

# From 'I' to 'We': Changing the narrative in Scotland's relationship with consumption

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## SUMMARY

Materialism has become synonymous with debt fuelled, wasteful, unsatisfying consumerism used to build and sustain our identities via what we buy.

This materialism and consumerism has been interwoven with the rise of *the narrative of 'I'*, where individual freedom takes precedence over and above collective experience and responsibility.

The narrative of 'I' has become increasingly dominant as part of wider economic changes in Britain, where there has been a decline in productive exports and a rise in wealth extraction through mass consumption.

Central to the narrative of 'I' has been the role of marketing as a manipulator, where social interactions are to a much greater extent imbued with spending, and status and group membership are defined by what, where, how and with whom we consume. It also helps create and support cycles of consumption by supporting a culture of continual change through product differentiation, regardless of social need or environmental sustainability.

A shift from the narrative of 'I' to 'We' is necessary to establish the precedence of collective experience and responsibility, of shared experience and society, of equality and fairness and sustainability.

The narrative of 'We' already exists in society – studies have shown that having a positive relationship with our families, friends and community, as well as having good health, are the things that matter most to us. The job of government is to re-establish the link between that narrative and our idea of what prosperity is.

Partly this is about changing the language of government, to talk in terms of the social rather than the individual, the citizen rather than consumer, sharing rather than competition, and so on. When talking about business, government should not talk about citizens-as-consumers - a purely market-driven

resource to extract wealth from – but in terms of how business can empower citizens.

Policy recommendations include:

- Make participation more desirable and possible by for example making entry to council sports facilities free, including entry to local authority swimming pools, open up park facilities, encourage sharing equipment through creating 'libraries', exclude shared and community goods from VAT.
- Developing skills through more access to lifelong learning, including a 'national skills database' where experts put on workshops to teach people skills
- Fund participation through subsidising community participation rather than the car and pharmaceutical industry. Make community volunteering tax deductible.
- Reform the role of marketing so it is a facilitator rather than a manipulator. This will involve redefining how it is taught and understood and controlling how it is currently practiced by for example banning marketing and advertising to kids.
- Make the producer pay for the cost of commercial waste rather than local government and introduce a pollution price trading scheme so environmental harm is added on to cost.

New measurements of progress are needed to move from 'I' to 'We' to include more complex measures of how people, practices and spaces work together to create vibrant families and communities. These would include how often people access green space and the number of children who walk/cycle to school.

*The meaning of 'Shop till you drop' has changed, from a glib exhortation about getting out there on the high street and have a day's fun bargain hunting with friends, to a darker meaning.*

## INTRODUCTION

On any given day, the consumer citizens of Scotland can be found out shopping: buying, bargain hunting, seeking out real or imitation brands - *consuming*. We can be found in the homogeneous high streets or upmarket malls, in hotels, pubs, clubs or gyms, indeed across almost every facet of our lives either when physically present or via the veiled anonymity of the internet, we consume. We search for the next pair of shoes, the next 'fashion' sofa, the next 'must have' electronic gadget, a better body or whiter teeth all to be paid off, perhaps in cash, but more likely in "easy" monthly payments or via credit cards at sometimes 34.9% APR.

Encouraged by the free market economics of government policy, the availability of credit and sophisticated marketing and supply chain activities of national and international firms, it can be argued that for many people in Scotland today the dominant mantra for living a successful, prosperous life is consumerism. This consumerism, like all actions, has consequences. We take the example of a pair of shoes to introduce the key themes of this de-consumerisation paper.

The shoes could have been originally designed in Milan, but are likely to have been redesigned in London for the mass market. They could be made from leather from one of the 37.9 million hides produced in India each year, from adhesives and plastic originating from the oil extracted in the Middle East, but cracked and manufactured in the USA. The plastic pellets are then transported to India where they are formed into component parts, then shipped to China for assembly and then finally shipped to a store in Scotland via Singapore and London. These

shoes may be bought as one of 20 pairs owned by the "average" woman in Scotland or the numerous pairs owned by men. They may even be bought, but never worn, something that 90% also admitted to (Mooney, 2011). They may be bought for comfort or practicality, but they will also be worn for their symbolic value - what they say about us - our taste, our imputed wealth and where we belong.

This symbolism is transient, however, and becoming more so as fast fashion<sup>(2)</sup> increases apace. So the shoes that have just been bought become 'old' and 'need' to be replaced much more quickly than before – all in order for us to replenish such statements of self-worth as 'I have made it', 'I fit in' and 'I have good taste'.

All of this comes at a longer term cost - the months and years spent in debt paying it off, the environmental harm of the materials used and produced via expansive linear "dig, use, dump" supply chains. Supply chains which rely on increasingly scarce resources to produce goods which are too poorly made to warrant (or indeed may be designed to constrain) any attempt to repair, rework or recycle.

These issues are not just associated with the purchase of physical goods. We see it with services too. For example, ensuring that we eat at the 'right' restaurant, are seen in the 'right' spa or pub or nightclub. These services also offer us the transient value of cheap symbols and also contribute to debt issues and environmental harm.

Whilst shoes (and most other products and services) give us what marketers describe as functional and symbolic benefits, they can often be a burden. An emotional burden on their owners from worrying about whether they were the right ones to select when there were so many from which to choose. Or a financial burden of the work or the credit needed to pay for them.

The burden is often placed on those with the least resources to shoulder it, people living in poverty who, following a quite natural and very human instinct to fit in, belong and avoid stigma, buy shoes on credit.

