



## **UNDERSTANDING THE ETHICAL CONSUMER. COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS AND DERIVED MEANINGS. AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN THE COOPERATIVES OF RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION**

**Eleni Papaoikonomou**

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Universitat de Rovira i Virgili

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**Στον Δημήτρη και τη Ζαχαρένια,  
τους αγαπημένους μου γονείς.**

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## **Abstract**

Understanding The Ethical Consumer: Collective and Individual Projects and Derived Meanings. An Exploratory Study In The Cooperatives of Responsible Consumption.

**Eleni Papaoikonomou**

Ethical consumer behaviour has been gaining increasing attention among both practitioners and academic researchers in recent times. This trend is evident in the increasing number of papers and doctoral dissertations published on the topic. Nevertheless, even if researchers have made remarkable progress to the knowledge base in the area of ethical consumer behaviour with contributions from the disciplines of marketing, sociology, anthropology, human geography, economics among others, there are certain aspects that currently remain under researched.

The review of the existing literature reveals, among others, the following three main gaps: 1) existing empirical knowledge is fragmented and focused on specific types of ethical behaviours, 2) past studies have followed the individualistic approach considering the ethical consumer as an individual that decides and acts alone and largely ignoring the existence of collective ethical projects, 3) empirical evidence represents limited cultural contexts with an emphasis on the United Kingdom (U.K.) and the United States (U.S.).

As a result, the main objectives of the present study are to contribute to the existing knowledge and to cover the research gaps that have been identified. Thus, it aims at providing a holistic view and an in-depth understanding of the individual and collective ethical consumer experience.

For that purpose, the selected units of observation are individuals that participate in the collective project of the cooperatives of responsible consumption. The reasoning lies on the boycotting nature of the collective project, since the limited empirical evidence has focused mainly on collective projects of anti-consumption or boycotting. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of the project at grass root level supports such decision.

The current study employs a Grounded Theory Methodology placed within the constructivist philosophy. Therefore, categories were not pre-defined and the final sample was not pre-selected, but decisions on how fieldwork would proceed were taken according to the emerging theoretical concepts. The final data set consists of a rich

variety of sources; 4 focus groups where 32 consumers participated, 9 in-depth interviews, a year-long participant and non-participant observation in the cooperatives and in events they organized, documentary analysis of internal documents and of 15 issues of a magazine edited and published by members of cooperatives of responsible consumption that represents a five-year period.

The analysis of the data provides a holistic perspective of the ethical consumer experience and produces a different conceptualisation of the ethical consumer than the ones found in existing literature. In the final stage of analysis, a conceptual framework is proposed that intends to integrate the knowledge that emerged.

# **Understanding The Ethical Consumer: Collective and Individual Projects and Derived Meanings. An Exploratory Study In The Cooperatives of Responsible Consumption.**

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## **Appendices**

The appendices are structured in three sections:

Appendix A:

Appendix B:

Appendix C:

The appendix C contains the raw data from the focus groups and interviews and the issues of the magazine TROC which were analysed for the purposes of this doctoral thesis.



## Notes

*Note about the translation of the data:* All the quotes from the participants (focus groups and interviews) are translations from Spanish to English. The rest of the data (documentary analysis of the magazine TROC, observation) required translation from Spanish and Catalan to English. In both cases, the help of native speakers was sought, so that the final translation would be as loyal as possible to the original narratives. The primary data can be found in the attached CD.

*The identity of the informants has been preserved:* In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, only their first name is disclosed when examples of quotations are given. Furthermore, the real names of the researched cooperatives are replaced with pseudonyms, to preserve the rapport built to date with the members of the cooperatives.

*Notes about the quotes:* The intention of the doctoral student was to include in the doctoral thesis the quotations that would best represent the emerging concepts. Thus, in certain cases parts of the consumers' discourses were omitted and replaced with (...).

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# CHAPTER ONE

## **INTRODUCTION**

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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### 1.0 Introduction

Nowadays, as consumers we live in a rapidly changing and increasingly globalised marketplace, where the forces of the capitalistic market concede enormous powers to large multinational companies (Fernandez & Merino, 2005). Governments no longer have the power they once held to control or supervise the economy and influence society at large (Harrison et al., 2005). So, from an ethical perspective, companies must be held accountable not only for securing profit-financial surplus, but also for having a responsible attitude towards society.

At the same time, a greater shift of market power towards consumers is observed (Jenner, 1994; Keat et al., 1994). Murphy and Bendell (2001: 304) refer to consumers as the “*new counterbalancing force to capitalists*”. So, they propose a different view of consumption based on the premise that choosing one product over another is considered as casting an economic vote.

The aforementioned in combination with the rise of campaigning pressure groups, the social and environmental advantages of technological evolution, the effectiveness of marketing campaigning and the expansion of a wider Corporate Social Responsibility movement (De Pelsmacker et al., 2006) have all contributed to the rise of the ethical consumer behaviour phenomenon around the turn of the twenty first century (Harrison et al., 2005).

The obligation of science is to keep up with reality. Consequently, the past three decades have begun to yield an increase in research concentrating on identifying and understanding the ethical consumer. It is within this line of research focused on a greater understanding of the ethical consumer that the present thesis intends to make a contribution.

## 1.1 Justification and scope of the study

It should be recognized that the selection of the research area was primarily a result of the personal motivation of the doctoral student. A previous mini-dissertation on green consumers had familiarized her with the broader area of knowledge and volunteering in ethical organizations reaffirmed her interest to pursue research in this area. A high level of personal motivation was considered as an essential requirement from the outset, since it is perceived as crucial for the successful completion of a doctoral thesis (Saunders et al., 2003; Grove et al., 2007). Indeed, the 24/7 commitment to the doctoral project and the self-discipline it presupposes verify that holding a personal interest in the research topic can help in overcoming the inevitable difficulties that all doctoral students face at some point of the course of the study.

In particular, it seemed important to study the new meanings attained by consumption. The traditional economic theory of the rational consumer is challenged by the new post modern theories of consumption (Bianchi, 2001; Goulding, 2003). Modern theories hold the view that consumption is used to build identities, to declare one's uniqueness or one's belonging to a social group by conveying the image that the individual wishes to project (Horton, 1984; Slater, 1997; Haanpää, 2007). The concept of the ethical consumption argues that, at least in part, the purchase making is decided on altruistic considerations with regards to the social and environmental implications of the consumer decision, rather on purely judging the personal benefits from it (Newholm & Shaw, 2007; Starr, 2009). In this way, it has become a form of protest or reaction for those interested in issues such as environmental pollution, the global social injustice, the sweatshops in underdeveloped countries etc., but who might be or not willing to engage in political activism (Strong, 1997). So, as Ed Mayo mentions in the foreword of the book 'The Ethical Consumer' (Harrison et al., 2005), the idea of participating in the society through consumption knowing '*not that you can do everything through what you buy, but you can do something*' is captivating (p. xvii).

Furthermore, the ethical consumer movement is growing at fast pace as market reports from market agencies and Non Profit Organizations (N.P.O) indicate (e.g. Krier, 2007; SETEM, 2008). Ethical products have conquered dominant positions in certain markets, such as the example of Fair Trade bananas that hold 70% of the market share

in Norway (Krier, 2007), whereas most market reports report growth in different aspects of ethical consumerism; ethical tourism, ethical funds, ethical food and beverage (Ethical Consumerism Report, 2008). The aforementioned show that the ethical consumer group should be seriously taken into consideration and that further understandings of the ethical consumer are required.

While ethical consumer behaviour has existed for centuries, it has only become the object of research mainly during the last thirty years. Earlier, single efforts by Webster (1975) and Anderson and Cunningham (1972) were encountered, but a look at the references shows that the main body of the identified existing empirical evidence is quite recent.

Over this period, an evolution was observed in the ethical consumer research referring to the theoretical, epistemological and consequently methodological perspective employed to study the ethical consumer. Initial research was conducted from the marketing and business perspective trying to measure the responses of consumers to the ethical initiatives of the companies (Corporate Social Responsibility, Cause-Related Marketing) and to delineate the ethical consumer on the basis of socio-demographic variables (e.g. Balderjahn, 1988; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). For those purposes, quantitative designs were employed with an emphasis on experiments and surveys, while the need for generalizations led to large samples (see sections 3.2.1 and 3.4.1).

Nevertheless, this type of research effort didn't prove fruitful. Furthermore, new bodies of knowledge, such as sociology, anthropology and human geography among others, begun to examine the ethical consumer (see section 3.1). Researchers started to focus on the understanding rather than profiling the ethical consumer by adopting qualitative designs and by studying small purposeful samples (see section 3.4.2). Although much valuable research has been conducted during the last thirty years, certain aspects need to be explored further more. Here, they will be explained briefly, given that they are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

First, ethical consumer behaviour has been traditionally studied as a type of project carried out by single individuals (Grønhøj, 2006; Newholm & Shaw, 2007; Low & Davenport, 2007). Nevertheless, this perspective ignores the existence of ethical collectivities that promote and practice ethical consumer behaviours (see Klein



(2000)). The existence of ethical collectivities and their limited representation in academic research indicate the need for further research in this area.

Furthermore, different studies mention that a barrier for carrying out ethical projects is the lack of effectiveness that they consider they have. The attitude ‘one person cannot change the world’ often appears (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Mohr et al., 2001). For instance, the effectiveness of boycotting has been questioned since it is a collective mobilization, but uncoordinated in the sense that the boycotters often do not communicate with each other (Sen et al., 2001; Delacote, 2009). In this sense, ethical collectivities can help overcome the obstacle of effectiveness, since the sense of belonging to a group fighting for the same cause can increase the perceived effectiveness of the action and help expand the ethical consumer movement. So, a research gap with practical implications was found, given that the importance of acknowledging the collective ethical projects implies moving from the perspective that the responsibility for social change through consumption lies in the hands of individuals to collectivities.

Second, more emphasis should be given to the interaction of the ethical consumer with the social networks where he/she participates and the respective influences on his/her behaviours. It is important to understand the renegotiation of meanings and behaviours because such interaction takes place, especially when the social networks are ethical spaces.

Third, ethical consumer research appears fragmented and dispersed. Studies focus on specific ethical practices such as Fair Trade purchases or Bring Your Own Bag behaviour (e.g. Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Cherrier, 2006), but they do not provide an insight into whether this is the only ethical action of the individuals or it represents just a fragment of a more ethical lifestyle. This shows the need for a more holistic insight into ethical consumer behaviour in order to understand all the consumer channels that the individuals employ to express their ethicality.

Fourth, ethical consumer research has placed much emphasis on the construction of individual identities through the adoption of ethical practices. While some authors (Shaw et al., 2006; Cherrier, 2007) claim that the ethical consumer movement shares a common collective identity, this has not been thoroughly investigated.

Fifth, research has been limited to specific cultural contexts, with an emphasis on the UK and the US. Structural differences in the contexts that influence the feasibility of behaving ethically and cultural differences that define the cognitive frameworks of the individuals do not allow a generalization across contexts. Therefore, empirical evidence from different contexts is necessary.

Sixth, in spite of the methodological variety encountered in the ethical consumer literature, most studies have examined ethical consumer behaviour from a static point of view. Methodological combinations and longitudinal research such as netnography could offer a new perspective of the topic under study.

Finally, the dynamic nature of the ethical consumer movement calls for updates in the existing definitions.

The aforementioned gaps showed that a study focusing on the holistic experience of the ethical consumer, both collective and individual, from contexts outside the UK and the US would provide new insights into ethical consumer research.

For the purposes of this doctoral thesis, the focus will be placed on the Catalan ethical consumer looking for ethical consumption narratives in this cultural context. More specifically, the study will be centered on members of Responsible Consumption Communities in Catalonia, because of their participation in a collective ethical project. Nevertheless, the focus will not only be on the collective ethical experience of these consumers, but also on their individual ethical experiences, if any. The information that will be collected will hopefully answer the research questions and objectives that guide the current project, which are presented in the following section.

## 1.2 Research Questions and Research Objectives

The general objective of this thesis is to provide a profound and detailed understanding of the ethical consumer experience; how it is carried out and why it is carried out. The difference and at the same time one of the main contributions is that it does not only focus on the individual experience, but on the collective one that has been largely ignored in the existing literature. Therefore, the main research questions that will be posed are:

- How do consumers consume ethically?
- Why do consumers consume ethically?
- Are the aforementioned re-negotiated within the ethical space of the cooperative?

On that basis, the research objectives that will guide the present project are:

1. To describe the strategies that consumers undertake to express their ethicality both on an individual and a collective level.
2. To explore the meanings they derive from their actions and their respective motivations.
3. To comprehend how they have built their external social reality.
4. To examine whether the participation in a social network and ethical space such as ethical coops influences the individual members through the renegotiation of meanings and perceptions and through the sharing of a collective identity.
5. To provide empirical findings that represent a different reality to the UK and the US, keeping in mind that the perception of ethics might be culturally-bound.

## 1.3 Thesis Organization

This thesis is divided in three parts and eight chapters. In this section, the structure of the thesis is explained.

### **Part I: Conceptual Part**

In this first part, there are three chapters; Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

**Chapter 2** aims at providing a brief introduction to the history of ethical consumer behaviour, since it has existed in different forms for centuries. Furthermore, the evolution of the concept from the green to the ethical consumer is presented and the types of behaviours that are currently considered by academics as ethically valid. The chapter finishes with an overview of existing theories around the emergence of the ethical consumer movement.

**Chapter 3** constitutes the conceptual basis of the thesis. It presents a review of the existing literature in ethical consumer behaviour. The focus is on the empirical studies that have been conducted until now and on identifying:

- i) the bodies of knowledge that have studied the topic,
- ii) the research questions that have been asked,
- iii) the context where existing research has taken place and
- iv) the methodologies that have been employed.

On the basis of the findings from Chapter 3, **Chapter 4** was written. It discusses the main gaps in the literature that the present thesis will intend to cover. Then, the research questions and objectives that guide this project are formulated and presented.

### **Part II: Epistemology and Methodology**

## CHAPTER 1

Part II refers to the methodological planning of this research project. It consists of two chapters; Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

**Chapter 5** begins by presenting the research philosophy wherein the present thesis lies. The decision to opt for the research paradigm of social constructionism is explained and supported. Then, other methodological decisions are taken. They refer to the selection of a research approach, of a research strategy and of the data techniques that will provide the primary data. All these decisions are interconnected. The metaphor of the research onion that has to be peeled away one by one is employed to represent this (Saunders et al., 2003).

**Chapter 6** shows how the research was operationalized. All decisions are explained in detail, so that the reader can have a clear idea of what happened during the fieldwork. Given that Grounded Theory is the selected methodology for the recollection and analysis of data, the implications for the research design are various; simultaneous data recollection and analysis, theoretical sampling that lasts until saturation of the emerging themes. Therefore, certain issues such as the composition and size of samples were not decided beforehand. The operationalisation of the project includes the description of the following; negotiation and entry in the fieldwork (sections 6.4.1 and 6.4.2), sampling of collectivities and participants (section 6.3), data recollection (section 6.4.2.1, 6.4.2.2 and 6.4.2.3) and data analysis (section 6.6). The final section is dedicated to showing how rigour is ensured in the current project, a conflictive issue when qualitative research is concerned (section 6.7).

### **Part III: Findings and Discussion**

This is the final part of the thesis where the main findings from the data analysis are presented and discussed. It encompasses two chapters; chapter 7 and chapter 8.

**Chapter 7** presents the main findings from the rich volume of data that qualitative research usually generates. The chapter is divided into three main parts according to the three main research questions that are formulated. Nevertheless, the main body of the chapter is dedicated to answer the first two, since more data were generated with regards to them. Therefore, the first part (section 7.1) is dedicated to providing a

holistic perspective of the reality of the ethical consumers that participated in the study, beginning from their collective project, the cooperative of responsible consumption. The general objective of the second part (section 7.2) is to get a more thorough insight into the why of ethical consumer behaviour. The presentation of findings begins with the general social constructions of the consumers with regards to their surrounding reality (section 7.2.1), followed by the hidden meanings assigned to the behaviours presented in section 7.2.2 The third part (section 7.3) discusses the renegotiation of meanings that takes place within the ethical space of the cooperative.

**Chapter 8** is one of the most important chapters of the thesis, given that it discusses the main findings of Chapter 7 and links them (section 8.1) with the existing literature that Chapter 2 & 3 illustrate. On the basis of the findings a conceptual framework is developed and proposed (section 8.2), whereas section 8.3 checks whether the objectives of the project were accomplished. Next, section 8.4 establishes the theoretical and practical contributions of the current project. In the final sections, limitations (section 8.5) and future lines of investigation (section 8.6) are identified.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# **INTRODUCTION TO ETHICAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR**

## Chapter 2: Introduction to ethical consumer behaviour

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### 2.0 Introduction

The current chapter serves as an introductory chapter to ethical consumer behaviour.

First, the author delineates what ethical consumer behaviour is, as different streams of research have dealt with ethics in the marketplace. The transformation of the concept from green to ethical consumer behaviour is examined, as well as the types of consumer behaviour currently embraced by the term ethical.

Second, a historical overview of the ethical consumer movement is provided in search of the origins of the movement and of the features that contributed to its growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thus, this chapter provides an overview of the phenomenon of study before proceeding to the review of the empirical studies in ethical consumer behaviour in the following chapter.

### 2.1 Ethics in the marketplace: Business Ethics, Consumer Ethics and Ethical Consumer Behaviour

Ethics is a word of broad interpretation and wide application. In marketing, there is a large body of literature on business ethics (see reviews by Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 1989; Robertson, 2007), which has been examined more intensively during the last 30-40 years (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Business ethics refers to the adoption of ethical principles by companies with regards to their conduct towards their stakeholders; workers, customers, suppliers, local community organizations (Stakeholder Theory-Freeman, 1994). Empirical studies on business ethics traditionally use managers as their sampling unit (Cacioppe et al., 2006).

Ethics in consumption is a separate line of investigation focusing on individual consumers. During the last thirty years, an increase in research concentrating on the

ethics of the consumer has been noted. However, ethics in consumption is not perceived in a homogeneous way across the literature. Two main streams of research can be identified focusing on different conceptualizations of what is behaving ethically in consumer situations (Steenhaut, 2006; Chatzidakis & Mittusis, 2007).

First, ‘consumer ethics’ studies how consumers react to and perceive potentially unethical purchase situations or behaviours. Copying or buying pirated software, using an expired sales coupon, shoplifting, receiving too much change at the counter, changing price tags on products are some examples of these studies (Vitell, 2003). In this stream of research, variables such as religiosity (Vitell et al., 2005), history of civil war (Rawwas et al., 1998) and culture (Babakus et al., 2004) have been examined as relevant to the propensity of consumers to behave ethically or not.

Second, the “ethical consumer” behaviour literature focuses on the study and understanding of consumers that decide whether to buy and what to buy according to their ethical and environmental concerns. This thesis is focusing on this stream of research. There is a plethora of definitions of the ethical consumer. In the following section, these definitions are discussed.

### **2.1.1 Defining the Ethical Consumer: Green Consumers and Ethical Consumers**

A number of authors (Smith, 1990; Strong, 1996; 1997; Shaw & Shiu, 2002; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004) consider the ethical consumer as an evolution of the green consumer. The green consumer has been researched mainly since the 1970’s prompted by the movement of alternative consumers<sup>1</sup> that emerged during that period (Lang & Gabriel, 2005; Chatzidakis & Mitussis, 2007).

The *green* (Balderjahn, 1988; Elkington & Hailes, 1988; Rolston & di Benedetto, 1994; McDonagh & Prothero, 1992; Bhate et al., 1997; Peattie, 1998), *environmentally conscious* (Kinnear et al, 1974) or *ecologically concerned* (Kardash, 1974; Neilssen & Scheepers, 1992) consumers are defined as individuals that demonstrate an interest in the environment both by their general attitude to environmental protection and conservation as well as their predisposing purchasing

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<sup>1</sup> Alternative consumers are explained in more detail in section 2.2

behaviour (Kinnear et al., 1974). Kardash (1974) and Rolston and di Benedetto (1994) describe the latter (predisposing purchasing behaviour) in a simpler way as the discrimination in favour of an environmentally superior product.

Balderjahn, (1988) and Elkington & Hailes (1988) provide more specific and detailed definitions: the green consumer buys environmentally friendly products whose production, distribution, use and disposal do not harm the environment or the health of one or others, saves energy, does not cause unnecessary waste, does not use materials from endangered species or that involve unnecessary use of cruelty on animals.

Drawing from the aforementioned definitions, the concept of the green consumers goes beyond simply buying environmentally friendly products and/or avoiding products that harm the environmental equilibrium. This is a very narrow perspective of the green consumer, since “*something more than purchasing decisions are required to constitute distinctively ecological consumption*” (Sorell & Hendry, 1994: 83). Instead, other aspects of daily life consumption decisions are taken into account; energy saving (Elkington & Hailes, 1988), recycling and composting of household waste (Carrigan et al., 2004; Grønhøj, 2006; Vining & Ebreo, 2006), using public transportation instead of car (Grønhøj, 2006).

All these are expressions of environmental concern in consumer situations and can represent a fragment of a general lifestyle reflected in different types of behaviours e.g. donation of money to environmental organizations (Bhate et al., 1997), working in environmental organizations, environmental activism (Grankvist & Biel, 2001). As Haanpää (2007) argues, green consumption styles represent green lifestyles or better “*striving for a green lifestyle, which is stable only in terms of a set of consumption styles*” (p. 484).

The difference between the green and ethical consumers is that the latter take into account a broader agenda of issues. Green consumers pay attention to environmental and animal welfare issues (Balderjahn, 1988, Elkington & Hailes, 1988), whereas ethical consumers are oriented towards additional issues of a more societal welfare nature (Shaw & Shiu, 2002) such as Fair Trade (FT), social injustice, human rights (Newholm & Shaw, 2007).

Chronologically, it is argued that the evolution from green consumer behaviour to ethical consumer behaviour took place around the 90's. Fletcher (1990) mentions that the consumer of the 90's decides what to buy by looking not only at the price, quality, delivery and environmental issues, but also at the *ethical dimension of the marketing exchange* in contrast to the consumer of the 80's. Furthermore, the term ethical consumer started appearing more in academic papers around this time (e.g. Strong, 1996; Shaw et al., 1999) and became the focus of doctoral dissertations (e.g. Bedford, 2000; Shaw, 2000; Newholm, 2000; Higgins, 2001).

Cowe and Williams (2001) explain ethical consumption as the making of certain consumption choices because it is the right thing to do, or else because these choices are in accordance to one's moral beliefs and values.

Others (Mohr et al., 2001; Ethical Consumer, November/December 2006) emphasize the purpose of consuming ethically, namely the long run beneficial impact on society and the minimization or elimination of any harmful effects such as exploitation of humans, animals or the environment.

Cowe and Williams (2001) narrow down the focus of ethical consumer behaviour to purchasing decisions defining it as taking into account environmental and ethical considerations when buying, which they distinguish between matters of conscience (they give the example of Fair Trade), Social Aspects (example of Labour Standards) and Self-Interested health concerns (example of organic products). Nevertheless, the "*involvement in consumption encompasses more than the acts of purchase and consumption*" (Harrison et al., 2005: 4) influencing the general lifestyle of the individuals.

A further element added to the ethical consumer conceptualization is the understanding of the power that the consumer has (Webster, 1975; Solomon et al., 2001). Solomon et al. (2001) call it the use of the buying pattern as a weapon against companies, while Webster (1975) discusses the possibility of using consumption to bring about social change. Other academics talk about voting through ethical purchase behaviour (Adams, 1990; Shaw et al., 2006). For instance, Adams (1990) identified how consumers may 'vote' by making ethical purchases, implying support (e.g. by purchasing environmentally or animal-friendly products) or rejection (e.g. by not purchasing products produced in sweatshop environments) of companies' practices.

It should be mentioned that across the literature, different terms have been used to describe the same phenomenon as ethical consumer behaviour. Some of the concepts that have been used as synonyms are political consumption (Solomon et al., 2001), political consumerism (Klintman, 2006; Terragni, 2007; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2007) sustainable consumption<sup>2</sup> (Connoly & Prothero, 2003; Gronboj, 2006) consumption in solidarity, responsible consumption or fair consumption<sup>3</sup>, consumer citizenship (Dickinson, 1996), active consumerism (Cowe & Williams, 2001), socially conscious consumer behaviour (Webster, 1975) and quite frequently socially responsible consumer behaviour (SRCB) (Mohr et al, 2001; Memery et al., 2005; Fernandez & Merino, 2005). Throughout this thesis though, the term ethical consumer behaviour will be employed for matters of consistency.

At this point, it would be appropriate to make a distinction between the terms consumption and consumerism, since they have different meanings but both have been used to describe the same movement.

The comparison of ethical consumer behaviour to green consumer behaviour reveals (i) a broader perception of socially responsible consumer behaviour with the incorporation of more social issues in the consumer agenda, other than the environment-related ones and (ii) a greater focus on the purchasing decision as a means of social change.

### 2.1.2 Types of ethical consumer behaviour

Newholm et al., (2005) suggest that ethical consumer behaviour is a complex phenomenon encompassing a wide diversity of behaviours. Individuals can express how they take an ideological standpoint in consumption in different ways.

Four main types of ethical purchase behaviour have been identified in the literature, as outlined below;

1. **Boycotting**: This term (Friedman, 1996; Shaw et al., 2006b; 2007) describes the act of choosing and buying certain products and services over others, due

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<sup>2</sup> Although, sustainable consumption appears as a more narrowly defined concept and focused on the minimization of the **environmental** impact of consumer activity.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.alliance21.org/2003/article.php3?id\\_article=534](http://www.alliance21.org/2003/article.php3?id_article=534) accessed on 27/08/07.

to social considerations (Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006; Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Shaw & Shiu, 2002a; 2002b). Harrison et al. (2005: 3) also call it positive buying or affirmative buying. An example is the purchase of Fair Trade or environmentally friendly products.

2. Boycotting: Consumers may also express their social concerns by avoiding certain actions or by not purchasing a product. This happens either because the companies that commercialise the product have an unethical social record (company oriented boycotting) or because their products are unsustainable (product-oriented boycotting) (Harrison et al., 2005: 3). Newholm and Shaw (2007: 261) refer to boycotts as the “*archetypal semi-organised consumer action*”. Research around this type of behaviour includes the exploration of the associated meanings (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998) and the motivations (Klein et al., 2004). This research suggests that boycotting behaviour is a vehicle for self expression and an intrinsically satisfying behaviour. Boycotters manage to express their uniqueness, distinguish themselves from the crowd and make a difference.
3. Voluntary simplicity/ Downshifting/ Ethical Simplifiers: Within the ethical consumer movement, ethical simplifiers represent the consumers that choose to cut down on their consumption levels and to adopt a simpler lifestyle (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). The motives (Miller & Gregan-Paxton, 2006), the meanings (Cherrier, 2005) and the daily practices of voluntary simplicity (Huneke, 2005) have been the subject of consumer research. This ethical lifestyle permeates all aspects of behaviour (e.g. running a home, bringing up a child, managing finances). Cherrier (2005) calls it a search for meanings in life; taking control over one’s life, searching for the real self and managing to belong to a community.
4. Slow Food movement<sup>4</sup>: While it first appeared in Italy in the mid-1980’s, only recently has it been considered as another form of ethical consumer behaviour by academics (Petrini et al., 2001; Miele & Murdoch, 2002; Pietrykowski,

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<sup>4</sup> Recently, media refer to Slow Food as part of the broader ‘Go Slow’ movement, which has led to the emergence of Slow cities. Some of the requirements for the denomination of a city as a Slow city are: cars are forbidden in the centre of the city, sustainable energy is used, local food is consumed only (<http://la76strategicdesign.blogspot.com/2009/04/go-slow-movement-spreading-fast.html>;  
[http://www.matogmer.no/slow\\_cities\\_citta\\_slow.htm](http://www.matogmer.no/slow_cities_citta_slow.htm);  
[http://www.citymayors.com/environment/slow\\_cities.html](http://www.citymayors.com/environment/slow_cities.html)).



2004; Parkins & Craig, 2006; Friedmann & McNair, 2008). This type of ethical consumer behaviour is focused on supporting alternatives that intend to save local food traditions, protect biodiversity and counteract fast food expansion. Despite enjoying international acceptance as a project, no consumer research on the ethical consumers/advocates of this movement was found.

Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 examined the wide range of different conceptualizations of what constitutes ethical consumer behaviour in the existing literature. As mentioned, while in the 1970's the focus was on environmental issues, nowadays attention is distributed among environmental and societal concerns accompanied by a greater sense of consumer empowerment (Adams, 1990; Shaw et al., 2006a). Bringing together all the aforementioned definitions leads to the conclusion that a more general conceptualization of the ethical consumer would be of an individual that consciously makes his consumer decisions on the basis of his ideological principles and concerns, environmental and/or social.

This definition is quite broad since it can include very different types of projects. The categorisation of an individual as an ethical consumer may be caused by a multitude of different behaviours. Some of these projects are mentioned above, but this is not an exhaustive list, since each individual can express his concerns through many different ways. Furthermore, they might represent a lifestyle attitude as in the case of voluntary simplicity or fragments of consumer behaviour such as the case of participating in a consumer boycott or a Fair Trade product purchase.

## 2.2 The Ethical Consumer Movement: Antecedents and Evolution

The origins of the phenomenon of ethical consumer behaviour are not recent. It has existed in different forms for hundreds and maybe even thousands of years (Low & Davenport, 2007). However, its exact roots remain a topic for debate.

One perspective is that concern about environmental issues has been raised repetitively during the centuries since the times of the ancient Greeks (Downs, 1972). According to this cyclical approach, this process is repeated in shortening intervals, demonstrating a gradual deepening of concern. Nevertheless, most academics identify interest in this topic over two centuries through a constellation of visible initiatives.

One contribution concerning the origin of ethical consumerism comes from Terragni (2007), who argues that the ethical consumer movement was deeply connected to the women's activism movement. She proposes the example of the "white list" campaign during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> in the U.S. and European countries where women played an important role<sup>5</sup>. She also mentions the relevance of boycotts as an instrument in the early stages of ethical consumerism, such as the labour boycotts at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Cowe and Williams (2000) cite the anti-slavery petition (1783) and the abolition of the slave trade in the colonies (1807) as the first attempts to restrain and humanise capitalism and as the seeds of the ethical consumer movement. Their historical view of the ethical consumer movement evolution coincides with the one provided by Lang and Gabriel (2005) and Dubuisson-Quellier (2007).

Lang and Gabriel (2005) identify four waves in the history of consumer activism, which lead up to the ethical consumer movement of today. They consider the *cooperative consumers* as the first wave in the history of consumer activism placed chronologically in 1844 in Rochdale of England (Cowe & Williams, 2000; Lang & Gabriel, 2005). Dubuisson-Quellier (2007) argues that the *cooperative movement* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and other social movements tried to civilize the market and give more power to the consumer. At the time, cooperatives appeared as an answer to the increasing need of low income people for more control over production and more

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<sup>5</sup> The White List Campaign was a protest against products produced under questionable working conditions. The objective was to establish legitimate production conditions and promote the products produced legally (Terragni, 2007).

quality goods at affordable prices. Nevertheless, the arrival of the mass consumer society weakened the rationale for the movement (Lang & Gabriel, 2005).

The second wave of consumerism was the value-for-money consumers. They emerged in their current form in 1930s in the U.S. and had as an objective the improvement of the market place by focusing on information and labelling issues (Lang & Gabriel, 2005).

The third wave also appeared in the U.S. with Ralph Nader's attack on the car industry for matters of safety and the publication of his book "Unsafe At Any Speed" in 1965 (Cowe & Williams, 2000). Because of this, it is called Naderism by Lang and Gabriel (2005). The main idea was the control of the power of large corporations over the powerless individual consumer. Nader himself founded a series of young lawyers' groups (Nader's Raiders) that defended individual consumer interests against big companies.

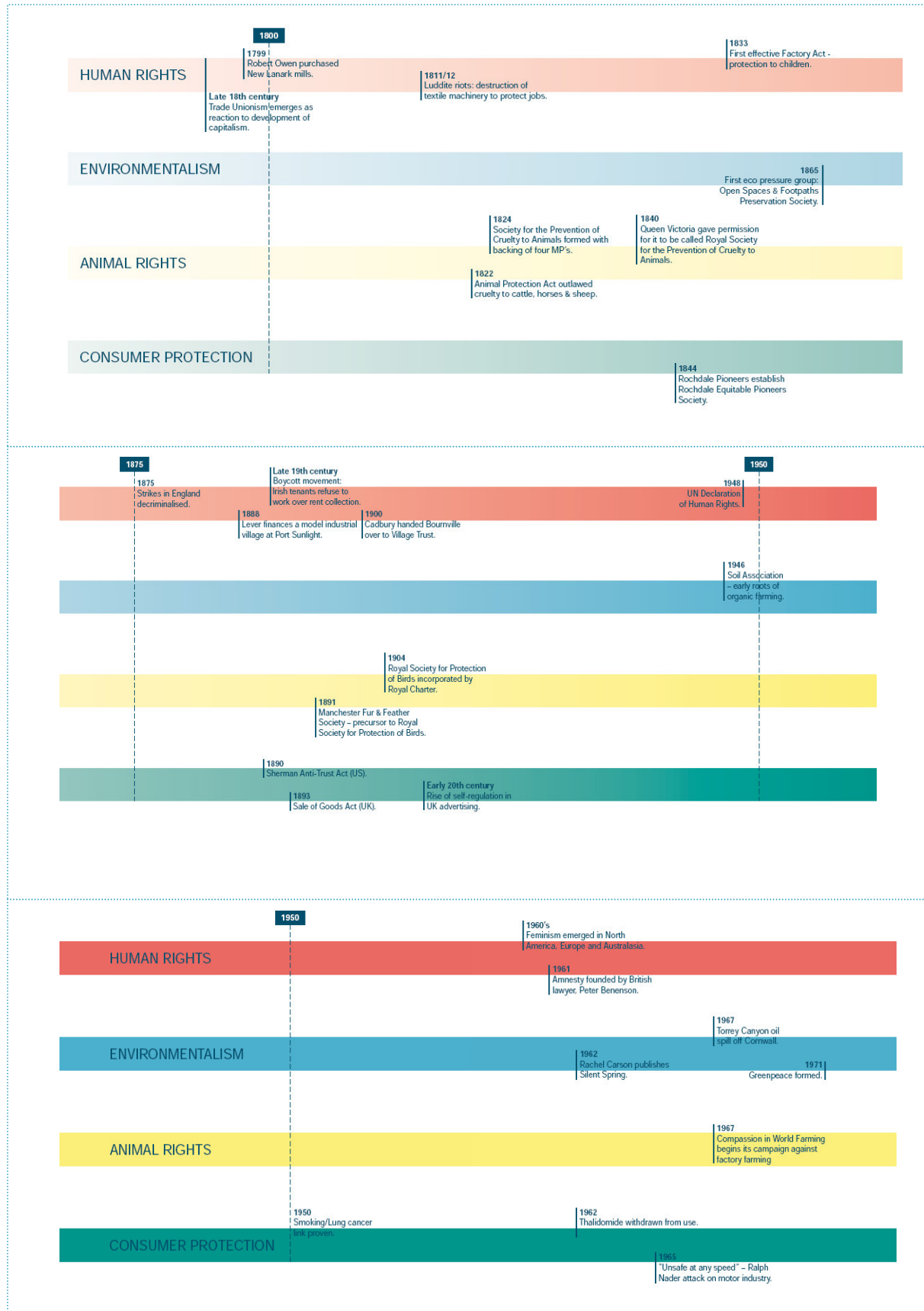
Until this point, the focus of consumer activism had been on consumers' rights, safety and quality (Cowe & Williams, 2000).

The fourth wave or 'alternative consumers', as Lang & Gabriel (2005) call them, focused more on the ethical questions of consumption. They represent the current ethical consumer movement. They appeared gradually in the 1970s in Europe and expanded to North America. Examples include the fair trade initiatives of the 1970s and the ethical unit trusts that first appeared in the UK in 1984 (Harrison et al., 2005).

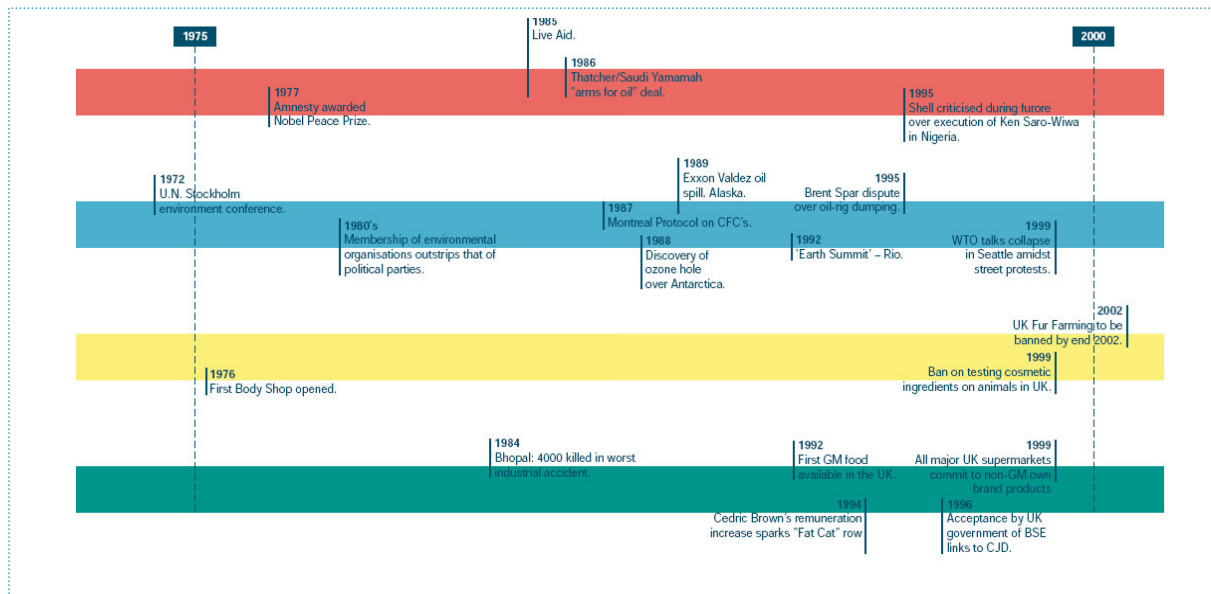
As already mentioned, initially the salient group were the environmentalists and the movement of green consumers who tried to protect the environment in different ways; recycling, buying environmental products, cutting down on consumption. The scope of ethical concerns became wider during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with consumers interested in Third World solidarity, child labour, more fair economic relationships between North and South etc. The appearance of products with Fair Trade and Non-Sweat Labels are examples of the ethical alternatives that were offered in the market.

To better illustrate the evolution of the ethical consumer movement Figure 2.0 outlines a detailed time-line figure of its most critical moments from Cowe and Williams (2000).

Figure 2.0: Evolution of Ethical Consumer Movement



## INTRODUCTION TO ETHICAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR



Source: Cowe and Williams (2000: 8-11)

## 2.3 The rise of the Ethical consumer movement in the 20th century

In section 2.1, it was mentioned that ethical consumer behavior is not a recent phenomenon. Nevertheless, as outlined the wave of the alternative consumer made its appearance in the 1970's and strengthened its presence during the last three decades. Therefore, the question emerges as to why the ethical consumer movement made such a strong appearance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? What conditions favored its expansion?

The review of the literature identified a number of factors that have contributed to the growth of ethical consumer behavior in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

An interesting insight is offered by Rob Harrison in the book "The Ethical Consumer" (2005: 56-59). He identifies seven key external factors that contributed to the growth of ethical consumer activity, as outlined below:

- The globalization of the markets and weakening of local governments
- The emergence of multinational corporations such as Nestlé and Citigroup
- The appearance of single-issue pressure groups
- Rapid technological advances
- More empowerment of consumers
- Market campaigns prove to be effective
- The corporate social responsibility movement

On the one hand local governments have less power since they are not able to regulate the market as they used to (Irving et al., 2002; Harrison, 2005). They either adapt their legislation in order to attract capital investment like the case of the Philippines, Taiwan and other developing countries (Klein, 2005) or cede their regulation rights to international organizations such as World Trade Organization (WTO).

On the other hand, transnational companies that compete on a global level depend less and less on single countries and gain more and more power. As a result, local governments cannot interfere and regulate the market as they used to. For instance, social phenomena like sweatshops are rather common in developing countries, indirect results of multinational companies' decision to outsource their production and reduce costs (Klein, 2005).

Furthermore, the current economic reality is characterized by fierce competition. First, at the sector/industry level since industries that once used to be monopolized and government owned are now open to competition such as the case of telephone industry in different countries (Mexico-Telmex, Spain-Teléfonica, Greece-OTE, Argentina-Entel). Then, at a country level since countries that were considered traditionally ‘closed’ economies<sup>6</sup>, like China and India have opened their frontiers to foreign capital investments. The growing global market invites multinational companies to compete and win the largest piece of market share.

However, this means at the same time a greater shift of market power to the consumer. The wide range of purchase choices and the minimization of switch costs between products make companies more vulnerable to consumer’s fickle preferences.

Also, as Newholm and Shaw (2007) underline, the increased level of information and media coverage have played their part in the strengthening of the ethical conscience of the consumers. The appearance of informative sources such as the magazines ‘The Ethical Consumer’ (UK), ‘Adbusters’ (Canada), ‘Opciones’ (Spain) or websites like [www.corporatewatchdog.com](http://www.corporatewatchdog.com) help maintain consumers informed about campaigns, current ethical issues and companies’ social behavior in the marketplace. Naomi Klein in her book “No Logo” (2005) lists more than twenty different websites, where consumers can become informed and/or interchange opinions in forums. As Berry and Mc Eachern (2005) claim, more information about people’s ethical stands can lead to a greater diversity of opinions and attitudes.

Moreover, Harrison et al. (2005) mentions that more single issue groups have appeared (e.g. Friends of the Earth and Amnesty International). In addition, different collective spaces have emerged to serve as outlets for the concerned consumers. Low and Davenport (2007: 343) focus on the Fair Trade (FT) movement and discuss the appearance of voluntary ethical spaces such as FT cities, universities and higher education campuses in the UK, the US and Australia. Barnett, Cloke, Clark & Malpass (2005a:27) review some of the organizational forms that have appeared; ethical trade organizations (see Body Shop, Triodos Bank), FT campaigning groups

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<sup>6</sup> Since, no economy is purely closed.

(e.g. Intermon Oxfam, SETEM<sup>7</sup>), boycott campaigns against multinational companies (examples of Nike, Gap, Shell) or countries with oppressive regimes (e.g. Burma) and cooperative movements (such as the UK Cooperative Bank). In the case of market campaigns some have proved to be effective such as the Campbell's Soup boycott in 1979-86<sup>8</sup> and the Shell boycott in 1995 (Harrison et al., 2005).

The implications of the aforementioned are the following. First, consumers are provided with outlets for protest. Second, consumer action has proved to be effective in certain cases and so consumers have become more empowered (Cherrier, 2006).

Another factor that Harrison et al. (2005) included in his list is technological change. Technology's results depend on its use. For that reason, it has been considered both a threat and an opportunity. On one hand, it can bring about important changes that improve the quality of life such as reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions technology and taking advantage of renewable forms of energy. On the other hand, technological advances have contributed to more intense industrialization and so have been responsible for many of the concerns in consumption; biotechnology and genetically modified products, aerosols and ozone layers, contamination, repletion of natural resources etc. Furthermore, some of these consequences have been more obvious for the average consumer. The accident of Chernobyl and data about global warming are some examples that make consumers more conscious of the need for their taking action.

Other authors have explained the growth of the ethical consumer movement as a result of the changed conditions of consumption. These are:

- Ethical consumers are an implication of the new paradigm of consumption.

According to Borgmann (2000), there are fundamental changes in the nature of consumption. In modern society, consumers are more detached from production than they used to be partly because of technological progress. They are the final consumers of products whose production conditions and processes they ignore. So, "*consumption became unencumbered enjoyment*" (Borgmann, 2000: 420).

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<sup>7</sup> SETEM is a Spanish Non Profit Organization in favour of more fair relationships between North and South. They organize campaigns about issues such as Fair Trade or sweatshops ("Roba Neta" campaign).

<sup>8</sup> The objective of the boycott was to improve the working conditions of Hispanic immigrants farm workers in Ohio.



Nevertheless, as Borgmann continues, consumption without careful consideration contributes to social injustice because it attaches resources to the accumulation of “*lumber*” (p.418), while they could be used to help the poor. The realization of the contribution of consumption of each individual to the current pessimistic economic and environmental reality leads to the consideration of more responsible criteria other rather than pleasure when consuming.

Furthermore, the alienation of the consumer from the production process, reduces the control that the consumer has over production. The globalisation of commerce, makes consumers unaware of the conditions under which the products they consume were produced (Cook, 2004), or simply their origin, leading to global ‘panic’ every time dangerous and unsafe products are found (example of the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy disease known also as mad cow disease).

