

## **Consumption and Resistance in the Context of Brazilian Housewives and Consumers' Movement**

### **Consumo e Resistência no Contexto do Movimento Brasileiro de Donas de Casa e Consumidores**

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#### **Abstract**

The way people consume in contemporary societies has directly affected forms of citizenship. The continuous process of reframing goods, followed by a growing disbelief in representative political institutions and social rights has encouraged the proliferation of a number of institutions and alternative modes of participation. Canclini (2001, p.29) states that "men and women realize that many of the questions made by citizens are more promptly answered by private consumption of goods and mass media than by abstract rules of democracy or collective participation in public spaces. Therefore, the study of the reconfiguration of the links between consumption and citizenship is a way to glimpse new possibilities of social participation and representation of interests of civil society. Although most studies still focus on the understanding of consumer satisfaction, this work seeks to highlight the consumer as the focus of resistance to consumption. So, I used narrative analysis to identify – between the participants of the Housewives and Consumers Movements (MDCC) – the conditions under which some form of resistance was possible. For this, there were 16 in-depth interviews in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais. At the same time, I described the strategies developed by MDCC to participate in the formulation of public policies, as representative of civil society with regard to the protection of consumer rights. The observations indicate that the existence of an opponent, as well as an intention and the existence of mechanism of action around the (re)construction of collective signs show that favorable conditions for the existence of the MDCC as an institution of resistance to consumption.

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**Keywords:** Marketing, Society, Consumption, Consumer Resistance, Social Movements

### **Resumo**

O modo de consumir nas sociedades contemporâneas tem afetado diretamente as formas de exercício da cidadania pelos sujeitos. O processo contínuo de resignificação dos bens, associado ao crescente descrédito nas instituições políticas e representativas dos direitos sociais tem fomentado a proliferação de instituições e modos alternativos de participação. Canclini (2001, p.29) afirma que “homens e mulheres percebem que muitas das perguntas próprias dos cidadãos [...] recebem suas respostas mais através do consumo privado de bens e dos meios de comunicação de massa do que pelas regras abstratas da democracia ou pela participação coletiva em espaços públicos”. Portanto, o estudo da reconfiguração dos vínculos entre consumo e cidadania é uma forma de vislumbrar novas possibilidades de participação social e representação de interesses da sociedade civil. Embora a maior parte dos estudos sobre consumo ainda esteja debruçada sobre o entendimento da satisfação dos consumidores, este trabalho busca evidenciar o consumidor como foco de resistência ao consumo. Assim, utilizei o método de análise de narrativas para identificar junto aos participantes do Movimento das Donas de Casa e Consumidores (MDCC) as condições em que algum tipo de resistência fosse possível. Para isso, foram realizadas 16 entrevistas em profundidade nos estados do Rio Grande do Sul e Minas Gerais. Paralelamente, busquei descrever as estratégias de participação do MDCC na formulação de políticas públicas, enquanto representante da sociedade civil no que diz respeito à proteção dos direitos dos consumidores. As observações indicam que a existência de um oponente, de uma intenção e de mecanismos de ação em torno da (re)construção de signos coletivos desse grupo evidenciam condições favoráveis para a existência do MDCC como uma instituição de resistência ao consumo.

**Palavras-Chave:** Marketing, Consumo, Sociedade, Resistência do Consumidor, Movimentos Sociais

### **1 Introduction**

The way we consume in contemporary societies has directly affected the forms of citizenship carried out by individuals. Historically, consumption is associated with the acquisition of goods for different purposes: symbolic as well as material. Even though, levels of consumption could change according to a large number of variables, such as income, family structure, personal interests and years of formal study. In addition, the idea of citizenship has been balanced over the years by the guarantee of abstract rights, such as voting, political representation and the existence of labour union movements (Canclini, 2001).

The implications of consumer movements on public policies concerning the protection of consumers' rights are particularly interesting in Brazil. Lobato (2006) notes that the number of Brazilian non-governmental organizations representing consumer interests is still growing. Most of the movements from the 30's and 50's were essential to improve the regulation of this theme, whose apex is the creation of Law number 8.078/1990, that gives Brazil a leading position compared to other countries in Mercosul<sup>1</sup>.