(2) Fast fashion refers to the practice of providing low to medium cost fashion items that respond very quickly to trends and, hence, with frequent changes to what is offered. It sees the styles on sale, which used to follow seasons, now replaced on a frequent basis.

Contrary to the populist right wing view of the frivolity and lack of self-control of the purchaser, shoes can represent one simple, yet vital, way to feel part of society and avoiding the marginalizing effect of poverty.

This burden goes beyond the consumer - when the shoes no longer 'say' the right thing or are broken and need repaired, what value do they have? They cost so little - relatively - in monetary terms that it often seems pointless to repair them and is better value (to the consumer at least) to buy new ones instead.

Even if you did want to spend the money on repair, the materials and skill requirement can make this a difficult task. So the shoes might instead be passed on to a charity shop or they may be sold, along with 'old' clothes for 50p a kilogram to a clothes recycler, where they may end up in a developing country's local market, potentially under-cutting the price of the local producers or local stores and deepening the burden faced by people living on low incomes.

The burdens and impacts of hyper-consumerism go further still. The products are made in an economy which takes our income, but puts very little back into our society, while creating status anxiety. It is an economy that is increasingly low-pay and unproductive, but premised on taking from, rather than protecting, the environment.

Many consumption practices contribute to global inequality through iniquitous labour relations. In developing countries, workers are often paid at levels which undermine their ability to prosper, so that those in the developed world can have even more possessions. Our health is undermined too. We eat and drink heavily marketed processed food and drink which, combined with passivity, leads to obesity.

A vicious circle of market stimulated over-consumption emerges: debt leads to having to work long hours; which leads to exhaustion and anxiety; which leads to poor diet and stimulates more over-consumption. Ultimately, consumption traps people in a life that lacks real prosperity - good health, strong community bonds, value, and, as we will explore later, unhappiness.

We must also consider the burden this hyper-consumerism places on the environment. Returning

to the example of shoes, think about the farming required to produce the leather and the oil recovery and chemical process required to make the plastic or the glue or the energy needed to fuel the production process. Hyper consumerism has placed a burden on our environment that it cannot shoulder, contributing to the global food and fresh water shortage experienced by over half of the world's population. It contributes to the loss of habitat, the crisis in environmental pollutants, and - where people struggle to feed themselves - the burden of social unrest and crisis in government.

We are now, thankfully, seeing consumer, government and business action to address the problem, including signs of a small decoupling of economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions. And whilst these signs of resistance and change are most welcome, ultimately we are still using more resources and creating more waste each year, hence, the speed of progress towards sustainability must increase.

The biggest decision we have in our life is how to spend our time whilst we are on this planet. This paper contends that there are better, more fulfilling, less harmful, more dignified and fairer ways of doing this than we currently practice as consumers in Scotland. It is not our place in this paper to make judgments about what specific activities people should or should not participate in. What we are advocating is that more choices are available, so that active citizenship is possible with regard to how we spend our time.

We also contend that the *choice* to go shopping for consumer goods is an illusion, and that the choice *not to shop* is harder, when one considers the pre-eminence given to our role as consumers and to the prevalence of institutions attempting to sell us something. With this pressure removed, we will leave more time, energy and resources for other activities that have been shown consistently to make us happier, healthier and feel more prosperous (Pretty, 2013).

As a policy paper we have been careful not to put the onus on the consumer to change and resist the system which is ultimately set up to encourage and compel consumption. Instead, we focus this paper on government and public policy changes: we believe

that given the appropriate narrative, infrastructure, price, time and symbols for identity development, we can consume to help us live rather than living to consume.

*“The media is constantly saying if you haven't got this, you're not good enough”(1)*

Having set out some of the consequences of consumerism, how did these come about? We argue throughout this paper that over the last 40 years various conditions and actors have led to the creation of a strong narrative of consumption that exists across many parts of life in Scotland. To provide a clearer background, in the *Context* section we examine materialism and consumerism, then, in the *Narrative of Consumption* section we set out the role played by governments and changes to the economic structure of Scotland that spawned this configuration of modern life. This allows us to explore the role of marketing in creating invidious materialism in the *Marketing and Society* section. We will then provide a *Vision* as to how to re-balance Scotland's relationship with the goods we own as part of re-emphasising our connection with families, friends, communities, society, our work, the outdoors and the environment.

This vision is then used to develop a framework for *Policy Recommendations* across a range of areas and for various actors, including various levels of government. It is important to state, however, that this paper and the changes suggested are intertwined with changes espoused in other Common Weal papers. This paper requires support from (and enhances) other work examining the nature of the economy, work and benefits and the structure and funding of local government. These papers also address the key belief underpinning our call to address consumerism - that there are better, more fulfilling, less harmful, more dignified and fairer ways of living in Scotland.

## CONTEXT

### Materialism

The term *materialism* and the notion of having materialist values have become part of the narrative used for describing modern life in both developed (and now developing) countries. Materialism is a paradoxical term, however, as it does not refer to the actual material that 'stuff' is made of, instead it refers to the symbolic meanings we attribute to it. We contend here that materialism is a misnomer because in our material culture, the objects themselves have little functional value compared to their symbolic importance, but their production and disposal is central to the damage to the environment.