- The notion of the post-modern consumer.

There has been a shift from the traditional approaches to consumer behaviour, where the purpose of consumption was complying with a purely utilitarian function (Solomon et al, 2002; Harrison et al., 2005) to post-modern and neo-liberal perspectives of consumption.

In post modernity, consumption has a double meaning; the formation of personal identity (Northern school) and a way of communication between group members (Southern school) (Cooper et al., 2005).

Therefore, on the one hand consumers buy products to differentiate themselves from the rest, as markers for social distinction (Horton, 1984; Slater, 1997; Corrigan, 1997)<sup>9</sup>. The post-modern consumer has freedom and variety of choices, which allows him to create different social identities and lifestyles (Haanpää, 2007). As Cherrier (2007: 322) mentions: ‘*the neo-liberal self is a knowledgeable, integrated, rational subject who actively and deliberately acquires, consumes and disposes of ethical objects that symbolize its (desired) identities*’.

On the other hand, products become signals of belonging in social class and lifestyle groupings. In this sense, consumption facilitates group communication

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<sup>9</sup> However, this is not a new argument. Thorstein Veblen was the first to discuss in 1899 that the leisure class uses consumption to demonstrate wealth and social status.

between members (Haanpää, 2007) and defines collective identities (Sassatelli, 2001).

For some authors (Shaw et al., 2002; 2003, Ozcaglar- Toulouse et al., 2006, Haanpää, 2007), ethical consumer behaviour is closely related to reaffirming the self identity of consumers. Through ethical consumer practices like voluntary simplicity, consumers question their lifestyle and change their consumption patterns looking for an authentic identity (Cherrier, 2005; Shankar et al., 2006) or a way to integrate themselves in a community (Cherrier, 2005).

Furthermore, it is argued that the aforementioned is valid for the case of wealthy societies looking to satisfy post materialist values (Bauman, 2005; Haanpää, 2007). Ethical consumerism fulfils self-actualization needs, which constitute the highest level of Maslow's pyramide of needs. In developed, rich countries modern consumers have satisfied the other levels of needs like biological and safety needs so they can move on to the other categories (Brooker, 1976; Hansen & Schrader, 1997; Dickinson & Carsky, 2005). In this context, buying and consuming takes up most of individuals' time and is a form of building their self identities, maybe the most dominant one (Miles, 1998; Newholm, 2000; Bauman, 2005; 2007; Haanpää, 2007).

- Beck's concept of risk society (1992).

The birth of the ethical consumer movement can be related to the concept of risk society. This concept was introduced by Beck in his book 'Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity' (1992) and further discussed in later papers (e.g. Beck, 2006).

Beck (1992) describes a double process that takes place in Western Welfare states. On the one hand, people do not have to fight scarcity anymore. Basic goods are accessible to them, either due to the increased human and technological productivity or the welfare state measures (or both). On the other hand, he argues, the industrial society of Marx and Weber is replaced by the new 'global risk society'. By citing different examples such as the CFC's (Chlorofluorocarbons), the Chernobyl accident and the Katrina disaster, he claims that people are always

at risk<sup>10</sup> and that the concept of risk society refers to a systematic dealing with dangers and uncertainties provoked by modernization. These dangers and uncertainties have the following qualities:

- De-localization: They are not geographically limited and they have a long latency period (e.g. nuclear accidents).
- Incalculableness: They cannot be controlled because they are not expected.
- Non-compensability: There are dangers that if they occur, they will not be compensated. The example of an irreversible climate change can illustrate better the argument.

So, he continues, the realization of these risks and their respective qualities can lead an individual to three possible reactions; denial, apathy or transformation (Beck, 2006: 331). By transformation it is meant a global mobilization of humanity to respond to the unpredictable and impersonal risks.

Here, the relationship with the ethical consumer movement can be found. Following Beck's argument, the emergence of the ethical consumers is a reaction to the constant exposure to unpredictable, uncompensable global dangers by taking some action to control them. An example can illustrate better the argument. For instance, modern consumers find themselves in an increasingly deteriorating environment facing climate change and natural catastrophes. The identification of the risk and of its magnitude alerts them and makes them consider their personal responsibility for the situation. So, the purchase of environmentally friendly products appears nowadays as one of the answers of the environmentally concerned individual to the environmental risks he/she perceives.

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<sup>10</sup> He defines risk as the anticipation of catastrophe (Beck, 2006: 332).

## 2.4 Conclusions

This chapter provides an overview of ethical consumer behaviour. Firstly, ethical consumer behaviour is defined and secondly, the different perspectives on the genesis and growth of the ethical consumer movement are reviewed. Thus, it lays the conceptual foundations for Chapter 3.

Clearly, although ethical consumers have existed in various guises for centuries, they have become more prevalent over the last thirty years. This came as a result of the political, social and technological factors that characterize the reality of the modern consumer. This is especially true in wealthy western societies where consumption has taken on a different symbolic meaning according to postmodern, neoliberal theories. Indeed, as explained in the next Chapter, ethical consumer behaviour has been almost exclusively studied in such contexts.

New technologies like the Internet facilitate the dissemination of information and consumers can keep up to date easily and quickly on corporate practices and ethical alternatives in the marketplace. Better labeling on products serves as the main source of passive information search of concerned consumers. Collective spaces like forums, social and environmental organizations and single-issue pressure groups are available as outlets for action for concerned consumers who have seen in the recent past that taking individual action can be successful. All these have resulted in a shift of market power to the consumer. At the same time, companies' market oriented strategies focus on satisfying the consumer and in that context they intend to comply with social and environmental requirements through their Corporate Responsibility programs.

Moreover, the new paradigm of consumption results in excessive consumerism, the alienation of the consumer from production and the *involuntary enlightenment* of the individual (Beck, 2006: 338).

All these have contributed to the genesis of the ethical consumer.

Having outlined the conceptual basis and evolution of ethical consumer behaviour, Chapter 3 reviews the empirical research on this phenomenon.

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## CHAPTER THREE

# **EMPIRICAL RESEARCH IN ETHICAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR**

## Chapter 3: Empirical Research in Ethical Consumer Behaviour

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### 3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter lays the conceptual basis for the examination of the ethical consumer by defining the ethical consumer and by discussing the emergence and rise of the homonymous movement. This chapter examines the empirical research on ethical consumer behaviour.

Here, it should be mentioned that the dynamic evolution of the research on ethical consumer behaviour required a frequent update on the conducted empirical studies on this research area. New knowledge was constantly emerging and hence, it should be taken under consideration.

Also, while this chapter is based mostly on the academic literature, different sources of information were employed in the search of relevant knowledge; market reports (e.g. MORI), reports by Non-Profit Organizations (e.g. UK Cooperative Bank, SETEM, Confederación de Consumidores, European Fair Trade Association), ethical magazines (e.g. The ethical consumer, Opciones), relevant websites (e.g. [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org), [www.adbusters.org](http://www.adbusters.org), [www.decreixement.net](http://www.decreixement.net)).

The chapter is structured in four main sections. Firstly, the main bodies of knowledge which have contributed to the study of ethical consumers are identified and briefly described. Secondly, the main research questions on ethical consumer behaviour are identified and categorized. Thirdly, the context of this research is examined and fourthly, the methodologies employed in previous studies are considered. This approach facilitates the identification of the gaps in current knowledge on the topic and leads to the formulations of the doctoral research questions which are presented in the following chapter.

## 3.1 Bodies of Knowledge related to the study of Ethical Consumer Behaviour

The study of the human behavior in the context of consumption is in general an interdisciplinary science drawing from different bodies of knowledge such as sociology, psychology, anthropology and economics (Blackwell et al., 2002; Solé, 2003; Solomon et al., 2006; Hogg, 2006; Schiffman et al., 2008).

Similarly, ethical consumer behavior is a phenomenon that has been studied from different perspectives. In this section, the author briefly presents the different bodies of knowledge where the study of the ethical consumer behaviour has drawn from and highlights the main contributions.

### 3.1.1 Marketing

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the ethical consumer movement has gained momentum around the turn of the twenty-first century. As a result, the increasing demand for 'ethical' products attracts the interest of commercial and academic research. A large number of studies in the form of quantitative market research and opinion polls was conducted during the 1990's decade that often focused on specific types of ethical consumption such as green consumption (Intel, 1995; 1997), or Fair Trade consumption (e.g. Ayglon, 1999; MORI, 1999)<sup>1</sup>. To that, academic research that tried to answer '*conventional marketing concerns*' (Newholm & Shaw, 2007: 255) is added. Among the topics examined in recent years are the following:

- The socio demographic and psychological profile of green and ethical consumers (e.g. Shrum et al., 1995; Bhate and Lawler, 1997; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003)
- The willingness of consumers to pay for products with social features (e.g. De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Fernandez & Merino, 2005; Arnot et al, 2006; Auger et al., 2006).
- The impact of E-Commerce on ethical consumers (Coles & Harris, 2006)

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<sup>1</sup> For a more complete list of market research and opinion polls see Tallontire et al. (2001: 9).



- Expectations and perceptions of consumers regarding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Programs (e.g. Mohr et al., 1998, Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Sen & Bhattacharaya, 2001).
- How consumers process information about companies' social conduct (e.g. Ahluwalia et al., 2000; De Matos & Teixeira, 2004; Ingram et al., 2005). It should be mentioned that these studies also draw from psychology and more specifically from the impression formation literature.

These studies are discussed more thoroughly in section 3.3.

### 3.1.2 Sociology

Ethical consumer behaviour has also been examined by sociologists and social psychologists. Both perspectives are considered in this section owing to the close relationship between social psychology and sociology<sup>2</sup>.

In the sociology literature, we find post modern theories of consumption (see Cooper et al., 2005) and how these apply to ethical consumers. In post modern theories, consumption conveys different meanings on at least two levels; reaffirming one's identity and integrating one into social groups. Indeed, the expression of individuality through consumption has been the focus of recent research in ethical consumer behaviour literature (Haanpää, 2007). More specifically, various academics propose that ethical consumers search to define their self identities through consumption (Shaw et al., 2000; Shaw & Shiu, 2002; Cherrier, 2005; 2006; 2009). At this point, it should be mentioned that much contemporary research on ethical consumption has focused on green consumer behaviour (e.g. Stets & Biga, 2003; Haanpää, 2007).

Furthermore, it is argued that ethical consumers constitute a new social movement that connects individuals/members of society with the same interests, values, activities (Cherrier, 2007). This coincides with the basis of the sociological perspective which proposes that for ethical consumers the individual self is shaped by the social context

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<sup>2</sup> It is not the intention of the researcher to define the boundaries between Social Psychology and Sociology. Social Psychology is seen as the interdisciplinary domain that bridges Psychology and Sociology (Gilbert et al., 1998) and that tries to '*understand and explain how the thought, feeling and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of other human beings*' (Allport, 1954: 5).

(Wilska, 2002) that influences his likes and dislikes (Lang & Gabriel, 2005) and guides him towards moral and immoral acts (Caruana, 2004).

With regards to social psychologists, studies focusing on pro social and pro environmental behaviors were found. Most of them are chronologically placed in the 1990's (e.g. Sparks & Shepherd, 1992; Taylor & Todd, 1997), with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) often acting as framework (for further discussion see section 3.2.1.3).

Most current research draws from the disciplines of marketing and sociology. While research efforts from the area of marketing are directed towards commercial concerns, like identifying and profiling the ethical segment, sociological research pays more attention to what ethical consumption represents. It looks at issues such as the identity construction through ethical consumption and the explanation of ethical consumption through frameworks such as the TPB model. Studies from the sociological perspective have advanced the knowledge on the ethical consumer and have contributed toward a better understanding of ethical consumer behaviour.

### 3.1.3 Anthropology

Due to its social and political implications, ethical consumption has been also looked at from the anthropological perspective. However, it has only recently woken the interest of anthropologists (Carrier, 2007).

Among the conducted research, it is found the doctoral thesis by Sigmund Wagner (1997). From a cognitive anthropological perspective<sup>3</sup>, Wagner examines the relationships between motivation, cognition and behaviour in the daily shopping context of green consumers with different levels of 'intelligence'<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Cognitive anthropology has traditionally focused on tribes and how they solve practical problems of daily life such as classifying plants and forecasting events (Levi-Strauss, 1966). It is often argued that logical thinking is not a matter of literacy and school education, instead the solution to daily life problems (Berry & Irvine, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> The authors clarify that intelligence in this study is interpreted as the creativity, flexibility and practical thinking shown in the way green consumers shop in their specific contexts, rather than the traditional, abstract, strictly quantitative meaning of intelligence (Intelligence quotient-IQ). However, they use a type of life cycle analysis IQ test to examine consumers' specific and scientific knowledge with regards issues such as the production, transportation and disposal processes of products (Wagner-Tsukamoto & Tadjewski, 2006).

Also, the handbook “Hidden Hands in the Market” (De Neve et al., 2008) includes proposals for further advances of ethical consumer research. The book includes 12 essays many of them discussing the problematic of buying ethically on the basis of images provided by advertisements and websites that represent commercial ethics rather than the reality (e.g. Luetchford, 2008; Carrier, 2008; Berlan, 2008). In those cases, research was carried out in the FT producers’ communities including Trinidad (West India), Costa Rica and Ghana.

Other research focuses on ethical consumption as a mimicking behaviour. For example in Hungary researchers have examined the case of consumers who ‘consume’ ethically in order to copy western consumers and in so doing appear modern and overcome their communist past (Dombos, 2008).

As expected, most anthropological studies on ethical consumer behaviour have employed ethnographic methodologies. In general, ethnography constitutes a basic methodology in anthropological research (Bernard, 2006).

Nevertheless, few studies draw from this discipline. The need for more anthropological attention on ethical consumer behaviour was recognized in the workshop “Hidden Hands in the Market” (University of Sussex, April 2007) that led to the publication of the respective book (Carrier, 2007).

### **3.1.4 Human Geography**

Within the literature on human geography, ethical consumer behaviour is approached from the perspective of the concept of ‘space’. To explain that, a definition of human geography is borrowed from the website of the Association of American Geographers:

*"Human geography is concerned with the spatial aspects of human existence - how people and their activity are distributed in space, how they use and perceive space, and how they create and sustain the places that make up the earth's surface"*  
(Accessed on 22/11/2007).

What human geographers discuss is the problematic of caring at a distance, since distance weakens the interest in ethical issues and hides the consequences of the ethical consumer action (Barnett et al., 2005a; Malpass et al., 2007; Low & Davenport, 2007). To overcome that, Low and Davenport (2007) propose that the

creation of ethical spaces of consumption can boost sales of ethical products, spread awareness of ethical issues and help the ethical consumer movement grow. By ethical spaces, they mean Fair Trade universities and Fair Trade and non sweat campuses, Fair Trade cities and zones citing the example of Garstang, the first Fair trade city of the world<sup>5</sup>. Malpass et al.'s study on the Fair Trade city of Bristol (2007) confirms that such initiatives are successful because they target infrastructures of consumption, rather than changing the individual consumer.

Studies that draw from the area of human geography question the effectiveness of ethical consumer behaviour that is seen as an individualized, impersonal action. They propose the creation of ethical spaces as a form to shorten the distance between producer and consumer and examine the spaces' success as to whether they establish more solidly ethical consumer behaviours.

### 3.1.5 Ethics

Ethics is an important branch of philosophy focusing on the evaluation of human conduct and social relations, which has been applied to a wide range of situations including consumption (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). One of the most significant contributions of the ethics literature to the understanding of consumer behaviour, is the knowledge and theoretical basis that it provides for the elaboration of ethical consumer decision making models.

Ethical theories are often divided into two kinds (see Beauchamp & Bowie, 1979; Murphy & Laczniak, 1981); deontology and consequentialism (Barnett et al., 2005b) or deontological and teleological evaluations (Chan et al., 2007). Deontological evaluations focus on the inherent rightness or wrongness of possible actions/behaviours according to one's personal values (Steenhaut, 2006). Teleological evaluations emphasize the consequences of the actions/behaviours, i.e. how much good or bad they shall provoke (Peterson & Ferrell, 2005).

According to the Hunt & Vitell model (1986), both types of evaluations are used in the judgment of an ethical problem. Although the Hunt-Vitell model has mostly been

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<sup>5</sup> Fair Trade status is given to a city or university when there is a commitment for the promotion of Fair Trade products. This includes availability of Fair Trade products in the city or university outlets, campaigns favoring Fair Trade consumption, establishment of steering group that evaluates and checks on the project's progress ([www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk))

applied in consumer ethics situations (see section 2.1), a number of authors have also supported its applicability to ethical consumer behaviour situations (Chan et al, 2007; Chatzidakis, 2007). For instance, Chan et al. (2007) very recently elaborated a framework based on the Hunt and Vitell model in order to test the ‘Bring Your Own Bag’ (BYOB) shopping practice. This is a very new and evolving line of research.

Furthermore, the ethical consumer literature examines the relationship between ethics and consumption. Barnett et al. (2005: 21) discuss whether ethical consumption is the “*object of moral evaluation*” or just the means for action. In the first case, the whole capitalistic system is criticised evoking the movement of slow food and downshifting on consumption. In other words, ethics lies on cutting down consumption levels. In the second case, change will be achieved through commodity consumption but of ethical alternatives such as Fair Trade products.

### **3.1.6 Further related bodies of knowledge**

Research on ethical consumer behaviour can be also found in other bodies of knowledge:

- Economics: Ethical consumer behaviour raises questions about the validity of the traditional economic theory of bounded rationality, since it claims that individual utility is not the ultimate and sole driver for consumption. Altman (2005a) presents a model of consumer behaviour which tries to fit altruistic motives into neoclassical theory. This evoked a dialogue with other economists through academic publications (Colander, 2005; Cullis, 2005; Levine, 2005; Altman, 2005b).
- Public Policy: There are two dominant theories about where ethical consumerism should originate from; the liberalist bottom-up approach and the conservative top-down approach (Cherrier, 2006). In the former, it should originate from consumers’ conscience. In the latter, ethical consumer behaviour is a result of structural regulations and public policies which establish norms for behaving (such as imposing fines to enforce recycling). In this literature, the focus is on the employed policy tools to facilitate ethical consumer behaviour (Autio & Heinonen, 2007; Van den Burg, 2007) such as

product labelling (Inkamp, 2000; Klintman, 2006) or educating and creating monetary incentives (Santopietro, 1995).

### **3.1.7 Conclusions**

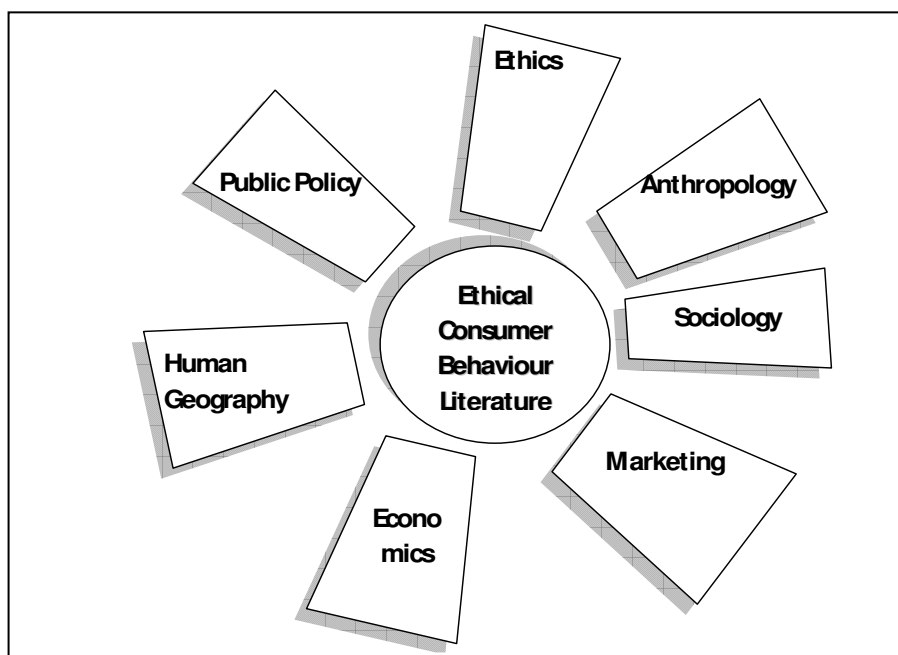
The review of the existing empirical studies reveals that while research on ethical consumer behaviour mainly draws from the disciplines of marketing and sociology, there are a number of other areas of knowledge interested on the ethical consumer movement and its implications (see Figure 3.0).

In some areas, such as human geography, anthropology and economics, research is still found in an initial stage. Contributions from more disciplines are expected and suggested, since they can allow gaining a more complete understanding of the ethical consumer. The ethical consumer movement should not only be seen as a new market segment, but also as a social phenomenon given the dominant role of consumption in modern lifestyles (Miles, 1998; Bauman, 2005).

Moreover, interdisciplinary research could further advance existing knowledge. There is a long list of options. For instance, an interdisciplinary research could bridge marketing and economics and answer traditional commercial questions such as the willingness to pay more for ethical products by applying concepts from economics, such as the indifference curves and elasticities of price.

In the present study, the findings from different disciplines are taken into account. More specifically, the bodies of knowledge of marketing, sociology of consumption and human geography are considered relevant and are used in the study.

**Figure 3.0:** Bodies of Knowledge in Ethical Consumer Behaviour



## **3.2 A Review of the Empirical Research on Ethical Consumer Behaviour**

This section provides an overview of the existing research on ethical consumer behaviour. In doing so, the main research questions posed are highlighted and the results are discussed. In this way, the current state of knowledge on the topic is presented, with special emphasis on identifying where there is conclusive evidence and where there is an inconsistency in empirical findings. This leads to the identification of the gaps in current knowledge on the topic, the generation of an agenda for research and the formulation of research questions for this doctoral thesis.

In order to facilitate the analysis of the literature the research questions have been categorised under four headings.

- Do Ethical (CSR/CRM) or unethical business practices affect consumer decision making and how?
- Who is the ethical consumer?
- Modeling ethical consumer behaviour
- Narratives in ethical consumer behaviour

Under the first and second categories researchers attempt to answer conventional marketing issues such as the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices on buying decision making or the socio-demographic delineation of consumers according to their engagement in ethical purchase behaviours (among others Creyer & Ross, 1997; Mohr & Webb, 2001; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Nilsson, 2009).

A third category of research involves the elaboration of new theoretical frameworks or the adjustment of existing ones in order to explain ethical consumer decision making. Various frameworks have been elaborated usually emphasizing the importance of social norms for behaving ethically. The most widely adopted framework is the Theory of Planned Behaviour which has been used as a conceptual basis in many studies (e.g. Shaw & Shiu, 2002a; Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006).



The fourth and final category of research focuses on the narratives of ethical consumers and the construction of self-identity. In this category, post modern theories on consumption and contributions from diverse bodies of knowledge such as sociology and ethics are identified (e.g. Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Barnett et al., 2005; Haanpää, 2007).

Thus, there is a number of definable and separate categories of research in ethical consumer behaviour. The evolution, expansion and maturing of the phenomenon (Newholm & Shaw, 2007) during the last three decades has required authors to focus on delving deep into the thoughts and decision making of ethical consumers. Hence, in recent times there has been an emphasis on research under the two last categories. In the following sections, each of these categories of research is outlined and discussed.

### **3.2.1 Do Ethical (CSR/CRM) or unethical business practices affect consumer decision making and if so how?**

The general objective of this stream of research is to see how ethical and unethical corporate practices affect buying behaviour. Thus, in this first stream of research, the studies mainly belong to the domain of marketing. These studies are generally within the literature of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The term CSR encompasses all the major activities performed by a company that are intended to support social and environmental causes (Kotler & Lee, 2005). It can include a wide range of activities from charity donations to carbon emission reductions (Ethical Consumer January/February 2007). Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) mention, among others, activities such as community support, diversity within the company, employee support, environment, supporting local produce and avoiding practices such as sweatshops, product safety.

This stream of research presents a number of basic research questions which are outlined as follows:

### 3.2.1.1 Do consumers take into account the ethicality of companies when they make purchase decisions?

According to Adam Smith, (1863), the objective of companies is the maximization of their profits. Thus, the engagement in socially responsible activities did not appear as a primary corporate objective. In fact, even if later theories (Stakeholders theory- Freeman, 1984) acknowledge the importance of other groups such as the employees and the clients, the important question is how consumers themselves perceive the role of the company.

Empirical evidence in academic literature suggests that consumers expect companies to be ethical and that they positively value the companies that do so (Ross et al., 1991; 1992; Creyer & Ross, 1997; Murray & Vogel, 1997; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Ellen et al., 2000; Mohr et al. 2001). These findings are confirmed by various market agencies' reports (Cone/Roper Cause Related Trends Report, 1999; MORI, 2000).

Furthermore, ethical consumerism reports by market agencies and N.P.O. (MORI, 2000; Krier, 2005; The Ethical Consumerism Report, 2007; 2008; SETEM, 2008) show a significant increase in the consumption of ethical products e.g. Fair Trade products, ethical investment etc. According to the SETEM 2008 Fair Trade report, overall Fair Trade spend in Spain for 2007 reached 16,221,383 presenting a 57% increase compared to 2000 figures. Figure 3.2 describes the Fair Trade sales in Spain and in the Catalonian region for the years 2000-2007.

Available data demonstrate rapid growth in Fair Trade markets across Europe over the last 7 years (Krier, 2005; 2007) and some Fair Trade products have reached dominant positions in local markets. Table 3.0 shows the highest overall market shares of certified Fair Trade bananas and coffee in European Countries. Fair Trade bananas and coffee were chosen, only due to the availability of data.

**Table 3.0:** Highest overall market shares of certified Fair Trade bananas and coffee in European Countries<sup>6</sup>

<b>MARKET SHARES OF CERTIFIED BANANAS AND COFFEE IN % OF TOTAL MARKET</b>					
<b>Product/ Country</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>Switzerland</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>UK</b>
<b>Fair Trade Coffee</b>	1.3	4	2.5	7	20
<b>Fair Trade Bananas</b>	70.0	55.0	20.0	N/A	5.5

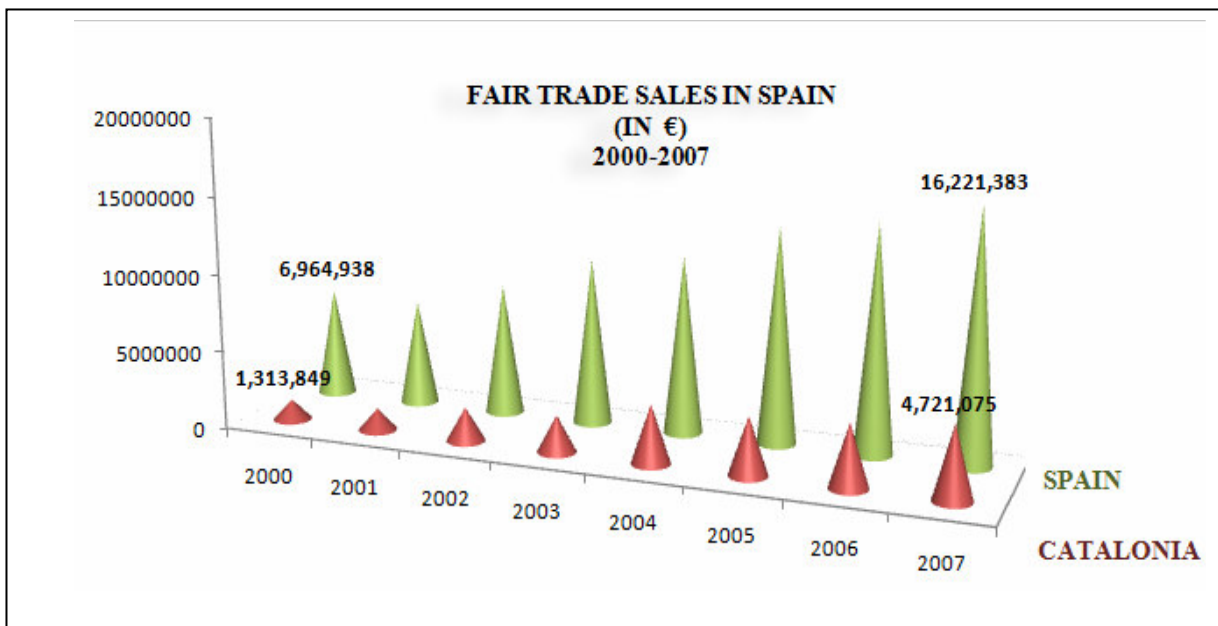
Elaborated by the author based on the Krier 2007 report 'Fair Trade 2007: new facts and figures from an ongoing success story. A report of Fair Trade in 33 countries'.

More complete data on ethical consumption can be found for UK (availability of figures for ethical finance, eco travel and transport, ethical food and drink etc). Ethical Consumerism reports are published annually by the UK Cooperative Bank, while a number of reports on different UK ethical consumer markets can be sourced from internet (see [www.reportlinker.com](http://www.reportlinker.com)). According to the latest data for 2008, UK household expenditure on ethical goods has tripled since 2000, whereas six percent of the UK adult population shop ethical products on a weekly basis (Ethical Consumerism Report 2008).

The aforementioned indicate that consumers who purchase ethical products are a growing tendency. However, ethical expenditure figures are not always available and are often fragmented (Krier, 2007). Most reports on ethical products' sales focus on specific cultural contexts such as UK. This does not allow measuring the size of ethical consumer groups with certainty in different settings.

<sup>6</sup> All figures refer to 2006 data, except UK where the only available data were from 2004.

**Figure 3.1:** Fair Trade Sales in Catalonia and Spain, 2000-2007



Elaborated by the author based on the SETEM 2008 Fair Trade Report

Moreover, even if sales grow, there is a discrepancy between what consumers claim to buy (academic studies, opinion polls) and what they actually buy (market figures). This is the so called attitude behaviour gap, documented in many studies about ethical consumers (e.g. Simon, 1995; Roberts, 1996; Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Mohr et al, 2001). Cowe and Williams (2000) refer to it as the 30:3 syndrome, i.e. just one third of people that claim that they purchase on the basis of ethical considerations, actually does so. The 30:3 syndrome is confirmed in the later study by FUTERRA Sustainability Communications (2005). Thus, the claims about the size of the ethical consumer segment may be significantly overstated. The existence of the attitude behaviour gap has elicited much research (e.g. Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Padel & Foster, 2005) and its existence is contributed to different factors. Section 3.6 presents a summary of the different research findings and suggested explanations around the emergence of the attitude behaviour gap.

### 3.2.1.2 What is the level of awareness of social corporate practices?

According to Harrison and Shaw's (2005) definition, the ethical consumers are individuals that buy or consciously avoid certain product offerings according to the information provided about the product. Therefore, the absence of such information may limit ethical consumer behaviour.

Indeed, a number of studies suggest that the absence of this information reduces the likelihood of ethical consumer behaviour (Dragon International, 1991; Mohr et al., 2001; Forética, 2003; Carrigan et al., 2004; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005a; CECU, 2006). Carrigan et al. (2004) mention that consumers complain about information quality and quantity because they consider it incomplete and insufficient. Similarly, in the study by Mohr et al. (2001) consumers claim to make too much effort to find information.

According to the Dragon International study's results (1991) just 26% of the respondents could identify a socially responsible company. One could argue that it is a rather antiquated study, but the results are similar in the much later study of Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004). They describe consumers as confused with regards to which are the reliable information sources and more than half seem unable to identify ethical firms. The examination of relatively recent studies from various countries lead to the same conclusion; Spain (Forética, 2003; Fernandez & Merino, 2005; CECU, 2006); UK (MORI, 2000); United States (Cone/Roper, 1999); Finland (Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004).

Interestingly, a number of studies suggest that consumers have more difficulty in recognizing and remembering examples of ethical firms than the unethical ones (Creyer & Ross, 1997; Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004; Mohr & Webb, 2005). This phenomenon is known as asymmetric diagnosticity (Folkes & Kamins, 1999) or negativity bias or effect (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001)<sup>7</sup>. One explanation is offered by Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy (1990). They argue that when consumers receive negative information about a product/company, they tend to categorize it as low in quality, but positive information is found to be less useful for this type of evaluations. Thus, while negative information about a company often leads to negative evaluations

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<sup>7</sup> According to Ahluwalia et al. (2000) the negativity effect is a robust finding in impression formation literature in psychology.

of products and companies, positive information does not necessarily convince the consumer of a company's ethicality and might have no effect on his/her judgement.

This is related to that consumers tend to be untrusting of positive information about companies as they see CSR as merely another Public Relations trick (Mohr & Webb, 1998; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Mohr et al., 2001). Nevertheless, consumers do tend to trust and believe corporate ethical acts that imply an altruistic act and are not mere compliance to the moral standards set by social pressures such as avoiding child labour because it is publicised in the media (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Rick, 2005)

Other academics claim that the problem is not the lack of information, but instead that modern consumers are overwhelmed by it (Titus & Bradford, 1996; Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Dickson, 2005).

Therefore, as Berry and McEachern (2005:87) argue, "*there is not a lack of information on ethical issues, but that its quality and complexity may be of concern in some areas*".

### 3.2.1.3 Are consumers willing to make an extra effort in order to buy ethically?

This is an issue raised many times in the ethical consumer literature because the real purchasing decision does not involve just the evaluation of a product's ethical features, but also of a bunch of other attributes (Kotler et al., 2002). Various authors (which are mentioned below) have considered whether consumers will prefer an ethical product even if they have to compromise on other attributes such as price, quality and availability of the products. For this type of studies, conjoint analysis (e.g. De Pelsmacker et al., 2005a; 2005b) and choice modelling (e.g. Auger et al., 2004a; Fernandez & Merino, 2005) have often been employed, because of their ability to simulate the real buying process (Fernandez & Merino, 2005; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005b). The following subsections examine each of the major attributes which consumer may be asked to compromise on in order to choose ethical products.

- **Price:** The basic question asked here is: 'Are consumers willing to pay a higher price for ethical products?'. The evidence on the importance of price is inconclusive and depends on the methodological design of the study. For

instance, using a self-administered questionnaire Creyer and Ross (1997) found that the respondents would pay a price premium for an ethical product. Nevertheless, answers in self-administered surveys run the risk of being biased (Auger et al., 2004b), and more so when dealing with socially desirable actions. In addition, the precise questions used were quite general (e.g. *“I would pay considerably more money for a firm that I knew to be extremely ethical”* p. 426) and so not representative of the real buying decision process of specific products.

Mohr and Webb (2005) preferred a scenarios experiment and found that information on CSR can influence purchase intentions more strongly than price. Nevertheless, even if they adopt a more sophisticated methodological design (control groups, manipulation of variables), the experiment still cannot simulate the actual buying process. For instance, Mohr and Webb (2005) themselves admit that giving information on beneficial and harmful corporate practices right before the evaluation of the companies makes the effect of CSR stronger than in an actual store (p.142).

Fernandez and Merino’s (2005) focus groups revealed that consumers were more willing to pay a premium, when the absolute quantity to pay is not very high<sup>8</sup>, confirming an earlier study by Elliott and Freeman (2001). In a similar vein, De Pelsmacker et al. (2005b) concluded that the average Belgian consumer was prepared to pay 10% premium for the Fair Trade label, instead of the actual 27% premium charged in the market. Nevertheless, it could be useful to incorporate a more economic perspective in this type of studies by taking into account the elasticities of demand of the different products, i.e. how much consumers are willing to pay in case of change of the product’s price.

- **Quality:** The evidence found on ‘product quality’ as a trade-off attribute is quite clear. Consumers do not accept ethical company behaviour as a substitute for product quality (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). According to Folkes and Kamins (1999) virtuous behaviour is not a substitute for product quality, while Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) claim that a good social profile cannot compensate for inferior quality.

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<sup>8</sup> Respondents claimed willing to pay 1 more euro for ethical deodorants but more than half wouldn’t pay 10 euro for ethical sneakers.

- **Availability:** In the study of Creyer and Ross (1997) and Bhate (2001) a high percentage of the respondents claimed to change their retail store if there were no ethical alternatives. However, other research has raised availability as an obstacle for ethical consumerism, when consumers wish to buy ethical alternatives but they don't find them (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005a; 2005b; 2006).

To sum up, according to the revised studies consumers will not compromise on quality. Results are inconclusive with respect to price and availability showing that consumers might purchase ethically if they do not have to pay a lot more for the product or if they can easily find it. The evaluation of a bunch of attributes when making the purchasing decision can impede ethical consumption and can partially explain the existence of an attitude-behaviour gap.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention the differences among the respondents in these studies. Since they are randomly chosen, it is normal to identify heterogeneous groups within the sampled population. While some consumers will pay little heed to ethics when buying and value more other factors, others are willing to make a lot of effort to be consistent with their beliefs. In most studies, this last group of consumers represent a niche (Newholm & Shaw, 2007:255) baptised in various ways; True Blue Greens (Johnson-Roper Starch Study, 1990), Green consumers (Peattie, 1995), Fair Trade Lovers (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005b), Global Watchdogs (Cowe & Williams, 2000), Caring and Ethical (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

#### 3.2.1.4 Do different types of corporate social practices have different effects on ethical consumer behaviour?

As mentioned in the beginning of the section, in this stream of research academics and marketing agencies have attempted to understand the effect of corporate practices (ethical and unethical) on consumer behaviour. Companies' social contribution is often represented by the terms CSR or Cause-Related Marketing. Therefore, certain authors tried to understand how different types of CSR activities could influence consumers.



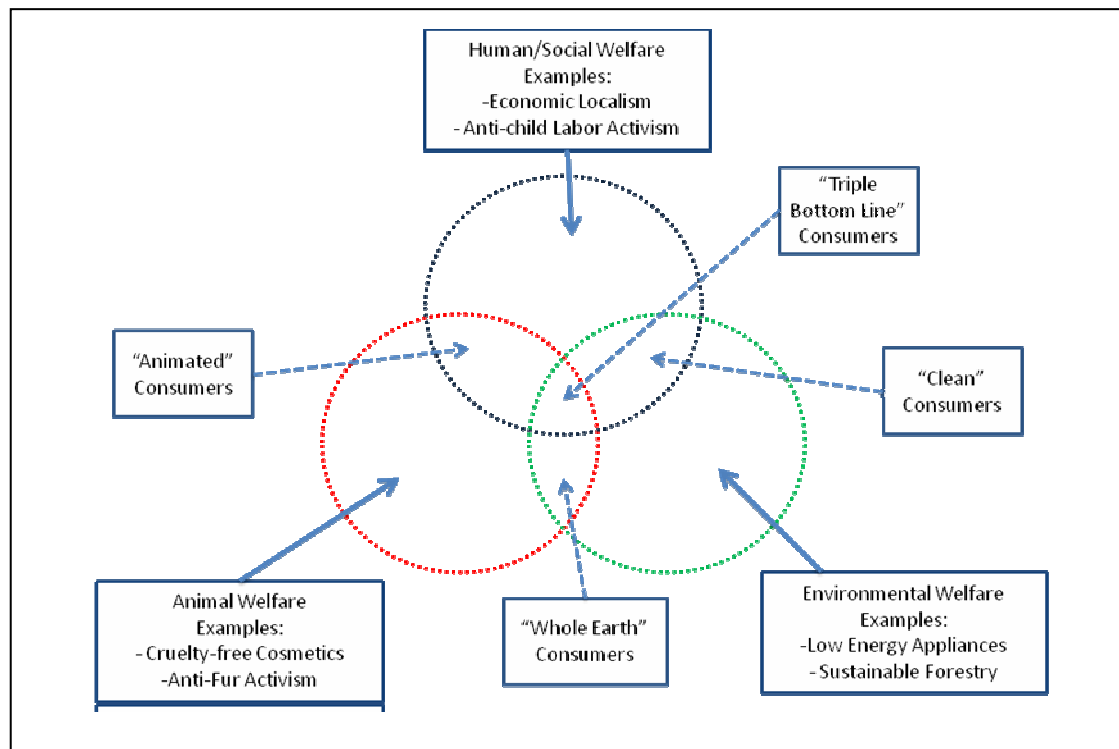
Research consistently identified human and labour issues (such as child labour, sweatshops etc) as significantly important for consumers (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Forética, 2003; Fernandez & Merino, 2005; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005a; Auger et al., 2007; CECU, 2006). Also important are environmental and animal rights issues.

In Mohr and Webb (2005), a company with a good environmental record (use of recycled materials, caution with pollution) can have a greater influence on consumer purchase decisions than the corporate philanthropy (charity, donations to disaster victims). Nevertheless, there is no solid empirical evidence that permits social practices to be ranked according to their importance for consumers.

Therefore, it seems more pertinent to accept that the group of ethical consumers is heterogeneous and that within it there are subgroups that appreciate different type of social practices (Connolly & Shaw, 2006). An interesting segmentation is provided by Low and Davenport (2007) (see Figure 3.2). They see ethical consumers as a line of different types of consumers that use a combination of ethical concerns as their bottom line for purchasing. These concerns are animal welfare, human/social welfare and environmental welfare, which (as said before) were found to be important in different studies. As seen in the Figure, seven segments of ethical consumers are identified. Each segment prioritizes different issues and thus, the strategic marketing implications for companies differ from ethical group to ethical group.

So, the question of what matters more remains. As Newholm (2005) argues, consumers live in a world of competing considerations. For instance, Fair Trade movement's objective is to reassure that producers in Third World countries are paid a fair price for their work. So, on one hand Fair Trade comes as a reply to the sweatshop practices that multinational companies apply in their product units in developing countries. However, on the other hand, a common criticism of Fair Trade products is that they are not environmentally sustainable since they have to be transported huge distances from the production country to the consumption country. So, an ethical consumer should choose social welfare or environmental welfare when he cannot have both and when he is a 'clean' consumer (see figure 3.2)?

**Figure 3.2:** Segmentation of ethical consumers according to issues of concern



Source: Low and Davenport (2007:340)

The aforementioned highlight the complexity of being an ethical consumer in the modern society, since a large number of issues that could compete between themselves should be taken into consideration. At the same time, the heterogeneity within the ethical consumer group and the diversity in perspectives makes the analysis of the ethical consumer more complex.

### 3.2.1.5 Are there any factors that mediate the effects of social corporate practices on consumer behaviour?

A number of researchers examine the moderating effects of *customer commitment* (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Ingram et al., 2005) and *positive psychology* (Giacalone et al., 2005) on consumers' evaluations of corporate social performance. The main argument is that on the one hand, loyal consumers are not influenced when their favourite brand/company behaves in an unethical way. On the other hand, positive psychological dispositions (e.g. gratitude for life, hope, personal

spirituality, interest for the future of next generations) make consumers more sensitive to corporate social behaviour.

The empirical findings confirm the influence of these mediators. In specific, Ahluwalia et al. (2000) find that highly committed consumers might counterargue instinctively negative information about the social practices of their brand. Nevertheless, according to Ingram et al. (2005), even loyal consumers will be dissatisfied if this situation continues.

### 3.2.1.6 Summary on findings

The studies found in this stream of research were mainly concerned with the consumer response to ethical market initiatives. Their main findings are summarised as following:

- Academic studies, opinion polls and market figures confirm that the existence of a market for ethical consumerism. Nevertheless, the measurement of ethical markets is easier in certain contexts such as the UK due to unavailability and fragmentation of information.
- Market figures indicate that the ethical consumer group is magnified in academic studies. Consumers that actually buy on the basis of ethical considerations are less than the ones that claim so. This is known in the ethical consumer literature as the attitude behaviour gap.
- Consumers appear to be inhibited to act ethically due to lack of credible and quality information in the marketplace. In addition, findings suggest that when information is available, negative information tends to influence more a consumer's judgement than positive information about companies and products.
- Consumers are not willing to compromise on quality in order to purchase ethical products. However, the conclusions are inconclusive on whether they are willing to pay a premium for 'ethical' products or on whether they will keep looking for ethical products when they do not find them easily.
- There no conclusions as to which type of social practices can influence more the consumers. There is a diversity of concerns that can drive ethical consumer behaviour and in cases they might be competing with each other. So, the ethical consumer group should be treated as an aggregation of niches rather than one homogeneous group.
- Research on factors that might moderate the effect of social corporate practices on consumers is limited. The existing research findings show that loyal consumers counteract negative information about their negative brand unless it is an enduring situation. Positive psychological predispositions make consumers more sensitive to companies with ethical records.

### 3.2.2 Who is the ethical consumer?

In this stream of research, the main question was whether certain consumer profiles are more prone to consume ethically. Such segmentation of the market is a very common practice in marketing (Wind, 1978). In this case, the procedure followed in the different studies is quite similar.

First, the authors conceptualize and operationalize what constitutes ethical consumer behaviour. Such conceptualization differs from study to study. Additionally, scales have been developed for that purpose. For instance, Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) elaborated a Social Responsibility Scale (SR) which was later used by Anderson and Cunnigham (1972), Kinnear et al. (1974) and Webster (1975). This scale measured the general ethical behaviour with questions around voting, interest in politics and volunteering among others. While Webster (1975) used the SR scale to profile the ethical consumer, he also added to his study the Socially Conscious Consumer Index in order to focus more on purely purchase decisions (e.g. “*have you ever refused to buy a product involved in a labor dispute?*”). Later, Mohr and Webb (2005) created the 26-item Socially Responsible Purchase and Disposal Scale composed by similar questions as the one provided by Webster (1975).

