay of Maastricht foresaw a special chapter attributing specific competence to the European Union.

In Europe, at the beginning of the eighties, a series of directives EECs are sent forth on important aspects of the world of consumerism: the responsibility of the firms for damages provoked by defective products, the contracts negotiations out of the commercial places, the deceptive publicity, the consumers' protection on the indications of the sale prices, of the guarantees to the consumption and the general safety of the products.

The European Committee founded the General Health and Consumer Protection Directorate (DG SANCO) to protect the health and the safety of consumers and to promote programs of information.

Moreover, in 2003, European Advisory Group of Consumers (ECCG) was founded, that has the function to support the Committee on the problems concerning the consumers in the EU.

In Italy the phenomenon and the discussion on consumerism developed starting from the end of the eighties concretizing with the creation of specific associations.