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**TOWARDS MORAL AND ETHICS  
THROUGH IMPOSSIBLE PRACTICES:  
ZERO WASTE IN LATVIA**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the contradictions within individual Zero Waste consumption practice. For theoretical framework, I have chosen Kathryn Wheeler's (2017) three-layer framework for 'moral economy' in the context of consumption. Since Wheeler's framework does not provide precise definition of 'moral', I have added Zigon's (2017) 'moral breakdown' and 'ethical demand' analytical approach to the framework. Methods used in order to carry out the research was participant observation, state regulation analysis, social media ethnography, informal and unstructured interviews.

I argue that the willingness to participate in Zero Waste practices is rooted in different kinds of moments of 'moral breakdown' connected to consumption. Zero Waste it is perceived as the most convenient way to address the 'ethical demand' that is placed on consumption practices.

**Keywords:** Zero Waste, consumption anthropology, moral economics, moral breakdown, ethical demand

## Anotācija

Šis maģistra darbs pēta pretrunas individuālā Zero Waste praksē. Teorētiskajam ietvaram esmu izvēlējusies Katrīnas Vhīleres (Wheeler 2017) trīs līmeņu karkasu 'morālās ekonomijas' analīzei patēriņa kontekstā. Tā kā Vhīleres ietvars nesniedz precīzu definīciju jēdzienam 'morāls', es esmu tam pievienojusi Zigona (Zigon 2017) 'morālā lūzuma' un 'ētiskā pieprasījuma' analītisko pieeju. Pētījuma veikšanai tika izmantotas tādas metodes kā līdzdalīgais novērojums, valsts likumdošanas analīze, sociālo mediju etnogrāfija, kā arī neformālās un nestrukturizētās intervijas.

Darbā secināts, ka vēlme piedalīties Zero Waste praksēs sakņojas dažāda veida 'morālajos lūzumos', kas saistīti ar patēriņu. Zero Waste tiek uztverts kā vispiemērotākais veids kā piepildīt 'ētisko pieprasījumu', kas izveidojies attiecībā pret patēriņa praksēm.

**Atslēgvārdi:** Zero Waste, patēriņa antropoloģija, morālā ekonomija, morālais lūzums, ētiskais pieprasījums

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## INTRODUCTION

When I applied for master's studies in anthropology, I knew that my main scientific interest would be consumption anthropology and social media as a tool or method in qualitative research projects. These interests are rooted in my previous education and work experience in social media marketing. Before my social anthropology studies, I obtained a bachelor degree in business management with speciality in marketing communications, during which my favourite study course was "consumer behaviour" – I saw consumption anthropology as a possibility to deepen my understanding about this topic.

In 2017 during the Anthropology of Consumption study course, I conducted fieldwork and wrote a report based on it: "There are no such things as "Latvian consumers", but rather global consumers in Latvia: the case of Zero Waste". I saw Zero Waste Latvia as a case where I could try out both: (1) studying consumption from anthropological perspective and (2) social media data as useful array for a research. My research field was *Facebook* group "Zero Waste Latvija diskusijas" (further: "Zero Waste Latvia discussions"). Back then for a theoretical perspective I used Igor's Kopytoff's (1986) approach of "cultural biography of things" (Meiere 2017). One of the conclusions I did during research was that biographies of things are extremely important for those who are interested in Zero Waste practices. Some of the most often discussed topics back then and also when I analysed data in the group for the second time (January 1<sup>st</sup> - May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019) are biographies of packaging, plastic and single-use items (Meiere 2017). I suggest that since then these topics have become more-and-more actively addressed also in global and official discourse – European Commission's press release (28 May 2018) states: "Across the world, plastics make up 85% of marine litter. And plastics are even reaching people's lungs and dinner tables, with micro-plastics in the air, water and food having an unknown impact on their health. Tackling the plastics problem is a must and it can bring new opportunities for innovation, competitiveness and job creation." (European Commission 2018) On October 24, 2018, European Union officials agreed to ban single-use plastic items such as plastic bags, plates, cutlery, straws, balloon sticks or cotton buds etc. by 2021 (European Commission 2018).

Everyday items that have made contemporary day-to-day life as easy as possible have also become a threat to the natural world and human health. In my opinion, European Commission's statement illustrates the idea of trash literally invading natural scenery and also human body. I would even argue that this discourse has become "an official discourse":

the fight against plastic waste has become more and more straight-forward active in EU governmental level.

Another conclusion I made during my research in 2017 is that Zero Waste discourse goes far beyond only tangible packaging and plastic - biographies of things include such concepts as, for example, 'environmental footprint', 'sustainability', 'effective resource management', 'circular economy' and others (Meiere 2017). During this research, I understood that socialites around Zero Waste are fast-changing and data-rich, which is the reason why I decided to continue my research in this field also in my master thesis.

When carrying out my master thesis I broadened my method arsenal with participant observation (I worked in a Zero Waste shop) and during this, I noticed people at the shop actively denying themselves being Zero Waste and discussing the actual impassibility of becoming Zero Waste. And from my observation there is a contradiction between the fact that these statements are made in spite of the fact that they were there, actively practising Zero Waste by shopping without packaging. Also, Līna Orste, anthropology bachelor studies graduate, in her BA thesis mentions similar observations of informants denying themselves being Zero Waste and referring to Zero Waste concept as "noisy and intrusive" or "arbitrary" - as it is hard to talk about it to others, because people tend to understand the concept literally (Orste 2018). Moreover, Tian Song (both PhD of Physics and PhD of Philosophy) has even argued that Zero Waste is impossible from the perspective of thermodynamics (Song 2016).

The **scientific problem** at the centre of my thesis is the contradictions within individual consumption practice that address the same environmental concerns that are widely acknowledged in scientific and (EU) governmental discourse.

Based on this I have proposed **the research question of my master thesis**: "How can it be that someone is willing to participate in Zero Waste even through these practices can be considered impossible?"

Thus, the **aim of my research** is to develop an answer to the research question in a way that the results of the research can help to deliver argued suggestions for more effective Zero Waste communication in Latvia.

In order to find an answer to my research question, I have posed following **tasks**:

1. To develop a theoretical framework by overviewing and analysing academic articles in the spheres of consumption anthropology, morality and anthropological researches on Zero Waste and environmentalism.
2. To develop a research design and carry out a fieldwork that would provide sufficient empirical data about Zero Waste in Latvia.
3. To analyse empirical data by using developed theoretical framework.

4. Make conclusions, reflect on results and propose suggestions that could be useful for communication of nongovernmental organisations and social enterprises that deal with Zero Waste concerns.

My thesis consists of **four main parts**:

1. **Theoretical background.** In this section I introduce to the field of consumption anthropology and justify its relevance to the research I have conducted. Then the chapter elaborates on the recent Daniel Miller's and Richard Wilk's debate about morality and consumption, and moves on to the introduction of two theoretical concepts 'morality' and 'economy' encounters in theoretical literature. Then I introduce to the thesis main analytical concept 'moral economy' and Kathryn Wheeler's (2017) framework for 'moral economy' in the context of consumption. Since the framework doesn't provide precise definition of 'moral', I also introduce to Jarrett Zigon's (2007) phenomenologist approach of 'moral breakdown' and 'ethical demand'.

2. **Research design.** In this part I explain my choice of methods (participant observation, state regulation analysis, social media ethnography, informal and unstructured interviews), describe the process of the research, justify the choice of informants and elaborate on my (researcher's) position in the field.

3. **Data analysis.** In this part I at first elaborate on Zero Waste conceptual origins and definitions and more in details describe the exact field I'm researching, then I analyse data according to Wheeler's (2017) analytical framework of 'moral economy' in the context of consumption. 'Moral economy' in my work is understood as an "encompassing approach for studying individual ideas and practices and their relation with collective moral frameworks and confinements, and to exploring change and change potential." (Kofti 2016, 433) Morality in 'moral economics' is analysed by using Zigon's approach of 'moral breakdowns'.

4. **Final conclusion, reflection and suggestions.** In this part, the final conclusion is done and I reflect on my research result relationship with wider ethnographic contexts. In the end, I introduce to my suggestions for communication of nongovernmental organisations and social enterprises that are dealing with Zero Waste concerns.

# 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Because the moral challenges in given capitalist society can no longer be effectively addressed without considering the interaction and influences of different societies in the global system, ethnographic research from around the world can help document and make sense of the changes sweeping our planet. (Browne, 2009, 2)

This section elaborates on a theoretical background for the study of Zero Waste in Latvia. Firstly, I introduce to the field of consumption anthropology and argue for its relevance to the research I have conducted. Then the chapter elaborates on the recent Daniel Miller's and Richard Wilk's debate about morality and consumption, and moves on to the introduction of two theoretical concepts 'morality' and 'economy' encounters in theoretical literature. Then I introduce to 'moral economy' that is the main analytical concept I have chosen for my theoretical perspective. Then I elaborate on Kathryn Wheeler's framework for 'moral economy' in the context of consumption. Since the framework doesn't provide precise definition of 'moral', in next subchapter I elaborate on Jarrett Zigon's (2007) phenomenologist approach of 'moral breakdown' and 'ethical demand'.

## 1.1. Anthropology of consumption

In order to successfully address concepts that will be used in the analytical part of my thesis, at first, I will briefly elaborate on (1) the development of Anthropology of Consumption as the anthropological field that I intend to represent in my thesis, and (2) the field's relevance to the research I have conducted. Also, in order to develop my argumentation, in this subchapter I will address a recent discussion on morality and consumption.

Anthropology of consumption can be considered as subfield of economical anthropology which studies how different societies organize their economical lives and secure their livelihood. Economical anthropology focuses on how people produce, exchange and (of course) consume things that can be both: material objects and immaterial things (labour, services, knowledge etc.) (Carrier 2005, 4) I suggest that since consumption is a part of economic activities, also choice not-to-consume or to consume differently is a part of people's economical efforts.

As for the beginning of consumption anthropology Daniel Miller (1995) traces back to Levi-Strauss' ideas of structuralism and studies of semiotics in the late 1960s and early 1970. He also mentions Baudrillard, Barthes, de Certeau, Saglin, Hodder and Shanks and Tilley as first who has approached consumption in anthropology. At the same time Miller (1995) argues that these works missed a sense that in order to approach the process of consumption a new perspective should be found. Thus, he marks birth of "the new anthropology of consumption" with Douglas and Isherwood's publication "The World of Goods" (1978) and Bourdieu's "A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste" (1979).

Douglas and Isherwood argue against familiar theories of consumption that claim that consumers see goods only as private satisfaction providers or status symbols in a never-ending competition and thus suggest third theory, which sees consumer as giver and receiver of information and goods and services as embodied non-verbal messages, and also they claim that: "Consumption decisions become the vital source of the culture of the moment. People who are reared in a particular culture see it change in their lifetime: new words, new ideas, new ways. It evolves and they play a part in the change. Consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape." (Douglas and Isherwood 1978, 37). As the concept of Zero Waste is relatively new and has gained wider popularity in last few years (see chapter 3.1.) I argue that anthropological study of Zero Waste practices is important, because consumption practices not only provide the survival of an individual, but also hold important cultural meanings and thus can provide deeper understanding of the cultural changes and tendencies apparent at the moment.

Richard Wilk (2001) has argued that consumption has always been a moral matter. In his essay "Consuming Morality" he addresses Daniel Miller's (2001) argumentation in "The Poverty of Morality". Before I elaborate on Wilk's position I introduce to Millers standing point: he argues that recent writings about consumption hold 'extraordinarily conservative vision on consumption' (Miller 2001, 226) Daniel Miller elaborates on the duality in which 'production' is opposed to 'consumption' and in this opposition the latter is seen as evil that 'uses up' the first. He argues that this view prevents studies of consumption to be nuanced enough and criticizes three assumptions that consumption is *per se* (1) materialistic, (2) capitalist, (3) incompatible with environmentalism. For Daniel Miller, it is not acceptable that study of consumption in the context of morality is reduced to a heroic and resistant expression of guilt and anxiety (of the rich), and argues that the study of consumption morality obviates morality that is 'based on a passionate desire to eliminate poverty'. (Miller 2001, 227) In "The Poverty of Morality" Miller argues that:

[...] a literature that allows the anxieties of the rich to obscure the suffering of the poor and seems constantly to assume that goods are intrinsically bad for people is simply not my idea of a moral approach to the topic of consumption. It is rather a sign of an academic discipline that has lost touch with what it purports to study. (Miller, 2001, 241)

Miller also argues that although he considers environmentalists' critiques as proper, their argumentation is weakened when activities that aim for environmental good poses threat of leaving out welfare provision to the poor. That's where Wilk (2001) steps in the discussion by arguing that: "No modern traditions recommend that everyone drop their worldly possessions and take to the road, begging bowl in hand. What most moralists argue instead is that some kinds of consumption are good, others bad." (Wilk 2001, 250) Wilk invites to look at moral pronouncements as placed in their own social and historical contexts that doesn't leave out the existence of completely different contexts that deliver different moral arguments and critiques (Wilk, 2001). He elaborates on the idea that developing countries can be torn between moral contradictions brought with "addictive and exploitive forms of consumption" and at the same time points out that "all forms of consumption are morally ambiguous and problematic, whatever one's social role or position in the world system." And since consumption holds wide array of meanings in different contexts it requires questioning and thus "consumption and morality can't be separated". (Wilk 2001, 253) In the same writing Wilk elaborates also on the moral conflict that is inevitable - as an example he mentions contradictionarity that is held by creation of drugs that (1) on the one hand serve as practical and useful commodity, but (2) on the other hand the same commodity can also become addictive and thus destructive for the users themselves and communities around them. He draws parallels with wider consumption practices that can draw similar moral questions that are apparent when, for example, someone is faced with drug-addicted friend. He argues that he finds himself uncomfortable about the idea of attacking the moral stand of those who address such moral conflicts by adjusting their consumption. (Wilk 2001, 257) I suggest that it is possible to draw parallels with Wilk's example of drug addicts and the possible moral evaluations of their fellow people with Zero Waste – just as a person can be aware of destructiveness of drug usage, awareness of different destructive impacts of consumption practices is possible.

In this subchapter, I have shortly elaborated on the development of the field of consumption anthropology, addressed the field's relevance to my research and also presented Miller's and Wilk's discussion of morality within consumption. Since it is clear that morality

is embedded within consumption practices either (1) they are made in order to fight poverty or (2) address moral conflicts within consumption itself, in next subchapter I elaborate more on the theoretical encounters of two concepts: ‘morality’ and ‘economy’.

## **1.2. Morality and economy**

As it was suggested in the previous subchapter - consumption practices are largely affined to economic practices and thus - economy. Katherine E. Browne (2009) in the introduction to "Economics and Morality: Anthropological Approaches" reflects:

To think about the relationship of morality and economics is to connect the most abstract and perhaps meaningful realm of human life with the most banal - to consider how the everyday matter of living gets infused with our deepest beliefs of what we live for and how we live well. (Browne 2009, 2)

In following subchapter, I aim to briefly summarize earliest ideas that reflect on both - economy and morality. Most of the ideas mentioned in this subchapter will not be used for analysis, but, in my opinion, at least a brief mention of them is important, because concepts and framework that are used for analysis are based on critiques on some of these ideas. My view is that in order to understand the critique it is needed to address the criticised too.

