

## Changing Your Lifestyle to Change the World. Who Is Willing to Take up the Challenge of the Globalisation of Risks?

*Paola Di Nicola*

### **How to cite**

Di Nicola, P. (2017). Changing Your Lifestyle to Change the World. Who Is Willing to Take up the Challenge of the Globalisation of Risks? [Italian Sociological Review, 7(1), 125-143]

Retrieved from [<http://dx.doi.org/10.13136/isr.v7i1.152>]

[DOI: 10.13136/isr.v7i1.152]

### **1. Author/s information**

*Paola Di Nicola*

Department of Humanities, University of Verona, Verona, Italy

### **2. Contact authors'**

E-mail: [paola.dinicola@univr.it](mailto:paola.dinicola@univr.it)

### **3. Article accepted for publication**

December 2017

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Italian Sociological Review  
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# *Changing Your Lifestyle to Change the World. Who Is Willing to Take up the Challenge of the Globalisation of Risks?*

Paola Di Nicola\*

Corresponding author:  
Paola Di Nicola  
E-mail: paola.dinicola@univr.it

## **Abstract**

This article aims to analyse the degree to which a sample of the Italian population has assimilated a new form of awareness of consumption. The focus is not on concrete behaviour, but on the willingness to ‘renounce something’ – in terms of consumer goods – for a general interest. It cannot be assumed that all consumers have the same level of sensitivity to the issues raised by environmentalists, the fair trade movement or degrowth; some of the discriminating variables that can influence the relative willingness of consumers to modify aspects of their behaviour include generalised trust, political culture of belonging, local traditions and perception of the degree of influence that individual action can have on the political context, together with the more traditional profile variables such as gender, age, level of education, area of residence and social class. It is assumed that a greater or lesser willingness to change lifestyle cannot be separated from the broader social context in which consumers act, as our daily lives are marked by frequent purchases that are often routine, but also subject to systematic assessments in terms of price, value for money, beauty, self-gratification and symbolic and material investments.

Keywords: critical consumer, life style, social capital.

## **1. Introduction**

Sustainability, more equity and social justice are the new watchwords that entrust consumers with the responsibility to influence economic macro-

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\* Department of Humanities, University of Verona, Verona, Italy.

processes, contributing to the bottom-up activation of virtuous behaviour, which has taken on a clearly 'political' value over the last few decades (Bruni, Pelligra, 2001; Becchetti, 2005; Micheletti, 2003; Tosi, 2006; Secondulfo, 2001). 'The consumer has been invested with political duties on an increasing basis since the early 90s and above all since the turn of the millennium after events in Seattle at the World Trade Organisation meeting in 1999. In this way, various forms of alternative consumption have been defined as "boycotting", a "positive" form which is coupled with "negative" initiatives of boycotting large multinationals, in addition to "conversational" activities of protest, condemnation and pressure, above all through the Internet: it is essentially all seen as a set of new forms of political participation included in the umbrella term "political consumerism"' (Leonini, Sassatelli, 2008: 9). While consumers initially focused on the protection of consumption, with increased awareness of purchased items through information campaigns about 'who produces what and how', the profile of the critical consumer has changed in recent years. 'The globalisation of the economy and communications, and the consolidation of a post-colonial culture have not only made the world more interconnected, but also highlighted the ecological implications of the level of consumption maintained by wealthy countries and underlined the unnatural nature of the differences in consumption levels between different areas of the world' (Leonini, Sassatelli, 2008: 11). Therefore, consumers have acquired awareness of both the economic implications and ethical repercussions (in terms of social justice and environmental sustainability) of their purchases. Furthermore, globalisation processes (in terms of the intensification of trade flows of goods, people, money, ideas and information at an intercontinental level) (Held et. al., 1999) have led to the emergence of the dual awareness that risks are global and that any counteraction must also be global. This new awareness has generated what U. Beck defines as cosmopolitan democracy (a new way of constructing the democratic consensus) and cosmopolitan social movements, which translate local issues into global concerns and vice versa (Beck, 2000, 2003). In the common sense perception, the world becomes smaller and closer (we are united by the same problems and as a result of the intensification of communications, we are more aware of the underlying interconnections between the global and the local). At the same time, the context of daily life (the local) becomes larger, in the sense that it is also shared by unknown subjects that we might never even have the chance to meet. We have been transformed into citizens of the world by environmental pollution, global warming, increasing poverty in developing countries, the forced migration of whole populations, junk food and economic oligarchies that act beyond and in spite of the limits and constraints of politics (Sassen, 2015). Although we live

