TWO PICTURES OF NON-CONSUMERISM IN THE LIFE OF FREEGANS

KATEŘINA LOIDOVÁ

Abstract: The growing consumerism has its opponents. Among these are environmental activists within the freegan subculture. The goal of the study is to describe how freegans construct and practice non-consumerism. The qualitative research on the freegan subculture was conducted in Brno, the Czech Republic. Two main categories were identified. Each category is conceptualized as a “picture of non-consumerism”, showing how freegans construct and practice non-consumerism. “Individual modesty” is an inward non-consumerist strategy, aimed at the individual life careers of the subculture members, while “agents of social change” is an outward strategy, aimed at the general public and endeavouring to reduce consumerism in society.

Key words: dumpster diving; environmental activism; freegans; non-consumerism; subcultures

Introduction

Today’s western society is usually labelled consumerist. In this context, the word consumer is used in a judgemental sense to mean excessive consumption (Librová, 2003). In distinguishing between degrees of consumption, Lipovetsky (2007) uses the term hyper-consumption. A consumer or hyper-consumer society is one which the dynamic is shopping and the consumption of environmentally harmful items. As Fromm says, “Consumption is rampant today, not for maintenance but for shopping, which becomes shopping for wastage.” (Fromm, 1976, p. 60)

Environmental harmfulness of consumerism lies in its ecological consequences and in the fact that consumption levels in consumerist societies keep rising. The richer a society is, the greater the desire to consume. The more we consume, the more we want to consume (Lipovetsky, 2005). This material excess is tightly connected to the ecological pressure it creates, and has a visible impact on nature.

Non-consumerism was established in response to consumerism, and can be defined as contingent unity composed of a broad set of existing social movements and their discourses, which range from religion and traditional groups to ecologist, labour and anti-globalization activists and cultural vanguards (Foucault, 2002). Non-consumerist attitudes come in various forms and have, to a certain extent, become a trend and fashion (Choi, 2011). The
environmentally friendly way of life that results from such an attitude also takes various forms and varies greatly in radicality and consistency (Librová, 1994; 2003; 2016). This study focuses on the emergence of non-consumerism in the freegan subculture.

**Freegans**

Freegans can be defined as individuals who employ strategies for living based on limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumption of resources (Thomas, 2010). Freeganism is a part of the DIY1 and punk scene that fed into many cultural lifestyles (Guerra, 2017). Freegan lifestyles differ greatly depending on the individual and so represent a postmodern subculture rather than a single coherent attitude.

Postmodern subcultures originated around the late 1990s. Their members do not come from the same class, the subculture is not characterized by a single musical style, and nor does it represent a reaction to capitalist society, as was the case with traditional subcultures (cf. Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003). Identities in postmodern subcultures are not predetermined, but “constructed and reshaped by everyday life, clothing and cultural activities” (Evans in Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003, p. 11). Freegans, as members of a postmodern subculture, have fragmented, individualistic, and stylistic identifications. They have a range of identities and their lifestyles are not homogeneous (cf. Muggleton, 2000).

The main symbol of freeganism is dumpster diving, obtaining items from dumpsters for consumption, especially food (Eikenberry & Smith 2005). By engaging in dumpster diving freegans reject the commodification of food by refusing to pay for it and consuming food that is almost rotten (Gross, 2009).

The cradle of freeganism is New York. In the late 1980s a few alternative activists attempted to distinguish themselves in opposition to the spendthrift system. Living “for free” soon began to spread to other countries and across social classes. Participants in freeganism include high-school teachers, corporate lawyers, workers, squatters, college students, freelance employees, bike messengers and retirees (Ernst, 2010). Freegans represent a reaction to both food wastage and starvation in the world. This can best be seen in the taking of discarded food for personal use or for those in social need (Edwards & Mercer, 2012). However, what is important is that the motivation for this life strategy is not primarily found in poverty or a focus on saving money.