Four key types of materialism can be identified:

- **Romantic materialism** is probably best expressed through the belief that more stuff can make us happy and as such it represents a focus on the romance of the idea rather than on the stuff itself.
- **Expressive materialism** can be a positive relationship and exists where we relate more to what we want to do with the stuff than on its intrinsic properties. For example, when we purchase a musical instrument to express ourselves, thus, developing our skills and linking us through music to other people.
- **Experiential materialism** also has positive aspects and is based on the feeling of flow or enjoyment associated with using the stuff.
- **Invidious materialism** relates to situations when stuff matters for the sake of possession or the status it confers. The key dynamic here is social recognition and the emphasis is on the role of consumer goods in signalling status - the material properties of the stuff itself are down played.

(1) This quote, and those that follow, are from an unpublished Oxfam Scotland research project carried out in 2011 by Lisa Glass. For a fuller introduction to them, see Glass, Lisa, Hamilton, Kathy, Trebeck, Katherine 2012 'Mothering, Poverty and Consumption' in *Motherhoods, Markets and Consumption: The Making of Mothers in Contemporary Western World*, ed. Stephanie O'Donohoe, Margaret Hogg, Pauline MacLaran, Lydia Martens and Lorna Stevens, Routledge

Of the four types of materialism described above, *invidious materialism* best describes much of our current relationship with goods and it is this sort of materialism that has become synonymous with debt fuelled, wasteful, unsatisfying consumerism used to build and sustain our identities via what we buy. Much of current consumption is, therefore, invidious as the goods we buy and their symbolic value often mediates our relationship with ourselves, others and that society has with itself. Consumption has *invaded* these relationships and such consumerism has contributed to social fragmentation and encourages individualism and competition against others through consumption.

Further to this our consumer culture is based on a certain type of faith where we consume knowing that the symbols which motivate our consumption activities have not been decided by us, but by the intertwined interests of the fashion industry, media, banks, and advertisers. Hence our subordination to these symbols reflects our subordination to these establishments. Whilst they may offer us acceptance as part of a group, apparent relief from 'status anxiety' or even the prospect of a psychological sense of immortality, in reality we are ultimately left dissatisfied when these promises are not kept. The problem is that our solution to this is to purchase new stuff in the hope that this new thing will give us what we want, rather than seek other more permanent forms of solution to these anxieties

## **THE 'NARRATIVE OF I' - A NARRATIVE OF CONSUMPTION**

Interwoven with the rise and development of materialism and consumerism has been the establishment of a new political discourse within the UK. Supported by a range of economic, legislative and rhetorical factors this created, then maintained, an accepted narrative of post-modern existence, *the 'Narrative of I'*.

Narratives, in the form described here, are connected stories that effectively transfer and share cultural meaning and help us construct our understanding of reality or 'how things work'. The story that says we are now consumer-citizens whose continued consumption of 'stuff' is essential to our personal and national prosperity is both well entrenched and enduring.

At the heart of *the "Narrative of I"* is the precedence given to individual freedom over collective experience and responsibility. Shared experience and society remains important, but it is the individual or consumer, who is lauded as King. It represents Hardin's story of the tragedy of the commons (1968) where we reap the benefits of our desires, but the collective pays the price. It is a narrative of 'I must have' 'I deserve', 'I'm worth it' 'it is my right to have'. 'I', more *Id* than *Ego* in Freudian terms, insists that instant gratification is good and pleasure seeking and discomfort avoidance are appropriate, even laudable, goals.

It manifests itself in our continually prompted desire for individualism, encouraged and enabled by the bewildering retail choices available and the credit available to purchase. 'I' lives increasingly alone and in smaller and smaller households, bought (perhaps now subsidised by government) rather than rented, where one can do as one pleases, where one is King or Queen in one's castle. 'I' has a personal pension scheme rather than collective final salary schemes and lives in a shareholder – rather than solidaristic – version of democracy.

The '*Narrative of I*' starts in the 1970s where, according to its interpretation, Britain was in turmoil, a country riven with self-serving, out of control unions holding the government and its people to ransom. State owned businesses were losing money, bloated and unproductive, acting as a drain on the national purse whilst simultaneously providing poor services. This lays the foundation for a saviour(s) to appear in the shape of certain political figures and neo-liberal politics who promise to champion individual rights and freedom over collective restraint. They promised

to make Britain Great again. This assisted in an understanding of where the *I* is more important than the *We*. The advice was to buy our homes, fill them with consumer items, own a car for the first time, and buy the clothes we've always wanted from the shops that are now conveniently located for us to drive to.

So how did this narrative form and how is it maintained? From an economic perspective, since 1979 our governments have eagerly embraced the profit and contribution to GDP of global finance capital. Indeed the UK is now dependent on finance for many jobs and the size and growth of our GDP, more so than many other industrialised countries.

As a result of the widely discussed changes brought about by globalisation, goods can be produced and imported at a much lower outlay than in Scotland where higher labour and health and safety investments (we avoid the word cost here as keeping people safe at work and paying them decent wages are an investment in our society) and lack of financial investment resulted in domestic manufacturers being squeezed.

A problem arises, however, if your economy no longer makes and exports things; other ways of making corporate viable must be identified. Invariably this has been achieved by structuring the economy to enable corporations to extract wealth from consumers as quickly and as continuously as possible. For example, to replace the income lost from manufacturing jobs that have disappeared, the UK government now gets 41% of its per capita tax revenue from the taxes, such as VAT, that are imposed on the goods we purchase (Office of National Statistics, 2014).

Another issue creating a feedback loop of extraction of wealth is that these structural economic changes occurred without replacing the jobs, skills, work based identities, securities and solidarity lost in the decline of traditional manufacturing industries, particularly in Scotland. Despite some efforts to retrain affected individuals and communities, a mismatch remained between the skills provided by those who once worked in traditional manufacturing and primary industries and those required by the finance/knowledge economy (Trebeck, 2011).