Often though, the general constructs that define what is an ethical consumer behaviour have to do with the extent of consumers *knowledge* of ethical issues, their *attitudes* towards ethical issues and/or types of ethical consumer behaviour and finally the actual practice of certain ethical consumer *behaviours* (knowledge-attitudes-behaviour structure) (e.g. in Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). Then, typologies of consumers are developed, based on the chosen constructs to measure ethical consumer behaviour and relationships with socio-demographic and personality variables are searched. In this way, researchers attempt to provide a profile of the ethical consumer.

A vast amount of empirical research has focused on the delineation of the green or ecological consumers (Balderjahn, 1988; Samdahl & Robertson, 1989; Bhate & Lawler, 1997; Sanchez et al., 2001; Vicente & Mediano, 2002; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003).

Among the variables that were used for the delineation of the ethical consumer are: *age* (e.g. Roberts, 1996; Samdahl & Robertson, 1989; Bhate & Lawler, 1997; MORI, 2000; Sanchez et al., 2001; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; De Pelsmacker et al., 2006),

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*social class* (Bhate & Lawler, 1997; MORI, 2000; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003), *gender* (Schann & Holzer, 1990; Roberts, 1996; Bhate & Lawler, 1997; MORI, 2000; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; DePelsmacker et al., 2006), *level of education* (Balderjahn, 1988; Roberts, 1996; Sanchez et al., 2001; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; DePelsmacker et al., 2006), *income* (Roberts, 1996; Sanchez et al., 2001), *family size* (Sanchez et al., 2001), and *lifestyle* (Sanchez et al., 2001; Haanpää, 2007).

In marketing, variables such as social class and lifestyle are considered as more complex to define than the straightforward variables of age and gender. In the reviewed studies, social class usually features occupational descriptions (e.g. Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). Lifestyle is associated to eating and exercise habits (Sanchez et al., 2001), while for Haanpää (2007) it is associated to the general consumer style.

Other authors attempt to explain ethical consumer behaviour on the grounds of the consumer's personality. The early studies on ethical consumer behaviour (Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Webster, 1975) made a significant contribution to this issue, describing ethical consumers as *less dogmatic* and *conservative, non-judgemental and status conscious*, contradicting the traditional and conservative ethical consumer by Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968).

Table 3.1 summarizes the relationships reported in the literature between socio-demographic and personality variables and ethical consumer behaviour.

**Table 3.1:** Empirical results on Ethical Consumers' Profiling

STUDY	MEASURES FOR CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR	PROFILING VARIABLES	MAIN FINDINGS
<b>Berkowitz &amp; Lutterman (1964)</b>	Social Responsibility Scale	<b>Socio-Demographics and Personality Variables</b>	Middle class, educated, young females have a greater tendency to be socially responsible. In terms of personality, more conservative and traditional individuals appear as more socially responsible.

<b>Anderson &amp; Cunningham (1972)</b>	Social Responsibility Scale	<b>Socio-Demographics (Occupation, Family Income, Education, Age, Stage in Family Life Cycle) and Personality Variables (Dogmatism, Alienation, Conservatism, Cosmopolitanism, Personal Competence and Status Consciousness)</b>	Younger, less alienated, less dogmatic, less conservative, less status conscious, less personally competent and more cosmopolitan consumers are more socially conscious. No results with regards income and education.
<b>Kinnear, Taylor &amp; Ahmed (1974)</b>	Extended Social Responsibility Scale	<b>Socio-Demographics and Personality Variables</b>	Socially responsible profile is deduced as of a well educated, middle-class affluent consumer.
<b>Webster (1975)</b>	Social Involvement Model	<b>Socio-Demographics (Education, Age, Occupation, Sex, Marital Status, Income, Number and Ages of Cars owned) and Personality Variables (Dominance, Responsibility, Socialization and Tolerance)</b>	Socio economic and demographic variables are not good predictors of socially responsible behaviour.
<b>Balderjahn (1988)</b>	Environmentally friendly behaviour (Green Purchases, Energy Conservation, Political Action)	<b>Socio-Demographics (Age, Education, Income, Size of residence place, number and status of friends)</b>	No socio-demographic profile emerged.
<b>Samdahl &amp; Robertson (1989)</b>	Perception of environmental problems, support for environmental regulations, ecological behaviour.	<b>Socio-Demographics (Size of community, Education, Income, Age, Political Ideology)</b>	The examined variables are largely insufficient to delineate the green consumer.  Other findings: Negative relationship between education and

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			environmentalism. Older consumers tend to be more environmentally concerned.
<b>Schann &amp; Holzer (1990)</b>	Environmental Knowledge and Environmentally Friendly Behaviour (Green Purchase, Recycling, Energy Conservation).	<b>Socio-Demographics</b>	Women are less informed of environmental issues but more sensitive with regard to their behavioural response.
<b>Johnson-Roper Starch Study, (1990)<sup>9</sup></b>	Environmental Knowledge and Environmentally Friendly Behaviour (Recycling, Green Purchase etc).	<b>Socio-Demographics</b>	Women and children are more environmentally aware, whereas highly educated and affluent people are more likely to select green products.
<b>MORI (1992)</b>	Knowledge on ethical issues and purchase of ethical products	<b>Socio-Demographics</b>	Green consumers are mostly women, under 45
<b>Roberts (1996)</b>	Socially Responsible Consumer Behaviour Scale (Green Purchase, Recycling, Avoidance of non-environmentally friendly products)	<b>Socio-Demographics</b>	General conclusion: Demographics are not sufficient to define the ethical consumers segment. Other findings: More responsible appear the older consumers and the women. There is a negative relationship between the income and the level of responsibility.
<b>Bhate &amp; Lawler (1997)</b>	Purchase and Use of Environmentally Friendly Products	<b>Age, Sex, Social Class and Psychological variables</b> (adaptative/innovative cognitive style and involvement in purchase)	Innovators will display environmentally friendly behaviour. Inconclusive results for relationship of high involvement in purchase and environmentally friendly behaviour. Insignificant results for demographics.
<b>Sanchez, Gil &amp; Gracia (2001)</b>	Purchase of Ecological Products	<b>Socio-Demographics (Gender, Age, Income, Education, Family Size)</b>	No accurate profile emerged.
<b>Bhate (2001)</b>	Environmentally Friendly Behaviour (Green Purchase,	<b>Psychological variables</b>	High involved and innovators are more likely

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Hoffman (2000: 87)



	Recycling etc.)	(adaptative/innovative cognitive style and involvement in purchase)	to undertake environmentally friendly activities.
<b>Olli, Grendstad &amp; Wollebaek (2001)</b>	Environmental Behaviour (Green Consumption, Energy Conservation, Waste Reduction, Avoidance of Toxic products)	<b>Socio-Demographics (Gender, Age, Education, Proximity to Farm Life, Family Income)</b>	Females and older people are more environmentally friendly. Education does not appear as a significant variable.
<b>Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics &amp; Bohlen (2003)</b>	Environmental Knowledge, Environmental Concern, Participation in Green Activities (Green Purchase, Recycling and Political Action)	<b>Gender, Age, Marital Status, Number of children, Education, Social Class</b>	No accurate profile emerges.  Other findings: Females and younger people are more environmentally concerned, but older people engage more often in recycling.  Higher education is positively associated to higher levels of environmental knowledge, recycling and green political action.
<b>Dickson (2005)</b>	Anti-sweat apparel Attitude and Boycott	<b>Socio-Demographics</b>	Ethical consumers tend to be single, female and less educated.
<b>De Pelsmacker, Janssens, Sterckx, Mielants (2006)</b>	Fair Trade Knowledge, Attitude and Purchase	<b>Gender, Age, Province and Level of education</b>	The gender doesn't show a significant relationship with regards the attitudes towards Fair Trade. University-educated and older respondents are more positive about Fair Trade.  The French speaking part is more concerned about fair trade issues (according to the authors maybe because they are more left wing).
<b>SETEM (2008)</b>	Fair Trade Knowledge and Purchase	<b>Socio-Demographics (Gender, Age, Education,</b>	No clear profile emerged. Nevertheless, highly educated and left-wing individuals have a greater

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		<b>Occupation, Residence, Political Ideology)</b>	tendency to purchase Fair Trade.
<b>Haanpää (2007)</b>	Environmental concern, Green Consumption	<b>Socio-demographic (Age, Gender, Income, Type of Household, Marital Status, Education)</b>	Socio demographics do not explain greenness.
<b>Nilsson (2009)</b>	Ethical Investment	<b>Socio-demographic (Age, Gender, Income, Place of Residence, Education)</b>	Partly shown that women and higher education individuals tend to invest more ethically. Nevertheless, a clear socio-demographic profile is not sourced.

Elaborated by the author

As it can be deduced from the table, the existing empirical evidence is inconclusive in terms of generating a general profile of the ethical consumer. Many studies find that socio-demographics cannot explain ethical consumer behaviour given the absence of statistically insignificant relationships and the conflicting empirical findings. Only with regards to education, the results are relatively consistent and indicate that the ethical consumer is a person of a relatively high educational status (Balderjahn, 1988; Roberts, 1996; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; De Pelsmacker et al., 2006).

Hence, despite the early efforts to do so, it is now widely agreed that socio-demographics and personality variables are not sufficient to accurately define the ethical consumer (Samdahl & Robertson, 1989; Roberts, 1996; Bhate & Lawler, 1997; Manrai et al., 1997; Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). As Shaw and Clarke (1999: 110) mention, there is a need to look beyond the relationships between discrete variables and behaviour and to adopt a less simplistic approach to understand who the ethical consumer is. Moreover, as mentioned earlier in the literature review, ethical consumers are a dynamic group whose characteristics constantly change (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Haanpää, 2006; Newholm & Shaw, 2007).

Another observation is that in these studies the ethical consumer behaviour conceptualization is arbitrary. The need to develop specific constructs when measuring ethical consumer behaviour is understood, since it is the only feasible way to conduct this type of studies. Nevertheless, it seems that the author defines every time what is ethical consumer behaviour. For Diamantopoulos et al (2003) an ethical consumer would know about environmental issues, would be concerned about environmental quality and would participate in green activities such green purchases, participation in pro-environmental political action and recycling. For Bhate and Lawler (1997), ethical consumers will frequently purchase and use environmentally friendly products. De Pelsmacket et al (2006) focus on the ethical consumers that buy Fair Trade. For Sanchez et al. (2001) it also about consuming recycled products and separating the garbage.

Even if there are similarities in the way authors conceptualize ethical consumer behaviour, it also depends each time on the **subjective perspective of the author** leading to the generation of increasing but disjointed knowledge and showing that more research should be undertaken to understand who the ethical consumers really are.

### 3.2.3 Modelling ethical consumer behaviour

In the third stream of research, different authors propose various models of ethical decision making. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the early focus of the researchers was limited to green behaviours, so at first, frameworks were applied in the contexts of the purchase of recycled products (Diamantopoulos et al., 1994), of the air conditioning use reduction (Osterhus, 1997) or of the purchase of re-usable cloth baby diapers (Follows & Jobber, 2000). Then, the attention was placed on ethical consumer behaviour with an emphasis on the context of Fair Trade grocery products (Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006).

The models found present similarities in the constructs used (social norms, personal norms, perceived behaviour control) and their hierarchical structure. The Theory of Reasoned Action/ Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) appears to be the framework that most influenced the majority of the researchers. In fact, many frameworks were built on the basis of TPB (for further discussion see Follows & Jobber, 2000).

So, first the Theory of Planned Behaviour and its use in the ethical consumer literature will be briefly discussed, while later the rest of models will be presented.

#### 3.2.3.1 The Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action. It was elaborated by Ajzen and Fishbein and widely applied to the sciences of psychology and marketing, especially to explain human behaviour in food choice (Dean et al., 2008). As Ajzen mentions (1991) it is generally well supported by empirical evidence.

According to the initial conceptual framework, the intention to perform a specific behaviour is defined by three constructs that interrelate; the attitude towards the behaviour, the subjective norm and the perceived behavioural control (see Figure 3.3).

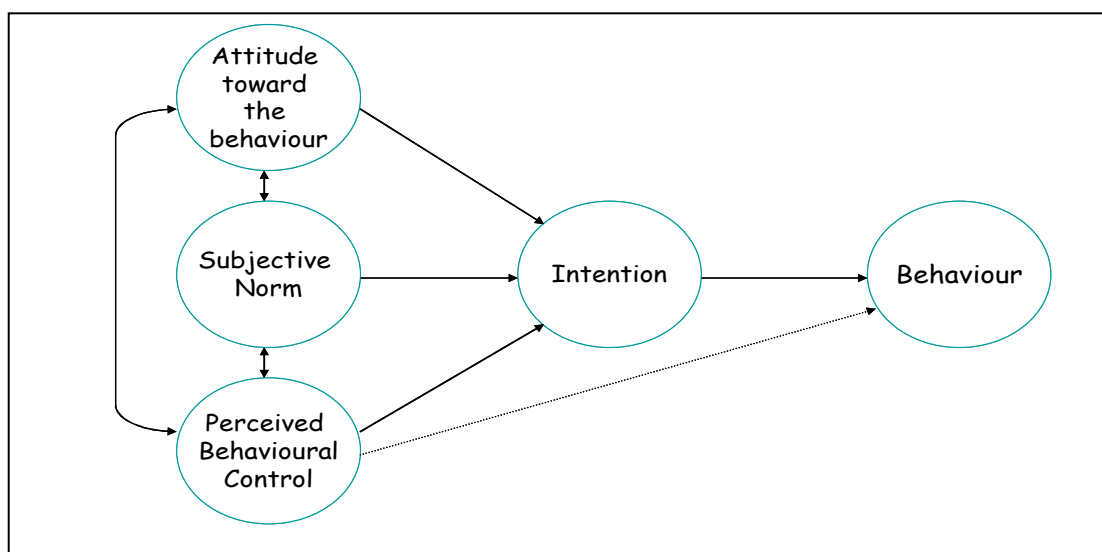
First, the attitude towards the behaviour (ATT) refers to how the individual perceives the consequences of the performance of the behaviour in question. The individual can value positively or negatively the outcome of a given behaviour and respectively have a positive or negative attitude towards this behaviour.

Second, the subjective norm (SN) is the social normative pressure that an individual perceives with regards the performance of certain behaviour. This pressure comes from the opinion of significant others like parents, friends, spouse.

Third, the perceived behavioural control (PBC) refers to an individual's perception about the ease or difficulty to perform certain behaviour. The construct of perceived behavioural control describes the *ability* of performing a specific behaviour, while the first two constructs the *motivation* to do so. Actually, the incorporation of this last construct differentiates the Theory of Planned Behaviour from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Ajzen decided to extend the initial model after criticism that TRA was only suitable to describe behaviours over which the individual had little volitional control (McEachern et al., 2007).

The TPB is often used as a framework in ethical consumer literature. Some authors (e.g. Kalafatis et al., 1999; Chan & Lau, 2001) applied the framework in the context of green consumer behaviour. Table 3.2 summarizes some of the studies where TPB is applied in the general ethical consumer literature. In most cases (Shaw et al., 2000; 2002; 2007; Ozcalgar-Toulouse et al., 2006; Mc Eachern et al., 2007; Dean et al., 2008), variations of the initial framework are encountered. This is further explained in the following section.

**Figure 3.3:** Theory of Planned Behaviour



Source: Ajzen (1991: 182)

**Table 3.2:** Ethical Consumer studies where TPB is applied

<b>AUTHORS</b>	<b>CULTURAL CONTEXT</b>	<b>TYPE OF BEHAVIOUR STUDIED</b>
<b>Sparks &amp; Shepherd (1992)</b>	UK	<b>Consumption of organic vegetables</b>
<b>Kalafatis et al. (1999)</b>	Greece and UK	<b>Buying Eco-Labeling Furniture</b>
<b>Shaw, Shiu &amp; Clarke (2000)</b> <b>Shaw &amp; Shiu (2003)</b>	Scotland, UK	<b>Fair Trade Grocery Purchasing</b>
<b>Chan &amp; Lau (2001)</b>	China and U.S.	<b>Eco-friendly Purchasing</b>
<b>Ozcaglar-Toulouse, Shiu &amp; Shaw (2006)</b>	France	<b>Fair Trade Grocery Purchasing</b>
<b>Shaw, Shiu, Hassan, Bekin &amp; Hogg (2007)</b>	UK	<b>Avoidance of sweatshop apparel</b>
<b>McEachern, Shröder, Willock, Whitelock &amp; Mason (2007)</b>	UK	<b>Freedom Food Purchasing (avoiding animal cruelty)</b>
<b>Chatzidakis, Hibbert &amp; Smith, (2007)</b>	UK	<b>Purchasing Fair Trade products</b>
<b>Dean, Raats &amp; Shepherd (2008)</b>	UK	<b>Buying organic apples and organic pizza</b>

Elaborated by author

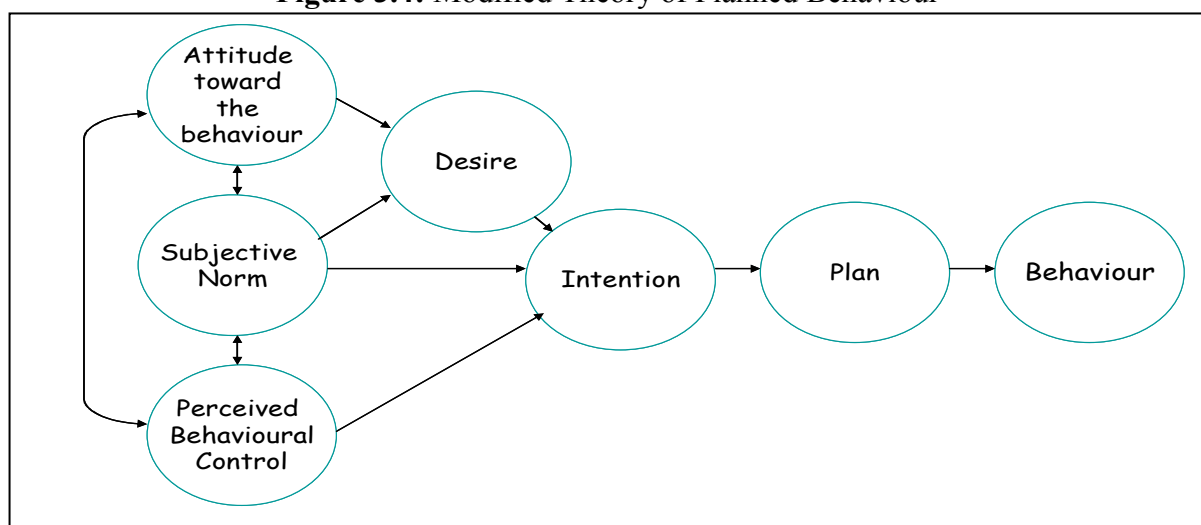
### 3.2.3.2 Variations of the initial Framework

Ajzen and Fishbein mentioned that any incorporation in the initial framework would be welcomed as long as it improved the explanatory ability of it (Ajzen, 1991) such as situational variables. In ethical consumer research, variations of the initial framework have been encountered with the incorporation of new constructs. Firstly, the inclusion of the construct of *moral concerns* is argued to be important for the prediction of human behaviour (Shaw et al., 2000; Shaw & Shiu, 2002; McEastern et al., 2007; Dean et al., 2008).

Shaw et al. (2000; 2002a) also add the constructs of self identity and ethical obligation in the initial model and according to the empirical test, the predictive ability of the framework has indeed improved. Previously, other authors had argued in favour of such incorporation. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) supported the addition of the measure of *ethical obligation*, while Sparks and Shepherd (1992) tested the model with the construct of self identity for the consumption of organic vegetables. In a similar vein, Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al (2006) used the modified framework following the research path of Shaw and colleagues but in the French context. Both Shaw et al. (2000; 2002) and Ozcaglar-Toulouse (2006) applied the framework in the context of Fair Trade grocery shopping.

In later research, examining other type of behaviours reveals the need to readjust the framework. For instance, Shaw modified once again the framework to examine the avoidance of sweatshop clothing. Shaw et al. (2007) incorporated to the initial framework the constructs of *desire* and *plan* as additional explanatory motivational constructs to behaviour. The main idea was that a certain level of effort is required in order to achieve a certain behaviour, which implies setting a plan and having a strong desire to go through with it. This came as a response to criticisms that the TPB didn't take into account the motivational aspects of intention (Nuttin, 1987; Bagozzi, 1993). According to these modifications, the Theory of Planned Behaviour is graphically represented in Figure 3.4.

**Figure 3.4:** Modified Theory of Planned Behaviour



Source: Shaw et al. (2007: 37)

In spite of the modifications and the addition of explanatory variables, the Theory of Planned Behaviour can only partially explain ethical consumer behaviour (Shaw et al., 2000; Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006; Shaw, 2005; Dean et al., 2008). Shaw et al. (2000) find that the modified model can explain just 24 per cent of intention to purchase Fair Trade groceries and while the addition of plan and desire improve the explanatory ability of the model, 47 per cent of intention still remains unexplained (Shaw et al., 2007).

The TPB accepts that the intentions of the individual consumer will determine his/her behaviour, but this premise does not prove valid in the context of ethical consumer behaviour. The well documented attitude behaviour gap (see section 3.2.1.1) is the proof. As a result, the empirical application of the TPB framework in its existing form does not allow advancing understandings in ethical consumer behaviour.

Furthermore, the modified models have been tested in specific contexts with an emphasis on the UK. Thus, there is no strong empirical evidence that supports the generalizability of the models in other cultural contexts.

### 3.2.3.3 Other frameworks

Apart from the TPB, other models of behaviour have been proposed (Osterhus, 1997; Thøgersen, 1999; Follows & Jobber, 2000). Both in the models proposed by Osterhus (1997) and Thøgersen (1999) there are two levels of norms that define behaviour; the broad social norms and the specific personal norms, which are internalised social norms. Both frameworks have been influenced by Schwartz's (1977) model of altruistic behaviour. Follows and Jobber (2000) propose a model of environmentally responsible purchase behaviour that is based on the teleological evaluation of ethics. In simpler words, they argue that an environmentally responsible purchase is defined by the consequences of such purchase on the environment and on the individual.

It should be mentioned that in general ethical decision making<sup>10</sup>, many more models can be identified; Ferrell and Gresham, (1985), Rest (1986), Hunt and Vitell (1986), Trevino (1986), Jones (1991), Tan (2002). Due to its wide application, the Hunt and Vitell model is one of dominant frameworks but it has been applied just in the field of

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<sup>10</sup> Business ethics literature and consumer ethics literature (see Chapter 2)



consumer ethics (see Chapter 2, section 2.1). Nevertheless, Chatzidakis and Mitussis (2007) propose an integrated framework based on the models by Hunt and Vitell (1986) and Tan (2002) that could be applied in an ethical consumer situation setting. Chan et al. (2007) also suggest a BYOB framework using the Hunt and Vitell theory.

Even if existing ethical consumer decision making models such as the modified Theory of Planned Behaviour have a satisfactory predictive ability, there is a lot of information that remains unexplained (Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006). These frameworks are social cognition models that assume that attitudes will translate into behavioural intentions (Chatzidakis & Mittusis, 2007). Nonetheless, the well documented appearance of the attitude behaviour gap shows otherwise and, as Follows and Jobber (2000) argue, it could be a matter of refining these models. To achieve this, improvements in understanding are necessary (Shaw, 2005).

Moreover, the applicability of the models has been tested in specific cultural contexts (mostly the UK), a fact that questions the generalisability of the discussed ethical decision making models.

### 3.2.4 Narratives in ethical consumer behaviour

In comparison with the previous streams of research, this is the newest one with the majority of papers published during the last five years. It can be considered the vanguard of ethical consumer research. Such studies seek “*to understand the construction of consumer identity from the discourses of ethical consumption*” (Newholm & Shaw, 2007: 256), aiming at a more profound understanding of ethical consumers. They belong to the interpretivist stream of marketing (Newholm & Shaw, 2007: 259). Interpretivist research’s goal has been traditionally a hermeneutic understanding (Shankar & Goulding, 2001) of consumer experiences in their own terms (Szmigin & Foxall, 2000).

Naturally, ethical consumer studies in this stream follow the qualitative tradition and often phenomenological interviews (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Cherrier, 2005; Cherrier, 2006; Shaw et al., 2006), ethnography (Bekin et al., 2007), consumer essays (Autio et al., 2009) and case studies (Newholm, 2005) are the means for the recollection of primary data.

The main research questions that empirical research tries to answer are:

#### 3.2.4.1 How do ethical consumers behave ethically?

Instead of focusing on specific types of behaviour, certain authors (Newholm, 2002; 2005; Connolly & Prothero, 2003) examined how consumers decide themselves to express their ethical concerns in their consumer behaviour due to the multiplicity and complexity of ethical concerns.

Connolly and Prothero (2003) explore the consumption habits of Irish consumers in relation to their environmental concerns using phenomenological interviews. Their major findings suggest that consumers’ environmental concerns are reflected in their product choices (e.g. avoiding aerosols, buying recycled packaging) and disposals (e.g. recycling, using green bags instead of plastic ones), but not on their consumption levels.

Newholm (2005) adopted a multiple case study methodology to investigate how consumers, that describe themselves as ethical, manage to be ethical in a daunting environment. In other words, what types of projects and strategies they employ to be

consistent with their beliefs. While he identifies certain ethical consumer strategies, he argues the unpredictability of ethical consumer behaviour as a project, bound to the contextual circumstances of the research.

In an earlier study, Newholm and Shaw (2002) examine how ethical concerns are reflected in voluntary simplicity behaviors on the basis of the qualitative findings of focus groups and case studies. A simplified diet (e.g. vegetarianism), moderate or minimal car use, the use of second hand objects are some of the identified facets of voluntary simplicity.

Voluntary simplicity is at the same time a less energy-consuming waste reduction strategy. The study of voluntary simplified communities by Bekin et al. (2007) shows that these communities employ practices such as buying second hand objects, growing their own vegetables, repairing and devising new uses for owned products to cut on the accumulation of unnecessary waste.

The most recent study by Autio et al. (2009) examines the narratives of Finnish adolescents with regards green consumer behaviour. The difference with the aforementioned studies is that the chosen sample is not ethical consumers, but instead young students. Therefore, different postures appear; the ‘antihero’ that is not interested at all in these issues, the ‘heroic tale’ that favors mainstream practices such as organic products consumption and recycling and the ‘anarchist’ who is critical of multinationals and advocate of initiatives such as the Buy Nothing Day<sup>11</sup>.

#### 3.2.4.2 Why do consumers behave ethically?

The other main objective in this stream of research is to discover the underlying motivations behind the ethical actions by looking at the narratives of ethical consumers. The meanings of different types of behaviours were searched:

- ◆ Boycotting: Kozinets and Handelman (1998) focused on the meaning of *boycotting* behaviour using netnographic methodology. While boycotts are considered to be a collective or semi-collective type of action (Shaw &

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<sup>11</sup> Buy Nothing Day is an initiative to cut down on consumption that begun in Canada and now has expanded in more than 65 countries. For more information see [www.adbusters.org/campaigns](http://www.adbusters.org/campaigns)

Newholm, 2007), the discussion of the results reveals that respondents view boycotting as a form of self realization and an expression of uniqueness.

- ♦ Voluntary simplicity: Cherrier (2005) conducted phenomenological interviews with Northern American consumers looking for the hidden meanings behind *voluntary simplicity* practices. She found that voluntary simplicity is a whole lifestyle, where consumers either look for their real self, either reach out for social integration (e.g. fit with partner or friends), or want to be in control of their lives and so of their consumption.
- ♦ Green Shopping Bag/ BYOB: In a later study, Cherrier (2006) adopted the same methodological design but with Australian consumers seeking the meanings in green shopping bag consumption practices. Her results suggest that green bags act as symbols that connect green consumers and also constitute an example to imitate for the rest of the consumers.
- ♦ Boycotting: The meanings attached to positive buying have been examined in two studies. Shaw et al. (2006) concludes that buying ethical alternatives such as Fair Trade is an expression of consumer power in the marketplace. Moreover, they found it to be an action that adds to the power of a larger collective group of ethically concerned consumers. Carey et al. (2008) follow the same line of enquiry and examine the meanings of ethical choices in the family decision making context. They conducted in depth interviews with three families that had a child less than three years old, so that the experience of having a child would be recent. They find that the mothers lost personal and professional status after the birth of their child due to the sacrifices they had to make and that their ethical consumer choices (e.g. buy natural baby products, organic products, Fair Trade products) help them reconstruct their identities and regain self confidence. Furthermore, the experience of having a child brings out more concerns about the products that have a direct impact on the baby; for example nappies.

Interpretive research shows that ethical consumer practices serve as a form to construct an ethical self and distinct ethical consumers from the rest (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Cherrier, 2005; Carey et al., 2008).

Visible objects such as green bags become symbols of belonging to certain groups where consumers share the collective identities of the groups (Cherrier, 2006). Cherrier (2007: 327) argues that “*voluntary simplicity embodies a social movement because it connects different members of a society through a similar arena of interests, norms, personal meanings or values*”. Shaw et al. (2006) discover that ethical consumers perceive themselves as a part of something larger in line with the findings on the anti-brand communities by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001). The question is: “What are these collective identities?”

It has been already mentioned that within the range of ethical consumer behaviours there are contradictions (see Section 3.2.1.5). Some are ethical because they buy and others are ethical because they stopped buying. While in the case of green bags or other ethical commodity alternatives, ethicality is transmitted by the possession of the product, this is not the case for voluntary simplifiers or those that avoid brands. How do they build their collective identities? Cherrier (2007) mentions that the voluntary simplicity movement communicates through publications such as “YES! A Journal of Positive Future”, web sites like the Simple Living Network, e mail conferences. In this way, consumers from around the globe are connected with possibly no face to face interaction among them. Nevertheless, Barnett et al. (2005:24) see distance as a barrier to ‘*maintain a sense of a morally responsible action*’. Then, how different types of ethical consumers build a common collective identity (if such thing indeed is happening) through virtual and personal interface?

The aforementioned thoughts led to the conclusion that there are still areas that require attention.

First of all, according to the post modern theory of consumption, the figure of the consumer is a social construction (Firat, 1991) and so the meanings attached to his behaviour are constantly re-negotiated in his social context. In Cherrier (2005) the meaning of consumption is re-negotiated after destabilizing events in the life of the respondents (e.g. rape, divorce of parents, own divorce). But, any adult average consumer has to take purchase decisions every day of his life. Where do these consumption-related influences come from? How is consumer behaviour re-negotiated in every-day life and within social networks?

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Furthermore, it is widely accepted that consumer behaviour has been studied mainly from the perspective of the individual (Bagozzi, 2000; Grønjøj, 2006). Here, it becomes clear that ethical consumer research has taken the same route. There is a restricted number of studies that treat ethical consumer behaviour as a project carried out by a group (Barnett et al., 2005; Bekin et al., 2007; Low & Davenport, 2007<sup>12</sup>), while there is an increasing number of ethical spaces that serve as outlets of expression for the new consumer movement. Fair Trade cities, campuses, ethical trade organizations (see Body Shop, Triodos Bank), Fair Trade campaigning groups (e.g. Intermon Oxfam, SETEM<sup>13</sup>), ethical consumer websites (see [adbusters.org](http://adbusters.org), [www.alliance21.org](http://www.alliance21.org)) and ethical consumer publications (e.g. The ethical consumer magazine, Opciones), preagriculture villages, cooperatives of consumption are some of the examples. Additionally, none of the existing studies focuses on the personal motivations of the individuals and on the meaning they give to their participation in these ethical spaces and collective projects.

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<sup>12</sup> Barnett et al (2005) and Low and Davenport (2007) choose to focus on the emerging Fair Trade collective spaces

<sup>13</sup> SETEM is a Spanish Non Profit Organization in favour of more fair relationships between North and South. They organize campaigns in favour of the Fair Trade or the “Roba Neta” campaign focusing on the issue of sweatshops

### 3.2.5 Conclusions

In the previous sections, the author attempts to identify the different streams of research that exist currently in ethical consumer behaviour. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the presented literature review has led to some general conclusions.

First, there is an impressive growth in ethical consumer research during the last twenty years. By arranging the empirical studies chronologically, the author could argue that initially the interest of academics was placed on examining the effect of corporate social behaviour on consumer decision making and on providing an ethical (or socially responsible consumer as it is often used) consumer profile. Then, the focus was relocated on proposing models that explain ethical consumer behaviour.

The frequent emergence of the attitude-behaviour gap and the lack of a clear-cut ethical profile showed that previous research attempts to delineate ethical consumers and model ethical consumer decision making provide a static and limited insight in ethical consumer behaviour. Besides that, in both those streams of research (profiling and modeling of ethical consumers), researchers decide what constitutes ethical consumer behaviour with no contribution from the consumers. Defining a constantly evolving phenomenon based on previous research is not sufficient and needs to be complemented to reflect better the reality and the changes that take place. This is the main contribution of the interpretivist stream in ethical consumer behaviour.

Connolly and Prothero (2003) and Newholm (2005) suggest a different logic to approach ethical consumers. While previous research would focus on the general population looking for ethical declarations and trying to correlate them with certain variables (e.g. socio demographic, brand loyalty), these authors focus on small samples of consumers who claim to be ethical and volunteer to the study. Then, they discuss with them their consistencies and inconsistencies, since after all there is no perfect ethical consumer. In this way, there is a more complete image of the ethical consumers and more information is gathered about what they actually do, what they do not do and why.

The revision of the literature showed the need to take a step back, conduct exploratory research and contribute to theory building, since the phenomenon is still evolving and new insights are required. In the following section, the identified gaps are discussed. The present thesis will intend to cover these gaps.

### 3.2.6 Gaps in the Literature

The revision of the literature revealed certain aspects that have not been studied until now:

- Ethical Consumer Behaviour has been studied as an individual project and not as a collective one, even if ethical consumers have started to organize themselves in collective groups, virtual or not. Therefore, a greater insight is needed in order to understand how ethical consumer behaviour is handled as a collective project, which are the motivations of the consumers/participants in the group and the meanings they derive from the participation in such groups.
- Another gap identified is the very narrow insight in the existence and formation of a shared collective identity by ethical consumers. It is argued to exist but is it true? Is there a shared collective identity? How is it defined and formed?
- While ethical consumer decision making models and interpretative research acknowledge the interaction between the consumer and its context, there is limited knowledge on how the different social networks influence an ethical consumer towards bigger decisions (e.g. change his lifestyle or world viewpoint) or smaller decisions (e.g. try a new store or a new food) in everyday life.



### **3.3 Context of Empirical Research on Ethical Consumer Behaviour**

In section 3.2, the emphasis was placed on the content of empirical research. In this section, the context of empirical studies will be taken into consideration.

#### **3.3.1 Cultural contexts**

##### **3.3.1.1 Is the cultural context important?**

The cultural context of research on ethical consumer behaviour is important because it shapes ethical beliefs and moral values (Belk et al., 2005). Indeed, Cherrier (2005) argues that the perceived rightness or wrongness of consumer decisions depends on the context (time and place) of where one lives. For Haanpaa (2007), the social and cultural setting may even define the degree of freedom of individual consumer choices, in accordance with a top-down approach, where ethical consumer behaviour originates from the imposed structural regulations (see Cherrier, 2006).

However, it was observed that while researchers consider the cultural context of the sample employed in the consumer ethics literature (e.g. Rawwas, 1996; Al-Khatib et al., 1997; 2005), the literature review indicates that they do not do so in the ethical consumer behaviour literature.

The Hunt and Vitell model (1986), one of the dominant models in consumer ethics research, includes cultural environment as a crucial background factor that impinge upon the evaluation of ethical issues in consumption. Hence, simply put, culture is important and cultural differences exist in terms of ethical perceptions.

For instance, Rawwas (1994) investigates how accepting Lebanese individuals are of questionable consumer practices in light of the turbulent political situation and terrorism at the time of the research. Among other factors, the importance of religiosity (Vitell & Paolillo, 2003), the experience of civil war (Rawwas et al., 1998) and differences in terms of Hofstede's (1991) dimensions of culture (Rawwas, 2001; Rawwas et al., 2005) were considered as relevant for the formation of cultures that are more or less accepting of ethically disputable consumer situations such as copying intellectual property. Indeed, the Hunt-Vitell model has been applied in various

countries; Ireland, Egypt, Lebanon, U.S., Japan, Hong Kong, Ghana, Australia among others (an extensive review is provided by Vittell, 2003).

However, as mentioned above in the ethical consumer behaviour literature. In general, the authors do not in general consider the cultural implications of their research context. Therefore, the question that arises is: Why is culture taken into account in one branch of the “ethics and consumption” literature and not in the other? In the following subsections this question will be further discussed and the contexts where research has been conducted will be presented.

### 3.3.1.2 The context of existing empirical research

Some of the authors justify their choice of country. For instance, De Pelsmacker et al. (2005a, b, 2006) and Vantomme et al. (2005) based their studies on *Belgian* samples because they see the Belgian consumer as representing the average EU consumer.

Although, some cross country studies also take into account the cultural context (see section 3.3.1.3), most empirical findings are not examined in light of their cultural contexts.

A glance at Table 3.3 quickly demonstrates that available studies were carried out in the UK or the US as mentioned throughout section 3.2. Some studies have been carried out mostly in Central and Northern Europe, but there is very limited evidence on the situation of the ethical consumer movement in Southern Europe. In Spain, for example, the little empirical research that was identified has mostly focused on ecological consumption and on segmenting the ecological market<sup>14</sup>.

Moreover, the identified studies pertaining to the interpretative stream of research were mainly conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries (UK, Australia, U.S., and Ireland)<sup>15</sup>.

Although Table 3.3 includes only academic studies, it should be mentioned that there are a number of marketing consultancy and N.P.O reports that describe the ethical spend situation in the UK (Key Note, 2000; MORI, 2000 in Cowe & Williams, 2000; Ethical Consumerism Report, 2007; 2008; Mintel, 2005; 2007; 2009) and the US

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<sup>14</sup> From the identified studies only one (Goig, 2007) is published in English.

<sup>15</sup> Except the study by Autio et al. (2009) that took place in Finland.

(Cone/Roper, 1999) and an annual report on the Fair Trade situation in Spain published online by Setem.

**Table 3.3:** Country Context of Academic Research

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>AUTHORS</b>
<b>Australasia</b>	Brenton & Hacken (2006); Cherrier, (2006); Bocoock, Dresler-Hawke & Mansvelt (2007)
<b>Belgium</b>	De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp (2005), De Pelsmacker, Janssens, Sterckx & Mielants, (2005), De Pelsmacker, Janssens, Sterckx & Mielants (2006), Vantomme, Geuens, Houwer & De Pelsmacker, (2005)
<b>Canada</b>	Follows & Jober (2000); Cleveland, Kalamas & Laroche, (2005); Arnot, Boxall & Cash, (2006)
<b>Denmark</b>	Thøgersen (1999); Grønhøj (2006)
<b>Finland</b>	Uusitalo & Oksanen (2004); Heiskanen, (2005); Haanpää (2007); Autio, Heiskanen & Heinonen, (2009)
<b>France</b>	Ozcaglar-Toulouse, Shiu & Shaw (2006); Dubuisson-Quellier, (2007)
<b>Germany</b>	Balderjahn, (1988); Inkamp, (2004)
<b>Ireland</b>	Connoly & Prothero (2003)
<b>Spain</b>	Sanchez , Grande, Gil & Gracia (2001), Barreiro, López, Losada & Sanmartín (2002); Vicente & Mediano, (2002); Fraj & Martinez, (2004); Fernandez & Merino (2005); Goig, (2007)
<b>Hungary</b>	Dombos, (2008)
<b>Thailand</b>	Johri & Sahasakmontri (1998)
<b>India</b>	Jain & Kaur, (2004)
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Strong, (1996; 1997); Bhate & Lawler, (1997); Shaw & Clarke, (1999), Shaw, Shiu & Clarke, (2000); Bedford, (2000); Newholm, (2000); Carrigan & Attalla,(2001); Shaw & Newholm, (2002b); Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics & Bohlen (2003); Carrigan, Szmigin & Wright, (2004); Memery, Megicks & Williams, (2005); Shaw, Grehan, Shiu, Hassan & Thompson (2005); Newholm (2005); Barnet, Cloke, Clarke & Malpass (2005);

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	Shaw, Newholm & Dickinson, (2006a); Shaw, Hogg, Wilson, Shui & Hassan (2006b), Coles & Harris, (2006); Chatzidakis, Hibbert & Smith (2006); McEachern, Schröder, Willock, Whitelock & Mason, (2007); Shaw, Shiu, Hassan, Bekin & Hogg, (2007); Shaw (2007); Bekin, Carrigan & Szmigin (2007); Carey, Shaw & Shiu, (2008); Dean, Raats & Shepherd, (2008)
<b>United States</b>	Berkowitz & Lutterman,(1968); Anderson & Cunningham, (1972); Webster,(1975); Miller & Sturdivant, (1977); Samdahl & Robertson, (1989); Burke, Milberg & Smith, (1993); Roberts, (1996); Creyer & Ross, (1997); Roberts & Bacon, (1997); Osterhus (1997); Mohr & Webb, (1998); Kozinets & Handelman, (1998); Folkes & Kamins, (1999); Straughan & Roberts, (1999); Strahilevitz,(1999); Baron,(1999); Ahluwalia, Burnkrant & Unnava,(2000); Dobscha & Ozanne (2001); Sen & Bhattacharya, (2001); Mohr, Webb & Harris, (2001); Klein & Dawar, (2004); Ingram, Skinner & Taylor, (2005); Ricks,(2005); Mohr & Webb, (2005); Giacalone, Paul & Jurkiewicz, (2005); Cherrier (2005); Huneke (2005); Klintman, (2006); Miller & Gregan-Paxton, (2006)
<b>China</b>	Chan, Wong & Leung (2007)

Elaborated by the author

Table 3.3 clearly shows an overpresentation of Anglo-saxon contexts creating concerns whether research on the ethical consumer is conducted in non-English-speaking countries and is published in English.

### 3.3.1.3 Studies across countries

A number of studies collected primary data in different national contexts (see Table 3.4). In some cases, the objective was to increase the external validity of the study (Wagner-Tsukamoto & Tadajewski, 2006). In others, the purpose was to check for differences among the various contexts. For instance, Bhate (2001) assumed that consumers in economically developed countries such as the UK would be more concerned about the environment than in developing countries like India, since the main concern in developing countries is the rapid economic growth. Nonetheless, this hypothesis was rejected. Kalafatis et al. (1999) carried out their research in the UK and Greece because of the very different market conditions in these countries. They found that societal influences in the UK (various pressures groups, availability of products) help form stronger ethical product purchase intentions.

Finally, a small number of studies examine the impact of cultural context on ethical consumer behaviour. Of these, Belk et al. (2005) and Auger et al. (2004a; 2004b; 2007) concluded that culture does not influence consumers' ethical stands. Nevertheless, it is likely that the sampling decisions employed affected the results of the study. In the case of Auger et al (2004a), the comparison is among Australian MBA students with Australian Amnesty International supporters and Chinese undergraduates. According to their results, a predictor for ethical consumer behaviour is the association with ethical groups such as Amnesty International, but there is only one such group in the sample. Thus, a cross-country comparison of groups that are similar not in terms of socio demographic profiles, but in terms of variables that could predict ethical consumer behaviour such as the affiliation to ethical groups found in Auger (2004a; 2004b; 2007) could provide more useful insights.

The aforementioned studies do not provide conclusions on whether certain cultures are more ethical than others. Most importantly, the concentration on specific contexts and the limited empirical evidence from cross-cultural studies do not allow understandings on how 'ethics in consumption' is perceived across different cultural contexts. Thus, there is lack of information on the ethical projects and the derived meanings in different cultural contexts.

**Table 3.4: Cross- Cultural Studies**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<b>Australia, China, Germany, India, Spain, Turkey, Sweden, U.S.</b>	Belk, Devinney & Eckhardt (2005)
<b>Germany, U.S.</b>	Wagner-Tsukamoto & Tadjewski, (2006)
<b>Australasia, China</b>	Auger, Deviney & Louviere (2004a; b); Auger & Deviney (2007)
<b>UK, Greece</b>	Kalafatis, Pollard, East & Tsogas (1999)

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<b>UK, Greece, India</b>	Bhate, (2001)
<b>Germany, UK</b>	Varul, (2008)
<b>Holand, U.S.</b>	Sriram & Forman (1993)

Elaborated by the author

### 3.3.2 Business Practices and Product Categories

It was considered useful to look at the product categories and business practices where the empirical research had been carried out, since behind every act of making a specific purchase lays a different decision process in terms of information search, criteria set and the level of involvement in the purchase (Kotler et al., 2002: 211). Hence, there is an important difference between purchases of different types of products i.e. the purchase of Fair Trade coffee or the purchase of a hybrid car.

