

## The Consumption of Food between Risk of Individualism and Political Participation

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# *The Consumption of Food between Risk of Individualism and Political Participation*

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## **Abstract**

Nowadays, we all live in a globalised world, a scenery where the control on their own daily experience is getting more and more evanescent. In this variable and dangerous scenery, food is becoming a source of incertitude and danger, too. A lot of people, as consumers, perceive that their relationship of trust with food producers is cracked, so the watchword is now “to distrust”. But totally opposite sign processes live alongside these processes and these political fractures. Crisis of politics, meant in the traditional sense, in fact, if one side has alienated many people from political life, it has also changed the forms of participation. In fact, many people have started to vocalize their dissent through channels very different from the traditional ones. Consumption choices are included between them.

In this essay we focused our attention on food consumption choices, and specially on biological food consumption, which shows that the relationship between man and environment is complicated and full of deep implications.

In order to investigate this relationship, we have realized a qualitative survey by using semi-structured interviews addressed to a “sample” of 81 people who live in Apulia, selected in random way. They have been asked what kind of products they buy, the frequency of their purchases and, moreover, the motivations which encouraged them to make their choices. In checking the interviews, we find a composed classification. Different types start from the highest level of individualism arriving to the highest level of political interest. It shows as consumption of biological food, may actually be the result of very different, and even opposite, motivations.

Keywords: Political consumerism, biological food, political participation, individualism.

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## **Introduction**

Nowadays, we all live in a globalised world, a scenery where the control on their own daily experience is getting more and more evanescent. People have to face the consequences of what is decided somewhere else and of what happens very far from them<sup>1</sup>. In this variable and dangerous scenery, food is becoming a source of incertitude and danger, too. A lot of people, as consumers, perceive that their relationship of trust with food producers is cracked, so the watchword is now "to distrust". People believe that everyone follows his economic interest and this is now the standard of every choice, so all people are ready to sacrifice every ethical principle for a greater profit without thinking too much. The sense of responsibility is today perceived as unlikely and the general trust in other people becomes more and more evanescent in favour of more limited and particular forms of trust<sup>2</sup>.

But totally opposite sign processes live alongside these processes and these political fractures. Crisis of politics, meant in the traditional sense, in fact, if one side has alienated many people from political life, it has also changed the forms of participation. In fact, many people have started to vocalize their dissent through channels very different from the traditional ones. Consumption choices are included between them. The different experiences of subjects come from their different perception of risks arising from institutional choices and/or individual everyday life behaviours, from their perception of the level of their own intervention capacity and resources physically available, but especially from the breadth of their sense of belonging and social cohesion and the resulting feeling of responsibility.

The common element underlying very different forms and purposes of association is the recovery of the feeling of belonging to a community that, without indulging in nostalgic meaning, is sometimes thought in a completely "modern", or even "late-modern" meaning, because extended in space and time, to other peoples as to future generations, to get to the "non-human" (environment, animals, plants, ...). Against economic globalization that stifles

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<sup>1</sup> Beck (2000) describes our society as a society in which the effects of the choices are often detached temporally and spatially from the choices themselves, ending paradoxically to involve players who have not had in no way part in those choices. This dynamic, continuing the line of reflections drawn by the author, configures our world as a "society of risk" for some and a "society of the danger" to others, where the substantial difference between the two terms is traced in the one category of the decision (Luhmann 1983).

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive discussion of these different types of trust cfr. Mutti 2003, Roniger 1988, 1992.

and parcelled territories and people in the name of a liberal financialization (even Darwinist in some passages), as proposed by some of these new collective subjects is a globalization of collective responsibility and more aware solidarity<sup>3</sup>. This perspective has given rise to an increasing number of associations, movements and organizations, that, although pursuing aims and objectives are slightly different, they are united by their focus on environmental issues. The red thread that binds very different experiences is a strong interest around the defence of nature. Despite the difference that divides the different forms of association and their contents, many of them have a strong political valence, appearing as an expression of a model of governance of the territories in which the widespread participation of citizens, sometimes even solicited by territorial institutions, become project and tool set to a potential and widespread structural change (Tacchi 2004).

So food consumption choices, seem to be a subject which shows that the relationship between man and environment is complicated and full of deep implications.