The freegan lifestyle is a complex manifestation of cultural resistance (Pentina & Amos, 2011). It is based not only on utilizing waste but on the intention to participate minimally in the capitalist economy. The means of achieving this include reducing waste, foraging freely growing plants, bartering goods instead of buying them for money, using old things such as second-hand clothing, recycling and following an economical lifestyle. Non-consumption of meat or animal products generally have a wide-ranging environmental impact on the planet. Therefore vegetarianism or more often veganism is another key characteristic of freegans. Freegans may be understood as environmental activists whose prevailing concern is anti-

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1 DIY refers to Do it yourself culture.
consumerism (Edwards & Mercer 2007) and whose worldviews are therefore shaped by their involvement in other social movements and activist networks (Barnard, 2016).

Methodology

The goal of this empirical study is to describe how a group of Czech freegans construct and practice non-consumerism. Qualitative research seems the most suitable methodology. Data were collected from the freegan subculture in Brno, the Czech Republic. The research sample was obtained through snowballing and consisted of 15 participants who defined themselves as freegans pursuing freeganist practices and interacting with other freegans. They all belonged to the Brno freegan community.

The informants were aged between 21 and 39 years. All had secondary or tertiary education, mainly secondary, and two were postgraduate students. As for gender, the sample consisted of 7 women and 8 men. In my role as researcher, I was an outsider with no prior close knowledge of the group (Griffith, 1998).

The main method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with all 15 freegans. The interview questions were derived from the research goals, published studies about freegans and observations of freegan practices within Brno subculture. The average length of interview was 90 minutes. The researcher selected informants for interviews during the observations and by asking the first informant to suggest who should be interviewed next, and then asking the second informant to pick the third interviewee and so forth. The snowball sampling used in this study is the consecutive method of purposeful sampling (Sadler et al., 2010). Materials produced by the freegans were also analysed (webpages, blogs, leaflets). I also followed freegan activities in both public and private spaces such as dumpster diving, collective cooking of vegan meals in private flats, street events, meetings in the basement of a house and kept field notes.

The qualitative data analysis was based on open coding, focusing on identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena (Charmaz, 2006). Constant comparison and analytical induction method was used within the analysis (Boeije, 2009). This study has limitations that pertain to qualitative research generally. The research results apply to this particular sample and cannot be generalized. However, the insights might inspire international research as they may be relevant for different cultural contexts.

Research results

The results are in the form of a description of the two main categories that emerged inductively from the research. Each category was conceptualized as a “picture of non-consumerism”, depicting how freegans construct non-consumerism in terms of attitudes and practices.

Picture One: Individual modesty

Individual modesty represents the freegans’ non-consumerism in relation to mainstream society, which they consider to be consumerist. The freegan’s criticism is mainly targeted
at the dominant consumerist culture and wastage of products and resources. They therefore
strive to maintain individual lifestyles that are distinct from consumerist ones. This picture
depicts an “inward” non-consumerist strategy focused on the individual’s lifestyle. One of
the freegans, Olina, characterizes mainstream society as follows:

The basic value is to have, to consume, as much as possible, to own... And that’s what annoys
me, you know, family values are not really respected today. Basically, these relations are not
respected and it’s all about money. And it really annoys me that money determines everything.
Let’s say Christmas is coming. It’s so important for people ‘to make a big thing of Christmas’.
They fall into debt because of it, they buy such a heap of shit. Three quarters of this shit is then
thrown away. And that’s it, nothing else matters, just gorge yourself like hell, sit in front of the
telly, gaze at the ads... (Olina)

