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CONSUMER CITIZENSHIP
SOFT GOVERNANCE IN POLITICAL MARKET ARENAS

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I. Introduction

Current notions of the consumer's political role can be characterized by their great ambivalence. Positions that highlight the potentials of enhanced political participation, the effectiveness of soft governance, and the development of transnational political communities, are confronted with perceptions that suspect the commercialization of politics and a marginalization of legitimate political power. Nikolas Rose, for instance, points to the expansion of citizenship through everyday practices: 'Citizenship is no longer primarily realized in a relation with the state, or in a single public sphere, but in a variety of private, corporate and quasi-public practices from working to shopping' (Rose 1999: 166). In contrast, Benjamin Barber assumes that merging the citizen's role with that of the consumer leads to a privatization of citizenship and is accompanied by notions of private liberty that can be characterized as *false freedom* (Barber 2007: 139). For him, only democratic participation, in a strict sense, and ensuing government intervention guarantee legitimacy and public liberty (Barber 2007: 142). In a similar way, Colin Crouch describes a deficit of active political participation as a main characteristic of post-democracy by stating 'the consumer has triumphed over the citizen' (Crouch 2004: 49).

The positions outlined above point to the ambiguity that is connected to the conflation of market arenas and political arenas. This article aims at scrutinizing these reconfigurations from a political science point of view. In doing so, it will take into account both conceptual aspects and aspects of applicability. Hence, I will analyse in a first step if the term citizenship can be transferred to the market arena, namely the consumer. How do ideas of consumer citizenship interfere with traditional concepts of citizenship? In a second step I will focus on the applicability of consumer citizenship. What is the empirical value for dealing with current questions of transnational political arenas and soft governance?

I will start with a definition of terms: what does the term consumer citizen imply and how can it be related to definitions of citizenship in general? Subsequently, I will consider consumer citizenship against the backdrop of existing notions and concepts of citizenship. Considering the traditions of citizenship is important for revealing conceptual problems but also analytical potentials for grasping the complex relationship between markets, political institutions and civil society. Finally, I will analyse the question of *where* and *how* consumers are able to assume the role of citizens: what is the (geographic) framework of consumer citizenship and how do consumers exert power within transnational political market arenas?

II. Definition of Terms – Consumer Citizenship

Conceptions of consumer citizenship emanate from the assumption of merging consumer and citizen roles in terms of the transference of civic considerations and behaviour to habits of consumption. Consumption is understood as a form of political participation that can initiate or reinforce social change: '[…] [C]ivil action turns the sphere of consumption

into a political terrain' (Zadek/Amalric 1998: 11). Hence, consumer citizenship is a matter of looking at the consumer as citizen: 'The new consumerism […] has restored to consumption the idea of citizenship. It is forcing markets to treat consumers as citizens' (Scammell 2003: 128-129).

An initial point for the assumption of fusing political and economic arenas is the reflection of the political context of material goods and economic decisions which Micheletti (2003: x) describes as the 'politics of products' and to which Shah et al. (Shah et al. 2007: 9) refer to as 'the politics of consumption'. The politics of products and consumption comprises diverse aspects which are particularly linked to complex processes of production and the corporate gain of power in the course of economic globalisation. Historically, the linkage of consumerism and citizenship is not bound to processes of globalisation – boycotts in the context of the anti-slavery movement in the United States at the end of the 18th century (Kroen 2003) or the British *co-operative*s of the labour movement at the beginning of the 20th century (Trentmann 2001) are only two examples for early political consumerism. Nonetheless, a general perception of market spheres as arenas for political participation takes place against the backdrop of corporate political power in a globalising world (Micheletti/Stolle 2007: 159-160):

'[…] [C]onsumer critique is fundamental to citizenship in the age of globalization. It brings into the daylight the dangerously hidden issue of political power of corporations. […] [I]t exposes the potential power of consumers as citizens and provides incentives to businesses, which regulation increasingly does not, to mind corporate responsibility to and dependence on democracy' (Scammell 2000: 354).