### **1. Food choices and political consumerism**

In this scenario the consumer daily committed to absorb the endless production of goods, often even completely unnecessary, (re)discovers his political power. It's the "consumer citizen" (Zamagni 1994) daily engaged in making socially responsible choices about its consumption and that intends to build its "demand" referring to ethical values. That's the importance of consumption, which has now supplanted work as "organizing center of existence" (Cesareo, Vaccarini 2012, 129) and appears to be the axis around which the entire economic system, that makes it a possible area of protest and political intervention<sup>4</sup>.

We are facing the phenomenon named political consumerism, defined as "the active orientation of the consumer to choose products and manufacturers, according to a variety of ethical and political environmental considerations (...) Political consumers choose particular products and

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<sup>3</sup> We are faced with the "solidarity among strangers" (Habermas 1996) in opposition to the communitarian fundamentalism, solidarity "among several" that can renounce a strong common identity and that think at democracy, not as a technique but as a place of different voices and the reasons argued, as its ideal space of affirmation.

<sup>4</sup> "Many groups protesting tend, to change society, to focus not on changing in the relations of production, as the Marxists of the past, but on changing consumer choices" (Cesareo, Vaccarini 2012, 130).

manufacturers because they want to change institutional practices and market conditions that they don't consider acceptable "(Micheletti, Föllesdal, and Stolle, 2003). The political consumerism presents itself as particularly complex and unambiguous to define, not only because within it coexists different reasons, but also because proliferate and take shape very different strategies and actions: talkative, negative and positive ones (Micheletti et al. 2004), as ethical finance and purchasing fair trade products and biological food.

In this form of political action, private and public merge themselves and give rise to different patterns of political participation, difficult to read in the classic categories. In fact, individual consumption choices wish to pursue the public good, or, at least, what is referred to individually as the public good. Here, classical model of collective action is accompanied by the most Boudonian "effect of mere aggregation". Consumers, together or individually, recognize and assume their share of responsibility (Pellizzoni 2009, 45). But this multiplicity is not the biggest difficulty for interpretation and analysis of the phenomenon. It is still open to debate around the question of whether political consumerism corresponds to a collective act of cooperation, a new form of collective participation, or whether its recent and growing popularity is a symptom of a widespread crisis of democracy, also due to a potential erosion of social and civic life.

But the question is even more open when you consider that in many cases the same consumption choices counted in the active actions of political consumerism, such as the consumption of biological food, may actually be the result of very different, and even opposite, motivations.

## **2. «How do you eat?» An empirical survey**

The biological consumption is therefore one of the choices in which the political commitment of some subjects takes form. But, as noted earlier, consumer choices, including food consumption, have become a problematic issue that they cannot be taken for granted. In fact, the same behavior may have very different underlying motives which prohibit simplistic observations on the relationship between consumer choices and political commitment. In order to investigate this relationship, we have realized a qualitative survey by using semi-structured interviews addressed to a "sample"<sup>5</sup> of 81 people who live in Apulia, selected in random way. About half of these subjects have been chosen among those who often buy biological products. These people have been approached just outside shops which sell biological products, or in the hypermarkets near the counters of biological food or by some farmers linked

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<sup>5</sup> These people aren't a statistical sample, and it's word is used only to define our "reference group" for this research.

with circuits of direct sale. Other interviewed people have been found among “normal” buyers in the small- and large-scale retail trade.

They have been asked what kind of products they buy, the frequency of their purchases and, moreover, the motivations which encouraged them to make their choices.

In checking the interviews, we find a composed classification: *inattentive*, *health care people*, *resigned* and *critical environmentalists*. These different types start from the highest level of individualism arriving to the highest level of political interest.

a) At first the *inattentive*. These are people who do not seem to be having perception of any "environmental issue", or, at least, they don't appear worried about these environment problems, and they think at them as something very far from their own daily experiences. In their representations, food isn't a problem and it isn't linked with environmental issues. Their food consumption does not appear in any way problematic, except for what concerns the costs, always more difficult to endure. The crisis has changed their style of eating, prompting them to reduce purchases and look for deals and places to buy affordable. They don't care places where they do their shopping, so they are attracted by offers and cheap prices, though without exaggerating. In this group, we find also people who use a lot of parboiled and frozen food, because, in this way, they save time «and then it is good, my children like it and they don't make a fuss».

