

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: a multidimensional analysis of practices and meanings

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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the discourse surrounding social and environmental sustainability has ascended to a prominent position within contemporary academic and political frameworks. This prominence is largely attributable to the exacerbation of ecological crises, the rampant overexploitation of natural resources, and the alarming exacerbation of social inequalities engendered by dominant production and consumption paradigms (Abramovay, 2012a; 2022). As the resilience of ecosystems is increasingly tested, it becomes apparent that sustainability transcends a mere technical challenge; it is inherently a multifaceted social and political issue.

Reports from esteemed multilateral organizations, notably the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021), emphatically highlight the imperative to synchronize economic productivity with ecological stewardship. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development further articulates a multidimensional framework underpinned by five strategic pillars—People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace, and Partnerships. Within this framework, Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) assumes particular significance, as it endeavors to foster sustainable consumption and production patterns through the promotion of efficiency, the reduction of waste, and the encouragement of environmental responsibility.

Despite the importance of individual behavioural change, recent scholarly contributions caution against reductionist approaches that solely attribute responsibility to consumers (Fuchs et al., 2025; Valur et al., 2018). It is essential to interrogate the structural dynamics of consumption—dynamics that are influenced by institutional, cultural, and economic factors. As highlighted by Holt (2012) and El Bilali (2019), the transformation of consumption patterns necessitates a concerted effort to challenge prevailing ideologies, market logics, and systemic inequalities that limit collective imagination and constrain individual choices.

In this context, social movements are emerging as pivotal actors in articulating and advocating for alternative modes of consumption and production. These movements not only politicize consumption but also reconceptualize it as a domain of resistance, identity formation, and transformative action (Gohn & Bringel, 2012; Melucci, 2006; Scherer-Warren, 2013). Their capacity to mobilize collective identities and nurture experimental spaces has established them as vital laboratories of sustainability transitions (Oliveira et al., 2018; Lavallo et al., 2019).

Recent scholarship has underscored the potential of these social movements to forge counter-hegemonic narratives, stimulate grassroots innovations, and influence public discourse and policy (De Hoyos Guevara et al., 2021; Barbosa et al., 2019). Gohn (2014, 2022) characterizes contemporary social movements as dynamic, autonomous, and reflexive entities that operate within intricate networks that encompass both digital and territorial domains. These movements increasingly prioritize an agenda of socio-environmental justice and advocate for a reconfiguration of citizenship that comprehensively incorporates ecological responsibility.

Scherer-Warren (2013) provides a particularly insightful analytical framework for dissecting these dynamics. Her triadic model—comprising material life (being), symbolic value (knowing), and political empowerment (power)—facilitates an integrated understanding of the practices, values, and strategies mobilized by social movements in the pursuit of sustainable consumption. These categories resonate with emerging scholarship that explores the cultural, affective, and ethical dimensions of sustainability (Holt, 2012; Thongplew & Kotlakome, 2019), emphasizing the interrelations of meanings, identities, and collective action.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to investigate the contributions of social movements to the promotion of sustainable consumption, with a focused examination of three emblematic Brazilian organizations: the Akatu Institute, the Brazilian Institute for Consumer

Protection (IDEC), and Greenpeace Brazil. Utilizing Scherer-Warren's (2013) framework as a theoretical foundation, this study critically analyzes how these movements mobilize distinct repertoires of action and meaning to shape public discourse, transform consumption practices, and establish novel standards of citizenship and sustainability.

In addition to this introduction, the paper is meticulously organized into five sections. Section two delves deeper into the theoretical interplay between social movements and sustainable consumption. Section three articulates the methodological approach employed, followed by an analysis of empirical findings, culminating in concluding reflections.

2 SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: Aligning Objectives

Consumption is an intrinsic dimension of human existence, essential not only for maintaining biological metabolism but also for sustaining social life. Far from being a merely utilitarian act, consumption is embedded in symbolic, emotional, and identity-laden dynamics. For Bauman (2009, 2014), "being in motion means never being satisfied," an expression that encapsulates the restless pursuit of novelty and the insatiability that characterizes consumption in liquid modernity. Complementing this view, Barbosa (2004) argues that while it is possible to live without producing, no one can live without consuming—revealing consumption's central role in both individual experience and collective reproduction.

Yet, consumption is not a monolithic practice. Its meanings, drivers, and consequences are historically, culturally, politically, and economically situated. As Portilho (2020) contends, it must be analyzed as a multidimensional sociocultural phenomenon, wherein values, lifestyles, material conditions, and symbolic disputes intersect. In this regard, the sociology of consumption has increasingly distanced itself from reductionist interpretations that emphasize consumer choice or utility maximization. Instead, it has moved toward understanding consumption as a field of power, identity, and normativity (Southerton et al., 2023; Thongplew & Kotlakome, 2019).

The emergence of sustainable consumption as a research category reflects this critical turn. It articulates environmental, ethical, economic, and cultural dimensions in response to the crises of modern consumer society (Barbosa et al., 2019; Barboza et al., 2022). Rather than focusing solely on "green" behavior or eco-efficiency, it calls for a radical rethinking of production-consumption systems, life standards, and the imaginaries that sustain unsustainable ways of living (Holt, 2012). Sustainable consumption implies questioning growth paradigms and proposing new value regimes anchored in solidarity, sufficiency, and justice.

Authors such as Liu et al. (2017) and De Hoyos Guevara et al. (2021) argue that sustainable consumption demands transformations that exceed the sphere of individual behavior. Structural changes are needed in production systems, public policies, regulatory frameworks, and market logics. From this perspective, assigning full responsibility to consumers—as if they operated in a vacuum of freedom and equality—is both insufficient and politically regressive. Abramovay (2022) reinforces this position by stressing the need for co-responsibility among businesses, governments, and civil society. For sustainability to become a systemic principle, it must be embedded in institutions, infrastructure, and cultural practices.

Moreover, sustainable consumption has emerged as a contested and dynamic terrain, where different actors—ranging from social movements to corporations—struggle to define its meaning and scope. Valor et al. (2018) highlight the emotional and moral burdens placed on consumers who face contradictory demands and limited autonomy within unsustainable systems. These tensions underline the importance of approaching consumption through a political and cultural lens, recognizing it as a site of contestation, resistance, and transformation.

Thus, the debate on sustainable consumption is not solely about changing individual habits but about reconfiguring the societal structures that produce unsustainability. It demands

an intersectional and systemic analysis, attentive to inequalities, institutional constraints, and the emancipatory potential of collective action.

This article adopts the concept of sustainable consumption as the responsible use of natural resources to ensure quality of life in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brazil, 2015; UNEP, 2022). However, when subjected to a critical and politicized lens, this definition transcends its apparent neutrality and reveals itself as a contested terrain—a field where conflicting visions of development, justice, and citizenship are negotiated. In this expanded understanding, sustainable consumption is not merely a technical adjustment or managerial innovation. It becomes a political project: one that challenges dominant production-consumption regimes and advances alternatives grounded in equity, care, and ecological balance.

Within this transformative perspective, practices such as conscious consumption, circular economy initiatives, agroecological systems, and short food supply chains emerge as concrete expressions of alternative sociopolitical imaginaries. These practices articulate new values and reconfigure relationships among production, nature, and society, offering glimpses of post-capitalist futures that are more inclusive and regenerative.

It is on this horizon of change that social movements gain strategic relevance. No longer perceived solely as spaces of resistance or protest, they are increasingly recognized as living laboratories of alternatives—arenas where collective experimentation unfolds, re-signifying everyday practices and contesting the normative foundations of consumerist modernity (Melucci, 2006; Gohn, 2014). As Lamine et al. (2023) affirm, the social movements most effectively contributing to sustainability transitions are those that combine three interrelated capacities: (1) a critical diagnosis of socio-environmental inequalities (analytical posture); (2) collective mobilization to advance rights and influence public policies (political posture); and (3) the creation of tangible solutions through collaborative, experimental practices (experimental posture).

By fostering alternative modes of production and consumption, promoting sustainable lifestyles, and expanding channels for citizen participation, these movements challenge the dominant notion of consumption as an individual, depoliticized act. Instead, they reframe it as a site of political agency and collective construction. In doing so, they help redefine citizenship, not merely as a legal status or right to vote, but as a form of daily engagement in shaping the conditions of coexistence and intergenerational justice (Schnaudt et al., 2021).

In this sense, sustainable consumption is best understood as a socio-political field, wherein competing discourses, interests, and projects are in constant negotiation. This aligns with the normative orientation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12, which recognizes the need for integrated action among civil society, states, and markets to promote more equitable and responsible patterns of production and consumption (UN, 2021).