So-called ‘father of economics’ Adam Smith (1776) in his influential and at the same time - widely criticized - work “The Wealth of Nations” (that is considered as first book on economics) has argued that if market isn’t affected by government institution, it ultimately serves positive (moral) outcomes for society, because individuals act on their own self-interest. Because of this “invisible hand” prices within market remain low and monopolies are eradicated thus providing morality that allows individuals act on their own. In 1890 Alfred Marshall's "Principles of Economics" sets the rise of widely criticized ideas of "neo" classical economics that includes notion of supply and demand and assumption that rational choices of individuals are made based on the knowledge of choices and in order to maximize their utility. In neoliberal view morality is embedded in the freedom individuals gain in a free market. (Browne 2009)

According to Browne (2009) morality within economic life has been anthropologically addressed already since the end of 18th century with the work Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss has carried out. Durkheim introduced to the idea that "primitive", non-Western societies hold together because their members share the work that is needed to be done in order

to survive, but Mauss developed the notion that gifts in non-Western societies are used as a currency that are exchanged by moral persons. (Browne 2009)

Since then market economies has been widely anthropologically criticized and described as amoral because of its individualism, maximisation of gain and exploitation - roots for such descriptions can be found in Max Weber's (1905) seminal work "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" and Albert Hirschman's (1977) "The Passions and the Interests Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph". (Browne 2009) And also these ideas have been extensively challenged by many social scientists. For example, Browne (2009) challenges Marx approach: "the moral spheres of capitalist societies are neither static nor hard edged." (2009, 2) She argues that although there are constraints of inequality - in comparison to any other system - capitalism still provides much more choices. And the availability of these choices provides also bigger variability of choices that are actually made (of doings, beliefs and possessions) by people. Browne also suggests that these variables force the system to adapt and change. She argues that an enterprise within a capitalist system may attempt to take in account moral concerns if it is (1) threatened or (2) presented with a profitable opportunity, and when these situations occur moral sphere of capitalism is enlarged. (Browne 2009) In the data I have gathered in order to analyse contradictions within Zero Waste practices in Latvia, I have noticed that enterprises, indeed, react on the pressure that is posed in "Zero Waste Latvia discussions" Facebook group either by changing their product/service that has been directly criticized (threatened) or by creating new products or services proactively (when a profitable idea is presented). Furthermore, I would even suggest that increasing volume of Zero Waste shops and other enterprises that claim themselves Zero Waste is a process of capitalism's moral sphere's enlargement.

When it does not cost too much to make an economic choice that seems morally good, the choice resonates easily with the economic rationality of capitalism. Those moral actions that seem to make good economic sense also stand a better chance of becoming absorbed into the moral sphere of capitalism, either on the strength of widespread customary practice, or because such choices become the political will of legislators who get them inscribed into law. (Browne 2009, 24)

According to Browne, the size of capitalist moral sphere can vary because of socio-political context, thus the smallest is apparent in neoliberal economy while in welfare-states moral sphere takes up much more space in the society. (Browne 2009)

In this subchapter, I have briefly introduced to first encounters between concepts 'morality' and 'economics' and elaborated on discussions around these ideas. When returning to development of thought regarding economy and morals, one cannot leave out the concept of 'moral economy' that appeared in 1971 - a little before previously mentioned Hirschmann's influential work. In next subchapter, I explore the original idea behind this particular concept and its profound development that has happened over time.

### **1.3. Moral economy**

Since the concept of 'moral economy' is important for my analysis, in this subchapter I elaborate on the concept's origins and development.

The concept of 'moral economy' first appeared in 1971 when historian Thompson (1971) used it to oppose neoclassical (market) economy to moral (pre-market) economy and theorized wide food riots in England. In his work "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" Thompson (1971) calls out at-the-time (growth) historians on economic reductionism that explains food riots solely as triggered by prices, conflicts between sellers and hunger. He argued that concept of 'riot' was not wide enough to encompass all impingements of those who rioted, that "these grievances [also] operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc. " (Thompson 1971, 79) He suggested that in late eighteenth century English peasants rioted in the name of "fair price" and against "free" market price to push against farmers who sold highly needed food outside local communities while there were people in the community who still were in need. (Thompson 1971).

Since then Thompson's approach has been widely debated and the concept has been developed by several scholars (Booth 1993, 1994; Clay 2011, Heilke 1997, Popkin 1979, Scott 1976 and others).

Norbert Götz (2015) in his article "'Moral economy': its conceptual history and analytical prospects" outlines Daniel Bell (1990) suggestion that if the term 'moral economy' can be opposed to any 'amoral economy' then it can help cultivate the evolution of economic thought (Bell 1990, 219). But Götz suggests the term has also the potential to illuminate the workings of civil society:

The 'moral' would thus no longer be something per se uneconomic or laudable, but an alternative way of 'utility maximisation' through the construction of altruistic meaning for economic transactions. (Götz 2015, 158)

Dimitra Kofti (2016) argues that although in literature on moral economy there is a discussion on whether the concept can help to understand social change (Booth 1994, Edelman 2012) her ethnography based on long-term fieldwork in a factory in Bulgaria has showed that:

Moral economy may offer an encompassing approach to studying individual ideas and practices and their relation with collective moral frameworks and confinements and to exploring change and change potential. (Kofti 2016,433)

Sayer (2003) has also selectively discussed the moral economy of commodification and consumer culture: mainly drawing upon Daniel Miller's work in altruistic consumption and by augmenting against Bourdieu's approach (that constitutes consumer exposure to the influence of symbolic domination) he has argued that buyers can decommodificate or recontextualise commodities and this process can happen in different forms – consumers can, indeed, pursue external goods (for example - prestige), but they also aim for internal goods (such as committed relationships, practices etc.) and consume them for their own sake. (Sayer 2003).

Kathryn Wheeler (2017) goes one step further with moral economy in the context of consumption and by drawing upon an already existing analytical framework for moral economy of work and employment (developed by Bolton and Laaser, 2013) and extending it to consumption. She states:

This is important because academics should adopt a critical stance to explore the causes and consequences of inequality and injustice within consumer capitalism to both the environment and society, but this critique must be grounded in the context of how markets are made and incessantly negotiated through moral ideas, institutions and practices embedded at the micro, meso and macro levels of the economy. (Wheeler 2017, 273)

She develops a discussion of diverse range of literature and similarly to previously mentioned Götz challenges the assumption that morals are essentially uneconomical and vice versa. She draws on literature to illustrate that dualism between economy and culture is widely apparent in academic literature and refers to Zelizer's (2011) statement that "markets are continually negotiated social projects making it impossible for moral boundaries to be

understood outside of the market relations that constitute them in practice" (Wheeler 2017, 274).

In order to explore moral economies of consumption Wheeler (2017) proposes framework three analytical layers:

- (1) state regulation of the economy acknowledged as a powerful force that affects harmful/beneficial economic processes,
- (2) the collective customs and actively moralising social group critical discourse that pushes the state regulation;
- (3) lived experiences of consumers or the lay of formatives of costumers. (Wheeler 2017)

She argues that:

Using this lens, we can learn how everyday lay normativities are shaped within and against broader instituted systems of provision and cultural repertoires, recognising the interdependent relationship between these elements that together constitute distinct moral economies of consumption. (Wheeler 2017, 276).

Authors of the original framework that focused on work and employment analysis argue that his holistic framework allows an analysis of the process of different groups mediating and re-shaping the material reality of economic practices (Bolton and Lasser 2013, 520).

For the **first layer** of institutional context draws upon Polanyi's (1944, 1957) work and suggests that although critiques towards it are reasonable "his analysis displays how markets are embedded in society in different ways, that they can never be entirely free as they rely on (often invisible) exchange mechanisms that belong not to the market but the social sphere." (Bolton and Lasser 2013, 513) Because of this realm state is forced to work towards restriction. At the same time, they point out that this perspective neglects capacity of an individual to resist market without state acting on it. (Bolton and Lasser 2013)

In order to make moral economy a more holistic analytical frame Bolton and Lasser add **second layer** that is drawn from 'moral economy' conceptual founder Thompson's work (1971, 1993). They argue including his approach in the framework "stresses the agentic capacity of people". (Bolton and Lasser 2013, 514). Wheeler points out that in this layer it is important that:

Thompson highlights the role of collective movements who act without state intervention to resist processes of marketization and together oppose unfair or destructive economic practices. (Wheeler 2017, 275)

To substantiate **the third layer**, Bolton and Lasser reflect upon Sayer's critique upon Polanyi's and E.P Thompson's moral economy approaches:

A moral economy concept that is centrally grounded in community dependent customs, values and norms neglects the diversity and complexity of social and moral life, debilitating individual character. (Bolton and Lasser 2013, 515)

Thus, they draw this layer upon Andrew Sayer's approach that includes concept of "lay morality" that understands people who have ongoing moral evaluations that reflect to relations to others and normative issues of social commitments and responsibilities. Bolton and Lasser argue: "the notion of lay morality takes an analytical leap further in the way it embodies the practical and instrumental responses of people to given situations, not only as a community" (Bolton and Lasser 2013, 516).

For analysis I've chosen a framework that consists of layers and thus can be considered structural. I have made such choice because, in my opinion, the framework has taken in account flaws and critiques of different 'moral economy' approaches and at the same time combined them in a deliberate way so that they supplement each other with each of their strength. At the same time, I have noticed a flaw in this approach and in general in all 'moral economy' approaches: understanding of what is 'morale' and 'ethics' is not defined, but, in my opinion, although I'm grounding my approach in anthropology of economics and particular - of consumption - it is important to define the perception of 'moral' in thesis. Next subchapter elaborates on my position towards understanding concepts of 'morale' and 'ethics'.

#### **1.4. Moral and ethics**

In theoretical literature that I have reviewed previously morals and ethics have been approached generally and mainly on societal level. It's rarely concretely or not-at-all defined clearly defined, and in literature around the concept of 'moral economies' it has been stressed out that it affects individuals and is affected by their experiences and reactions. In this subchapter, I'm aiming to more precisely define the approach of 'morale' and 'ethics' that I will use to analyse data I have collected.

Jarrett Zigon (2007) in “Moral breakdown and the ethical demand: A theoretical framework for an anthropology of moralities” argues that (1) it hasn't been stressed out in anthropology that morality has been studied by anthropologists all along and (2) those anthropologists who specialise in anthropology of moralities “find it difficult to make distinctions between the moral and the non-moral, and morality and ethics.” (2007, 134) He also points out that his approach is what in anthropology has traditionally been considered when doing research of embodied culture, tradition and power and thus he suggests that this subfield of anthropology should be limited to “moral breakdowns”. (Zigon 2007)

When defining his framework, he draws mainly on ideas of three philosophers - Heidegger (1996 [1953]), Løgstrup (1997) and Badiou (2001) – positioning them as ‘rediscoverers of morality’.

At first, he reflects upon Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world in which ‘in’ constitutes residing in familiar ‘at-homness’, in a world that is dual in a sense that it is both - personally experienced ‘mine’ and at the same time shared ‘ours’. Here he also briefly refers to Dreyfus concept of ‘comportment’ that constitutes unreflective, ‘taken for granted’ or overfamilized acts of personal everydayness and shared ideas of morality. He opposes this concept to Bourdieu's (1990) habitus by arguing:

Being-in-the-world as involved dwelling is always a relationship. This relationship is always a relationship between persons. This way, being-in-the-world is always a being-with. This relationship as being-with is always maintained, even in the absence of a coterminous other. (Zigon 2007, 135)

‘Being-in-the-world’ is being always open to external world and it is possible because of another Heidegger's concept - ‘breakdown’ that is closely entangled with his notions of ‘ready-to-hand’ and ‘present to hand’. ‘Ready-to-hand’ is understood as something that has been unquestioned or taken for granted, and in ‘moral breakdown’ becomes ‘present-to-hand’ and thus - becomes reflected-on and questioned. During this ‘moral breakdown’ person also transfers to ‘step-away’ [from “ready-to-hand” object or idea] and becomes conscious, present and reflective, and thus - open to the world. (Zigon 2007)

This is the moment in which ethics must be performed. In this way, then, I make a distinction between morality as the unreflective mode of being-in-the-world and ethics as a tactic performed in the moment of the breakdown of the ethical dilemma. (Zigon 2007, 137)

Further on Zigon develops his argument by reflecting to Løgstrup (1997) and his concept of 'ethical demand' - a moment when a moral breakdown is experienced and individual poses a demand on himself/herself for Other (not because of demand that is placed by Other). Zigon points out that Løgstrup " [...] has moved beyond the Kantian notion of the autonomous moral subject and provided a way to think of the ethical moment as a moment of relationship. For Løgstrup this responsibility precedes freedom." (Zigon 2007, 138) Thus according to Zigon (2007) this demand depends on the situation and all involved sides. He also points out that responses in these moments can be unconventional and thus - sometimes 'immoral' towards usual perceptions in society.

Zigon proceeds by reflecting Badiou's idea of 'Keep Going!', which accounts individual reacting to particular situations (ethical moments) in order to get through them. Here he connects all previous ideas.

Moral breakdowns are characterized by an ethical demand placed on the person or persons experiencing the breakdown, and this demand requires that they find a way or ways to 'Keep Going!' and return to the everydayness of the unreflective moral dispositions. (Zigon 2007, 148)

In Figure 1 I have illustrated Zigon's approach by including all concepts he has used in it.

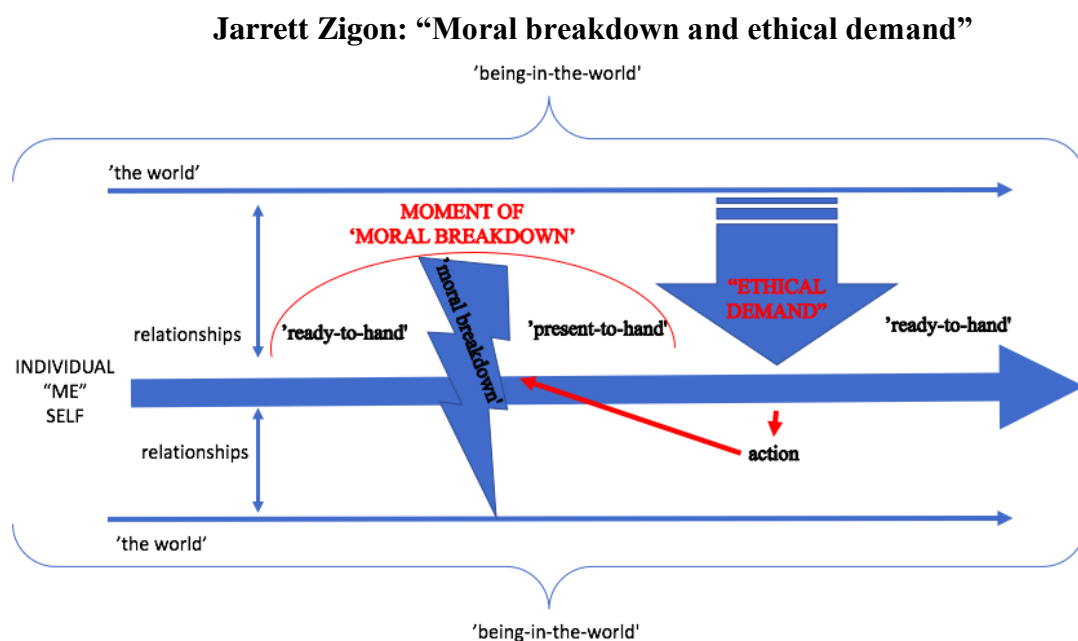


Figure 1

In my opinion, adding Zigon's approach to previously described framework for analysing moral economies in the context of consumption, adds missing conceptualisation of 'morale' and 'ethics' thus providing depth to the analysis.

Nevertheless, it is needed to mention critiques towards Zigon's approach. Since Zigon (2007) in previously summarized article "Moral breakdown and the ethical demand" criticized Joel Robbins approach of morality, Robbins (2009) evolves the discussion in "Value, Structure, and the Range of Possibilities: A Response to Zigon".