Although the idea of resistance is not new in social sciences, it has recently been introduced in the discussions and research agenda in the field of consumer behaviour. Despite the multitude of conceptualisations of the term resistance – which refer to individual, collective and institutional behaviours as well as to a variety of settings with implications for social, political, economic and cultural systems - the framework proposed by Hollander and

Einwohner (2004) seems to be particularly interesting for the purposes of this paper. The authors argue that resistance can be comprised of two dimensions presented in this paper: intent and recognition.

The aim of this paper is to describe and analyze the way the Housewives and Consumers' Movement (Movimento das Donas de Casa e Consumidores) has been built and managed as a resistance movement, and how these resistance practices interact with public policies and the markets.

## **2 Consumption and Resistance: brief overview**

Given its centrality in our social and cultural systems, the concept of consumption has been discussed by many authors. In this respect, Barbosa and Campbell (2007:7) state that "one can live without producing, but not without consuming". Thus, consumption becomes one of the most important human activities not only for the economy, but also and perhaps primarily, for the creation of meaning by individuals, who recognize and affirm in their groups through what they consume. After all, according to Belk (1988: 160): "we are what we possess and this may be the most basic and powerful fact in consumer behaviour".

Consumer behaviour literature has focused on understanding what makes people happy through consumption (Fischer, 2001). However, the understanding of what makes people a potential locus of resistance is still incipient. The marginalisation of resistance in academia is a limitation to the development of the field, since the speeches of both themes - consumption and resistance - are not isolated. Actually, they keep a close relationship with each other, and then understanding the practices they (re)produce over time is essential to the investigation of both. Thus, resistance becomes an interesting locus of research, which allows us explore the realms of consumption that graze the exercise of citizenship - still neglected in many studies on consumer behaviour.

Consumer rejection to the market is not new. Nevertheless, the tension between consumers and business activities has only recently acquired some status in studies on consumer behaviour (Friedman, 1985; Ritsona & Dobscha, 1999). Questions concerning (1) collective movements of resistance (Friedman, 1985; Hemetsberger, 2002), (2) brand communities (Schouten and McAlexander, 1985), (3) communities of consumption (Szmigin, Bekina & Carrigan, 2007), such as other readings on consumer resistance became the target of interest to researchers.

According to Fournier (1998), resistance can be understood as a continuum, whose scope ranges from rejection behaviours (e.g. reduction of consumption and timely replacement of assets) to the rebellion (e.g. boycott, the systematic replacement of assets and leaving markets).

This paper focus on the transformative capacity of consumption. When one selects and acquires goods he/she defines what he/she considers publicly valuable. At the same time, one defines paths to integrate and distinguish him/herself in society. If so, it seems interesting to explore the interfaces between consumption and citizenship. Canclini (2001), argues that the responsibility of defining a framework in which participating in the public life was possible (even if it was limited or unfair) was given to the State primarily. What we see today is that the market establishes a system to converge new forms of participation through public consumption.

There are still many issues to be investigated for better understanding of the subject. Close and Zinkhan (2007) consider any contrary action to the traditional ones in a given context as resistance. According to the authors, any behaviour that is not consistent with the established cultural practices in a certain context can be characterised as resistant.

Hirschman's (1973) approach may be closer to that perspective. The author proposes a typology that emphasises consumers' agency. According to him, individuals can have three reactions to the market: (1) use of voice – i.e. complaint of individual and collective rights, activism, etc; (2) loyalty; and (3) exit – i.e. boycott and refusal to consumption of certain goods. Hirschman (1973) argues that the only effective form of resistance is given by the exit, while the use of voice is an important resource to be used by consumers' movements since it makes extreme behaviours an evident possibility.

The recognition of consumers' agency – in terms of individual as well as collective action – shows a more political dimension of resistance. Thus, Fernandes (1988) defines resistance as social attitudes, as well as counter-hegemonic actions and behaviours that aim to weaken classifications of social categories. These sorts of behaviours represent an explicit expression of protest, since they are against the dominant power.