One of the main features of the existing literature on ethical consumer behaviour is the frequent repetition of the same purchase context across studies. The identified studies tend to examine specific product categories in combination with specific ethical issues, mostly because sectors tend to be associated with these ethical issues. For instance, the athletic shoes industry is often examined in relation to unethical labour practices, the coffee industry is associated with the fair trade movement and the cosmetic and toiletries sector with animal testing. The most frequent combinations of product category and corporate practice are: 'Athletic shoes and Unethical Labour Practices', 'Grocery Shopping and Fair Trade', 'Coffee and Fair Trade' and 'Cosmetics and Toiletries- Animal Testing'. The main papers are identified and organised according to product category and business practices in Table 3.5.

In line with Newholm and Shaw's comments (2007: 258), it was observed that much of the existing empirical research has focused on Fair Trade. Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al. (2006) justify their selection of fair trade products because of the constant growth of this sector, and also because of the possibility to build on previous research in the context of Fair Trade grocery shopping (Shaw et al., 2000; Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Shaw et al., 2005). Indeed, Fair Trade is considered as one of the most popular and more mainstream ethical alternatives in the marketplace (Nicholls & Opal, 2005). Fair Trade products are available in specialised retailers like Third World Shops (e.g. Oxfam), but also in bigger supermarket chains.

**Table 3.5:** Product Categories and Ethical/Unethical Practices that have been examined

<b>PRODUCT CATEGORY</b>	<b>BUSINESS PRACTICES (ETHICAL/ UNETHICAL)</b>	<b>AUTHORS</b>
<b>Athletic Shoes</b>	<b>Unethical Labour practices<sup>16</sup></b>	Ahluwalia, Burnkrant & Unnava (2000); Auger, Devinney & Louviere, (2004a; 2004b); Mohr & Webb, (2005); Ricks, (2005); Fernandez & Merino (2005); Brenton & Hacken, (2006).
<b>Apparel</b>	<b>Unethical Labour Practices</b>	Dickson, (2005); Iwanow, McEachern & Jeffrey, (2005); Shaw, Hogg, Wilson, Shui & Hassan (2006b)
<b>Cosmetics and Toiletries</b>	<b>Animal Testing</b>	Sriram & Forman, (1993); Johri & Sahasakmontri, (1998); Auger, Devinney & Louviere (2004a; b); Fernandez and Merino (2005)
<b>Grocery Shopping</b>	<b>Fair Trade</b>	Shaw & Clarke, (1999); Memery, Megicks & Williams, (2005); Shaw, Grehan, Shiu, Hassan & Thompson (2005); Ozcaglar-Toulouse, Shiu & Shaw (2006)
<b>Coffee</b>	<b>Fair Trade</b>	De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp (2005), De Pelsmacker, Janssens, Sterckx & Mielants, (2005), De Pelsmacker, Janssens, Sterckx & Mielants (2006)
<b>Milk</b>	<b>Recyclable Packaging</b>	Sriram & Forman, (1993)
<b>Washing Machines</b>	<b>Energy Efficiency</b>	Sriram & Forman, (1993)
<b>Informatics</b>	<b>Helping the third world Antitrust</b>	Fernandez & Merino (2005)

<sup>16</sup> Child Labour, Sweatshops, Racial Discrimination



<b>Electricity</b>	<b>Community Investment/Environment</b>	Fernandez & Merino (2005)
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Elaborated by the author

Furthermore, there is an increased awareness about the Fair Trade’s concept (Nicholls, 2002). Both factors have unquestionably contributed to its growth (Strong, 1996) and according to recent data, Fair Trade spend in UK reached £458 million in 2007 experiencing a growth of 61% in just one year (Ethical Consumerism Report, 2008). Therefore, it seems that the marketing attractiveness of Fair Trade elicits marketing and academic research. However, most of the research has focused on two product categories, coffee and grocery shopping, while other Fair Trade products also occupy a large market share such as bananas (47% of market share in Switzerland), flowers (28% of market share in Switzerland), honey, tea (2% in Germany), sugar<sup>17</sup> (Fair Trade in Europe, 2005).

Then, the most common example of unethical corporate practices is the use of sweatshops and child labour. One possible explanation is the increased consumer awareness about these issues and the consequent emergence of unethical stereotypes such as Nike (Brenton & Hacken, 2006). Most research about unethical labour practices uses athletic shoes or clothing in general as the context. Ricks (2005) says he chooses athletic shoes because of their extensive use in the literature.

Therefore, it seems that academics chose those combinations for two reasons. Initially, because they are ethical and unethical examples that consumers are quite familiar with. Second, some authors such as Ricks (2005) or Ozcaglar-Toulouse (2006) also intended to continue certain research traditions and to build on the existing empirical evidence.

Research on ethical consumer behaviour has been also identified in the services sectors. Ethical investment (Anand & Cowton, 1993; Beal & Goyen, 1998) and ethical tourism (Weeden, 2002) are growing lines of investigation in ethical consumer research. Nevertheless, ethical consumer decision making do not exclusively refer to specific product and service categories, since information and ethical rankings of

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<sup>17</sup> Figures for 2004.

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companies are offered for a wide range of sectors from paint, toys, chocolate to washing machines and petrol (Ethical Consumer 100 May/June 2006; Ethical Consumer 102 September/October 2006; Ethical Consumer 103 November/December 2006; Ethical Consumer 105 March/April 2007).

So, from the one hand, research could be expanded to other product categories. On the other hand, the fact that most of the identified studies place their focus on specific product purchases, results in examining fragments of an ethical consumer's purchase strategy and lifestyle chosen by the researcher. Thus, only specific aspects of ethical consumer behaviour tend to be explored at the expense of a more holistic understanding of the ethical consumer experience.

### 3.3.3 Gaps in the Literature

The examination of the context of current empirical research led to following conclusions:

- There is a need to expand research to geographical and cultural contexts outside UK, U.S. and Northern Europe and to take into account the implications of conducting research in specific settings.
- Such research should focus on understanding rather than measuring. As Newholm and Shaw (2007) propose, research should contrast “*the varied ethical consumption discourses that arise in different cultures*” (p. 264).
- Excessive focus has been placed on the examination of specific types of behaviours (e.g. anti-sweat clothing purchase, Fair Trade purchase). This offers insights on specific aspects of an ethical consumer’s reality resulting in a limited understanding of the holistic ethical consumer experience.

### 3.4 Methodologies that have been employed

As already shown, four streams of research were identified in the general ethical consumer behaviour literature. In the first three streams of research, the research strategies that dominate are the experimental design and the survey recollecting mainly quantitative data. In the fourth one, solely qualitative methodologies are encountered. The subsections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 will briefly present the employed methodological strategies, whereas the subsection 3.4.3 will discuss these methodological choices indicating whether there is room for methodological contributions.

#### 3.4.1 Quantitative Methodologies

##### 3.4.1.1 Surveys

Different types of surveys have been used by researchers in the study of the ethical consumer. The completion of the questionnaires varies. In some cases, researchers hand them over to the respondents and they have to complete them themselves (e.g. Bhate, 2001). In other cases, the completion of the questionnaire takes the form of a structured interview face to face (e.g. Bhate & Lawler, 1997) or by phone (e.g. Klein et al., 2004). In these cases, there is contact and interaction between the respondents and the researchers. In other cases, the researchers and the respondents never interact. Mail (e.g. Creyer & Ross, 1997<sup>18</sup>; Osterhus, 1997; Shaw & Shiu, 2002; De Pelsmacker et al., 2006) and online questionnaires (e.g. De Pelsmacker et al., 2005a; Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006) fall into this type of data recollection.

In terms of design, the questionnaires generally include constructs measured with rating scale questions (e.g. Creyer & Ross, 1997; Bhate, 2001; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Klein et al., 2004; De Pelsmacker et al., 2006), while in a few exceptions they have some open questions (e.g. Bhate & Lawler, 1997).

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<sup>18</sup> In the case of Creyer and Ross (1997) questionnaires were sent home with the children so that the parents could fill them in.

### 3.4.1.2 Experiments

Experimental designs are also often employed, especially in the first stream of research. Empirical studies collect data through experiments in order to test the effect of information about corporate conduct on consumers' opinions and purchasing decisions (e.g. Henion, 1972; Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Strahilevitz, 1999; Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Sen & Bhattacharaya, 2001; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Mohr & Webb, 2005; Ricks, 2005; Brenton & Hacken, 2006). Other independent variables whose effect has been manipulated by the researchers were the type of business practice (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Mohr & Webb, 2005; Ricks, 2005), the product type (Strahilevitz, 1999), customer commitment (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Ingram et al., 2005).

The identified experimental studies present similarities in terms of design. More specifically, they are all laboratory experiments following a similar pattern. Most researchers prepare a contrived stimulus like a newspaper article (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Klein & Dawar, 2004) or a news release (Ricks, 2005) or scenarios (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Mohr & Webb, 2005) about a real (Sen & Bhattacharaya, 2001; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Ricks, 2005; Brenton & Hacken, 2006) or a fictitious company (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Mohr & Webb, 2005).

Only the study of Brenton and Hacken (2006) differs, because they use real information from Oxfam campaigns against Nike.

In terms of test units, researchers almost exclusively use university students (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Strahilevitz, 1999; Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Sen & Bhattacharaya, 2001; Brenton & Hacken, 2006). The justification in some cases was that the sample was the key demographic for the product used as the focus of the study. However, Brenton and Hacken (2006) accept that their sampling technique might raise issues of external validity, because their sample is not representative of the general population, a fact also criticised by Wagner (1997). Also, it is interesting to mention that in almost half of these cases (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Sen & Bhattacharaya, 2001) the university students have a business or economic studies background.

Finally, another similarity in the identified studies is in the dependent variables and the respective measurement scales. The consumers' attitudes towards the company and the brand, feelings towards the company and purchasing intentions are measured. In most cases, the measurement of these variables is done by 2 to 3 item semantic

differential or rating scales. Measurement scales are different in choice modelling experiments where consumer preferences are identified indirectly by multi-attribute evaluations of products and not by direct rating scale questions. Choice experiments in ethical consumer literature examine the willingness of consumer to pay for social features (Auger et al, 2004b; 2007; Fernandez & Merino, 2005).

### **3.4.2 Towards a more qualitative understanding**

While the aforementioned methodological strategies are very popular, other researchers have made important efforts for a more deep and qualitative insight in ethical consumer behaviour. Even if qualitative techniques are not seen only in the interpretivist stream of research, a variety of original and interesting methodological designs are found within this stream.

#### **3.4.2.1 Focus Groups**

In most studies, focus groups have been combined with another technique or they serve as the starting point for further, more quantitative research. This is the case of Fernando & Merino (2005), De Pelsmacker et al., (2005b; 2006) and Johri and Sahasakmontri, (1998). These authors intend to get an initial insight and define the main constructs for the further completion of their studies.

Nevertheless, there are academic papers based only on data gathered in focus groups discussions (Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Memery et al., 2005; Shaw et al., 2005). Their similar characteristics are purposive small samples of ethical consumers such as subscribers of the Ethical Consumer magazine (Shaw & Clarke, 1999) or consumers of the Scottish Cooperative Society (Shaw et al., 2005).

#### **3.4.2.2 Phenomenological Interviews**

This is the most frequent technique in the interpretivist stream of ethical consumer behaviour (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Cherrier, 2005; Cherrier, 2006; Shaw et al., 2006). These are based on the principle that social reality can be understood from the

experiences of individuals of that reality (Ardley, 2005). Cherrier (2005) provides guidelines to prepare and conduct such interviews.

#### 3.4.2.3 Other approaches

The dynamic evolution of the phenomenon invites a greater methodological variety. Thence, within interpretive research, the doctoral student finds:

- netnography<sup>19</sup> (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998)
- ethnography (Bekin et al., 2007)
- consumer essays (Autio et al., 2009)
- case studies (Newholm, 2005)

#### 3.4.3 Critique of methodologies

It is important to discuss the different methodological approaches that have been employed, because there is some disagreement and debate as to the most suitable methodological approaches when studying ethical consumer behaviour. Ulrich and Sarasin (1995) argue that consumers will always give misleading answers and hide their true opinions as to ethical purchase behaviour independently of the methodology used. However, there are authors that are more specific as to which methods are unable to offer reliable empirical evidence.

In line with Crane (1999), Auger et al (2004b, 2007) heavily criticise the traditional survey methods, which as they mention, have been employed in nearly all studies of consumers' willingness to engage in ethical behaviour. The problems related to the survey method are the emergence of social bias, generally common in the social sciences and especially when studying sensitive topics (Fisher, 1993), and the limited ability of numerical and rating scales to express ethical consumer opinions.

Then, laboratory experiments (including choice modelling) (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Strahilevitz, 1999; Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Sen & Bhattacharaya, 2001; Auger et al., 2004a; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Mohr & Webb, 2005; Ricks, 2005; Fernandez &

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<sup>19</sup> Also known as online ethnography. To explain the process, Kozinets and Handelman (1998) observed online consumer communities and then conducted cyber interviews.

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Merino, 2005; Brenton & Hacken, 2006) only test the relationship of specific variables and do not draw information from the natural setting of decisions. They provide useful knowledge, but fragmented. So they fail to provide a more holistic view of the ethical consumer behaviour phenomenon and to explain the attitude behaviour gap.

In recent times there has been a growing emphasis on the use of qualitative methods to collect information focusing on smaller and more intensive samples (e.g. Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Newholm, 2005; Cherrier, 2006) due to the depth of understanding generated. This agrees with Clavin and Lewis's (2005) suggestion that qualitative research is more suitable when the focus is consumers' ethical views. In addition, Ozcaglar et al (2006), who originally preferred the quantitative route of TPB based on the previous work of Shaw, argue that the existing model omits a number of factors which, if included, may further improve the TPB.

It could be argued that latest research (referring to the interpretivistic stream of research) has emerged to cover gaps that previous research created; lack of an holistic approach to ethical consumer behaviour, limited contribution of consumers to choosing opinions from preexisting lists of answers, arbitrary definitions of ethical consumer behaviour according to the subjectivity of each researcher (see section 3.2.1.2), focus on convenient samples such as students that do not represent ethical consumers. Previous research intended to describe ethical consumers, to identify them within larger populations, but not to understand them and the meanings attached to their actions. Therefore contributions should be directed towards that direction.

Even so, qualitative research receives critiques. For instance, Crane (1999) argues that social desirability bias may equally affect qualitative methods, even if it is better handled due to their inherent flexibility. This, he suggests could be solved through the "*use of multiple data sources or triangulation*" (p.243).

Furthermore, a look at the employed qualitative methodologies shows that most empirical evidence is static, representing consumer opinions in a specific moment. Only two examples of ethnography were found (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Bekin et al., 2007), which shows a need for more longitudinal empirical evidence.



### **3.4.4 Gaps in the literature**

In general, it could be argued that a great methodological variety is encountered, especially since researchers turned to more qualitative methods in order to understand better the ethical consumer. However, there are a few areas where more attention should be placed.

The lack of understanding in ethical consumer behaviour points the need to continue with the qualitative tradition. To do so, a combination of data sources should be used to overcome the emergence of bias in line with Crane's suggestion (1999). Given the limited longitudinal empirical evidence, already employed techniques such as ethnography or new tactics such as diaries, weekly interviews could be employed.

### 3.6 The issue of the attitude-behaviour gap

As it was seen throughout the literature review, the emergence of the attitude-behaviour gap in ethical consumer research is well documented (e.g. Carrigan & Attala, 2001; Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Auger et al., 2004; Chatzidakis et al., 2007). To explain it, different perspectives have been adopted. For Ulrich and Sarasin (1995) it is a matter of people not telling the truth. For some authors (Crane, 1999; Auger et al., 2004b, 2007) it is a matter of choosing the right methodological approach or a combination of them, while for others (e.g. Follows & Jobber, 2000; Shaw & Shiu, 2002) models have to improve and gain in predictive ability.

This section serves as a summary of the different research findings and suggested explanations around the emergence of the attitude behaviour gap. In order to be explicit, the attitude behaviour gap is defined as the discrepancy between respondents' claims that they will buy ethical products and their actual purchase behaviour. A definite weakness of most studies is that respondents are not put in a life like consumer situation, so maybe they answer yes to everything because they want to seem good or because they really think that they will do it. Here, it is assumed that consumers are not responding the way they do to present a good image of themselves. It is assumed that they are interested in ethical issues. What impedes them from being ethical even if they want to?

- The issue of information: As already discussed, one of the main obstacles when buying ethical products is the lack of information about these products. A number of studies found that consumers would like better product labelling (Sen & Bhacattarraya, 2001; Carrigan et al, 2001; 2004; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). Other authors claim that consumers are overwhelmed by excessive information (Shaw & Clarke, 1999) and tend to question the credibility of the information sources (Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). Nevertheless, independently of the quantity of available information, the significant distance between the producer and the final consumer in the modern production system means that "*a fully informed consumer is unattainable*" (Newholm & Shaw, 2007: 258).

- Scepticism concerning companies' motives: This is related to the aforementioned issue of information. A number of studies find that in general consumers do not know for sure whether companies are actually ethical or not, nor are they aware of the real motives behind company's seemingly ethical actions (Mohr & Webb, 1998; Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Indeed, many consumers consider ethical activities as nothing more than a marketing ploy (Fernandez & Merino, 2004). This leads to scepticism and cynicism. Companies are all considered unethical to some degree and more interested in boosting profits (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Shaw et al., 2005).
- Customer commitment: A number of studies suggest that customer commitment to a product can be the overriding factor in the final purchasing decision, even in cases of unethical corporate behaviour (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Ingram et al., 2005). Furthermore, it can lead to selective processing of the information about the company and the product. Ahluwalia et al. (2000) refer to this as the information processing bias, saying that high commitment consumers tend to believe positive information about their favourite brand and ignore the negative messages.
- Customer's support of the ethical practice and relativity of ethics: According to the postmodern view of ethics "*what seems good or ethical for one [consumer] may not be so for another*" Cherrier (2007: 322). Hence, it is important to consider what ethical issues each individual consumer supports and whether there is a congruence between the morality/immorality of a company and the self perception of a consumer (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Shaw et al., 2002). Moreover, consumers might concentrate on single issues of concerns like anti-child labour, what Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004: 220) call the "*practice of selective ethics*".
- Stages of change (see also Transtheoretical Model. Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984). Mohr et al. (2001) claim that consumers usually undergo a slow process of change so that while they may be interested in ethical issues, they do not change their behaviour at once but in definable stages. Hence, consumers' taking action largely depends on the phase in their development ('precontemplators', 'contemplators', 'action group', 'maintainers'). Freestone

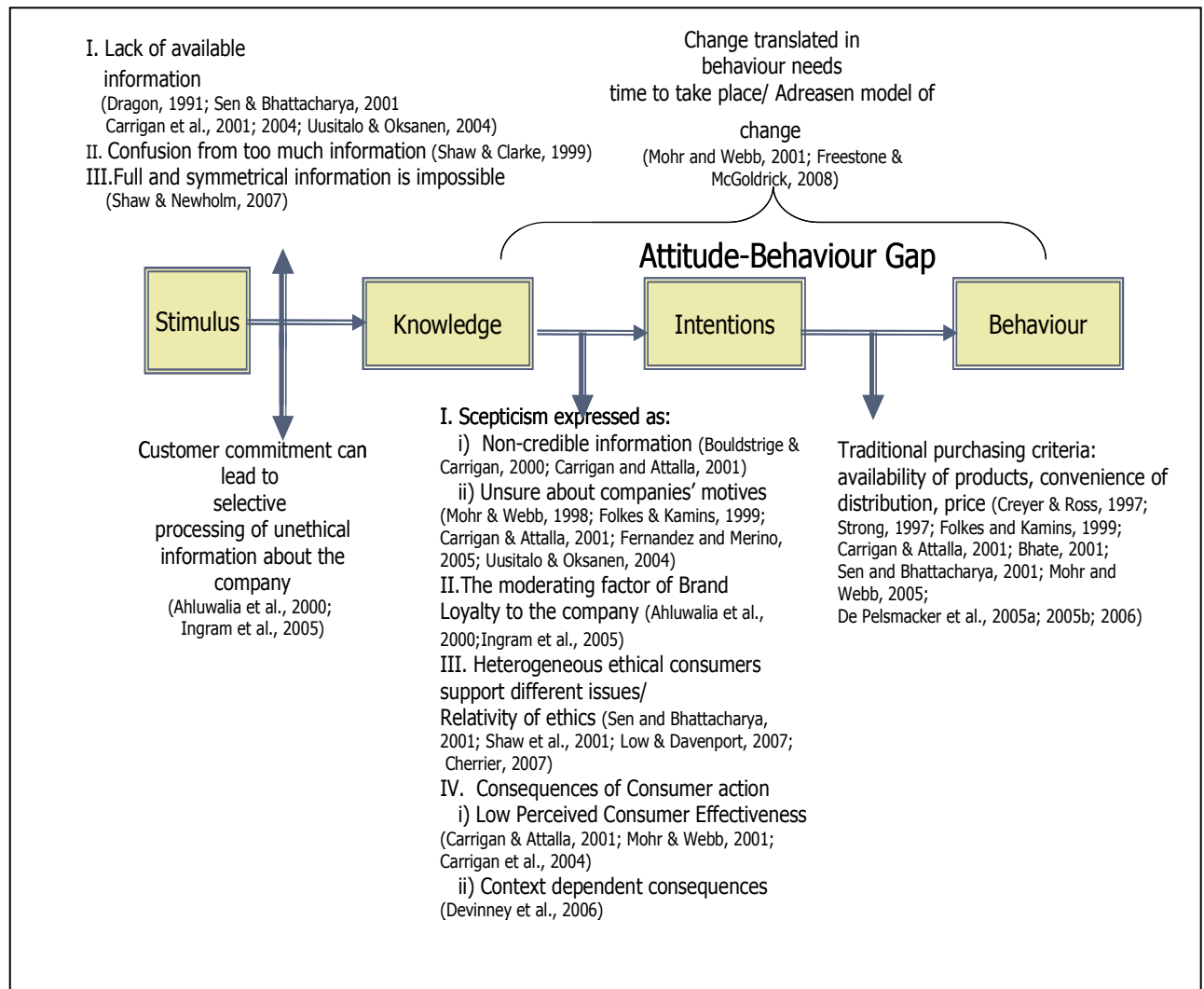
and McGoldrick (2008) apply the same model in a longitudinal study to test consumers as they move along the phases of ethical concern. They found that individuals are gradually developing “*more socially conscientious mindsets*” (p. 461).

- Traditional purchasing criteria: The complexity of ethical consumer behaviour increases when we take into account that the purchasing decision involves the evaluation of a bunch of different attributes. This has already been discussed. To remind, certain studies (e.g. Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) argue that when the decision involves a trade-off between ethics and traditional purchasing criteria (price, quality, and availability), consumers might compromise on ethics.
- Consequences of consumer action: An issue that has been frequently raised as inhibiting ethical consumer behaviour is the societal impact that it is perceived to have. Low effectiveness of consumer actions is quite common in the ethical consumer literature (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Mohr et al., 2001; Carrigan et al., 2004) in that consumers feel that their efforts make little real effect, especially in the case of ‘boycotting’, probably because the act of boycotting is perceived as an individual action (Newholm & Shaw, 2007).

Moreover, the consequences of action are considered as relative according to the context they impact on. Auger et al. (2004a) and Devinney et al. (2006) suggest that although in western countries sweatshops are frowned upon, in Asian countries they are more acceptable because otherwise workers would not have any kind of income. So, boycotting on an anti-sweat basis can sometimes create more problems than solutions.

These issues are diagrammatically represented in Figure 3.6. They are organised according to the phase they might appear in the buying decision process.

**Figure 3.5:** Summary of empirical findings that explain the emergence of the attitude behaviour gap



Elaborated by the author

Chapter 3 has examined and reviewed the empirical research concerning the phenomenon of ethical consumer behaviour, drawing from different areas of research. During the review of the literature, different gaps were identified in the body of knowledge. These gaps will be further discussed in the following chapter. Once having identified where there is room for theoretical and methodological contributions, the research questions that guide the doctoral thesis will be introduced.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

# **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

## Chapter 4: Research Objectives & Research Questions

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### 4.0 Introduction

The revision of the literature summarised the existing knowledge and led to the identification of the gaps in the body of knowledge. In this chapter, the author will present a brief overview of the literature followed by the identified gaps in the literature. Next, the research questions that underlie this research project are formulated as based on those specific aspects of research which remain unexamined.

### 4.1 Brief Overview of research on the ethical consumer

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, most empirical evidence on ethical consumer behaviour is found during the last thirty years. During this period the focus of research has evolved. Research has progressed from the initial emphasis on identifying the ethical consumers, to a much later focus on understanding them.

Initially, the focus of research was on marketing and commercial interests. Demand for social responsibility demonstrated through boycotts like those against Nestlé (1977) and later against Shell (1995), were showing that there are consumers that take their role as citizens seriously and want to protest through what they buy or do not buy. So, in the beginning the question was “Who is the ethical consumer and when does he react?” First studies were oriented towards traditional marketing concerns such as:

- Can these concerned consumers be delineated according to socio demographic characteristics and so have a clear target group?
- Will they pay more for products with ethical attributes (not use of child labour, organic, Fair Trade)?
- What social issues matter most to them?

Nevertheless, the findings of these studies were either inconclusive or did not seem to represent reality. While consumers professed to take into consideration ethical concerns in their purchase decisions, market figures told otherwise. This phenomenon was named by Cowe and Williams (2000) as the 30:3 syndrome; one third of consumers claim to care about ethics, but the market share for ethical products is no more than 3%. Such observation raised doubts with regards the suitability of the employed methodologies and underlined the need for more sophisticated research methods that would overcome consumers' tendency to misrepresent their real behaviour (Crane, 1999; Auger et al., 2004).

The main outcomes were two:

1. While there are consumers that purchase on the basis of ethical concerns, their number is less than research might initially suggest. Comparing the results of studies and the reality in the market identifies the existence of a words/deeds inconsistency.
2. While there are consumers that are guided by ethical considerations in their purchases, very little is known about them.

These led to a move of the focus of research towards an interpretivist approach. Such evolution is only recent and constitutes the vanguard in ethical consumer behaviour studies.

Along with the focus of research, the preferred methodological designs changed. Emphasis has evolved from quantitative methodologies to qualitative designs and from large, random samples to smaller, purposive samples that could provide a deeper understanding. As very little was known about ethical consumers, samples in the first studies were often random with the intention of representing larger populations. The objective was to find within those populations, the consumers that would pay more for products with social features or those that would change purchase patterns if companies were irresponsible towards society.

Instead, more recent research focuses on small samples of cases that could be a rich source of in-depth information (among others Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Newholm, 2005; Memery et al., 2005; Cherrier, 2005; 2006; Carey et al., 2008). In these studies, the samples were selected because of having adopted some type or types of ethical behaviour or because of

being involved in some kind of related ethical activity. For instance, Shaw and Clarke (1999) chose their sample because they were subscribers to an ethical UK publication.

This methodological swift is due to that quantitative techniques and random probability sampling at this stage will not yield satisfactory answers, because “*much more research has been carried out in order for marketers to delineate the ethical consumer than for ethical concerns and aspirations to be understood*” (Newholm & Shaw, 2007: 255). So, the conceptual and methodological focus of recent research is not anymore on identifying ethical consumers but on understanding them.

## **4.2 Gaps in the Existing Knowledge on Ethical Consumer Behaviour**

The present thesis will intend to contribute towards a greater understanding of the ethical consumer. Even if researchers have made remarkable progress to the knowledge base in the area of ethical consumer behaviour, the literature review showed that there is room for further advances in the study of the changing ethical consumer.

This section highlights the identified gaps in the body of knowledge that emerged during the review of the literature and proposes recommendations to fill them. Even if all gaps cannot be fully covered with a single study, the intention of the thesis is to contribute and advance the existing knowledge in the identified specific areas.

### **4.2.1 Ethical Consumer Behaviour has been examined mostly as an individual project despite the emergence of ethical collective projects**

Ethical consumer research presents a clear preference towards the use of individualist approaches (Brinkman & Peattie, 2008). Except few studies (Grønhøj, 2006; Bekin et al., 2007; Carey et al. 2009), most research that was found has been limited to the ethical consumer activities of individuals.

These studies assume that ethical consumer projects are carried out by single individuals in spite of the growing popularity of organised communities that choose to participate in ethical consumer behaviour collective projects.

In recent years, more cause groups rise and consumers have started to organize themselves in physical and virtual communities that support different issues and forms of ethical behaviour. Barnett et al. (2005) and Low and Davenport (2007) talk about voluntary ethical spaces such as Fair Trade organizations, Fair Trade cities, universities, school boards. Cherrier (2007) mentions the existence of virtual communities of voluntary simplicity, whereas the Slow Food cities of the homonymous movement have been largely ignored by researchers (see section 2.1.2).

Therefore, a first recommendation would be to consider communities that carry out group projects of ethical consumer behaviour and complement to the sole focus on individual ethical behaviours. In specific, there is little, if any, information about:

- How ethical consumption is treated as a group project?
- Why individuals participate in ethical consumer groups? What meanings do they derive from such behaviours?

#### **4.2.2 More attention should be placed on how the interaction of the ethical consumer with his context defines his behaviours**

While ethical decision making models and interpretative research acknowledge the interaction of the consumer with his context, the need for more information of qualitative nature is identified. More specifically, the existing empirical evidence does not offer answers on how the social networks where an ethical consumer participates define his behaviours.

As Cherrier (2007: 323) argues:

*“Consuming ethically links consumers to family members, friends, the state, and the market. Thus, consumers’ degree of ethical involvement depends not only on their particular aims and personal (desired) identity but also on their cultural background, personal histories, commitment to others’ needs, and overall social context”.*

Simply put, the ethical consumer cannot be seen as an individual that acts and decides alone, freed from influences. His participation in social networks of different kinds

might make him reconsider decisions, ideas and behaviours. Thus, consumption should be seen both as a social and individual experience (Carú & Cova, 2003).

In that line of research, the studies by Grønhøj (2006) and Carey et al. (2008) were encountered. They put emphasis on the processes of the family decision making and the impact of family dynamics on ethical consumer behaviour. However, more is left to be explored especially since new ethical spaces emerge.

So, the renegotiation of meanings and behaviours for the ethical consumer that participates in such spaces constitutes the second recommendation to be made. This suggestion is in line with what Newholm & Shaw propose (2007: 264).

#### **4.2.3 Fragmentation of the ethical consumer research at the expense of a holistic understanding**

Past research on ethical consumer behaviour has been fragmented and mainly research-driven. Existing findings often refer to specific expressions of ethical consumer behaviour such as Fair Trade shopping, BYOB practicing, boycotting acts among others. These studies only only examine specific fragments of a consumer's ethical lifestyle and disregard other ethical projects that a consumer might be involved in.

In other words, previous studies shed light only on the ethical behavioural aspects that the researcher chooses. The implication is a lack of a holistic understanding of the ethical consumer and of the wide range of strategies and behaviours that he/she might adopt.

Hence, a third recommendation is that research should go beyond the narrow examination of specific ethical projects and adopt a more open, qualitative approach that allows observing the ethical consumer experience in its totality.

#### **4.2.4 The role of shared-collective-identity in ethical consumer behaviour has been previously under researched**

In post modern theories, consumption has two aspects; consumers can construct self identities through purchases (Sassatelli, 2006) or they can enter in new tribes (Cova & Cova, 2001) that share collective identities. The review of the literature showed that

consumers construct their ethical self through ethical practices. Shaw and Shiu (2002) acknowledge the importance of self identity and include it in the TPB as an additional measure to improve the predictive ability of the model in the ethical consumer context. In other words, empirical research shows that ethical consumer behaviours offer the sense of unique identity and differentiation from the others. So, much research has focused on the formation of the individuated or personal self through ethical consumer practices. Nevertheless, little research has dealt with the existence of a shared collective identity among the consumers of the ethical movement.

In previous studies, ethical consumers appear to perceive themselves as part of larger collective group that is guided by the same moral principles (Cherrier, 2006; Shaw et al., 2007). However, it has been ignored the extent to which consumers define their identity in relation to social groups. To explain collective identity, we borrow a definition from Cherrier (2007: 324) where collective identity represents “*a common cognitive framework to assess the environment*”.

Furthermore, existing research has mostly examined the ethical consumer movement as a community of imagined relationships, where the members are geographically dispersed with little or no real life interaction among them (Carrigan et al., 2004; Cherrier, 2007). The emergence of organised communities that practice and/or promote ethical consumer projects directs researchers towards the study of collective identities in more tangible and traditional group structures that are found within restricted geographical spaces.

The lack of satisfactory answers as to whether ethical consumers truly share a collective identity and more importantly how they perceive their collective identity shows a clear need for research to fill the gap. So, a fourth recommendation would be the study of the role of shared collective identity in ethical consumer behaviour not only in the vaguely approached, imagined ethical community, but also in more tangible and defined ethical spaces and groups.

#### **4.2.5 The focus of existing empirical research is on specific cultural contexts, particularly on the US and Northern Europe**



According to the literature review, the bulk of the empirical research was carried out in the U.S. and northern European countries with an emphasis on the UK. Especially, interpretive research has been almost exclusively carried out in the UK.

The limited focus of research in specific cultures create doubts whether existing knowledge on ethical consumer is applicable and generalizable to other contexts, especially since culture shapes consumer behaviour (Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000) and perception of ethics (Belk et al., 2005; Cherrier, 2005; 2006).

At the same time, the consumer ethics literature<sup>1</sup> takes into account the importance of the cultural context. Empirical findings come from very different contexts, while the cultural environment appears as central in the popular model of Hunt and Vitell (1986). This raised the question: Why is this not the case in ethical consumer behaviour literature?

Different authors recognize this gap and confirm what was observed during the literature review. Newholm and Shaw (2007) say that most of the research has been conducted in affluent countries where certain ethical practices, like Fair Trade, were pioneered (e.g. Belgium, UK). So, they affirm the need to further explore the ethics of consumption across different cultures. In a similar vein, Carrigan et al., (2004) mention that it would be of interest to conduct research beyond the UK to see if nationality and culture has a significant influence upon the ethical purchasing behaviour. Furthermore, according to Auger et al. (2004) the results from certain contexts cannot be generalised to others because different cultures do not interpret ethics in the same way.

Thus, a fifth recommendation is that there is a clear need that research in ethical consumer behaviour should be extended outside the UK and the US to other contexts currently under researched.

#### **4.2.6 There is a need for rigorous methodology and solid empirical evidence**

As already mentioned, the existence of the attitude behaviour gap is often attributed to the adopted methodological approach. As Shaw and Newholm (2007: 258) mention narrowing the gap could be *“a matter of refining the models or methods”*.

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<sup>1</sup> Consumer ethics is the other branch of research in ethics and consumer behaviour. It is explained in chapter 2.

The traditional survey instruments have been heavily criticised as unable to offer reliable empirical evidence on the topic (Crane, 1999; Auger et al., 2004). If we consider the claim of Auger et al. (2004) that nearly all studies of consumers' willingness to engage in ethical behaviour are based on unconstrained survey methods, then we should be concerned about the validity of the empirical evidence. The reasoning of such criticism is explained in the following paragraphs.

(i) The first problem is the emergence of the social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993). When it comes to research about consumers' ethics respondents tend to give socially acceptable answers. According to Fisher (1993), social bias has been observed in self report measures across all social sciences and is more likely to occur in research about sensitive issues, since respondents "*are unable to report accurately for ego-defensive or impression management reasons*" (p. 303).

Similarly, Auger et al., (2004) offer empirical evidence that traditional surveys allow the appearance of the social bias or of the incentive compatibility -as they call it- and so these methods should not be used for drawing conclusions.

(ii) The second issue is that the survey methods might misrepresent the opinions of consumers with regards to ethical issues (Auger et al., 2004), because the wording of the questions might elicit answers and respondents are limited to expressing themselves in the case of numerical and rating scales. This is supported by previous empirical results of Swartz et al. (1998; 1999; 2003).

(iii) The third problem is that especially in opinion studies (MORI, Forética, CECU) but also in academic studies (e.g. Creyer & Ross, 1997; Bhate, 2001) consumers do not respond in a context that resembles the actual context that they make decisions. In order to deal with the last issue, certain authors turned to the experimental designs of conjoint analysis (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005) and choice modelling (Auger et al, 2004; Fernandez & Kranz, 2005), where consumers are called to trade off among functional attributes (price, quality, brand) and social features of a product.

As shown in the previous chapter, experiments are a very popular methodological strategy in ethical consumer literature. However, even if they are more sophisticated as methodological approaches than traditional survey methods, they do not allow a more holistic approach to the phenomenon of ethical consumption. They allow

detecting causal relationships between variables, but they do not give an insight in consumer thoughts and behaviours in real life situations (Morriss, 2002).

Qualitative methodology though has been considered as more appropriate when researching consumers' ethical views (Auger et al., 2004; Clavin & Lewis, 2005). It is argued to have "*the ability to delve deeper into the actual actions, motivations and influences behind participants*" (Clavin & Lewis, 2005: 185). Therefore, researchers should consider the qualitative tradition.

The review of the literature showed that a variety of qualitative techniques have been used; focus groups, interviews, multiple case studies are some of them. Nevertheless, apart from a few cases (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Bekin et al., 2007; Cherrier, 2007) most empirical evidence is collected on a specific day at a specific time.

So, without rejecting previous methodologies, they could be complemented with longitudinal research following Crane's (1999) advice for variety of methodological sources. For that purpose, techniques that have not been found to have been used to research this topic, such as diaries, or very little used, such as netnography, might be useful.

#### **4.2.7 Recent Developments in notions of ethical consumer behaviour should be taken into considerations to update current definitions of the ethical consumer.**

The review of the literature showed that ethical consumer behaviour is a highly complex phenomenon characterized by a wide diversity of ethical concerns and actions that often compete with each other. Volunteer simplifiers see consumerism as unethical and decide to minimize their consumption levels. For boycotters, consumerism carries an ethical meaning when it is about buying the ethical alternatives offered in the market. However, boycotters might get confused when evaluating Fair Trade, since Fair Trade products are beneficial for the local economies of the Third World countries, but harmful to the environment due to excessive transportation (Newholm, 1999). Boycotters and anti brand consumers express themselves by avoiding specific products or companies, inconsistent with their ethical beliefs. Nevertheless, what do they do in the case of sweatshop products that are the product of exploitation in under developed countries, but maybe in Asian countries it is the only source of income for the locals (Devinney et al., 2006)?

For Shaw and Newholm (2002) these are all different projects of ethical consumer behaviour. It is obvious that there are conflicting ethical attitudes and concerns that result in multiple behavioural strategies, which are all however embraced under the term ethical consumer behaviours following a disjunctive logic. Therefore, currently there are no normative prescriptions that treat ethical consumer behaviour as a single, coherent behavioural approach.

Cherrier (2005: 126) says: *“It becomes impossible to know who belongs to any given ethical constituency and whether all constituents are to be treated as ethical equals. Such an argument questions the possibility of defining a ‘valid’ ethical consumer”*.

The main implications of this debate are:

- (i) First, definitions such as the one suggested by Strong (1996: 5), ethical consumerism *“refers to buyer behaviour that reflects a concern with the problems of the Third World, where producers are paid low wages and live in poor conditions simply to produce cheap products for western consumers and profits of multinational companies”* are too narrow and no longer useful. Especially since ethical consumer behaviour not only refers to consumption, but also to cutting down on consumption.
- (ii) Second, the common element between all these different and even contradicting aspects of ethical consumer behaviour is the existence of ethical considerations that guide behaviour. Fair Trade’s objective is to support Third World producers, whereas boycotts send message of protest to unethically ‘behaved’ companies. Thus, ethical consumer behaviour is not utilitarian, it is symbolic. It intends to express an individual’s ideology and concerns.
- (iii) Third, consumers can express their ethical considerations in many and diverse forms such as those identified in the literature or others not yet discovered. It can represent a whole lifestyle as in the case of voluntary simplifiers that cut down their consumption in general or a fragment of a consumer’s identity like the case of a consumer that buys Fair Trade coffee, but this is his only ethical act.

Given that ethical consumers constitute a dynamic and evolving tendency, more forms of expression might exist, but currently remain unidentified. Especially, since the literature review showed that most researchers choose a very narrow aspect of ethical behaviour and study it (with few exceptions e.g. Cooper-Martin & Hollbrook, 1993;

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Newholm, 2005). The conceptualization of ethical consumers should keep up with current manifestations and not just to draw from previous research. This gap is confirmed by Brinkmann and Peattie (2008: 22) that consider current definitions as “narrow and outdated”.

### 4.3 Research Questions

In the previous section, the identified gaps in the ethical consumer literature were presented. However, the current thesis does not intend to address all of these equally. Different weights have been assigned according to the priorities set by the researcher.

In terms of the important gaps found in the literature, it was decided to follow Newholm's example and reverse the attitude-behaviour gap (2005). Given the multiplicity and complexity of concerns in modern society, the unattainability of full and symmetric information and the freedom of expression of the post modern consumer, it was concluded that the perfect ethical consumer cannot be framed and aspired. So, consumers should talk about their actual experiences, their efforts to be ethical and maybe to identify and explain their inconsistencies. In this way, the present thesis intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of the reality of being an ethical consumer.

Much emphasis will be placed on approaching ethical consumer behaviour as a collective project, given the almost inexistent identified literature in that area. Furthermore, the fact that general consumer research has traditionally adopted individualistic approaches makes any contribution towards that area more significant.

In specific, this project tries to understand the 'ethical consumers' involved in group projects of ethical consumer behaviour within restricted ethical spaces, which in this case are Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. In this way, emphasis is not only placed on attitudes (as is the case of the majority of reviewed studies) but on actual behaviours.

Furthermore, the doctoral student accepts that the individuals construct their reality and on the basis of these constructions they behave and interact with each other. While the paradigm of social constructionism (which is clearly adopted in this thesis) will be further explained in the following chapter, it influences the formulation of the research questions.

Hence, the more general questions to be answered are:

1. How do individuals who participate in ethical consumption group projects consume ethically?

2. Why do they consume ethically?
3. Are the aforementioned (how and why) re-negotiated within the ethical space of the cooperative?

The current project intends to understand mainly how and why consumers undertake projects of ethical consumer behaviour<sup>2</sup>. At the same time:

- There is a focus on the discourses of Catalan ethical consumers. The revision of the literature and the suggestions of recognizable authors in the field (e.g. Shaw & Newholm) clearly point out the need for more cultural diversity of empirical findings. New perspectives might come up and also they serve as reference for comparison with previous findings.
- The research intends to offer empirical evidence about group and individual ethical projects that these consumers carry out, so that the level of coherence of their individual and collective consumer behaviour can be compared. The reduced impact of individual consumer decisions has been brought up as a problem for consumers willing to practice ethical practices throughout the ethical consumer literature (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Mohr et al., 2001; Carrigan et al., 2004), since it is a difficult task for single individuals to carry through (Moisander, 2007). Therefore, answers could be provided about whether the participation in ethical collective action can increase consumers' motivation and establish sustainable lifestyles in a more solid way.
- The issue of the collective identity supposedly shared by ethical consumers is taken into account, since until now the individuated self-identity has received the largest share of attention.
- The project aims at dealing with the emergence of social bias by collecting information about the same phenomenon from different angles and on employing a combination of techniques that could give a new perspective to understand the ethical consumer.
- Current 'narrow' definitions (Brinkmann & Peattie, 2008) will be broadened by the insights that hopefully will be gained.

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<sup>2</sup> Even if it was mentioned that the focus will be on Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, for now we avoid narrowing down the ethical group projects to consumption of products, since other forms of expression might be involved within the ethical space such as boycotting or voluntary simplicity.

In order to be more explicit and specific, the aforementioned general questions are operationalized in subquestions, or research propositions. These are presented graphically in Figure 4.0. They ensure that the researcher will be well guided and concentrated throughout the project.

### 4.3.1 Research Sub-questions

The exploratory nature of the current research project calls for a broader focus in order to obtain more insights into the phenomenon (Saunders, 1997). This explains why the main research questions are so general. Following Silverman's (2001:297) suggestion for qualitative studies, the question of 'how' proceeds the question of 'why'. Here, they are further explained :

#### 1. How do these consumers consume ethically?

The selection of the participants was made on the basis of their participation in Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. The mere participation in a cooperative of responsible consumption is considered itself an ethical act carried out by a collectivity. Given that very few empirical studies have examined ethical collective projects, there is a need to understand how the project of the cooperative of responsible consumption is carried out and what it is about.

Nevertheless, the participation in a cooperative of responsible consumption is just a fragment of the consumers' reality and this study examines the ethical consumer from a holistic perspective. So, the question emerges: Do these consumers also express their ethicality on an individual level and how? This can show the level of coherence between the individual that consumes alone and the individual that consumes as a part of a group. Assuming that the perfect ethical consumer does not exist, interest is also placed upon the difficulties and the inconsistencies of these consumers, so that a better description of their realities can be achieved. Therefore, the following three research sub-questions emerge:

1A: How do these consumers treat ethical consumption as a group project?

1B: Do they undertake other ethical consumer projects on an individual or collective level?