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in local and localised environments, we are not certain of or reassured by the promises of greater economic development made in the name of neoliberalism and the growth of consumption. Moreover, there is emerging awareness that the answer to the effects of current economic trends on our daily living environment (in terms of worsening general living conditions) cannot be local, but must have a broader – global – scope (Beck, 1999).

This article aims to analyse the presence of a new form of consumer sensitivity among a cross-section of the Italian population. Rather than examining concrete behaviour, the focus is on the willingness to ‘renounce something’ – in terms of lifestyle and consumer goods – for a general interest. It cannot be assumed that all consumers have the same level of sensitivity to the issues raised by environmental and fair trade campaigns or the degrowth movement; discriminating variables that can influence the consumer’s relative willingness to change certain behavioural aspects include generalised trust, political culture of origin, local traditions and perception of the degree of influence that individual action can have on the political context, along with the more traditional profile variables (gender, age, level of education, area of residence and social class). As daily life is characterised by ongoing purchases, which are often routine but also subject to systematic assessments in terms of price, benefit, beauty, self-gratification and symbolic and material investments (Secondulfo, 1990, 1995, 2012; Setiffi, 2013; Viviani, 2013, 2015), it is assumed that a greater or lesser willingness to change lifestyle cannot be separated from the wider social context in which the consumer acts. Reduced and/or better consumption is not a rational choice entrusted to a value-oriented rationality, as in everyday life we usually negotiate between what we like and what is right, what we need and what is superfluous, and what we can do and what we would like to do (or buy). This negotiation process takes place in our world of everyday life delimited by constraints and opportunities that cannot always be controlled. Furthermore, there can be varying levels of sensitivity or attention paid to the issues raised by fair trade, reducing pollution, reducing consumption and/or improving health conditions. It is therefore assumed that the choice to potentially welcome new models of consumption is the result of weak rationality<sup>1</sup>, which takes into account both value orientations and the limits and potential that come into play in the selection process.

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<sup>1</sup> Weak rationality can be seen as a behavioural tendency that allows social actors to make decisions about what they do in their everyday lives in the absence of general and universal criteria and without all the necessary information to act. They are not impulsive or irrational choices, as they are made in the light of knowledge of common sense and past experiences.

## **2. Why change lifestyle? A set of complex reasons**

Studies on critical consumption and political consumerism (Forno, 2016; Leonini, Sassatelli, 2008; Paltrinieri, 2012b) have stressed the difficulty of profiling the new consumer, as acts of consumption can be given different meanings by consumers for a wide variety of reasons: profile variables such as a high level of education and social status seem to be influential, as well as participatory experiences both at a political and social level (Leonini, Sassatelli, 2008: 14). At the same time, changes in the broader socio-cultural context have left their mark on different generations of consumers over time. 'We can therefore consider the current movement as a third wave of consumer politicisation, after a first wave between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries characterised by an attempt to lobby to expand political citizenship and a second wave in the 1960s, which coincided with the consecration of consumer rights in terms of "safety", "being informed", "choice" and "being heard". Globalisation, environmentalism and new forms of hedonism (from healthism to slow living) play a fundamental role in this third wave' (Leonini, Sassatelli, 2008: 10-11).

If it is assumed that citizens in the global society are no longer defined by their role as workers but as consumers (Bauman, 2005, 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Secondulfo, 1995), and that in the risk society (Beck, 2000, 2003) the trajectories of individual lives become discontinuous and, above all, subject to constant processes of negotiation, definition and redefinition (with an uncertain outcome), consumption becomes not only a distinctive element against which individual personalities are constructed (Parmiggiani, 2004; Secondulfo, 1995; Setiffi, 2013), but also a horizon of meaning for making ethical choices (Paltrinieri, Parmiggiani, 2005; Paltrinieri, 2010, 2012a). The individual level can therefore act as the starting point for a reflective practice that opens itself up to the wider issue of the ethical meaning of our daily actions, involving the aspects of pleasure, self-realisation and social recognition related to consumption and its impact on the physical and social environment.

