

Consumption of Sweeteners: An Evolutionary Analysis of Historical Development

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1. Introduction

“The economic growth over the past two hundred years is unprecedented. So, too, is the growth of demand, i.e. real per capita consumption. Economic theorizing has been eager to discuss why and how a growing output can be maintained. It has shown little interest, however, in the role of the exceptional growth of demand. Only one necessary, yet certainly not sufficient condition for a sustained growth of demand... is usually acknowledged: per capita real income must be rising.” (Witt 2001: 31)

In this paper, the demand-side conditions which are usually neglected in growth theories are highlighted. Starting from the consideration that the occurrence of innovations is not restricted to production processes (Saviotti 1996) the question raises how consumers cope with novelty. To answer this question in the framework of standard economic theory is for epistemological reasons impossible. It is true that Lancaster's (1966a, 1966b, 1971) “new demand theory” avoids the epistemological problem by means of a modification, the indirect utility approach. New goods are conceived to be just more efficient technologies which produce characteristics that are conceived to be the actual objects of consumer preferences (for a discussion of this approach see Ruprecht 2001a). Since the content of novelties, by definition, has not revealed yet, however, maximizing efficiency makes no sense.

Unless no vicarious entrepreneur is presumed who knows exactly what consumers want, it has to be analysed explicitly how consumers wants are shaped and how consumers establish cause-effect relations, given that objectively true knowledge of cause-effect relationships is impossible.¹ The present paper approaches these questions theoretically as well as empirically. A positive approach of how humans cope with the epistemological problem is presented in section 2. In order to illustrate the usefulness of this approach, in section 3 a case study on the historical development of the markets for sweeteners is presented.