Most theories on this topic focus on the duality *domination* versus *resistance*. Foucault (1985) shows that domination is present in the discourses of power and invariably leads to resistance. Thus, domination and resistance show evidence of asymmetric power relations. This way, the study of resistance movements and acts is also a study of domination discourses and practices. Hollander and Einwohner (2004), delving on the diversity of the resistance concept, reflect on the objectives, scale, forms of coordination, diversity of targets and goals, always assuming its political character and only recognising its effective existence when some form of recognition or intention is present. Based on such reflection, Holland and Einwohner (2004) propose a taxonomy of types of resistance based on three dimensions - *types of resistance*, *intention* and *recognition* (table 1). The present work adopts this taxonomy.

**Table 1: Types of resistance**

	Is act intended a resistance by actor?	Is act recognized as resistance by	
		Target?	Observer?
<b>Overt resistance</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Covert resistance</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Unwitting resistance</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Target-defined resistance</b>	No	Yes	No
<b>Externally-defined resistance</b>	No	No	Yes
<b>Missed resistance</b>	No	No	No
<b>Attempted resistance</b>	No	No	No
<b>Not resistance</b>	No	No	No

Source: Hollander e Einwohner (2004)

We are particularly interested in which act is intended by actors. When one realises that by consuming individuals think, choose and re-establish the social meaning of goods - and therefore production, distribution, negotiation, acquisition and use of goods - there is also recognition that the public space overflows the classical boundaries of political interaction, especially when (and where) traditional forms of representation seem to have collapsed.

### 3 Public Policies and civic society participation

The process of formulating public policies begins with the definition of the problem to be treated (Subirats, 2006). It is therefore a key step for the participation and representation of multiple interests. The lack of clear understanding of expectancies to be considered is a major problem for policy makers. Although practitioners, as well as academics, argue that this is not a highly relevant point, since public policy problems would be given by external variables

(such as social and economic variables), Subirats (2006) considers that the decisions in the public administration domain are based on political interests and power games.

Concerning the representation of multiple interests in the formulation of public policies, Lobato (2006) describes a series of considerations about the possibilities, limits and effects of inscribing different representatives in this process. According to the author, the approach adopted by most studies on this topic, which is focused on standards of effectiveness and efficiency (Lobato, 2006) - is no longer sufficient to deal with the complexity of formulating public policies since it involves a wide range of relationships and decisions.

The focus on certain problems or themes may be a result of (1) resource constraints (such as economic, financial and human), (2) lack of regulations, (3) lack of political will, or (4) pressure by groups such as the media. For all these aspects presented so far, civic society representation should be considered to create a link between the sectors affected by public policies and the public policy agenda.

Policy making requires the understanding of local socio-political conditions. Then, the way a certain society is organised as well as its economic conditions and, to a greater or lesser extent, technological and cultural conditions, should be considered by policy makers (Lobato, 2006). The intensification of consumption relations in Mercosul has led to the development of specific regulation to deal with these issues (Lunardi, 2016). However, as argued by Lunardi (2016), the social, political and historical conditions under which consumer defence is addressed by the countries in Mercosul has caused significant asymmetries, especially concerning the liability of suppliers.

In Argentina the *Ley de Defensa del Consumidor* (Consumer's Protection Act) was enacted in 1993 and amended in 1994, when it started being treated constitutionally. In Paraguay, although this issue had already been addressed by the Constitution, the enactment of the *Ley de Defensa del Consumidor y del Usuário* (Consumer's and User's Protection Act) was enacted in 1998. In Uruguay, where the *Ley de Defensa del Consumidor* only came into force in 2000, the consumer's rights were not even constitutionally treated (Lunardi, 2016).

In Brazil, however, the Constitution of 1988 has opened up channels for citizen participation in social issues. In that context, the organisational arrangements of civic society have emerged as alternative possibilities to the traditional model of governmental intervention. The Code of Consumer Protection (CDC - Código de Defesa do Consumidor), which dates from 1990, is regarded as a milestone in terms of coverage and levels of protection. Moreover, its formulation is a remarkable result of civic society participation, herein represented by a series of movements such as the Housewives and Consumer Movement.

It is also important to recognise the importance of the Housewives and Consumers Movement in Brazil in the way relationships between citizens and market institutions has changed throughout these last two decades. The markets have been reshaped in order not only to adapt to new regulations, but also to serve consumers with a more active perspective. In the following sections some of these transformations will be described and analysed.