Just as national citizens are able to choose between different parties and candidates, consumer citizens take the vote in terms of products and producers with the aim of influencing corporate policies or comprehensive institutional regulation: '[C]ampaigns that urge investors and consumers to express their ethics are asking people to vote with their money' (Linton 2003: 361). Hence, Dickinson and Carsky (2005) describe consumers as *economic voters*[1] just as Beck (2002: 128) underlines that consumers always seize their right to vote while taking purchasing decisions.

However, the range of political consumers is not confined to *boycotting* or *buycotting*.[2] Stolle and Micheletti (2005: 4) introduce the term *discursive political consumerism* to refer to actions of publicly raising the issue of corporate behaviour in terms of political, ethical, and ecological questions (e.g. demonstrations, petitions). Despite a general ability to distinguish between political consumerism based on buying and based on communication there are often hybrid forms in practice. For instance, calls for a boycott spread via mass media are one way of combining monetary sanctioning with public scandalization. Accordingly, Friedman (2004: 46-47) refers to 'media-oriented boycotts' and 'market-oriented' boycotts in order to highlight different facets of this form of consumer activism which may aim at a quantifiable decline in sales and/or at damaging corporate reputation.

III. Traditions of Citizenship – Transferability to the Consumer

III. a) Conceptual Openness of the Term Citizenship

Definitions of consumer citizenship have to be analysed against the backdrop of existing definitions of citizenship in order to assess if and to what extent notions of consumer citizenship are compatible with the underlying concepts of this term.

First of all, the term citizenship describes equal membership within a political unity as well as corresponding rights and duties. Citizens are on one hand expected to take responsibility for the polity; on the other hand they own the 'right to have rights' (Kymlicka/Norman 1994: 355).[3] Individuals that are not accepted as members of the political unity are not provided with the same rights as citizens and are not subject to the same duties. Hence, the term citizenship implies processes of inclusion and exclusion that grant access to the resources of the polity and shape social interaction: 'Citizens are connected by the ways in which they govern themselves and agree to be governed, by the organization of their conflicts and differences' (Gunsteren 1998: 5).

However, the specifications of the term citizenship bring with them tensions and contradictions. There are different positions in political theory regarding the role of the citizen, i.e. rights and duties and the impact on processes of policymaking. Moreover, there is a continuous enlargement of the term both in relation to conceptual aspects and to actual appropriation: '[T]he concepts and practice of citizenship have been struggling to encompass ideas, attitudes and activities for which it was not originally designed' (Heater 1999: 155). While citizenship was originally reserved for the wealthy and male elite of ancient city states, the term has been used by diverse groups in the course of history as a symbol of their efforts toward political appreciation. At present, it is increasingly put into the context of universal (human) rights. Hence, questions regarding the social and political status of ethnic minorities or refugees, as well as challenges of global human rights or ecological issues, are framed as a matter of citizens' rights and duties (Benhabib 2004, Dower 2005, Latta 2008, O'Byrne 2003, Somers 2008). Here it becomes obvious that citizenship can be characterized by its dynamics and ambiguity both in terms of theoretical and empirical aspects. In this sense, Chantal Mouffe states with regard to the historic development and different theories of citizenship: 'The nature of democratic citizenship will remain as contested as the idea of democracy itself' (Mouffe 1995: 221). Paul Barry Clarke emphasizes that citizenship cannot only be attained through birth, or assigned by the sovereign, but that the privileges of citizenship are often the result of processes of appropriation: 'Again and again it emerges with some clarity that it is not because people are equal that they are granted citizen rights; it is because people demand and obtain citizen rights that they become equal persons' (Clarke 1994: 19). A perspective that understands reconfigurations of citizenship as 'ongoing products of intense political contests' (Smith 2002: 114) and considers the 'struggle for membership and participation in the community' (Held 1991: 20) appears appropriate for looking at consumers as citizens. Hence, a differentiated analysis of political 'membership'. as well as a definition that emphasizes the dynamic character of citizenship is a precondition for transferring notions of citizenship to consumers.

Despite the general openness of the term citizenship the transference to consumers comes along with conceptual challenges. Ideas of consumer citizenship have to be scrutinized with regard to the scope of the theoretical principles of citizenship. This can be done by considering some core dimensions of citizenship theory with regard to different theoretical traditions, namely republicanism and liberalism. Against this backdrop recent literature dealing with consumer citizenship can be examined and systematized in order to evaluate challenges of transferring the term citizen to consumers.