«I look at the counter of the biological and fair products, but you don't know how they have been made and who receives the earnings. Nowadays, people would go to any length for money, so you can't trust only because they ask you to trust. These products are more expensive and worse. Do you know it?» (RF 38);

«I think that ecological problem is only a *money-earn-machine!* (...) I don't trust politicians and their experts. I choose my food looking at the best price. My wife has lost her job and this is our main problem» (RF 39);

«I sometimes buy biological products but my parents find them flavourless. Moreover, you need much time to prepare them and I have no time. I can't tell you my days, they are always hasty, I have no time to prepare a meat sauce or a bouillon. Then, you may find parboiled food so you save your time; then it's good, my children like it and they don't make a fuss» (RF 42).

A lot of them are people who are very keen on hypermarkets. They are the only ones who, during the interviews, have spoken about consumption and shopping as a *freetime* and a moment of relax, which very often involves all the family. Even though they have children, they are not so worried about their health.

« I do not think the fact that the food is unsafe! It's just to make money! I very often do my shopping at the Coop, because I believe that there I find good food and because there are a lot of offers. (...) Moreover, it is convenient. Every Saturday I go there with my wife and my children and we spend all day. My wife always buys something, especially clothes, even if she has got a lot of clothes, and there are also toys for children and places where we can eat. So we are all happy!» (RF 29);

«I always go to the same Auchan, because I'm happy with it, I'm at ease, I know all the places, and then there I find all the products. I believe that those products aren't worse than others. Nor worse nor better. Now you don't know, you look at the brand, but the makers are always unknown» (RF 38).

b) Then there are the *health care people* who affirm to pay absolute attention to the biological quality of the products, to the eating healthily, which is often considered as the completion of a kind of healthy lifestyle. These people have approached to the biological consumption because they believe that food has become a *source of danger* as concerning the techniques and ways of production, so all people should take care of themselves. Moreover, biological products are searched in the web of local suppliers, and this choice is a chance to invest with confidence in what is immediately verifiable and also to verify the products' quality directly, which is otherwise evanescent in the international trade routes. They are sometimes vegans or vegetarians or, anyway, supporters of a healthy lifestyle and criticise the most developed styles of consumption, especially of food. But they are always on the borders of a protest against the wider western consumption pattern. The attention to the wider social and political aspect, when it is present, seems to be secondary. Some of the people interviewed are arranged in more or less structured groups to do their

shopping, so they share their life and consumption style, but also to overcome the problems caused by the finding of places and products fit for their needs<sup>6</sup>.

Some of these *healthy fanatics* seem to be at the boulder of these behaviours, because they look for and buy biological products even in the big shopping centres and *are satisfied* only by “reading the labels carefully”. They seem to be more confident than other “fundamentalists”, nearly *distracted* by the problems that worry the greatest number of people who belongs to this group. So they approach to the following group when they state that «what all the farmers tell us to do can be false and perhaps they use also junk products». For some of them this answer can be thought as a kind of *rationalisation in retrospect*, in order to justify the need of keeping the biological lifestyle, but by reconciling it with lack time.

«I do my shopping where I end up, the main thing is that the products have to be biological. This is important, even if what all the farmers tell us to do can be false and perhaps they use also junk products! I worry about my health because I'm fed up with chemical food, it is killing us. Today allergies are increasing. Where are they coming from? Only from junk food that we eat. (...) I don't trust politicians because I Know that they look for money. That's all! We can't trust them anymore» (RF 11);

«I have been eating biological food for two years. I have always been obsessed with health, I go to the gym, so I keep fit. Fortunately, nowadays, many people eat biological food, so there are also a lot of stores which sell these products. I have no time because I am a freelance so I do my shopping in the hypermarkets that now have a counter of biological food. It's comfortable because I