What we agree upon is that the anthropology of morality needs to reckon with the existence of at least two broadly different kinds of morality or moral experience, both of which it has to recognize as equally part of its subject matter. (Robbins, 2009, 278)

Although Zigon has pointed out that there is a difference, Robbins still draws 'close enough' parallels between his concept of 'morality of reproduction' and Zigon's 'morality'; as well as between his own 'morality of freedom' and Zigon's 'ethics'. He contrast's Zigon's approach as rooted in phenomenology, and his own (Robbins) approach as rooted in structuralist tradition. His main critiques towards Zigon's view is that it is in comparison less receptive to change, because it focuses on individual adaption that aims for returning into routine, while Robbins focuses on value clashes "that keep the question of 'the good' open in some domains and situations." (Robbins 2009, 284)

In his response Zigon (2009) attempts to address a misconception he claims to see in Robbins argumentation. He argues that from Heidegger's scholarly view phenomenology studies sociality which is not about the individual, but rather about the intersubjectivity that is mediated within social world:

"I hope to make clear that the theory of moral breakdown is not primarily concerned with describing the moral experiences of individuals. Rather it is concerned with analysing the processes by which moral experience becomes possible." (Zigon, 2009, 287)

Heng Leng Chee & Andrea Whittaker has seen Zigon's approach as " a way to structure our enquiry into moralities from either unspoken references that shape practice, behaviour and attitudes, or verbalised discourse in relation to experiences." (Chee and Whittaker, 2019, 4) Meanwhile Justine Chambers (2019) has criticized Zigon's approach by claiming that his approach leaves out the possibility that people would 'moral breakdowns' as part of their

everyday life. She argues that his approach navigates "morality in fragmented, conflictual and sometimes contradictory ways while simultaneously retaining coherence with broad moral ideals that form the ethical substance of fluid and contingent ethnic and personal subjectivities." (Chambers 2019, 273)

Although there Zigon's approach could be considered flawed, a year after his elaboration on his particular approach, he has also criticized the 'moral economy' by claiming that: "It is limited, that is, because moral economy is concerned simply with economic and production relations and the ways in which these relations acquire moral significance over time." (Zigon 2008, 70) I suggest that this particular 'moral economy' limitation is connected to its descent from theories that are more connected to concept of 'economy' than 'moral', thus I suggest that by attaching Zigon's approach to 'moral economy' makes this concept more about 'moral' and thus – the understanding can become more balanced.

### **1.5. Summary of the chapter**

In theoretical background chapter I have elaborated on the field of Anthropology of Economics (and in particular – its subfield – Anthropology of Consumption), concluding that consumption practices are inseparable from economical socialities (that are also inevitably moral). Further on I have explored the development of thought regarding meeting points of 'economy' and 'moral' concepts – 'moral' within 'economy' has been anthropologically addressed already since the end of 18th century. Then I have laid out the development of 'moral economy' concept - in my work I will view 'moral economy' as an "encompassing approach for studying individual ideas and practices and their relation with collective moral frameworks and confinements, and to exploring change and change potential." (Kofti 2016, 433)

In order to define more precisely the 'moral' in 'moral economy' in my work I continued with dedicating a subchapter that drew upon Zigon's (2007) approach of 'moral breakdown and the ethical demand'. His approach constitutes that 'moral' in anthropology should be considered as particular moments of 'moral breakdowns' that create 'ethical demands' (for reaction) that individual puts on himself/herself in order to get through the breakdown and solve ethical dilemma. According to Zigon 'moral breakdown' happens at moments when something that has been unquestioned before ('ready-to-hand') becomes an object of awareness and doubt about it' 'present to hand'.

Thus, I suggest that Zigon's approach develops to the concept of 'moral economy' and the concept could also be called 'aware economy' / 'conscious economy' or 'ethical economy'.

‘Aware economy’/ ‘conscious economy’ - if an economy considered as a process that occurs at the moment of ‘moral breakdown’ when ‘ethical demand’ on the economy appears in order to maintain positive and continuous relationship with ‘Other’ (it could be also described as an economy that questions itself). ‘Ethical economy’ – if an economy is considered as a particular change or result that is achieved by the reaction that is made because of ‘ethical demand’ that appeared in (at that point already-solved) ‘moral breakdown’.

Coinciding with the chosen ‘moral economy’ definition I have chosen Wheeler’s (2017) analytical framework of ‘moral economy’ in the context of consumption. Analytical framework consists of three layers:

- 1) state regulation made in order to affect economical processes in particular context;
- 2) critical discourse of actively moralising social group and the collective customs;
- 3) the lay of formatives of costumers (lived experiences of consumers).

In next chapter I elaborate on the research design I have developed in order answer the research question by to collecting data and analysing it according to theoretical perspective I have chosen.

## **2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this chapter I explain my choice of methods (participant observation, state regulation analysis, social media ethnography, informal and unstructured interviews), describe the process of the research, justify the choice of informants and elaborate on my (researcher's) position in the field.

### **2.1. Research methods**

For research methods, I have chosen participant observation, text analysis, social media ethnography and interviewing. In following section I explain why I chose each of the methods.

#### **2.2.1. Participant observation**

Participant observation has been and still is considered as a central foundational method of cultural anthropology. In this method, the researcher learns both the explicit and tacit aspects of a group's life by taking part in its daily activities, interactions and events (Musante, 2015). I considered this method as unavoidable and necessary for both: development of my research question and answering to it.

As already mentioned before: I carried out participant observation by working part-time at Zero Waste shop *Turza* as a shopping assistant. I worked there from beginning of November till the end of December. Once a week I worked on working-day evening shifts and once a week I worked on a weekend. My duties included being a cashier, as well as assisting buyers and taking care of products in the shop. I always tried to keep a padlock close to me so that I could make notes about my observations and/or informal conversations that I have had.

Qualitative research has been stressed as important part of the development of hypotheses and theory: "Participant observation, in particular, encourages the continual reassessment of initial research questions as hypotheses, and debilitates the development of new hypotheses and question as new insights occur as a result of increasing familiarity with the context." (Musante, 2015, 15) Participant observation - when combined with previous notes, interviews and other materials provides the researcher with deeper insight and understanding of behaviour. (Musante, 2015, 15)

During participant observation, I wrote down my field notes in a A6 sized notebook. During the day, I shortly wrote down most interesting observations and most important phrases

from informal conversations, but after every working day I took my notebook notes as reminders of that day happenings and wrote down everything much more in detail.

Another part of my participant observation was also trying to implement some of Zero Waste practices in my life. I also used previously mentioned notebook to take field notes on my own Zero Waste experiences and revelations.

During my fieldwork, I questioned my initial assumptions and research question and that has led me to changing the research question (and thus also the theoretical perspective) several times - thus it was participant observation that has led me to my current perspective. While being in process of writing my thesis, I participated in a public speaking training (at that time I was also employed by the particular public speaking school) and (persuaded by my employer) I prepared for my defence a small speech about the process of my Zero Waste research. Even though I had explained the idea that I'm not referring to myself as Zero Waste, but rather refer to myself as a social scientist interested in Zero Waste practices, when first-exposed to the Zero Waste concept some people in the group asked sceptical questions about the implementation of Zero Waste practices in my life: "Where you will throw out your boots when they will be broken?" I initially noticed that contradictory feelings raised in me: (a) I self critically thought that I cannot represent this high-standard-community although during my fieldwork I indeed have implemented some of the Zero Waste ideas in my life, but at the same time (b) I also did not want to appear "crazy" and "radical" by even speaking about Zero Waste. Later on, that evening I was working on my thesis by looking at my field notes, and I realized that at the shop I have met several people who told that they are not doing Zero Waste but rather would refer to themselves as people who are aiming for Zero Waste. And also, there were individuals who referred to themselves as doing Less Waste rather than Zero Waste. Besides that, there have been several informal conversations about impassibility of 100% Zero Waste. At the same time - these people theoretically were actively practising Zero Waste by being at the shop. The participant observation was the first step to define the Zero Waste concept as the community members themselves use it that would help afterwards during the interviews analysis.

In my research participant observation as a method has been extremely beneficial for developing my research question and for choosing informants, data from field notes enriched data that I gained by using other methods and also deepened my understanding of other data. Rest of the methods are tied to layers of Wheeler's (2017) framework.

### **2.2.2. State regulation (text) analysis**

In order to approach the first analytical layer of Wheeler's (2017) analytical framework (state regulation made in order to affect economical processes in particular context), I analysed information about Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia activities that connected to Zero Waste concerns. Analysis was done by summarizing information about environmental legislation and by pointing out the parts of it that are criticized in "Zero Waste Latvia discussions" Facebook group.

### **2.2.3. Social media ethnography**

In order to approach Wheeler's (2017) framework's second layer (critical discourse of actively moralising social group and the collective customs) I used social media ethnography. In this subchapter, I will elaborate on specifics of social media ethnographies.

Essentially, ethnography is ethnography. Only now social stories of the human experience involve digital interactions. (Hallett, Barber 2014, 325)

Ronald E. Hallett and Kristen Barber in "Ethnographic Research in a Cyber Era" argue against a dichotomy between online and offline data and suggest that "people now occupy online as well as physical "habitats," and these spaces have become important for the creation and reproduction of relationships, identities, and social locations." (Hallett, Barber 2014, 307) They argue that online spaces now have become central to life and have fundamentally transformed daily lives of people around the world, and "lived realities increasingly include online interactions" (Hallett, Barber 2014, 307). They strongly outline that "ethnographers studying contemporary social life should consider online spaces as another "level" or site where their participants live" (Hallett, Barber 2014, 307). From their own experiences in several fieldworks where at the beginning they didn't plan to use online data, but research process has lead them to do so. They claim that "grappling with the complicated relationships between online and offline interactions increases the depth in understanding complex issues in modern social life" (Hallett, Barber 2014, 325).

As an example, I will quote Hallett' and Barber's reflection:

Prior to entering the field site, I had considered asking participants to journal about how they spent time and perceived the educational process. I soon realized students were already "journaling" on their Facebook pages, and these posts were

more natural than I may have received if they had used paper and pencil to write at my request.” (Hallett, Barber 2014, 316).

In my opinion, this note perfectly illustrates their notion of how tightly online experiences are tied to tangible reality. (Hallett, Barber 2014)

Also, Christine Hine in “Virtual Ethnography” argues that conducting an ethnographic enquiry online, the process gives the opportunity to gain a reflexive understanding of how it is to be a part of the internet. And as the ethnographer learns by using the same media as informants – ethnography is provided with a symmetry (Hine 2000, 10).

In Zero Waste Latvia case I find social media (digital) ethnography unavoidable, because digital media has been the means through which Bea Johnson’s initially proposed concept of Zero Waste lifestyle is known in Latvia. As I will elaborate later– the Facebook group was created before shops were open – before it was possible to find a physical place that would be regularly visited by people who are familiar to the concept (see chapter 3.1.).

With the introduction of new technologies, the stories have remained vivid, but the ways they were told have changed. (Murthy 2008, 838)

Dhiraj Murthy outlines six ways in which social networking sites are useful to ethnographers. In my research, I see two of them the most appealing: (a) vast availability of multimedia and (b) ability for me to “invisibly” observe activity (a previously unavailable type of ethnographic data). He argues that social networking web sites should be treated in a layered or nuanced fashion, and emphasizes that in combination with other data that is gained in, for example, Facebook can provide in-depth autobiographical accounts of scenes (Murthy 2008).

The main conclusion of the article is that when physical and digital ethnography is used in a balanced combination it can give researcher (1) a larger and more diverse array of methods and (2) enable researcher to “demarginalize the voice of respondents”. (Murthy 2008, 839)

John Postill and Sarah Pink reflected on their research that “posed a set of questions concerning how activists and social movements were engaging social media in their activist practices, and the implications – if any – for socio-political change.” (Postill, Pink 2012, 123) In 2010 they moved to Barcelona for twelve months to do this particular research and in the article, they suggest that “for the internet ethnographer, the implications of the shift to Web 2.0 and the rapid growth of social media platforms, applications, practices and activity are threefold. They create new sites for ethnographic fieldwork, foster new types of ethnographic practice and invite critical perspectives on the theoretical frames that dominate internet studies,

thus providing opportunities for rethinking internet research methodologically.” (Postill, Pink 2012, 124) When reflecting to their own research in Barcelona they suggest that:

Going to Barcelona to study social media meant the project benefited from making connections between online and locality-based realities. Rather than being ‘the pursuit of ethnographic holism’ (Hine 2000, 48); it enabled us to follow ethnographically the (dis)continuities between the experienced realities of face-to-face and social media movement and socialities. This is part of the process of making an ‘ethnographic place’ (Pink, 2009). (Postill, Pink 2012, 124)

They suggest looking at social media as:

[...] a research environment that is dispersed across web platforms, is constantly in progress and changing, and implicates physical as well as digital localities. [...] Thus, we propose, social media ethnography practice further suggests a critical shift from the analysis of online communities to that of digital socialities. (Postill, Pink 2012, 127)

In my opinion, it is important to point out that in my research my social media ethnography usage has aimed to look for continuities and discontinuities between social media online movement and reality that I experienced when spending face-to-face time during my participant observation and by conducting interviews.

Besides observation of data already available on the Facebook group, I have also inflicted a methodological experiment. After noticing certain tendencies offline, I initiated an “online focus group discussion” with an open question posted in Facebook Latvia Discussions group. Later on (in chapter 2.5) I will elaborate on the process of the experiment.

#### **2.2.4. Informal and unstructured interviews**

In order to approach Wheeler’s (2017) framework’s third layer (lived experiences of consumers), during my fieldwork, I conducted informal and semi-structured interviews. Informal interviews happened mostly during my participant observation at Zero Waste shop Turza, where I took part in many informal conversations with costumers as well as with the owners of the shop and my colleagues. In analysis, I use the data when turning to Wheelers (2017) third layer: the lay of formatives of costumers (lived experiences of consumers).

Harvey Russell Bernard (2006) states:

In informal interviewing the researcher just tries to remember conversations heard during the course of a day in the field. This requires constant jotting and daily sessions in which you sit at a computer, typing away, unburdening your memory, and developing field notes. Informal interviewing is the method of choice at the beginning of participant observation fieldwork to build greater rapport and to uncover new topics of interest that might have been overlooked. (Bernard 2006, 211)

And indeed – informal interviews at the beginning of my participant observation helped me to develop my plan for unstructured/semi-structured interviews that I conducted later on.

At the beginning of my participant observation, I developed an interview guide/plan with a plan in my head that said that my interviews will be semi-structured rather than unstructured.

Unstructured interviews are based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind, but are also characterized by a minimum of control over the people's responses. The idea is to let people open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, and at their own pace. (Bernard 2006, 211)

In contrary:

It has much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing and requires all the same skills, but semi-structured interviewing is based on the use of an interview guide. This is a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order. (Bernard 2006, 212)

But my plan / guide ended up more as a frame for very organic conversation-like interviews / unstructured interviews where my informants themselves when answering to questions mentioned something connected to another theme-section of my plan, so I just wrote down in my notes how they did it, and after they have answered the previous questions/covered one part of my plan, I could very organically ask them more about something they already mentioned before. In that way, it was impossible to hold on to a particular order and questions much more differed between different interviews (they were connected to the same topics, but

questions mostly differed, so I believe that they are less comparable than if they were the same), but at that point I felt that rapport and probing is much more important.