#### **4 Method**

The unit of analysis of this research is the narrative. It is unlikely that any event is transmitted to other individuals without being told. That said, the event itself is constituted at the moment is told, or narrated, during the interview. According to Alberti (2003), when the interviewees recount their experiences, they transform the experience into language, selecting and organising the events and expressions in a certain way. Thus, the process of crystallising

images evokes the experience not to a deconstruction of the events, but to rebuild facts - and then the original meanings are brought back (Alberti, 2003). In this respect, Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992) state that:

“How individuals recount their histories – what they emphasise and omit, their stance as protagonists and victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience – all shape what individuals can claim from their own lives. Personal stories are not a merely way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life, they are the means by which identities may be fashioned.” (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992: 1)

This research concerns the Housewives and Consumers’ Movement in Brazil. It is important to observe that the Movement is organised in independent state units along the country. We focused on two units – Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul – for two reasons: (1) resource limitations – temporal, financial and human resources; (2) the strong influence of these two units on national public policies concerning consumers’ rights.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews (McCracken, 1988). According to Gaskell (2002:78), when it is intended to “explore the world of one’s life [...] and when the topic refers to detailed individual experiences, choices and personal biographies”, researchers should conduct personal interviews. Furthermore, through in-depth interview, researchers may identify other perspectives (besides their own) on a given topic.

Although narratives belong to individuals, they are produced through social processes (Bauer & Gaskell, 2002). Thus, personal interviews would be a path of access to data that would lead to understanding of the relationships established between social actors. We conducted the interviews using a flexible script comprised of guidelines that allowed the researchers to improve it according to the context of each interviewee (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Most of the issues covered in the script arose spontaneously.

We conducted 16 interviews with founders, employees and associates. Because it is a movement primarily comprised of women, most of the respondents were female. However, it should be noted that there were no restrictions on sex, age and level of education. When selecting employees, we focused on informants who had more than 5 years in the Movement, since both units have been formalised within this period. Table 2 presents a summary of the informants’ distribution.

**Table 2: Informants’ distribution**

<b>Gender</b>	Male	2
	Female	15
<b>Relationship with the Movement</b>	Founders	6
	Employees	5
	Associates	5
<b>Unit</b>	Minas Gerais	5
	Porto Alegre	11

Data collection lasted about 3 months and each interview lasted 2 hours on average. The interviews were realised in sites where participants usually get together (such as the Movements’ official headquarters and participants’ houses). It was, then, the most informal and welcoming environment as possible, which helped in building a comfortable *locus* for interviewers and the interviewees. Most interviews were recorded. However, the recording is dropped in some snippets because of the arrival and departure of people during lunch time, or even over coffee time in the afternoon. Thus, the analysis is based on transcripts and field

notes. The names to which the citations refer to are real and its publication was authorized by informants.

## **5 The Housewives and Consumers' Movement**

The Housewives and Consumers' Movement emerged during the 80's, a difficult period of Brazil's economic and political history. According to Brum (1991), at this time the overall level of investment in the country had been drastically reduced, while production was concentrated in products for export. The inflation rate increased drastically, incomes suffered real losses and consumption levels decreased. In addition, the Government maintained subsidies for certain segments, expanding the internal public debt.

Recession affected many industries, and specially the industry of durable goods. The level of unemployment in urban areas has become a significant problem. The 80's became known by the term "stagflation", since there were alternate movements of stagnation and inflation. Although there have been attempts to control high inflation, especially at the beginning of the decade, these efforts were soon put aside because of its political costs. Thus, the inflation indexes exceeded 200% annually between 1983 and 1985 (Brum, 1991).

In this context, the defence of consumers' rights (who faced gradual decreases in their purchasing power) was an emerging issue and, indeed, urgent. At the time there were no specific laws protecting the rights of consumers. However, the State Program for Protection of Consumer Rights (PROCON) had just been created, in 1982. The first unit of this program has been settled in Minas Gerais, where the Housewives and Consumers' Movement was organised shortly after.

During an interview to a local radio, in 1983, Arlene Gonçalves – the Department of Food and Health's coordinator at the time – stated that she believed in an effective cooperation between the Minas Gerais' PROCON and the civic society. According to the registers of the local Housewives and Consumers' Movement, when asked about it by the interviewer, Arlene Gonçalves held the first call to housewives from Minas Gerais to organise themselves around a common cause: their protection against the abuses that they had been suffering as consumers.