Following Beck's thinking, it can further be assumed that risks in society also become global and that global risks are 'very democratic'<sup>2</sup> because they are distributed almost equally among different social groups. As consumption develops critical, responsible and political dimensions, it can become a strategy for stemming seemingly unstoppable processes that require

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<sup>2</sup> For U. Beck, even if the 'rich' live in more salubrious and better-kept areas, they cannot actually do anything against global pollution or, in extreme cases, nuclear radiation.

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everybody's involvement, which naturally assumes political and ethical overtones.

In the light of these considerations, the Observatory on Family Consumption Strategies at the University of Verona and the survey company SWG conducted their latest survey on Italian family consumption (2016) to reconstruct the broader social and cultural context in which consumers act and develop varying degrees of sensitivity to issues related to the exploitation of human and environmental resources. The survey used a stratified sample of 2007 subjects and featured specific questions on the topic in order to build the socio-cultural profile of the potential critical consumer<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. The general profile of respondents

2007 subjects took part in the research, 47.9% of whom are male and 52.1% female. 54.1% of the sample are employed, while 20% are retired, 8.9% are homemakers and 7.4% are students.

The distribution of the sample among the different age brackets is as follows:

- 18-24: 9.9%
- 25-34: 18.7%
- 35-44: 18.6%
- 45-54: 16.1%
- 55-64: 14.5%
- over 64: 22.3%

The level of education is medium-high, with the sample distributed as follows:

- Primary level: 10.8%
- Secondary level: 48.6%
- Tertiary level: 33.8%
- Postgraduate: 6.9%

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<sup>3</sup> The Observatory on Family Consumption Strategies was founded in 2009 by Prof. Domenico Secondulfo and Prof. Luigi Tronca from the Department of Human Sciences in Verona and by Dr Maurizio Pessato and Dr Iolanda Di Pelino from SWG. The Observatory conducts annual surveys on changes in the consumption patterns of Italian families using a representative sample of the Italian population stratified according to gender, age and geographical area of residence.

Secondulfo and Tronca (2012) edited issue 3 of vol. 2 of the periodical *Italian Sociological Review*, dedicated to the results of the first surveys conducted by the Observatory.

In terms of social class, 23.2% of the sample belong to the upper-middle class, 42.2% to the middle class and 5.9% to the working class<sup>4</sup>.

With regard to area of residence, 26.9% live in the North-West, 19.1% in the North-East, 19.5% in Central Italy, 23.2% in the South and 11.2% on the Islands.

Regarding household structure, 12.5% of respondents live alone or in households without a nucleus<sup>5</sup>, 19.9% are in childless couples, 56.1% are in couples with children, 9.6% are in single-parent families and 2.0% are in families with two or more nuclei. Compared to the national data (2011 ISTAT census), households without a nucleus, couples and single-parent families are underrepresented, while families with children are overrepresented. These differences are probably due to the fact that the respondents to this survey indicated the families in which they actually live rather than their registered addresses.

With regard to the variables that will be used in successive analysis, almost half of respondents (49.4%) are not members of any association, 21.9% are enrolled in one association, 14.9% in two, 8.0% in three and 8.8% in four or more associations: the average number of memberships for our sample is a little over one association (1.08).

When asked to express their level of agreement with the statement 'Most people are trustworthy' using a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree), respondents give a moderately positive opinion with an average value of 5.58. In terms of political orientation, 9.5% place themselves on the right, 23.1% on the centre-right, 10.9% in the centre, 34.4% on the centre-left and 22.0% on the left (with a response rate of around 76%). Slightly over 50% of respondents believe that their consumer behaviour can influence the current political context: 'quite a lot' for 21.9% and 'a lot' for 31.7%.