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<sup>6</sup> Some of the women and men belonging to this type are members of GAS, Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (Ethical Purchasing Groups) of some Apulian cities and towns. The GAS are born in Italy in 1994 with the birth of the first group to Fidenza, then in Reggio Emilia and subsequently in various other locations. In the same period, spreads to Italy the operation "budgets of Justice", which was launched at the end of 1993, which calls for families to check the impact of their changes to the styles of life on the family budget. In 1996 is published by the Center New model of development the "Guide to Critical consumption", with information about the behavior of larger firms to guide the choice of the consumer. In 1997 was born the network of buying groups, in order to connect between the different groups, to exchange information about products and producers, and spread the idea of buying groups ([www.retegas.org](http://www.retegas.org)).



don't need to look for specific stores and then I can go there all day when I have time» (RF 46);

«My boyfriend and me have always paid attention to food and especially to a healthy lifestyle. We knew ourselves for this reason. In our town there are a lot of shops which sell biological products but we always go to the source. We have a web of known producers so we call them and they put aside our shopping. As regarding other products, we go to two shops that we know very well and we rely on them. The problem is this: the confidence» (RF 24).

They are often people with young children whose presence has frequently been the catalyst of a need of a healthy lifestyle, perceived before in a confused way.

«Since my first son was born, my wife and me have decided to pay attention to our food so we have begun to eat biological food. We go to two shops next to our house, but I also go to the 'Mongolfiera' where I find them and they are cheaper, too. I read the labels carefully: this is important» (RF 26);

«Since my daughter was born, I have always bought biological products. I believe that eating healthy is important for our health and especially for a little child. I nurse her only with homeopathic medicines because other medicine intoxicates us instead of nursing us, like wrong food. I'm vegetarian, too. (...) I never go to the supermarkets because their biological counters are false. How can I know if their food is produced according to specific techniques? By the labels? Not at all. I go directly to some farmers in order to buy fruits and vegetables, I go to the source. I knew them thanks to one of my friend who agrees with me and now I rely only on them» (RF 49);

«The greatest motivation comes from children. We wanted to assure our children healthy food. When our children were born, I began to buy biological food and, in this way, I knew some people, entered this group and then I reached the Gas» (RF 55);

«At the beginning, I was willing to do the biological shopping, even if not completely almost the main part. Especially after my daughters' birth, this aspect has become more important. For the first year and half, I have fed my children only with biological food, while we, adults, eat what we could. When I knew this Gas, I liked its framework and now we all eat the same food, and the system of common shopping runs so good» (RF 56).

c) The third ones is the *resigned* type. These subjects show to be aware of consumption problems, both as a health problem and as a problem of environmental protection, but they believe they haven't any control on their own environment, starting from the air they breathe and until the water they drink and, of course, the food they eat. So they are resigned to live in a “fatalistic” way, so they trust to luck, but, in particular, they declare to give up being worried and trying to choose, because all these attempts are considered to be vain. They are aware of being able to trust in someone, because «all people are identical» and «all people are interested only in money» and «they would do anything to get money», even by exposing the consumers to serious risk. A heavy trust crisis trouble them in their relationships with the unknown producers of their food. They are resigned because they believe they can have no control on the quality of what they and their children eat, so, in this group, we find also who buy those products at hypermarkets.

«But what about are we speaking? Speaking about biological food is only a mockery! Even if it is true, what about the air and the water? Today all is dangerous, so let's eat everything and hope that nothing bad never happens. Everything is a matter of luck. You can only rely on luck!(..) None really controls, too much money and our politicians don't care nothing else than themselves» (RF 3);

«I don't trust in biological food. According to me, all producers are identical and are interested only in money because they look only for money. Therefore, looking for different products everywhere is not worthwhile because nobody can assure me that those products are really biological. Should I believe because they tell me so? Wouldn't you know! Today you can't rely on anyone» (RF 11);

«I'm sorry but I believe that you cannot do anything to protect yourself and your family, everything that we drink and eat now are dangerous! What can I do? I think that those that should protect us do nothing. There is no any control. Now I don't trust anyone because money is the goal of everyone now. And politician aren't different» (RF 57);

«I know very well all about Earth's problems. ... And I know how is important doing something. But I know also that nobody will do nothing for this because everyone is worried about themselves and environment is always a *problem of others!* What can I do or say? So I think at myself and about my family. What else? (...) There in nothing that we can do. Everything have already been decided very far from here, and you cannot do anything» (RF 78);

Who, among them, has children, does not appear worried or, to be more precise, they aren't worried only because they are sure that they cannot protect their health in anyway. Convinced that there can be no control over what they consume, they have now abdicate to try. And so, also justify the choice to make their purchase seven to places not specialized. Their motto seems to be: «Needless worry, so you never know what you eat! Now everything is dangerous!».