III. b) Consumer Citizenship and Political Theory

When conceptualizing consumer citizenship, there is the challenge of differentiating between the individual as citizen of a nation state and as consumer citizen. Both roles inevitably overlap as becomes obvious with regard to citizens' rights. For instance, information rights in relation to certain products can be regarded both as rights of the consumer citizen and the citizen of the nation state. Moreover, the dual role becomes apparent when looking at economic-political regulations. In order to enforce those regulations, the individual may resort to 'traditional' repertoires of the citizen (e.g. electing a specific party) or to consumer repertoires (e.g. boycott). Besides the conceptual ambiguity due to the overlapping roles, there are some further challenges in transferring the idea of citizenship to consumers. I will refer to these challenges by linking current notions of consumer citizenship to the theoretical background of citizenship, namely the opposed traditions of republicanism and liberalism. In doing so, I will focus on the dimensions of citizens' rights and duties, as well as civic participation, as they are particularly relevant when it comes to the subsequent analysis of empirical applicability.

The recent debate on consumer citizenship ascribes weight to the dimension of citizens' duties which is predominately explicated with terms of responsibility: 'The ethic of responsibility is geared […] to the consumer who is urged to buy socially conscious goods' (Baxter 2003: 13). When outlining the duties of a consumer citizen, literature focuses on responsibilities emanating from decisions of consumption. Thus, responsibility is traced back to the assumption that choosing certain products bears societal relevance and, moreover, reinforces the structural background of

these products, for example in terms of labour conditions and ecological consequences of production or consumption (Micheletti 2003: 40-41, Young 2003):

'[…] [O]ur purchases can impact society. We may be promoting sweatshops in developing countries by our votes. And why not demand of consumers that they consider the ramifications of their actions on the common good, if that impact can be reasonably and readily ascertained?' (Dickinson/Carsky 2005: 31).

Here, a strong reference to the republican tradition of citizenship becomes apparent. Therein, the emphasis on duties plays an important role:

'The whole republican tradition is based upon the premise that citizens recognize and understand what their duties are and have a sense of moral obligation instilled into them to discharge these responsibilities' (Heater 1999: 64).

From a republican point of view citizens' duties do not only refer to observing the law but also comprise active participation in the political realm: voting or running for a political office is conceived more in terms of duties than in terms of rights. Accordingly, citizens' rights are conceptualised as rights of the polis and not as rights of the individual (Riedel 1972: 672-673). In contrast, liberal notions of duties are not predominantly connected to ties of solidarity but are rather based on 'enlightened self-interest' (Rosa 1999: 52) in order to protect citizens' rights which are perceived as individual property rather than common good.

Literature on consumer citizenship can be attached to both republican and liberal ideas of civic rights. For instance, informed choice is conceptualized with regard to collective and individual aspects. Roger Dickinson (1996: 269) and Jörn Lamla (Lamla 2005) put demands on consumers' political knowledge and awareness and pledge consumers to keep informed about the composition of products as well as about the structural implications deriving from the process of production. By contrast, Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang (2006: 30-31) refer to information rights in terms of consumer protection and self-determination. Referring to the British National Consumer Council's principles, they specify the right to free market access and free product choice as well as the right to product safety, free access to information about the background of products, and adequate consumer representation. Lizabeth Cohen (Cohen 2003: 345-346), drawing on the US Consumer Bill of Rights, exemplifies consumer rights in the realm of consumer protection such as the protection from harmful products, delusive advertisements, and monopolies. However, she also stresses the importance of comprehensive rights like an intact environment or the consideration of consumers' issues within institutional political processes.

