We’re witnessing more ecological and ethical patterns of consumption in Western countries. This is a logical development in a world in which people are more aware of the problems that threaten humans and the rest of the world: obesity, bad labor circumstances, ecological change, addiction, animal cruelty. These problems obligate us to change our shopping decisions and our consumption suppliers – supermarkets, restaurants, coffee bars etc. are offering their help.

Our observations

- In large Western cities (New York, Berlin, London), we’re witnessing the rapid rise of an eco-friendly lifestyle, sometimes referred to as “green consumption”. This trend is both a form of idealism and lifestyle, especially for those who can afford it, for ecological consumption is expensive. That is why anthropologists speak of “eco chic”.

- The number of vegetarians and vegans is growing steadily, but it is still a very small eco-elite whose ideals influence major restaurants and are voiced in the media – and thus eco-consumption is increasing rapidly, e.g. in the U.K. and in the West in general.

- The car industry (especially Tesla) is offering electric cars. Its customers are not necessarily always eco-friendly consumers, but may simply like the brand, the lifestyle it represents, etc.

- Coffee bars, lunch rooms and restaurants are increasingly offering eco-friendly products. There is a growth in green consumption in both hospitality (e.g. vegetarian/vegan restaurants Spirit and Veganz), as well as supermarkets (Marqt).

- Supermarkets Aldi, Lidl, Jumbo and Plus aim to offer only environmentally friendly fruits and vegetables by 2020. They use the quality label “On the way to PlanetProof” and display a sales growth in eco-friendly products.

- Budget supermarket Lidl offers remarkably fair product lines. Kipster eggs from the most animal-friendly chicken farm of the Netherlands, organic fruit and vegetable product lines, and it is going to completely stop selling cigarettes.

- Unilever reports that the sale of its green products is growing almost 50% faster than regular products.

- There is a global movement that promotes a low sugar diet among consumers, and even pleads for a sugar tax.

- In contrast, consumers are flying more and using budget airlines, despite the criticism on the ecological downsides.
There is growing awareness of the need for a more sustainable economy. There seems to be more pressure to behave morally now that we have so much awareness on issues such as ecological exhaustion. We cannot expect people to stop consuming, but quite a few changes are happening. Which group is taking the lead? There is a small group of pioneers that stimulate the introduction of certain eco-friendly supply chains. Sometimes this is only a small and local initiative that instigates eventually widely-accepted changes. Take, for instance, Lidl’s continuous “early adopter approach” regarding eggs. The pioneers – such as vegans and fair-trade buyers – are idealistic and inspire a somewhat larger group. This group is not necessarily very idealistic, but it does like to incorporate some ideals. These people are happy to choose Tesla and Marqt, while consuming fair-trade cappuccinos and chocolate. Furthermore, there is a wider audience that is gradually becoming accustomed to green consumption, supported by brands of companies such as Unilever, as well as restaurants. Think, for instance, of the popularization of hummus. However, not all types of ethical consumption have momentum. In the realm of energy, there are initiatives, but the question remains how many consumers will really switch to more ecofriendly providers, e.g. of wind and sun energy. Another issue is the persisting popularity of the polluting airline industry. This industry is privileged with taxes by governments and there is little hope that customers will pay a serious flight tax voluntarily. Things might change in the future, with more sun and wind energy, and with trains as alternatives to flights. However, generally speaking, consumption patterns are mainly changing in the daily visible usage of food and drinks. What eco-pioneers teach us in this regard, is that the popularity of vegetarian and fair-trade products will increase even further.

Now that plastics are identified as eco-unfriendly more often, coming developments might entail a package revolution.

Transparency of supply chains will increase from within companies. Larger companies, such as H&M and Ahold, already work with their own labels.