During my fieldwork, I realized that I have my own perception of what is “Zero Waste” and I start to see ideas connected with this concept more and more appealing, entirely logical and not at all “alien”. During interviews, I noticed that I have gone “too far” in my participant-observation and therefore losing the stance in which I started the fieldwork. To distance myself from the field I have allowed the informants to lead the interviews by losing my own structure and lead. I see it as the best possible turn in my fieldwork process. After all – I’m writing my master thesis about others Zero Waste practitioners not about myself “converting” to Zero Waste. In order to distance myself even more - later on, a while after I ended my participant observation, I intentionally allowed myself to go back to my old consumption practices.

The journalistic style tries to verbally pin the respondent down by appearing to know everything already. The ethnographic style of interviewing instead tries to enter into the world of respondent by appearing to know very little. (Leech 2002, 665)

Harvey Russell Bernard has also stated that: “A lot of what is called ethnographic interviewing is unstructured.” (Bernard 2006, 211) I believe that by letting my informants lead me more than I expected I have gained more less-obvious and in-depth information that otherwise I wouldn’t get.

### **2.3. Choice of informants**

My informal interviews mostly happened without planning and choosing informants – these conversations happened while I was doing my participant-observation in Zero Waste concept shop Turza. Most often-talked-to informants for my informal interviews were shop-owners and colleagues.

Informal interviews in the shop also helped me to choose informants for unstructured interviews – those were people who I saw there several times and/or with whom I managed to talk/do informal interviews several times. In Figure 2 it is possible to get to know more about each of the interviews (all names are changed). Since Ieva is Laila’s daughter, I interviewed them at the same time.

## Interviewed informants

Name (changed)	Details about the interview
Jana (32)	1.12.2018, length of the interview: 2:25
Jānis (30)	12.01.2019, length of the interview: 1:15
Kristīne (29)	25.01.2019, length of the interview: 1:25
Laila (42)	19.01.2019, length of the interview: 1:05
Ieva (12)	19.01.2019, length of the interview: 1:05

*Figure 2*

In total, I have conducted four unstructured interviews with five informants - this data adds to the social media ethnography and state regulation analysis.

## 2.4. Data coding and analysis

Data that I'm using for coding consists of five interview transcripts, my field notes and data from Zero Waste Latvia Facebook group discussions (January 1<sup>st</sup> till May 1<sup>st</sup>).

Interviews were transcribed in Latvian and coded by using ATLAS.ti computer programme, but coding process of discussions in Zero Waste Latvia group was different. I collected data by screenshotting active discussions and sorted them in key-worded folders. I translated into English only the quotes used in the text.

## 2.5. Ethics

American Anthropological Association (AAA) states: "Anthropologists work in the widest variety of contexts studying all aspects of the human experience, and face myriad ethical quandaries inflected in different ways by the contexts in which they work and the kinds of issues they address." (American Anthropological Association. 2012)

During all stages of my research, I'm aiming to fulfil all Association's Principles of Professional Responsibility. Most acute question regarding ethics for me seems to be "obtaining informed consent and necessary permissions".

Owners and colleagues of the shop Turza were informed about my initial intent to carry out fieldwork. On a daily day-to-day basis, I didn't introduce myself as a researcher to every single customer, but the shop is a public space and data I collected during observation and informal conversations will be used in compiled, generalized and anonymous way. I introduced

to myself and my research only to those customers I have met there several times and that I decided to approach for an in-depth interview. Before every interview I told my story once more and asked for their permission to be recorded and whether they wanted to stay anonymous or not. Two of the informants wanted to remain anonymous, so I chose to change the names for all of the informants.

Informed consent, in this case, is also a critical question because of the challenging task I have decided to do: to use relatively new social media ethnography method. Roxana Willis (2017) in “Observations online: Finding the ethical boundaries of Facebook research” addresses justifiability of waiving informed consent in this online setting. She supports her argument by proposing that there are at least two ways informed consent could be waived in research: (1) if the data is public; (2) if the data is textual. To prove that information she harvested on Facebook is public, she explored: (1) the technical availability of Facebook News Feed information and (2) Facebook users’ apparent perceptions about the publicity of their News Feed. (Willis 2017) To argue the publicity of data I will be using in my research, I will note that (1) “Zero Waste Latvia discussions” Facebook group is technically public (Facebook 2019) and thus available for everyone (Facebook 2019), (2) people increasingly use the group to ask questions and/or share experiences or ideas for others and rarely overly private information is shared. Regarding the question whether data collected on Facebook is textual/documental or constitutes human subjects research Willis claims:

Since the Facebook News Feed involves social interaction that may elicit 'ethically important moments', this paper proposes that observing it may constitute human subjects research. While informed consent is desirable for human subject’s research, it is suggested that Facebook News Feed observations are comparable to observational research in a public space, and thus waiving informed consent in this online setting could be justifiable. (Willis 2017, 1.)

In the “Zero Waste Latvia Discussions” Facebook group I would argue that it is both – data collected in the group can be considered both – textual/documental and it also constitutes human subject research in a public space.

Considering everything mentioned before I still have changed names for any quotes from Facebook that I have used in my research.

Meanwhile, I have risked and I admit that during previously mentioned “digital focus-group” experiment I have faced a dilemma and I would even say that (for around half an hour) I have failed the ethical principle of informed consent. The idea of the experiment arose

suddenly after hours of reading the content of discussions and because of interest to see whether tendencies I noticed during participant observation and also in interviews would be apparent also in answers to my question: “If you would need to rename “Zero Waste” - what would be the new name?” Before posting the question I had just read Roxana Willis article as well John Postill and Sarah Pink article "Social Media Ethnography - The Digital Researcher In The Messy Web" and I must admit - I was excited about using Facebook as a tool for my research and even more excited about the idea that I could try out my own “innovative” approach of “digital participant observation” - I perceived this particular Facebook group as a public space and my question as a logical part of conversation that is taking place. I thought: “No need to provide my context, it's a public space and I'm participating”. I didn't perceive the post as one of those “classical” survey posts of students - I was taking part in the discussion by posing a question. But soon after posting, I started to doubt myself because of a member aggressively asking: “Why do you need to rename something that already has a name? Why is it needed?” I realised - there is a difference between a spontaneous and informal conversation/interview with people I've just met offline and online. In comparison, I suggest that sudden informal conversations in offline public spaces are mostly floating and grants anonymously for both - informant and researcher. Informal conversation stays only in researcher's field notes and memory. In contrary - in Facebook's online public space you don't have a need to ask someone's name - it's only granted thing that you know about the person (as all other information on individual's profile can be made private) (Facebook 2019). In online public space shortage of time is no more an argument and researcher always have an opportunity to give information. Also - Facebook is not comparable to anonymous public online spaces as, for example, online gaming platforms etc. Once the observer enters the field and participates, both sides are identifiable - researcher and anyone researcher interacts with. If name changing in the case of simple “observing” of public online spaces helps to anonymize data, if the researcher tries to participate in the way I tried to participate - name changing makes no sense anymore, because it is extremely easy to find the particular question I have posted and conversation it has created. Given the context, I have laid out previously - situations similar to one I described before cannot be compared to participant-observation and/or informal interviewing in offline public spaces but rather it is comparable to formal interviewing and/or focus group interviews that has to have informed consent. As Matter Williams in “Avatar watching: participant observation in graphical online environments” states:

While the days of harvesting data from unsuspecting chat and newsgroups are at an end and practices for online informed consent semi-established (Markham, 2005), the evolution of

online interactivity calls for constant evaluation of these guidelines and forms of practice. (Williams 2007, 18)

I crossed the line by putting an equality sign between participant observation in offline and online (especially - Facebook) public spaces. Right now (in context to all the work I have put into my research before my relatively impulsive action) my spontaneous experiment seems extremely reckless. Yes - I edited my post after around 25-30 minutes of posting by adding information that I invite them to help me to write my master thesis by participating in an “online focus-group”, but later on I saw other members calling out on the author of aggressiveness (that for them was inadequate since then information about the context of my question was available) and I answered those few comments by admitting that it wasn't she who did the mistake - I was the one to blame, because of giving wider context of my question and that I have done my best to correct my mistake.

I could leave out the data I collected during my experiment and/or I could leave out my honest reflections on this process - that would be a cowardly way to leave out all the risk of admitting and learning from my mistakes. Since social media ethnography is a new methodological approach - it is challenging and, indeed, risky. What is done can't be undone, but I hope that my lesson-learned can be a lesson for fellow anthropology students, who will be aiming to enter this challenging field.

Despite my concerns on my own approach, I want to clarify that AAA “Principles of Professional Responsibility” still states that: “Normally, the observation of activities and events in fully public spaces is not subject to prior consent.” In this context, I still want to clarify that: I'm not arguing against perceiving Facebook public space the same way as any other public space, just pointing out that Facebook as public space functions differently from physical public spaces, and because of that these spaces cannot be approached the same way.

Another strong argument of Roxana Willis:

If researchers avoid incorporating data from online platforms such as Facebook due to difficulties obtaining informed consent, then that leaves the information only to be exploited for financial profit, through targeted advertising and so forth (see Fuchs 2011, for example). Socially minded researchers could have a valuable role to play in balancing the market-led aims of online data analysis. (Willis 2017, 13)

I still will be using the data I gained during my experiment, because in my view it strongly supports the arguments I'm going to use in my thesis, and I believe that by combining this data with other types of data increases overall quality of data analysis.

By observing the group I'm able to observe other students using the group for their study needs - I'm also analysing data made by other researchers, by that means - answers to my question in any way would be public and available for everyone - no matter if I would have given my full context from the beginning or not, it could even be another person who asked the question - everyone who participated, participated by knowing that their answers were public. Although if I could redo my attempt, I would have done my experiment differently and I would not use the same approach again, I will distance myself from my mistake by learning from it and doing good for research that hopefully has wider context and public value.

Willis in her article claims:

In situations where the right to informed consent has not been achieved, researchers might go beyond the ethical goal of doing no harm and seek to do good (Boellstorff et al., 2012: 130; Dupont, 2008; Herring, 1996: 164). (Willis, 2017, 13)

To amend not having gained full informed consent Willis aimed to make her research findings accessible to her research community and worked with policies makers to make a positive change. Even without coming to the conclusion that I might have jeopardised an ethical principle, I aimed for the best possible quality of my research. Now (after realising that I have done a mistake) I know that when (and if) will get approval that my work has met reasonable quality standards, I have do my best to deliver results to Zero Waste Latvia Discussions group members, Zero Waste nongovernmental organization and also (but not less important) - to a wider public.

## **2.6. Reflexivity on the researcher's position**

Joan E. Dodgson has said: "In qualitative research, it is assumed that who the researcher is makes a difference in the findings of their study; objectivity is not present. In fact, it is often said 'The researcher is the research instrument'." (Dogston 2019, 220) In this sub-chapter of my thesis I have aimed to describe the context of myself as a researcher. Firstly, I have unfolded the story of my main scientific interest. I explain how it is connected to the topic of my research and reflect on the possible effects my previous context could leave on my perspective.

Secondly, I reflect on my personal interest in the topic and how it could affect the research. Lastly, I reflect on overall research process and on my position in it.

As I already mentioned in the introduction – before I started to study social and cultural anthropology, I attained a bachelor degree in business management with speciality in marketing communications. When studying marketing I was particularly interested and captivated by “customer behaviour” study course. When I discovered that there is a field of Anthropology that specialises in consumption, I saw that as possibility to study (1) consumption on a deeper level (by using completely different and much more diverse range of concepts); (2) to study marketing in reverse (by that I mean – I saw it as a possibility to deconstruct everything that marketing has ever constructed). This realization became one of main reasons I decided to study anthropology. Also – already for eight years I have been working in the field of marketing communications and to be more precise – social media communication. And because of this background I’m also interested to methodologically understand and implement digital ethnography.

Although during my studies it has been extremely interesting to get to know other fields of anthropology, consumption anthropology has remained as my main scientific interest, because this field has the biggest potential for my previous knowledge and experience to meet my newly gained knowledge of anthropological approach (and vice versa). It would be extremely rewarding to use the combination of both in a practical (applied) way.

Another important reason why I chose to study anthropology was connected to my previous business management studies, but this reason is more connected to my own personal struggle to “get along” with narrative that profitability (instead of viability or sustainability) is the most (or sometimes - the only) important part of the business. Because of this struggle I’ve been interested into the concept of social entrepreneurship. I believe that it is clear that social and cultural anthropology (and the field of consumption anthropology) can be especially useful when aiming for social innovation – nevertheless on small or large scale. In my opinion, when social innovation is at the centre of business, it also can grant a certain commercial viability and even profitability. Thus – another important reason why I chose to study anthropology is possibility that I could (1) study social entrepreneurs and help them with the results, (2) through my studies an idea for my own social enterprise could be born.

Taking in account everything I’ve mentioned before, in my opinion, it is important to point out two aspects. Firstly, studying Zero Waste in Latvia has allowed to do both - to (1) study consumption and (2) use digital ethnography. And besides that: study a topic connected to social entrepreneurship. Social enterprise law in Latvia includes enterprises that aim to

protect and maintain environment – Zero Waste shop Turza in their crowdfunding application stated that:

We want to create a place, that would unburden life for those, who already practice zero-waste lifestyle, and to serve as an informational stepping stone for many of those who still find environmentally friendly shopping and life as a challenge. We want to create a business that fully functions by circular economy principles - waste creation and unneeded amount of packaging would be eradicated not only for the customer, but also in product supply chain. (Projektbanka, 2018)

And from my viewpoint those two aspects are also arguments that connect this research not only to consumption anthropology, but also applied anthropology.

And in this case, I would even refer to Agneta Johannsen (1992) and call myself (in the context of this particular work) more specifically a post-modernist applied anthropologist that:

[...] neither seeks to solve a problem as the applied anthropologist does nor to represent a target culture as the interpretive anthropologist attempts to do. The post-modernist applied anthropologist can provide a mechanism by which the target community represents itself and determines the nature and solution of its problems.” (Johannsen 1992, 72)

In her approach, the goal of a post-modernist applied anthropologist is to establish a dialogue/collaboration in which ethnographer can present a number of “voices” that has the authority to be a part of the target culture’s portrayal to a variety of readerships. Also, Louise Lamphere argues that in 21<sup>st</sup> century the relationships applied anthropologists have established with communities have been reshaped from that of “outside experts” and scientists studying “others” to more collaborative and partnership arrangements. (Lamphere 2004, 431) Thus my research aims to (1) give voice to those who are studied and (2) help the Zero Waste movement with qualitative market data that can be used in order to help social enterprises thrive and archive wider impact.

Referring to reflexivity:

Researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor

the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal. (Berger 2015, 220).

I believe that it is important to take in account that besides my previous academic and professional background, I've also been personally interested in such concept as "minimalism" (as a lifestyle that eliminates clutter in order to live simpler and calmer life). I couldn't tell that I've tried to practise this lifestyle deliberately, but I have definitely followed online information flow around this topic and because of this interest I noticed the concept of Zero Waste long before it gained visibility and popularity in Latvia. The first time I came upon this concept it appeared very extreme and radical, even a little bit strange, so it was even more interesting to observe how the concept gains popularity also in Latvia. From the very beginning of my research I have been aware that my initial interest in the topic is connected to other interests that are conceptually related to the concept of Zero Waste, thus I have tried to remain as reflexive as possible.

As I already mentioned before, I used participant observation mainly for developing my research question and perspective. During my participant-observation (by working in a Zero Waste shop) I noticed otherwise unusual behaviour: some people felt so free at the shop that when (their own) jars got a leak of, for example, cream or syrup – they licked the jars. When I visited another Zero Waste shop and wasn't sure that I could pour Nutella in my jar as neatly as I would love to and told my concerns about that to the shop assistant, she told me: "Just lick it [my jar] and it will be ok!" These events raised contradictory reactions in me and lead me to an idea that concept of 'clean' in the context of Zero Waste would be an interesting angle that most probably would lead to interesting conclusions, because concept 'clean' can be connected to so many ideas and things.