1C: What difficulties do they experience?

2. Why do these consumers consume ethically?

Given that the participation in the cooperative of responsible consumption is the only known ethical project that these consumers carry out, initially the attention is placed on understanding what motivates them to participate in the cooperatives and what this collective project represents for them.

However, it is perceived that the participation in the cooperatives and other ethical projects they might be involved in are all consequences of their social constructions of reality. These social constructions are expressed as perceptions, truths, worldviews and ethical concerns that drive the behaviour of the individuals. Therefore, in line with the premises of social constructionism, another question that emerges is how these consumers have constructed their external reality.

Finally, in order to attain a fuller and more holistic understanding of the “why” behind ethical consumer behaviour, attention is put on the different factors that might affect these perceptions, worldviews and concerns.

Hence, the following research sub-questions emerge:

2A: What motivates them to participate in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives? What meanings do they attach to this ethical project?

2B: How have these consumers constructed reality? What are their perceptions, worldviews and concerns?

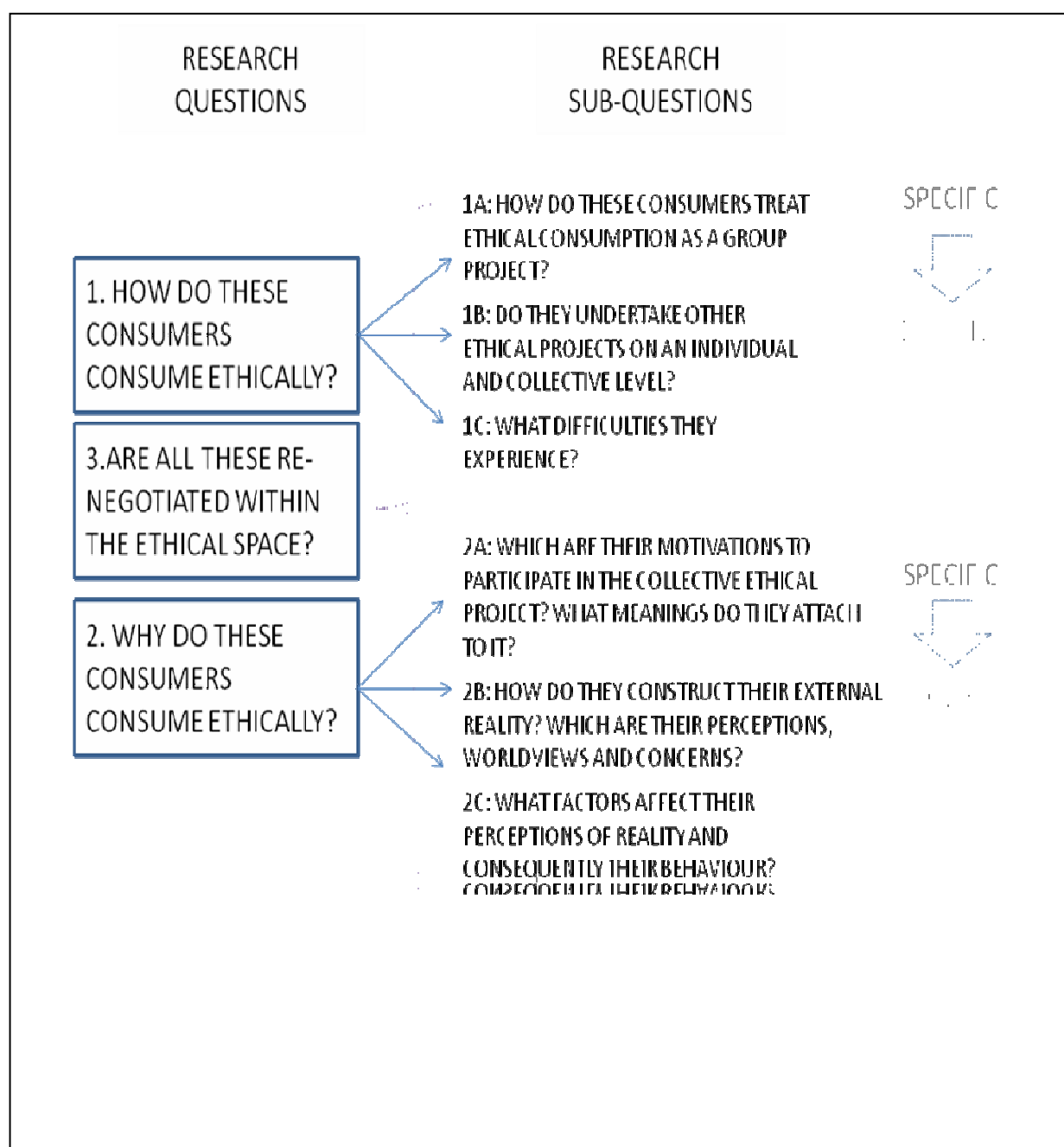
2C: What factors affect their perceptions of reality and consequently their behaviour?

3. Are all these re-negotiated within the ethical space?

One of the main contributions of this project intends to be to map the ethical space dynamics and its impact on the individual members. The aim is to understand the changes on the individuals and their decisions (if there are) and maybe the existence of a collective shared identity.

To facilitate understanding, the research questions and subquestions are graphically represented in the following diagram.

**Figure 4.0:** Graphic Representation of Research Questions and Sub-Questions



### 4.3.2 The unit of Analysis

An important decision that has to be taken is the choice of the most appropriate unit of analysis, since it is directly related to the whole research design of the thesis (Patton, 2003).

Traditionally, the individual has been the preferred unit of analysis in social science research (Kenny et al., 2003). However, this has provoked a debate on whether the individual is the most appropriate unit of analysis (Matusov, 2007). He mentions a wide range of possible units of analysis for sociocultural research: “*word meaning, mediated action, activity, activity system, activity systems, person-in-the-world, event, utterance or community of practice*” (p. 307).

In this thesis, the central emphasis is on the **subjective ethical consumer experience**, which constitutes the unit of analysis. The intention of the doctoral student is to understand as holistically as possible the ethical consumer and avoid reducing the research focus to just one aspect of ethical consumer experience. Members of Responsible Consumption Communities were chosen as the units of observation i.e. the units from which data will be sourced (Brewer & Hunter, 2006), so that both collective and individual aspects of the ethical consumer experience could be examined.

### 4.3.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this present doctoral thesis are:

1. To describe the strategies that consumers undertake to express their ethicality both in an individual and a collective level.
2. To explore the meanings they derive from their actions and their respective motivations
3. To comprehend how they have built their external social reality
4. To examine whether the participation in a social network and ethical space such as ethical coops influences the individual members through the renegotiation of meanings and perceptions and through the sharing of a collective identity.

5. To provide empirical findings that represent a different reality than UK and US, keeping in mind that the perception of ethics might be culturally-bound.

## 4.4 Conclusions

Chapter 4 presented the main gaps in the body of knowledge in ethical consumer behaviour, as they emerged from the literature review. Seven main areas were identified that refer both to possible theoretical and methodological contributions; lack of attention on collective ethical projects, unsatisfying answers on the social networks' dynamics on ethical consumer behaviour, fragmentation of ethical consumer research, limited research on specific cultural contexts, lack of understanding on what constitutes the collective identity of the ethical movement, more methodological variety with an emphasis on over time research and the need to update the definition of the ethical consumer as the ethical consumer movement evolves.

In consideration of the gaps and weaknesses, three research questions were formulated to shed light on the holistic ethical consumer experience. More specifically, this research will attempt to answer how and why individuals consume ethically, setting as unit of observation consumers that participate in Responsible Consumption Communities. Their participation in a restricted geographical ethical space will reveal whether there is some kind of renegotiation of meanings and behaviours taking place. This is the third research question that is posed in this doctoral thesis.

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## CHAPTER 4

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# **EPISTEMOLOGY & METHODOLOGY**

## Chapter 5: Epistemological and Methodological Approach

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### 5.0 Introduction

Having set the research questions that the current thesis will intend to answer, there is a series of steps to be taken in order to define how data will be collected and analyzed in the course of the research.

The first decision to be made refers to the research philosophy that underlies the study and it explains how the doctoral student understands the development of knowledge. The selection of the research philosophy is an important step since it gradually leads to the other decisions on research design; select a research approach, choose a research strategy and finally decide on the data collection methods.

Saunders et al. (2003: 83) compares all these decisions with the layers of an onion that have to be peeled away one by one. In this way, they intend to show the interconnectedness of the methodological and epistemological decisions. Following their suggestion, this chapter will start peeling away all the layers of the research process onion. Thus, the objective of this chapter will be to give a clear idea to the reader about how research will be carried out and what philosophical principles it reflects.

## 5.1 Peeling the Research Process Onion: Towards a choice of Research Philosophy

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2002), the importance of understanding the existing philosophical positions is central to the design of the research. They cite three reasons to sustain their argument:

- Knowledge of philosophy helps to understand research designs. It allows the researcher to clarify how data can be collected and interpreted and whether they are suitable to answer the research questions. Therefore, it can guide the researcher on the design of the investigation, since as it will be explained, each paradigm has its methodological implications.
- It sheds light on the limitations and benefits of each research design and so, prepares the researcher in terms of what to anticipate.
- Furthermore, the past experience of the researcher does not always provide him with all the necessary tools for the design of his research. So, learning about the paradigms helps him adapt the investigation “*according to the constraints of different subject or knowledge structures*” (p.27).

In Brunet and Pastor<sup>1</sup> (2003; p. 155-157) it is mentioned that the acceptance of a particular epistemology can be influenced by the interests of the scientific community, of the institution where the researcher belongs to, by the position of the researcher within this institution and the scientific status obtained by one or other selection. However, this was not consciously the case in the current thesis.

The most well known division among the epistemological paradigms is the one between *Positivism* and *Social Constructionism/Interpretivism*. Here, it should be mentioned that while Saunders et al. (2003) treat Social Constructionism and Interpretivism as tautological, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) make a distinction between Interpretivism, Social Constructionism and Hermeneutics as epistemological stances in qualitative research. Also, it has to be specified that the distinction between positivism and social constructionism is made for the case of the social sciences.

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing from Kuhn’s (1970) ideas about power struggles in scientific communities.

Another distinction that is not of concern for the present study is between positivism and relativism when referring to natural sciences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

An ongoing debate between the two main philosophical approaches has been taking place. The two paradigms<sup>2</sup> have been presented as mutually exclusive. Illustrative of that is the positioning of the two paradigms as polar extremes (Saunders et al., 2003). Nevertheless, researchers can be found in between the two traditions, adopting elements from both (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

The author feels that in this doctoral thesis it is not necessary to engage in the debate with regards to the appropriateness of each for conducting research and understanding reality. She acknowledges that they are different approaches to build on knowledge. Following that line, the following subsections will present briefly the two main paradigms and their implications for research methodology will be discussed. This section will conclude with the epistemological posture that has been adopted in the current thesis.

### 5.1.1 Positivism

Positivism has been an influential philosophical doctrine in the history of science (Carsten Stahl, 2003). The French philosopher, Auguste Comte is seen as the founder of positivism (Crotty, 1998; Smith et al., 1996) in the early nineteenth century<sup>3</sup>.

Briefly, the basic tenets of the positivist paradigm are:

- Reality is perceived as objective and independent from the investigator (Saunders et al., 2003; Weber, 2004).
- The main purpose is to offer law-like generalisations similar to the ones provided by natural sciences (Saunders et al., 2003).
- The reality is reduced to the smallest and simplest elements, also known as reductionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> The term scientific paradigm was popularized by Kuhn in his work “The structure of scientific revolutions” (1970) to describe “*a universal set of scientific achievements that for the time provide moral problems and solutions to a community of practioners*” (Mitchell, 1979:137)

<sup>3</sup> Auguste Comte published the six-volume *Cours de Philosophie Positive* between the years 1830-1842 that popularized positive philosophy, but it is alleged that the terms were found earlier in the work of Francis Bacon in the middle of 16<sup>th</sup> century (Crotty, 1998).

- This paradigm places great emphasis on the internal and external validity (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). The former refers to the identification of causalities between variables, while the latter to the generalization of the research results to populations bigger than the sample.

According to Patton (2002: 91), the foundational questions in positivism are:

*‘What’s really going on in the real world? What can we establish with some degree of certainty? What are plausible explanations for verifiable patterns? What’s the truth insofar as we can get at it? How can we study a phenomenon so that our findings correspond, insofar as possible, to the real world?’*

Hence, he continues, the adoption of this paradigm has its practical implications in the research design. The positivist approach is linked to highly structured methodologies that measure quantifiable elements and that allow the reproduction of the research results (Gill & Johnson, 1997). Therefore, usually the deductive approach makes more sense within this research tradition. As Saunders et al. (2003) mention, the deductive approach owes more to positivism, while the inductive to constructionism. Even if they claim that such labelling can be misleading, the comparison of the deductive and inductive approaches presents quite a few similarities to the comparison of the positivist and constructivist approach.

At the same time, positivism and the deductive approach are more linked to quantitative data and research strategies such as experiments, surveys (for more information see Saunders et al., 2003; p.89). The deductive approach creates knowledge through the testing of hypothesis, while the inductive is more related to theory building with the appearance of new data and scientific insights (Malhotra, 2006).

### **5.1.2 Social Constructionism**

The paradigm of social constructionism came into vogue in the late 1960’s with the book ‘The Social Construction of Reality’ by P. Berger and T. Luckman (1966). Other key authors in the development of the paradigm are P. Watzlawick and J. Shotter (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). It is also known as Radical Constructionism

(Watzlawick, 1984; Blaikie, 2007). It is often described as the opposite to positivism and it has been considered as a new school of thought for the generation of knowledge (Burr, 2003). Therefore, the arguments in favor of it are often arguments that criticise the dominating perspective at the time of its appearance, the positivist paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasize the following as the main deficiencies of the positivism paradigm, which constructivism came to solve:

1. Positivism, or conventional methodology as they call it, does not take into account the opinions of stakeholders (defined as groups at stake in terms of money, status, power, opportunity, face etc), because knowledge is a matter of facts not of opinions and begins from prior theoretical considerations that the researcher chooses to bear.
2. In relation to the aforementioned, positivist scientists follow steps and rules that allow the verification of existing ‘truths’, but not the discovery of new ones.
3. The positivist paradigm isolates the research results from their context by controlling contextual factors in a purely physical or statistical manner. Hence, the individual, which is the research object in social sciences, is not seen in an interactive relationship with his context.
4. The issue of the nomothetic /idiographic dilemma: positivism aims at generalizing scientific causal inferences. Nevertheless, these inferences cannot apply to unique and idiosyncratic cases or as Guba and Lincoln (1989; 61) mention they “*have little utility for local understanding or prediction*”.
5. The assumption of the conventional methodology that science is value free cannot be sustained. The process of evaluation of the research results is fundamental in science, which is done according to the personal values of the scientist in the most objective way possible.

Social Constructionism corresponds to the ontology of nominalism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Nominalism lies on the assumption that the labels and names that individuals associate with their actuality are what matters. Social Constructionism is concerned with how meanings are created through the use of language. Thus, language is not neutral as in positivism (Crotty, 1998; Blanche et al., 2006) and the



process of adopting labels and names is an issue to delve into (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

Some of the main characteristics of this research tradition are:

- It argues that instead of an objective world beyond the human brain, there is a socially constructed world.
- Social Constructionism supporters view the social world as really complex and consider that its reduced representation by law like generalizations cannot capture the whole picture (Saunders et al., 2003).
- Constructionism tries to understand the subjective reality of the subjects of research (Saunders et al., 2003). The researcher begins with the premise that there is no pre-existing reality, instead individuals invent structures according to what they perceive around them (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).
- Guba and Lincoln (1989) talk about the interactive nature of the knower-known dyad as a contrast to the subject-object duality of the positivist paradigm.
- Another important feature is that individuals understand the world through the interaction with each other via the medium of language (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). In this research tradition, science and the production of knowledge are a linguistic activity defined by specific socio-cultural and historical contexts (Brunet and Pastor, 2003).

For Patton (2002: 96), the burning questions in Social Constructionism are:

*‘How have people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, “truths”, explanations, beliefs and worldviews? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact?’*

At the same time, the different assumptions that hold the constructivist paradigm lead to a distinct operationalisation than the one encountered in positivism. Hence, as mentioned before, the inductive approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) and qualitative

data are more attached to constructivism, while most common are qualitative techniques such as focus groups, interviews, diaries etc.

In an effort to summarize the methodological implications of the two paradigms, the following table was elaborated on the basis of what other authors suggest (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Saunders et al., 2003; Ryan, 2004; Weber, 2004)

**Figure 5.0:** Methodological Implications of main research paradigms.

	← <b>Positivism</b>	<b>Constructivism</b> →
<b>Aims</b>	→ Discovery	Invention
<b>Research Approach</b>	→ Deductive	Inductive
<b>Starting point</b>	→ Hypotheses	Meanings
<b>Method</b>	→ Statistical analysis	Hermeneutics/ phenomenology
<b>Type of Data</b>	→ Quantitative	Qualitative
<b>Techniques</b>	→ Measurement	Conversation
<b>Designs</b>	→ Experiment	Reflexivity
<b>Analysis/ Interpretation</b>	→ Verification/Falsification	Sense-making
<b>Outcomes</b>	→ Causality of variables	Understanding
<b>Samples</b>	→ Large Samples	Small Samples (in depth)

Elaborated by the author based on the work of Easterby-Smith et al. (2002), Saunders et al., (2003), Ryan, (2004) and Weber, (2004).

### 5.1.3 Selection of an epistemological approach

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) mention that in the early 1980's there was a shift from the positivistic to the constructionism paradigm especially in the management field. A similar evolution is also observed in ethical consumer literature. Initial research (socio-demographic profiling, experiments, modeling) are perceived closer to the positivistic philosophy, while the fourth and more recent stream of research opts for sense-making and is found within the interpretivist stream of marketing (Newholm & Shaw, 2007: 259). This trend is explained by some of the authors that are advocates of the constructionism paradigm.

Heiskanen (2005: 180) argues that concepts such as environmental attitudes or green consumers are not waiting to be discovered as if they had always been “out there”. Instead they are produced by the researcher (performative nature of research) and so different interactions and contexts elicit different answers. She calls this phenomenon the performative nature of research.

Cherrier (2005: 125), one of the key authors in the ethical consumer research at the moment, claims that ethics in consumption is contextually and culturally bound, because morality is embedded in social processes that define wrong and right.

Following that line, the current study leans towards the constructivist philosophy. The reasons for this choice are explained as following:

- It is considered that ethics and morality and its subsequent expression in human behaviour cannot be perceived as an external and objective reality. What each individual perceives as correct and wrong is contextually and culturally bound. For instance, in the study ‘Why consumers do not behave ethically?’ by Eckhart et al. (2006), consumers from Western countries condemned sweatshops, while some consumers in Asian countries find it acceptable, because for some people it might be the only way to gain any salary at all. Therefore, ethics is not objective and absolute. It is socially constructed through the daily interaction among individuals. Such a view is consistent with the social constructionism paradigm (Burr, 2003).
- In line with the previous argument, the study of ethical consumer behaviour does not refer to the study of one single and absolute reality, but instead it refers to the exploration of multiple realities that are contextually and culturally bound. It is thought that different individuals express their ethical concerns in various forms; some in groups, others individually, some are concerned about environmental issues, while others are anti-capitalists, some consume ethically, others simply stop consuming. The ethical projects that ethically concerned individuals carry out can only be understood through their experiences, since they construct the meanings of their actions. This is clearly expressed in the research questions and research objectives of the current thesis.

Furthermore, this opinion led to the conclusion that much research remains to be conducted in ethical consumer literature, given that existing empirical findings are contextually limited and so, cannot be representative of all ethical consumers.

- In contrast to the reductionistic logic of positivism, the current study does not reduce the research object in smaller measurable units, but aims at a holistic understanding of the ethical consumer as can be seen in Chapter 4 (see section 4.2.1).
- In addition, most previous research has looked for causal relationships between variables and different expressions of ethical consumer behaviour. This resulted in a limited understanding of the ethical consumer and to the lack of a coherent theory on ethical consumer behaviour. The widely used Theory of Planned Behaviour can only partially explain ethical consumer decision making (Shaw, 2005; Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006) and this stresses the need for more qualitative understandings instead of further testing the same theory. The conclusion points towards an inductive, qualitative approach that can provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

The aforementioned arguments explain the choice of social constructivism as the most suitable research philosophy for the generation of knowledge in the current thesis. This decision has its respective implications (see Table 5.1) in the research design of the study. These implications led to methodological decisions that will be discussed in the following sections.

## **5.2 Methodological Implications: Choosing a Research Approach and a Research Strategy**

This section will explain the methodological implications of the selection of social constructivism as the underlying paradigm for the study.

### **5.2.1 Choosing a Research Approach: Inductive or Deductive?**

As described in Table 5.1, the selection of the constructivist paradigm is usually associated with an inductive, qualitative approach, since the intention of the researcher is to contribute to the creation of new theory. Positivism, alternatively, is seen as more involved with the use of existing theory which has to be tested and so further confirmed or rejected, also known as the deductive approach.

Traditionally, the deductive approach has been considered as more scientific, because it contributes to the development of a rigorous theory subjected to many tests that confirm or reject its veracity (Saunders et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, there are cases in which the current state of knowledge calls for inductive research:

- The theory building approach fits more disciplines in an early stage of growth, whereas the deductive approach is more typical of mature sciences (Kitchen, 1997; Field & Morse, 1985).
- Inductive research is necessary in bodies of knowledge that independently of the volume of empirical findings, there is still a limited understanding of the phenomenon of study. Therefore, it is required to escape the rigid methodologies applied by the deductive approach, so that alternative interpretations of the research object can be achieved (Saunders et al., 2003).

Keeping in mind the aforementioned, it was decided that a deductive approach would not add value at the current moment in the ethical consumer research. As already described, the lack of in-depth understanding and of a coherent theory calls for new perspectives, for new theories that can explain the multiple realities of ethical consumers.

Furthermore, ethical consumer behaviour as a collective project is a remarkably under-researched area of the ethical consumer literature. Very few empirical findings were encountered which means that present research should focus on understanding ‘*what is happening*’ (Saunders et al., 2003; 96). It could be claimed that ethical consumer research is still in the Kuhnian pre-paradigm phase (Oldroyd, 1986: 320). Therefore, it was decided that a purely deductive hypothesis-testing approach wouldn’t be appropriate at the moment. The need for more understanding and for new theories pointed towards the direction of inductive, theory-building research. Nevertheless, in order to make sure that there is a fit between emerging theory and reality, Grounded Theory was selected as the most apt methodology.

### **5.2.2 Choosing a Research Strategy: Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory was first formulated by the sociologists B. Glaser and A. Strauss in 1967. It emerged as an alternative to the hypothesis-testing deductive approach that dominated at the time (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), originating in symbolic interactionism (Goulding, 2004). Nevertheless, while it is often thought as an example of inductive inquiry (Thyer, 2001), Saunders et al. (2003) call this conclusion rather simplistic, because grounded theory combines induction and deduction for the generation of theory [also confirmed by Corbin & Strauss (2008)]. The main objective of this methodology is the generation of theory derived from data. The main strengths of this methodology that make it appealing in comparison to other qualitative methodologies are described as following:

- While different theoretical perspectives try to shed light on particular aspects of human behavior (for instance phenomenology on lived experience or semiotics on signs), grounded theory ‘*focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content*’ (Patton, 2002: 125). Spiggle (1994) argues that grounded theorists look for conceptual links that will form in ensemble an integrated theory, while other methodologists avoid causal links. For that reason, she suggests the application of grounded theory in consumer research. Indeed, in recent years, grounded theory has started to become popular in marketing and consumer research (Goulding, 2004).

- An implication of the aforementioned is that grounded theory permits the use of a wide range of data sources as long as they fit the study, whereas other qualitative traditions, such as phenomenology, mainly employ interviews and observation (Goulding, 2002: 44)
- Grounded theorists explain in such detail the strategies for data recollection and analysis that the guidelines are explicit for the new and inexperienced researchers (Morse, 2001; Charmaz, 2006). According to Morse (2001) this happens more in grounded theory than in any other qualitative methodology. According to Patton (2002), the emphasis placed on specific methods and systematic procedures for the generation of theory has contributed to the fact that Grounded Theory is currently considered the most influential among the qualitative traditions by some researchers (Denzin, 1997; Thyer, 2001). Thyer (2001) mentions the increasing number of doctoral dissertations using grounded theory during recent years.
- However, at the same time, it allows researchers to use their creative imagination and generate their theories in their field of study (Turner, 1981). According to Glaser and Strauss (1977) this was one of the aims of this strategy; promote systematization of the research process but encourage creative thinking for the generation of theory at the same time.
- In addition, it is considered particularly useful to study decision making because of its ability to capture complexity, its good linkage to practice and its support towards theorizing new investigation areas (Locke, 2001).

For the aforementioned reasons, grounded theory was considered as a more appropriate choice for the current thesis. Next, the main features of grounded theory will be briefly discussed, which according to Thyer (2001) are unique and original to this research strategy.

#### I. Researcher as Tabula Rasa

Initially, when Grounded Theory first appeared (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) it was understood that the researcher should enter the field with no previous preconceptions

about the phenomenon in study that could ‘contaminate’ his findings (Goulding, 2002). The theory should emerge from the data, not from the preformed hypotheses of the researcher.

Nevertheless, the principle of *tabula rasa* was considered unrealistic and risky from later grounded theorists, since especially in the case of inexperienced researchers could lead to naïve inductivism (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007: 197).

Also, the founders themselves question the feasibility of *tabula rasa*, first because ‘*no researcher enters into the process with a completely blank and empty mind*’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 326) and second because a general theoretical knowledge of the area under study forearms the researcher with **theoretical sensitivity** to recognize categories and concepts. In ‘Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies of Qualitative Research’ (1977: 45-46), the authors Glaser and Strauss explain what they mean: ‘*the initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework...but...the sociologist should also be sufficiently theoretically sensitive so that he can conceptualize and formulate a theory as it emerges from the data*’.

## II. Simultaneous Data Collection and Data Analysis

Cresswell (1998: 57) describes the data collection as a *zig zag process*. The researcher collects inductively information, which he/she analyzes and then returns to the field in order to confirm or reject the initial conceptual links provided from analysis. This is one of the main ‘rules’ of grounded theorists, because the theory building should be a flexible and dynamic process that emerges from data. Constant data analysis reveals initial conceptual relationships that guide future data collection. This is how concepts are identified and relationships are revealed to lead to integrated and abstract theory that describes as fully as possible the phenomenon in study. In this way, the researcher makes sure that there is a match between the empirical world and the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1977).

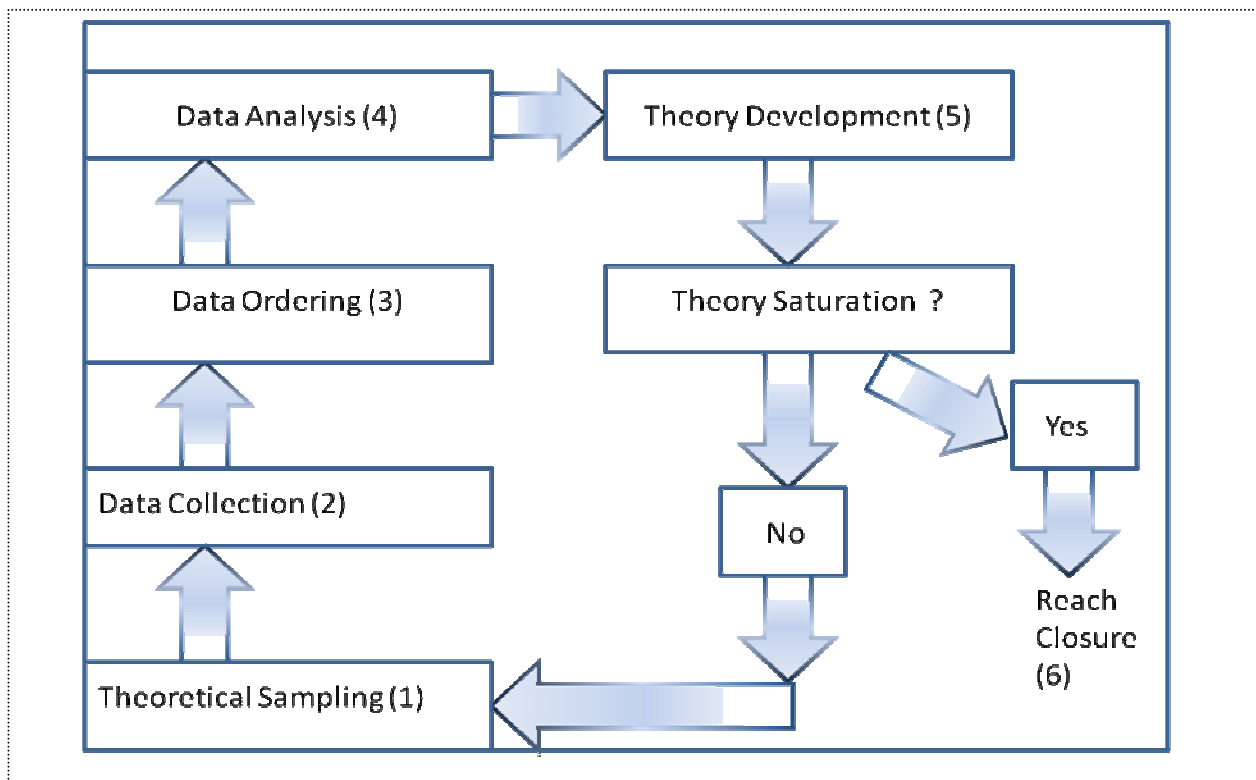
## III. How to collect data: Theoretical Sampling and Theoretical Saturation

Grounded theorists do not take a priori decisions with regards to their sample. Certainly, they have already clarified their unit of analysis, but more concrete



decisions like ‘whom’ or ‘how many’ are taken during the course of fieldwork as a consequence of the simultaneous analysis that takes place. Theoretical sampling (which is further explained in Chapter 6) is a sampling technique that is concept-driven in the sense that cases are selected only when they are considered as adding value to the development of the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, the size of the sample depends on whether theoretical saturation is achieved or not. This means that research continues until the point that theoretical categories are saturated and it is considered that nothing new can be found in the data. At that point, the fieldwork ends (Pandit, 1996). Pandit (1996) has elaborated the following figure to show the interrelatedness of data collection and analysis. It is included because it competently describes the whole process.

**Figure 5.1:** Research Process to Build Grounded Theory.



Source: Pandit (1996)

#### IV. How to do Analysis of Data

- *Constant Comparative Analysis and Coding Procedures*

The previously described theoretical saturation can be accomplished through constant comparative analysis of the new data with the old data. As Glaser and Strauss (1977) explain, comparison of categories takes place on the basis of theoretical criteria and relevance. This is one of the procedures that increase rigorousness of the strategy, since the grounded theorist should not be afraid to constantly challenge his conceptual categories with fresh data. The result is an increased precision and consistency of the emerging concept through a greater variation of the concept (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The main idea is that when an incident is observed, it should be compared against others, so that similarities or differences can be identified.

Furthermore, Grounded theory provides guidelines on how the coding procedure should take place. Here, though, two different schools of thought were identified. The leaders of these schools were the two founders of grounded theory, B. Glaser and A. Strauss (Morse, 2001; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Bryant and Charmaz (2007) explain that Glaser proposed a more loose and flexible coding framework, whereas Strauss set out concrete procedures for codification. For Strauss, coding should begin with open coding, continue with axial coding and finish in selective coding. Corbin and Strauss (1990) define open coding as the formation of initial categories of information that are put together to build a conceptual skeleton during the axial coding process (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007: 202). Finally, during selective coding the researcher identifies the 'story line' of the phenomenon he/she studies (Cresswell, 1998: 57), alternative called paradigm model (Pandit, 1996; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Cresswell (1998) adds that in some cases a conditional matrix can be included that represents the socio-economic and historical conditions that might influence the phenomenon of study.

For Glaser, the version of Strauss was not reflecting Grounded Theory, since he claimed that Strauss's coding procedures would force categories onto the data, instead of letting them emerge (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

- *Other procedures*

At this point, it was considered useful to mention other analytical procedures that Corbin and Strauss (1990; 2008) have proposed such as writing theoretical memos to

keep track of all concepts, group work of grounded theorists for the generation of theory, and the analysis of broader structural conditions.

#### V. How to ensure validity of findings: Rigorous Canons of Verification

Corbin and Strauss (2008) affirm the difficulty of evaluating the quality of grounded theory research. This is common when it comes to any type of qualitative inquiry, since it has been often criticised as unscientific and unreliable (Cresswell, 1998). To avoid that, they draw attention to the issues of validity, reliability, credibility of data, plausibility and value of theory, adequacy of the research process and empirical grounding of research findings by offering specific criteria to judge quality in grounded theory research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Nevertheless, this topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

#### VI. Outcome of the research: Substantial and Formal theory

Goulding (2002) explains that Glaser and Strauss differentiate two types of theory building; substantial and formal. Substantial theory offers a certain level of abstraction but does not attempt to explain more than a specific area, a specific type of organization. Alternatively, formal theory has a greater degree of applicability in more contexts than the immediate field of study. Most researchers, she continues, opt for substantial theories given their limited resources and high levels of abstraction, while formal theories are often the result of group work of researchers in longitudinal studies. Cresswell (1998: 57) for instance takes for granted that the outcome of data collection and analysis in grounded theory will be a substantive level theory.

The aforementioned are the basic principles that a grounded theorist is advised to respect during his research according to the manuals on Grounded Theory. A first decision that a researcher has to make is whether he will follow the Glassian or Straussian approach to grounded theory. The present thesis leans towards the Straussian approach and coding procedures such as axial and selective coding were applied (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, in terms of data recollection the doctoral student followed the advice by Glaser: '*All is data*' (Glaser, 2001: 145) no matter the

source. This will be observed more in the analysis chapter since different types of sources have been used for the empirical grounding of the concepts (signs, statutes, observation notes, summaries of the meetings of the cooperatives written by the researcher or by members of cooperatives, interviews and focus groups transcriptions, the magazine TROC, websites etc).

Nevertheless, literature shows that not all researchers strictly follow all the aforementioned 'rules' (Goulding, 2004). While Corbin and Strauss (1990: 20) '*strongly urge grounded theory investigators to adhere to its major criteria unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so*', it is now accepted that a looser embrace of the basic principles simply means adoption of partial Grounded Theory (Parry, 1998; Goulding, 2004). Goulding (2004) mentions such examples, while she also brings up methodological marriages between grounded theory and other methodologies<sup>4</sup>.

The current study has aimed at full use of grounded theory giving particular importance to the concepts of theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling and saturation and certainly simultaneous data collection and analysis. Special emphasis is given to the aforementioned concepts, since they differentiate grounded theory from other qualitative methodologies in many respects (Goulding, 2004).

Furthermore, a mention should be made of the epistemological implications of Grounded Theory. There has been an ongoing debate on whether Grounded Theory should be placed in the positivistic or constructivist side. Some vote in favor of the Positivistic paradigm (e.g. Patton, 2002) due to the structured and objective guidelines provided by Corbin and Strauss (1990; 2008). Others (e.g. Locke, 2001) remind the association of Grounded Theory with Symbolic Interactionism and clearly place it in the constructivist philosophy. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) discuss the epistemological conflict between the quantitatively trained Glaser and Strauss, that had a background in social interactionism. They add that for Corbin and Strauss grounded theory meant interpreting and so, should be found in the constructivistic paradigm.

Charmaz's (2000) opinion is found in the middle. She suggests that it can be found on both sides depending on the researcher's philosophical orientation. In line with her

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<sup>4</sup> Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) have talked about marrying ethnography and grounded theory, suggesting that when used together they can complement each other.

opinion, the present thesis situates the use of Grounded Theory within Social Constructivism.

## **5.3 Choosing Research Methods**

The final decision to be taken in terms of methodological design is the selection of the most suitable research methods for the recollection of data. After consideration, the doctoral student opted for a combination of focus groups, interviews and observation, so that each method could compensate for the deficiencies of the others. As seen in the following chapter, other data sources were also used such as documents from the cooperatives, analysis of websites and the magazine TROC that is edited and published by the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives in Barcelona. Nevertheless, these are not included in the initial research plan because they emerged a posteriori during the fieldwork.

First, it was decided that the current study would employ a purely qualitative approach. As explained in the following section, this decision was taken on the basis of the formulated research questions and in line with the suggestions of ethical consumer researchers.

Second, focus groups, in depth interviews and observation were chosen among the existing qualitative techniques. In this section, it will be explained why these techniques were chosen but not how they were operationalized during the fieldwork. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

### **5.3.1 Qualitative Research**

During the literature review, it soon became clear that a qualitative approach should be followed. The underlying reasoning of this decision lies in the identified gaps in the current body of knowledge.

As mentioned in the previous section, the lack of a coherent theory in ethical consumer behaviour and the limited understanding of the ethical consumer call for more depth and richness in empirical findings. Furthermore, the literature review did not identify any empirical findings on this type of ethical collectivities. These

observations guided the formulation of the research questions towards the in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. Therefore, following Cresswell's advice (1998), qualitative inquiry seemed more appropriate to explore the topic, due to its inherent flexibility and capacity to gather rich and meaningful data.

Furthermore, Field and Morse (1985) say that qualitative research is suggested, when the intention of the researcher is to capture the emic perspective, or in other words the perspective of the insider on what is happening. This agrees with the philosophical position of the present thesis.

The need for more qualitative research was also acknowledged by researchers in the field of ethical consumer studies. They guide future research towards this direction. Clavin and Lewis (2005) argue that when researching consumers' ethical views, qualitative research is more desirable than quantitative, because "*it has the ability to delve deeper into the actual actions, motivations and influences behind participants*" (p.185). Heiskanen (2005) claims that qualitative methodology will capture better the multifaceted real consumer. Furthermore, a qualitative methodology is seen as more appropriate to overcome the frequently emerging social desirability bias (for details see section 3.). Different authors (Crane, 1999; Clavin & Lewis, 2005; Auger et al., 2004a; 2004b; Auger & Devinney, 2007) say that in quantitative research, respondents tend to exaggerate the extent of their ethical behavior, so they categorize it as a data collection method that favors social desirability bias. Crane (1999) accepts that social desirability bias is not an exclusivity of quantitative inquiry, but the flexibility that qualitative inquiry offers help to manage better the emergence of bias.

The disadvantages of qualitative research were taken into account. Most authors refer to the credibility of the findings and to the labour intensive data collection and analysis as the main issues when conducting qualitative research (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Whitfield & Strauss, 1998). So, qualitative inquiry is often accused of lacking generalizability and of not being easily replicable and transparent. The measures taken to deal with these are described in more detail in Chapter 6.

Before selecting the combination of techniques, the main manuals on qualitative research were consulted, so that the doctoral student would have an initial idea of the advantages and disadvantages of the existing qualitative techniques. This knowledge was then applied to the practical reality of the doctoral student and to the nature of the

research topic. After consideration, a combination of observation, focus groups and in-depth interviews was selected. Their use in terms of intensity and frequency depended largely on the fieldwork and on the emerging data. In other words, while the strengths and weaknesses of the different techniques had been studied prior to the fieldwork, the application of the techniques was not rigid. Different techniques were used simultaneously in different periods of the data collection because it was considered more efficient.

In the following section, some of the strengths and weaknesses of each technique will be briefly presented, so that their complementary selection for the data collection will be justified.

### **5.3.2 Selection of Data Collection Techniques**

It was decided to begin the fieldwork with the technique of observation. Observation was selected as a complementary technique in this thesis. Given the lack of information on what constitutes a cooperative of responsible consumption and the difficulty of finding detailed information about the project and the participants online, it was understood that the doctoral student should engage in observation as a first phase of data collection. The main objective from it would be an initial contextualization of the phenomenon, by seeing where it takes place and how people interact (Patton, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, it would help the doctoral student to establish a relationship with the participants that would allow the later use of focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Furthermore, it would complement the data from interviews and focus groups because:

- The data drawn from observation come from the personal experience of the researcher and not through narratives of other people or through reports. This is important because all people have a selective perceptive ability, so the interviewees might exclude details during interviews (group or individual) simply because they haven't paid any attention to them. But, the observer/researcher is an external eye and can capture details and information that insiders in the setting do not perceive. Hence, this type of information cannot be accessed through interviews or focus groups (or other techniques that only

collect data based on the participants experience) (Patton, 2002; Sapsford & Jupp, 2006).

- Through observation the researcher can learn things that the participants are unwilling to discuss (Patton, 2002).
- Observation is a direct method that doesn't depend only on retrospective narratives of the participants (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006).
- It allows the observation of details that might not come up during an interview such as how the setting is arranged or observing people that are unwilling to participate in the study, whose existence would be otherwise ignored (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006).

Nevertheless, the need to complement the data from observation was acknowledged when thinking about its limitations (Patton, 2002; Sapsford & Jupp, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008):

- It can study only external behaviours, but not the subjective meanings that consumers derive from their behaviours or their perception of the surrounding reality.
- It might produce an erroneous or biased interpretation of the phenomenon in study, especially if researcher and participants do not belong to the same culture (like in the present study).
- It is time-consuming and requires a long-term engagement in the field when it is the only method used.
- It can only observe a limited number of activities that take place at the specific context at the specific moment of observation<sup>5</sup>.

One of the main objectives of the thesis is to understand the meanings that the consumers attach to their behaviours. This could not be achieved only through observation. Furthermore, observation in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, a finding during the fieldwork was that Responsible Consumption Cooperatives participated in boycotting campaigns. This first came up when the doctoral student observed a poster of the campaign 'Som lo que Sembrem' in a cooperative. Nevertheless, interviews (both group and in-depth) confirmed the participation of other cooperatives in this campaign and in other campaigns that had already finished before the fieldwork.



could only give insights on the collective experience, but not on the individual experience. Therefore, in order to get information around specific aspects of the experience of the ethical consumer, focus groups and in-depth interviews were employed. Through their use it would be possible to gather data according to the specific foci of the research, since the doctoral student could ask the questions she would see as most fit. Furthermore, they are both flexible techniques that allow the exploration and the emergence of new data throughout the data collection (Patton, 2002).

While both methods (in-depth interviews and focus groups) can provide a profound insight to consumers' experiences and opinions, each could contribute in different ways in the study.

The following strengths of the focus groups make them particularly attractive for this research project:

- They offer the possibility to observe a live interaction of the members about topics that the moderator sets (Morgan, 1998; Blee & Taylor, 2002). Each one makes his/her contribution offering personal opinions and interpretations, while at the same time the dynamics of the group can be observed. According to Bryman (2001), the focus group allows us to see how groups of people give meaning to phenomena, which makes it suitable for the study of social movements (Munday, 2006). Therefore, they can be particularly useful in order to understand how the members of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives experience their participation in the group.
- It is a flexible technique in terms of duration, costs, participants etc. that allows gathering rich amounts of data from many participants in short time periods (Stewart et al., 2007; Berg, 2007). According to Morgan (1997: 11), *'two eight person focus groups could produce as many ideas as 10 individual interviews'*.
- In focus groups, the participants hear the other people's views and they can react, agree or oppose to them. Moreover, the same question can be interpreted differently among the participants, which can lead to further insights. This is also known as the synergistic effect of the focus groups (Stewart et al., 2007).

- They can generate insights on topics that the researcher does not understand very well (Berg, 2007). Especially in the beginning, certain aspects of the project of the cooperative of responsible consumption should be clarified such as details about how the project is carried out by the collectivity. The opinions of various individuals involved in the project can offer a more complete image than just one view, because they can complete each other's answers.
- Social desirability bias is an issue in all research, because the respondent is interested in the impression he makes (see Fisher, 1993 for self presentation management). However, according to Wooten and Reed (2000), when the participants of a focus group know each other already, they are more likely to provide an authentic self-presentation. Krueger (1998) favours strangers in the focus group composition, but other authors (such as Morgan 1998; Bloor et al., 2001) consider Wooten and Reed's idea as best for the generation of more reliable data. Hence, in this case focus groups can prevent the bias that other techniques could provoke.
- Furthermore, focus groups have been mentioned as a highly appropriate and innovative technique to delve into the motivations of the participants (Lewis, 2001), especially in the ethical consumer research (Clavin & Lewis, 2005).

However, it has been suggested that the focus groups duration should be bried in duration. For instance, Berg (2007) suggests 30-60 min, whereas Morgan (1997) sets the length at 90 minutes and Patton (2002) increases to 120 minutes. Either way, the focus of the researcher during that interval is on all the participants, since all have to contribute for an efficient and successive group discussion. Alternatively, an important advantage of in-depth interviews is their exclusive focus on one person. They are one-to-one sessions. Therefore, it is understood that in-depth interviews offer more time to the interviewee to develop and express his opinions (Catterall & Maclaran, 1997).

While it is understood that focus groups and in-depth interviews are not substitute methods (Kaplowitz & Hoehn, 2001), it was considered that the use of both methods could add value to the study and offer a holistic and profound insight into consumer experiences and opinions.