Yet, the operationalization of these goals faces persistent obstacles. Structural inequalities, institutional inertia, and the commodification of sustainability often undermine their transformative potential. Corbier et al. (2025) stress that achieving meaningful sustainability transitions requires aligning individual aspirations with systemic change—grounded in democratic governance, regulatory innovation, and public policy frameworks capable of confronting entrenched interests and power asymmetries.

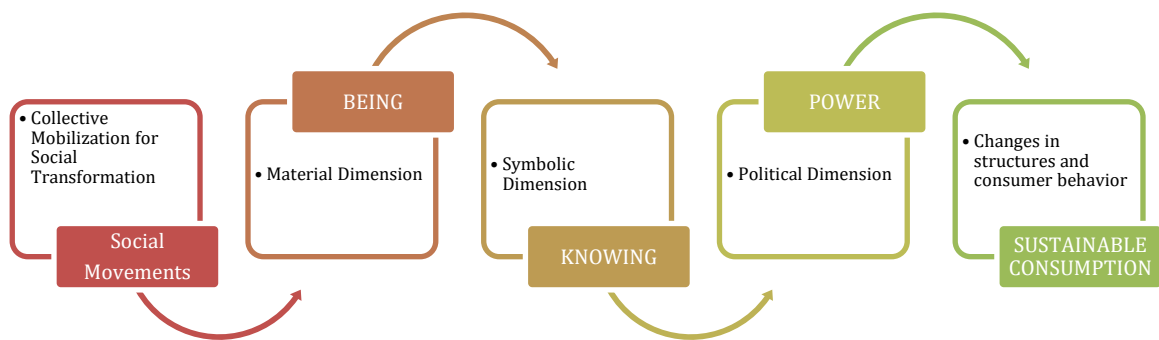
In line with this critique, Fuchs et al. (2025) warn against approaches that locate the burden of transformation primarily on individual consumers. Such reductionism obscures the structural, economic, and cultural forces that shape consumption choices, and inadvertently perpetuates narratives of guilt and moral individualism. For these authors, repoliticizing consumption is essential: it means recognizing that consumption is not only an economic act, but also a normative battleground space where different models of society, values, and futures are contested and (re)imagined.

Within this framework, social movements—such as those analyzed in this study—perform a dual role. On one hand, they mobilize consumers and foster critical awareness, using education and advocacy to stimulate more reflexive and ethical consumption practices. On the other, they pressure institutions to implement structural reforms, and construct alternative provisioning systems rooted in solidarity, environmental justice, and democratic participation.

In doing so, these movements do not merely promote sustainable consumption as a set of practices—they elevate it to a political expression of active citizenship, and a vehicle for ecological, cognitive, and economic justice. They reclaim consumption as a space of struggle and transformation, where the question is no longer just what to consume, but rather what kind of society and future we aim to build.

Figure 1 synthesizes this convergence between social movements and sustainable consumption, highlighting the multiple roles that these actors play in shaping systemic transitions.

Figure 1 – The Convergence of Social Movements and the Promotion of Sustainable Consumption



Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the theoretical review, 2025.

This article thus adopts a relational and multidimensional perspective, situating sustainable consumption at the intersection of environmental justice, collective agency, and cultural transformation. It underscores the need to move beyond individual-centered approaches, embracing collective strategies capable of confronting the systemic nature of unsustainability. To further explore these dynamics, the next section presents the conceptual contributions of Scherer-Warren (2013), linking the analytical dimensions of social movements to the emerging categories of sustainable consumption identified in the literature.

2.1 MATERIAL LIFE DIMENSION

The material life dimension, as conceptualized by Scherer-Warren (2013), refers to the concrete conditions of existence and the structural foundations that underpin collective mobilization. It expresses what the author terms the “being movement”—a dimension anchored in objective inequalities that trigger social struggles, whether economic, environmental, political, racialized, or related to systemic exclusion. This dimension embodies the pursuit of substantive changes in the conditions that restrict human dignity, hinder the realization of rights, and compromise the sustainability of life in its multiple material manifestations.

When situated within the sustainability debate, the material life dimension assumes particular relevance in relation to consumption. Patterns of access to goods and services, daily habits, and standards of living are not merely reflections of individual choice, but indicators of broader socio-environmental disparities. To analyze sustainable consumption through this lens is to acknowledge that such practices are deeply shaped by structural determinants—including income, class, race, gender, territorial belonging, and access to infrastructure and information (Barber, 2007; Alonso, 2009, 2022; Lavallo et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2018; Tawfeiq, 2022).

Rather than being neutral or universally attainable, sustainable consumption practices are conditioned by material constraints and opportunity structures that vary across social groups. These disparities reveal the unequal distribution of the capacity to live sustainably and to make choices aligned with environmental responsibility. In contexts marked by poverty, food insecurity, or lack of infrastructure, the imperative to consume sustainably often collides with the daily challenge of survival and access to basic rights.

Contemporary consumption is also deeply intertwined with identity formation and the performative expression of lifestyles. Within this symbolic economy, consumption becomes a space of both reproduction and resistance—where values, aspirations, and ethical choices are negotiated. In this sense, the emergence of collective practices such as conscious consumption, cooperative purchasing groups, agroecological markets, and zero-waste initiatives represents more than a behavioral shift: it signals a political redefinition of material life itself (Pereira & Calgaro, 2021).

Social movements play a critical role in politicizing these practices and in reframing consumption as a social, rather than individual, act. By articulating demands for access to essential goods, for decent standards of living, and for structural conditions that enable sustainability, these movements anchor the material life dimension within broader struggles for environmental justice. They denounce the systemic logic of hyperconsumption, question the commodification of life, and advocate for redistributive and regenerative models of development.

In this regard, sustainable consumption—when rooted in material life—transcends the sphere of individual responsibility and acquires a transformative character. It becomes part of a broader political project aimed at confronting environmental inequalities and building systemic alternatives that integrate justice, dignity, and the right to live sustainably. Rather than a mere change in consumer behavior, it signals a reorientation of social priorities and a reconfiguration of the very conditions that make sustainability possible.

2.2 SYMBOLIC VALUE DIMENSION

The symbolic value dimension of social movements encompasses the universe of shared meanings, cultural codes, and collective identities that confer cohesion, legitimacy, and resonance to collective action. According to Scherer-Warren (2013, 2018), this dimension is rooted in the articulation between individuals' material conditions and the meanings they assign to their social trajectories, political engagement, and everyday practices. It encompasses the circulation of knowledge, the formation of affective and identity-based bonds, and the construction of plural, situated, and dynamic collective identities.

More than language or aesthetics, the symbolic dimension constitutes a strategic pillar of mobilization. It is through the elaboration of symbolic repertoires that social movements generate recognition among individuals, forge shared values, and challenge hegemonic narratives about what is legitimate, desirable, or possible. As Gohn (2014) notes, symbolic power enables movements to create visibility, disrupt dominant discourses, and shape the social imaginary—redefining the frames through which society interprets justice, progress, and citizenship.

Within the field of sustainable consumption, this dimension plays a particularly potent role. Consumption, once perceived primarily as an economic act of individual rationality, is

resignified as a political and cultural expression—an act that embodies values, ethical commitments, and worldviews (Barbosa & Campbell, 2006; Castells, 2013; Oliveira et al., 2016). Through this lens, consumption becomes a medium through which individuals and groups communicate their belonging, mobilize identities, and engage with broader societal debates. It is transformed into a site of symbolic struggle, where competing meanings of development, well-being, and sustainability are negotiated.

This symbolic reconfiguration is also reflected in emerging norms of democratic citizenship. Schnaudt et al. (2021) argue that in the context of ecological transitions, the boundaries of citizenship expand to incorporate the adoption of sustainable lifestyles and civic engagement with environmental causes. The "good citizen" is no longer defined solely by political participation in formal institutions, but also by their role in shaping sustainable futures—through consumption choices, advocacy, and everyday practices informed by care and responsibility.

However, the symbolic dimension is not without contradictions. As sustainability discourses gain prominence, they are increasingly co-opted by market logics. Green consumption and eco-branding often aestheticize sustainability, stripping it of its political charge and transforming critical consumption into a marker of status or distinction (Barbosa, 2021). This commodification risks diluting the transformative potential of sustainability and reducing it to a lifestyle niche accessible only to privileged consumers.

This ambivalence demands critical reflexivity and strategic positioning from social movements. Their task is not only to construct alternative symbolic repertoires but also to defend them from appropriation, depoliticization, and trivialization. This includes reaffirming the connection between sustainability and social justice, valorizing ancestral and solidarity-based practices, and resisting narratives that individualize responsibility while obscuring structural determinants.