«I'm very angry because I would like to protect my son with biological food, ...and also with many other situations healthy, but how can I do that? I believe it's impossible in this time when everyone think at its own interests. (...) What I can do? Needless worry, so you never know what you eat! Now everything is dangerous!» (RF 67);

«What can I do? Everything is dangerous now. When I buy food I can't really chose because I can't know about the qualities of things and food. Politic has failed its role of control. They don't care about our health because there are too much money in this game. I'm very angry but I don't think you can do anything, either for the children who are the main victims of this crap! (...) For this reason I don't care where I do my shopping. It's all the same» (RF 80).

d) At the end, there are the *critical environmentalists*, according to the choice of consuming biological food is bound to the preference, more or less exclusive, of environmentally-friendly products which can assure social justice. A lot of people who belong to this group buy and consume natural "local" products, "zero kilometre" and/or bought in the fair market. They consider very important to *go beyond* the choice of consuming food produced through biological methods, in the name of real political participation and commitment, in the broadest sense. They are animated by the awareness that biological consumption is and has to be *a piece* of their different experience, without using it up, and show a strong political purpose, a will of change, a great motivation in order to take part in and found *another* politics. The food consumption is considered to be a chance, so that all forms of widen responsible participation to the social and political community and to the local and global levels linked together can become daily behaviours. Food and all choices bound to it are the possibilities to *assert themselves*, sometimes together with already lived experiences of political and social commitment, often against a deep disillusion of the traditional politics which has betrayed all expectations.

For these people, the biological quality of food has got only a marginal value compared to the awareness that you can promote proposals different from the predominant consumption patterns and be a daily bet for a possible difference. Many people declare to have tolerated and to carry on tolerating extra expenses in order to carry on to choosing fair consume, because they are persuaded to and wish to move inside a strong project of change and social and political transformations.

Almost all these people affirm all their repulsion against the large-scale retail trade, accused to have «deeply changed the relationship between people and consumption», to have made everybody a «compulsive consumer», an *omnivorous eater of food and objects*. They buy food only by producers, by making sure not only of the food quality but also of the work conditions. Some of them choose only local food because they want to safeguard both the biodiversity and the same environment, which is saved from the «disaster caused by the transport all over Italy and also all over the world», and also the work which is protected by the choice of buying what is produced in their territories. And this is true also for very far territories. In effect, these people show to have increased a widen sense of responsibility and a universalistic approach. So, they think that their choices can influence also the life and maybe the destiny of very distant people.

«According to me, the biological consumption is an important piece of my political life, it's a way of eating

healthy, in order to say that I don't agree with producers who are marketing everything. Not only I eat biological food, but I also buy it by honest producers, who haven't illegal workers and don't exploit neither land nor people» (RF 6);

«I consume biological food, but it has to be local, because otherwise we fool with us. I make this choice not for myself but I believe that environment is the first victim of this system that wants to make money by exploiting everything without worrying about nobody. I spend my money also to send a message. Some of my friends understand me, others fool with me and say that mine is a drop in the sea. But it's, at any rate, a drop. At the university, I spoke about this choice with a teacher and he told me that this is the right behaviour of a citizen» (RF 33);

«In my group we consume biological food, we buy them directly by the producers, so we avoid freight brokers and transports. We believe that this is the right way to try changing things. Certainly, we know that we can't do it against the world economic power but, at any rate, we don't feel accomplices» (RF 49);

«Buying biological food is not enough, it's a starting point, but is not enough. It's necessary to understand that all life has to change if we don't want destroy all the environment, if we want to give it a *chance* and if we want have a chance on this Earth. (...) My family uses rechargeable and biodegradable detergents, we try not to waste water, to use the car only when it's necessary, reuse all what is possible, even if the trash cans are put far from my house, though we are in a village... so biological food is only a piece of a wider question. And children understand what biological is only if you educate and explain them why it's necessary» (RF 59).