I developed the interview plan and questions by basing on this idea, but when I started doing the interviews, I realized that the concept of 'clean' most probably was more interesting for me than for my informants. They didn't touch the concept or did it once during the whole interview. This point of my research seemed like a deadlock – it was devastating to realize that the angle I have finally found is more about me than about my informants. I definitely didn't want to write my thesis about my own struggle with my own perception of 'clean' while 'converting' to Zero Waste.

I believe that my self-reflexivity has lead me to my second (and current) research question. Around the time I realized that my idea to build by thesis around the concept of "clean" will not work – I was participating in a public speaking training group and instructor inspired me to try speaking about the topic of my master thesis. Since I didn't have my

perspective yet, I decided to speak very generally, but even before I got a chance to explain that I will be telling about Zero Waste from a perspective of a researcher (and I don't identify myself as Zero Waste), I got some quite sceptical questions from other group members: "Where will you throw your boots when they will we all-worn out?" In the context of this situation I realized all those situations when people who came to the shop has told me: "I'm not Zero Waste", "I'm Less Waste", "it's impossible to be 100% Zero Waste" etc. I noticed that at that moment I could tell the same things, though – just as those people in the shop – as a part of my participant observation I have indeed tried to implement some of Zero Waste principles in my life. After this realization, I (1) reconsidered my position and (2) re-read my interview transcripts and found another (current) angle and perspective of the research.

When I approached the shop with a question whether I could spend time at their shop and start my research by working there, I described my background, and shop owners were very open and interested to have me as a part of the team also because they were interested in using my consultations for shop's social media communication. I did consult before the shop opened and periodically also helped a little bit by creating and posting some content (it was very rare – only at the busiest weeks, when manager couldn't do it properly because of lack of time). Although it can be perceived as effect on the field, I consider that it is a matter of ethics – declining to use my capability to give a good deed to enterprise that has given me access to the field (other shops declined my plea) would be inappropriate.

For interviews, I chose people who I have met in the shop several times - I approached them, positioned myself as a student and researcher and asked for their contacts while being in the shop – that's the reason why I believe that during the interviews I was perceived as an insider. I was a person they met at the shop and probably perceived as someone they could consult themselves regarding questions connected to the shop itself. It is possible that because I was perceived as an insider - a person who already understands the basic ideas connected to Zero Waste – informants didn't respond to my interview plan with answers connected to cleanliness and concept of 'clean'.

## **2.11. Summary of the chapter**

In my research design participant observation served ad first step for defining Zero Waste concept as the community members use it. Participant observation also played a big role for re-shaping the research question and choosing informants for interviews. Rest of methods are aligned with layers of Wheeler's (2017) analytical framework for 'moral economy' in the context of consumption:

1) in order to analyse state regulation made to affect economical processes in Zero Waste context, I collected and analysed information about state regulation and any reactions available in “Zero Waste Latvia Discussions” Facebook group in the period between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 1 May;

2) in order to analyse critical discourse of actively moralising social group and the collective customs, I used data from Facebook group "Zero Waste Latvia Discussions" (social media ethnography);

3) but in order to approach the lay of formatives of consumers (lived experiences of consumers), I conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews and analysed transcribed data together with field-notes and informal interviews that happened while I conducted participant observation.

### **3. DATA ANALYSIS**

At the beginning of this section I elaborate on Zero Waste conceptual origins and definitions and more in detail describe the field I'm researching. Then I analyse data by using Zigon's approach of 'moral breakdowns', and 'moral economy' in my work is understood as an "encompassing approach for studying individual ideas and practices and their relation with collective moral frameworks and confinements, and to exploring change and change potential." (Kofti 2016, 433) Analysis is done according to Wheeler's (2017) analytical framework of 'moral economy' in the context of consumption.

Firstly, I analyse state regulation regarding the questions Zero Waste concept is concerned, secondly, I analyse actively moralizing "Zero Waste Latvia Discussions" Facebook group's moral discourse, and lastly – I explore lived experiences of consumers by analysing interview material.

#### **3.1. Origins of Zero Waste concept and description of the field**

Before I turn to analysing the data I have gathered, I aim to provide wider context by examining Zero Waste concept itself and its history/origins. The term "zero waste" was first used publicly in the mid-1970s in Oakland, California in the name of a company, Zero Waste Systems Inc. (ZWS), which was founded by PhD chemist Paul Palmer. ZWS worked to find new uses for most of the chemicals being excessed by the nascent electronics industry and they soon expanded their services in many other directions (Palmer 2004).

A peer-reviewed (in 2004 and then revised 2009 and 2018) definition given by Zero Waste International Alliance (ZWIA) states:

Zero Waste is the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning, and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health. (ZWIA 2019)

Bea Johnson – author of the bestselling book "Zero Waste Home" that initiated Zero Waste concept's popularity on an individual level has proposed basic principles of Zero Waste lifestyle as: "Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rot (and only in that order)." (Zero Waste Home, 2019) In short, it means – refusing things that you can live without, reduce what you need by decluttering home, replacing disposable items with reusable ones and recycling and rotting everything that cannot be refused, reduced and reused. (Johnson 2016)

The book “Zero Waste Home” was released on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2013, before that content of the book was available as a blog (the first post was made on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2009 (Zero Waste Home 2019)).

20 months after the Bea Johnson’s book release – on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014 biggest (now) international Facebook group (community) “Journey to Zero-Waste” (now has 94 633 members from around the world) was created (Journey to Zero-Waste, 2019). My research field was another Facebook group “Zero Waste Latvia Discussions” and group of people that shops in Zero Waste / bulk shop Turza.

The group “Zero Waste Latvia Discussions” was created on January 2016 and back then it was named “I want a no-packaging shop in Riga” (soon after renamed to “Zero Waste Riga”). On Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup> first “Zero Waste Riga” meetup is organized - Facebook event shows that there were 328 people interested and 43 attended the event. In May 2017 group is renamed from “Zero Waste Riga” to “Zero Waste Latvia”. When I first examined this field in 2017 Facebook group had 1432 members, now (May 29<sup>th</sup>) it has 9828 members. Throughout this period group has been active – members of the group use a virtual environment to share their experiences, newfound ideas, questions. They also inform each other about relevant lectures and participate in discussions quite actively (Zero Waste Latvia Discussions 2019).

Since the creation of the group, there have been a group of activists who organize activities in order to popularize Zero Waste concept in Latvia – in 2018 these activists founded a nongovernmental organisation called “Zero Waste Latvia”. (Lursoft 2018, Zero Waste Latvija 2019)

In 2018 also three Zero Waste shops were opened in the centre of Riga – *Burka*, *Zeroveikals* and Turza, as well as shop *Ber un sver* opened in Jelgava. In 2019 the tendency is still apparent – a shop *Neiepakots* in Sigulda has been opened, a *Zero Waste café* has been opened in the centre of Riga and few days before handing in the research (in May 31<sup>st</sup>) Zero Waste shop *Zemes draugs* has been opened in Āgenskalns (district in Riga), in “Zero Waste Latvia Discussions” Facebook group there have been information that besides *Zemes draugs* another shop in Āgenskalns will be opened too.

In this section I have introduced to Zero Waste conceptual origins and in more detail introduced to the background of Zero Waste in Latvia. In following subchapters, I will analyse Zero Waste Latvia as a ‘moral economy’ of consumption.

### **3.2. State regulation (in context of Zero Waste)**

In order to analyse state regulation that aims to make an effect on economical processes in Zero Waste context, I elaborate and analyse information about state regulation in Latvia: I summarise information about regulations regarding environmental protection and point out the information regarding state regulation implementation that were apparent in “Zero Waste Latvia discussions” Facebook group during the time period between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2019.

To define what regulation applies to Zero Waste concerns I will elaborate only on information that I see as applying to Zero Waste International Alliance’s definition of ‘Zero Waste’: “the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning, and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health.” (ZWIA 2018)

Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia is the main institution that is responsible for implementation of state regulation that applies to Zero Waste concerns (mainly - environmental protection) - in following subchapter I will elaborate on main regulations and ministries main activities that promote responsible production, consumption and environmentally friendly reuse and recovery of products. Firstly, I will introduce to variety of laws that regulate responsible production and recovery of products, packaging etc., then I will elaborate on state regulation that was addressed in “Zero Waste Latvia Discussions” Facebook group within time period 1<sup>st</sup> January and 1<sup>st</sup> May.

Also – it is needed to note that since Latvia is a part of European Union (EU) national legislation makers are required to take in account different kinds of legislations that are issued by EU:

EU environmental policies and legislation protect natural habitats, keep air and water clean, ensure proper waste disposal, improve knowledge about toxic chemicals and help businesses move toward a sustainable economy.

On climate change, the EU formulates and implements climate policies and strategies, taking a leading role in international negotiations on climate. It is committed to ensuring the successful implementation of the Paris Agreement and implementing the EU’s Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). In this regard, EU countries have agreed to meet various targets in the years to come. The EU seeks to ensure that climate concerns are taken on board in other policy areas (e.g. transport

and energy) and also promotes low-carbon technologies and adaptation measures.  
(EUR-Lex 2019)

One of the main laws that restrict economical activities regarding Zero Waste concerns is **Environmental Protection Law** – law's main aim is to ensure the preservation of environmental quality and sustainability regarding the use of natural resources. (Environmental Protection Law 2006) Another important law connected to Zero Waste concerns is **Law on Pollution** - the purpose of the law is to prevent or minimize damage to human health, property and the environment caused by pollution, to prevent the consequences of damage. (On Pollution 2001)

In order to address responsible production Natural Resource Tax is implemented. The goal of this activity is: "to promote efficient use of natural resources, limit environmental pollution, reduce production and sales of products that are harmful to the environment, promote the implementation of new environmentally friendly technologies, support sustainable economic growth, and provide financial support for environmental protection measures." (Natural Resources Tax Law 2005)

According to **Natural Resources Tax** Law natural resources tax is paid by those companies in Latvia that (1) acquires or realizes taxable natural resources, (2) use the useful properties of the subterranean depths, (3) emits taxable pollution into the environment or bury waste, (4) sell their goods in packaging, (5) during their economic activities use packaged goods, (6) during production or whilst providing a service use disposable accessories, (7) during their economic activities sell or use any goods that are harmful to environment or sell or use any electrical equipment, (8) uses radioactive substances in their activities, (9) for the first time permanently register vehicles in Latvia. (Natural Resources Tax Law 2005, The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development 2019a)

In order to ensure the fulfilment of **emission reduction targets**, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, as well as other institutions, if their decisions have a direct or subordinate effect on the emission of air pollutants, develop an action plan for reducing air pollution and coordinate its implementation. (Rules for Reducing and Accounting of Air Pollutant Emissions 2018) In the action plan for economical instruments for reducing the emissions Natural Resources Tax and Excise Duties increase is mentioned. (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia 2007)

Waste management in Latvia is governed by the **Waste Management Law** - the state is responsible for the organization and coordination of toxic waste management, but municipalities are responsible for the organization of household waste management in their administrative territory. (Waste Management Law 2010)

In October 25, 2018, Latvian parliament supported the intention of implementing a packaging deposit system. (Saeimas Preses dienests 2018) In April 24, 2019, after wide public discussions by signing the Memorandum of Cooperation, several nongovernmental organizations of beverage producers committed not only to financially support the introduction of the deposit system in Latvia, but also to ensure its functioning, respecting the basic principles of the system, including the centralized operation, the non-profit principle, which envisages reinvesting all revenue in the development of the system, but in May 28 several beverage nongovernmental organizations that before were against the implementation of the deposit system, have changed their minds and called for an extended deposit system. (Leta 2019)

**Packaging Law** aims to ensure the development of packaging production, the introduction of advanced packaging technologies and the rational use of packaging waste management systems in the country, thus reducing the environmental impact of packaging waste. The law stipulates that the packer is responsible for the management of the packaging waste generated as a result of his activity, and the packer manages the packaging waste himself or concludes a contract with the packaging manager. According to the law the company has a duty to inform the public about the possibilities of separate collection of packaging waste, the importance of packaging labelling and the reuse of packaging. (Packaging Law 2002)

On 28 November 2018, latest amendments to the Packaging Act come into force (requested by EU directives). According to these amendments, from 1 January 2019, plastic shopping bags are not issued free of charge at points of sale (the limitation applies to all types of plastic bags, regardless of the thickness of their material). The new regulatory framework does not provide for a fixed fee for plastic shopping bags - the merchant is entitled to determine at its own discretion. Still – there is an exception that is limited to very lightweight plastic shopping bags (material thickness not exceeding 15 microns) that are required for bulk food. Under these conditions, very lightweight plastic shopping bags will continue to be available for free. (The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development 2019b)

Nongovernmental organization "Zero Waste Latvia" believes that the impact of the latest amendments to the Latvian Packaging Law on the use of disposable plastic bags will be minimal and insufficient. They have posted an initiative on platform for public initiatives [www.manabalss.lv](http://www.manabalss.lv) ([myvote.lv](http://myvote.lv)) – if initiative gets 10 000 votes, initiative is transferred to

parlament. Initiative asks for complete ban of environmentally unfriendly plastic bags in supermarkets (Griestiņš, 2018)

Under the governance of Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development also **Environmental Impact Assessment** is done. This assessment evaluates changes which (1) affect or may affect a person, his or her health and safety, (2) biodiversity, (3) soil, air, water and climate, (4) landscape, cultural and natural heritage, tangible values as well (5) interaction of all previously mentioned areas. (On Environmental Impact Assessment 1998)

There are several other regulations regarding environmental protection:

- **Law on Chemical Substances** lays down the general requirements for the handling of chemicals and chemical mixtures (Chemical Substances Law 1998);
- **End-of Life Vehicles Management Law** aims to (1) reduce waste from vehicles and end-of-life vehicles (also by setting requirements for the production of new vehicles) (2) promote the reuse, recovery and recycling of end-of-life vehicles and their materials; (3) to ensure the treatment and disposal of end-of-life vehicles in a safe manner for human health and the environment. (End-of-Life Vehicles Management Law 2005)
- **Law on Radiation Safety and Nuclear Safety** aims to ensure the protection of people and the environment from the harmful effects of ionizing radiation and to determine the duties and rights of state institutions, natural and legal persons in the field of radiation safety and nuclear safety. (Law on Radiation Safety and Nuclear Safety 2000)
- **Marine Environment Protection and Management Law** (2010) aims to establish a system for the protection and management of surface and groundwater, which promotes sustainable and rational use of water resources, improves the protection of the aquatic environment. (Marine Environment Protection and Management Law 2010)
- **Law on Subterranean Depths** (1996) – according to the Civil Law, subterranean depths, including mineral resources, belong to the landowner. However, in order to ensure the sustainable use of resources, the state sets its own conditions. Using the law “On Subterranean Depths”, the Law “On Environmental Impact Assessment” and other regulatory enactments achieve a compromise between the interests of landowners, development needs and environmental protection requirements (Law on

Subterranean Depths 1996, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia 2019)

There are more regulations related to each of these spheres, but these are the main laws.