Altogether, definitions of consumer rights comprise comprehensive polity rights of being integrated in processes of political decision making as well as individual rights of protection and property. With regard to the aforementioned duties, it is noteworthy that liberal duties of sticking to the law are not very much exemplified. Rather, civic duties are conceptualised as self-defined and self-imposed responsibilities. This comes along with a strong emphasis on the active character of consumer citizenship, as it does likewise in the tradition of republicanism. Republican thinkers regard political participation as the most characteristic attribute of citizenship, whereas the liberal tradition first and foremost defines citizens as legal subjects: the conception of 'citizenship-as-desirable-activity' contrasts with the notion of 'citizenship-as-legal-status' (Kymlicka/Norman 1994: 353). Citizenship understood as activity essentially implies commitment for the polity:

'It is by acting, by public service of fairly specific kinds, that individuals demonstrate that they are citizens. This public service relates to what is necessary for citizens to do in order to define, establish, and sustain a political community of fellow-citizens' (Oldfield 1998: 191).

Citizenship as legal status in contrast refers to the codification of the individual's relationship to the state or government especially with regard to its entitlements: '[…] the political community is only a necessary framework, a set of external arrangements, not a common life' (Walzer 1989: 215-216). Hence, the polity's capability is ascribed to efficient structures of representation and a comprehensive legal framework within liberal con-

ceptions, whereas it is traced back to the extensive integration of all citizens by republican thinkers. Current notions of consumer citizenship can be attached to the republican ideal of active citizenship. Margaret Scammell (2003: 123) for instance, assumes consumer citizens to act reflexively and expressively in order to generate social capital and to connect to other political consumers. Boris Holzer (2006: 413) describes political consumption as active and direct participation in democratic processes, just as Dietlind Stolle et al. (2004: 154) refer to the necessity of constant engagement, for example by placing consumption-related topics in public discourses. The interrelation between active commitment and meeting a citizen's role is finally emphasised by Simon Zadek and Franck Amalrick: 'Consumption can be an active process involving conscious, collective choices and actions, and so extends well beyond what are often seen as passive processes of acquiring goods and services' (Zadek/Amalric 1998: 8).

This focus on active participation rather than the legal status can be regarded as a conceptual necessity but at the same time comes along with conceptual challenges. As the legal status of consumers does not directly correspond with that of national citizens, consumers necessarily have to prove their possible citizenship through active engagement. However, focusing on civic practices implies a (self-)definition of citizenship beyond an institutional sovereign. Rights and duties of consumers that transcend the borders of the nation-state (e.g. responsibilities for the political background of products) are not codified in a binding way. Their implementation cannot rely on a legal system that characterizes the liberal tradition of citizenship. It rather needs the republican mechanisms of commitment and responsibility-taking. Hence, consumer citizenship is very strongly related to ideas of civic empowerment and the broad importance of the citizen for the polity. It is based upon a role that is taken on a voluntary basis. This focus raises questions about the binding character of the role of a consumer citizen. How can responsibility be ascribed within transnational market arenas, and how can consumer citizens influence processes of governance? Hence, the further analysis concentrates on the question of how consumer citizenship can be realized. It draws upon the result that the term citizenship bears a conceptual openness that allows for transferring it to the consumer, with some reservations regarding the transnational market arenas where consumer participation takes place. Consequently, the following chapter will ask how consumer citizenship can be located, and how consumers may exert political power as citizens.

IV. Applying Consumer Citizenship

IV. a) Reference Framework

Literature on consumer citizenship places strong emphasis on challenges of globalization and transnational solidarity (e.g. Carter/Huby 2005: 256-257, Clarke/Barnett et al. 2007: 242, Littler 2009: 23-49, Spaargaren/Martens 2005: 35-37, Trentmann 2007: 148). Jacob Rosenkrands, for instance, mentions these aspects as decisive for a politicization of consumption: 'Political consumers express a higher degree of global orientation and sense of global solidarity than consumers who base their choices on economic criteria' (Rosenkrands 2004: 59). In a similar way, Mette Tobiasen states a correlation between political consumerism and raising awareness for questions of transnational solidarity amongst Danish consumers. She regards political consumerism as a driver of global citizenship in the sense of a commitment for comprehensive political issues (Tobiasen 2004: 21). Hence, recent literature points out that the reference framework of consumer citizenship has to be located outside traditional mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, both geographically and institutionally. However, the remarks are predominantly vague and not connected to general theoretical enhancements in the field of citizenship studies. These can be used to conceptualize a more concrete framework in order to prevent the randomness of a purely global framework and to provide the idea of consumer citizenship with a binding character.