*"PROCON could work more efficiently if supported by the civic society. And it could be still better if the civic society were represented by the housewives. [...] They decide what, how and where to buy, and these choices directly affect the economy. So why not having an association of housewives to work with PROCON?"(Arlene Gonçalves, quoted from the Housewives and Consumers' Movement in Minas Gerais' archive)*

Soon after this interview, Arlene Gonçalves suggested the executive secretary of PROCON at that time, Raymundo Mendes, to invite a group of women from the city to work in a partnership with the Program. The idea was to help organise a civic group – with no ties to the government – to discuss alternative ways to improve individuals' conditions as consumers. Mendes immediately agreed and started a public call to the housewives of Minas Gerais. See on Figure 1 a newspaper article on this meeting.

On the way to school with their children, professors Pacífico and Mattos were hearing the radio at the exact moment that Raymundo Mendes called the housewives. He encouraged them to gather in an entity, that could be an association, to discuss and work in defence of consumers' rights.

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*"I told Darcy that it had everything to do with us. And asked her to come to the meeting with me."*

*(Lúcia Pacífico, Main founders in Minas Gerais)*

*"The first meeting was held in the Church of Boa Viagem. We were a hundred people of different ages and social and economic levels. There were neighborhood leaders, teachers and unions reps. Dr. Raymundo brought a food engineer with him, Arlene Gonçalves, and also two techniques from EMATER<sup>ii</sup>. We did not know how to organise ourselves and listening to them was very useful."*

A few years after that, in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, a similar movement began, inspired by the example of Minas Gerais. In the southern state, a group of women led by Professor Maria de Lourdes - began its activities at the time of the President José Sarney, with what they called "The Bee Operation".

*"I did not accept to be called 'Sarney's inspector'<sup>iii</sup>. One should inspect itself. So I gathered a group of women, most with children in the same school as my own, to check prices in the supermarkets. We went to the markets and when prices were falling, each one linked to ten other women, warning that the price was better in this or that place. Was a rush!*

*(Maria de Lourdes, Main founder in Porto Alegre)*



## Associação das Donas-de-casa em BH

D.T.  
9/6/86

E uma idéia nova, que poderá gerar muitos frutos, a curto prazo: a coordenadora do setor de alimentos do PROCON — Programa de Defesa do Consumidor, Arlene Gonçalves, está propondo a criação da Associação das Donas-de-Casa de Belo Horizonte. Para concretizar o plano, ela depende da receptividade do convite, que fará em breve, chamando às interessadas para uma primeira reunião. E advertiu que o consumidor não pode mais ficar como um mero espectador dos acontecimentos, à mercê de todos os tipos de abusos, sem nada fazer para expressar suas reivindicações e seu descontentamento diante de certas situações.

Será que vai dar certo? A senhora já reparou que nem sempre um pacote de "cinco quilos" de arroz tem cinco quilos? E aquele velho sonho de ter uma creche no seu bairro, onde seu filho ficaria, enquanto você ajuda na renda familiar? Quando uma criança é atropelada na porta de uma escola, a inexistência de um protesto mais forte das mães dos demais alunos favorece a ocorrência de outros acidentes? E, se de repente, em vez de apenas voltar para casa revoltada, a mulher que comprou uma carne estragada tiver, a seu lado, na porta do estabelecimento, algumas vizinhas a exigir a troca do produto ou devolução do dinheiro?

Além destas perguntas, dezenas ou centenas de outras surgem, naturalmente. A resposta é uma só: mais do que nunca, a dona-de-casa precisa de organizar porque só assim terá consciência de sua força, mostrará seu poder de decisão e será respeitada. Ditos populares como "a união faz a força" e "trabalhador unido jamais será vencido" nunca estiveram tão atuais. As grandes cadeias de supermercados estão crescendo, esmagando o pequeno comerciante, "o bar do só Zé" ou a "Mercearia do Militão". Nos supermercados, o trabalho de marketing é feito para vender mais e mais e inclui prateleiras maravilhosas, que convidam ao espectador comprar mais e mais. Ali não há trabalho para quem pesa e embrulha, tudo é enlatado.