The consumerist nature of today’s society is the corollary of the one envisioned by
freegan subculture as defined by them. Yet all those who criticize consumerism live in and
to a certain extent participate in the consumerist system. The idea of not participating in
the conventional system of production and consumption is utopian even for freegans. The
interviews show that the interviewees are freegans, but only to a certain extent. Not all the
necessary food can be obtained from waste and squatting opportunities are limited in the
Czech Republic. So the freegans’ non-consumerism may be better described as a lifestyle of
“individual modesty”. However, the motivation to pursue freeganism is multidimensional.
Non-consumerism and environmental values are accompanied by the pragmatic choice to
spend more of their free time engaging in limited consumption. The feeling that they are
revolting against the system is enjoyable too:

Generally, to put it in vulgar terms, I try to fuck the system this way. That makes me really
satisfied. I’m glad if I can dodge it somehow. (Marek)

The freegans’ non-consumerism encompasses both abstinence from consumption
and engagement in forms of consumption that signify the opposite of consumption. While freegans reject new clothes or cars, some consider travelling (even by plane),
festival tickets or good wine to be acceptable forms of consumption. The freegans’
austerity is mainly aimed at goods. Their material consumerism is partly replaced by the
consumption of experiences within the freegan subculture. Heath and Potter (2005) point
out that consumerism should not just be about its material and tangible meaning, the greedy
pursuance of wealth, but also about the excitement of new, unusual impressions. Consumers
are primarily collectors of delight (Bauman, 1998). From this point of view, freegans cannot
be labelled non-consumerist. The point is not whether or not certain things are consumed,
because non-consumerists never fully disengage from consumer behaviour (Portwood-Stacer,
2012). It is about criticizing what the others consume. It is about criticizing the consumerism
in mainstream society, but not rejecting consumption entirely, as is evident in Libor’s
statement:

Certainly it’s in opposition to wasting things. It’s more about thinking for yourself, which
means being critical about things I don’t agree with. I try not to spend money on rubbish, but
I’m not trying to live entirely without money. (Libor)
The criticism of mainstream consumption leads to change in the freegans’ individual lifestyles. Zdena talks about her life before she encountered freeganism:

*Before, I generally wanted everything to be new; I had this incredible desire to shop. When I had money, I was keen on fashion and stuff like that. Now I hardly buy anything. Now it seems ridiculous to me.* (Zdena)

These days Zdena usually gets her clothes from second-hand shops. Of course freegans do not just give up shopping for clothes; they try to reduce their consumption of consumerist items either by not using them at all or by acquiring them second-hand. Jiří describes his freeganist approach as follows:

*If I need something, I just ask my friends whether they have it. Or people I know, who consume much more than me and I know they might have an old one because they could have bought a new one to replace it. You can very easily get a mobile phone this way. If your mobile phone stops working, you just contact 10 or 20 people and half of them will say they've got an old mobile at home.* (Jiří)

Therefore, what is characteristic about the freegans’ non-consumerism is not the gap between them and consumerist society but their “individual modesty” within that society. In their life careers freegans are not seeking solutions to the environmental crisis or trying to transform society, they are looking for alternatives through their individual forms of consumption.

The most significant alternatives to consumption are veganism and dumpster diving. Freegans see the meat industry as symbolic of excessive consumption in two ways – environmentally and ethically. Hynek points out the environmental reasoning:

*Behind today's vast consumption of meat lies the vast production of animal feed, which takes up huge areas of land and creates huge amounts of waste. The pharmaceutical industry is involved with its antibiotics and so on, and then processing all the waste such as excrement and urine is difficult and does a lot of damage to the Earth ...* (Hynek)

Freegans also warn of the global impact of factory farming:

*Our immense obsession with meat, which has increased greatly in the last thirty or forty years, the incredible industrial farms and so on, that's what people in the poorer parts of the continent, where resources are disappearing, pay for.* (Petr)

At the core of this criticism is the extent of meat consumption. It has risen dramatically in industrial and developing countries. At first, the idea of veganism appears to be connected to these environmental reasons. Yet freegans are quick to produce ethical reasons:

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2 The rise in global meat consumption is exerting growing pressure on the environment in various ways, most notably in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, nitrogen pollution and the destruction of natural ecosystems such as in the Amazon Basin, where 70% of deforested land is now under pasture (Harris, 2012).
The whole system around meat and around this perception of meat... or animals, because most people just eat meat and don’t realize there are living beings behind it, which someone is exploiting. (Lucka)

This approach leads to vegetarianism, or veganism, which many freegans see as an ideal to strive towards. Petr assesses his progression from vegetarianism to veganism as follows:

I was a vegetarian for four years and at that time I didn’t know what animals were exposed to in the milk industry. I mean, the way they feed them with all kinds of antibiotics and steroids. For a cow to have milk it has to be in calf all the time. And then, the calf is taken away, usually killed immediately. So I found out that when I drink milk I’ve actually got blood on my hands. And I’m just contributing to this kind of slavery. (Petr)

Restained consumption of animal products is predicated on the idea that the industrial handling of animals treats animals as mere things. Other freegans think that society invents immense differences between animals, referring to the dominant cultural custom of labelling some animals pets and others food. Eliška illustrates this by describing an event she co-organized relating to the Czech tradition of killing carp at Christmas:

Here we wanted to make it clear that we consider animals equal and don’t make distinctions between them in the sense that some are bigger, fatter, uglier, some are more domesticated and some, such as carp, make no sound. We think that if carp made noises, the Christmas carp terror wouldn’t take place in the streets. Nobody would be able to stand it if they actually cried out. (Eliška)

This construction means that our society regards beef differently from dog meat, for instance. Joy (2010) explores this stereotype from a socio-psychological point of view. She thinks the fact that dog meat evokes a different mental, emotional and behavioural reaction from meat for human consumption is down to the ideology of carnism. Carnism is an ideology that promotes the consumption of meat. It is the dominant ideology, so meat consumers never question why they consume it. They see the consumption of meat as a given. Vegetarianism differs from this standard and so has to be substantiated (DeMello, 2012). Carnism is not just an individual ethical code but is considered to be an irreversible and deeply rooted ideological system in mainstream society (Joy, 2010). Thus, freegans come into collision with the common cultural practice that categorizes beings as “those we eat and those we do not”.

An environmental lifestyle is not just about limiting meat consumption but also the management of the waste inevitably produced. Recycling is therefore important to freegans. Recycling is relevant where products can be used again or are thrown out prematurely. For freegans, recycling starts with very careful waste separation:

OK, it’s totally normal that if there’s a communal paper bin I’ll separate the paper. And I’ll separate anything you can think of, say paper tea bags, you know. Why wouldn’t I put it there? Why would I put that small piece of paper into the mixed waste if I can separate it so easily. (Olina)

Recycling is not just environmental. It is also about reducing participation in the system of production and consumption, which also means that the capitalist economy is subject to criticism by some freegans (Thomas, 2010). For Martin, recycling is:
… a non-consumerist approach to life and… a fight against capitalism. I don’t think I’ll kill capitalism by collecting things from waste bins, I don’t think that, but I don’t contribute to its growth in a big way. (Martin)

Consumerism and capitalism are closely connected. When learning to live in a capitalist regime we also learn to accept consumerism as a natural feature (Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012). Freegans do this and look for ways to minimize their participation in the capitalist economy. One is to use waste instead of going shopping, typically the waste from bins, called dumpster diving. Freegans dumpster-dive mainly in fruit and vegetable dumpsters at large shopping centres. Most people are not aware of the existence of these dumpsters and the unspoiled food inside them. As Lucka says:

*At first people think it’s a disgusting bin. But it has clean vegetables and fruit in it.* (Lucka)

These dumpsters are not municipal waste bins but waste-specific bins, usually found at large shopping centres, for fruit and vegetables for example. Much of this produce will have been discarded prematurely so may be fresher than the fruit and vegetables on the shelves. Dumpster divers do not use damaged or rotten food. Nevertheless, freegans face frequent prejudice from the general public.