Despite these tensions, the symbolic value dimension remains a core driver of cultural and political transformation. The proliferation of sustainable communities, climate justice campaigns, and solidarity networks—often amplified through digital media—illustrates the capacity of social movements to craft new narratives of hope, belonging, and resistance. These narratives mobilize emotions, foster collective identifications, and articulate visions of alternative futures.

Ultimately, the symbolic dimension expands the understanding of consumption beyond utility, repositioning it as a terrain of cultural contestation and ethical affirmation. It is through symbolic struggle that movements reimagine the world—constructing meanings that challenge the prevailing logics of exploitation and exclusion, and paving the way for new modes of coexistence, mutual recognition, and planetary citizenship. In this reimagining, sustainability ceases to be a technical goal and becomes a civilizational project.

2.3 POLITICAL DIMENSION

The political dimension of social movements encompasses the practices of participation, the pursuit of rights, and the construction of emancipatory agendas oriented toward structural transformation. It refers to the institutional and non-institutional arenas in which collective actors intervene to dispute power, influence decision-making, and challenge the hegemonic order. As highlighted by Scherer-Warren (2013, 2018) and Gohn (2014), this dimension constitutes a field of collective action through which movements articulate counter-hegemonic discourses, mobilize demands for justice, and forge alternatives to dominant models of development and consumption.

Within the sustainability agenda, this dimension assumes particular relevance as consumption itself is reframed as a political act. The notion of “political consumption” (Echegaray, 2012; Portilho, 2020) underscores the idea that consumer choices are not merely market transactions but can express social values, articulate dissent, and exert pressure on both

corporations and governments. By choosing what to consume—and equally, what to refuse—citizens signal political positions and challenge the legitimacy of unsustainable and unjust economic models.

As an analytical category, empowerment within this dimension refers to the expansion of individual and collective autonomy to intervene in processes that affect everyday life. Social movements foster this empowerment by cultivating critical citizenship, encouraging active engagement, and building capacities for political participation—not only in formal institutions but also in community practices and alternative economies (Oliveira et al., 2018, 2021; Layrargues, 2020a, 2020b). In this sense, consumption becomes a terrain where individuals are called upon not as isolated consumers, but as organized and conscious citizens, co-responsible for the collective future.

The political dimension also entails the defense of democratic innovation and environmental justice. It calls for new forms of governance that transcend market-centric rationalities and promote inclusive, participatory, and redistributive arrangements. Through activism, advocacy, and grassroots experimentation, social movements shape public agendas and dispute the normative foundations of consumption, sustainability, and citizenship itself (Gohn, 2020; Volpato et al., 2019). In doing so, they contribute to consolidating sustainable consumption not only as a set of practices but as a public and political agenda, embedded in broader societal transformations.

Importantly, the three dimensions proposed by Scherer-Warren—material life, symbolic value, and political empowerment—should not be treated as separate analytical blocks. Rather, they are interdependent and dynamically articulated in the praxis of social movements. Together, they offer a robust and integrative framework for understanding how collective actors influence consumption patterns, challenge dominant paradigms, and construct more sustainable and democratic alternatives. Figure 2 synthesizes the key analytical categories associated with each dimension, as identified in the literature, and supports the theoretical model that underpins this research.

Figure 2 – Analytical Dimensions of Social Movements and Their Relationship with Sustainable Consumption

DIMENSION	ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES	REFERENCES
MATERIAL LIFE (BEING)	Lifestyle	Barber (2007); Oliveira et al. (2014, 2018, 2021)
	Social transformation	Alonso (2009, 2022); Scherer-Warren (2013, 2018); Lavallo et al. (2019); Tawfeiq (2022)
SYMBOLIC VALUE (KNOWING)	Knowledge exchange	Gohn (2014); Sandel (2020)
	Collective identity	Fernandes (1994); Gohn (2005, 2008, 2011); Gohn & Bringel (2012); Santos et al. (2021); Ravasi & Rindova (2008); Melucci (2006)
	Network formation	Castells (2013); Gohn (2014); Scherer-Warren (1993, 2013)
	Multi-identity character	Gohn (1997, 2008, 2011)
POLITICAL (POWER)	Sociopolitical participation	Tilly (2012); Scherer-Warren (2013, 2018); Cançado (2015)
	Social emancipation	Fávero (2007); Scherer-Warren (2013, 2018); Bettine & Gutierrez (2021, 2022)
	Critical citizenship	Fleig et al. (2006); Werner (2005); Alonso (2009); Layrargues (2020a, 2020b); Bettine & Gutierrez (2021, 2022)
	New forms of mobilization	Volpato et al. (2019); Gohn (2014, 2022); Scherer-Warren (2013, 2018)
	Empowerment	Tilly (2012); Scherer-Warren (2013, 2018); Gohn (2014, 2022)

Source: Data based on theoretical review, 2025.

This figure summarizes the analytical dimensions and categories drawn from the literature, forming the conceptual foundation of this study. Grounded in this theoretical model,

the research investigates how these dimensions materialize in the discourses and practices of organizations engaged in promoting sustainable consumption in Brazil. The following section presents the methodological procedures adopted, detailing the case selection, data collection techniques, and analytical strategies employed in the empirical investigation.

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study investigates how social movements contribute to the promotion of sustainable consumption by analyzing the practices of three emblematic organizations in the Brazilian context: Instituto Akatu, the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Protection (IDEC), and Greenpeace Brazil. The analytical lens is guided by the triadic framework proposed by Scherer-Warren (2013)—material life, symbolic value, and political empowerment—to explore how these dimensions are mobilized in the organizations’ discourses, strategies, and interventions.

Given the contemporary and complex nature of the phenomenon under study—marked by the interweaving of environmental, political, and cultural variables—a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study design was adopted. This methodological strategy allows for a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of actors’ experiences, meanings, and actions within their specific institutional and sociopolitical environments (Creswell, 2010; Yin, 2016).

A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for capturing the depth and nuance of social processes, emphasizing subjectivity, intentionality, and the situated construction of meaning, rather than aiming for statistical generalization (Villarreal Larrinaga, 2017). The exploratory character of the study also provides flexibility in navigating an emerging and still under-theorized field—namely, the intersection between social movements and sustainable consumption—opening space for conceptual refinement and the emergence of interpretive hypotheses.

Figure 3 – Summary of Methodological Procedures

Research Dimension	Description
Methodological Approaches	Qualitative approach; Exploratory focus; Multiple case study design
Units of Analysis	Instituto Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil
Participants	Organizational collaborators; Snowball sampling
Data Collection Methods	Semi-structured interviews; Non-participant observation; Document analysis
Analytical Strategies	Content analysis (Bardin, 2016); Data triangulation; ATLAS.ti-assisted coding

Source: Elaborated by the authors, 2025.

The research began with a documentary analysis of each organization’s institutional materials, including mission statements, strategic plans, educational content, and public campaigns, accessed through their official websites and social media platforms (e.g., Instagram® and Facebook®). This initial step enabled a deeper understanding of the organizations’ trajectories, thematic focus areas, and discursive orientations—thus informing the selection of cases and subsequent empirical phases.

Following this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key collaborators directly involved in sustainable consumption initiatives. A snowball sampling technique was employed, allowing for the identification of relevant interlocutors through referrals provided by initial participants (Costa, 2018). The final number of interviewees was determined by the principle of theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989), whereby data collection was concluded once additional interviews ceased to generate novel insights or analytical variation (Guerra, 2010).

Figure 4 – Profile of Interviewees

Interviewee / Organization	Role	Main Activities
E1 Akatu	Content Coordinator	Innovation and digital inclusion to foster collaborative networks
E2 Akatu	Executive Director	Awareness-raising and mobilization for conscious consumption

E3 Akatu	Education and Community Assistant	Dialogical education promoting sustainable lifestyles
E4 IDEC	Program Coordinator	Advocacy for adequate food and sustainable consumption
E5 IDEC	Project Advisor	Monitoring public policy and mobilizing consumers
E6 Greenpeace	Photographer and Activist	Visual activism and environmental awareness campaigns
E7 Greenpeace	Sustainability Assistant	Social mobilization and environmental justice initiatives
E8 Greenpeace	Economist, Historian, Activist	Coordination of regional campaigns in the Legal Amazon

Source: Research data, 2025.

In addition to interviews, the study included non-participant observation of public events and digital campaigns, as well as the analysis of institutional documents and publicly available textual materials. These different sources were integrated through a strategy of methodological triangulation, which enhanced the internal validity of the study by enabling cross-validation of findings and perspectives (Yin, 2016).

The empirical data were analyzed using content analysis, following the procedural framework established by Bardin (2016). This process unfolded in three interrelated phases: Pre-analysis, involving organization of the corpus and initial readings to establish familiarity; Material exploration, during which data were coded and analytically categorized based on the study's objectives and theoretical constructs; and Treatment and interpretation, wherein the coded material was synthesized and interpreted in light of the Scherer-Warren framework and the literature on sustainable consumption.