Finally, with regard to religious practice, 14.7% of respondents define themselves as non-believers, 14.6% say that they never attend religious services, 31.4% do so only on special occasions (weddings, baptisms, funerals and so on), 16.5% on religious holidays, 19.6% once a week and 3.3% more than once a week.

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<sup>4</sup> The index of social class was constructed from the variable where respondents indicated their profession (active, pensioner or retired from workforce, on unemployment benefit/mobility allowance), inspired by the three-position class model presented in Ballarino, G., Cobalti, A. (2003), *Mobilità sociale*, Roma, Carocci, page 35, table 1. The sum total of the percentages of the three classes is not one hundred, as the index was constructed without considering subjects that were homemakers, students or had no occupation, whose social position could not be deduced.

<sup>5</sup> Households without a nucleus, consisting of two or more persons not united by the couple's relationship and/or affiliation.



The majority of respondents are therefore middle class, employed, live in families with children, have little involvement in associations, are centre or centre-left politically speaking, are not very involved in religious practices and have moderate levels of trust in others (the level of generalised trust is just positive) and in their ability to influence the political context.

#### **4. Willingness to change lifestyle: structural variables**

The aim of the study was to reconstruct the socio-demographic profile of people willing to change their lifestyle (potential willingness was surveyed) and make sacrifices to obtain benefits in private and personal terms (such as a health drive) and in the public and collective realm (fight against pollution or the exploitation of people in the developing world, reducing the typically high levels of consumption in industrialised countries).

The distribution of responses to the question: 'For which of these reasons would you be willing to sacrifice your customary lifestyle?' was as follows (response rate: 89.4%):

- To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world (as in the fair trade movement): 21.8%
- To protect our planet from pollution (environmental movements): 25.4%
- To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use (degrowth movement): 21.9%
- To be able to lead a healthier life (health movement): 22.6%
- I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons: 8.2%.

It can be seen that significant proportions would be willing to renounce comforts or consumer goods, with greater sensitivity to environmental and health issues, which respondents identify with more than the exploitation of people in the developing world.

Men are slightly less willing to change than women (9.5% vs. 7.1%), but are more attentive to issues relating to the exploitation of people in the developing world (22.3% vs. 21.3%) and the degrowth movement (22.3% vs. 21.6%). However, women are more sensitive to health issues (24.8% compared to 20.4% of men). Instead, with regard to the fight against pollution, there are no major differences between men and women (25.6% of men compared to 25.2% of women).

*TABLE 1. Willingness to change lifestyle by age group (data in percentages).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Age groups						Total
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over	
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	19.3	16.2	21.6	21.6	24.9	26	21.9
To protect our planet from pollution	32.7	23.6	16.5	23.7	24.5	30.6	25.4
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	19.3	28.9	23.2	24	20.5	15.2	21.9
To be able to lead a healthier life	20.5	24.2	25.3	24.7	21.6	19.4	22.7
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	8.2	7.1	10.4	5.9	8.4	8.8	8.2
Total	100.0 (171)	100.0 (339)	100.0 (328)	100.0 (287)	100.0 (273)	100.0 (396)	100.0 (1794)

Table 1 illustrates that subjects aged between 35 and 44 are the least willing to change, while those in the 45-54 age bracket are the most inclined to do so. Adults and elderly subjects (from 55 upwards) are more likely to make sacrifices to reduce the exploitation of people in the developing world, while the youngest and oldest age groups feel more involved in the fight against pollution. Instead, the middle age bands (above all 25-54) are more sensitive to issues of degrowth and protection of health).