Based on the result that the transference of the term citizen to consumers demands a conceptual extension there are different possibilities for connecting to comprehensive theoretical ideas on transnational and non-governmental polities. Starting-points can be found with David Held's conception of multiple citizenship in overlapping local to global political communities (Held 1995: 272). Likewise of importance is Martin Albrow's (1996) concept of performative citizenship which is realized in everyday

practices and focused on the future of the globe. Gerard Delanty (2002: 169) introduces the idea of 'community beyond unity' in order to describe the relevance of discourse for the relationship amongst citizens. These extensions of political frameworks and ideas of citizenship lead to social connections beyond the nation-state and transnational political interdependencies. However, there is the danger that 'universal' conceptions of citizenship become too diffuse. Hence, it is important to apply the ideas of transnational and non-institutional political arenas to precise and tangible contexts. Here, Hermann van Gunsteren's outline of neo-republican citizenship that regards the tension between a rigid and a boundless framework is highly relevant: 'Wisdom and effectiveness lie somewhere between overreaching and exclusiveness, but no one knows exactly where' (Gunsteren 1998: 91). With his citizenship concept van Gunsteren rejects both ideas of global or universal citizenship and notions of citizenship as membership of homogeneous groups (Gunsteren 1998: 98-99). Rather, he specifies unavoidable connections between heterogeneous actors due to shared physical or symbolical spaces and systematic interdependencies on national or transnational levels (Gunsteren 1998: 50-68).[4] This approach can be fruitful for debating consumer citizenship by linking it to Iris Young's (Young 2003, 2006) social connection model of responsibility, which provides a basis for the concretion of reference frameworks within the market sphere. Young acts on the assumption that market actors are structurally connected through social processes from which she deduces not only a moral but rather a political responsibility: 'The 'social connection model' of responsibility says that all agents who contribute by their actions to the structural processes that produce injustice have responsibilities to work to remedy these injustices' (Young 2006: 102-103). Hence, Young turns away from state-centred models which tie ascription of responsibility and processes of inclusion to political institutions, as well as from cosmopolitan-utilitarian models, because she considers basal humanitarian principles insufficient for creating structural justice. Following Charles Beitz und Onora O'Neill, she argues that structures of power and politics are not restricted to governmental regulation but may also emerge in the course of economic globalization:

'[…] many structural processes do not recognize national boundaries, and they often produce more widespread and long-term harms than do particular actions or policies. The basis of political responsibility lies not in membership in a political community governed by a common set of laws and regulatory institutions, but rather in social and economic connection. Laws and regulatory institutions are less a basis for political responsibility than a means of discharging it' (Young 2003: 44).

As an example of structural injustice Young refers to the global textile industry and the related interdependencies between corporations, consumers and workers (Young 2006: 107-111). Here, structural injustice becomes apparent as some actors (especially workers) suffer from domination, coercion, and need-deprivation whilst other actors (especially corporations and consumers) benefit from this situation and are able to act in pursuit of their goals and interests (e.g. increase in profits, cheap clothes). For Young, structural injustices can be characterized as complex social interdependencies without a direct relationship between the action of an identifiable person or group and a certain harm (Young 2006: 114-115). However, Young states that individuals bear responsibility for structural injustice as they contribute to the processes that result in unjust outcomes. Hence, *all* actors involved in unjust structures bear responsibility to remedy those structures, i.e. those who have got power or influence over the processes that produce unjust outcomes, those who acquire privilege by virtue of unjust structures, those who have got great interest in structural transformation, and those who are able to organize collective action to address an injustice (Young 2006: 127-130).

A possible reference framework for consumer citizenship can derive from the integration of Young's considerations and van Gunsteren's approach of citizenship. Polities within which consumers could be regarded as citizens are not bound to certain nation states and do not vanish in the indefiniteness of the global market sphere. Rather, they can be located in the context of precise economic interconnectedness and structural interdependencies within transnational production cycles. Against the backdrop of this reference framework, and keeping in mind that citizenship has always been a dynamic category and that reshaping it has mostly been accompanied by debates 'that distribute powers and memberships to some people and not others' (Smith 2002: 114), the idea of consumer citizenship bears empirical value for seizing political spheres of power and contesta-

tion which do not develop along the lines of nation states and political institutions but transnational production cycles. Here, the question arises of how consumers in the role of citizens are able to participate and govern within those market-based transnational political arenas. How do they fulfil their political responsibility and what are their instruments for evoking processes of change?