To support this analytical process, the software ATLAS.ti was employed, which facilitated the management of codes, construction of co-occurrence maps, and identification of interpretive patterns. The software also enabled visualization of linkages between the three analytical dimensions, enhancing the clarity and robustness of the interpretive framework (Klüber, 2014).

The findings generated through this methodological trajectory are presented in the next section, through an interpretive analysis of the empirical evidence. This analysis is structured according to the three dimensions proposed by Scherer-Warren—material life, symbolic value, and political empowerment—in articulation with key analytical categories identified in the literature on sustainable consumption.

4 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN ACTION: Practices for Sustainable Consumption

The literature on sustainable development has increasingly emphasized sustainable consumption as a central axis for addressing the environmental, social, and ethical challenges of our time. Far beyond a matter of individual behavior, sustainable consumption is now understood as a political, cultural, and systemic issue—intertwining everyday choices with broader structures of production, inequality, and governance (Portilho, 2020; Fuchs et al., 2025). Among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 12 explicitly addresses the imperative of ensuring responsible consumption and production patterns, highlighting the need for transformative action that involves not only consumers and producers but also civil society, states, and markets (UN, 2021).

In this context, civic engagement—understood as the active and organized participation of citizens in shaping societal agendas—emerges as a vital mechanism for constructing sustainable lifestyles anchored in principles of environmental justice, social equity, and intergenerational ethics. This section analyzes how three organizations—Instituto Akatu, the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Protection (IDEC), and Greenpeace Brazil—materialize this engagement. Each represents a different but complementary expression of organized civil

society and plays a strategic role in promoting sustainable consumption through diverse but converging practices.

Grounded in the analytical framework proposed by Scherer-Warren (2013)—material life, symbolic value, and political empowerment—the empirical discussion that follows reveals how these organizations activate these dimensions in their strategies, discourses, and interventions. The analysis demonstrates not only their thematic focus but also the sociopolitical functions they fulfill in reframing consumption as a site of collective transformation.

Founded in 2001 by Instituto Ethos, Instituto Akatu has established itself as a leading educational and communicative actor in the promotion of sustainable consumption in Brazil. Its name—drawn from the Tupi-Guarani terms "*a*" (good seed) and "*katu*" (better world)—encapsulates its core mission: to cultivate values of care, responsibility, and critical awareness in the everyday choices of individuals and communities. Positioned at the intersection of behavioral change strategies and civic education, Akatu develops and disseminates campaigns, digital platforms, and pedagogical tools aimed at encouraging reflexive and ethical consumption practices. Its thematic focus spans key areas of daily life—including food, mobility, housing, and technology—through which it seeks to reframe consumption not as a passive act, but as a space of agency, deliberation, and social transformation.

While its interventions are primarily educational, Akatu's approach transcends mere information dissemination. By reframing consumption as a political act and situating individuals as agents of collective change, the organization activates both the symbolic and material dimensions of sustainable consumption. Its campaigns encourage the redefinition of consumption patterns not only for environmental efficiency but also for solidarity, equity, and shared responsibility. In particular, its focus on reaching underrepresented groups through accessible and engaging communication underscores a concern with democratizing environmental literacy.

Akatu's discourse—anchored in the ethics of care, sufficiency, and conscious choice—challenges the dominant model of hyperconsumption and suggests that citizenship itself is expressed through everyday decisions. In doing so, the organization contributes to building new imaginaries around consumption, where sustainability becomes a normative horizon rather than a niche alternative.

Established in 1987 in the wake of Brazil's re-democratization process, the Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor (IDEC) has historically played a foundational role in shaping consumer protection policies. Its contributions to the drafting and implementation of the Consumer Defense Code, as well as its continuous engagement in public interest litigation, situate IDEC at the intersection of rights-based advocacy and environmental justice.

IDEC's approach is deeply rooted in the political dimension of sustainable consumption. Its actions combine institutional pressure, policy monitoring, and legal mobilization to ensure the enforcement of consumer rights in key areas such as food security, energy access, fair trade, and urban mobility. The organization's political independence—sustained through voluntary contributions—reinforces its legitimacy as a critical actor that mediates between citizens and the state, while maintaining a vigilant stance against corporate abuses.

Through digital platforms and public campaigns, IDEC also engages in the production of accessible knowledge, contributing to the symbolic reconfiguration of consumption as a field of rights and duties. It acts not only as a watchdog but also as a civic educator, enabling individuals to recognize their role in the governance of markets and policies. This dual function—defensive and propositional—positions IDEC as a key actor in the politicization of consumption and the expansion of democratic citizenship.

Operating in Brazil since 1992, Greenpeace is globally recognized for its activism and high-impact campaigns. Its Brazilian chapter mobilizes public opinion around pressing issues

such as deforestation in the Amazon, climate change, ocean pollution, and socio-environmental rights violations. Funded exclusively through individual donations, Greenpeace maintains institutional autonomy and operational independence, which it strategically uses to denounce injustices and demand political accountability.

Greenpeace Brazil activates the three analytical dimensions proposed by Scherer-Warren in a particularly integrated manner. In the material dimension, it promotes sustainable alternatives and challenges extractivist and predatory consumption practices. In the symbolic dimension, it constructs powerful visual and discursive repertoires—through photography, documentaries, and digital activism—that seek to mobilize emotions, create identifications, and reframe public narratives. In the political dimension, its work is marked by direct action and institutional pressure, targeting both public authorities and corporate actors.

What distinguishes Greenpeace’s role in the field of sustainable consumption is its capacity to position consumption as a strategic site of resistance—a space where socio-environmental injustices are made visible, and alternatives are collectively imagined. Its motto, “Change is a choice,” encapsulates an ethos of transformation that moves beyond individual responsibility toward systemic intervention.

4.1 CONVERGING PATHS: Multidimensional Strategies for Transformative Consumption

Together, Instituto Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil represent a plural and complementary landscape of social movement engagement with sustainable consumption. While differing in their institutional arrangements, discursive strategies, and operational focuses, all three organizations mobilize the dimensions of material life, symbolic value, and political empowerment to construct new repertoires of action and meaning.

Their initiatives demonstrate that transforming consumption practices is not an individual task, but a collective, multidimensional process that requires the articulation of critical education, regulatory frameworks, and political mobilization. Rather than merely informing consumers, these organizations dispute hegemonies, provoke reflection, and reconfigure structural conditions, contributing to the emergence of new societal compacts oriented toward justice, ethics, and ecological regeneration.

This empirical analysis reinforces the theoretical proposition that sustainable consumption must be understood as both a field of conflict and a field of creation—where values, institutions, and identities are negotiated in the pursuit of new civilizational models. The following sections deepen this interpretation by thematically analyzing how these organizations mobilize the Scherer-Warren dimensions in their daily practices and strategic engagements.

4.2 SYSTEMATIZING ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS: Interfaces Between Social Movements and Sustainable Consumption with the Support of ATLAS.ti

This study sought to examine how social movements contribute to the promotion of sustainable consumption, drawing from the practices and institutional trajectories of three emblematic organizations—Instituto Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil. To address this objective, the empirical analysis was anchored in a theoretical dialogue between the dimensions proposed by Scherer-Warren (2013)—*material life*, *symbolic value*, and *political empowerment*—and analytical categories grounded in key principles of sustainability, such as justice, participation, equity, and collective agency.

To support this analytical process, the qualitative data—comprising eight semi-structured interviews and complementary documentary materials—were systematically processed using ATLAS.ti software. This digital tool facilitated the organization, coding, visualization, and triangulation of the data corpus, enabling the identification of thematic recurrences, co-occurrences, and interpretive patterns across the three organizations studied.

The analytical process resulted in the development of a structured model comprising: Three central analytical dimensions; Eleven thematic categories derived from theory and empirical evidence; and 207 coded citations, representing substantive statements from the participants that reflect key practices, perceptions, and strategies.

This coding architecture not only allowed for the mapping of how sustainability discourses are mobilized in practice, but also illuminated the intersections between discourse and action, revealing how these organizations operationalize the ethics and politics of sustainable consumption in their daily engagements.

The resulting structure—systematized through the analytical tools of ATLAS.ti—is presented in Figure 5, which illustrates the networked relationships between dimensions, categories, and empirical citations.

Figure 5 – Structure Formation and Data Relationship

	interview_1.pdf	interview_2.pdf	interview_3.pdf	interview_4.pdf	interview_5.pdf	interview_6.pdf	interview_7.pdf	interview_8.pdf
Material	3	4	11	9	8	3	2	1
Political	15	9	14	12	19	14	10	9
Symbolic	12	8	13	8	10	7	1	5

Source: Table generated in ATLAS.ti, based on research data (2025).

