



Reconstituting the Consumer in EU Law and Policy: Towards a More Multi-dimensional Approach

ACES Conference
30-31 August, 2022
University of Amsterdam

Preliminary Programme

The EU's notion of the consumer as a rational economic actor and as a legal/political instrument to build, support, and expand the internal market has long been criticized for its limited attention to the social and political dimension of consumption. Various calls to protect the most vulnerable consumers in digital markets and financial services have pushed the EU Commission to propose a New Deal for Consumers in 2018 and to engage in a thorough review of the EU's regulatory framework. The urgency of climate change and the adoption of the European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan have further induced the Commission to re-state the role of consumers as responsible agents in the green transition as part of its EU consumer policy revision. However, these shifts in EU law and policy stay guided by the same one-dimensional view of the consumer as needing additional protection and empowerment and may thus reinforce entrenched dichotomies between consumer weakness and agency.

This conference is stimulated by the observation that consumer roles do not fit easily into simple dichotomies between weak/passive and active/confident actors, nor can changing consumer practices in the face of digitization and the environmental crisis be captured by a mono-dimensional and mono-disciplinary perspective. Consumers today enter into more frequent and technologically more complex transactions than in the period when the current EU consumer law and policy was developed. However, have consumers become more conscious of the negative externalities of their consumption choices and are they willing to buy sustainable,

fair trade or energy efficient products and services in order to minimize the environmental and social impact of their purchases? As consumer choices are becoming ethically and politically more complex, discussions emerge on how to address and engage consumers not only as economic actors but also as responsible citizens. At the same time, these developments challenge established legal definitions and social identities of the consumer, as well as policy frames that differently mobilize consumer actions and behaviour.

The conference will examine these challenges to current EU law and policy posed by the consumers' changing roles in the marketplace and society. It will consider how the underlying concept of the consumer within EU law and policy can be recast in a more inclusive and multidimensional direction. Drawing on multiple disciplines, including sociology, history, philosophy, political science and law and economics, speakers will discuss various policy agendas that mobilize different concepts relating to the consumer, social practice theory, consumer citizenship, digital sovereignty, consumer social responsibility and consumer empowerment. They will address a variety of practical problems concerning emerging consumer behaviour, needs, and interests, and will offer suggestions about how the notion of the consumer in EU law and policy can be reshaped to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Day 1, 30 August:

14.00-16.00 Historical perspective on Consumerism and EU Integration

Moderator: Giacomo Tagiuri, University of Amsterdam (ACELG)

Koen van Zon, Utrecht University

Brigitte Leucht, University of Portsmouth

16.00-18.00 Paradigm Shifts in Consumer Law and Policy

Moderator: Kati Cseres, University of Amsterdam (ACELG)

Luke Herrine, University of Alabama School of Law

Adrian Kuenzler, University of Zurich

Giacomo Tagiuri, UvA, ACELG

18:00-20.00 Speakers Dinner

Day 2, 31 August:

10.00-12.00 The consumer and Sustainability

Moderator: Yannick van den Berg, University of Amsterdam (ACELG) (ACT)

Carl Dalhammer, Lund University

Evelyn Terryn, Leuven University

Jenny Rinkinen, University of Helsinki

13.15-14.00 Lunch

14.00-16.00 Digitalization, Artificial Intelligence and the consumer

Moderator:

Mateusz Grochowski, Max Planck Institute for Private law Hamburg

Catalina Goanta, Utrecht University

Thomas Poell, University of Amsterdam

16.00-17.30 Roundtable Policy Makers

Moderator: Kati Cseres, University of Amsterdam (ACELG)

René Répási, European Parliament

Marie-Paule Benassi, DG Justice

Edwin van Houten, Autoriteit Consument & Markt, Netherlands

17.30-18.00 Closing and Looking Back to Look Forward