IV. b) Exercise and Control of Power

The extension of reference frameworks for consumer citizenship brings with it political power structures that can be located outside national or institutional policymaking. Here, the role of consumer citizens is closely related to the political power of multinational corporations. Many authors take the dominant position of corporations as a starting point for outlining the need for political consumerism. For instance, Victoria Baxter (Baxter 2003: 19) regards the shift of power towards corporations as a driving force for relocating questions of the common good into the sphere of consumption. Moreover, corporations are generally addressees of 'consumer votes': 'Consumers use their purchasing power as a kind of vote and thus are capable of successfully scandalising corporate giants like Shell, Nike or Monsanto in collective action' (Baringhorst 2008: 175). However, looking at political interactions between consumers and corporations in the sense of soft governance is not completely separated from reflecting the role political institutions take within those interactions. Political institutions are rather seen as essential for constraining corporate power or enabling the political control that consumers exercise (Bakan 2005, Baxter 2003, Littler 2009, Oliviero/Simmons 2002). In this context, Mads Sorensen (2005: 65-67) points to the danger that legal frameworks, and related mechanisms of policymaking, might lose their impact due to processes of (market) self-regulation. Thereby, he reveals an important limitation for the concept of consumer citizenship. Exercise and control of power within transnational political market arenas have to be approached as the interaction and reciprocal challenge of different actors. In doing so, it is essential to analyse how political power of corporations can be controlled both by consumers acting as citizens and corresponding legal and institutional frameworks. Significant in this regard is the dimension of the public sphere as an instrument of political power and control.

Michael Beetz (2005: 5), for instance, points to the relevance of demonstrating individual actions of consumption in order to visualize the political demands connected to them. Visualization can be realized through collectivizing individual action in boycotts, demonstrations, and publicity generated by mass media. In this sense, Monroe Friedman (2004: 46-47) differentiates between 'marketplace-oriented boycotts' and 'media-oriented boycotts'. Whilst marketplace-oriented boycotts aim at mass-participation for a boycott, media-oriented boycotts try to exert pressure on corporations through media-effective threats of a boycott. In addition, internet-based public spheres are highly relevant for politicizing the role of the consumer. Internet technology can be adopted in order to gain and spread information as well as to build up networks of consumer citizens in order to strengthen the position in relation to corporations (Banet-Weiser/Lapsansky 2008: 1057-1058, Baringhorst 2009: 627, Lamla 2008: 143-144, Zwick et al. 2007). Ingo Schoenheit (Schoenheit 2007: 217) refers to the internet as a new and congenial platform of communication and organisation, while Margaret Scammell states: 'Digital technology is re-writing the rules of the marketplace. It is democratising the information environment, transforming what Kotler calls the 'asymmetry' between sellers and customers' (Scammell 2003: 120). Altogether, public spheres appear essential to support a political dimension of consumption as well as to exert pressure on corporations. However, this mode of political power and regulation is not applicable for all contexts as not all corporations are sensitive to public pressure. Hence, the potential of consumer citizens to enforce social and political norms on corporations varies. Action repertoires of soft governance applied by consumer citizens are especially efficient when addressing big brands, consumer products companies, companies that rely on communicative differentiation due to homogeneous products, and corporations that face high need for legitimation (e.g. the pharmaceutical industry or oil companies). Moreover, the power of consumer citizens depends on the accessibility of information – depending on corresponding legislation – as well as the possibilities to make this information public. In this sense, Lance Bennett points to the importance of connecting political consumerism to visible brand repertoires:

'[…] [H]ooking political messages to brands and lifestyle symbols makes it easier to get media coverage and public attention for messages that would be hard to transmit otherwise to audiences that are not receptive to ideologies or radical political messages' (Bennett 2003: 147).

Therefore, transferring the idea of citizenship to consumers is not only subject to conceptual challenges but also to limitations of empirical applicability. The performative character of consumer citizenship bears consequences for the concept's explanatory scope. Both potentials and limitations of the concept with regard to the exertion and control of power will be summarized in the final part of this article.