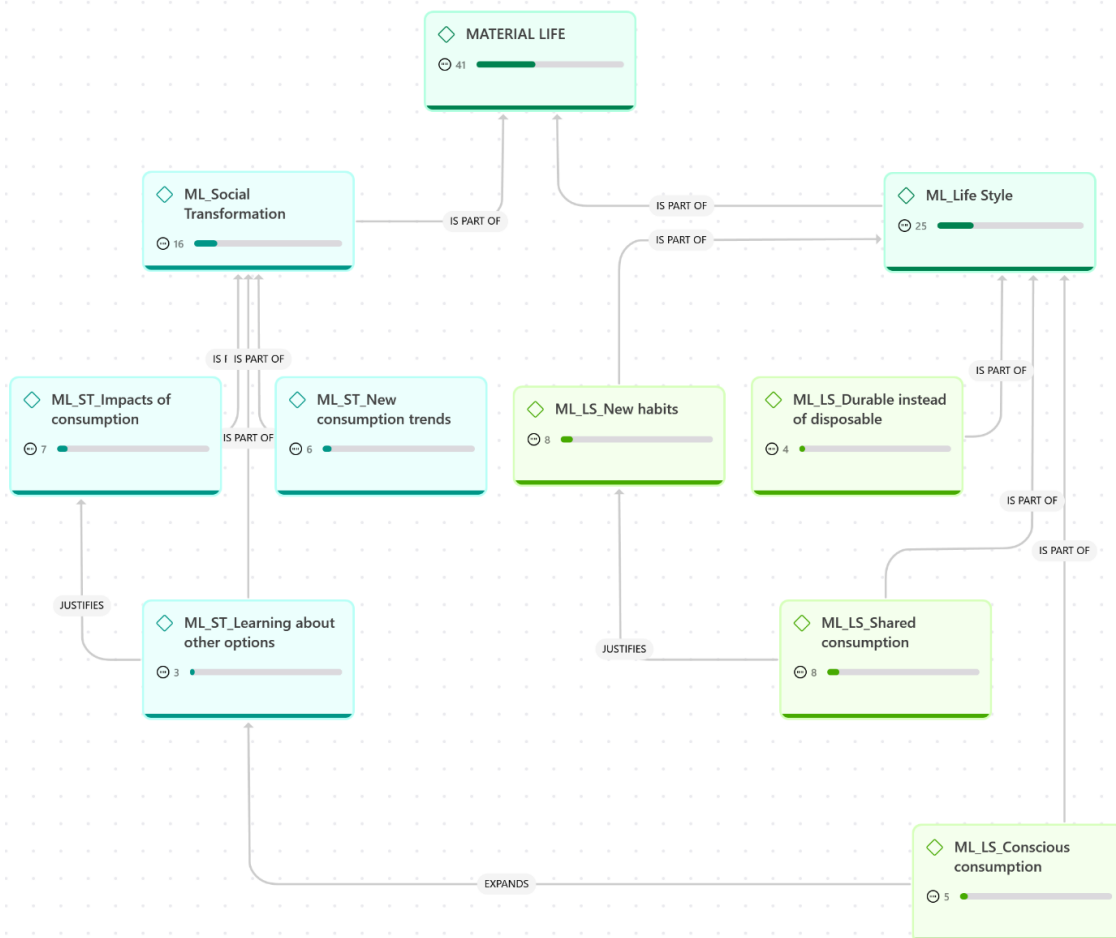
This analytical framework forms the foundation for the interpretive discussion that follows, which explores how each of the three dimensions—material, symbolic, and political—manifests in the concrete practices of Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil. It also allows for the identification of convergences, tensions, and innovations within the broader field of organized civil society’s engagement with sustainable consumption.

4.2.1 MATERIAL LIFE DIMENSION: Between Lifestyles and the Struggle for Structural Transformation

The material life dimension, as theorized by Scherer-Warren (2013), refers to the objective conditions of existence and the historical trajectories of social struggles that arise in response to inequality, deprivation, and systemic exclusion. It constitutes the structural foundation from which social movements emerge, articulating collective responses to precarious living conditions, the denial of rights, and the unsustainability of dominant models of production and consumption.

Within this study, the material life dimension was clearly manifested in the practices of Instituto Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil, particularly through the analytical categories of lifestyle and social transformation (Figure 6). Qualitative analysis conducted using ATLAS.ti software allowed for the coding and systematization of 207 excerpts from interviews, revealing how these organizations not only promote the redefinition of everyday consumption habits but also contest the deeper structural logics that sustain unsustainable consumer cultures.

Figure 6 – Network Material Life Dimension



Source: Figure generated in ATLAS.ti, based on research data (2025).

The *lifestyle* category emerges as both a symbolic and practical battleground over the very notion of “living well” in a context shaped by overconsumption, inequality, and environmental degradation. Instituto Akatu, for instance, reframes consumption as an ethical and reflective practice, calling upon individuals to assume responsibility for their choices. While these efforts contribute to everyday empowerment, they also risk reproducing a neoliberal logic of individual responsibility, which may obscure the structural drivers of unsustainability.

This paradox is illustrated by participant E1, who links pandemic-related behavioral shifts to new reflections on daily life: “With COVID-19... new habits were incorporated into daily life, such as staying home, seeking a connection with nature, and prioritizing healthy and sustainable eating.” (E1 – Akatu)

Although these shifts reflect significant potential for change, they occur within unequal material contexts, where access to sustainable alternatives is limited. As Portilho (2010) and Alonso (2009) argue, sustainable consumption must be viewed not as a purely moral or individual act, but as a relational and socially conditioned practice, shaped by unequal opportunities, cultural values, and the availability of enabling public policies.

Greenpeace Brazil offers a more explicit articulation between lifestyle changes and structural transformation. The organization critiques predatory development models while promoting systemic alternatives, such as clean energy transitions. As stated by participant E7: “The energy matrix and the global production and consumption profile will undergo major transformations... The world will need clean energy and materials produced from biodiversity.” (E7 – Greenpeace)

This perspective reflects a systemic understanding of consumption, linking individual practices to macrostructural change. Such an approach aligns with Fuchs et al. (2025), who critique behavior-centric sustainability strategies for neglecting the political and economic systems that constrain individual agency. Greenpeace thus reframes sustainable consumption as a collective and political strategy for societal transformation, grounded in demands for public policy reform, regulatory oversight, corporate accountability, and a fundamental reconfiguration of production and distribution systems.

IDEAC, in turn, operates at a strategic intersection between consumption as a right and as a responsibility. Its work on food security, product labeling, and pesticide regulation positions consumption within a broader struggle for institutional guarantees and public transparency: “Expanding our choices depends on public policies and regulations that ensure the right to information.” (E5 – IDEAC)

This view reinforces the notion that sustainable consumption cannot be reduced to individual choices but must be understood as a struggle for structural conditions that make sustainable options viable and accessible—particularly for marginalized populations. As Fleig et al. (2006) and Layrargues (2020a) suggest, consumption becomes emancipatory only when accompanied by democratized access to information, infrastructure, and political participation.

The practices of these organizations extend traditional notions of citizenship by repositioning consumption as a political domain and the consumer as a political subject. Rather than reinforcing the ideology of personal choice, they promote an understanding of consumption embedded in socio-environmental justice, equity, and participatory democracy—where participation is enacted as a daily, multi-scalar, and collective process.

This argument resonates with the work of Lamine et al. (2023), who demonstrate that community-based initiatives in sustainable food systems function as vehicles of structural transformation when aligned with environmental justice and participatory governance. For these authors, the most impactful initiatives are those that combine an analytical posture, grounded in critique and awareness of structural inequalities, with an experimental posture, focused on building participatory and concrete alternatives.

Across the interview data, strong empirical evidence supports the *social transformation* category: the promotion of new consumption trends, the emphasis on renewable energy, the formation of multi-sector coalitions, and the investment in critical environmental education. However, a deeper reflection is required: to what extent do these actions disrupt the reproductive logic of the current system? And how far do they avoid the risk of being absorbed by the market-oriented discourse of sustainability?

While the contributions of the organizations are evident, the analysis underscores the importance of advancing strategies that directly confront the hegemonic production and consumption paradigms—rooted in explicit political projects for civilizational change (Layrargues, 2020a, 2020b). This entails moving beyond awareness-raising to invest in resistance practices, political advocacy, and the construction of alternative economic and social models grounded in environmental justice (Costa & Teodósio, 2011; Oliveira et al., 2016, 2018, 2021a).