They say that they need to dispel the myth that using waste is dirty. A myth can be anything based on a collective idea. Myth takes an already constituted sign and turns it into a signifier and captures relations between language and power (Barthes, 1972). The myth of dirt as related to waste is rooted strongly in our society. Freegans have had to go about redefining what dirty means in the context of waste. Martin describes his first freegan contact with waste (fruit in a hypermarket dumpster) as follows:

*The first thing I found was a huge quantity of peaches, beautiful peaches in punnets, so I took them out totally enthusiastic and then I washed them like crazy because that’s what you do in your first contact with that kind of waste. Only later do you realize it’s nothing*… (Martin)

Dispelling the dirty myth is a behavioural strategy which freegans must go through. The dirty myth does not relate to food only, but to everything that has been abandoned. There has been a gradual change in how freegans perceive waste. Most people consider waste as something you throw into a waste bin of some kind. The item that becomes waste through this action is, all of a sudden, perceived as unclean. The definition of what is clean or unclean changes within seconds. For freegans, throwing something out does not mean labelling it waste, unusable or even untouchable waste. They show us that what has been thrown out is not always rotten. They use media to do this, as publicizing waste (particularly food in hypermarket dumpsters) directly challenges generally held ideas about waste and draws attention to the enormous wastage of food.

Freegans think about waste and seek to ensure it is used in the best possible way. Their relationship to waste helps them to do this. While the majority population considers waste to be dirty, freegans have a closer relation to it:

*I’ve overcome my apprehension of waste, the feeling that once I’ve thrown something out it becomes disgusting and I wouldn’t touch it anymore, so I’m better able to handle waste now, yes.* (Olina)
A similar phenomenon was identified by Nguyen, Chen and Mukherjee (2014), who wrote about reverse stigma in relation to freegans’ use of waste. They suggest that mainstream consumers regard freeganism as dirty. Freegans, however, seek to turning this stigma into a dominant culture. The use of waste is often symbolic, which is partly how the media represent it. Nevertheless, it is necessary to realize that it is part of a comprehensive environmental strategy involving the criticism of mainstream consumption and a quest for “individual modesty”.

**Picture two: Agents of change**

The second picture shows a non-consumerist strategy directed “outwards” and representing freegan efforts to decrease consumption or change the nature of consumption among the general public. Freegans criticize consumerist society and endeavour to lead the majority population to adopt a less consumerist style of life. Šimon describes this specific strategy for transforming consumption in society as a whole, not just in the freegan subculture:

*We try to look for alternatives to certain routine mechanisms that don’t work. For example, the Czech Republic has the highest number of hypermarkets in Europe. We say no, we should look for an alternative to this kind of development, and it’s the retail kind of development. So for any problem we identify in society we always offer a solution. But I say it’s always an alternative in the sense of the principles society adheres to.* (Šimon)

In fact, this picture shows the strategy for spreading “individual modesty” in mainstream society. The main topics disseminated to the public are veganism and waste. An example of how they promote veganism is the outdoor movies shown by the freegans in Brno. Earthlings is one such movie, in which hidden cameras were used to show the practices of the largest industries in the world which rely entirely on animals for profit. A group of freegans I observed showed the movie every Wednesday at four o’clock in the centre of Brno. A TV was connected up to an electrical generator and the freegans answered questions from passers-by and shared out animal rights leaflets. This type of promotion attracts public attention and shows freegans that street initiatives make sense. Petr describes his experience of the reactions to Earthlings:

*There were some older people there, a couple of about fifty, who stopped and watched it and all of a sudden said: That’s awful, is it true? They’d never heard about it. For us it was incredible that they hadn’t heard about it. But then they watch TV at home and they never come into contact with these circles of people, where they can get a leaflet about what happens in the world. And these people, who were over fifty, they started to ask questions and we recommended the film to them and where they could find it. And we gave them some leaflets and they went away. That’s the people we do it for.* (Petr)