V. Conclusion

The concept of consumer citizenship carries the potential to analyse and systematize political power structures and related modes of soft governance within transnational market spheres. Based upon a dynamic understanding of citizenship and a framework that takes account of precise economic interconnectedness and structural interdependencies within transnational production cycles, the idea of consumer citizenship can contribute to conceptualizing exertion and control of power beyond the nation state and traditional political institutions. However, one has to take into account that the political influence of consumer citizens heavily relies on the power of communication and of the public sphere. Possibilities for imposing social and political norms for market arenas depend on the corporations' need for reputation and public legitimation, as mobilization and action repertoires of consumer citizens are linked to the public scandalization of certain misbehaviour.

Moreover, the role of consumers within processes of soft governance has to be considered against the backdrop of the high expectations that might be related to that role. Above all, it is arguable if consumers are able to fulfil control functions based on considerations concerning the common good. Bearing in mind that consumer citizenship does not only imply the citizen's commitment towards the polity but also the consumer's interest into a 'good bargain', it appears necessary to consider complex motives that also comprise private interests. In doing so, one can draw upon Michele Micheletti distinction of a *public virtue tradition of politics* and a *private virtue tradition of politics* (Micheletti 2003: 19-21). Micheletti mentions two forms of political consumerism: one that depends on a deep political motivation, and one that starts from individual interests but may also initiate comprehensive political changes. Although political motivation and virtue-based political consumerism can be regarded as decisive for long-term and structural changes, private interests can likewise be considered as a starting point for the exertion of political power. There is a lower threshold of engagement that is based upon the individual need for safe or healthy products. In addition, self-oriented and other-oriented motives can be closely connected, just as private interests may spill over to considerations of the common good.

Altogether the question remains as to what extent corporations' need for reputation and legitimation as well as consumers' mixed motives are able to initiate social change and to establish a new dimension of citizenship. Political regulation by mobilized consumers that exert pressure on corporations is not sufficient for enabling structural transformation. Rather, changes need to go beyond preventing a violation of norms committed by single global players. Consumers in a citizen role who are able to exert power and to enforce collective norms for political market arenas rely on specific context factors but are also dependent on political institutions on a national or transnational level. Legal frameworks remain essential for a democratic understanding of citizenship. In this sense, Matthew Amengual points to the indispensable linkage of public and private regulation:

'Private and state regulators implement similar policies in different ways, at times making up for one another's failures and, in other cases, unwittingly supporting one another's efforts. In their co-production of regulation, the comparative advantages of private and state actors make their respective inputs non-substitutable […]' (Amengual 2010: 406).

Despite new forms of political organisation, soft governance to a certain extent remains dependent on the decisions of political institutions and the frameworks of democratic policies. Hence, information rights and report-

ing commitments are determining factors for the political power of consumers. They ensure that the politicization of market arenas is not limited to moral struggles of interpretation. However, the norms discussed between political consumers and corporations shape political frameworks, even though they are not part of the political decision-making process but of the prior level of articulation. Just as practices of consumption are structured by institutional frameworks, consumers affect these frameworks by their practices. This is why the limits of transferring notions of citizenship to consumers do not generally conflict with the concept of consumer citizenship. Rather, they illustrate the necessity for a differentiated analysis of the concept that takes into account the duality of a need for and a loss of institutional regulative power.

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[1] 'Consumers participate in creating the societies of which they are a part by their purchases, just as they may influence their environments by their votes in political elections' (Dickinson/Carsky 2005: 25).

[2] The term *boycott* describes conscious decisions against certain products or brands whereas the term *buycott* means conscious decisions for certain products (e.g. regional food) or brands (e.g. the TransFair label).

[3] Kymlicka und Norman cite the US Supreme Court.

[4] Here, van Gunsteren refers to a *community of fate*: 'A community of fate obtains when people are connected in ways they cannot avoid – bodily (or in symbolic space that works as directly as bodily presence) and also systematically (for instance, through environmental connections). The community of fate is a 'given' in the sense that we cannot avoid it. But it only appears and is only experienced by way of particular cultural interpretation' (Gunsteren 1998: 62).