De outro lado, quando uma senhora mais atenta percebe que é explorada, que paga Cr\$300,00 por um quilo de tomate quando, a poucos metros, poderia pagar Cr\$220,00, ela se limita a ir embora. As vezes, resolve telefonar para um órgão de comunicação, uma emissora de rádio, televisão, uma redação de jornal. Mas é um protesto. Só um. E nem sempre ele ganha prioridade, diante das reuniões de sindicatos, assembléias de trabalhadores e grandes temas políticos nacionais. E a dona-de-casa, elemento da maior importância nos canais de comercialização, fica só a assistir, horrorizada, o festival de abusos.

Arlene entende que "esta, dona-de-casa personifica a figura do consumidor, uma vez que a maior parte dos bens adquiridos para consumo ou uso no lar passam por sua escola; o, sta maneira ela define o que comprar, em que quantidade e, principalmente, onde adquirir". E, estando em contato direto com os problemas do dia-a-dia, sabe quais são aqueles que mais a afligem, quer seja a carência, a má qualidade dos produtos, a falta de infra-estrutura no seu bairro, além de outros. Mas, sem se ora organizarem, pouco ou



**Arlene Gonçalves vai marcar a primeira reunião**

quase nada poderão alcançar no sentido de verem suas reivindicações atendidas.

"Daí" — explica Arlene — "a importância da criação da Associação, pois esta vai poder atuar como porta-voz das donas-de-casa, não expressando apenas a opinião de algumas pessoas mas, sim, de uma classe. E o PROCON-MG incentiva a criação desta Associação pois considera que o consumidor precisa se organizar para defender seus interesses. Nesta etapa inicial nos propomos a colaborar, através do levantamento dos estatutos e da estrutura organizacional das associações existentes em outras capitais para nos pautarmos pela sua experiência aqui em Minas".

Enquanto busca os dados necessários para a criação da entidade, a engenharia-de alimentos do PROCON procura difundir a idéia, visando a congregação das pessoas interessadas, para a primeira reunião, a se realizar brevemente. E Arlene tem motivos para estar entusiasmada pois, bastou que falasse do assunto na Rádio Guarani para que inúmeras pessoas se apresentassem, oferecendo participação. Ela continua chamando as interessadas, que poderão telefonar para 335-7022, ramal 47, e deixar o nome e endereço, ou número do telefone. Quando for definida a data da primeira reunião, essas pessoas serão então convidadas.

Antes mesmo de se tornar uma realidade, a Associação das Donas-de-Casa de Belo Horizonte já vem recolhendo sugestões. Algumas pessoas que se manifestaram propõem uma ação efetiva e voltada para as questões mais próximas, que interferem no lar diariamente. E lembram que quando as donas-de-casa, lideradas por uma associação devidamente registrada, marcharem contra a porta de um supermercado, com gritos ou faixas, não terão qualquer obstáculo. Organizadas, elas poderão finalmente determinar uma série de fatores que as envolve todos os dias mas, como diz Arlene, apenas como "meras espectadoras".

Figure 1

Source: Jornal Diário da Tarde, matéria publicada em 9 de junho de 1983/Arquivo MDCC-MG (Lúcia Pacífico)

In 1986, the local PROCON started its own Program of Consumer Education and invited Maria de Lourdes to be its coordinator. The Housewives and Consumers' Movement in Porto Alegre was formalised just after that, in 1988.

Their history of the Housewives and Consumers' Movement in Porto Alegre, as well as in Minas Gerais, is comprised of boycotts, public claims and educational activities. Both units have very similar modus operandi. Currently, both offer legal advice to associates and systematically develop price researches which are published in their own website, Twitter and internal documents, or by local media. They also conduct educational activities – such as lectures and short-term courses – related to sustainable consumption practices.