Ministry also is responsible for implementation of **Green Public Procurement** which is a process whereby state and local government authorities seek to procure goods and services with the least possible impact on the environment, taking into account the life cycle costs of products or services with the same primary function. Green Public Procurement aim to reduce environmental impact, promote social improvements, achieve budget savings. (The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development 2019e)

Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development also takes part in "Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030" development and implementation. Regarding nature, the plan intends to put nature as future capital: "The natural capital of Latvia is in comparatively good condition, however, it is used and managed insufficiently. The existing diversity of natural resources and natural environment is a unique opportunity for Latvia not only to develop "green" economy and sustainable consumption. It is also a possibility to create and maintain the image of Latvia as green country – the brand of international recognisability of Latvia." (The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development 2019g)

In April 2019, European Commission has issued Environmental Implementation Review on Latvia. The review states that:

Latvia remains at risk of not attaining the 2020 municipal waste recycling target and of not meeting the 2020 landfill diversion target for biodegradable waste. The circular (secondary) use of material in Latvia was well below the EU-28 average in 2016. However, the country performs above the EU-28 average in terms of how many people are employed in the circular economy. (European Commission 2019)

What is interesting – according to investigative journal "Ir" findings – there is a lack of control regarding waste registration. Landfills fake/cheat their data about waste in order to save on Natural Resources Tax and Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development and State Revenue Service "close their eyes" because of the need to fulfil official needs of meeting the European Union requirements. (Jakone 2019)

Nongovernmental organizations "Zaļā Brīvība" (Green Freedom) and "Zero Waste Latvia" has posted another initiative on platform for public initiatives [www.manabalss.lv](http://www.manabalss.lv) ([myvote.lv](http://myvote.lv)). Particular initiative asks the public to take action to change Latvia's position

on the Cohesion Fund co-financed activities in the EU's next multiannual budget for municipal waste incineration plants. It states:

There is currently a debate on the future EU multiannual budget, including discussions on the conditions that will determine which activities will be co-financed by the Cohesion Fund and the ERDF. In these discussions, Latvia is the only EU Member State firmly opposed to the European Commission's recommendation to exclude the possibility of cofinancing municipal waste incinerators from the Cohesion Fund. Latvia hopes that it will be able to convince the European Commission that waste incineration will be counted towards meeting the waste recycling targets. However, while waste incineration reduces the amount of landfilled waste, it does not increase the amount of recycled waste, and this is just a pseudo-compliant to meet EU requirements. (Treimane 2019)

In this subchapter, I have elaborated on first layer of Wheeler's analytical framework for 'moral economy' in the context of consumption – governmental regulations. It was done by summarising official information about regulations and by adding evaluative information that was shared on “Zero Waste Latvia discussions” Facebook group in the time period between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2019. In Latvia, there is a wide range of regulations regarding Zero Waste concerns (environmental protection), but the weakest point – according to European Commission Environmental Implementation Review and discourse in “Zero Waste Latvia discussions” Facebook group – is municipal waste recycling. The implementation of packaging deposit system has its hitches since the opinions of the various stakeholders are ambiguous and constantly changing. Another weak point is the latest amendments to Packaging Law - according to nongovernmental organization "Zero Waste Latvia" the exception for very lightweight plastic shopping bags makes the amendments impact insufficient. The same nongovernmental organization protests on Latvia's position in the debate on the future EU multiannual budget. Latvia is the only member state that incinerator financing is legitimate in the context of environmental protection. In next subchapter, I am going to elaborate on the second layer by analysing the critical discourse of actively moralising social group - Facebook group "Zero Waste Latvia Discussions".

### **3.3. Zero Waste Latvia Facebook group: moments of ‘moral breakdown’**

Zero Waste Latvia Facebook group mainly is used as a platform for idea sharing and collective sorting of every-day issues connected to Zero Waste practice. For example - if a member posts a question how unpleasant tastes from metallic bottles can be removed or, for example, how dog's faeces can be collected by remaining Zero Waste, members of the group participate in a discussion by sharing their own experiences or commenting on others. Or, if, for example, a member of the group finds a unique stall in Central Market that allows to buy not-packaged products that otherwise are available only in packaging, the member lets the group know about it.

In order to analyse critical discourse of actively moralising social group and the collective customs, I analysed data from Facebook group "Zero Waste Latvia Discussions". In this section I will elaborate on my findings.

#### **3.3.1. Consumption in general and Zero Waste itself**

I suggest that in Zero Waste Latvia Facebook group it can be seen that consumption itself is at what Zigon (2007) would call a moment of ‘moral breakdown’. Content often is connected to consumption practice’s effects on nature – thus consumption that before has been ‘ready-to-hand’ now is questioned as members of the group share wide assortment of content that serve as reasons for the ‘moral breakdown’. Now, knowing the consequences of consumption, these practices are not anymore ‘ready-at-hand’, but rather ‘present-to-hand’ and thus questioned quite literally – another extensively popular topic that is discussed in the group is more environmentally friendly consumption practices that alternate the ones that do the damage to the nature.

In the discussions, it can also be seen that paradoxically Zero Waste itself also at a moment of ‘moral breakdown’. There are precedents when the author of the previously mentioned “Zero Waste Home” book is claimed as not ‘100% zero waste’, because ‘100% zero waste’ is not possible, as well as ‘extreme zero waste’ portrayal is criticised as not friendly for overall ‘zero waste’ idea spreading. Also - a design student posed an open-question survey in order to source ideas for a product that would be designed in order to fulfil Zero Waste aims. One of the questions she posed, was: "Are you 100% Zero Waste follower in your everyday life or are you in the process of becoming it (100% as possible not exactly 100%)?" None of the people who participated in the public survey claimed that

they are 100% Zero Waste, but most of them rather suggested that it is a (1) myth, (2) not possible or (3) extreme.

I suggest that arguments against the idea of ‘100% zero waste’ can be considered as expression of the moment of ‘moral breakdown’ of Zero Waste itself. If at the main moment of ‘moral breakdown’ in the Zero Waste discourse is consumption itself, also consumption that aims for Zero Waste remains consumption that is ‘present-at-hand’ and thus continuously questioned and reconsidered.

As I already mentioned before, I held digital focus-group in “Zero Waste Latvia Discussions” Facebook group. Since I noticed a ‘moral breakdown’ within Zero Waste itself, I asked a question: “If it would be possible to give another name for Zero Waste movement – what would you call it?” The first answer I got was “less waste – because it is what we actually accomplish” - this answer gained the widest support of likes (27 supportive likes). Other answers were: “responsible consumers”, “mindful consumerism”, “clean living”, “right living”, “on the way to zero”, “zero unnecessary waste”, “less=more”, “strategic economy movement”, “grandmother’s knowledge in economy”, “environmentally friendly movement”. I suggest that these answers serve as answer to the question: “What is the action to resolve Zero Waste’s ‘ethical-demand’?” Thus, in order to consumption that is ‘ready-at-hand’ it has to become more ‘responsible’, ‘mindful’, ‘clean’, ‘less unnecessary’, ‘strategic’, ‘economical’, ‘environmentally friendly’ and above of all – consumption needs to become ‘less’.

Another kind of ‘moral breakdown’ within Zero Waste itself can also be seen in discussions that elaborate on practices and ideas that aim for Zero Waste. For example: several discussions have been bound to plastic straw alternative - metallic straws. Main argument against using even the alternative is that it is possible to live and functionate without straws no matter what is the material they are made from. Contra-arguments are bound to idea that it is an alternative that can help those who (1) either cannot refuse the habit or (2) have special needs that require straw-usage. In such case it is possible to see that there are different ‘moral breakdowns’ apparent – one that is aware and takes in account the material from which straws are usually made and in order to address the ‘ethical demand’ that is made on this ‘moral breakdown’ they look for alternative materials (metal or sometimes - paper) and substitute the plastic straw with compostable or reusable alternative. Second ‘moral breakdown’ is realization that it is possible to go along in the everyday life without using any straws at all, this ‘ethical demand’ on this ‘moral breakdown’ is to refuse the item at all.

Another topic that has been discussed a lot is plastic bags and their alternatives. Although reusable cotton bags are considered as one the best alternatives for plastic bags –

a member of the group posted an article that claim that production of a cotton bag requires disproportional amount of recourses and in order for those bags to be used effectively, it needs to be used unrealistically many times. In comment section, there are some opinions who agree to the ideas presented in the article, but mostly data trustability and interpretation is discussed as well as alternative fabrics are suggested. This is another example how Zero Waste practitioners keep questioning ‘present-at-hand’ objects of consumption even when they are claimed to be as a good alternative.

Another interesting discussion was raised by a group member's question about synthetic geotextile's alternatives - some suggested cotton bedsheets could be a good environmentally friendly alternative, but this option was quickly criticized because of extensive need of resources in order to produce cotton fabric and also, its inability to survive changing weather conditions and other considerations:

I think that there are no better alternatives - it is needed to take in consideration that natural fibre cannot live long in the conditions of sun and coldness and you will need to buy them regularly. This will probably be one of the cases when plastic products are really worth using for their unique characteristics, similarly to medicine and other spheres. Most important is to use it carefully so that they don't go to garbage. In future, most probably similar things will be produced from bioplastics that will not create such pollution at the end of its life. (Zero Waste Latvia discussions 2019)

In this case the discussion and questioning for alternatives has met ‘deadlock’ – if a person chooses classical synthetic geotextile – it is not compostable, but if cotton alternatives are chosen, production of them consume disproportionally much natural resources. I suggest that in this quote it is possible to see exact action its author suggest as the answer for the ‘ethical demand’ – production of bioplastics, thus I suggest that the ‘ethical demand’ of Zero Waste continuously demands for innovative solutions.

Another article that has been shared on the group discussed the idea that although a lot of packaging can be considered waste, plastic packaging has an effect on keeping the food fresh and thus helps avoiding its waste. The article has caused a reaction in the comment section of the group - although none of participants of the discussion agreed to the idea that some plastic could not be considered as waste, discussion still was open to the idea that there might be practical considerations from retailers’ side that makes plastic packaging as a solution for more rentable enterprise activity. At the same time – expectation for retailers to

look for solutions that could do both – (1) act in a way that reduces food waste and (2) also refuse plastic that takes up large part of pollution problem that are otherwise widely discussed in the group. Activities of enterprises – even if aiming to be more Zero Waste – are at another moment of ‘moral breakdown’ apparent in the discussions in Zero Waste Latvia group. Next subchapter will be devoted to this particular moment of ‘moral breakdown’.

### **3.3.2. Activities of enterprises**

I suggest that another moment of ‘moral breakdown’ apparent in Zero Waste Latvia Facebook group discussions is connected to activities of enterprises. In this subchapter, I’m going to elaborate on this suggestion.

Often discussed topic in Zero Waste Latvia Facebook group is different kinds of enterprise activities in the context of efficient resource management and pollution. For example – a situation worth discussing in the context of Zero Waste Latvia Facebook group have been situation when because of ‘hygienic reasons’ it was forbidden to reuse plastic bags that “Elektrum Olympic Center Riga” have recommended their visitors to use for outdoor shoe placement in the cloakroom. Reactions in comment section of this post was not unambiguous - other group members not only shared their similar blameful experiences in other places, but also shared their experiences of solving the problem with taking their own reusable bags with them or reusing the plastic bag they were given at the centre anyway. Later on, the post was updated claiming that plastic bags were not available at the centre anymore. In this case I suggest that two different kinds of ‘ethical demands’ were placed on the same ‘moral breakdown’ of single use, not biodegradable plastic bags. First kind of ‘ethical demand’ required individuals themselves act by using the same bag several times or taking their own reusable bags with them, second kind required enterprise itself find another solution that wouldn’t require resource-ineffective and pollution increasing actions.

Another example – group member posted a letter she has written to trail running race “Stirnu Buks”. The letter in a friendly tone elaborated on different ways in which the race could improve so that it would be more environmentally friendly (by both - effective resource usage and avoiding pollution). For example - suggestions included idea of returning the clips that hold the numbers, consideration of using the same number in several runs, providing possibility to refill reusable water bottles, to popularize possibility not to take medal and other suggestions. Again - reactions in the comment section were not unambiguous - although many supported the opinion and argued that over-

commercialization of the event has led to this situation (in contrast to 'how it was before'), contra-arguments were apparent too - some suggested individual refusal of medals, argued that the event itself is already "green thinking" and suggested that since the medals (1) are made out of biodegradable materials and (2) are one of the most important reasons why they participate, thus suggested that the critique is exaggerated. I suggest that what is seen in the comment section of the post that contained the letter is two different 'moral breakdowns' that evolve in a conflict on some level – one 'moral breakdown' that is aware of many different ways the race is not environmentally friendly, and second one that is aware of other group member's unawareness of the many different ways the same race is trying to be environmentally friendly in spite of the fact that the race becomes more and more popular and thus – staying as environmentally friendly becomes more and more complicated.

Another interesting case apparent in the "Zero Waste Latvia discussions" Facebook group's discussions was extensive conversation about organic skincare enterprise "Madara Cosmetics". A group member was interested to get to know more about how the enterprise treat the packaging that is returned to their shops and redeemed for a discount. The answer she got from "Madara Cosmetics" was published and widely discussed in the group. Enterprise claimed that they do not refill used packaging, but (1) they recycle the packaging in different ways - for example, glass containers are given to glass artist, (2) half of their packaging is made out of recycled plastic and (3) soon they will launch a product with a packaging that is made out of plant based material. Post's author positively evaluated the fact that enterprise has addressed environmental aspect and is willing to take responsibility for the fact that can be created because of their packaging, but she still was interested in more details about the processes and asked others to participate with their suggestions for questions. In comment section variety of questions were raised. One of the questions that raised a discussion was about the excess space in the boxes that bottles were put in. Different ideas on the reason for the excess space were apparent: (1) for amortization, (2) for marketing purposes. Another question that raised a big discussion was why enterprise doesn't melt the glass and use repeatedly. Contra arguments in this discussion suggested to visit the production site and ask the questions on the spot, because different specifics of production can affect the possibility of doing so. A woman that claimed to own "almost Zero Waste shop" elaborated on different requirements that manufacturers have for packaging that limit their possibilities to be more environmentally-friendly, and also another woman participated the discussion by elaborating on technical possibilities connected to glue that can help making more easily removable labels. I suggest that in cases like this all actions by enterprises also are at moments of 'moral breakdown' – when paying attention to

consumption's consequences, also production and marketing activities of enterprises from 'present-at-hand' become 'ready-at-hand' and thus – critically (but at the same time - ambiguously) evaluated and discussed. Another example of enterprise activities being 'ready-at-hand': under a post about Ikea opening its most sustainable store a comment that contained concept of 'greenwashing' appeared by arguing that one sustainable store shouldn't distract from the fact that they have been cheating on taxes and producing enormous amounts of trash, at the same time: the same commenter praised for 'one step' (although they [Ikea] still have a long way to go).

Also, even through Turza is a Zero Waste concept-shop, during my fieldwork, I experienced that shop still time-to-time gets (mostly friendly) questions, suggestions and opinions about the effectiveness of the processes in the shop – thus I suggest that even when shopping in Zero Waste consumption, production and marketing is at a moment of 'moral breakdown'.

### **3.3.3. Summary of the subchapter**

When analysing the critical discourse of actively moralising social group I have come to a conclusion that (because of its consequences) consumption in general is at the central moment of 'moral breakdown' in the context of Zero Waste.

Also, paradoxically, Zero Waste has several kinds of 'moral breakdowns' within itself. Firstly, when consumption in general has become 'ready-to-hand' also consumption practices that aim to be Zero Waste are 'ready-to-hand' and consumer is aware of the fact that consumption is unavoidable. The 'ethical demand' for consumption thus is for it to become more responsible, mindful, clean, less unnecessary, strategic, economical, environmentally friendly and above all – 'ethical demand' of Zero Waste 'moral breakdown' requires consumption to become 'less'.

Another kind of 'moral breakdown' apparent within Zero Waste itself happens as for different individuals there can be the same 'moments of moral breakdown', but different 'ethical demands' for the actions that should be done in order to resolve the 'moral breakdown' - thus more heated or conflicted discussions happen to appear.