## CHAPTER 5

In combination, the aforementioned three techniques could offer data that would provide answers to the formulated research questions in the natural setting of the participants.

## 5.4 Summary of Epistemological and Methodological Decisions

This chapter presented and justified the epistemological and methodological decisions taken by the doctoral student for the operationalisation of the study. So, this chapter discusses the planning of the research process, while Chapter 6 will show how the fieldwork was actually carried out. For instance, it will be seen in Chapter 6 that more data sources were employed than the ones described in this chapter, simply because it was considered that they would add more value to the empirical findings. The intention was to find the answers to the research questions of this thesis employing a flexible rather than a rigid and less efficient research design. It was understood that different types of data sources should be used if they contribute to the understanding of the ethical consumer of this study. Nevertheless, at all times these decisions were coherent with the principles of social constructionism and grounded theory.

Before proceeding to the presentation of the fieldwork, Table 5.0 summarizes the main decisions of this chapter that served as a guide during the whole research process; data collection and analysis.

**Table 5.0:** Main Epistemological and Methodological Decisions

<b>PEELING THE RESEARCH PROCESS ONION</b>	<b>DECISION TAKEN</b>
<i>Epistemological Position</i>	Social Constructionism
<i>Type of research project</i>	Exploratory, Theory Building
<i>Methodology</i>	Grounded Theory
<i>Research Methods</i>	Focus groups, in-depth interviews and observation

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# CHAPTER SIX

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

## Chapter 6: Research Design

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### 6.0 Introduction

In previous chapters, the research questions that guide the present thesis and the selected epistemological approach were presented. This chapter describes the research design and outlines how the research questions were operationalised.

An adequate research design is critical, given that the fieldwork and analysis of data intend to answer the previously formulated questions on the basis of empirical findings. As in any project, it requires careful planification with regards to the available resources and their most efficient use, so that the best results can be attained.

Within the spirit of openness and transparency, the decisions taken during the fieldwork are explained in detail, so that this chapter can serve as a bridge to Chapter 7, where the research findings are presented.

Given that the present thesis follows the basic principles of Grounded Theory tradition, the chapter begins with a section about the general approach to the fieldwork. Then, more specific decisions are described and explained; the sampling decisions, the ‘entry in the field’ decisions, the data collection techniques and their application and the data analysis general strategies. The final section is devoted to the criteria and procedures employed to ensure rigour and quality of the research project, in order to deal with criticisms of qualitative research as unscientific and unreliable.

## 6.1 Research Design according to Grounded Theory principles

In Grounded Theory, the objective is to build data driven theory. Data collection and analysis take place simultaneously, so that the questions about concepts that come up during the analysis can be answered by future data collection. It depends on the questions that need to be answered and the data collected are those considered more appropriate to provide such answers (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Corbin & Strauss (2008) explain one research experience to show how data collection takes place in Grounded Theory: *“I did obtain a couple of interviews, but at the time was not able to obtain more. So, I went to memoirs to find my answers. However, when it was context that I was interested in, I went to historical documents because they would provide me with the type of data I was looking for to answer my questions about how the United States got into the war and why. Then, when I needed more information about the concept of surviving, I returned to the memoirs”* (p. 150-151).

Following a similar line of data collection, all data collection was not planned a priori. This less structured and more flexible strategy refers to the order in which the data collection techniques were employed and to the type of data that were finally collected.

To explain it further, the example of how observation was employed is presented. While the decision to employ observation as a complementary method was taken *a priori*, initially the focus would be on visiting the ethical consumption cooperatives on the days of product distribution and on the days of assemblies to better observe the project taking place and try to chat with the members. But it soon became necessary to change the type of observation and the observational focus. To be more concrete, after several visits to different cooperatives on the days of product distribution, sufficient information about how the project was carried out was collected. However, the fact that most members picked up their products and left within short time didn't allow for much interaction with them. Even though, it allowed to arrange the focus groups and interviews.

Fortunately, alternative data sources were found. For instance, while conducting the first focus group, one of the group mentioned that the members were usually online connected through the cooperative's mailing list. So, if the observation could not be

in person, it could be online through subscription to the coop mailing list. Another source of information, that proved to be very rich, was an initiative by many Catalan cooperatives, called *la Repera*, which begun shortly after the primary research started. *La Repera* was a meeting of cooperatives from all over Catalunya and the information was passed to the researcher. As type of information was not known before the research started, so it could not have been planned beforehand. Thus, the flexible use of observation as a data collection technique in this study followed the basic tenets of grounded theory of data collection-data analysis-data collection and so on.

## 6.2 Choosing the ethical collective project

One of the main gaps identified in the literature was the lack of empirical findings about collective expressions of ethical consumer behaviour with a traditional emphasis on the individual. This section briefly outlines why the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives appeared as the most attractive choice among other ethical collective projects.

Indeed, there is a wide variety of ethical consumer collective projects. As it is the case for individual expressions of ethical consumer behaviour, the emerging collectivities do not have a unique, standardized form of expression. Instead, different groups support different issues and different forms of actions. To give some examples:

1. **Boycotting:** The collectivities that classify here are the ones that support and promote different types of positive buying e.g. Fair Trade organizations (Oxfam, Setem) and Fair Trade cities and campuses.
2. **Boycotting:** Boycotting has been traditionally considered as a type of semi-collective behaviour, since its effect depends on the mobilization of people. The rapid information sharing and worldwide connections through Internet have played their part in the emergence of online boycott communities (Cherrier, 2007). The appearance of online boycott communities that communicate and organize themselves through forums could be a modern

example of collective boycott action. There are several examples given the number of campaigns in vigor (e.g. ASPCA online community<sup>1</sup>).

3. Voluntary simplicity and downshifting: Anti-consumerism groups and online anti-brand communities are an example of this category given their rejection of the consumerism lifestyle. For instance, the study by Cherrier (2007) examined the online Voluntary Simplicity networks. The participants in these networks are people practicing simple living and willing to share experiences with others. Further examples are the permaculture villages, co-housing movements or the 'New Consumption Communities' of Bekin et al. (2007).
4. Slow Food movement: Slow cities (also found as Cittaslow) constitute the collective expression of the 'Slow Food' or 'Go Slow' movement. Slow cities are currently found in many countries such as Italy, Germany, UK, Spain, Australia among others (for more details see <http://cittaslow.blogspot.com/2008/10/cittaslow-list.html>)

The aforementioned are just some examples that show the diversity of existing ethical collectivities, both in virtual and traditional versions.

The initial intention was to examine collective projects of ethical consumer behaviour. After consideration, it was concluded that the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives (in specific the members of these coops) would be an interesting focus for the current thesis. Given the diversity of collective projects, the responsible consumption cooperatives were chosen for this study for the following reasons:

1. Increasing popularity of the project: During the last decade, Spain and in specific Catalunya have experienced a significant expansion of a new cooperative model, the cooperative of responsible consumption. Rough figures suggest about 100 families join cooperatives each year in Catalunya<sup>2</sup>. This initiative spreads out at a grass root level, as there is no mediation or support

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<sup>1</sup> Accessible at <http://aspcacommunity.ning.com/group/helpinganimals/forum/topics/boycott-circuses-1>

<sup>2</sup> Information about the cooperatives was found at first in a TV show and online articles.

TV show: Entrelinies, emission date: 05/11/07 (consult webpage: <http://www.tv3.cat/pprogrames/entrelinies/enlSeccio.jsp?seccio=arxiu&item=tema&idint=851&ordre=1>)

<http://verdeandoalimentos.blogspot.com/2007/02/las-cooperativas-de-consumo-ecologico.html> accessed on 22/02/08

<http://www.lavanguardia.es/lv24h2007/20080728/53506162618.html> accessed on 12/09/07

from the 'authorities' (as is the case of the *top-down* initiatives of Fair Trade cities and Fair Trade universities). Furthermore, the absence of other ethical consumer initiatives (such as the Fair Trade movement which has not grown in this context as much as in other countries) imply that the expansion of the cooperatives takes place because it seems to be an appropriate channel of expression for the motivated individual consumers that get together to act collectively. So, it is interesting to understand why this type of project becomes so popular, describe it and promote it as an alternative by including it in the wide array of possibilities for the ethical consumers.

2. The nature of the project: The nature of the project carried out in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives makes it more relevant to study, as it is involved group purchasing decision-making. In online voluntary simplicity communities the consumers interchange opinions and experiences, but their decisions are taken separately. However, as well as sharing experiences and ideas, the members of the coops share the same consumer project. This project consists principally of taking purchase decisions together according to mutually agreed social and environmental criteria. Therefore, it is not only about interacting and influencing each other, but more than that, it is about deciding together.
3. The real life interaction of the members: Another interesting feature of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is the real life interaction of the members in small geographically restricted spaces, unlike the online communities. These consumers meet normally once per week in the same geographical space, the cooperative, and they live in the same geographical space, the same neighborhood. This might imply the existence of a microculture (Sirsi, 1996) where the members share experiences and meanings. Hence, the study of the cooperatives can provide insights into whether a renegotiation of meanings and ideas takes place through their interaction and meetings.



## 6.3 Sampling Decisions

As mentioned in Chapter 4, for the purposes of this thesis, the unit of observation is the individual engaged in collective ethical projects, since the overall objective of the thesis is the deeper understanding of the ethical consumer experience.

In previous studies, the ‘ethical consumers’ were selected, because of engaging in single ethical acts; e.g. buy Fair Trade (Shaw & Shiu, 2003), avoiding sweat-shop clothes (Shaw et al., 2006) or bringing their own bag when they go to the supermarket (Cherrier, 2006). However, it is not clear if these acts were fragmented, single expressions of ethicality or whether they were part of a more general behavioral strategy. That explains why the focus of the research project is placed on all the possible expressions of consumer ethicality besides the known participation in the project of the cooperatives.

In terms of sampling design, Grounded theory suggests a flexible and sequential sampling process through the use of theoretical sampling (Glaser, 1978). As already explained previously, theoretical sampling does not consist of taking all the decisions a priori. Sampling takes place during the research process.

Since the objective is theory building, the sampling depends on the theoretical categories emerging from the data and the identification of the cases that could further develop the theory.

### 6.3.1 Step One: Selecting the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives

After deciding that the participation in Responsible Consumption Cooperatives would be the general criterion for the sampling procedure, the existing Responsible Consumption Cooperatives were identified. This was the first step that would later lead to deciding which specific individuals to be sampled.

An initial search revealed three websites with relevant listings of ‘ethical’ consumer groups; the website of Ecoconsum, the coordinating entity of Catalan cooperatives, the website of Germinal, one of the most traditional Catalan cooperatives, and the website of Món Verd, an ecologic association. The listings consisted of cooperatives

and ecologic associations located in different regions of Spain; Catalunya, Madrid, Galicia, the Basc' country etc.

At that point, the following general criteria were established for the selection of the cooperatives. The establishment of the aforementioned criteria was decided according to the suggestions of Miles and Huberman (1994). They argue the importance of setting boundaries in qualitative research, so that the researcher can identify the cases he/she wants to study within the limits of time and resources available.

- ✓ Only Catalan cooperatives would be selected. This was decided for two main reasons. First, information from the media<sup>3</sup> and the listings implied a high concentration and an increasing growth of cooperatives in the region of Catalunya. Moreover, the first cooperative ever founded in Spain is situated in the south of the Catalan region. Second, due to limited resources and for reasons of proximity, the focus on Catalan cooperatives would facilitate the data recollection and would allow face-to-face follow up.
- ✓ Second, it was decided to focus only on Responsible Consumption Cooperatives of products. Other collectivities that promote ethical consumption were found, such as cooperatives of financial services (e.g. Coop57). Nevertheless, their functioning and purpose is completely different to the responsible consumption cooperatives. For instance, no boycotting project is carried out there. So, it was considered that for reasons of consistency the collectivities should both follow the cooperative model and carry out the same type of project.

### 6.3.2 Step Two: Selecting the participants

Two important decisions were to be made on selecting the participants: 1) the identification of who would participate in the research, 2) the definition of the size of the sample required.

Starting with the second decision, in Grounded Theory the research continues until theoretical saturation of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In other words, when there

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<sup>3</sup> Mostly online newspaper articles: e.g. <http://verdeandoalimentos.blogspot.com/2007/02/las-cooperativas-de-consumo-ecologico.html> accessed on 22/02/08

is nothing new to be found, it is time to stop searching. Therefore, this type of decision cannot be taken beforehand.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous Chapter, the adopted epistemological paradigm is social constructionism. The desired objective is to achieve a deeper understanding of the ethical consumer, instead of ensuring representability of all ethical consumers, or of all consumers engaged in collective ethical projects. The focus is on achieving quality and depth of data, instead of targeting breadth through extensive samples. As Patton (2002: 244) argues, “*there are no rules for sample size in qualitative enquiry*” and according to Marshall (1996: 523) “*an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question*”.

Often, the sample size in qualitative research is small, given that the objective is information rich in detail and larger samples can be unmanageable and time requiring (Marshall, 1996; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Furthermore, as Ritchie and Lewis (2003) add, there is a point in qualitative research that augmenting the sample size does not yield any new information.

Indeed, small, purposive samples are common in previous qualitative ethical consumer studies. To give some examples:

- Shaw and Clarke (1999) conducted 2 focus groups with 16 ethical consumers exploring the formation of ethical beliefs. The individuals were selected because of being subscribers to the Ethical Consumer magazine.
- Connolly and Prothero (2003) undertook 6 interviews with volunteer participants from the age range 23-30 years old about their consumption habits and the impact that environment had on them. No more information is provided regarding the sampling strategy of the researchers.
- Newholm (2005) adopted a multiple case study approach with 16 participants for his doctoral thesis. All participants were self-selecting ethical consumers that discussed their ethical consumption strategies.
- Cherrier (2006) interviewed 9 consumers that were holding at least two reusable green bags during shopping in a supermarket after observing these consumers for 15 h. The main focus of the study was the exploration of green

bag usage as a “*routinized and socially embedded form of ethical consumption behaviour*” (p. 516).

- Carey et al. (2008) opted for 9 interviews with the parents of three families (6 individual interviews and 3 interviews of the couples) with small children and an interest in ethical consumption. Their sampling begun with the selection of individuals working in web-based organizations disseminating information about ethical consumption, while the rest of participants were identified through snowball sampling.

Given the qualitative focus of this study and the prioritization of depth instead of breadth, the most appropriate decision was to use purposive sampling. Purposive or judgmental sampling is the selection of information rich cases, according to the judgment of the researcher, because they can answer the research questions and meet the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2003).

A comprehensive table with the different types of purposeful sampling strategies is presented (adapted from Patton, 2002). The sampling techniques that were finally used in this doctoral thesis are ticked. These specific sampling techniques are further explained.

**Table 6.0:** Purposeful Sampling Strategies

<b>PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING</b>	SELECT INFORMATION-RICH CASES STRATEGICALLY AND PURPOSEFULLY: SPECIFIC TYPE AND NUMBER OF CASES SELECTED DEPENDS ON STUDY PURPOSE AND RESOURCES.	
Extreme or deviant case (outlier) sampling	Learning from unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest, for example, outstanding successes/notable failures; top of the class/dropouts; exotic events; crises.	
Intensity Sampling	Information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely, for example, good students/poor students; above average/below average.	√
Maximum variation sampling-purposefully picking a wide	Document unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions.	

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range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest	Identify important common patterns that cut across variations (cut through the noise of variation).	√
Homogeneous sampling	Focus; reduce variation; simplify analysis; facilitate group interviewing.	
Typical case sampling	Illustrate or highlight what is typical, normal, average.	
Critical case sampling	Permits logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases because if it is true of this one case, it's likely to be true of all other cases.	
Snowball or chain sampling	Identify cases of interest from sampling people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview participants.	√
Criterion Sampling	Picking all the cases that meet some criterion, for example, all children abused in a treatment facility. Quality assurance.	
Theory-based sampling, operational construct sampling, or theoretical sampling	Finding manifestations of a theoretical construct of interest so as to elaborate and examine the construct and its variations.	√
Confirming and disconfirming cases	Elaborating and deepening initial analysis; seeking exceptions; testing variation.	
Stratified purposeful sampling	Illustrate characteristics of particular subgroups of interest; facilitate comparisons.	
Opportunistic or emergent sampling	Following new leads during fieldwork; taking advantage of the unexpected; flexibility	
Purposeful random sampling (still small sample size)	Add credibility when potential purposeful sample is larger than one can handle. Reduces bias within a purposeful category. (Not for generalizations or representativeness.)	
Sampling politically important cases	Attract attention to the study (or avoid attracting undesired attention by purposefully eliminating from the sample politically sensitive	

	cases).	
Convenience sampling	Do what's easy to save time, money and effort. Poorest rationale; lowest credibility. Yields information-poor cases.	
Combination of mixed purposeful sampling	Triangulation; flexibility; meet multiple interests and needs.	

Source: Patton (2003: 243-244)

- Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical Sampling is explained in the previous chapter (section 5.2.2), since it is one of the basic principles of Grounded Theory. Briefly, its main quality is that it is data driven, instead if theory driven. Concepts emerge from data analysis and questions about these concepts lead to the next round of data recollection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). So, with theoretical sampling the objective is to select cases that can provide new data and refine existing concepts (Saunders et al., 2003).

- Snowball or Chain Sampling

This type of sampling is consistent with theoretical sampling, in the sense that sampling decisions are not taken a priori, but instead they depend on the information gathered during the data recollection. Snowball sampling was considered suitable for this research for two reasons. First, it was not always easy to identify the members of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. The lack of a complete directory of the existing cooperatives in Catalunya and the lack of information regarding their members lead to specific people and cooperatives (towards the few members that were giving out their details in the coop websites or the few cooperatives included in the listings of Ecoconsum, Germinal and Món Verde). Nevertheless, sampling based only on that information would have meant that a large part of other cases would have been ignored resulting in a biased image of the 'ethical consumers'.

Second, snowball sampling seems a valid sampling strategy, because the opinions and knowledge of the 'insiders' in identifying information rich cases are taken into account. However, in combination to the previous sampling technique, the doctoral

student was selecting the cases not only because the participants were suggesting them (referring to cooperatives in general or specific people), but also because they would contribute interesting new data.

- Intensity Sampling

The previous two sampling strategies helped deciding the order of sampling. This strategy was applied throughout the research. It is often defined as conceptually close to extreme sampling (see Table 6.0), because both extreme and intensive sampling tend to focus on information-rich cases that experience a phenomenon in an extreme or intense way. For this thesis, the members of Responsible Consumption Cooperatives are seen as cases that manifest sufficient intensity to contribute to the understanding of the ethical consumer, without being extreme or unusual. Maybe one could perceive them as extreme cases when comparing them to previous ethical consumer research that sampled individuals based on them being subscribers to an ethical publication (Shaw & Clarke, 1999), while the members of coops carry out a kind of ethical consumer project. However, it is believed that there are more extreme cases of ethical consumers, such as ethical consumer activists or people living in premaculture villages or the people living in the New Consumption Communities of Bekin et al. (2007), simply because their whole lifestyle is guided by their ethical concerns.

- Heterogeneous Sampling

This type of sampling was mainly employed at the beginning of the research process. Heterogeneous sampling consists in identifying different characteristics to construct the sample. According to Patton (2002), one main advantage of this strategy is the identification of common patterns in heterogeneous samples.

In the beginning, theoretical and chain sampling was not easily applied due to lack of knowledge of who would constitute an interesting and value-adding case. So, the main idea was to start with cases that presented differences between themselves. For instance, the first focus group was conducted in a cooperative in Sant Cugat, a smaller city in the suburbs of Barcelona, while for the second one a cooperative in the centre

of Barcelona was selected. Indeed, Creswell (1998) recommends that in Grounded Theory the individuals should be sampled from multiple sites, so that they can offer contextual information for the axial coding stage.

Besides that, especially in the beginning, the maximum diversification of the sampled cases was sought in terms of age, gender, phase of life (family, in a couple, single) and years of participation in the coop. In the focus groups, such diversification became possible with the help of the gatekeeper (Berg, 2007). The gatekeeper was one of the members of the cooperative that functioned as the point of contact between the doctoral student and the members of the coop.

## 6.4 Stages of the Fieldwork

The fieldwork does not only consist of the actual data collection process. There is a pre-phase during which the researcher tries to gain access to the field and to convince the units of observation to participate in the study. This phase can be time consuming because it is often difficult to convince people to participate in a study. Its importance is critical, since as Johnson (1975) in Patton (2002: 312) says ‘*no entree, no research*’. Once this stage is successful, the actual data collection follows until the point where theoretical saturation is reached. In the following subsections, the phases of the fieldwork are described.

### 6.4.1 Negotiating Access in the Fieldwork

Gaining access in fieldwork is often a complicated process that includes many steps and difficulties (Creswell, 1998). This was confirmed in this research. In order to establish an initial contact different tactics were employed. In some cases, initial contact was made through mails, whereas in others the doctoral researcher would visit the cooperatives during their opening hours (when she was in possession of such information). Both in mail and face to face contact the following were communicated<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> One cooperative asked for a written document signed from the tutor of the doctoral student stating the purposes of the study and the use of the results. It is attached in the Annex for further consideration.



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- The central purpose of the study and the techniques to be employed (type of technique, duration).
- Some details about the doctoral researcher (nationality, university and department). The nationality was disclosed in order to explain why the interviews and focus groups could not be in Catalan but in Spanish, since the doctoral researcher has a limited knowledge of the Catalan language.
- The time frame to complete the research project. The purpose was to get quicker answers as to whether they would participate or not.

Furthermore, the people were reassured that the confidentiality of the respondents would be protected. However, the fact that the doctoral student belongs to the Marketing Area of the department of Business Studies of the University of Rovira and Virgili raised questions on various occasions. The members of the cooperatives wanted to ensure that the research was not destined for the marketing departments of companies, in other words that it was not a type of market research. The doctoral researcher reassured them that they would participate in an academic study, not in a commercial one, adding that it was part of a doctoral thesis. In order to incentivise participation the following were mentioned:

- That their participation would help to promote the collective project of the cooperative, since little was known about it.
- That the research involved a number of cooperatives. When the research was more advanced, some of the names of the participant cooperatives were revealed, but not the names of the people that participated or what they had said. The rationale was that some of the cooperatives were well known in the cooperatives world and their participation in the study functioned as a kind of guarantee. Therefore, the previously sampled cooperatives, functioned as the 'known sponsor' (Patton, 2002: 312) who reassured the legitimacy and credibility of the doctoral researcher.
- That they would have access to the results of the research once finalized.

Monetary incentives could have been used, but they were considered inappropriate especially since they could associate the research project with a commercial study. Fortunately, all aforementioned arguments had a high degree of effectiveness.

First, as it turns out, one of the main objectives of the cooperatives is the promotion and establishment of their model as an alternative in society. Second, the members of the cooperatives were enticed by the fact of having access to the results, because they were very interested in knowing how other cooperatives were carrying out the project. Actually, the doctoral researcher was often asked about this topic in the course of the research especially by participants from more recently established cooperatives. Towards the end of the data collection, the participants often seemed to perceive the doctoral researcher as an ‘expert’ in cooperatives and even ask her specific questions about how they should carry out the project. For instance, they were saying: “*You have met a lot of people involved in cooperatives, so you know what we are talking about..*”, “*I am probably explaining things that you know already and better*”, “*Maybe now that you know, you could make some suggestions on how to do it*” etc. Although, it facilitated the entry into the coops, in order to avoid introducing bias the doctoral researcher didn’t give any opinions during the interviews or the focus groups.

#### 6.4.1.1 Presenting Oneself

The doctoral researcher did not hide her identity, because she wanted the members of the cooperatives to consciously participate in the study, especially after she saw that there was an issue of distrust towards research when the intentions of the researcher are not known. In almost all cases, she presented herself as a doctoral student, except during the first focus group when she presented herself as a researcher without specifying that the research project was her doctoral thesis. By presenting herself as a researcher, she wanted to make the members of the cooperative see that she wasn’t a ‘spy’ for big companies.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) suggest that a possible interpretation of ‘student’ can be an amateur but inoffensive researcher, while presenting oneself as a ‘researcher’ seems more professional, but has to be managed with caution. The experience during the study showed that the word ‘doctoral student’ had a positive effect. It seemed that the participants didn’t perceive the doctoral researcher as someone that could harm them, nor too amateur given that she intends to study in depth the unit of analysis.

Furthermore, after some visits to cooperatives more attention was placed on the dressing style. The researcher decided to avoid wearing apparel of known brands or

very formal clothing, because she wanted to *look more like* the respondents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 707).

Then, as mentioned in the previous section, she revealed her nationality in order to justify her not speaking Catalan and any mistakes she might make in Spanish. In order to gain the confidence of the participants, she willingly answered simple questions such as: “How long have you been in Catalonia?”, “What have you studied?” and “From which Greek city are you from?”. It was thought that by answering these simple questions the participants would feel more relaxed and comfortable, since they would know at least some basic information about the person that wanted to interview them. Furthermore, during the entry phase the researcher has to gain the confidence of the future participants, because this will condition their future answers and subsequently the quality of the data (Patton, 2002).

#### 6.4.1.2 Difficulties in Gaining Access

The doctoral researcher considers the beginning phase of the research as one of the most difficult of the entire research process, since it required a lot of effort to identify and convince the members of the cooperatives to participate. In detail, some of the difficulties were:

- Almost all the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives are not open on a daily basis (except the coop ‘Organic Veggies’ that sells ecological products to the public as well<sup>5</sup>). Usually, the cooperatives are open once per week for three hours during a weekday. So, even the initial phase of contacting the members of the cooperatives had to be carefully planned according to the respective schedule of each coop.
- Identifying information regarding the opening hours of the coop required much time and effort to be found, since there is no complete listing of the cooperatives in Catalunya. There are two websites that provide relevant information; the website of Ecoconsum, the coordinating entity of cooperatives in Catalunya and the website of Germinal, one of the most traditional and oldest cooperatives located in Barcelona. However, the

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<sup>5</sup> There are other cooperatives besides Organic Veggies that are open on a daily basis such as el Rebot in Girona and Xarxa de Consum Solidari in Barcelona.

information found there is quite limited and incomplete, since they identify the existence of very few cooperatives, most of them located in the city of Barcelona<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, in some cases, cooperatives do not have a website or even a fixed physical space where the members meet. Instead, they arrange their meetings by rotation in the members' houses (that was the case of Ecology Land for instance). The more informal the functioning of the coop, the more difficult it was to find information about it and ways to contact the members.

- Participation in a coop is a part-time and voluntary activity for the members of the coops. They might weekly or twice per month depending on the arrangements made. Since most members were busy with their work and/or family obligations that it was complicated to find a gap in their agendas so that they could participate in the study<sup>7</sup>. In fact, there were times that arranged meetings were cancelled at the last moment because of lack of availability and had to be re-scheduled, or cancelled.
- As mentioned before, another difficulty for convincing the members of the cooperatives to participate was the lack of trust in future uses of the research results. This has happened before in ethical consumer studies. Kozinets and Handelman (1998: 475) describe a more violent research experience: "*the first author was 'flamed' publicly in a newsgroup for being a 'tool of Babylonian mind-control' after posting a polite request for interviews about boycotts. Clearly, there are social desirability concerns at work in this topic*". In my case, this distrust was translated in unwillingness to participate (independently of the explanations given) but always in a polite manner.

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, such weakness is acknowledged by the cooperatives themselves. Towards that goal, they decided to constitute a group in middle of 2008 in order to identify all the groups, cooperatives and associations of responsible consumption located in Catalunya. The doctoral student met the members of that group, but unfortunately their search was still ongoing by the end of the primary research in January 2009. Such listing would have facilitated the process of getting in contact with the cooperatives.

<sup>7</sup> This is what Stewart et al. (2007:60) call "*time poverty*".

#### 6.4.1.3 Results of the first stage of negotiation of access

This section presents the results of this first stage of establishing contacts with the cooperatives and negotiating the access, so that primary research could be conducted. The real names of the cooperatives that participated in the study were replaced by pseudonyms that were selected by the researcher and that would preserve the identity of the participants.

The access to the cooperative was always negotiated with one of the members. That person played the role of the *gatekeeper* (Creswell, 1998; Berg, 2007) who would either convince the rest of the members to participate (especially in the case of the focus groups) or he/she would give contact details of members of the same or other cooperatives that could be suitable cases. Their help was undoubtedly decisive for the whole research design.

As expected, the effectiveness of this first stage of gaining access varied<sup>8</sup>:

- The members of 'Green Wave', 'Ecology Land', 'Green Valley' and 'Alternative ways' agreed immediately to participate in the study. The doctoral researcher gave some information about the project without extending too much. This seemed to be sufficient for the members, since no more information was asked. The focus groups and interviews were arranged through visits to the cooperative and sequent e-mails with the gatekeeper in each coop. Between 5 to 8 short e-mails were sent to make all the necessary arrangements. The date of the meetings was decided by the members of the coop, but in all three cases it took two weeks or less to make arrangements.
- The members of 'New Tendency' agreed to participate in the study after one month of calling and e-mailing some of them. Initially, there was no answer either way, so the doctoral researcher kept searching for the contact details of different members. Finally, one of them replied positively, but it took another month to actually proceed to interviewing them.
- 'Organic Veggies' had the most requirements. The initial phase of gaining access lasted for three months, until the members were convinced to

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<sup>8</sup> The decision made was to ensure anonymity of the names of the cooperatives just for this section.

participate. During this period, further information about the project was continuously asked, such as official documents that would state the specific objectives of the project in progress. The doctoral researcher visited the coop various times before the interviews, since face to face contact seemed the best means to get a positive and definite answer.

- Other cooperatives were contacted as well. In five cases, no reply was received independently despite the insistence of the doctoral researcher, while in four other cases, members immediately replied negatively due to lack of time or lack of interest in the study. Nevertheless, it took two months to get definite replies from four other cooperatives that initially accepted to participate but then the actual meetings were postponed until they eventually refused to participate.

It should be clarified that many of the aforementioned activities took place simultaneously. It couldn't have been done otherwise due to reasons of efficiency and due to the limited time frame planning of the doctoral researcher<sup>9</sup>. To keep track of it all, an electronic calendar (a Word file) was kept. There, the doctoral researcher noted which cooperatives had been contacted, which had answered positively or negatively and when a visit or focus group or interview was planned.

#### **6.4.2 Entry in the Fieldwork and Data Collection**

After overcoming the difficulties associated with the first stage of gaining entry, the actual data collection began. The fieldwork involved the use of different techniques; focus groups, interviews, observation and document analysis. It took place over 14 month period, from middle February 2008 until April 2009. The long period is a disadvantage when Grounded Theory is used according to Bryant and Charmaz (2007). The implementation of the different techniques overlapped. For instance, when the first focus group took place, observation had already started.

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<sup>9</sup> The intention was to establish contact first, because it was soon understood that the negotiation of access could last for months. The final decision of whether the members of a cooperative would be sampled or not depended on the emerging data.

The reasoning behind the selection of the techniques has been already explained in Chapter 5. In this section, the implementation and design of the data collection techniques is described.

#### 6.4.2.1 Data Collection through Focus Groups and In-Depth Interviews

The principal techniques for the data recollection were the focus groups and interviews with the members of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. They are considered as the most important source of information, because the doctoral researcher intended to answer all the research questions by employing these techniques. The rest of the data sources have a complementary function. In specific, the focus groups and interviews intend to answer:

- How the participants construct their social realities? What are their perceptions and worldviews? What are the issues that concern them?
- What type of strategies do they adopt in terms of individual and collective projects?
- What meanings do they attach to their behaviors (individual and collective projects)? How do they perceive themselves?
- Are these perceptions, behaviors and meanings renegotiated within the cooperative?

##### 6.4.2.1.1 Focus Groups

The advantages and disadvantages of this method have been presented in Chapter 5. Here, the decisions taken in order to carry out the focus groups will be explained. For their design, different qualitative research manuals were consulted. Among them, the tetralogy on focus groups by the focus group expert Richard Krueger and David Morgan (1998) should be highlighted.

##### *Designing the questions for the focus group*

Easterby-Smith et al. (2003) say that focus groups are loosely structured. However, the main areas where light needs to be shed should be identified beforehand. Krueger

(1998) argues that researchers intending to use this technique can choose between two strategies; the *topic guide* or the *questioning route*.

The topic guide is described as a list of topics to be explored by the focus group, whereas the questioning route is a list of questions in complete, conversational sentences. According to Krueger (1998), each questioning strategy offers different advantages and disadvantages which are summarised in the following table (see table 6.1).

Given that the doctoral researcher did not have previous experience in focus group research, she preferred the more conservative strategy of questioning route, following the recommendation by Krueger (1998). A list of the questions asked during the focus groups is attached in the Annex. It should be noted that the list of questions was modified according to the emerging data. For instance, during the focus group with the members of the Civada an issue that came up was the way other people ‘treated’ them because of their ‘ethical’ habits. Initially, the doctoral researcher had included a question about their self-perception trying to understand how they see themselves. After that focus group it was considered useful to add a question about how they perceived the way others perceived them.

For Patton (2002) the number of questions depends on the number of the participants and on the expected duration of the focus group. He recommends that “*with eight people and an hour for the group, plan to ask no more than 10 major questions*” (p.387). Questions on eight general topics were developed. Then, each question had subquestions. Nevertheless, the focus group is a flexible and relatively unstructured group interview, so the questions asked and their order depended a lot on the flow of the discussion. The main concern was to cover the general topics, provide data to answer the research questions and keeping the conversation on the topic at hand. The funnel approach was adopted, meaning that the interviews started with more general, unstructured questions followed by more specific ones (Stewart et al., 2007).



**Table 6.1:** Topic Guide or Questioning Route?

	<b>ADVANTAGES</b>	<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>
<b>Topic Guide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Speed</li> <li>- More conversational</li> <li>- Spontaneity</li> <li>- Flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More difficult analysis</li> <li>- Limited feedback when pilot testing</li> <li>- Inconsistency between different moderators (it could lead to more free interpretation)</li> </ul>
<b>Questioning route</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More precision, moderator addresses the topics more precisely</li> <li>- More efficient analysis</li> <li>- Enhanced consistency when different moderators are involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Questions are slower to develop</li> <li>- Potential false perception between what is written and what is asked</li> <li>- This method can be less spontaneous and more rigid</li> </ul>

Source: Krueger, (1998: 11)

*Planning and Conducting the focus groups*

Suggestions on the Size of the focus group

The recommendations about the most efficient size of the focus group point towards different directions. Patton (2002) argues that focus groups should be between 6 to 10 people, whereas Stewart et al. (2007) lift the upper boundary to 12 participants. But Berg (2007) claims that focus groups should be kept to no more than 7 participants. Morgan (1997) says that the optimal size can vary, since small groups give more time to each participant, but it is more difficult for the moderator to maintain an active discussion. He adds that researchers shouldn't feel obliged to respect strictly the lower boundary of 6 and the upper boundary of 10, because the size should also depend on the circumstances. He cites his experience: *"I have conducted groups of 3 highly involved participants that would have been unmanageable at size 6, and I have led discussions in naturally occurring groups of 15-20 in which the progress was quite orderly"* (1997: 43).

### Suggestions on the Number of focus groups

In terms of how many focus groups are enough, Morgan (1997) suggests three to five focus groups, given that more focus groups rarely provide new insights. Stewart et al. (2007) agree that this is usually the norm. Nevertheless, the aforementioned are suggestions that were taken into account, but not blindly followed, because the number of focus groups is a decision to take based on the new, emerging data and the objectives of the current thesis.

### *Deciding the details and Conducting the focus groups*

For the purposes of this thesis, four focus groups were conducted in total, where 32 members of cooperatives participated. The initial aim was at 8-10 participants per group<sup>10</sup> and a total duration of 1,5-2 h according to what most manuals recommend (e.g. Patton, 2002). In this way, it was considered that there was enough time for each participant to talk and that the groups would be big enough, so that the discussion would be vivid and not monopolized by single participants [frequent risks in small focus groups according to Morgan (1997) and Stewart et al., (2007)].

Unfortunately, it was not possible to control the level of participation in all cases. For instance, a focus group with 7 participants was arranged, but only 5 of them showed up<sup>11</sup> (the two that didn't show up informed the other participants of their not coming, but they didn't let the doctoral researcher know). In another case, the opposite happened. A focus group with 8 participants was arranged and 4 more showed up. When the doctoral researcher proposed to divide the participants in two smaller focus groups, she received general dissatisfaction and excuses such as: '*we don't have more time, it should be today..*'.

Before the focus groups, the participants had a vague idea about the topic. The doctoral researcher told them that she was studying the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives without giving more details. It was considered best, since data were supposed to emerge and not to be produced or conditioned.

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<sup>10</sup> At least for the first focus group. The personal experience would show whether such decision was correct or not.

<sup>11</sup> Stewart et al. (2007) mention that a good rule of thumb is to expect that 2 participants might not show up.

According to the initial target most focus groups lasted between 1,5 h. and 2 h.<sup>12</sup>. They were videotaped and recorded. The setting and date was decided by the participants and in all four cases the cooperative premises were selected as the most convenient setting to carry out the focus group. The doctoral researcher acted as moderator for all focus groups, mainly because she wanted to ensure that all topics would be covered and that the conversation wouldn't go to irrelevant topics. Three colleagues of the doctoral researcher helped her and acted as assistant in the focus groups discussions. Previously, she had updated them about the main topics to be covered, since they were not previously involved in the research. The details of the focus groups are resumed in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2:** Focus Groups details

<b>FOCUS GROUP</b>	<b>NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER GROUP</b>	<b>DURATION</b>	<b>DATE</b>
Coop A	5	90 min.	April 2008
Coop B	11	100 min.	May 2008
Coop D	12	120 min.	June 2008
Coop E	4	100 min.	October 2008

### *Ensuring Participation*

To ensure participation of the members of the focus groups, different tactics were used. First, the opening question was intentionally quite general, because the objective was to start the discussion by inviting all members to participate and somehow 'break the ice'. Paper and pens were distributed to them and then one by one they were asked to answer the question. It has to be mentioned that this order was respected only in the beginning. Then the flow of the conversation was more natural. Second, the moderator would encourage the more shy and less talkative members to participate more. This became more necessary especially in the third and bigger focus group.

<sup>12</sup> Besides the focus groups with the 12 participants that lasted almost 130 min.

Third, the doctoral researcher tried to observe discreetly the facial expressions and gestures of the participants that showed dissatisfaction and seemed to want to add something to the discussion. A common drawback of focus groups is that the after the end of a focus group the participants might have a sense of not having expressed themselves fully (Krueger, 1998).

#### *Brief conclusions from the use of the technique of focus groups*

After conducting the focus groups, an initial observation was that the first and second focus groups presented a better dynamic. This was attributed partially to the size of the group. The first focus group had 5 participants willing to get involved and answer to questions, so the discussion remained interesting and vivid during the 90 minutes it lasted. The second group was much bigger, but the members had been trained to debate and interchange opinions (through their assemblies and previous participation in another focus group), which facilitated substantially the work of the moderator and the flow of information. The most dysfunctional group turned out to be the third, because of its size and because three of the participants had the tendency to monopolize the conversation. It required much more effort from the part of the moderator to ensure participation of all members. Nevertheless, in all four focus groups the participants showed a high level of involvement which provided a substantial amount of useful data.

#### 6.4.2.1.2 In-depth Interviews

To complement the data from the focus groups, the method of in-depth interviews was selected. Creswell (1998) suggest in-depth interviews as an appropriate data collection method in Grounded Theory.

#### *Designing the questions*

Patton (2002) proposes three alternative strategies to carry out an interview; the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview. In this thesis, a combined approach was adopted. A conversational strategy was adopted within an interview guide approach, because a

high degree of flexibility was required but also, certain topics had to be covered. Hence, the doctoral researcher would go to the interview with a list of topics and general questions, but their order was defined by the flow of the conversation. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the interview the doctoral researcher would start with more general, ice-breaking questions just like in the focus groups. The intention was to make the interviewee feel at ease.

Special attention was given to the wording of the questions. The objective was to ask “truly open-ended questions” (Patton, 2002: 353) and avoid dichotomous response questions that elicit answers of a simple yes or no. For instance, instead of asking “*Are you feeling comfortable as a member of the cooperative?*” and “*Is the cooperative an important part of your life?*” the doctoral researcher would ask: “*How do you feel in the cooperative?*” and “*How do you describe your experience as a member of the cooperative?*”. It was clear from the start that the wording of the questions should be open, so that the interviewees wouldn’t be guided towards certain answers.

#### *Carrying out the interviews*

Chronologically, some of the in-depth interviews were conducted at the same time as the focus groups, but most of them took place later from November 2008 to January 2009.

The interviewees belonged to three different cooperatives. In order to make them feel more comfortable, they decided where and when they wanted to have the interview. The settings of the interviews vary: a café, a bench in a university campus, over lunch in a restaurant, an office of CGT (General Confederation of Labour), an office of SETEM (a Non Profit Organization where the interviewee volunteered), a café and then a walk in the streets, their cooperative. The only request made by the doctoral researcher prior to the interview was that the setting should be a relatively quiet place. Otherwise, the quality of the recording would be affected.

The interviews lasted from 40 to 120 minutes, with an average duration of 70 min. They were all recorded and transcribed. The transcription was carried out by the doctoral researcher and it was intended to transcribe the interview soon after it was carried out, so that other details such as gestures, expressions and other body language

signs would be taken into consideration, given that the interviews were not videotaped like the focus groups. The doctoral researcher carried a notebook besides the digital recorder for any details that she wanted to write down.

### *Rapport and Neutrality*

In ethical consumer behaviour literature, one of the main preoccupations of the researchers is the appearance of the social desirability bias that conditions the quality of information (Clavis & Lewis, 2005 in Harrison et al., 2005; Auger et al., 2007). This was one of the main reasons behind the selection of the qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology does not eliminate the possibility of social bias, but it gives more flexibility to the researcher to manage the emergence of bias (Crane, 1999).

Within this context, the establishment of a good rapport during the interviews was considered paramount, since it can determine the quality of the emerging data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

In order to establish a good rapport, the doctoral researcher placed emphasis on the wording of the questions and on her body language. The questions should be open enough so no answers would be elicited, while empathy and understanding was conveyed through constant eye-to-eye contact, gestures and facial expressions.

However, major attention was placed on fighting any preconceptions that the interviewees might have towards the doctoral researcher. Basically, the concern that the results of the research would be used by the marketing departments of big companies was expressed again and again. Hence, in the beginning of the interviews the doctoral researcher would clarify again that she was a doctoral researcher doing her thesis. In one case, the interviewee seemed more concerned and asked how she was sure that the results wouldn't be sent to a big company. In order to calm him down, she replied that she worked in an academic environment, that she was not in contact with any company and that her intention was not to provide a socio-demographic profile of them and so a clear marketing target for companies, but to understand and promote their collective project.

In general, distrust would easily be created and interviewees would demand information to be sure to whom they were talking to. For instance, one interviewee wanted to know who was funding the PhD scholarship of the doctoral researcher. In

order to make them feel comfortable, the researcher answered most of their questions, unless they were asking her personal views about topics that would come up in the interview.

#### *Added Value from Interviews*

One main advantage from the use of interviews was a more in depth understanding of the interviewee, since he/she had more time available to express her/his opinions. Furthermore, interviews offered greater control to the doctoral researcher than the focus groups. As it turned out, the doctoral researcher couldn't always control who would participate in the focus group (e.g. more or less people appeared than arranged) which made the application of theoretical sampling more difficult. In both techniques, the help from the gatekeeper was very important, but in the focus groups the gatekeeper's role was decisive for the sampling of the participants. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the techniques of focus groups and interviews complement each other, since focus groups offered valuable information through the interaction of the members that wouldn't have been sourced otherwise.

#### 6.4.2.2 Data Collection through Observation

Observation was selected as a complementary technique in this thesis. Observational research can offer a more holistic perspective of the phenomenon under study, because the researcher can contextualize the phenomenon, by seeing where it takes place and how people interact. The benefits from the selection of this technique have been described in detail in Section 5.3.2.

As mentioned in chapter 4, one of the main gaps in the literature is the lack of a holistic approach in the study of the ethical consumer. So, it was thought that the use of observation could offer valuable information about the project carried out in the cooperative and the participants through first-hand experience, beyond the selective perceptions of the participants. As Jorgensen (1989: 21) mentions, the observer can “*experience the meanings and interactions of people from the role of an insider*”. In this thesis, the technique of observation serves to answer the following:

- What meanings do these consumers derive from the project of the cooperative of responsible consumption?
- What is exactly the project of the cooperative of responsible consumption?
- How do they carry out the project of the cooperative of responsible consumption?

#### *Duration of observations and fieldwork*

The actual data gathering was not structured, in the sense that the doctoral researcher did not repeat the same observational strategy in the same place for a pre-determined period of time. Instead, it depended on the course of the study and on the emerging information. Data were collected from different settings; various visits to cooperatives or a visit to a member's house, meetings of members of cooperatives in a rural house and in a cultural centre of a Barcelona district, an assembly of a cooperative in an Entities Hotel (Hotel de entidades). To these, online observation of two cooperatives should be added through subscription to their mailing lists. Online research has been previously used in ethical consumer research (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Cherrier, 2007) as the main data collection method.