The film is clearly meant not only to inform but also to shock. Thus it affects the audience both cognitively and affectively; this is where freegans find the potential for behavioural change in mainstream society:

*Maybe you can provoke something by shocking people around you, some kind of motion.* (Jiří)
Waste is also an important topic promoted to the public:

*Excessive consumption, wastage. These things are related to freeganism. And that’s what we try to warn people about.* (Hynek)

Freegans therefore disseminate information encouraging the general public to adopt veganism and waste reduction. They justify this by citing lack of awareness about this form of consumption in mainstream public:

*There are people who will remain shut up in the carnist world their whole life, influenced by the system the mainstream pumps into them. They’ll never absorb information other than what the mainstream provides. And they’ll never get out of their pigeonhole and they’ll never even look out of it. That’s also why for these people I would... we try to give them this information. Perhaps some things will gain acceptance.* (Petr)

They legitimize the dissemination of information on environmental and ethical terms. Carnism and waste are manifestations of consumption in mainstream society. There is therefore a non-consumerist strategy directed “outwards” at reducing meat consumption and waste production through freegan activities in public space.

Freegans are able to be agents of this social change as they spend less time in employment. Petr describes the contrast between the life career of a freegan and the mainstream population as follows:

*I’ve not achieved the goals in life that the system had planned for me. I’ve not finished my studies, I’ve got no sound employment with a great salary, so I’ve realized myself elsewhere. I consider becoming a vegan my biggest achievement in life.* (Petr)

The fact that freegans do not always have full-time jobs does not mean they do not work. They frequently work as volunteers or activists in issues similar to freeganism, but not for a salary. In the Czech Republic, freegans become involved in organizations supporting animal rights, social justice, fair trade, and so on. Two of the organizations most often mentioned by the freegans during the research were *Kolektiv pro zvířata* [*Collective for Animals*] and *Food Not Bombs*. *Collective for Animals* is a non-formal organization for freegans and other members that defines itself as a “Brno-based group promoting a non-consumerist lifestyle free from cruelty to animals, supporting veganism, respect for nature, recycling, freeganism, alternatives to capitalism and solidarity with the disadvantaged” (http://kolektivprozvíratu.blogspot.cz). They help distribute leaflets promoting veganism and highlighting various forms of animal cruelty.

While *Collective for Animals* is a small Brno-based organization, *Food Not Bombs* (FNB) is a global initiative the freegans are active in. FNB uses the excess food to prepare free vegetarian food for destitute people. Established in 1980 during a protest by a group of friends against a nuclear power plant in Massachusetts (Edwards & Mercer 2007), FNB has political roots. Most of FNB’s time and activities are devoted to obtaining free food from various sources: big storage facilities, health food shops, bakeries and other places where, for various reasons, it cannot be sold (http://food-not-bombs.cz/). Jitka describes FNB as follows:

*It’s just a kind of protest against spending money on weapons.* (Jitka)
Freegans consider the activities of these organizations to be meaningful, unlike some jobs:

*I just do things which I think make sense. In my opinion, at least fifty per cent of people my age can’t say this. For example, I’ve got a friend who works for IBM. When you talk to these people for a while, you find out they don’t know what they’re doing, what it’s good for. Sure, I do this, I enter this or that in Excel, but what it’s good for in reality they don’t know.* (Jitka)

Freegans do not regard these activities as a form of leisure or a source of money but as a kind of fulfilment. Within these organizations and individually, freegans are active in the public space as agents of social change. This activity is depicted here as another picture of non-consumerism within the “agents of social change” freegan subculture.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Drawing on the research, I have described two pictures of non-consumerism in the Brno-based freegan subculture: the picture of individual modesty and the picture of agents of social change. The picture of individual modesty represents a non-consumerist strategy that is aimed inwards, at the individual life careers of the members of the subculture, while the picture of agents of social change shows a strategy that is aimed outwards, at the general public, as an endeavour to reduce consumerism in society.