Often 'ethical demand' asks for innovative solutions that not always are apparent at the moment. And at this point also I noticed different kinds of demands - sometimes the demand was more addressed to individuals, but often enough - to enterprises, even to those who aim to be more Zero Waste. I've suggested that consumption's consequences have also made

production and marketing actions of enterprises to become 'ready-to-hand' and thus - at the moment of 'moral breakdown'.

In next subchapter, I will explore these 'moral breakdowns' on individual level by analysing the lay normatives of consumer lived experiences.

### **3.4. Lived Zero Waste experiences: moments of 'moral breakdown'**

This subchapter addresses lived experiences of consumers (in Wheelers (2007) framework - lay of formatives of consumers) by analysing the moments of 'moral breakdowns' within the unstructured and informal interviews that I have conducted during the fieldwork. Firstly, I elaborate on the ways informants addressed the moments of 'moral breakdowns' within consumption itself, then I elaborate on 'moral breakdowns' that are related to environmental concerns, but after that – to 'moral breakdowns' that appeared within concerns about 'other people in the world'. And lastly – I address the ways Zero Waste itself become a 'moral breakdown' of individuals who aim to practice it.

#### **3.4.1. Consumption in general**

When asked to describe what meaning Zero Waste holds in their lives, informants tended to refer to their 'inner' awareness, conscience or 'human factor' that is conscious and threatened of consumption's impact on the rest of the world. This impact is addressed and viewed in different forms that I have discussed in the following subchapters, but in this subchapter, I continue argumenting that consumption in general in the case of Zero Waste in Latvia is at the central moment of 'moral breakdown' and thus it the main object of 'ethical demand'.

In simple explanation, a moment of 'moral breakdown' (Zigon 2007) occurs when something that beforehand has been taken 'as is' becomes questionable because of its possible impact on the relationship with the world (which is important, because 'world' is understood as 'mine' and 'ours' home at the same time). In interviews, some informants directly state that they have 'started to see things differently'. For example, Kristīne when asked what is the hardest part of practicing Zero Waste, argues:

In practical, there is nothing hard - you just get accustomed and that's it. What is hard is to live with consciousness that now everything I do is bad. I don't know.. I will try to explain. Before I could put one tomato in one plastic bag, another one - in another bag, and I wouldn't even lift my eyes. Now I buy one orange juice in

plastic and I simply feel bad all-day long. So - that's the hardest. For [my boyfriend] Kārlis it's the same. Simply for every single thing. You look at those things differently. (Kristīne)

For those informants who don't address 'seeing things differently' directly, the doubt and questioning of consumption *per se* can be indirectly seen throughout their extensive reflection on otherwise seemingly 'innocent' consumption practices. For example, several informants have reflected that now in 'regular' shops they don't see the products anymore, but it is packaging (especially – plastic packaging) that now (negatively) 'grabs' their attention while product seemingly becomes invisible for them. During my fieldwork in Zero Waste shop I have also had similar experiences when visiting 'regular' shops. Also - several informants negatively reflected on strawberry consumption in wintertime and claimed that they try to consume food as seasonally and locally as possible, because that reduces food's environmental footprint that otherwise is made because of food's transportation. Instead of product they see the possible in-effective or even (as referred to) illogical/absurd consumption of natural resources. Recourses that can be analysed as 'the world' that is 'mine' and also 'ours', thus ineffective usage of any resources becomes a 'moral breakdown' that has an 'ethical demand'. I will elaborate more on this point in the next subchapter.

During my fieldwork in the shop I have also observed different views and discussions towards 'less impactful' food consumption. Although I often observed admiration towards the fact that milk products also were available at the shop (in comparison to other Zero Waste shops), there are Zero Waste practioners that argue that not consuming animal products leave a smaller environmental footprint. Sometimes they disclosed their doubt about the fact that in the shop it is possible to buy milk products. There was even one case when a man argued that in his opinion vegans will boycott the shop because of milk. Arguments against these concerns was (1) idea that handy Zero Waste should be available for as wide audience as possible (also for those who consume animal products) and (2) previously mentioned seasonality and locality factor. Second argument was based on idea that Zero Waste approach that leaves out animal products requires a lot of imported products and increased volume of otherwise less consumed products that production requires disproportional amounts of resources and has other side-effects. One of examples for such products was mentioned avocado that was referred as a product that has gained big popularity because of veganism. Growing this vegetable requires big amounts of water and, for example, in Peru because of increased avocado production (and actions of a particular monopoly) local communities are in short of drinking water have to import it. If relationship with "the world" while consuming big-environmental-footprint leaving

animal products is the moment of “moral breakdown” for one part of Zero Waste practitioners, relationship with “the world”, while consuming transported and out-of-season food that also leaves excessive environmental footprint (because of its production) is more important moment of “moral breakdown” for the other part.

Jana extensively expressed her condemnation towards the idea that something is *per se* produced for throwing out (plastic bags, coffee cups, packaging in general etc.). Many times, during the interview she mentions a phrase “just because we can”. Almost all informants reflect on the actual need for consuming (excessively).

If you think about it – how much of those things we really need? How much of it is used just for very short time and after that it goes somewhere... all electronics that we buy... every year there is a need to buy new iPhone and old one is thrown out. (Jānis)

During my fieldwork in informal interviews and in one of informants from the unstructured interviews mentioned shopping mall’s Galleria Riga promotional campaign “Out with the old!” (see Figure 3). Slogan directly translated from Latvian would be: “Old stuff doesn’t keep warm anymore!”. Visual materials of the campaign involved pictures with well-dressed women throwing black garbage bags in the air. Reflections towards the campaign were mute (as if my understanding of them were taken as given) and full of indignation towards vender’s direct invitation to throw out in order to buy new. Thus, I suggest that if shopping is ‘given’ for the shopping’s sake, in “Zero Waste in Latvia” discourse it becomes another sub-moment of ‘moral breakdown’.

**Galleria Riga campaign: Old stuff doesn’t keep warm anymore! (Weekend 2018)**



Figure 3

Another tendency I noticed during the interviews was that informants often reflected to ‘adjusting to Zero Waste’ as a never-ending and distressing process that makes them want “to try not to think”, because of continuous reevaluating of almost everything that appears in their life reveal new and new concerns that, as Kristīne previously mentioned, means “to live with consciousness that now everything I do is bad.” Another example - Jana argued that it is impossible to be 100% Zero Waste and referred to plumbing tires as an object that also has taken resources and claimed that “we ourselves are waste”.

When you start to be interested about that all, it starts to seem that "Oh my God, what are people doing, and what is going to happen? Doom days are coming!  
(Jana)

Being alive requires consumption, but for Zero Waste practitioners in Latvia there are several concerns that make any consumption practice moment of ‘moral breakdown’ and poses an ‘ethical demand’. In following subchapters, I have analysed and discussed each of them.

### **3.4.2. Environmental concerns**

Environmental concerns were already mentioned when analysing tendencies in “Zero Waste Latvia Discussions” Facebook group. These concerns are, firstly, embedded in previously mentioned focus on the concept ‘environmental footprint’ that refers to effective usage of natural resources.

I read somewhere about the argument that we need nature, but nature doesn’t need us. Which is quite right, but we have thought that nature is made for us, and we continue to do that although we should adapt, but we don’t know how to adapt, we are accustomed that everything is as we need, so that it is easier for us. (Jana)

After the formal part of unstructured interview Jana also reflected on her observation that “everyone was so happy for warm autumn, but that’s not normal, it’s global warming”. Thus, I suggest that taking nature, natural resources and natural conditions ‘as given’ or ‘for granted’ is another central moment of ‘moral breakdown’ in the context of Zero Waste in Latvia.

Meanwhile one of Ieva’s and her mother’s Laila’s most pronounced concerns were bound to pollution both – globally (in oceans) and also locally (in Latvia).

I think it is horrible that people use forests or, for example, meadows for their everyday garbage disposal. (Ieva)

These concerns were similar to previously mentioned Jana's concern's, but during the interview they also revealed another dimension. They referred to their walks in nature that otherwise would be / are enjoyable and aesthetic, but interrupted with visible un-aesthetic other people's disregard towards nature. Thus, I argue that careless attitudes towards pollution concerns (that are also connected to disruption of possibility to observe and consume nature's untangible/unmaterialistic resources through recreation (aesthetic, fresh air etc.) ) are another sub-moment of "moral breakdown".

When comparing to other informants Kristīne in the interview appeared the most concerned towards environmental issues. She is also practising veganism and became interested in Zero Waste through vegan activities.

It all started from veganism, because when you are "deeper" into it, information is about and around it, then it naturally happens that people who think about not slaughtering animals, think also about the environmental aspect. Respectively – they are sharing content that is very focused on conservation of environment and suchlike things. (Kristīne)

Concern's towards animal-product consuming when embedded within Zero Waste narrative, in my opinion, is a moment of 'moral breakdown' towards extensive consumption that involves not only the exploitation of natural resources in general, but in particular refers also on human consumption's exploitation of animals. I previously mentioned a man who visited Turza and claimed that vegans would boycott the shop because of animal-origin products that were available there – his concerns were similar to Kristīne's (although Kristīne didn't complain about the fact that it is possible to buy milk at Turza).

Kristīne also believes that "it is too late" and environmental issues are not solvable anymore. She claims that Zero Waste for her and her boyfriend is the first step in learning to survive when "everything will not be as it is now". They are also saving money so that after few years they could move "off grid" to a permaculture community, build a house and start learning permaculture practice that intends to (1) mimic processes in nature (thus doing no harm to it) and (2) making its practitioners self-sustainable.

I argue that in the case of Kristīne nature and ‘the known order of world’ in general is already not taken as ‘ready-to-hand’ and poses an ‘ethical demand’. In contrast to all other ‘moral breakdown’ moments, for Kristīne both - the way nature is treated and the fact that the damage is irreversible - are main concerns that make the moment of "moral breakdown" apparent. In a sense - not only human consumption, but also nature has even become a threat and posed an ethical demand that requires an action.

### **3.4.3. Other people in the world**

I suggest that a discontinuity that can be seen between physical and digital reality is that in comparison to tendencies I saw in “Zero Waste Latvia discussion” Facebook group, in interviews informants elaborated a lot more on concerns connected to consumption’s effect on other people. In Facebook group this topic was episodic.

In ideal order, all people simply would think one step further, for other people too. For nature, not only because we need nature so that we ourselves could survive, but also about next generations. Then much could be changed much faster and much effective too. (Jānis)

Informants mentioned people who might not even be born yet (or the wide concept of “next generation”) and the idea that extensive consumption (without reflectivity on its impact on nature) damages the environment that will be needed for next generations. Thus, I suggest that not taking in account that consumption’s possible affects environment can have negative effects on next generation’s lives is a ‘moral breakdown’ that has an ‘ethical demand’.

Another often reflected-to topic was the disruption of relationships with people who produce the goods that are consumed. For example, Jana is the informant who’s one of biggest concerns is extensive and unreflective consumption’s impact on human working force.

We care a lot so that animals are not harmed, but humans... in some kind of third world country... we don’t care about that. Because we want those jeans for five euros or for ten euros and that’s it. We don’t care, we don’t even think how they [jeans] were produced. (Jana)

She reflected on issues caused by fast fashion's impact on Bangladesh, where big companies (such as Forever 21) pay very little for production of fast fashion items, because of

extensive competition producers are left with little choice, and government hasn't set minimal wages because of fear that money-bringing big companies would leave the country and move their production to other countries that doesn't have fixed minimal wages and thus production there would be advantageous. Her biggest concern in this situation: working people in Bangladesh are left underpaid.

She also reflected on cotton production in Kazakhstan where "every 30 minutes one cotton farmer goes in his field and does a suicide" because of not being able to pay off the loan that a cotton-seed monopoly owner has given to him.

Another issue that was important to her was the idea that overconsumption could be justified because of "giving it to relatives" afterwards. She questioned the idea that "cousin from countryside" would not throw out the clothes that she decided not to wear. "Donation to the poor" is also a questionable idea for her.

With those red cross... In Africa, it is an unreal problem. They have so much donations (from UK etc.), but all that is given to Red cross is sent to Africa. They have unrealistic amount of clothes that they [people in Africa] sell, but it means that they themselves don't produce themselves anymore, and waste is created for them - all that waste that you have donated, because you are a good person, it is sent to them... and they throw away. (Jana)

Jānis was also concerned with issues connected to other people in the world:

You watch different documentaries and see how children burn those wires so that they could at sell a little bit of that metal that is within them. And they, I don't know, around 30 years the latest, are so sick that they cannot do anything. (Jānis)

He also reflects on the previously mentioned situation in Peru (by referring to a documentary). In second largest avocado producer-country companies are not only destroying forest in order to plant avocado-trees, but since the vegetable also requires a lot of water. In Peru water is privatised, the extensive production of avocados done by large investor-backed companies has lead to a situation where local communities suffer of lack of water - water is delivered by trucks from authorities once a week. Since discovering this situation Jānis does his purchases of not-local vegetables and fruits very carefully – he has not bought another avocado from Peru. Instead he has discovered a homepage that sells fair-trade oranges, lemons, and sometimes also avocados from small farms in Italy. He surveys his friends and together

with them once every one or two months orders a box from the shop. He is also very satisfied with the way orders are delivered – in a pasteboard box and sometimes (if avocados are ordered and there is a need to separate them from other fruits) also a cloth bag (that is useful for future grocery-shopping) might be in the box. Although the price of such order is much bigger than price of the same fruits in regular shop and it is still not the most perfect solution, Jānis claims feeling much better because of knowing that people who have grown the production are paid accordingly, and he also claims that the fruits are a lot tastier than the regular ones thus making the purchase even more satisfying.

When reflecting on reflectivity in consumption Jana also mentioned the possible unfair expectations also from local people in working service industry: “For example if you would have a 2000 euro salary, but he is payed only 2,70 an hour, but you want that he kisses your feet and leave 2 euros for tips..” While working in the Zero Waste shop as a shop assistant I experienced costumers being extremely kind and often refusing my help (although that was my responsibility). Although Jana’s argument about expectations towards service could be perceived as exaggerated, in context of the rest interview it was an extension of her thought, and the quote also serves as an extension on overall idea described in this subchapter. I suggest that it in the discourse of Zero Waste consumption that is unreflective on its impact on the people who has produced the product is also another moment of “moral breakdown”.

### **3.4.3. Zero Waste itself**

Also in ‘lay normative’ level of analysis I noticed ‘moral breakdowns’ within Zero Waste itself, but these ‘moral breakdowns’ are a different from what I discovered in previous layer.

I think that in ideal world people always think why I need to do this in this way. Maybe I can do differently. Better. People would be less ignorant. I think that the biggest problem is that people doesn't care. They don't care. They care only for ‘me’ and ‘mine’. (Kristīne)

When asked to describe their ‘ideal world’ in the context of Zero Waste informants were ‘on the same page’ and argued that reflexivity about consumption and care about the impact it makes would be most important. They dream of a world in which it would be easier to consume in a way that consumption itself wouldn’t be a moment of ‘moral breakdown’.

