



European Economic and Social Committee

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: DURABLE GOODS AND LEGAL GUARANTEES. BEUC

Planned obsolescence

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Planned obsolescence - Definition

There are three types of planned obsolescence:

- Technical obsolescence
 - Shortened product lifecycle
 - Planned breakdown
 - Incompatibility of older models

- Indirect obsolescence
 - Technically impossible to repair
 - Unobtainable components

- Style obsolescence



Origin

- The term obsolescence appeared in Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899.

Reference to the concept of producing « the next best thing » and consequently to « hasten product extinction ».

- Linked to advertising: 1934: « Our big job is to hasten obsolescence », Harley J. Earl, G.M.
Goal: « Changing the style of the cars regularly, on an annual basis ».

- Modern concept in 1932: Bernard London, Real Estate Broker: *Ending the Depression through Planned Obsolescence*, 22 pages.
- Two classic examples
 - The Phoebus cartel (1924-1939): incandescent light bulbs
 - Dupont (1940-1951): the invention of nylon stockings



Work in progress

- Timeline
 - Launched: 7 May 2013 – Public hearing
 - Two meetings: 8 May and 27 June
 - Submitted to the CCMI on 26 September
 - Submitted to the public session on 17 October
- Organisation
 - Rapporteur: Thierry Libaert, Gr. III
 - Co-rapporteur: Jean-Pierre Haber, Gr. II
 - President: Veselin Mitov, Gr. I

Plus 9 members:

The Netherlands, Italy,
Bulgaria, Slovakia, Spain,
Belgium, Romania



The problem

- Environmental issues:
 - Over-exploitation of natural resources
 - Massive waste production
- Social issues:
 - Social inequalities
 - Disappearance of the repairs sector
- Public health issues:
 - Incineration sites
 - Worldwide for waste transfers
- Cultural issues
 - Growing mistrust of industry
 - Ethics – what about duty-based engineering ethics ?
- Economic issues
 - Towards a sustainable model for European enterprises



The solutions

- Curb blatant cases
- Support the repairs sector
 - Keeping a stock of components
 - Operating instructions
- Encourage standardisation
- Make good use of public procurement
- Disclosure a product's life expectancy (price expressed as cost per annum)
- Extend warranties
- Raise consumer awareness
- Support studies



Links

- Planned obsolescence
 - The functional economy
 - Ecodesign for products
 - Circular or closed-loop economy
 - Industrial ecology
 - Collaborative consumption
- A single objective: basing environmental transition on sustainable economic and socially equitable foundations



And Now

- Big interest for consumer organization
 - Madrid - 24 June 2014
 - Lisbon - 10 October 2014
- European reference
 - Written question – 23 April 2014
 - Oral question – 2 October 2014
- Working group
 - Meeting with EC Consumers – 26 March 2014
 - Meeting with the EC services -23 September 2014
- 3 more to follow
 - Budget for research on consumer attitude
 - Question for a european EC Coordinator
 - Initiative from the EP



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Thank you for your attention

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