The UK's finance-centred economic model has been supported and enabled by the rhetoric of consumerism in the heart of political debate. The Conservative and then New Labour governments from the late 1970s to the present day have carefully implemented this neo-liberal agenda by two main means. First through enacting legislation such as planning laws that favoured out of town shopping centres, but also by explicitly expressing this doctrine through all the avenues open to the state - press releases, speeches, interviews, public service announcements and advertising (Harvey, 2007).

*"There always seems to be a lot of this kind of competition around now...what you're wearing, what your house is like, what food you offer guests when they come...And the bigger house, the bigger car, the bigger...everything's become a competition"*

The enabling doctrine has in some cases attempted to reverse strongly held societal positions, for example, the reinterpretation of greed from being a "deadly sin" to a lauded motivation. High levels of personal debt have become normalised as opposed to being seen a source of shame (Brown, 1997). Individualism not collectivism has been placed as a central doctrine for societal progress; private ownership and management of assets is almost fetishised as being better for society than public ownership because it is not only more efficient, effective and desirable, but even *necessary* to allow UK companies to compete with international rivals.

The trust of these new doctrines is demonstrated by the lack of evidence used to support their claims. Instead they are presented and repeated as matters of fact, and as if they are beyond contention. One of the consequences of the new truths these doctrines represent is that as these changes move through society, showing the narrative characteristic of accrual accumulation (Jones & McBeth, 2010; Bruner, 1991), it becomes progressively easier to enact more radical legislation supporting the doctrine. For example, if greed is good and private ownership is better than

public, then it becomes much easier to not only legislate for the sale of publicly owned assets, but also to find buyers for them.

The progression and power of the narrative can be seen in the stages of privatisation undertaken by the UK government which in turn lead us to accept and take part in ever more controversial public sell-offs. For example, the 'Narrative of I' has helped move the people of the UK from accepting the part privatisation of British Aerospace and Cable and Wireless, to the sale of national institutions such as the Royal Mail and the part privatisation of the NHS in England. Under its umbrella has come the sale of British Gas, British Steel, British Petroleum, British Rail and the electricity generating companies.

Once greed is good, private ownership seen as superior, and money has been made from feeding individualism via the selling of the collective wealth, it is almost inevitable that other institutions beyond the government become willing partners.

High levels of material consumption are only made possible because of the banking industry. This industry, supported by light touch regulation, has moved from relationship based, prudent consumer lending to providing wide availability of credit. Often based around credit cards and equity release schemes, we can see the invidious nature of the need to drive GDP via consumer spending and the false sense of wealth that access to credit can engender. Whereas once this lending was supported by rising house prices (Ivanova, 2011) the recession of the late 2000's threatened to stall this source of money and changes to legislation were made to allow capital to be accessed from pensions. Robbing Peter to pay Paul; robbing you and future generations to consume now.

Even our civic spaces and the geography of our population centres have been altered over the past 40 years, with shopping centres now becoming the focal point of towns and cities. Town planning is frequently based around benefiting the retail industry. We have seen roads to large shopping malls built at public expense. City centre spaces have been increasingly commodified while other activities – like protesting - are discouraged or even banned.

Advertising now dominates our travel and leisure spaces via radio, TV, cinema and the internet, but also our cityscapes - billboards and outdoor media. Even the names of previously sacred spaces of community formation and maintenance have been sold so that they too can encourage consumption. Take for example the renamed BT Murrayfield stadium (Murrayfield rugby stadium), the Tulloch Caledonian stadium (home to Inverness Caledonian Thistle football club) or even the Bargain Booze stadium (home to Witton Albion FC).

There is still a light touch approach to advertising regulation of categories under growing scrutiny such as high fat, high sugar foods, gambling and payday loans. There is little protection of high vulnerability groups, like children, to advertising.

It is our contention here that the enacting of progressively more neo-liberal economic and social policies would not have been possible if the government had still been talking about the importance of society, the benefits of collective ownership and prioritising looking after one's community. We now turn to marketing which has and continues to play a significant role.

## MARKETING AND CONSUMER SOCIETY

### Marketing as Manipulator

The key to marketing success is to persuade consumers to spend. Marketing has been so successful in this endeavour that it has been a central part of developing *the 'Narrative of I'*. So whilst people still view themselves as citizens, community members, workers, students, worshippers, cyclists, artists, and so on, rather than merely consumers, in many instances these roles now include a much larger material and consumerist dimension.

Marketing sanctions the expansion of consumption. This develops invidious materialism where social interactions are to a much greater extent imbued with spending. Status and group membership are defined by what, where, how and with whom we consume. Participation now requires brands. Marketing also

helps create and reinforce cycles of consumption by supporting a culture of continual change through product differentiation, new spaces of consumption and celebrity trend-setters which create new reasons for consumers to spend more.

Such activities imply that consumer resources and wants are infinite. Conflicting product selection advice makes choice challenging, leading to higher levels of dissatisfaction and regret (Wilkie and Moore, 2012). As such, marketing has been blamed for decreasing rather than improving consumers' quality of life (Redmond, 2005), supported by evidence that materialism and owning more 'stuff' does not make us happy (Dunn et al., 2011; Kasser, 2002).

*“You know you don't have to buy, but...you are fighting with your own conscience to say no, forget about it you know, live how you live”*

Indeed while marketers encourage and influence consumers to purchase, the ill health and social, economic and environmental problems caused by human consumption, is at odds with the message presented by most marketing campaigns. Such criticisms and potential harms are perhaps particularly deleterious for vulnerable consumers, as evidenced in practices such as price discrimination and consumer exclusion (Piacentini et al., 2014). At the core of the success of marketing is its very failure; it satisfies demands in a way that ensures they remain unsatisfied.