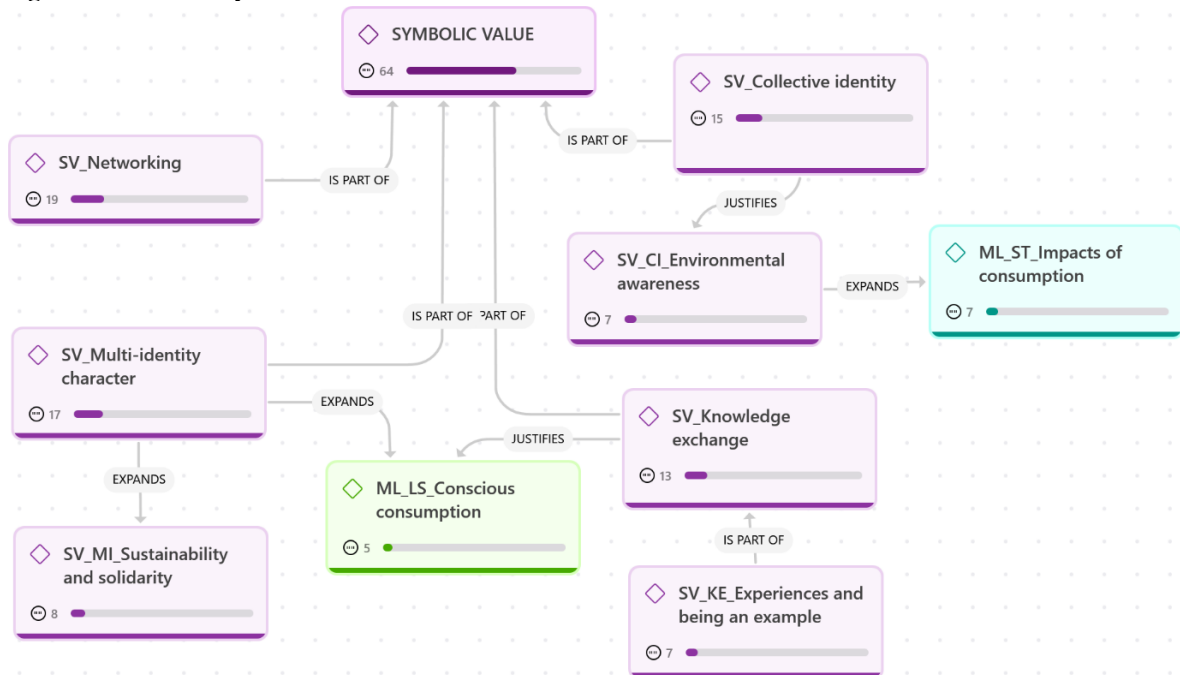
In sum, the articulation of the material life dimension with sustainable consumption reveals that Akatu, IDEAC, and Greenpeace Brazil function as hybrid social movements—operating simultaneously in the fields of consciousness-raising and systemic intervention. Their actions delineate a contested terrain in which the redefinition of lifestyles is inseparable from structural demands for justice, democracy, and sustainability. They connect the *being* of the consumer with the historical and material conditions of existence, underscoring the urgent need for structural transformation.

4.2.2 SYMBOLIC DIMENSION: Knowledge, Belonging, and the Collective Construction of Sustainability

The *symbolic dimension*, as theorized by Scherer-Warren (2013), encompasses the shared meanings, identity-based affiliations, and collectively produced knowledge that emerge from social interactions and collective mobilization. It is through this dimension that social movements construct cultural repertoires, generate markers of belonging, and engage in the symbolic production of legitimacy. Far from being peripheral, this dimension plays a foundational role in shaping the coherence, visibility, and mobilizing capacity of social movements.

In the context of this study, the symbolic dimension was strongly articulated through the practices of Instituto Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil, particularly in the analytical categories of collective identity, knowledge exchange, network formation, and multi-identity character. The network map generated in ATLAS.ti (Figure 7) illustrates the interrelations among these categories, which constitute the symbolic infrastructure of sustainable consumption activism.

Figure 7– Network Symbolic Value Dimension



Source: ATLAS.ti software, based on research data (2025)

The construction of collective identities is a critical strategy for sustaining engagement and generating a sense of shared purpose among diverse actors. As Melucci (2006) and Ravasi & Rindova (2008) suggest, identity formation in social movements is not merely about unifying interests but about fostering emotional resonance, mutual recognition, and symbolic alignment around shared worldviews. In Akatu’s work, this dynamic is enacted through educational strategies that connect sustainability to everyday realities. As E1 explains: “We must understand that a sustainable habit may make sense in one reality but be completely impractical in another.” This awareness of social and territorial diversity highlights a pedagogy of inclusion that resists homogenizing narratives and recognizes the different starting points from which sustainability is experienced and practiced.

Similarly, Greenpeace Brazil constructs collective identity through intersectional engagement, positioning environmental activism as inseparable from struggles for justice and recognition. E8 asserts: “Those of us with environmental awareness must place social and

environmental agendas at the core of our concerns.” This statement reflects a critical symbolic repositioning—moving beyond narrow ecological framings and embracing a broader, justice-oriented imaginary of sustainability that resonates with marginalized and underrepresented groups.

The symbolic dimension is also deeply embedded in knowledge exchange and network formation. These organizations do not merely disseminate information; they curate, mediate, and translate between epistemic communities—bridging scientific expertise, local wisdom, and civic narratives. As E1 reflects, “It’s the work of different social actors, and only then can further actions be included.” This illustrates a commitment to epistemological plurality and co-construction of meaning, particularly evident in collaborative projects such as Akatu’s urban mobility campaigns and Greenpeace’s transportation observatory. These initiatives embody a networked pedagogy that connects technical know-how with public deliberation and grassroots perspectives (Portilho, 2010; Oliveira et al., 2018).

For IDEC, symbolic strategies are linked to democratic engagement and the public’s right to understand and act on sustainability issues. As noted by E5: “It’s our role to create conditions that strengthen the public’s understanding of the SDGs — now more than ever.” Here, the symbolic dimension operates as a mechanism of political formation, where sustainability is not abstracted into technocratic discourse but translated into accessible and mobilizing language. These organizations thus act as mediators of meaning, shaping public narratives and enabling civic agencies in relation to consumption.

The multi-identity character of these movements is particularly relevant in an era marked by complex affiliations and overlapping struggles. The organizations studied recognize their constituencies not only as consumers, but also as citizens, activists, Indigenous peoples, youth, and urban communities. This intersectional framing is especially prominent in Greenpeace’s discourse. As E7 declares: “Our mission is to fight for human rights, for Indigenous peoples, for the environment, and for social justice...” This integrative vision of sustainability challenges reductionist models based on efficiency or individual choice and foregrounds collective memory, identity, and justice as key drivers of transformative action.

The symbolic power of example is also salient. As E3 from Akatu notes: “The power of example is very strong. When a consumption example brings benefits to the community, it will be followed.” Here, symbolic action takes the form of performativity: acts of consumption are framed as pedagogical gestures, capable of projecting aspirational models and producing emulative effects. These are not neutral practices—they are embedded in ideological disputes over values such as solidarity, equity, and care, which underlie broader cultural transformations.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal that the symbolic dimension is not limited to discourse; it operates as an infrastructure of action, enabling organizations to produce resonance, mobilize emotional and cognitive engagement, and anchor sustainability in culturally meaningful terms. Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil function not only as informers but as curators of meaning, shaping the imaginaries through which sustainability is understood, felt, and acted upon.

Yet, this symbolic field is not without tension. The commodification of sustainability icons, the fragmentation of activist ecosystems, and the subsumption of local knowledge under technocratic rationalities pose significant risks. These contradictions highlight the need for critical vigilance in sustaining inclusive, plural, and democratic symbolic repertoires. Affirming subaltern narratives and defending spaces of symbolic co-creation is essential for preserving the transformative potential of social movements.

Despite these challenges, the data affirm that the organizations analyzed engage in symbolically dense and socially resonant practices. By linking knowledge, emotion, identity, and political aspiration, they animate a participatory and affective mode of sustainability that transcends the merely cognitive. In doing so, they expand the normative boundaries of

citizenship and reframe consumption as a public and civic expression, aligned with democratic values and intergenerational ethics.

This finding echoes Schnaudt et al. (2021), who argue that contemporary citizenship incorporates environmental stewardship and sustainable consumption as core democratic practices. Within this horizon, knowledge production by social movements is not simply the dissemination of information, but a relational, situated, and emotionally charged process of meaning-making. It connects individual trajectories to collective imaginaries and situates consumption within broader struggles for dignity, recognition, and justice.