*"When the movement began, we did boycotts, public claims in the streets, but we did not have a clear goal. The boycott of the meat was very powerful not only in our city but also in the state. We also did a campaign against genetically modified goods. So, once again we went to the streets to tell women not to buy these products. We distributed prospectus explaining the problems related to this issue, and also distributed a couple of cookies made of organic products! I remember that, early on, all of us had little kids in school, and we used to write recipes on their notebooks, to teach other mothers to get more out of food.*

*All these campaigns were important, even when we did not have a clear goal in mind, because we learnt how to do, doing. At the beginning it was a struggle for housewives to provide for his family. Today, it is a struggle to provide the society. "*  
*(Maria do Céu, Founder)*

There are central characters in both units, whose values not only guide every day practices of the Movements, but also participants' practices. Their life stories have many common aspects to that of other respondents and this seems to be the reason – among others - why these people remain together after 25 years.

According to the informants, the Movement is considered successful when it can balance, harmoniously and peacefully, interests of both parties – consumers and companies

*"The creation of the Code (the Code of Consumer Protection) was our greatest victory. It is remarkable, an instrument that actually smooths consumer relations. We got 390 thousand signatures, which led to the amendment that, shortly after, generated code. Plus, it proves that civic society can actually transform the reality of a country by to encouraging public policies and representing the collective interests. "*  
*(Lúcia Pacífico)*

The informants seem to have a clear understanding of their "opponent". According to most of them, the target of the actions promoted by the Housewives and Consumers' Movements is the Government.

*"We do pressure on the State. Our target is the Government for a very simple reason: just government can change the rules of the game. Facing the companies would not be useful, it is better to have them as our partners. "*  
*(Dr Mário Sanseverino, Associate)*

Nowadays, the Movements participate in a series of forums such as the National Forum for Consumer Protection and the Conference of Urban Policy. This ensures that the Housewives and Consumers will occupy spaces before taken by others who do not necessarily represent civil interests.

## **6 Considerations**

Resistance, in the context of the Housewives and Consumers' Movement, seems to be feasible as new participants (even if they are associates or employees) identify themselves with the cause or with the object of resistance, i.e., they identify an opponent. It could be compared to a club of individuals with similar life histories who share that space as a form of: (1) having some kind of professional activity after retirement, (2) exercising their citizenship by understanding and claiming their rights as consumers, and (3) giving back to society part of what they believe to be due, as a self-indulgence.

Reusing goods and sharing practices within each other, and even between different units of the Housewives and Consumers' Movements, help them create cognitive links that

became gradually stronger, which leads to the Movement's consistency and legitimacy. It may be fair to say that resistance is possible in contexts in which it is intended to represent a set of socially **strong descriptions** based on personal or collective sharing. In saying that we mean that a number of these descriptions will be built individually, through one's experiences, while a new set of signifiers and meanings will be built together, constituting the identity of the group.

This continuous process – of creating and recreating collective meanings – justifies the maintenance of the Housewives and Consumers' Movement as a formal organisation. In addition, they have an **opponent** - governments as well as a consumption culture that emphasises the rapid disposal of goods – an **intention** – make pressure in order to achieve any change – and a number of **mechanisms** – such as researching, talking to the local media, maintaining a widespread network and lobbying. Thus, the Movement is quite permeable and it is enable to participate in public life in different dimensions

Participating in the formulation of the Brazilian Code involved collecting signatures which, later, led to the amendment prior to the very Code. That was a remarkable moment in Brazilian history when the civic society has effectively entered spaces previously occupied by government agents. After that, the Housewives and Consumers' Movement has become a legitimate voice on the debate of policies concerning consumers' rights. Despite of the asymmetries of information between agents in policy making, the power games and the divergent interests, the conjoint effort between governments and civic society can be useful for different purposes, such as:

- 1) The clear identification of problems to be addressed by public policy;
- 2) The optimal use of resources - financial, personal and temporal;
- 3) Increasing the transparency of this process.

Finally, future studies are necessary to deeper understand some of the issues that emerged from this research. The development of resistance networks as well as its implications for public and private strategies should be carefully investigated, especially in the context of Latin America, where the body of literature on this subject is still incipient.

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<sup>i</sup> Mercosul - Southern Common Market - is an economic and political agreement among Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. It was established in 1991 and its purpose is to promote free trade and the fluid movement of goods, people, and currency

<sup>ii</sup> Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural

<sup>iii</sup> The expression “Sarney’s inspector” was created in 1986, at time of President José Sarney’s mandate. It was popularly used to refer to the control of prices in the Brazilian retail by consumers when Plano Cruzado (a new monetary plan) was launched.