*TABLE 2. Willingness to change lifestyle by area of residence (data in percentages).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Area of residence					Total
	North-West	North-East	Centre	South	Islands	
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	20.2	22.5	21.8	22.3	23.4	21.8
To protect our planet from pollution	22	27.2	27.6	25.7	26.4	25.4
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	23.5	22	23.8	20.7	16.8	21.9
To be able to lead a healthier life	24.3	19.9	16.9	24.7	28.9	22.6
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	10.1	8.4	9.9	6.7	4.6	8.3
Total	100.0 (486)	100.0 (346)	100.0 (344)	100.0 (421)	100.0 (197)	100.0 (1794)

The residents of Central Italy and above all those in the North-West are less willing to change their lifestyle, while those most inclined to do so live on the Islands, closely followed by the inhabitants of the South. However, in a general context of high propensity for change among all residents of the

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different geographical areas, the issues of fighting against the exploitation of people in the developing world and improving health conditions are closer to the hearts of those on the Islands, while there is more awareness of pollution in North-Eastern and Central Italy, and more sensitivity to the need to reduce consumption in the North-West and Centre. Finally, the protection of health is given a slightly higher priority in the South and North-West than the general figure (see table 2).

TABLE 3. *Willingness to change lifestyle by social class (data in percentages).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Social class			Total
	Upper-middle class	Middle class	Working class	
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	22.1	23.6	18.2	22.8
To protect our planet from pollution	28.1	25.7	25.3	26.2
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	19.1	21.1	23.2	20.8
To be able to lead a healthier life	19.9	22.3	28.3	22.2
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	10.9	7.3	5.1	7.9
Total	100.0 (267)	100.0 (781)	100.0 (99)	100.0 (1147)

There are greater distinctions in terms of social class: as table 3 shows, the inclination to change decreases as we move down the social scale from the upper-middle class through the middle class to the working class, where the percentage is well below the mean figure. While the upper-middle and middle classes are most sensitive to pollution problems, the middle class are also most inclined to help the fight against exploiting people in the developing world. The working class are most sensitive to health issues and reducing consumption. It could be argued that as financial and social resources decrease, social actors (in this case the working class) pay more attention to the issues and problems that affect them more directly and with regard to which they find making a sacrifice more meaningful.

The previous interpretation is partly confirmed by the data in table 4, which shows that the willingness to change decreases in tandem with the level of education. Furthermore, sensitivity to health issues is very high among those with a low level of education. Those with graduate and postgraduate qualifications subscribe to degrowth theories to a significant degree and are also eager to fight pollution.

TABLE 4. *Willingness to change lifestyle by level of education (data in percentages).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Level of education				Total
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Postgraduate	
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	20.5	21.3	23.4	19	21.8
To protect our planet from pollution	18.9	27.1	24.7	27.8	25.4
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	22.6	19.6	23.4	30.2	21.9
To be able to lead a healthier life	26.3	24.1	20.4	18.3	22.7
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	11.6	8	8.2	4.8	8.2
Total	100.0 (190)	100.0 (864)	100.0 (612)	100.0 (126)	100.0 (1792)

Therefore, most respondents show a high level of willingness (as a potential choice) to sacrifice certain aspects of their individual consumer behaviour in order to help the developing world, reduce environmental pollution and support degrowth or forms of healthism: the level of willingness is slightly higher among women and even greater among subjects with a high level of education, those aged between 45 and 54, residents of Southern Italy and the Islands and members of the working class. It could be argued that a higher level of education and belonging to a social class that might offer fewer individual resources to face the new challenges of the global society are conducive to respondents being potentially open to a form of critical consumption that sees the individual and the collective, the local and the global as two sides of the same coin. This involves rethinking consumption styles that generate pollution and exploitation, and have a negative impact on levels of health.

### **5. Willingness to change consumption style: socio-political and relational variables**

Critical consumption requires the presence of a broad prosocial orientation. Although this seems to be fairly widespread in our survey (considering the high level of willingness to do something for the environment and people in the developing world), its intensity is affected by other cultural, political and relational variables. Political orientation, frequency of attendance at religious services, trust in others, level of involvement in associations and the perception that consumer behaviour can influence the global picture are factors that help to focus more effectively on the context in which our respondents operate when used in tandem with the profile variables analysed above.