## Marketing as Facilitator

We contend here that marketing is more likely to be understood and accepted as a manipulator and as a cause of hyper-consumerism. When spoken about in the media, for example, it is a sales technique designed to make you buy stuff, it is a clever gimmick, a slick presentation of the benefits with no consideration of the costs, something that tricks you and something that creates wants that can never be satisfied.

However, marketing is neither inherently manipulative nor dysfunctional and as we will argue, in fact it can

be a vital perspective and set of tools for changing Scotland's relationship with consumption. Promoting this different understanding of marketing and, hence, widening its use can facilitate rather than manipulate, and this is, we believe, an essential part of realising this change.

In exploring *marketing* as a possible *facilitator* (rather than manipulator) we draw on the following ideas: Kate Soper's 'alternative hedonism' as a means to enjoy prosperity without growth (Jackson, 2009); a reconsideration of market and legal frameworks through 'societing'; and collaborative consumption.

Soper's work on 'alternative hedonism' calls for a reconsideration of this dominant understanding of the 'good life' and points to a means to reconnect humans with the pleasures of consuming differently (e.g., Soper, 1999, 2013). Soper argues that self-orientated pleasures can accommodate moral concerns and vice-versa. This is illustrated via cycling, where a self-orientated preference for cycling is entwined with collectively oriented concerns to reduce car pollution and congestion, as the pleasures of cycling are generally dependent on their reduction, resulting in a desire to enhance the pleasures of cycling for all (Littler et. al., 2005).

Alternative hedonism links to new materialism (Simms & Potts, 2012) where we cherish and repair what we have and focus on *experiences* rather than ownership of items. This entails focusing on non-material dimensions of fulfilment via increased consumption of services. It also requires an improvement in the *quality* rather than quantity of what we do consume.

Much of this calls for a slowing down and a revision of notions of progress and prosperity (Jackson, 2010) that are currently detrimental to humans and the environment. Soper, proposing ideas subsequently echoed by other Common Weal papers, suggests a reduction in the working week and a resultant shift from a dominant work ethic to a reflective and democratic distribution of work and leisure. This would serve to rebalance the current situation whereby neither those with a job, but no time; nor those with time, but no job can experience the pleasure derived from alternative modes of living (Soper, 1999).

While markets offer solutions to a lack of time (e.g. fast food, gyms) they do so at the expense of less costly pleasures such as preparing and sharing a meal and walking. A culture less reliant on the car makes walking and cycling more pleasurable and safe; and it promotes a healthy lifestyle, thus, offsetting problems of pollution and potentially health related diseases (Soper, 2007). Public spaces given over to public art works can invite pleasure and relaxation without the requirement for market based purchasing, thus, encouraging slowing down and reflection. This can be facilitated through investment in public transport, energy provision and green and innovative systems and technologies that are, for example, low in resource use, easy to repair and upcyclable. These changes are not designed to reduce the impact of our current consumption but instead to promote alternatives such as self-sufficiency, self-styling (as opposed to fashion following) and ultimately a focus on human exchange and interaction (Soper, 2013).

Individuals and groups need to be supported to look beyond quick and easy consumer fixes, to think carefully about the limits of what the market can provide in terms of fulfilling personal pleasure and collective well-being, and to consider the move from *consumer* to *citizen*. This could further be encouraged by the transformation of how we perceive those products currently considered desirable (such as diamonds, iPads and cars) into items which are seen as harmful due to their exploitation of humans and the environment (Soper, 2008).

Badot, Bucci & Cova (1993) introduced a reformulation of marketing through the concept of *societing*. 'Societing' means either to 'put in the society' or 'to make society' (Badot & Cova, 2008). Thus, a *societing* ethos better supports companies in being respectful of environmental and social impacts: the logic of 'marketing to' is replaced by the logic of 'marketing with'. In specific marketing terms practices such as pricing to constrain demand rather than to stimulate sales (through, for example, price discounting, interest free credit, BOGOF, etc.) could be effective in helping consumers consider their consumption.

Such an approach invites both companies and citizens to consider collaborative consumption practices. Collaborative consumption values exchanges and the

circulation of value among consumers. It attributes relevance to sharing and giving and highlights the significance of production created by consumers. Collaborative consumption may materialise in activities such as the sharing of goods (Zipcar, etc.), competencies (Teachstreet), leisure time (co-lunching; couch surfing) and work (co-working). Collaborative consumption through sharing, gifting and prosumption, has the potential to generate sustainable alternatives to traditional forms of buying and ownership (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). As our relationship to possessions changes we do not feel that we rigidly either own or do not own stuff, but instead we are able to control them in a more liquid way (Bardh et al., 2012). In addition our sense of solidarity with those who have also rented, shared and co-owned the item increases.

Marketing used in such ways can empower people to choose the objects they consume, based on the things that they believe will benefit themselves and their community. In turn, this may move us from being socialised in a consumption culture to providing the mechanisms by which individuals would learn to effectively participate in a sustainable social environment (Ward, 1974).

## **VISION: CHANGING THE BROKEN RECORD FROM 'I' TO 'WE'**

So far we have explained the situation we are in and concerns this has led to and why this is problematic; we have explained how invidious materialism and consumerism is driven by our economic system, government narrative and a host of policy decisions. This has worked alongside a highly sophisticated and loosely regulated marketing industry.