Some of them are very near to the second type, the *health care people*, because they care their health and they pay attention to the quality of food. But more than them *theoretical environmentalists* show to have overcome the distance between the care about their own health and the care about the environment, by having understood all the deep connections. They are vegans more than “only” vegetarians, because they extend their attention to the quality of food

to quality of animals' life, until all nature. They practice their difference in everyday life.

«I'm veganian. It's a not a question of food, it is a matter of right to life and respect for nature! I buy biological food because it is healthy and because I believe it is important to take care of themselves. But mostly because eating biological for me is a philosophy, as well as not taking the car, do not consume water and protect forests and parks» (RF 54).

Moreover, some of the interviewed people (unfortunately few in truth) introduce the subject of the necessity of educating children to the sense of responsibility, to the respect for environment as respect for the future, for the *others*, that is to say *everyone* even far in space and time. This "ecological education" has to start from the "doing", from daily choices of difference, imagined and practised as possible.

«Eating healthy means not only that what we swallow has to be produced in a certain way, without chemical fertilizers, without products which hasten the growth, without insecticides and so on, it means also that food has to come from the nearby territory, it mustn't be packed and so on, because we have to worry not only about our health but also about environment. They are the same thing, you can't take care of one without taking care of the other one» (RF 51);

«I consume only biological food, and of course I give only biological food to my children. It is not easy, however, because children see friends who eat junk food and protest. There is a lack of food education, first in adults than in children. (...) It's the same in general for the respect of nature, instead of an ecological education would be critical to our future» (RF 72).

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the interviews and the classification built on that, show that some social characteristics, as gender, age and residence, haven't significant influence. Instead, presence of children has an impact on consumer choices.

But even this hasn't the power to influence univocally these choices. In fact we find parents moreover in critical environmentalist type and in health care people type, but also, in inattentive ones. It's clear that there are other variables that can influence consumer choices and especially the meaning given to them. And it can reasonably assume that, between these, quality of political culture and paths of political socialization have a significant influence. These pathways are the subject of another ongoing research.

By listening to these people, it is evident as for many of them the "environmental issue" is far from any awareness and perceived as «chat of people that we have to earn». With the consequence that they don't engage themselves in any conduct careful to protect the environment. But for others it also shows the perception of an absolute difficulty of living in a so globalised world, in which the decisions' places seem to be very far from the territories where those decisions fall back and cause consequences. And also the mistrust in the politics, at the institutional and political parties level, is not perceived any more as bound to the citizens but, on the contrary, is lived now as dominated or even "infiltrated" by economic powers. And when we can trust in nobody, we can only "do on our own", try to back and fill in this world where we seem to have lost the control and where we have to manage *the consequences of the secondary consequences* (Beck 2000). And where the multiplication of the possibilities does not means possibilities for all.

The answers seem to go in four different directions. Some people don't look at environmental issues as problems linked with their everyday life. They know that there is a world problem, but they think that is something non-specific and almost smoky. Don't think so you don't need to worry about! Some of them think that environmental issues, as well as those related to food, are evaluated in an exaggerated way for other economic interests. Some people try to gain private solutions in order to govern the results of choices made somewhere else and which we can interfere with in any way because they have, in the meanwhile, comes to a very low grade of political efficacy towards a politics perceived as something other and very far from its native function of a government responsible for the community. These people show to be folded almost entirely on their own private experience. Some other people have the full awareness of the environmental problems, but they feel have no chance to intervene on those problems. They have a strong belief that the economic issues prevent serious controls and that the subject does not remain that being resigned to trust to fate and destiny, by renouncing every attempts of control and management of the complexity, resigned to this lack of control and stopping to look for solutions. They explicitly declare a low or inexistent level of trust in politics. And, at last, there are some people try to

“take care” of these drifts, aware to be individually and together assigned of this responsibility.