The freegans’ individual modesty is not primarily driven by material poverty, but by their own decisions rooted in deep psychological structures, as Librová (1994) described in her research on voluntary modesty. However, freegans are not excluded from the consumerist system, but strive for a lifestyle of individual modesty within it. The freegan lifestyle manifests itself mainly in reduced consumption, recycling, veganism and dumpster diving. Freegans consider this lifestyle to be environmentally friendly and ethical. However, researchers have found that consumers often behave inconsistently, considering environmental issues in one context of consumption but not in others (Polonsky et al., 2014). Given that all consumption activities (acquisition, use and disposal) have an environmental impact, it is important to look at broader changes in consumer behaviour rather than focus on individual purchases. There were inconsistencies in the freegans’ descriptions. They criticized particular products. Their criticism of consumerism therefore tended not to be criticism of consumption per se but of the consumption of specific products. To a certain extent, criticism of consumerism is criticism of what other people buy. Therefore it cannot be said that freegans are not consumers merely that their form of consumption differs from that of the mainstream population. Indeed, consumption does not apply to material goods only. As Baudrillard (1997) suggests, anything may become an object of consumption. In Fromm’s concept even rituals, good deeds, knowledge or ideas may become objects of consumption (Fromm, 1976). Among freegans, their consumption is oriented to non-material goods, in particular the feeling of freedom they associate with this lifestyle. Hence they live in a kind of reverse luxury.

As the research results show, freegans’ motivation lies not only in their efforts to express their own “consumption” preferences but also in their aim to transform society in line with the social and environmental values bound up with their subculture. The picture of agents
of social change therefore illustrates freegans’ attempts to inspire and educate the majority in the hope they will adopt a thriftier lifestyle. This can be interpreted through the metaphor of political theatre. Barnard (2011) offers an unusual view of dumpster diving, described as a parallel to Goffman’s dramaturgical theory (Goffman, 1959) as the political theatre of waste. Not only do freegans confront their neighbourhood with leaflets and information, they also present real waste, and in consumerist society this often includes intact products. This “theatre” is an attempt to influence passers-by. At the same time, the goal is to encourage other persons not to adopt freeganism directly but to adopt a lifestyle that reflects selected elements of the freegan philosophy.

Freegans evince signs of a postmodern subculture, including having different lifestyles, attitudes and participating in different organizations. Nevertheless, freegans represent a reaction to consumerist society and illustrate an environmental strategy that criticizes extensive consumption, yet they exist on the basis of what consumption provides. If society did not produce a considerable amount of waste, freeganism would be very limited. The two pictures of freegan non-consumerism represent forms of environmental behaviour defined by the freegan subculture. When separated, we see that these forms of behaviour are not necessarily practised by freegans only. Many people who criticize the extent of consumption are vegans, separate waste or take part in environmental activism, but they are not freegans. Together, though, they exhibit these characteristics and other signs of freeganism. This research underlines that the freegans’ lifestyle focuses not only on individual ethics, but also on mainstream society in an effort to make society more frugal. This study presents the puzzle of an alternative structure and volume of consumption within consumerist society, which applies to both the individual careers of freegans and the potentialities for the majority population.

Freegans are activists reacting to the current often mentioned social, economic and environmental crisis, to which they offer radical alternatives (Chatterton & Pickeril, 2010). Freegans link these alternatives with environmental and, hence, political questions. Activism is not simply having an abstract understanding of the problem; it is the ability to get involved. It is a process of transforming the world in which the personality is transformed as well (Roth, 2010). Activism is therefore a strategy that affects the public, while transforming the freegans themselves. It is here that the two pictures of non-consumerism overlap.

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Department of Education
Faculty of Education, Masaryk University
Poříčí 31
63900 Brno
Czech Republic
Email: lojdova@ped.muni.cz