Our vision for change is based around establishing the precedence of the '*Narrative of We*'. This pro-social, pro-people, pro-planet narrative looks to establish the precedence of collective experience and responsibility, of shared experience and society, of equality and fairness and sustainability. It is a narrative of skills, mentorship, coaching, and apprenticeship. It is a narrative of participation, membership, joining, and creativity. It is a narrative of

repair, reuse, and re-appropriation. It is a narrative of active citizenship, protest, and change. It is a narrative where goods and services serve us: We does not exist to serve the market.

We will explain in this section why we believe this can be established and why language is critically important to this task. We will then set out policy requirements including linking our paper to other Common Weal work – in particular highlighting required changes to the economic system. As the glue that binds our consumerist world together, we will then examine how to control marketing's role as a manipulator'. Finally, building on work examining the limitations of GDP as a measure of societal progress we suggest new measures of success that emphasise the 'We'.

### Changing the meta-narrative

Much has been written about how relationships with our families, friends and communities, along with our health, are the things that matter most to people and to our sense of prosperity (Jackson, 2010). So rather than needing to establish a new meta-narrative of life in Scotland based on these ideals, we suggest that they are already well established. Such goals, however, are largely missing from the narrative of more and 'I' that dominates policy making. Our vision is based on re-establishing this link.

*“Media, peer pressure, status symbols. That's what it keeps coming back to.”*

Therefore, a key part of this change hinges on our use of language and the language of governance instilled in legislation, press releases, tenders or specific social marketing communications. It relies on a different press, socially owned and funded. To rebuild the narrative of 'We' us, the citizens, our government, our press and the marketers, should stop talking about ourselves as consumers, instead we are citizens. There are many other examples of language can build

this narrative and to illustrate this, table 1 lays out some suggested key ideas and words.

**Table 1: The language of 'We'**

PROMOTE	REPLACE
'We'	'I'
Citizens	Consumers
Community	Private
Shared ownership	Privatisation
Social	Individual
Prosperity	Profit
Sharing	Exploitation
Empowerment	Establishment
Needs	Wants
Interdependence	Competition
Enough	More
Slow	Convenience
Rental	Individual ownership
Empathy	Greed
Circular	Linear
Participation	Monetary wealth

As the use of government language changes, the 'Narrative of We' makes progress toward other collective changes easier, such as passing of legislation to bring strategically important assets (such as railways or energy production and distribution) back under public and community control. It also makes it easier to restrict the availability and marketing of personally and socially damaging products and activities, whilst simultaneously promoting and allocating funds to pro-social and pro-environmental activities such as cheap, regular and convenient public transport and access to community land.

We must also change the way government refers to the relationship between business and consumers. Instead of citizens-as-consumers being treated and discussed as essentially a market resource, existing

primarily to buy stuff to keep business generating profit, instead government must talk about this relationship in terms of how communities and families are empowered by the goods and services offered by a business. We must also challenge the notion that consumption is a hobby unto itself where shopping is a leisure activity, particularly when used as part of gender stereotyping.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Making participation desirable

To move from consumer consumption based life to one based on participation in society, participation needs to be more desirable for all sections of society. This has to include creating spaces that are seen as safe (physically, socially, culturally and psychologically) and do not constrain by reinforcing gender roles. Part of this will come from the culture, in our schools and education system, driven by the Curriculum for Excellence which inculcates cooperation, sharing and collaboration, rather than competition and hierarchy.

### Making participation possible

Possible entails issues of cost, accessibility, time and skills. Whereas funding and cost are critically important, making community accessible is about more than just money. It needs improved infrastructure and transport, it needs people to staff, coach, organise, teach, administer, raise funds and the raft of other tasks that makes participation possible and enjoyable. It requires local government to be local and to examine the hard and soft administrative barriers to participation. This represents another nexus between this paper and others in the Common Weal library as it needs an economy whose work patterns and rewards make volunteering possible. For example:

- This requires an economy where participation is supported by mandated maximum working hours and living wages (See- *Time for life: Why a 4 day, 30hr week can create a stronger economy* or *In Place of Anxiety: Social Security of the Common weal*).

- It entails changes to transport availability and cost (See- *Investment in Scotland a Common weal approach* or *Common weal transport*),

- It involves ownership and usage of public land and the planning laws governing the full range of geographic spaces (see- *The Silent Crisis: Failure and revival in local democracy in Scotland, Land for the People* and *A Red Road to Regeneration in Scotland*).

### Making participation cheaper

Community participation must be cheaper than or comparable to participation in passive isolating activities such as television (we acknowledge that watching television may often be one of few leisure activities currently available to many families due to high cost of entrance and participation in sporting, cultural or artistic activities). For example, Scotland previously was able to make entry to local authority run swimming pools free for children; we urge the reintroduction and expansion of this scheme to include other facilities run by local and national governments.

If one looks, for example, at the City of Edinburgh council budget document for 2014-15, a significant minority of its pages are taken up detailing charges for using its (in other words our) facilities. For example, the costs of playing football or swimming at one of the sports centres or the hire charges for running a scout group in a community hall or the cost of permits to hold events in council parks gardens or schools. Now clearly these facilities cost money to build and maintain, but this user-pays structure disadvantages those on lower wages (especially as these are the very people who are more likely to turn to council services – the wealthy have the option of buying access to privatised spaces). Another key issue is liability insurance as it is a major contributor to the cost of taking part, examining how to remove this barrier to participation is strongly urged.