So the choice of food to be consumed becomes a political choice, a chance of asserting ourselves, of vocalization of their protest (Hirschmann 1970). This is a strong return to the political responsibility not only for ourselves and our territories, but also, in some cases, for a too globalized world where we can and have to care of ourselves but also of the others. As concerning some people of the third group, the *health care people*, the attention to the local dimension means only the survival of a form of a focused trust<sup>7</sup>, after the loss of a possibility of a generalized trust. The *critical environmentalists*, on the contrary, feel this same attention to local not as a closure towards what is outside, but as safeguard of the peculiarities against every attempt of flattening and homogenization of the production and of the consumption. The local dimension is safeguarded as concerning the identification and the attempt to protect the peculiarity and the uniqueness of the goods produced *somewhere else* in very far places, so that they do not become mere and mediocre branches of manpower of the western outsourced production. The consumption pattern practised by the *critical environmentalists* seems to be the model of the awareness and the respect, the recovery of a pride of belonging which goes beyond the space closeness and the economic interests. A wider and strong relationship's dimension is searched despite the economic exchange but inside this one and starting from this one. Moreover, people who has got a wider perspective within a social and political context choose local producers because they see a chance of facilitating employment and legal condition of work and of strengthening the environmental and social sustainability of the agriculture. The attention to the local and to the *locals* of the world, return the goods to their peculiarity and difference, by allowing, at the same time, the recognition of those who produce those goods, so they return a *face* to those workers involved in the productive processes.

In the bargain, we have to observe the protest and the problematization of the wider consumption pattern which has activated the spread of the large-scale retail trade and especially of the big shopping centres. Subjects belonging to this fourth type are something more than the «critical consumer» (Zamagni 2003). Their protest is not limited to change the choice of what consume, but it's against the holy current system of consumption and an attempt to overcome the habit of *consuming for consuming* (Osti 2006), considered as a

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<sup>7</sup> Direct contact with suppliers, in fact, allows them to exert a constant control on production methods and compliance with the procedures of quality. But it also allows them to build a relationship of trust with the supplier, with which they share the choices of the quality of the products.



chance of recovery of a slighter level of control on the *liquidity* of the world where they feel *immersed*, a kind of new strategy for the self-affirmation. Overcoming a desire of consumption becomes a standard *to weight* other things and experiences, whose times and spaces dilate themselves till they include again inside all the areas which were traditionally outside. The need of doing the shopping (food, clothes, ...) has always been considered time inevitably taken away from free time, which, *at the end*, could start when all the activities linked to the subsistence were over. Today, more and more often, spaces and times of consumption hook into and often coincide with times and places of free time. The large-scale retail trade, indeed, has embraced and strengthened this tendency and has made hypermarkets and *shopping malls* «*citadels of the consumption*» (Amendola 1997), places where time is swallowed up and burned off in the everlasting artificial lightning, in the absence of clocks, in charming and endless aisles, where the glaze is captured and then boosted towards other desires and other chances of happiness that is never reached and only temporarily fulfilled. So people lose the sense of their presence in those places because they are always at ease among goods and desires they absolutely need.

On the other hand, this new proposal of consumption uses food, biological food specially, and its choices as an occasion to suggest a different idea of market, where the classic achievement of the profit *at any cost* can begin to give way to other values, such as solidarity, respect for rights, environmental conservation.

We need integrated projects of environmental education which assure the acquisition of eco-competences, starting from a right "eco-alphabet". This education has to start from the comprehension of the complex character of the "environmental question" perceived by many people only through some "partial" problems: garbage, pollution, traffic, climate change, and, of course, the danger of food. It is necessary to teach and spread these competences more and more, so that they become a daily routine. But the political conditions for this routine have to be created, too. The actions of all people have to be inserted in wider frameworks of political strategies for the environmental protection and rights. By preparing plans of positive actions, guidelines which uniform and limit the political choices of every territory<sup>8</sup>. By

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<sup>8</sup> Just think of the phenomenon of "environmental dumping", the selling of natural assets because of their lack of measures to protect them or to weigh up the extraction (Franzini, Tiezzi 2001). And, in addition to this, the "social dumping", linked to the fact that the personnel responsible for collection and to the first possible processing receives very low salaries and often does not have the coverage of statutory auditors and social security.

rethinking, on a legal level, the principle of responsibility as concerning the costs of the consequences of those choices. By carrying on wondering about the *environmental impact* of every decision on the territory and on farther territories. Because the concept of distance and difference should be rethought, by recognizing that we all have something in common: we share the same Earth and have to return, or assure, for the first time, the environment its complete subjectivity and importance.

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