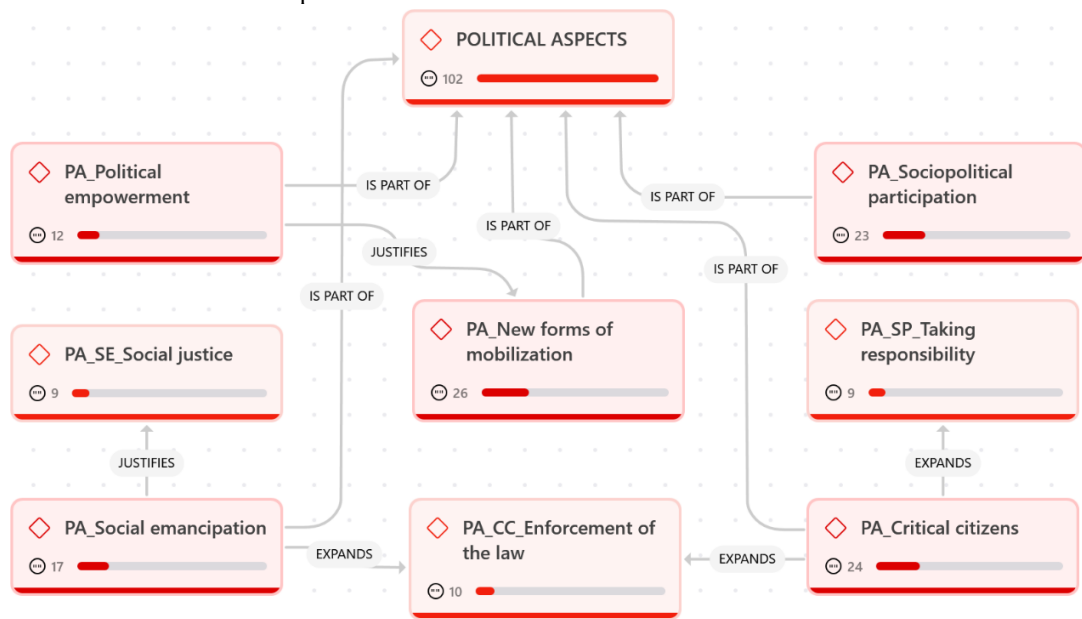
In sum, the symbolic dimension operates as a catalyst for cultural change, reinforcing the role of social movements as producers of narratives, framers of public discourse, and mediators of civic identity. Their practices demonstrate that the transition to sustainable consumption is not merely technical or behavioral, but symbolic and political—anchored in contested meanings, collective memory, and the ongoing construction of democratic life.

4.2.3 POLITICAL DIMENSION: Consumption, Citizenship, and Mobilization for Systemic Transformation

The political dimension, as defined by Scherer-Warren (2013), concerns the constitution of social power through collective action. It expresses the capacity of social movements to articulate emancipatory agendas, empower diverse actors, and dispute the institutional arrangements that shape society. Situated within arenas of contestation and proposition, this dimension reconfigures development models, broadens access to rights, and expands democratic participation. It unfolds across three central axes — transformative action, cognitive shifts, and inclusive policy advocacy — through which civil society engages more substantively with public and institutional life.

In the field of sustainable consumption, the political dimension is a strategic bridge between individual practices and structural transformation. This study operationalized it through five analytical categories: social emancipation, empowerment, critical citizenship formation, sociopolitical participation, and new forms of mobilization, as represented in the analytical network in Figure 8.

Figure 8 – Network Political Empowerment Dimension



Source: ATLAS.ti software, based on research data (2025)

Echoing the works of Gohn (2014) and Portilho (2020), social movements are conceptualized as enduring fields of resistance and innovation rather than mere ephemeral

reactions. This study reveals that Instituto Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil strategically engage the political dimension to critique hegemonic consumption paradigms, catalyze civic empowerment, and reframe consumption as a venue for democratic practice.

The category of social emancipation emerges as particularly salient, underscored by recurring themes of collaborative economies, redistributive justice, and the politicization of consumer access. These organizations actively challenge the dominant neoliberal narrative that places the locus of change solely within individual behaviors. Instead, they advocate for systemic interventions rooted in principles of solidarity and inclusion. E3 (Akatu) articulates this reorientation by stating, “There’s a whole ecosystem being built around a conscious economy... It’s about creating opportunities for those who haven’t had them yet.” Here, the notion of opportunity encompasses not only material access but also participation in a reimagined civic economy where consumption aligns with collective values and social justice imperatives.

In a complementary perspective, E4 (IDEC) posits sustainable consumption as a catalyst for institutional and societal change: “Sustainable consumption is a means to build societies where social and environmental justice go hand in hand.” This framing reinforces the assertion that emancipatory politics do not solely arise from critical discourse; rather, they emerge through the construction of new public ethics that transition consumption from a private act to a domain of public deliberation and ethical reorientation. The transformative potential inherent in sustainable consumption instills hope for a more just and equitable future.

The empowerment dimension resonates strongly within this discourse, particularly concerning informed choice and the democratization of knowledge access. IDEC assumes a pivotal role by translating complex regulatory, legal, and scientific information into actionable insights for consumers. As articulated by E5, “It’s challenging for a consumer to make sustainable choices without access to the right information... So we translate these major issues into clear and simple language.” This statement illustrates an intentional pedagogical initiative, wherein information is not merely disseminated but rearticulated as a form of civic empowerment, enabling consumers to engage critically with systemic structures as rights-bearing citizens.

This dimension further unveils the confluence of symbolic and political action. In this context, the act of informing becomes synonymous with politicization, transforming consumption into a battleground for rights defense and structural confrontation. Following Barbosa (2021), consumption operates as a vector of justice, through which individuals assert claims to recognition, equity, and autonomy amidst opaque market logics and institutional inertia.

The notion of critical citizenship formation emerges prominently across narratives expressing frustration with institutional inertia, particularly in relation to environmental and climate justice. Participants convey concerns regarding governmental inefficacy and the commodification of sustainability, prompting a re-signification of political agency through quotidian practices. As articulated by E7 (Greenpeace), “I want to believe that political leaders will take decisive action on the climate crisis... But I think the main responsibility lies with the consumer.” This stance not only acknowledges structural limitations but also affirms a form of bottom-up agency, positioning consumption as a means of ethical dissent and public engagement. It empowers participants, engendering a sense of responsibility for their role in sustainable consumption.

Initiatives such as Akatu’s “5Rs” campaign and Greenpeace’s advocacy for climate justice exemplify how these organizations leverage consumer practices not solely as pedagogical entry points but also as platforms for mobilization and civic protagonism. These campaigns operate at the intersection of education and advocacy, fostering a politics of the everyday in which micro-practices (e.g., waste reduction, ethical consumption) interlink with

macro-political agendas (e.g., environmental policy, corporate accountability). This collective nature of sustainable consumption fosters a sense of belonging to a larger movement, uniting individuals in the pursuit of a more sustainable future.

This micropolitical orientation is central to what Oliveira et al. (2018) describe as a nascent form of citizenship, constituted through localized, value-laden, and contestatory practices. It expands normative frameworks of democratic participation by embedding civic responsibility within daily consumption routines, thereby activating citizenship beyond the confines of the ballot box and extending into marketplaces, households, and social networks.

Furthermore, contemporary forms of mobilization reflect the adaptive capacity of these movements within the digital landscape. Through IDEC’s interactive online platforms and Greenpeace’s visually impactful media campaigns, these organizations effectively engage with broader audiences, thereby enhancing the collective impact of their initiatives.

4.3 DISCUSSION: Critical Perspectives of Social Movements Toward 2030 on the Path to Sustainable Consumption

The narratives drawn from the interviews unveil a horizon of *active hope* (Freire, 2005) as a driving force behind the practices of social movements engaged in advancing sustainable consumption in Brazil. This hope is not a passive expectation but a transformative and praxis-oriented posture that connects ethical indignation, civic engagement, and collective imagination. It emerges from concrete pedagogical, political, and cultural practices that seek to redefine the conditions under which people consume, produce, and coexist — thereby expanding the democratic quality of everyday life (Gohn, 2014, 2020).

The systematization presented in Figure 9 synthesizes the analytical dimensions proposed by Scherer-Warren (2013) — material life, symbolic value, and political empowerment — along with their corresponding categories and empirical indicators. This structure not only reveals the complexity of consumption as a social practice, but also illuminates the multiple ways through which civil society actors operationalize the discourse of sustainability.