The equipment required to participate becomes more affordable within our vision of a 'We' Scotland. For example, by sharing mountaineering equipment via a *library* rather than owning your own, costs can be reduced. Just as importantly, shared and rented goods are typically of higher quality and are capable

of repair. It also reduces the risk of starting new hobbies as you know good quality well maintained equipment is readily available without great outlay.

*“Aye at Christmas, then you're paying them off for the next year, and then you're still maybe not paid off that debt and then you've got it again. It can be a vicious circle”*

To facilitate shared ownership and higher quality goods shared, community owned goods should not attract VAT. Smaller but regular charges on items (as opposed to the labour) could be directed to repair and service of these goods.

### **Making participation space available**

No citizen of Scotland should be stuck at home because a club or group cannot find a room to rent or patch of green space to play on, explore or look after. Land must be available for community use, and other Common Weal papers (mentioned previously) discuss the issue of speculation on land prices by leaving areas under or undeveloped whilst waiting for real estate prices to rise. We call for a presumption of local ownership for all unused local government owned land (within a specific appeal framework where the council, not the community, must make the case for the land to remain unused). If it is not being used, the local community have the right to develop it in ways that benefit that community – for example, via use by local football clubs or by the many community gardens around the country. Indeed, in terms of the latter, many community gardens experience a general lack of security of land tenure (Crossan et al., 2015).

### **Developing the Skills**

To participate we need the skills to do so. These may be the skills needed to run a building, manage and maintain a club or the skills to take part. Training and becoming more skilful and knowledgeable is often inherent in the activities of the club. Whilst many colleges and universities exist to provide formal education, access to these is not evenly distributed across our society and wider issues of cost and access remain. In a post-

consumerist Scotland there is a need to provide greater access to lifelong learning. This may be through more part-time college places and evening classes, but this might also be provided and facilitated by local, regional and national skills databases where plumbers, builders, accountants, professional sports coaches, business planners, lecturers (and yes, even marketers!) could make their professional skills available to those requiring them. The notion here is that experts should be on tap, not on top.

### **Funding Participation**

Community sporting, artistic and cultural facilities should be free at the point of participation. We echo calls for the subsidies paid to the petrochemical industry, the car industry and other environmentally (and in some instances socially) damaging industries to be diverted towards enhancing community participation.

We also support tax incentives for community volunteerism. Instead of making volunteering expensive in terms of the cost of equipment, venue hire, travel, and administration, these items plus the time of the volunteers should be tax deductible. To all those volunteers who run our sports clubs, drama clubs, scouts and guides to all those who collect money for charities and the 1000s of ways people currently help us live more fulfilling lives, we in society, by providing an additional element to their tax free allowance, we are saying thank you for being the building blocks of society.

Tax deductions are used to encourage economic activity - why shouldn't it be used to encourage social and environmental activity as well? Indeed it seems paradoxical that the Royal Bank of Scotland can, for example, claim a tax deduction on allowing their staff time off to do charity and community work (a scheme that the bank advertises) yet we don't allow a similar deduction for those participating outside the work environment. Such support shouldn't be the preserve of the likes of RBS.

### **Controlling Marketing**

There is a need to control *marketing as manipulator* and encourage its use as a facilitator. We call for a redefinition of marketing to take into account 'societing' where marketers strive to 'put in the society' or 'to make society' (Badot & Cova, 1992).

They will also help us feel freer to participate with consumption playing a central role.

Many of these changes are also designed to put materiality back in goods so that it is better value for both the company and the consumer. These changes are also designed to help reduce the insecurity and status anxiety created by steep inequality and intensified by marketing as a manipulator.

Beyond this, as marketing management is conceptualised around the 4Ps (Promotion, Product, Place [where the products are made available], and Price), we suggest the following:

### Promotion

- A complete ban on the marketing and advertising of goods and services to children and other vulnerable groups. This includes in-game advertising and sales offers widely used in computer games.
- Control of sponsorship arrangements between products like alcohol, gambling, high sugar/ high fat food products or high sugar drinks and sporting, cultural and community groups and their activities (McDonald's, for example, should not be allowed to promote their products by sponsoring local sporting competitions).
- Control should be enacted over the amount and size of advertising allowed in civic and shared spaces. Sao Paulo in Brazil provides an excellent example of how this can work and subsequently reclaim these spaces as areas of cultural and social participation.
- Currently several statutory bodies regulate the full range of marketing media (including broadcast, print and online) via self and co-regulation. We would suggest the following changes to this regime:
  - End self-regulation of advertising instead moving to a fully co-regulated system

- Introduce another key principle to the current UK advertising standards authority: 'Does not undermine sense of personal or social self'

### Products

- Stricter control over the use of toxic materials in products.
- Material input labelling allowing consumers full access to information about what resources are used to make a product including energy, Green House Gas (GHG) emissions, fresh water and the ratio between how much waste is produced for each unit of goods sold (that is .5 tonnes of waste for 100kg of products).
- Treating packaging waste as a design and economic failure, therefore, introducing a *producer pays* model for litter.
- A targeted approach to litter reduction via concentrating on the product categories contributing the greatest amount of refuse.
- Uniformity in key bottle sizes to encourage return, reuse and re-manufacture (for example Germany's container deposit legislation has encouraged the use of uniform beer bottle designs and sizes, making them more easily used and recycled).
- Tax incentives for reverse logistic systems.
- Tax incentives and other facilitation for the circular economy.