You restructure your world for some kind of Zero Waste... I don't want that either, because then you become sick. [...] If all your life is subordinated to some kind of no-rubbish lifestyle and there are no like-minded people around, then it is... You become a grumpy, disgusting garbage bag... all you think is waste... all you care is waste... for what? (Jana)

When reflective consumption and production is not widespread and easy-accessible, following Zero Waste idea can also become a 'moral breakdown', because it is more time-consuming and emotional-energy consuming. Also, Kristīne reflected that she is very happy that Zero Waste shops are now available, because before following Zero Waste ideas was even more complicated and she enjoys visiting Zero Waste shops much more than visiting Central Market that was one of her most popular destinations before. In Central Market sellers not always understood the idea behind the bags, boxes and jars that she has brought with her and it was exhausting and unpleasant to explain. She enjoys shopping at the Zero Waste shop, not only because everything is at the same place, but also because she doesn't need to "tell the lady in the market that I [Kristīne] am a better person". She reflected to a situation in the market when she has forgot to bring her own bottle for olive oil refill and asked if next time she could bring back the plastic bottle lady at the market was offering. Kristīne was misunderstood, because woman would warm-hearty told that she doesn't need the bottle and it's ok if she doesn't bring it back. Although she reflected to this situation to be connected to ignorance (to all concerns mentioned in previous concern's), she also blamed it on generation difference and that she believes that people in the market simply doesn't know about the impacts. In Jana's and Kristīne's cases the fact that Zero Waste ideas doesn't have as wide popularity and awareness is also a moment of "moral breakdown". When I was doing my fieldwork in Turza, costumers quite often asked if Turza plans to open a branch in Pārdaugava (other part of Riga) – they expressed their gratitude about the fact that Turza exists, but at the same time dwelled on the dissatisfaction that they need to take a detour or plan the visit deliberately, because the shop is not as near to their home as they would like it to be. Turza has made Zero Waste practice more comfortable for them, but not as comfortable if the shop would be at their way.

More people would think about Zero Waste and such shops would develop more, and in more places (also for people who live in cities) would have an opportunity to dispose their compost. More people would sort their garbage and would join this process.

Also, maybe regular shops would think more so that so many things would not be packaged in plastic, it would be possible to also buy in bulk. For example: what's the point of putting spring onions in plastic if they could be bought on weight and everyone could take just as much they need. Also, I have heard that bags that look similar to plastic bags, but are made from wooden fibre, are produced. (Ieva)

For Ieva it is also the 'moral breakdown' of Zero Waste ideas and concerns not being widespread enough. She admitted that in her family still quite a lot waste is generated, but she believes that "for now" Zero Waste is more about inspiring other people so that more and more people would think about the issues connected to Zero Waste and would follow the principles at least for a little bit. She also reflected on the fact that in one of the biggest retail shop chain's "Rimi" next to vegetables and fruits she saw a sign that asked to think twice if [plastic] bag is needed: "Of course, that is only a sign and, probably, it will not affect many, but I think that someone maybe looks and thinks that maybe they can take that one apple simply in a hand [without plastic bag]."

It is the same for Jānis. He argues that although as the main drive for Zero Waste practice he defines his own conscience and not wanting to "participate" [in consumption practice that has a moment of "moral breakdown"], he doesn't exclude the idea that showing good example and thus inspiring fellow people is also a pleasant aspect. When asked if he intentionally educates his friends and family, he told that he tries not to impose the ideas on purpose. He himself was inspired by observing the lifestyle of his sister who lives in Berlin and his family in general often talk about similar things, but friends, colleagues and acquaintances observe his actions and often ask questions themselves. He reflected on an experience with a friend that few years ago observed Jānis' Zero Waste practices and argued that it seems complicated and that by observing him and also that she has bad conscience now. He recently has met her and admitted that he was very pleased to see that now he could even learn a lot from her and that she has told that two or three people that have followed her example. For Jānis seeing that knowledge and ideas spreading has left a rewarding impact.

To sum up this section I argue that if Zero Waste is practiced in isolation and without support and ability to do it in a comfortable way, it also serves as a moment of "moral breakdown".

### 3.4.4. Summary of the subchapter

Throughout the subchapter I argued that also in lived experiences of Zero Waste the main moment of 'moral breakdown' and the object of 'ethical demand' is consumption in general. In the discourse of Zero Waste all consumption practices are 'seen differently' [than before]. Other sub-moments of 'moral breakdown' in context of 'consumption in general' is 'ineffective usage of any resources' and 'shopping for shopping sake'.

Further in the chapter I described more specific sub-moments of 'moral breakdown' in individual level. I suggest that ethical demand is also posed on such 'moral breakdowns' as:

- Nature, natural recourses and natural conditions that are taken 'as given' or 'for granted';
- Careless attitudes towards pollution concerns;
- Extensive consumption that involves not only the exploitation of natural recourses in general, but in particular refers also on human consumption's exploitation of animals;
- The fact that the damage in nature is irreversible;
- Consumption that is unreflective on its impact on next generation and on the people who have produced the product as well;
- Reflective consumption and production that is not widespread and easy-accessible.

I suggest that a discontinuity that is seen between digital and physical world is that in "Zero Waste Latvia discussions" group members proportionally a lot less publically problematize consumption's effect on other people in the world. In interview informants elaborated on this topic a lot more.

## **4. FINAL CONCLUSION, REFLECTION, SUGGESTIONS**

In this section I will elaborate on final conclusion, reflect on my research result relationship with wider ethnographic contexts and introduce to my suggestions for communication of nongovernmental organisations and social enterprises that are dealing with Zero Waste concerns.

### **4.1. Final conclusion**

For Zero Waste in Latvia analysis I have used Wheeler's (2017) analytical framework for 'moral economies' in the context of consumption and in order to concretise the understanding of 'morality' within 'moral economics' I added Zigon's (2007) approach of 'moral breakdown' and 'ethical demand'. I've suggested that Zigon's approach develops the concept of 'moral economy' in a way in which the concept could also be called 'aware economy'/'conscious economy' or 'ethical economy'. 'Aware economy'/'conscious economy' - if an economy considered as a process that occurs at the moment of 'moral breakdown' when 'ethical demand' on the economy appears in order to maintain positive and continuous relationship with 'Other' (it could be also described as an economy that questions itself). 'Ethical economy' – if an economy is considered as a particular change or result that is achieved by the reaction that is made because of 'ethical demand' that appeared in (at that point already-solved) a 'moral breakdown'.

Wheeler's (2017) framework consists of three layers. In governmental regulation layer (first layer) I have found out that although Latvia has a wide range of regulations regarding Zero Waste concerns (environmental protection), the weakest point of regulation implementation is municipal waste recycling. The implementation of packaging deposit system doesn't happen smoothly because of the opinions of the various stakeholders are inconstant and ambiguous – a lot of discussions and (inconsistent) resistance from enterprises is apparent. Another weak point is the latest amendments to Packaging Law that only party bans free-of-charge plastic bags at shops - according to nongovernmental organization Zero Waste Latvia the exception for very lightweight plastic shopping bags makes the amendments impact insufficient. The same nongovernmental organization protests on Latvia's position in the debate on the future EU multiannual budget - Latvia is the only member state that insists that incinerator financing is legitimate in the context of environmental protection.

When analysing the second layer of Wheeler's framework - critical discourse of actively moralising "Zero Waste Latvia discussions" - I have come to a conclusion that consumption in general is the central moment of 'moral breakdown' in the context of Zero Waste. And, paradoxically, Zero Waste has several kinds of 'moral breakdowns' within itself, because when consumption in general has become 'ready-to-hand', also consumption practices that aim to be Zero Waste are 'ready-to-hand'. Thus, appears awareness of the fact that consumption is unavoidable. The 'ethical demand' for consumption then is for consumption practices to become more responsible, mindful, clean, less unnecessary, strategic, economical, environmentally friendly and above all – 'ethical demand' of Zero Waste 'moral breakdown' requires consumption to become 'less'.

Another kind of 'moral breakdown' apparent within Zero Waste itself can be a source for conflicted discussions, because different individuals can have the same moments of 'moral breakdown', but different 'ethical demands' for the actions that should be done in order to resolve the 'moral breakdown'.

In Zero Waste discourse 'ethical demand' often asks for innovative solutions. The addressee for the demand of innovative solutions can be different – Zero Waste 'ethical demand' asks individuals to innovate, but often enough - it is expected that enterprises act by adapting and changing their production processes, products and services so that they are more environmentally friendly. I've also suggested that in the context of Zero Waste production and marketing actions of enterprises also become 'ready-to-hand' and thus - at the moment of 'moral breakdown'.

In the third analytical layer, I have analysed the lived experiences Zero Waste practitioners - in the interviews it was also apparent that consumption in general is at the central moment of 'moral breakdown'. In the discourse of Zero Waste all consumption practices are 'present-to-hand' and 'seen differently than before' – 'ineffective usage of any resources' and 'shopping for shopping sake' are not acceptable anymore, thus these realizations have an 'ethical demand' that requires an action that is Zero Waste practice.

I have also identified specific sub-moments of 'moral breakdown' on individual level - 'ethical demand' for action is also posed on such 'moral breakdowns' as:

- Nature, natural recourses and natural conditions that are taken 'as given' or 'for granted';
- Careless attitudes towards pollution concerns;
- Extensive consumption that involves not only the exploitation of natural recourses in general, but in particular refers also on human consumption's exploitation of animals;
- The fact that the damage in nature is irreversible;

- Consumption that is unreflective on its impact on next generations and the people who have produced the product;
- Reflective consumption and production that is not widespread and easy-accessible.

A discontinuity that I have identified between digital and physical world is that in “Zero Waste Latvia discussions” consumption’s effect on other people in the world is a lot less problematized - in interviews I noticed that informants elaborated on this topic a lot more.

The research question for my research was: “How can it be that someone is willing to participate in Zero Waste even through these practices can be considered impossible?” Kofti has suggested that ‘moral economy’ is “an encompassing approach for studying individual ideas and practices and their relation with collective moral frameworks and confinements, and to exploring change and change potential.” (Kofti 2016, 433) Thus in my final conclusion I suggest that willingness to participate in Zero Waste practices (in spite to their complicatedness and impassibility) is rooted in different kinds of moments of ‘moral breakdown’ connected to consumption. Although there are several moments of ‘moral breakdown’ within Zero Waste itself, it is perceived as the most convenient way to address the ‘ethical demand’ that is placed on consumption. In order to eliminate the ‘moral breakdown’ consumption practices need to address the ‘ethical demand’ and become more responsible, mindful, clean, less unnecessary, strategic, economical, environmentally friendly and above all – Zero Waste requires consumption to become 'less'. And – in order to eliminate at least some of the ‘moral breakdowns’ within Zero Waste itself, ‘ethical demand’ requires acting in a way that increases the chance that Zero Waste practices become easily accessible, popular and supported from all involved parts – individuals, enterprises, government. Thus, I argue that Zero Waste in Latvia by requiring and acting in order to pursue a change is a form of ‘conscious economy’ in action. The aim for this ‘conscious economy’ process is to create an ‘ethical economy’ that continuously revalue all economical processes and seek for innovation in order to reduce all negative impacts of these processes.

## **4.2. Reflection**

Although the fight against plastic pollution has become increasingly active also on the institutional level, environmental concerns are still ‘on the table’ - scientists still are warning that humanity still is not doing enough and planet earth is running out of time to limit catastrophic climate change (The Guardian, 2019). Meanwhile, 16-year-old Swedish environmentalist Greta Thunberg has been nominated for Nobel peace prize. In August of 2018 she started to school-strike in front of Swedish government building – she required immediate and explicit action from government in order to tackle climate changes, in her

speeches she has also addressed big manufacturers. Her actions captured both – social and mass – media attention and as a result of media attention on 15th of March school climate strikes happened all over the world - it is said that more than 1.4 million young people from 2,233 cities and towns in 128 countries (also in Latvia) marched in these particular online-organised “Fridays for future” strikes (The Guardian, 2019). In one of her speeches, Thunberg says:

That means that rich countries need to get down to zero emissions within 6 to 12 years with today's emission speed. And that is so that people in poorer countries can have a chance to heighten the standard of living by building some of the infrastructures that we have already built, such as roads, schools, hospitals, clean drinking water, electricity and so on. [...]

So why are we not reducing our emissions? Why are they in fact still increasing? Are we knowingly causing a mass extinction? Are we evil?

No of course not. People keep doing what they do because the vast majority doesn't have a clue about the actual consequences of our everyday life. And they don't know that rapid change is required. We all think we know and we all think everybody knows. But we don't. Because, how could we?

[...] If I live to be 100, I will be alive in the year 2103. When you think about the future today, you don't think beyond the year 2050. By then, I will in the best case, not even have lived half of my life. What happens next?

The year 2078 I will celebrate my 75th birthday. If I have children or grandchildren, maybe they will spend that day with me. Maybe they will ask me about you, the people who were around back in 2018. Maybe they will ask why you didn't do anything while this still was time to act?

What we do or don't do right now will affect my entire life and the lives of my children and grandchildren. What we do or don't do right now, me and my generation can't undo in the future. (FridaysForFuture, 2019)

In Thunberg's speech, I see similar concerns to those that were expressed by informants I interviewed – she is worried about everyday life practice's (consumption's) and pollution's effect on other people, animals and irreversibility of damage that is done to nature. Thus, I suggest that “Fridays For Future” climate strikes are pushing forward the ‘moral breakdown’ of consumption in global level – ‘conscious economy’ similar to Zero Waste in Latvia is taking place by pursuing and requiring change.

Daniel Miller (1995) in a polemic essay calls consumption "a vanguard of history" by arguing that today in order to see a potential historical change one should observe consumer behaviour. He illustrates the shift of power by claiming that a stereotypical figure - a housewife from Western Europe or North America - is transformed into the "global dictator" that has power over producers. (Miller 1995, 4) Thus I suggest that both consumption related social phenomena – Zero Waste and “Fridays For Future” – are closely entangled “vanguards of history” taking place right here, right now.

### 4.3. Suggestions

In my opinion, the results for my research could be useful for nongovernmental organisations and social enterprises that dealing deal with Zero Waste concerns in Latvia. My suggestions for Zero Waste communication thus would be:

- Since the most noticeable discontinuity between digital and physical world was the fact that in interviews informants elaborated on their concerns about other people in the world a lot more than the popularity of this concern was seen in “Zero Waste Latvia discussions” group, I suggest communicating more about the effects of consumption practices that bound to realities of next generations and also people who produce the product right now.
- Since one of the most apparent and frustrating ‘moral breakdown’ within Zero Waste itself is the tendency that even trying to implement Zero Waste principles it is still consumption that is at a moment of ‘moral breakdown’, I suggest that communication should focus less on ‘zero’, but more on ‘responsible’, ‘mindful’, ‘clean’, ‘less unnecessary’, ‘strategic’, ‘economical’, ‘environmentally friendly’ and ‘less’.
- I would also suggest introducing the concept of ‘ethical economy’ to the public discussion about Zero Waste. The concept of ‘circular economy’ is already popular and extensively used, but since it deals with ‘tangible’ ideas regarding production, the concept of ‘ethical economy’ would add a social layer to the theoretical communication and would make ‘not-following ‘circular economy’ principles’ a ‘moral breakdown’ thus promoting the willingness to implement ‘circular economy’. For example: “‘Circular economy’ ensures sustainability – it is also an ‘ethical economy’ that provides for next generations the same living conditions as we can experience now.”

- Last suggestion resides in my reflection part: I suggest that promoting idea that “participating in Zero Waste is participating in ‘creation of history’, ‘changing the history’ ”, can be a reasonable communication angle worth to try to focus on.

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## DOCUMENTARY SHEET

The master's thesis with the title of 'Towards Moral and Ethics Through Impossible Practices: Zero Waste in Latvia' (Caur neiespējamām praksēm pretī morālei un ētikai: Zero Waste Latvijā in Latvian) was produced at the University of Latvia's Faculty of Humanities.

I hereby confirm that the research was conducted independently and only the referenced resources have been used. Further, the electronic copy is identical to the submitted printed copy of the thesis

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I hereby confirm that I recommend this thesis for defence.

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