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TABLE 5. *Willingness to change lifestyle by political orientation (data in percentages).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Political orientation					Total
	Right	Centre-right	Centre	Centre-left	Left	
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	11.2	11.4	18.1	29.9	30.5	22.8
To protect our planet from pollution	16.4	25.2	26.5	28.6	24.4	25.5
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	23.1	23.3	23.2	19.2	24.4	22.1
To be able to lead a healthier life	32.8	27.1	27.1	16.6	15.4	21.4
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	16.4	12.9	5.2	5.7	5.1	8.2
Total	100.0 (134)	100.0 (317)	100.0 (155)	100.0 (489)	100.0 (311)	100.0 (1406)

As table 5 shows, those with a right-wing (16.4%) or centre-right (12.9%) political stance are less willing to change their lifestyle. When they are prepared to change, it is more for self-centred reasons (living a healthier lifestyle for 32.8% and 27.15% respectively) than for social reasons. Commitment to the fight against the exploitation of people in the developing world is extremely strong among those with a left-wing stance (30.5%).

In general, respondents on the left and centre-left are better inclined towards change (especially to benefit the developing world and the environment), while a higher proportion of those on the right and centre-right are not willing to change their lifestyle, or would mainly do so for health reasons, displaying more sensitivity to their own health than to helping the developing world or reducing environmental pollution.

TABLE 6. *Willingness to change lifestyle and perception of how much consumer behaviour can influence the political context (data in percentages).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Perception of level of influence on the political context					Total
	Not at all	Little	Quite a lot	A lot	Dramatically	
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	21.7	21.4	22.5	20.1	24.1	21.9
To protect our planet from pollution	17.1	25.5	25.5	32.9	19	25.1
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	17.7	22.9	22.9	20.1	22.4	22
To be able to lead a healthier life	22.9	20.9	24.7	21.5	26.7	23
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	20.6	9.3	4.3	5.5	7.8	8
Total	100.0 (175)	100.0 (546)	100.0 (667)	100.0 (219)	100.0 (116)	100.0 (1723)

The respondents' willingness to change is naturally affected by their perception of being able to influence the political context.

They gave the following answers (92.7% response rate) to the question 'How much do you think you can influence the political context of our society as a consumer?':

- Not at all: 10.7%
- Little: 32.3 %
- Quite a lot: 38.0%
- A lot: 12.5%
- Dramatically: 6.5%.

Therefore, just under 60% of respondents display a relative level of optimism, although the largest single category is the more cautious 'quite a lot'.

In more than 20% of cases, those more strongly attached to their lifestyle think that their behaviour has little or no influence. Respondents who feel that they can influence the political context dramatically believe that their power can be exerted on almost all fronts: they only feel less influential with regard to the fight against pollution (19.0%), which is perhaps seen as a worldwide problem that needs to be tackled at a global political level rather than through individual action (table 6).

*TABLE 7. Willingness to change lifestyle by rate of attendance at religious services (data in percentages).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Frequency of attendance at religious services						Total
	More than once a week	Once a week	On religious holidays	Only on special occasions (weddings, funerals, baptisms)	Never	Non-believer	
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	25.4	27.3	21	19.4	14.1	25	21.5
To protect our planet from pollution	22	25.6	24.9	25.7	28.5	25	25.7
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	23.7	19.5	21.4	19.4	24.1	27.7	21.8
To be able to lead a healthier life	18.6	21.5	26.7	26.9	20.5	14.1	22.7
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	10.2	6.1	6	8.5	12.9	8.2	8.3
Total	100.0 (59)	100.0 (344)	100.0 (281)	100.0 (540)	100.0 (249)	100.0 (256)	100.0 (1729)

There is less willingness to change among those who attend religious services regularly (10.2%) and, to an even greater extent, those who never attend services (12.9%, see table 7). The former are a slightly atypical group of worshippers (ritualistic and extremely self-centred), while the latter fall into the category of those that only state they belong a religion because they were initiated into the community at birth (e.g. through baptism). Religious practice – even when irregular – implies a certain willingness to change and, in general, greater sensitivity to the condition of people in the developing world. Those who never attend religious services are more sensitive to the issue of reducing pollution, while non-believers are more sensitive to degrowth issues.

As mentioned above, the level of involvement in associations is extremely low: almost half of respondents are not members of any association, while those involved in associations are generally only members of one (average number 1.08).