In terms of duration, the fieldwork was more an aggregation of single observations rather than a long term standardized observational strategy. In specific:

- Various visits to different cooperatives took place. These included repeated visits to the same cooperative (e.g. Environmental Hope or Organic Veggies) or single visits to different cooperatives. The cooperatives whose members were interviewed (through focus groups or personal interviews) were all visited more than once. Also, other cooperatives that in the end did not participate in the study were also visited. The visits lasted from 1 h to 1,30 h. A main limitation for longer observation was the opening hours of the cooperatives. Apart from the case of Organic Veggies, the rest of the cooperatives opened once-a-week for an average of three hours to distribute the products. In some cases, as in the case of Environmental Hope or Ecology Land, this procedure took place once every 15 days. So, the way of functioning was dictating the timeframe for observation.



- Then, the doctoral researcher attended specific events such as an assembly of the members of a cooperative and two meetings of members of different cooperatives in Catalunya (including some of the cooperatives whose members were interviewed). Ryan and Bernard (2000) call these spot observations. The observation of the assembly lasted for 4h, while the observation of the meetings 8 h each time. The meetings were particularly enlightening, because the doctoral researcher had the opportunity to meet and have informal conversations with a lot of people that were members of cooperatives. The first meeting took place at the beginnings of June 2008 (around 4 months after the primary research had started) and it proved very useful for the theoretical sampling. In specific, the two last cooperatives that participated were suggested during an informal chat with a participant in the meeting. Given that these two cooperatives are relatively new collectivities, they do not appear in any directory and their identification would have been difficult otherwise. Besides that, a fortunate coincidence was the organization of these meetings. These were not ordinary meetings of members of Catalan cooperatives. Instead, a kind of action research was taking place. The organizing committee of these meetings, named *la Repera*, was arranging the participants of these meetings in focus groups of 12-20 people that would talk about problems that the cooperatives were facing. In fact, in the second meeting, *la Repera II*, a focus group was in charge of analyzing the motivations that drove the participants to join a cooperative, which is one of the basic questions of the thesis. *La Repera II* took place in February 2009 and by that time most of the primary research had already been completed. Nevertheless, it was useful because it helped refine and confirm the concepts that had emerged before.
- The online observation in the form of participation in the mailing list of two cooperatives lasted longer than the aforementioned. The subscription in the first cooperative online group lasted one year (from April 2008 till April 2009) resulting in 124 mails and the second one for 4,5 months (December 2008 till April 2009) resulting in 14 mails.

Due to the limited duration of the observation, it could be argued that the doctoral researcher was a part-time, in-and-out observer (Patton, 2002: 274).

### *Observational Focus*

The scope of the observational focus was quite broad, encompassing different aspects of the setting, because as mentioned in the previous paragraph the intention was to get a holistic view of the phenomenon. The range of observational foci is wide; from the setting itself (decoration, signs, product distribution etc.) to the members (interaction, dressing style, age and other demographics etc.). The different types of observational strategies that were employed contributed towards a more holistic understanding of the project, helped the theoretical sampling and added details that could have been ignored otherwise. For instance, the doctoral researcher observed:

- How the project was carried out; the e-mails sent to the members during the week, the reception of the vegetables from the producers, the arrangement of the products, the arrival of the members, the interaction among the members, the arrangement of the workload, the practical issues that would come up etc.
- That there were different orientations and cultures in the different cooperatives. For instance, the cooperative Organic Veggies seemed more like a normal shop where people would enter to buy, they wouldn't talk much to each other, then they would pay and would leave. In previously sampled cooperatives the members wouldn't stay for too long either, but the atmosphere in the cooperative was more like a meeting of friends or a social space in the neighborhood. The members would often come with their partners and children to pick up their vegetables, would chat vividly with each other and then leave. In the cooperative Alternative Ways, some of the space was used as a playground (there was a small sofa and some toys) and the parents were leaving there the children while talking and putting the products in the shopping cart.
- The interaction with the producers. It was interesting to see the personal relationship that had developed among consumers and producers, reminiscent of scenes from villages.
- The 'decoration' of the cooperatives' interior in relation to the cooperative's 'mission'. All the visited cooperatives were very simple and rustic warehouses (some more or less organised). However, details such as signs showed what

the members considered important. For instance, Organic Veggies had a big wooden sign in the entrance declaring the clear ecological mission of the coop, whereas Alternative Ways had directions on the walls with regards to self-governance and how to carry out efficient debates.

In order to record what was being observed, the doctoral researcher kept a notebook with her, where she recorded all the details that seemed relevant to answer her questions. Usually, these notes were short phrases and words that would be decodified afterwards. The doctoral researcher avoided to write at all when she understood that people were looking at her because she didn't want to create unease and make them behave unnaturally. This happened a couple of times during visits to cooperatives. In those cases, notes were taken after the doctoral researcher had left the cooperative. Jorgensen (1989) mentions the use of audio-video equipment in observational research, but it was considered as interfering too much with the natural flow of information.

### *Role as an Observer*

The researcher that decides to employ observation has to define what type of observational strategy he will adopt. Two of the basic decisions to be made are the following; 1) overt versus covert identity, 2) level of personal participation in the observation. Not revealing one's identity can be tempting, since participants tend to behave differently when they are aware of them being observed, a phenomenon known as the observer or Hawthorne effect (Patton, 2002). Nevertheless, hiding the identity can have ethical implications, since the subjects under observation haven't consented to participate in the research.

Saunders et al. (2003) identify four roles on the basis of the two aforementioned dimensions. In figure 6.1, these roles are illustrated showing at the same time and the posture that was adopted is identified. As outlines in the figure, a combination of roles was preferred. Jorgensen (1989) supports the performance of multiple roles during a research project.

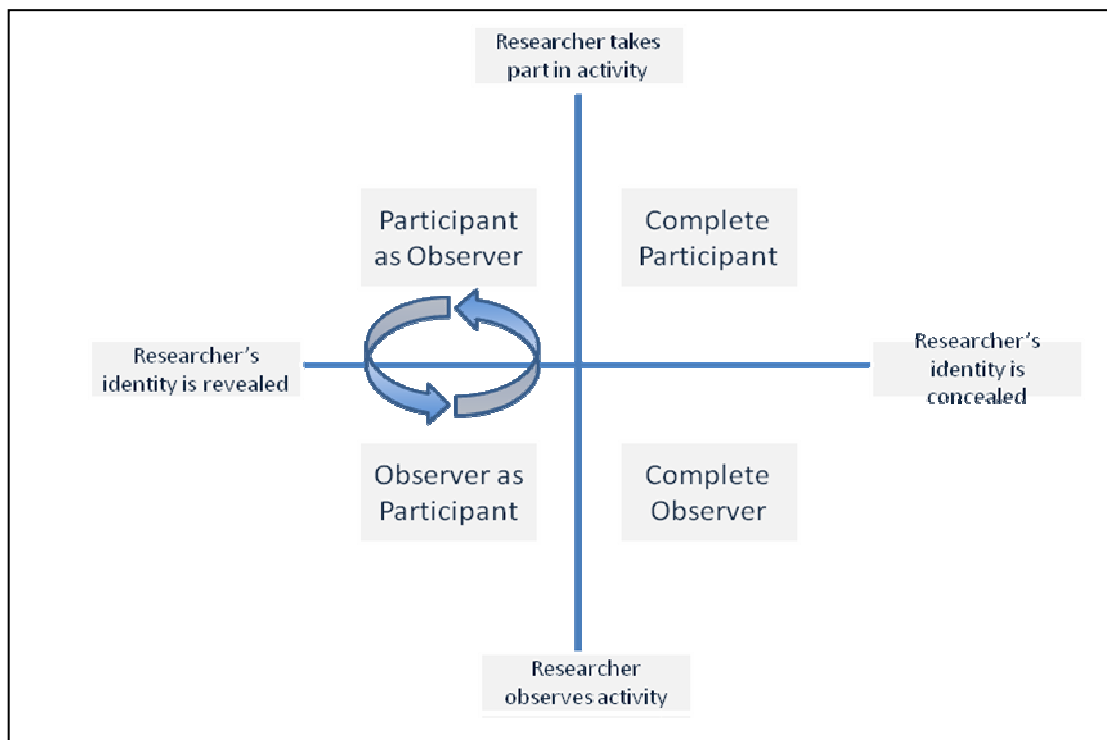
For ethical purposes, the identity of the doctoral researcher was disclosed at all times. For instance, before la Repera meetings, a mail was sent to the organizational committee asking permission to attend as a researcher. Furthermore, when the

researcher attended the focus groups in la Repera<sup>13</sup>, she had to present herself, so she explained that she was working on her doctoral thesis about Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, but without giving further details. The intention was to collect information only with the consent of the participants, especially due to the distrust and preoccupation faced in the beginning phase of negotiation of entry (see section 6.3.1.2).

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<sup>13</sup> There the doctoral student didn't have any active participation. The focus groups were organised by the members of the cooperatives themselves in a kind of action research project.

**Figure 6.0:** Participant Observation Researcher Roles in the current thesis



Source: Saunders et al. (2003: 224)

In terms of participation, there was a variation on the part of the doctoral researcher depending on the circumstances. Therefore:

- Observer as a Participant: Saunders et al. (2003) use this term to describe when the observer is simply a ‘spectator’ (p. 225). He collects data by separating himself from the setting and by avoiding taking part in the ongoing activity. During the research, this was the most frequently used strategy. It was preferred when the doctoral researcher didn’t want to interfere in the natural flow of information. For instance, during the focus groups in the meetings of la Repera or during the assembly of one cooperative, the doctoral researcher was simply observing and taking notes, since any other participation didn’t seem appropriate while conversations were taking place.
- Participant as an Observer: Patton (2002: 265) describes this role as “*complete immersion in the setting as full participant*”. Most of the time the doctoral researcher maintained a distance from the setting in observation, but sometimes she was not just watching but also becoming ‘one of them’. For instance, during the breaks in the meetings of La Repera, she had informal

conversations with the members, she had lunch with them and after the meetings ended, she would share a car back home and chat with them.

In the following table, the parameters of the employed observational strategies are summarized. Even if the observation was not long term and structured, it provided useful details especially regarding the collective project that is carried out and it helped in refining and confirming concepts that emerged during the focus groups and interviews.

**Table 6.3:** Synopsis of the Parameters of Observational Study

<b>TYPE OF OBSERVATION THAT TOOK PLACE</b>	<b>REPEATED OBSERVATIONS</b>	<b>SINGLE EVENTS</b>	<b>ONLINE OBSERVATION</b>
<b>Explanation of observational research</b>	Visits in cooperatives	Assistance in a coop assembly and in two meetings of members of different Catalan cooperatives.	Subscription in mailing lists of cooperatives
<b>Duration of fieldwork</b>	8 months, each visit lasted 1h to 1,5 h.	Each observation took place once, lasted 5 h to 8 h	First Group: 1 year Second Group: 4,5 months
<b>Role of Observer</b>	Interchanging between ‘Observer as a Participant’ and ‘Participant as an Observer’	Interchanging between ‘Observer as a Participant’ and ‘Participant as an Observer’	‘Observer as a Participant’
<b>Observational Focus</b>	How the project is carried out, interaction between members, observation of the cooperative (signs, products, decoration etc.) and of the members	Interaction between members, meanings ascribed to participation in the project of the coop, observation of the people (behaviours, dressing style, age and other socio-demographics)	Information on the Cooperative Project, communication between the members of the cooperative, information sharing, projects other than the main of buying products

	(behaviours, dressing style, age and other socio- demographics)		
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#### 6.4.2.3 Data Collection through other sources

During the data collection, the doctoral researcher came across other sources of information that could be useful. The following sources of information were finally used:

- Documents provided by the members of the cooperatives. After conducting the focus groups and interviews, the participants presented other types of documents related to the objectives and functioning of their cooperatives. Among them, there were the statutes of the cooperatives and other documents with information about their history and organization and their product range.

- A bulletin of news that the members of different cooperatives write and publish themselves, named TROC. TROC is a 20-page extension journal and it is available through the website of the cooperative Germinal. Three to four issues are published per year. For the purposes of this thesis, the last 15 issues were downloaded and analyzed, representing a 5-year period (2003-2008).

While it was not initially planned to use this type of data sources, mainly because their existence was not acknowledged by the researcher, they turned out to be very rich sources of information. For instance, the statutes of the cooperatives state the objectives and principles of the ethical collective project of the cooperative of responsible consumption. Then, the documents about the functioning and organization of the cooperative provide information about how the project is carried out. Finally, TROC is a recompilation of articles written by members of cooperatives destined to be read by other members of cooperatives. As it declares in its first page, TROC wants:

*“To be the vehicle for ideas, reflections, news and activities of all the consumer groups in Barcelona in all that are related to consumption, ecology and social movements”.*

TROC was considered a very useful data source because it allowed a more holistic understanding of the members of Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. In specific, it helps answer the following issues:

- It allows a wider understanding of how these people construct their reality. It provides information with regards to their perceptions and worldviews and the issues that concern them.
- It shows what type of individual and collective ethical projects they carry out and how they do it.

Its benefits in relation to the previous techniques are:

- They are documents that the members of the cooperatives produced themselves without any mediation from the doctoral researcher. They selected themselves the topics they write about and they use an informal and emotional language that shows that they don't inhibit themselves. Therefore, their articles reflect closely their perceptions and world views, since they were a means of expression that was not co-produced with the doctoral researcher.
- Unlike the other techniques, these documents offer access to information that represents a longer time period (5 years). According to Patton (2002: 559), "*checking for the consistency of what people say about the same thing over time*" is a form of triangulation of qualitative data sources.

To conclude, the main function of these documents is that they extend and confirm the knowledge that was collected through the previous techniques around the social constructions and perceptions of the members of the cooperatives.



## 6.5 Triangulation of Data and Summary of Data Collection Process

In this section, the concept of triangulation will be briefly presented and its application in this thesis will be explained accompanied by a summary of the previously described data collection techniques.

### 6.5.1 Triangulation of data

Originally conceived by the ancient Greek mathematician Thales (Deakins, 2008), the concept of triangulation is used as a rigorous measure of the validity of a study (Ma & Norwich, 2007). Initially, triangulation was associated with the quantitative tradition (Ma & Norwich, 2007), but it was soon suggested (Denzin, 1978) as an efficient tool of verification in qualitative research.

For many researchers, triangulation can be achieved through the use of multiple data-gathering techniques (Berg, 2007). Indeed, this is a frequent description of the concept (e.g. Jack & Raturi, 2006). Nevertheless, this type of triangulation is labeled “*the between methods*” type (Denzin, 1978: 302). Denzin (1978) suggests that there are four types of triangulation representing varieties of data, investigators, theories and methods. These are the ‘*within method*’ type of triangulation (Denzin, 1978: 301). As Patton (2002: 556) explains:

- Methods triangulation: Test the consistency of empirical results collected through different methods. In many manuals and papers (e.g. Patton, 2002; Burns & Grove, 2004; Feher-Waltz et al., 2004) it implicitly refers to a complementary use of qualitative and quantitative methods. An example are the studies by Jick (1979) who used a combination of survey, semi-structured interviews, non participant observation and archival material or by Jack & Raturi (2006) who opted for case studies, field survey and secondary data.
- Triangulation of sources: Compare and cross-check the findings generated at different moments and from different sources, but within qualitative methods. For Denzin (1978) data triangulation has three subtypes; time, space and person. For instance, Patton (2002: 559) mentions the examples: “*comparing*

*observations with interviews, comparing what people say in public with what they say in private, checking for the consistency of what people say about the same thing over time, comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view...”.*

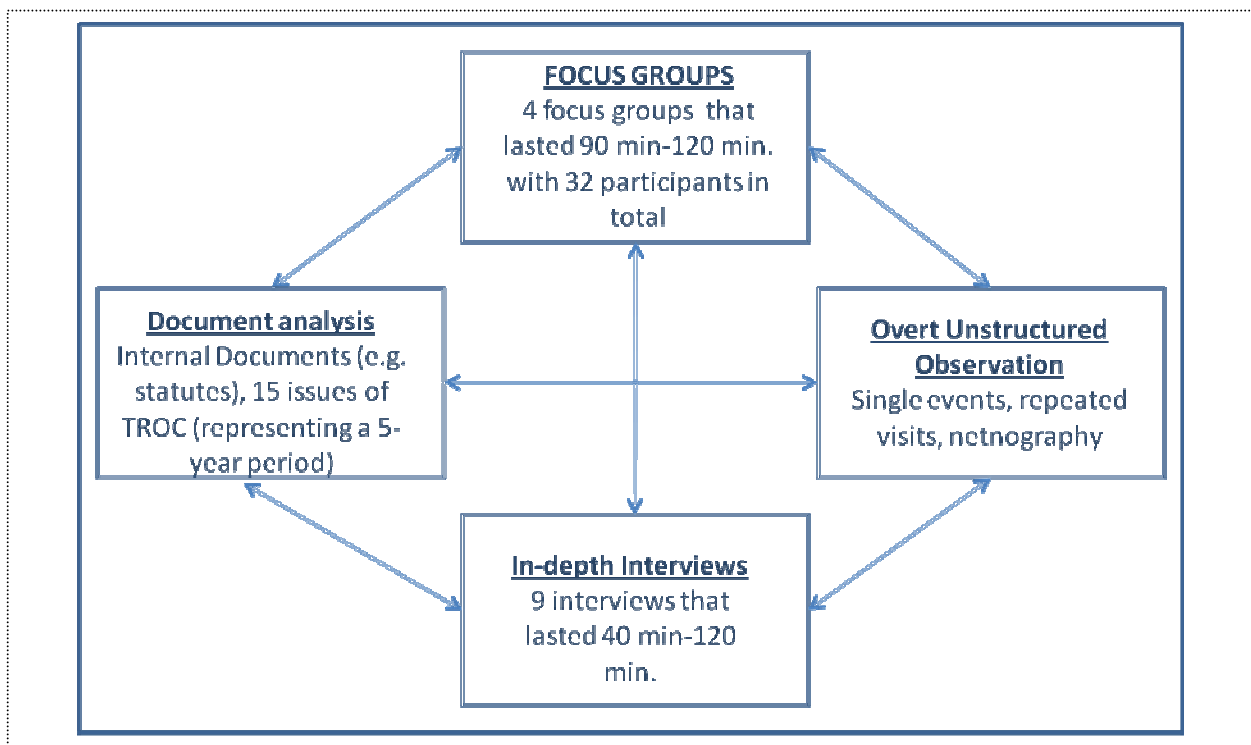
- Investigators triangulation: Use several researchers (observers, interviewers, analysts) to confirm findings. While previous types aim at overcoming the bias from single methods and data sources, this type intends to eliminate the bias from a single investigator and a single approach to research.
- Theory triangulation: Use different theoretical perspectives to examine the same data sets (for more information see Bennett, 1997).

### **6.5.2 Summary of Data Collection Techniques and Triangulation**

To facilitate the understanding of the application of triangulation in the present thesis, a summary of the data-gathering techniques is offered. The data collection process lasted for almost one year, from February 2008 to April 2009. The long duration of the fieldwork is due to the simultaneous data collection and analysis that Grounded Theory presupposes.

In the present thesis, data triangulation was employed. This was accomplished by comparing data from different qualitative techniques (interviews, documents, focus groups and observation) or by comparing data within the same method. For instance, when comparing the discourses of members of cooperatives over time (in TROC), or when comparing in-person observation with online observation.

**Figure 6.1:** Summary of Data Collection techniques.



## 6.6 Data Analysis

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is that it generates a high volume of messy and disorganised data (Patton, 2002). Therefore, strategies have to be applied so that the researcher makes the best possible use of the material she has. Given that this thesis follows the Grounded Theory tradition, analysis should start at the same time as the data collection, because it guides the data collection process. The data analysis is described in detail in the following chapter. Here, the main decisions that were taken during the data analysis will be presented briefly.

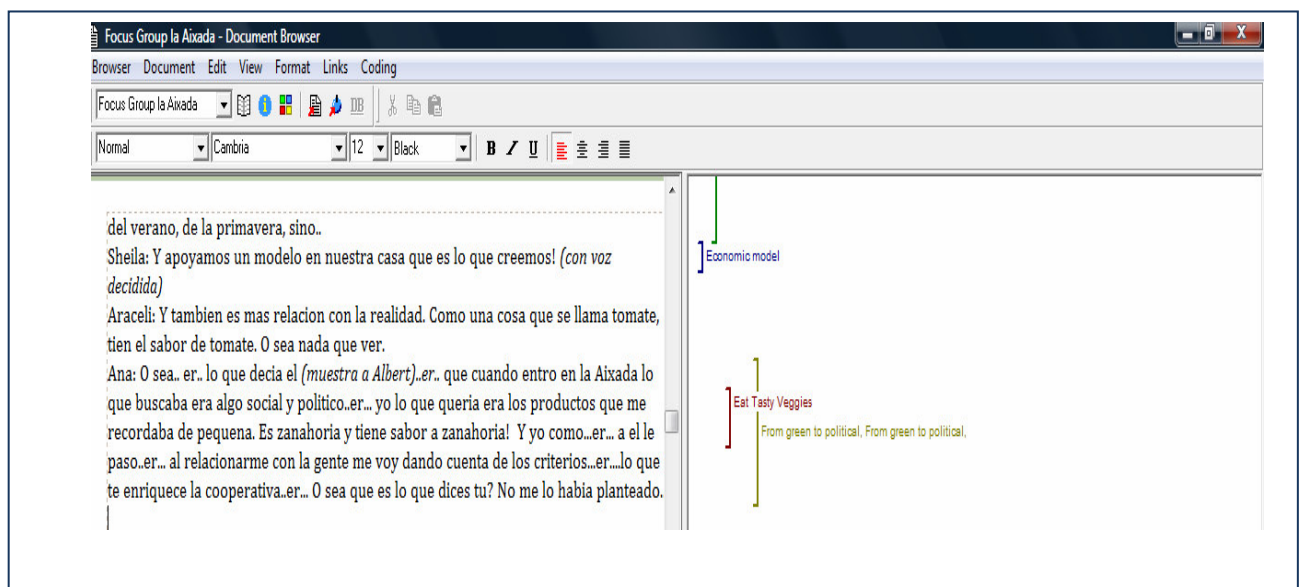
### First Decision: *Manual analysis or Use of Software?*

A first decision to be taken is whether the analysis will be manual, with the help of software or both. Following Welsh's (2002) and Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) suggestion, it was concluded that the use of a software would facilitate the whole process, would minimize the possibility of error and would maintain the data cleaner

and more organised, allowing leaving a ‘trail’ (Padgett, 1998). The selected software was NVivo due to the availability of the software and manuals and also because it is suitable for ‘fine-grained analysis’ when compared to other Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software such as NUD-IST (Welsh, 2002; Gibbs, 2002). NVivo allows the codification of even one character, while for NUD-IST the minimum text unit of analysis is one paragraph (Gibbs, 2002). Figure 6.3 shows an example of how NVivo organizes the transcript through the visualization of the coding stripes in the text.

Other advantages of NVivo that Welsh (2002) mentions is that it is easy to use. Indeed this was confirmed during the data analysis. Furthermore, the preparation of the documents before importing them to software was quite simple.

**Figure 6.2:** Codification of transcript and visualization of coding stripes in NVivo.



In order to import archives in NVivo they have to be saved in Rich Text Format (RTF). This meant that all transcriptions, notes from observation and issues of TROC had to be saved in RTF first. The issues of TROC were in Portable Document Format (PDF), so they had to be saved as Word files first and then in RTF.

It has to be mentioned that instead of only using the software, a combination of manual and electronic coding was finally used. Even if the doctoral researcher

acknowledged that the software maintained the data clear and organised, during the analysis process the need to go through the data manually emerged, since it offered a more holistic sense of the collected information. Such strategy is also recommended by Welsh (2002).

#### Second Decision: General Analytic Strategy?

Having completed the first transcriptions and notes the doctoral researcher has to start familiarizing herself with them (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). This means re-read and go through the data carefully. This was done both manually and electronically and it involved some of the suggested activities in the analytic strategy of Miles and Huberman (1994); write margin notes or passages when necessary, make a summary, pay attention to the metaphors. During this process, the codes and categories were identified which led to the following decision.

#### Third Decision: Coding Strategy?

In order to reduce the data, the researcher has to develop codes or categories (Cresswell, 1998). Corbin & Strauss (1990) argue that coding is an essential analytic process and that there are three basic types of coding in grounded theory; open coding, axial coding and selective coding. All three of them are interrelated and together they lead to building theory. Thence, they were all used during the data analysis.

**Open Coding:** It involves a brainstorming approach to analyzing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is the first phase, during which the researcher examines the collected material looking for relevant categories of information. The open codes can refer to strategies, activities, events, relationships, consequences among others (Gibbs, 2002).

Then, the identified categories have to be labeled. The labels can either be InVivo codes or Sociological Constructs (Berg, 2009). The InVivo codes are literal terms that the participants use, while sociological constructs are terms formed by the researcher. Both types of labels were used, as long as the NVivo code would have some theoretical weight (Gibbs, 2002).

For instance, when a participant said that she never used plastic bags, an NVivo code was created called 'No plastic'. In this case, no plastic was not merely a description of her words. It is describing a type of strategy that this woman is carrying out.

Nevertheless, when a participant said that every time her bike would break down, she would not throw it away, but she would replace the broken part, the open node was called 'Re-use' instead of 'Bike breaks down'. In this case, the second label is a simple description of the transcript, while the first one explains a more general idea. In general, the intention was the generation of more abstract, theoretical codes that would contribute to theory building and would increase the transferability of the findings.

Furthermore, the software provides the opportunity to accompany each open node with a concise description of what is meant. This was particularly useful when certain emerging concepts had to be recoded later in the process.

Figure 6.4 and 6.5 illustrate an example of how open codes and their properties were developed in the present thesis.

During this stage, the researcher constantly compares the emerging categories till the point of saturation (*constant comparative analysis*). To ensure saturation, theoretical sampling is applied. This means that new cases are sought that might question or confirm the existing findings. For instance, in this study some of the criteria employed for theoretical sampling were; related to the cooperative (location, age, size, organizational characteristics, culture), and related to the individual (age, gender, years of participation in the coop, founding member or not). The intention was to check the existence of any differences in perceptions due to these factors.

**Axial Coding:** Once, the researcher has identified salient categories, the phase of axial coding begins. During axial coding, the researcher relates categories and concepts using deductive and inductive methods. The intention is to understand the interrelations between concepts, the causal relationships that affect the salient categories, the context. A basic premise is that single events do not verify or discard a hypothesis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

For instance, drawing from the aforementioned example of the open code 'No Plastic' and the realization that it is a strategy, the question that arises is what type of strategy

is it? The answer from the analysis of the data is that it is a waste management strategy just like the ‘Re Use’ strategy.

Figure 6.3: Open Codes development in NVivo

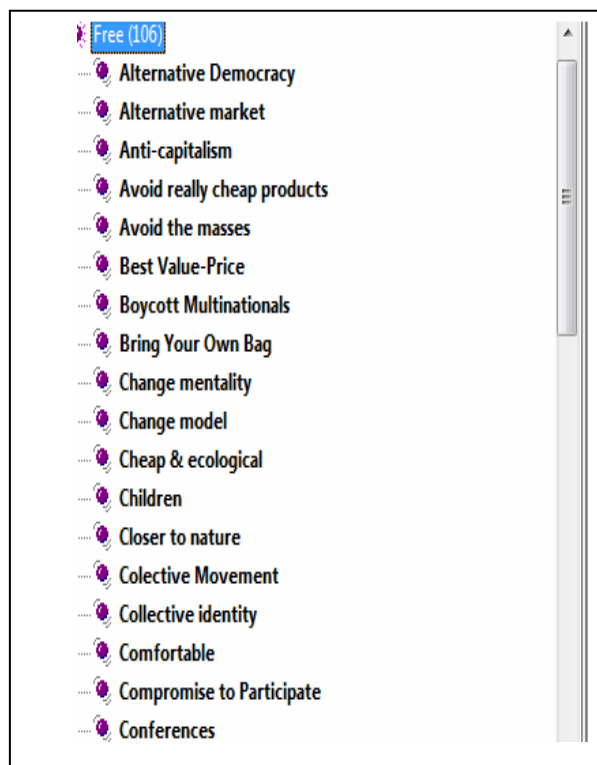
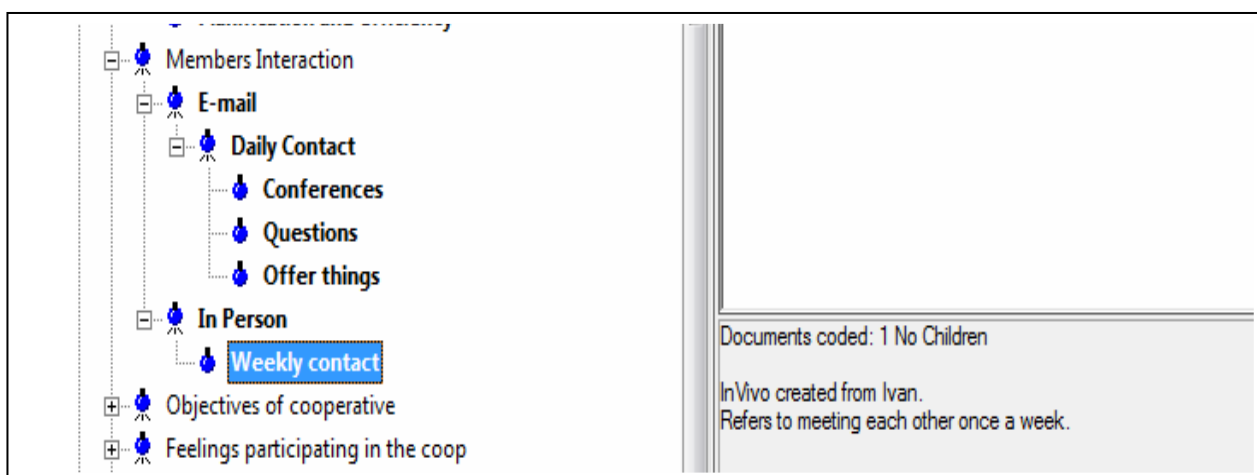
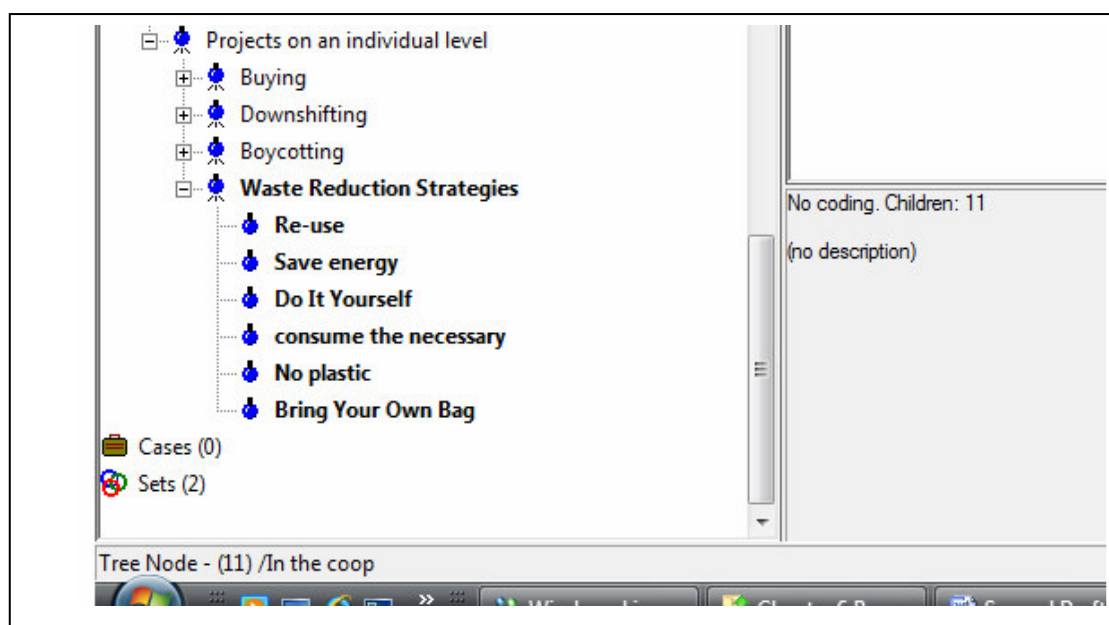


Figure 6.4: A tree node in NVivo illustrating node properties



Certainly, the only way to elaborate theory, according to Corbin & Strauss (2008), is to keep asking questions and making comparisons about the data and keep confirming the inductively generated hypotheses with more data. In this example, further questions could be why these strategies are used, when they are used, how they are used, with what consequences etc. A closer look at the data reveals that both ‘Reuse’ and ‘No Plastic’ are strategies that the participant employs in order to avoid the unnecessary accumulation of waste and to protect the natural resources and the environment. The linkage of categories explains how the participant who is preoccupied with the environment reacts through strategies that both involve avoidance of purchase. An illustration of Axial Coding in NVivo is presented in figure 6.6 below.

**Figure 6.5:** Axial Coding in NVivo



**Selective Coding:** This is the final step of coding. Cresswell (1998: 150) describes it as “*building a story that connects the categories and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions*”. Corbin & Strauss (1990) say that selective coding results in a core category that describes the main analytic idea of the research.



## 6.7 Measures to ensure rigor and canons of verification

According to Cresswell (1998: 193) one of the main issues when conducting qualitative research is: “*How do we know that the qualitative study is believable, accurate and ‘right’?*”. While in quantitative research formal rules of verification are used to collect data and standardized statistical tools are used to analyze them, in qualitative research this is not possible due to the different research goals, samples and frameworks (Kitto et al., 2008). This has raised skepticism on whether the qualitative methodology is ‘scientific enough’ and not merely “*an assembly of anecdote and personal impressions, strongly subject to researcher bias*” (Mays & Pope, 1995: 1).

Different authors (Sandelowski, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Patton, 2002) argue that qualitative research cannot be evaluated against conventional scientific criteria of rigor, simply because quantitative canons are not suitable and need to be modified to fit qualitative research. Corbin and Strauss (1990:4) say that traditional scientific canons such as “*significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, consistency, reproducibility, precision and verification*” should be retained but redefined.

In that context, some authors (such as LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) choose to continue with the use of positivist terminology, but they change their content. In other words, they propose qualitative equivalents for the traditionally used terms. According to Cresswell (1998) this facilitates the acceptance of qualitative research in a world where the quantitative tradition dominates. Others (such as Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Eisner, 1991) introduce alternative terms to distinguish quality in qualitative research. For instance, Lincoln and Guba (1985: 189) suggest the use of the terms “credibility”, “transferability”, “dependability” and “confirmability” as the analogs to “internal validity”, “external validity”, “reliability” and “objectivity”. The recommendations for achieving rigor in qualitative studies do not end there. Various authors (e.g. Creswell, 1998; Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Charmaz, 2006) propose their own lists of criteria of evaluation and procedures of verification.

While there is a wide variety of criteria and procedures (see Cresswell, 1998 and Corbin & Strauss, 2008 for more information), there seems to be no consensus on what constitutes a complete checklist of measures to ensure the rigour in qualitative research. The ongoing debate around the appropriateness of the existing measures (Welsh, 2002) can create confusion for the qualitative researcher that has various alternatives to choose from. Furthermore, the choice of a terminology seems to be a matter of personal judgment: “*Also I (Corbin) don’t feel comfortable using the terms “validity” and “reliability” when discussing qualitative research. These terms carry with them too many quantitative implications (a personal bias)*” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 301).

Finally, the review of the existing choices led to the selection of the ‘qualitatively’ adapted positivist measures as more appropriate. The reasoning behind this decision lies with the desire to maintain a common base with the quantitative tradition.

The adaptation of the quantitative terms of criteria of verification in qualitative methodology as proposed by Easterby-Smith (2002) (see Table 6.4) served as a general guide to ensure the rigour from the outset and throughout the research process. The qualitative equivalents proposed by Easterby-Smith (2002) are general enough to encompass other suggested measures of validity, which make them a more complete general framework to measure rigour in qualitative research.

Some authors consider **validity** as a synonym for truth (e.g. Silverman, 2004). Nevertheless, in the social constructionism paradigm the truth is a constructed concept. Constructionist approaches do not aim at singular truth, but embrace subjectivity and multiple truths (Patton, 2002). So, it could be argued that validity here means what Glaser and Strauss (1967) meant by fit and understandability. The constructed theory should fit with reality (with the constructed and experienced reality of the units of analysis) and it should be understandable to those involved in the area in question (Ryan, 2003).

**Table 6.4 : Criteria of Evaluation in Positivism and Constructionism**

<b>EPISTEMOLOGY</b>	<b>POSITIVISM</b>	<b>CONSTRUCTIONISM</b>
<b>CRITERIA</b>		
<b>Validity</b>	Do the measures correspond closely to reality?	Does the study clearly gain access to the experiences of those in the research setting?
<b>Reliability</b>	Will the measures yield the same results on other occasions?	Is there transparency in how sense was made from the raw data?
<b>Generalizability</b>	To what extent does the study confirm or contradict existing findings in the same field?	Do the concepts and constructs derived from this study have any relevance to other settings?

Source: Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 53)

In Grounded Theory, the fit between ‘truth’ and theory is an essential process and verification is an active part of the research. Among the proposed measures to test validity are:

- Adequacy of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967): This refers to one of the basic principles of Grounded Theory, theoretical saturation. What is meant is that sufficient empirical data should be obtained, so that theoretical saturation is achieved and no new insights can be obtained. This for Cresswell (1998: 201) can be obtained through *prolonged engagement* and *persistent observation*.
- Negative case analysis (Cresswell, 1998; Patton, 2002): While the research continues, the researcher looks for patterns and cases that might disconfirm the evidence that he/she already has. Such process is inherent in Grounded Theory, where through Constant Comparative Analysis the researcher tries to develop and verify hypotheses about relationships among categories as much as possible in the course of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

- Triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Cresswell, 1998, Patton, 2002): It consists of using data from different sources, methods, investigators, theories to check the veracity of the empirical findings.
- Minimization of error when data are processed by the researcher: Silverman (2004) says that reliability can be achieved through loyal transcription of interviews to the most minute, whereas Welsh (2002) suggests the use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDA) to minimize human error during coding.
- Member checks (Cresswell, 1998): Ask informants to judge the accuracy and credibility of the research work. This is the best measure to check credibility according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). It can be done by taking rough drafts of the findings to the participants so that they can examine them and give their opinions.
- Peer or external audit (Cresswell, 1998): This procedure refers to having the whole research process and its products examined by another person. In the case of external audit, this person is an external consultant. Here validity is achieved by having the research methods, findings and conclusions checked and questioned by someone external to the study.
- Clarifying researcher bias to the reader (Cresswell, 1998): The researcher should let the reader know about his past experiences and possible prejudices that might frame his/her interpretation of the data and the whole research approach.

The tests of validity refer to all the stages of research process, from sampling to data collection, codification and even after analysis is conducted. For Cresswell (1998), qualitative researchers should carry out at least two of the aforementioned procedures in order to check the validity of their findings.

The second criterion proposed by Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) is the reliability of the data. It can be achieved through an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse, 1994), alternatively called leaving a trail (Padgett, 1998). It means working with a spirit of openness and providing clear documentation of every step of the research process, so that other researchers can understand how theory was built from the data. In other

words, audit means “*tracking all decisions that are made in the process of research*” (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2003:134).

This can be achieved through the following procedures:

- Writing theoretical memos to keep track of all emerging data, hypotheses, categories, concepts. Corbin & Strauss (1990) describe it as an essential procedure in Grounded Theory.
- Use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDA) that offers a greater transparency of the data (Welsh, 2002).
- The six categories of Halpern (1983 in Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2003) for an audit trail in qualitative research; raw data, data reduction and analysis, data re-construction and synthesis products, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, instrument development information.

Finally, the third criterion of evaluation refers to the generalizability of the research findings, which means their applicability to other contexts. According to Corbin & Strauss (1990) the generalizability can be partially achieved through a process of abstraction during the research. They say “*the more abstract the concepts, especially the core category, the wider the theory’s applicability*” (p. 15). This can increase the reproducibility of the emerging theory keeping in mind that social phenomena cannot be reproduced with the exact same accuracy as the natural phenomena. Nevertheless, generalizability is achieved when two researchers that use the same general rules of data collection and analysis arrive to the same general scheme.

Furthermore, a rich, thick description has been mentioned as a measure to achieve transferability by Creswell (1998) and Lincoln & Guba (1985). It consists of rich, detailed descriptions of the participants and of the setting under study. This allows readers to see whether empirical findings can be transferred to other settings because of commonalities in characteristics.

A criticism by Corbin and Strauss (2008) that would apply to the table of Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) is that it measures only the scientific aspects of quality in qualitative research. Charmaz (2006) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that creative criteria such as the originality (Is it fresh?) and usefulness (Is it useful?) of the emerging data should be considered as determinants of the quality in qualitative research.

On the one hand, while it was considered a very interesting suggestion, creative criteria could not be included in the table. Corbin and Strauss (2008) point out that such inclusion might imply self-bias. On the other hand, all researchers, both quantitative and qualitative, aim at new, original and useful data given that the purpose of scientific research is the advance of knowledge. This is tested when the findings of a new study are compared to previous empirical work. In this thesis, it takes place in the Chapters 7 & 8 of the Part III.

### **6.7.1 How rigour was achieved in the present research project.**

A number of measures were taken to ensure the rigor and quality of the research work. To be more concrete:

#### *Ensuring Validity*

To ensure that the findings represent as close as possibly the experiences of the units of analysis, which in this case are the consumers engaged in collective ethical projects the following measures were applied:

- Adequacy: In qualitative research, adequacy of data is not translated in a very large sample, instead it implies a wide range of empirical observations that leads to theoretical saturation. In this case, theoretical saturation was considered to be achieved when no new insights were provided from the data, in terms of emerging concepts and in terms of relations between concepts. To fulfill that purpose, additional improvised data sources were employed such as the bulletin TROC, which helped confirm and complete previous findings.
- Triangulation of data sources: It is considered as an important measure to ensure rigour in qualitative research in general (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985), but it has also been proposed by ethical consumer researchers (such as Crane, 1999). So, different techniques (focus groups, interviews, observations and documentary analysis) were used to examine the same phenomenon from different angles and to cross-check the findings.
- Minimizing error during data analysis: Silverman's (2004) and Welsh's (2002) recommendations were taken into account. The doctoral researcher intended to

transcribe the interviews and focus groups to the most moment, including gestures, expressions and feelings during the talk. The videos of the focus groups considerably facilitated this process. Furthermore, a combination of manual and electronic coding was used (Welsh, 2002) to minimize human error from only manual coding.

- The use of focus groups adds validity because of the way the technique is carried out. First, a focus group implies the cooperation of two researchers, where one acts as the moderator and the other one as the assistant. To carry out the four focus groups, three colleagues of the doctoral researcher helped out. Their notes and views enriched the data analysis process. Furthermore, another characteristic of the technique is that in the end of the focus group discussion the assistant researcher summarizes and presents his notes on the discussion to the participants. This allows an initial feedback on the views of the participants on the very first draft of the collected data. The ‘member checks’ measure was partially used in another situation. After analyzing some of the data, the researcher made a short summary that she sent for further confirmation to some of the participants by e-mail.
- Clarifying researcher bias to the reader: While the doctoral researcher tried to maintain an objective posture towards the data analysis and the whole research approach, it is accepted that the emergence of personal bias cannot be 100% controlled. In that context, personal information about the doctoral researcher is described in the introductory chapter such as the personal interest of the doctoral researcher in the ethical consumer movement<sup>14</sup> which has led to her volunteering in an environmental and a Fair Trade organization. Furthermore, she has previously carried out a research project in ecological consumers. This information is only disclosed to acknowledge the possibility of bias emergence that might have influenced the interpretations and findings. Nevertheless, this is not consciously understood by the doctoral researcher and remains to be judged by the reader.

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<sup>14</sup> This is a common phenomenon in ethical consumer research. For instance, most of the authors of the book “The Ethical Consumer” (Harrison et al. 2005) are ethical consumers themselves or more than that, activists. Rob Harrison is the founding director of the Ethical Consumer Research Association (ECRA) and editor of the british ethical publication “The Ethical Consumer”, Hannah Berry is an environmental and social activist who works for ECRA, Barry Clavin is the Ethical Policies manager for the Co-operative Financial Services Group and the list goes on.

### *Ensure confirmability*

Throughout the research process, the doctoral researcher maintained a spirit of openness with regards to the decisions taken. This included activities such as:

- The use of a notebook during interviews and observation.
- Keeping a diary during the fieldwork, where sampling decisions and research activities are described. It should be mentioned that the diary was recorded on a frequent basis (on a daily basis in the beginning).
- The use of NVivo software to code and analyze the data.
- Keeping all raw data such as the videos from the focus groups.