### Place

- Prioritising local and urban centres as places to shop rather than out of town and large retail venues.
- Priority given to local, circular economies where local multiplier effects are seen in terms of economic and relationship benefits.
  - Including advertising and planning support for co-operative forms of market

place and supplier ownership such as the community share enterprise scheme.

- Restricting the sale of high sugar, high fat products in schools, libraries and other community owned spaces.

## Price

- Prices must include the full cost of producing, maintaining and disposing of goods throughout their life cycles. This will crucially involve fully costing the price of the pollution created across this life cycle and must go beyond just carbon emissions (or equivalent) to include an appropriate price for the damage caused by pollutants such as environmental remediation work required to clean the land or air and the financial cost to our health care and welfare systems.

- Implement at a national level, and advocate at an international level for an appropriately priced GHG pollution cap and trading scheme.

- It is no longer acceptable for local governments to spend millions of pounds dealing with the waste produced by manufacturing companies' poor product/packaging design and material choices.

- To make this transfer of responsibility from the society to the manufacturer, deposit return schemes should be more widely encouraged and if required, mandated. Indeed, this transfer of responsibility for changing the system from the consumer to governments and manufacturer is at the heart of this papers approach.

- The availability of 'bulk buy' food deals should be examined as they encourage faster

and more mindless consumption and favour better off consumers with the resources to take advantage of these offers.

## Measuring Progress

A key change to the narrative of governance and consumer society which has been thoroughly discussed is to move away from GDP as a measure of societal progress to more broad ranging assessments of prosperity. The Scottish government, Oxfam Scotland (through its Humankind Index), and others, have done significant work on this and we urge them to continue embedding and supporting these measures throughout Scottish society. Such initiatives represent a re-purposing of economic and governance systems that will help move away from the 'Narrative of I' to the 'Narrative of We'.

*“They wait for the cartoon time you know, like the early morning or something like that and they bring up advertisements”*

To develop this further we suggest adding measures of participation including number of volunteers, participation rate and governing body accreditation (e.g. coaching awards) and adding survey measures of community cohesion into national statistics and government progress reports.

In support of this broader approach we would recommend adding a range of specific *practice based prosperity indicators*(6) in which their successful completion indicate and would measure in more holistic, complex and fundamental ways the state of prosperity in our country and among its people.

### An illustration: Cycling to School

If we choose to include a measure of *the number of children who cycle to school*, for example, it would require multi-modal interventions and investment

(6) Borrowing Warde (2005) and other theorists, we define practices as social habits which are shared by different levels of social organisation (e.g. families, groups, communities and clubs) which help us structure our lives within society and are based on fundamental activities such as eating, drinking water, commuting, taking holidays, learning and keeping warm/cool. Each of these broader practices can be developed into more specific *practice based prosperity indicators* such as cycling to school or preparing home cooked meals which are shaped by individual knowledge and preferences but are reliant on institutional frameworks, infrastructure and cultural understanding. Hence, changes in these indicators rely on changes and improvements across a wide range of society's core actors and all levels of government and would demonstrate a shared understanding and intent and co-ordinated action between these actors and the institutions that govern our lives. Measurements should include the participation rates, participation intensity and the distribution of the various practices (both geographically and within sections of society).

across a wide range of areas to see a tangible increase in the figure: safe design of roads and urban planning, the establishment of dedicated cycle paths, legal and cultural measures to ensure the precedence of people over vehicles in a range of urban, suburban and rural settings and skills training.

To see the figure rise would have far ranging benefits, including, supporting progress towards health guidelines recommending 30 minutes of exercise per day, potentially reducing rates of childhood and population obesity, improving confidence levels in children to take part in a skilled activity and developing a relationship with an activity is likely to establish practices and hobbies for later life.

It would facilitate the rider's relationship with themselves as physical beings that are able to rely confidently on their skill and fitness and would establish a family and social skill which is enjoyed communally, helping to establish and maintain relationships. By maintaining your own and family cycling equipment builds skills and builds material relationships with goods that can be reworked and repaired. It might help individuals and families develop a closer relationship with Scotland's geography and natural heritage and contribute to greenhouse gas reduction targets and reduce the number of second or third cars in families.

These *indicators* rely in the first instance on making the land, time and skills needed for participation available. Here the community empowerment bill and land reform act provide some mechanism for change, these developed and expanded in common weal papers such as *Time for Life* and *A red road to regeneration in Scotland*:

- Cooking meals prepared using fresh, seasonal ingredients
- Growing fruit and vegetables
- How often people access green space
- Taking part in club based sport or groups (community, artistic, sporting, political or cultural)
- Number heating their homes and businesses via community systems (such as community boilers or local heat transfer schemes)

- Participation in local credit unions
- Number and growth rate of social enterprises being started each year
- Use of outdoor play facilities
- Use of community facilities

## CONCLUSION

Part of achieving a fairer and just society is re-evaluating our relationship with material and consumer practices. Currently we display behaviour which is damaging to just about every aspect of social life in the long term, as well as the environment. People rarely consider part of their core identity to be that of a 'consumer', yet much of their behaviour and resources are dictated by the pressures of consumer culture. We want to get to a society where people are free from the anxiety and stress caused by consumption practices, and are able to use goods to develop ourselves and communities as good citizens rather than consumers. In order to do this we must lever governments and advertisers to create the conditions in which communities can use objects to develop themselves and their skills.

Using these policy levers we change the narrative of life in Scotland, rebalance the cost and value of taking part in community, society and in the outdoors and put value back into the material goods we buy. We do so in a way that creates opportunities for more fulfilling less anxious lives, helps create opportunities for a range of work and skills and helps protect our society, communities and environment.

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