There is a higher level of involvement in associations among men than women (with respective mean figures of 1.25 and 0.91 memberships), just as there is for members of the upper-middle class (1.47), followed by the working class (1.12) and the middle class (1.06). In terms of level of education, those with a postgraduate qualification have the highest membership rate (an average of 1.45), followed by graduates (1.20) and those with secondary (1.01) and primary schooling (0.73). The average number of association memberships is higher among those on the centre-left of the political spectrum (1.30), followed by those on the left (1.27), centre (1.24), centre-right (1.12) and right (0.68). There is a higher rate of involvement in associations among those who attend religious services several times a week (1.98) and once a week (1.25), although the rate among non-believers is also above the general average (1.17).

As we have seen, respondents express a moderately positive level of generalised trust, with an average value of 5.58.

In general, men express more trust (5.72) than women (5.44), along with members of the upper-middle class (5.82), followed by the middle class (5.73) and working class (5.55). More trust is also expressed by those with a higher level of education (tertiary 5.60, secondary 5.58 and primary 5.54) and exponents of the centre-left (6.06), while there is least trust among those on the right (4.69).

Finally, religious practice is conducive to higher levels of trust than the general average even when it is not regular.

Involvement in associations and a higher than average level of trust favour a willingness to change lifestyle in order to generate virtuous behaviour that can benefit individuals and the community (see table 8). The previous findings are confirmed, with a slight difference in profile between those who

would like to help people in the developing world and the fight against pollution – more open and socially-oriented – and those whose main concern is being able to live a healthier lifestyle – more self-centred and focused on personal wellbeing. Involvement in associations and, above all, greater generalised trust favour more markedly socially-oriented behaviour. As table 8 illustrates, the analysis of variance confirms the distinctive role played by involvement in associations and trust in terms of adopting specific behaviour. This confirms the fact that there is greater social orientation and openness to others behind certain critical consumption choices, leading subjects to interpret and position their choices within a broader context where individual and collective interest are seen not as two zero-sum ‘goods’ but as two aspects of the same human condition.

*TABLE 8. Willingness to change lifestyle by number of memberships of associations and generalised trust (average values).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Number of associations	Generalised trust
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	1.38	5.98
To protect our planet from pollution	1.69	5.83
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	1.57	5.51
To be able to lead a healthier life	1.52	5.47
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	0.75	4.69
General average	1.10	5.62
ANOVA	F 7.42 Sig. ,000	F 11.01 Sig. ,000

In broad terms, the profile of the ‘potential’ critical consumer is similar to that of real critical consumers: with high levels of education, involvement in associations, generalised trust, attendance at religious services and left-wing political orientation, young adults and women from the middle class show a greater willingness to modify certain aspects of their consumption. The importance given to concern for environmental pollution and, in the second instance, health drives confirm the presence of two opposite driving forces within the sample. In the first of these, there is more awareness of problems concerning the environment and exploitation of the developing world among highly educated upper-middle class men who are socially and religiously active, have a high level of generalised trust and are left-wing. In the second group, low-status right-wing women who are not socially or religiously active are less willing to change their lifestyle, while those that are prepared to do so express a strong interest in safeguarding their own health. Interest in degrowth seems



to be a more elite inclination that is extremely pronounced among those with a postgraduate qualification.

But are respondents coherent with these orientations when making a purchase? They provided the following answers to the question ‘When you decide to buy a product, which aspect do you consider most?’:

- Value for money/price: 25.1%
- Brand: 4.8%
- Quality: 48.3%
- Origin: 9.3%
- Practicality/ease of consumption/use: 7.7%
- Ethical aspect related to respect for the environment: 2.5%
- Ethical aspect related to workers’ rights: 2.3%

It can be seen that quality and value for money are the two main criteria used in the decision to buy a certain product. The ethical aspects of respect for the environment and concern for workers’ rights are the least frequently adopted criteria, failing to reach a total of 5%.