Figure 9 – Summary of Dimensions, Categories, and Indicators of Social Movements in Relation to Sustainable Consumption

Dimension	Categories	Indicators
Material	Lifestyle	Adoption of new habits; self-regulation of consumption; critique of consumerism; sharing practices; reuse and recycling; waste prevention.
	Social transformation	Reflection on consumption impact; emergence of new trends; transition to renewable patterns; pursuit of transformative realities; learning through shared experiences.
Symbolic	Collective identity	Inclusion of diverse consumer profiles; promotion of environmental awareness; appreciation of ecocentric worldviews (ecological civilization).
	Knowledge exchange	Dissemination of SDGs; encouragement of conscious consumption; valorization of example as pedagogical strategy; critical reflection on consumption impact.
	Network formation	Consumer engagement; active listening to civil society; articulation among social actors; networked actions aligned with SDGs.
	Multi-identity character	Recognition of consumers as plural subjects; integration of sustainability, social justice, and solidarity; involvement of diverse stakeholders.
Political	Social emancipation	Promotion of collaborative economy; defense of social justice; expansion of opportunities.
	Empowerment	Access to and realization of rights; actions in vulnerable contexts; reinforcement of consumption’s social dimension.
	Critical citizenship	Assumption of individual and collective responsibility; awareness of contextual inequalities; critique of state monopoly over problem-solving.
	Sociopolitical participation	Promotion of active engagement; construction of democratic and pluralistic visions; framing consumption as a public issue.

	New forms of mobilization	Digital and in-person activism; organized social pressure; collective engagement for behavioral change.
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Source: Research Data, 2025.

Articulating these dimensions with practices derived from the field reinforces the understanding of consumption as a multidimensional and relational phenomenon, shaped by symbolic meanings, institutional arrangements, and structural asymmetries. As highlighted by Oliveira et al. (2016), consumption is not reducible to individual choice; rather, it must be interpreted within a broader sociopolitical and cultural framework, where norms, aspirations, and inequalities are continuously negotiated.

The material dimension, centered on lifestyle redefinition and socio-environmental transformation, reflects how organizations such as Greenpeace denounce extractivist development models while proposing alternatives anchored in clean energy, biodiversity, and ecological limits. Akatu, in turn, promotes behavioral change and reflexivity about daily practices, revealing how material engagement with consumption can become a gateway to broader systemic critique — especially when integrated with civic education and public advocacy.

The symbolic dimension underscores the power of collective identity construction, intercultural dialogue, and network formation. As seen in the discourses of IDEC and Akatu, the dissemination of sustainability values is inseparable from cultural translation processes that respect territorial specificities, epistemic plurality, and emotional engagement. These movements function not merely as information disseminators, but as curators of meaning, capable of weaving together knowledge, affect, and belonging into new narratives of democratic sustainability.

The political dimension, in turn, reveals the potential of consumption to serve as a field of mobilization, rights assertion, and systemic transformation. IDEC’s role in institutional advocacy and legal action highlights how the defense of informed consumption intersects with public policy, regulatory frameworks, and social justice agendas. Meanwhile, Greenpeace and Akatu reposition consumption as a tool of critical citizenship, where individual agency is reconnected to collective action and structural contestation. The emergence of practices such as digital mobilization, collaborative economies, and resistance to commodified logics of sustainability exemplifies a politics of the everyday (Oliveira et al., 2018) that expands the frontiers of civic engagement.

Taken together, these dimensions illustrate how social movements construct alternative infrastructures of meaning and practice that challenge dominant consumption regimes. Their actions reframe sustainability as a process of collective negotiation over what, how, and for whom we consume — a negotiation deeply entangled with issues of power, recognition, and redistributive justice. The organizations analyzed do not simply promote “best practices”; they enact counter-hegemonic practices rooted in ethical commitment, solidarity, and democratic experimentation.

Interview narratives reveal a prevailing tone of *critical optimism*, grounded in the belief that social transformation is both necessary and possible — albeit slow and conflictual. Participants point to tangible achievements, such as expanded civic engagement, wider dissemination of sustainability discourses, and strengthened networks among diverse social actors. These outcomes signal the emergence of new cultural grammars of consumption, based on care, reciprocity, and planetary limits.

Nonetheless, these advances coexist with structural contradictions. In a country marked by extreme inequality, territorial asymmetries, and institutional fragility, the idea of sustainable consumption faces tension between necessity and privilege. While some groups navigate hyperconsumption and accelerated obsolescence, others struggle for basic material conditions — exposing the coexistence of two consumption regimes: one of excess and another of

deprivation. Addressing sustainability thus requires a radical confrontation with social injustice, reframing sustainability not as a lifestyle choice but as a universal right.

Moreover, the integration of civil society into institutional arrangements — often through partnerships with the state and market actors — introduces risks of co-optation, political dilution, and asymmetric influence (Oliveira et al., 2022). In this context, social movements must assert their autonomy, maintain critical vigilance, and act as guarantors that sustainability is not emptied of its transformative potential or subordinated to technocratic or market logics.

As Fuchs et al. (2025) emphasize, effective sustainability initiatives are those that bridge micro-level behavioral change with macro-level institutional transformation. The findings of this study align with this proposition, demonstrating how social movements act as connective tissues between citizen engagement, public advocacy, and structural change. They enable consumption to become a political practice — a space of dispute and invention — capable of reorienting the development trajectory toward equity and resilience.

Ultimately, the contributions of Akatu, IDEC, and Greenpeace Brazil reaffirm that advancing sustainable consumption entails more than technocratic management of demand; it involves a redefinition of needs, a redistribution of opportunities, and a collective reimagination of futures. In this light, consumption is not the end, but the means — a platform from which to build more just, democratic, and ecologically viable societies. As such, the politicization of consumption must be understood not as a supplementary agenda to the 2030 Agenda, but as a normative foundation for a civilizational transition grounded in dignity, justice, and planetary coexistence.

5 CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the role of social movements in advancing sustainable consumption in Brazil, focusing on three emblematic civil society organizations: Instituto Akatu, the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Protection (IDEC), and Greenpeace Brazil. Grounded in Scherer-Warren's (2013) tripartite theoretical framework — encompassing the material, symbolic, and political dimensions of collective action — the research sheds light on the multifaceted ways in which these movements engage with, resist, and reconfigure dominant consumption regimes.

Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative, multiple-case approach supported by data triangulation through document analysis, non-participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with key actors from each organization. The use of ATLAS.ti enabled rigorous coding, lexicographic analysis, and the mapping of thematic co-occurrences, contributing to the interpretive depth and analytical consistency of the findings.

The results point to a significant convergence between the actions of the selected organizations and the normative vision of Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Beyond advocating for behavioral change, these organizations operate as mediators of meaning, mobilizing symbolic resources, legal frameworks, and political instruments to foster collective awareness and reshape public agendas. Their practices reveal that sustainable consumption is not merely a technical or individual endeavor, but a deeply political process, embedded in struggles over recognition, redistribution, and socio-environmental justice.

Akatu stands out for its focus on pedagogical strategies and value-based consumer education; IDEC asserts the political dimension through regulatory advocacy and defense of rights; and Greenpeace articulates material and structural critiques through environmental activism and campaign-based mobilization. Despite their distinctive approaches, the organizations converge in advancing transformative agendas that integrate ethics, participation, and collective action — positioning themselves as key actors in the redefinition of sustainability from a civil society perspective.

The analysis of these organizations highlights how social movements act as critical infrastructures for sustainability, offering not only resistance to unsustainable models, but also pathways for transition through the politicization of consumption. By connecting micro-level practices to macro-level institutional change, they enable the emergence of new civic grammars and ecological rationalities attuned to the ethical imperatives of the 21st century.

In theoretical terms, this study reaffirms the utility of Scherer-Warren's framework in capturing the complexity of contemporary social movements, while empirically demonstrating how material conditions, symbolic resources, and political agency intersect in the field of sustainable consumption. The categories and indicators developed herein contribute to an analytical vocabulary capable of informing future research, policy formulation, and civil society strategies.

From a practical standpoint, the findings underscore the need to strengthen institutional frameworks that support civic engagement, public access to information, and democratic participation in consumption-related decision-making. The initiatives analyzed reveal the potential of social movements to bridge the gap between critical consciousness and systemic transformation, offering bottom-up contributions to the operationalization of the 2030 Agenda.

While the study was limited to three organizations, it opens avenues for further exploration into other social movements, cross-sectoral alliances, and regional dynamics in sustainability governance. Future research could also delve into the mobilization of consumers as political subjects, investigating how identities, emotions, and community ties are activated in support of sustainable and inclusive practices.

In conclusion, the politicization of consumption emerges as an urgent and strategic horizon for societies facing intertwined ecological, social, and economic crises. The social movements analyzed herein offer not only resistance, but alternatives grounded in solidarity, equity, and democratic renewal. Their actions reaffirm that sustainable consumption must be understood not simply as a behavioral imperative, but as a collective right and a civilizational project — one that demands the reconfiguration of values, institutions, and imaginaries toward a more just, participatory, and ecologically viable future.

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