*TABLE 9. Willingness to change lifestyle by criteria followed when making a purchase (data in percentages).*

For which of the following reasons would you be willing to change your lifestyle?	Criteria followed when purchasing products						
	Value for money/price	Brand	Quality	Origin	Advertising	Respect for environment	Respect for workers’ rights
To reduce exploitation of people in the developing world	20.3	20.9	22.7	16.2	17.5	22.2	53.7
To protect our planet from pollution	21.7	18.6	26.2	32.9	26.3	35.6	24.4
To feel happier by reducing the number of things that you use	24.6	30.2	21.1	19.2	21.2	17.8	14.6
To be able to lead a healthier life	22.1	22.1	22.2	25.1	29.9	24.4	2.4
I would not be willing to sacrifice my lifestyle for any of these reasons	11.4	8.1	7.9	6.6	5.1	0	4.9
Total	100.0 (448)	100.0 (86)	100.0 (864)	100.0 (167)	100.0 (137)	100.0 (45)	100.0 (41)

As table 9 illustrates, when willingness to change is combined with purchasing criteria, the answers given by respondents differ in terms that are not always coherent. Among those who choose their purchases on the basis of brand, 30.2% would be willing to reduce their consumption, while among

those whose choices are based on advertising, 29.9% would be willing to change their consumption patterns to improve their health. For those who focus mostly on origin, 32.9% would change their consumption patterns to reduce pollution and 25.1% to protect their own health. The most coherent are those who make their purchasing choices by focusing on respect for the environment, of whom 35.6% are prepared to commit themselves to the fight against pollution, and those who make their decisions by considering workers' rights, of whom 53.7% would change their consumption patterns to reduce the exploitation of people in the developing world.

Therefore, although approximately 90% of respondents are willing to make sacrifices and change their consumption patterns to fight against the exploitation of people in the developing world and pollution, reduce consumption and lead healthier lives, they put aside these statements of intent when they purchase from a range of products and rely on other criteria. Quality is the most important criterion, followed by value for money, while other considerations are of secondary importance. It should be remembered that it is not always easy to find fair trade products, while organic products are generally more expensive. More time is required to locate the former, while more money is needed for the latter. Furthermore, as the major private label brands are also gearing up to launch 'healthy' environmentally friendly products that respect workers' rights, both brand and advertising continue to exert an influence in guiding consumers who have less and less time and are becoming accustomed to finding everything they need in a single point of sale. In this context, there is only a small group of the most coherent consumers (less than 5%), who are often (not always!) careful to ascertain that the producer has respected the environment and workers' rights when they make a purchase.

## **6. Conclusion**

The majority of respondents display a high degree of (potential) willingness to sacrifice some aspects of their consumer behaviour in order to help the developing world, reduce environmental pollution and support degrowth policies or forms of healthism. Their concerns revolve around the issues that affect them more closely: the fight against pollution and health issues are given more importance as potential critical consumption choices than the fight against the exploitation of people in the developing world and reducing consumption as a way of limiting the differences between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. It is apparent that the 'local' still holds sway over the 'global', but as the differences are not particularly significant it could be argued that our sample is generally aware that their consumption

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choices can influence the environment, the increasing differences between countries and the protection of health.

This awareness is combined with good levels of generalised trust, political orientation between the centre-left and left, membership of associations and attendance at religious services among those who believe that their consumer behaviour can influence the general political context. The level of this awareness is also higher among middle class or upper-middle class subjects with a high level of education.

However, there is a radically different picture when the question becomes practical rather than theoretical. When faced with the concrete choice of purchasing a product, consumers are most likely to consider the criteria of quality and value for money, with other ethical and/or prosocial assessments playing a secondary role. As we have seen, less than 5% of the sample show a definite level of coherence in their choices when making purchases, demonstrating that consumption choices are the result of mediation processes between what is seen as appropriate behaviour and what is actually done on the basis of meanings attributed to consumption in everyday life. Consumption is always positioned between the sphere of the satisfaction of needs and the sphere of cultural and symbolic mediation in which 'goods and items' circulate on the basis of their symbolic value rather than their value in use. The former thus becomes an important element in self-definition and the definition of mutual recognition (Secondulfo, 1990, 2012; Setiffi, 2013). In this symbolic sphere, critical consumption is only detectable when it is supported by a strong ideological drive that becomes an inherent part of the 'value' sometimes attributed to purchasing as a symbol of being 'different' from the majority.

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