Furthermore, the current chapter describes in detail all the decisions taken during the fieldwork; sampling, entry in the field, data recollection and analysis of data. The purpose was to make clear which steps were followed, how the actual research was carried out and finally how the theory emerged from the data.

### *Ensuring generalisability*

As already mentioned, this criterion refers to the applicability of the findings in other contexts. For Corbin and Strauss (1990), it can be achieved through the generation of a more general and abstract theory, which takes place through careful and sufficient coding. In other words, to test the ‘transferability’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the findings there are no single measures to be taken, instead the whole research process leads to that. To accomplish that, the basic principles of Grounded Theory, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity were respected. Furthermore, as shown in the following chapter, a rich, thick description of the setting and of the participants was provided taking into account the broader structural conditions that affect the unit of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).



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# CHAPTER SEVEN

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

## Chapter 7: Data Analysis

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### 7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the present thesis. The analysis will not introduce separately the results from the focus groups, interviews and the other techniques mainly because they were used in such a way that they complement each other. So, focus is placed on the themes that appeared and on how they are supported by empirical evidence from different data sources.

The structure of the chapter was arranged according to the order of the research questions and subquestions of the thesis moving from the 'specific' to the 'holistic' (as it was presented in chapter 4).

It is conceptually divided in two main parts. The first part is dedicated to answer the first research question and provide an insight into the collective and individuals ethical projects that these consumers engage in. The aim is to gain a holistic view of their reality acknowledging their different ethical strategies, as well as their inconsistencies. Given that their participation in Responsible Consumption Cooperatives was the criterion for their selection, the analysis will begin from there. A brief trajectory of the cooperative project is included, but the main emphasis is upon the nature of the project and on how it is being carried out by the ethical collectivities. To answer that, a more intensive study of 7 cooperatives was conducted, but information about other cooperatives enriches the findings.

The second part deals with the second research question looking for the hidden meanings behind their ethical actions. Following the constructivist paradigm, it is considered that these meanings are socially constructed, a consequence of how these consumers perceive their surrounding reality. Furthermore, importance is placed on the dynamic renegotiation of these meanings within the ethical space of the cooperative, which constitutes the third research question.

Respective conclusions are drawn in each part.

## **7.1 Range of ethical consumer projects and strategies**

In this section, the different ethical consumer projects carried out both in collective and individual level are explained. The objective was to get a more holistic perspective of the consumer behaviour of the participants, instead of focusing on very specific acts such as the purchase of Fair Trade products like in previous research (e.g. Shaw & Shiu, 2002; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006).

### **7.1.1 The Collective Ethical Project of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives**

Given that the participation in the cooperative was the criterion of selection and so the beforehand known collective ethical project, it will be presented first.

In order to understand what exactly are the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, a brief presentation of their trajectory and a description of the project they are carrying out is offered based on primary (focus groups, interviews, assistance in meetings of coops and informal chats with the participants in these meetings) and secondary sources of data (analysis of websites, documents from cooperatives). It has to be clarified that the intention was not to represent all cooperatives, but to understand in depth their way of functioning and their project. Therefore, data are sourced from a more intensive study of seven cooperatives, enriched where considered necessary with data about other cooperatives.

#### **7.1.1.1 General Information**

The Responsible Consumption Cooperatives are neighborhood based collectivities whose main project is the group purchase of eco-biological products. They consist of family units who compromise to participate in the periodical purchases, in the functioning and in other activities (e.g. campaigns, inter-coop meetings) organised by the cooperative.

Even if this is a more generic description of the collectivity, there are diverse models and forms of functioning which will be explained in the following sections.



The first cooperative of responsible consumption that appeared in Catalunya and in Spain is the cooperative Organic Veggies<sup>1</sup> founded in 1979 in the city of Reus. It was initially a small group of consumers that was not legally constituted, but during the 1980's it started to grow to reach today the 170 members. At the same time, the cooperatives Germinal in Barcelona and el Rebost in Girona appeared. The three of them are currently considered the oldest and most 'traditional' cooperatives in Catalunya. During the 1980's they constituted together with other associations of ecological consumption an entity of coordination of the cooperatives in the Catalan region called Ecoconsum. Ecoconsum is currently the official and legal coordinating entity of the cooperatives and other groups of responsible consumption in Catalunya.

During the last thirty years the expansion of the cooperative project has been impressive. According to members from the cooperatives Germinal and Green Valley, they have been experiencing a remarkable increase in the cooperatives of the region, which has been intensified especially after 2000. The exact number of the existing cooperatives remains unknown because, as they say, they appear like 'mushrooms'.

So, an effort to register all the existing cooperatives in the region of Catalunya has started since the middle of 2008 by a group of members of cooperatives in order to establish a more coherent network of communication and cooperation. The work of this group has led to the identification of 74 groups of responsible consumption, that can be found in the website of Ecoconsum, but this list does not cover all the active cooperatives (for example the doctoral student had informal chats with members of cooperatives like la Pera and Cal Cases that are not included in the list).

The difficulty of discovering the existing cooperatives is a result of their increasing spreading out. Their expansion could be attributed to the fact that constituting a cooperative is relatively easy and does not require the approval of the official coordinating entity. Information about how to start up a cooperative can be found in Internet; the website of Ecoconsum ([www.ecoconsum.org](http://www.ecoconsum.org)) and the website of Germinal ([www.coopgerminal.org](http://www.coopgerminal.org)) provide detailed advice and models of statutes. Furthermore, many cooperatives emerge as 'children' of older coops. Given that most cooperatives have a 'ceiling' of members that they accept (the notion of ceiling will be explained later in more detail), in various occasions the consumers that are in

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<sup>1</sup> which participates in the study

waiting list decide to constitute a new cooperative<sup>2</sup>. This, for instance, was the example of the cooperative Alternative Ways whose members claim to be a ‘child’ of the cooperative la Gleva. In these cases, the cooperative that acts as the ‘parent’ helps the new cooperative to start up the project by sharing their know-how on the functioning, suppliers, legal issues etc. The cooperation between the ‘parent’ and ‘child’ cooperative does not necessarily end once the new coop has been constituted. Nevertheless, the new cooperative is an autonomous and independent entity<sup>3</sup>. Hence, information can be found relatively easily for the constitution of a new coop without the mediation of any official entity. This has led to that the existence of many cooperatives is not acknowledged.

It has to be mentioned that in the beginning of the fieldwork just 34 cooperatives were mentioned in the website of Ecoconsum. The lack of representation in the website of the official entity complicated the initial search for cooperatives that could participate in the study.

In terms of participation in the official entity, only 18 cooperatives are currently official members of Ecoconsum (where only 5 of them are situated outside the city of Barcelona). Even if few cooperatives participate in Ecoconsum, according to information by the members of the cooperatives, there is always information and knowledge sharing with other cooperatives often of the same geographical area. The interchange of information might be about producers that fit with the general criteria set by the cooperatives or about organizational matters especially in the case of younger cooperatives.

In terms of location, it was interesting to note that the great majority of the cooperatives are found in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. Indicative is that from

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<sup>2</sup> The terms ‘children’ and ‘ceiling’ emerged during the fieldwork and are the ones that the cooperative members use to communicate.

<sup>3</sup> Here, the exception of Germinal should be mentioned. Germinal has followed a different pattern, since the ‘children’ cooperatives are not autonomous, but form part of the same cooperative. This has resulted in four activity centers (as they call it) found in four different neighborhoods in Barcelona city; Germinal Sants, Germinal Sarrià, Germinal Rubí and Germinal Farró. Altogether, they represent the cooperative Germinal.

the groups mentioned in the website of Ecoconsum<sup>4</sup> roughly 70% is found within the suburbs of Barcelona (51 cooperatives out of 74).

### 7.1.1.2 Main activity: Collective Boycotting

The main activity that is carried out in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is the group purchase of products according to the criteria that the collectivity sets.

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): *In reality, the intervention of coming here is not limited to one task, but in selecting the products that we end up having here. We take altogether the decision of what we want to consume here.*

The range of the products varies and depends on each cooperative. In TROC (Autumn, 2003), the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives are described to supply both perishable and non perishable products; vegetables, fruits, yogurts, olive oil, cheese, bread, spaghetti, jam, sweeteners, cereals, legume, drinks, fair trade products and personal hygiene and detergents. Table 7.0 offers a more detailed table description of the variety of products offered in the seven cooperatives whose participants were interviewed (focus groups and in-depth interviews).

**Table 7.0:** Range of products offered in seven cooperatives

COOP TYPE OF PRODUCT	ORGANIC VEGGIES	ECOLOG Y LAND	GREEN WAVE	GREEN VALLEY	NEW TENDEN CY	ALTERNAT IVE WAYS	ENVIRO NMENT AL HOPE
Groceries (Fruits and vegetables)	On a Weekly Basis	Rarely	On a weekly basis	On a weekly basis	On a weekly basis	On a weekly basis	Twice a month
Dry Food (Rice, Pasta, Coffee, Flower, Tea, Chocolate, Cereals, Legume etc.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

<sup>4</sup> While there are other listings of Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, the list provided by Ecoconsum is currently the most complete one.

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Fresh Products (dairy, eggs, meat, tofu, honey, etc)	Yes	Only tofu	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Only eggs every two weeks
Cosmetics (soap, cream, shampoo, toothpaste etc)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Detergents (soaps, detergent for clothes, toilet paper etc)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Elaborated products (Bread, cookies, muffins, jam etc)	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Only bread and muffins every two weeks
Alcohol (beer, wine)	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Textil (blankets, jerseys, rugs etc)	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Decoration (paint, varnish, cork etc.)	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Stationery (recycled paper, biodegradable pens etc.)	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Ethical publications (e.g. Opcions, Eco habitat, Crianza Natural)	Yes	No	No	Subscribed in Opcions and Troc.	No	No	No

Elaborated by the author

A look at the Table 7.0 shows the extent of self-sufficiency that the consumers can achieve through participation in the cooperative. In most cases, the basic alimentation

needs are covered to a great extent. When the range of offered product is relatively limited in comparison to other cooperatives (like the case of Ecology Land and of Environmental Hope), consumers have to look for alternative channels of distribution. This was taken into account to examine the level of coherence for purchases in and outside the cooperative. In other words, do the consumers apply the same criteria for purchase outside the cooperative?

### 7.1.1.3 Organization and way of functioning

According to their respective statutes, the cooperatives should function according to the principles of **self-governance** and **equal participation** to the responsibilities from the part of the members. There are no hierarchical structures. All the members in the cooperative have the same rights and obligations. One of these obligations is the active participation in the functioning of the cooperative. Before proceeding to the description of the boycotting project that is being carried out, there is a description of the main models of Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, of their functioning and of the responsibilities of the members. This description was considered necessary for a more complete and in-depth understanding of the cooperative project.

#### *Types of cooperatives that were identified*

The number of the members varies according to the type of the cooperative. Four types were identified.

**Type A:** The most popular model is the cooperative that accepts a certain number of members, that has a ‘ceiling’ as they call it, to ensure the direct and continuous relationship between the members and a more efficient self-management of the coop. These cooperatives have a type of warehouse that they usually open once per week to distribute the products to their members. In this type of cooperatives, the members have limited control over some of their purchases such as groceries. This means that they don’t get to choose the type of groceries, but they can choose the quantity they need. Instead, the producer chooses and cultivates seasonal fruits and vegetables and then distributes them to the coop members once per week upon the orders made. Such

examples are the cooperatives of Alternative Ways, New Tendency, Green Valley and Green Wave.

**Type B:** Another model is the cooperative that is open to the public, it has a shop (open on almost daily basis) and hired employees to take care of the administration of the shop but not of the coop. It is important to clarify that, because the principles of the coop require participation and distribution of the responsibilities among all the members. In this type of cooperative, the products are available to all consumers, but the members obtain a discount on prices. It is characterized by a greater degree of flexibility because orders are not made in advance. The member can buy products on an almost daily basis. Also, it has a greater variety of products (see Table 7.0 for example of Organic Veggies). An example is the cooperative of Organic Veggies in Reus or el Rebost in Girona.

**Type C:** The third model is partially open to the public. This means that some of the products are available only for the members of the group, while others are can be bought by non-participants. This is the example of Environmental Hope that provides dry food to the members, but other products such as fruits, vegetables, bread and eggs can be distributed to outsiders after placing group orders in advance. Nevertheless, it seems that this is a transitional type of model, since the members of Environmental Hope state their intention to follow the model of Organic Veggies and el Rebost and have a shop open to public.

**Type D:** Finally, information about a fourth and slightly different model of functioning came up during informal chats with members of different cooperatives in the second meeting La Repera. Marc, a member of such a cooperative called la Pera, explained how this model works. It is not open to the public and it administers mostly dry products since the members of the cooperative have their farms and are partially self-sustainable. Meetings take place less frequently than in the other models of cooperatives (e.g. once per six months), only when they have to distribute the products. He mentions that his cooperative follows the model of cooperatives that exist in la Garrocha in Girona.

The cooperative Ecology Land follows a similar form of functioning. At the moment the range of available products is limited in comparison to other coops and usually doesn't include fresh products (see Table 7.0). As a result, the members meet once per

two months for dry products' distribution. Furthermore, they do not have currently a warehouse for the activities of the cooperatives and the distribution of the products takes place in the houses of the members in rotation. Nevertheless, they aspire to follow the first model of functioning.

The aforementioned models were accrued during fieldwork, since initial information in the magazine TROC was discussing the existence of only two types of models, the first and the second one, since they are the most popular ones.

The following table describes in more detail the main characteristics of the seven cooperatives whose members were interviewed.

**Table 7.1:** Main characteristics of seven cooperatives whose members were interviewed

<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b> <b>COOPERATIVE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>OPERATING</b> <b>CHARACTE</b> <b>RISTICS</b>	<b>MODEL OF</b> <b>ORGANIZATI</b> <b>ONAL</b> <b>STRUCTURE</b>	<b>SIZE</b>	<b>PHASE OF</b> <b>DEVELOPMENT</b>
<b>Organic Veggies</b>	Provincial city	Open on daily basis	Shop open to Public Discounts to members	170	Mature phase, web under construction, 30 years old
<b>Ecology Land</b>	Provincial city	Orders every two months	No ceiling decided	26	Early phase of development, no warehouse, no web, not constituted legally yet, 2,5 years old
<b>Green Valley</b>	Urban	Open once per week	Ceiling of 45 F.U.	45	Established, web, highly organised, 13 years old
<b>Alternative Ways</b>	Urban	Open once per week	Ceiling of 40 F.U.	40	Established, Web under construction, 4 years old

<b>Green Wave</b>	Urban	Open once per week	Ceiling of 30	24	Established, Blog in the web, 9 years old
<b>Environmental Hope</b>	Provincial City	Open once per two weeks	Ceiling of 10-12 F.U. and maybe future intention to be open for the public	9	Early phase of development, 2 years old, no web of the group of consumption, not legally constituted
<b>New Tendency</b>	Suburban	Open once per week	Ceiling of 30 F.U.	30	Established, web, 5 years old

Elaborated by the author

- Factors that influence the adoption of a model

It was interesting to note that all the cooperatives located in the *city* of Barcelona function in similar ways. They all follow the first model; they have set a specific number of people as limit, they open once per week and they all include fresh ecological products in the group purchase. Alternatively, some of the cooperatives found in the *province* of Catalonia have selected other models of functioning. Therefore, **location** appears as an important factor because it determines the availability of alternative options for the purchase of ecological products.

Marc (la Pera) is not interested to amplify the variety of products in his cooperative, because for instance he self-produces fruits and vegetables, similarly to other members of his coop. In other provincial cooperatives, the members use or at least acknowledge the existence of other ways to find products. For instance, Laura (Ecology Land) and Carmen (Organic Veggies) mention the existence of ecological farmers that make home deliveries of ecological groceries boxes. Judith (Ecology Land) visits her nearby village to find groceries and meat that her family or family friends produce. Rebecca (Ecology Land) self-produces her groceries, but comments on the availability of a wide spectrum of choices to buy ecological groceries.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): *Here in Tarragona, there are many people that ask for boxes (with ecological products). Before, you had two and now you have ten and you can choose among the nicest, the*



cheapest, those with more variety. Before, it was different but now it is super supplied!

Therefore, the purchase of certain products such as fresh groceries appears as a *more urgent need in the urban cooperatives* due to the lack of other alternatives within the city (self-produce, ecological farmers, visit nearby village). At the same time, the purchase of fresh products requires weekly meetings for their distribution. Therefore, the location of the cooperative affects not only the type and range of products purchased, but also the form of functioning.

Another factor related to the adoption of a model is the links of the founding members with other cooperatives. For instance, el Environmental Hope aims at a model similar to the one used by Organic Veggies. Both are situated in the same city and contacts between the members were established during the initiation of the project of Casal. Marc (la Pera) says to follow the model of la Garrocha in Girona with which he has established links, while Rebecca (Ecology Land) and Marc (Ecology Land) mention that they already knew people from cooperatives that follow the first model before starting with the project. In addition, Alternative Ways appeared as a ‘child’ of la Gleva that also follows the first model.

It seems that when the members decided to start up the project of the cooperative, they established or had already established links with members from other cooperatives, whose model they set as prototype and tried to follow. Therefore this theme is called ‘**Follow Prototype**’.

The aforementioned factors do not explain the adoption of model of the cooperative Organic Veggies, given that is not an urban cooperative and it doesn’t follow any prototype. Organic Veggies is the pioneer among the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. In this case, the adoption of the model has to do with the **philosophy** of the cooperative. Organic Veggies’s philosophy is to maintain a spirit of openness to the public. This was the philosophy of the cooperative when it was created, because it serves a greater public and also it helps promoting the criteria of the cooperative.

Albert (Organic Veggies, interview): *Actually, being open to the consumers that are consumers of the street has an informative function. If you only have two members, it is much closer.*

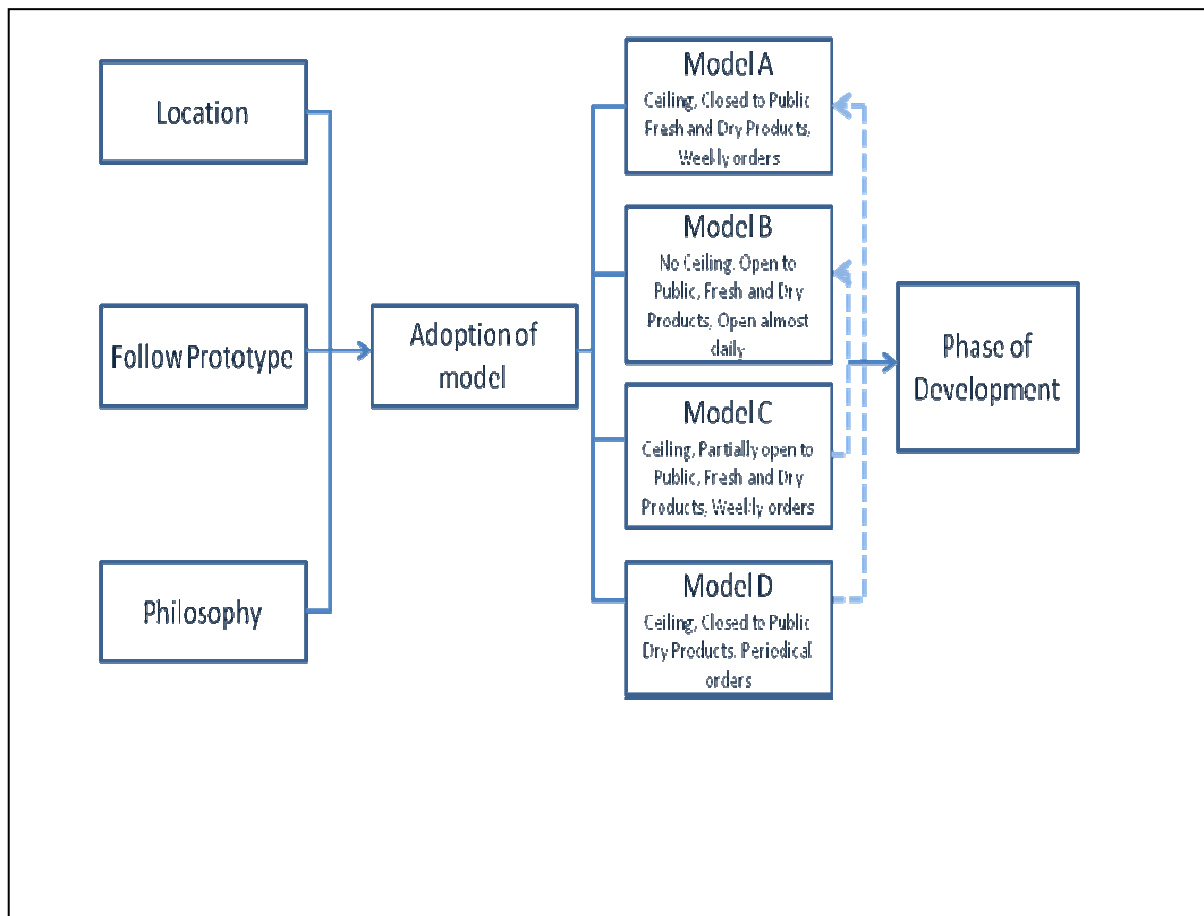
Albert is one of the founding members of the coop but newer members like Carmen continue with the philosophy of openness of Organic Veggies.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): *Organic Veggies no matter what..eh..we want it to stay..eh.. keep staying open to the street.*

The cooperatives that have selected the first model have a different philosophy. They prioritize the principles of self-governance and participation. Their members consider that they should accept until a specific number of members that will allow an operative and efficient function of the cooperative and avoid gigantism.

Finally, the **phase of development** does not affect the selection of the model but the actual model carried out. This was observed in the cooperatives Ecology Land and Environmental Hope. They are found in an early phase of development and they follow different models than the one they aspire for. The following figure shows the relation of the different factors to the adoption of a specific model.

**Figure 7.0:** Factors that influence the adoption of a model



*Responsibilities of members and distribution of workload*

All the members have the same responsibilities and rights that are translated in:

- Paying the expenses

These expenses include: an initial capital that is returned to the member if he/she decides to leave the coop, an annual quota for the operating costs (e.g. rent, utilities) and finally the cost of the products bought in the cooperative.

- Participation in the decision making and the functioning of the coop

The participation is taking place through the assemblies and the committees of work within the coop.

The work is not distributed similarly in all the cooperatives so the number of the committees and the responsibilities of each committee vary. Nevertheless, the following committees are usually found:

Purchase Committee: This committee is in charge of finding and contacting suppliers and of placing the respective orders of purchase.

Administration committee: It deals with the administrative work such as controlling the accounts and paying the suppliers.

Communication committee: It is basically in charge of the external relations of the cooperative. This might include give publicly information about the project (e.g. interviews to newspapers), edit articles related to ecologic agriculture, contact other cooperatives etc.

Activities committee: It has to do with the organization of other activities (besides consumption) such as seminars, workshops, participation in campaigns etc.

There are slight variations in the names and the number of the committees. For instance, the Purchase committee of the Green Valley and New Tendency cooperative is the Consumption committee for the Alternative Ways coop, while for the Ecology Land the responsibility of finding suppliers and placing orders is distributed in two committees, the Investigation committee and the Command committee respectively (the organization and work distribution of each of the 7 cooperatives can be found in Annex).

Additional committees can be found in some cooperatives. For example:

- Alternative Ways and New Tendency have also an Informatics or Web committee in charge of the web and of any informatics problem that might come up,
- New Tendency has a committee called Camp Fanga looking for land to self produce part of the groceries.

A different way of work distribution is found in Environmental Hope. It is the smaller group that the doctoral student came across and the number of committees is limited to 3 committees. There, every member is in charge of finding one supplier for the group always in compliance with the established criteria.

#### 7.1.1.4 Established Purchase Criteria in the Cooperatives

As mentioned earlier, the main project of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is the collective purchase of products that comply with their 'ethical criteria'.

It was interesting to see that even if different types of cooperatives were selected to conduct the interviews (in terms of location, size, model of organizational structure etc), the criteria that these collectivities set when deciding the purchase of products are very similar. They all follow the triptych: ecological products, small local producers and no intermediates.

- Ecological Products: In the statutes of the cooperatives, it becomes clear that ecological products rank high in the hierarchy of the decisive purchase criteria. In fact, in the entrance of the cooperative 'Organic Veggies' there is a big wooden sign that says:

“Essential Objective: To promote through the consumption of biological products, the expansion and consolidation of a non-aggressive agriculture that conserves the genetic integrity of every species and the native varieties bringing quality to human life.

The manipulation, elaboration and transformation of the products commercialized in this cooperative will not degrade the real nutritive capacity of food. It will supply the best conditions of quality and appropriate price for food and other household products that have a biologic-ecologic origin. It will provide the services determined by the Assembly for consumption and the social and cultural development of the members and their families” (translated from Catalan)

Indeed, the cooperatives are very often referred to as cooperatives of ecological products or ecological consumption in their statutes and in TROC.

Even if not 100% of the products are ecological, the majority of them are, according to the participants. This was confirmed during the visits in the cooperatives, since most of the products carry some **ecological label**, such as the ecological label of CCPAE (Council of Catalan Ecological Agrarian Producers) or the french ecological

label Concert. Nevertheless, the quality of the products is checked through visits of the cooperative members (who normally belong to the purchase committee) to the farms where the production process takes place.

Int: So you have a committee that looks for products? This is how it works more or less?

Joan (focus group, Green Valley): And that certifies the quality and the certificates.

Javier (focus group, Green Valley): Yes, yes..We have some guidelines some criteria to choose the suppliers. When a new supplier appears we look if it has the maximum of the qualifications we ask for. For us, it is fundamental that the product is ecological. And by ecological we understand that it is regulated and if the products have the label for us it's ok. Or we meet in person the people that produce it...er.. But the issue is that we have a guarantee that they don't use any chemicals..

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): Behind the ecological there is a principal label such as CCPAE, but each cooperative searches producers, direct suppliers, so, you talk about controlling the quality, you go to visit the farms.

The visits to the farms are a common practice of most cooperatives. The bulletin TROC<sup>5</sup> (denominated as the bulletin of eco-biological groups of Barcelona) includes a special section called "Who do we buy from?" There, members from different cooperatives (among them Green Wave, Green Valley, el Rebost, Germinal-Sants, Germinal-Rubi, Germinal-Sarria, Tota Cuca Viu) write about their visits to ecological farmers, from whom their cooperatives buy, and suggest him/her to other cooperatives.

It should be mentioned that some cooperatives do not always require the ecological labels. The absence of the label is not necessarily an exclusive factor, as long as there is **trust** in the producer.

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<sup>5</sup> It was mentioned in Chapter 6 that TROC is published and edited by the members of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives and it is available in the website of Germinal.

Statute, Ecology Land: Eco Products: *We include only ecological products without the need of the CCPAE label. In the final order we include a distinctive accreditation of the products that have the label.*

Marta (Green Wave, focus group): *Because of my work I have a lot of contact with producers and a personal relationship with them. And I confy in them. Maybe they don't have the ecological label yet, but slowly they will reach that point.*

Furthermore, it was observed that the official certification systems are questioned. This was one of the issues that were raised in the second meeting La Repera. A seminar was dedicated on whether the current certification system is satisfactory. The conclusion was a general feeling of dissatisfaction among the members of the cooperative towards the official system for the following reasons<sup>6</sup>:

- ◆ Lack of transparency and participation in the elaboration process of norms and certification.
- ◆ It favors the industrial ecological production, especially since the renovation of the European normative that came in vigor since 2009<sup>7</sup>.
- ◆ It is very costly for small producers.
- ◆ It is not credible because it is decided by pressure groups.

For instance, the label CCPAE is under examination, because the ecological Catalan council has decided to accept a percentage of 0,9 of genetic contamination. In the cooperative Organic Veggies, this raises questions around the credibility of the label.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): *Or this label CCPAE of Catalunya.. We don't trust it. What happens now with the genetically modified is that because we are 8 years with genetically modified cultivations and they say that there is contamination. So the council say that 0,9 of*

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<sup>6</sup> The information was gathered during the la Repera meeting and from documents that the cooperative members prepared after the meeting.

<sup>7</sup> The new European normative has introduced changes such as the most systematic control of the production process, the greater centralization of the decision making to the European level from the national level, acceptance of a 0,9 percentage of G.M.O in the ecological products and the gradual establishment of a European ecological logo.  
(<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/807&format=HTML&aged=0&language=ES&guiLanguage=en>).

genetically modified can be tolerated in the ingredients. But us no! We don't tolerate it! It's that a moment comes..eh.. that like a cooperative the label we can have it with a question mark, if we want it or not.

In search of a solution, during la Repera meeting it was proposed the establishment of a participatory system of guarantee among the cooperatives, based on mutual learning, participation, compromise, transparency, horizontality and confidence. This is a project that just started during 2008-2009, but it is indicative of a more general distrust towards the official certification system.

The fieldwork shows clearly that one of the main objectives of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is to find and purchase ecological products, that are plainly defined as products elaborated without any chemicals. To ensure that, the members do not rest on the existence of certified ecological labels. Instead they analyze them and question them to see if they fit with their acceptance threshold. They place more emphasis on the trust they build from their personal relationship with the producer. For them, confidence in the producer is their principal guarantee of ecological quality. As Xavier (Green Wave, focus group) describes it, the purchase of ecological products within the cooperative is 'an act of confidence'.

#### - Small and Local Suppliers

The proximity of the supplier to the cooperative is of critical importance. There are cases that the members of a coop decide not to buy ecological products only because they come from far away.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): It was one year ago, in the cooperative Well, our supplier here in Falset that was selling us onions and garlic, well, he got retired. And we had another one but what he produced was not enough So, we go to a distributor that we trust a lot and he started bringing us dry onions. And then we saw it was from Cairo, Egypt!!! Oh! (she laughs) So, oh! And the distributor said: come on man this is ecological onion! etc.. But we cannot permit as cooperative, even if it is ecological, an onion from Cairo! And we had consumed it already 15 days



that's ok, but there was a feedback. You call the distributor and you say: Here we don't want it and if you don't have then never again!

A second look at the section "Who do we buy from?" confirms that usually the preferred suppliers not only practice ecological farming but also all of them are from the region of Catalunya representing very small businesses. Some examples are provided:

Engracia (el Rebost, TROC winter 2003): (about a producer of biologic honey)

**Location.** Carretera Aeroport, km 1,1, Vilobí d'Onyar....

**Who runs the business.** The business is run by two couples, Victor that is in charge of P.R. and his wife and Joan who is an apiarist and Montse..

Jordi (Germinal-Rubi, TROC autumn 2005): It deals with the distribution of stationery fabricated with ecological paper or recycled paper. "Eco Reciclat" is a small catalan company constituted from Miquel... and Rosa Maria.

Anna (Germinal-Sarria, TROC autumn 2007): (about a producer of ecological cheese) Mas Pujol is found in the municipality of les Llosses touching the Vila de Ripoll... One of the few productions of ecological cheese that we have in *our house* (referring to the catalan territory) comes from this farm... Josep receives us with a lot of work. With him there are two girls helping with the work from the volunteer program WWOOF (World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farming), a project to which Josep participates since 2004.

Nevertheless, in some cooperatives there were found ecological products from other countries. Furthermore, in most cooperatives there are Fair Trade products that travel a long way and so violate the principle of 'only local commerce' and unavoidably create an 'ethical' conflict. While there are consumers that acknowledge that, Fair Trade products are usually found in the cooperatives. The principle of Fair Trade as a purchase criterion of the cooperative is discussed later in this section.

Int. (Green Valley, focus group): And you have fair trade products here?

Xavier, Joan (Green Valley, focus group): *Yes, there in the brown drawers.*

Int. (Green Valley, focus group): *Fair Trade from here or other countries?*

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): *From other countries.*

- No intermediates, Direct Relationship with Producers

A third important criterion for the selection of a supplier is that he should be the actual producer and not an intermediate. The intention of the groups is to create smaller circles between producer and consumer eliminating all (if possible) intermediates.

Silvia (interview, Environmental Hope): *What is actually happens is that there are a lot of products that we cannot consume. In the beginning we had the discussion of whether to buy from Natureco, which is a catalan intermediate..er.. And we were saying, god, we are buying from Natureco a product that comes from Cal Roma, that is a producer from close by.. but, but I buy it from Natureco! I am putting an intermediate in the middle when I could go to Cal Roma and buy directly. It's not about the price..It's about the thing..er..that we cannot create another of this kind of production-consumption cycles..*

Moreover, as already mentioned, the members of the cooperatives want to establish a personal relationship with the producer. They wish to know with whom they are dealing and how they produce their products. Part of that are the regular visits to the producers, which, as already mentioned, are made by all the cooperatives that the doctoral student came across.

Joan (focus group, Green Valley): *We know him (the producer) personally and we visit him periodically to his land, but obviously we cannot be there all the time.*

Ivan (focus group, Alternative Ways): *Finally you might pay the same? Probably but it is fair. The person who gets the money is the one that produces the product, not an intermediate. That is why we have to pay*

but we always prefer to choose that the money goes to who has worked. This is the idea. And also the producers that use cheap labor, we take that into account when we buy a product. That is why we have the Purchase committee that in theory has to contact and. I don't know, they go to the farm to check and get to know if this is what we are looking for. It is all a bit bucolic..

The visits and the personal relationship with the supplier is the another topic of the “Who do we buy from?” section in TROC. It is interesting to note that the farmers are always called by their first names in these articles and photos of them accompany the text, so that the readers can associate the face of the producer with the product they buy. A personal relationship between consumers and producers is implicit.

Jordi (Germinal Vallès- TROC winter 2005): In Can Pèlags lives our farmer and friend Alba..

Int. Observation Notes (took place during a Product Distribution in Environmental Hope): The supplier of bread and pastries comes to deliver his products. He is carrying three big plastic boxes full of muffins and bread. He is smiling as he enters and Silvia and another guy (I don't know his name, but he is a member) smile back. There is a very friendly atmosphere, the producer (whose name is Pere, they are talking on a first name basis) takes out the bread and muffins and together with Silvia and the other guy, they start putting them in order on the table on small pieces of baking paper. Each member should have brought a tupper or something similar to bring the muffins and bread back home (Silvia had advised by mail the members), because Pere isn't supposed to bring bags. While doing that, they are chatting and smiling. Pere starts asking the guy about his wife and he congratulates him on the new baby that he had heard they just had had. In the meanwhile, other members are coming and hitting friendly Pere on the back and telling how great the muffins and bread were last time.

This description aims at presenting the type of interaction that takes place between producer and consumers and the friendly atmosphere that exists. It reminds of scenes in villages, where the relationship between consumers and producers was more humanized and intimate.

Even so, just like with the previous criterion, there were found exceptions of ecological products that are not bought directly from the producer but from ecological intermediates such as Natureco, who supplies precooked meals such as vegan hamburgers, tofu, seitan, pasta, pizza etc.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): *Or we have as well precooked meals because this also was a dilemma, but there are members that want it because they have no time to cook at home.*

The reason for these inconsistencies appears to be the conflict in the hierarchical order of the members' criteria. In other words, not all members rank the 'small and local' and 'no intermediaries' criteria as high as the ecological criterion. Therefore, in order to have a greater variety of available products in the coop, they might accept some products that do not comply with all three criteria.

#### - Fair Trade products

It was interesting to note that while Fair Trade products are available in most of the cooperatives (e.g. Fair Trade coffee, cacao, chocolate, tea, quinoa, seaweeds), Fair Trade was not acknowledged as an important purchase criterion during the interviews with their members. Most participants did not mention Fair Trade until finally asked by the doctoral student who had observed the Fair Trade products in previous visits to their cooperatives and in the cooperatives' websites. It seemed that while Fair Trade products are bought by the collectivities, Fair Trade appears as a secondary objective in most of the cases. This was explicitly confirmed in the case of Environmental Hope.

Int (Environmental Hope, interview): *Then, products that come from underdeveloped countries. Fair Trade. What about that?*

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): *For us it is not a principal objective.*

At the same time, this created the doubt why Fair Trade is included within the range of products. According to some participants, Fair Trade products were included as an action of solidarity to under developed countries.

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): For instance quinoa arrives and you know it is produced in Bolivia or wherever in Southamerica and then it comes here. It is an ecological product. We consume it and that's it. But when you think if a product that comes from the other side of the world is an ecological and sustainable product, then you see that in the end it is not sustainable. It is not native. It is sustainable and it is not sustainable. But this has to do with the solidarity part..

Furthermore, most of Fair Trade products such as coffee, chocolate, seaweeds etc. are not produced locally. Therefore, they constitute the only ethical alternatives in the market for those product categories. So, participants that intend to be as coherent as possible with their ethical self prefer the ethical alternative of the market than the conventional and maybe unethical one.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): Nestle! Out! It is better to eat Fair Trade chocolate..hmm anyway it is a luxury to eat chocolate. So, when I buy chocolate, I choose it.

So, a greater variety of products is available within the cooperative and all products have at least one ethical aspect. In other words, Fair Trade fits with the ethical character of the cooperatives. Nevertheless, it seems that it hasn't been fully incorporated as a conscious and important criterion from all the participants. The criteria of proximity, no intermediates and ecological products seem to be the decisive factors for group purchases.

#### 7.1.1.5 Other projects within the cooperative

The group purchase of 'ethical'<sup>8</sup> products is the main activity of a cooperative of responsible consumption, but not the only one. This was implied by the organizational structure of the cooperatives and the existence of committees that work on areas other

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<sup>8</sup> Where ethical here is the ecological, locally produced product that was directly purchased from- often small- producers.

than search of producers, purchase of products and administrative work. Besides the purchase of products, other types of projects are also carried out:

### - **Do It Yourself**

There are cases that the members of the cooperative prefer to produce themselves the products consumed within the cooperative.

- ◆ Production as a group project: This project refers to the self-produce of groceries that would supply the members of the cooperative. It is accomplished by designating gardening roles to the members of the collectivity. The possession of land and the active implication of the collectivity are the two requirements that should be fulfilled, so that the project comes through.

For instance, the cooperative New Tendency has constituted a committee called Camp Fanga that searches for land so that the cooperative can self-produce some of the products. Another example is the case of the coop Germinal that has a garden that partially covers some of the needs for garden produce (combined with what they buy from local producers).

(TROC, Spring/Summer 2003): **News from the garden of Germinal**: The biological garden that the cooperative *Germinal* has started in the houses of some of its members that live in la Floresta is in full activity. After harvesting beans and garlic, tomatoes were planted. For the summer weekly shifts are scheduled to water the garden. We remind you that the garden is an activity of the cooperative open to every member. We encourage you to participate! (translated from catalan)

Some of the participants mention the self-produce of fruits and vegetables as common practice in different cooperatives.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): Yes producers, consumers, associations like Organic Veggies and other groups that come out. For instance..ehhh.. there is a group in Vals...eh..eh.. la Almaixera..eh.They have a minimum of land and they cultivate certain products, legumes principally.. eh..everything. But it is for their self consumption.

In Ecology Land, the lack of participation of the collectivity in the project didn't allow its operationalization on a collective level.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): **We are four from the cooperative that are in the garden..**

Int (Ecology Land, interview): **And you produce it on your own? You do it alone?**

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): **Yes, hmmm... We wanted to vinculate it with the cooperative so that all the people that are in the cooperative who wanted to be in the garden.....There were people interested whether there is ..hmm...surplus in the garden so it could be distributed to the cooperative. But this did not go forward because the people..er.. that we are in the cooperative don't have time to take care of the garden and manage what would be the surplus. So it has been self-consumption.**

♦ Individual members as producers: In this case, some of the cooperative members produce one type of product and they supply their cooperative or more cooperatives.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, informal chat pre-interview): **Here, some of the products are made from the coop members. Jordi (she is showing me who Jordi is) prepares tooth paste himself and sells it here and another member, Ana is studying oenology and provides us with wine that she makes.**

TROC (Winter, 2004): **Proposal for soap elaboration for clothes from recycling used olive oil**: Montse... a member of the cooperative Cydonia, has made the following proposal for the re-usage of used kitchen olive oil from the members of all the cooperatives. The idea is the following: every cooperative is in charge of gathering used oil and she will make the soap for the washing machine to sell it at a modest price in the same cooperative....**Soap elaboration**: Its fabrication is artisanal, in the open

air, reason for which it can be produced only in the summer (since it only curdles if it is hot). During the fabrication process, which lasts for a week, you can pass to visit and see it.

#### - **Minimization of waste generation**

The cooperatives stress out the importance of minimizing the waste they generate. This principle permeates the whole function of the cooperative.

♦ Minimization of packaging: Achieving a lean process without extra packaging is one of the side aims of the cooperatives. For instance, in the studied coops each member has his own wooden box (in some cases both photo and name are attached like in Green Valley) which he/she reuses when the weekly distribution takes place. If not, alternative measures are taken. The consumer should use other forms to transport the products such as a shopping cart, a backpack, a bag, a tupper. This was confirmed from observation during various visits in different cooperatives (Germinal Sants, New Tendency, Environmental Hope). The members come usually with a backpack or a shopping cart to receive their products. This is a widely accepted practice among the members of the cooperatives and it is encouraged through mails sent to the members.

Silvia (mail about upcoming delivery of products, Environmental Hope): *You should have in mind that in the case of bread and muffins, so that we don't generate waste, they will not be packed and when you come to pick them up in the Casal, you have to bring a tupper or a bag or what you prefer.*

The members of the cooperative Ecology Land prefer to order large quantities of products in glass and paper packages instead of plastic ones. This practice is described in the statute of the cooperative and was confirmed by later observation during product distributions.

Rebecca (informal chat pre-interview that took place during a distribution of products, Ecology Land): *We try to minimize as possible the packaging.. That is why we order big bags of rice and lentils for instance..* (meanwhile she is showing me two other members of the cooperative that distribute



the lentils of the big bag in smaller reusable bags which are distributed to the members)

**- Other activities: Campaigns, Seminars, TROC, Social Gatherings**

An interesting finding was that the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives are involved in collective activities and campaign movements that intend to promote ethical consumption. According to the participants, the cooperative of responsible consumption has two objectives: practice ethical consumption and promote ethical consumption.

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): *Well, the double objective was from one hand to consume and give a service to the members that wanted to be in the group, that can consume ecological in a space and in an organizational level. But on the other hand, it is about the social circulation...eh..well participate and we have been participating well in campaigns, well all about making it popular.*

For instance, during the fieldwork there was an ongoing campaign called: “We are what we sow” (‘Som lo que Sembrem’ in catalan) as a protest to the Genetically Modified cultivations in Catalunya. The members of the cooperatives were actively participating in the campaign; they were collecting signs in the street, they had posters and information about the campaign in their cooperatives, they were writing often articles about it in the magazine TROC. In two cases, members of the cooperatives asked the doctoral student to sign in favor of the campaign. Most cooperatives actively participated in the campaign “We are what we sow”, while the oldest ones had participated in previous campaigns about the banning of plastic bags and boycotting big supermarkets.

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): *So we started to participate in some campaigns and as a single cooperative maybe we don't do it, but as a group yes. We join that, we join the issues of the G.M.O.'s, 'Catalunya free of bags' or 'Supermarkets no thanks'.*

Furthermore, they organize: seminars about ecology, workshops about cooking or how to self- cover needs (e.g. how to make soap), meetings with other cooperatives

and with the producers (like la Repera meetings), presentation of books related to ethical consumption, visits to farms and self-sustainable rural houses and social gatherings such as dinners and excursions. This often requires or invites the cooperation among cooperatives.

Ariadna (New Tendency, mail for organizing a visit to a producer's farm together with another cooperative): *Good day people of Civada!*

The other day we were talking the ones of 'Purchase' (committee) that it would be good to have a reunion with ... (name of producer) in order to humanize a bit the contact between coop-producer, that he'll explain us about the field, the work...

The thing is that on Saturday 18 of October, he will have a meeting with another cooperative and he told us to join. His idea is apart from paying a visit in the field and explanation of the project, to have an excursion, diner and cooking lesson with the products that are not very popular (chards...).

Twenty families will go from the other cooperative, well it would be good to be together, help each other out and motivate ourselves to spend a day together with another cooperative that can also help us a lot.

In addition, during the fieldwork the magazine TROC was encountered. The magazine TROC is a publication edited by members of Responsible Consumption Cooperatives that wants to 'be the vehicle of the ideas, reflexions, news and activities of the groups in Barcelona in everything related to consumption, ecology and social movements'. Despite its limited range of influence (it can be found in the website of the cooperative Germinal), it still promotes and facilitates ethical consumption:

- On a group level. By suggesting producers that comply with the three criteria 'ecological', 'no intermediaries', 'small & local' to the cooperatives.
- On an individual level. By providing information about how to practice ethical consumption in everyday life to the readers/ members of cooperatives. For

instance, there is practical advice about ethical alternatives such as ethical banks or about brands that are falsely promoted as ecological and are suggested to be avoided, while respective websites are mentioned so that the reader can perform his personal search (see following figure). Another example is the inclusion of recipes where the ingredients can be found in the cooperative. The main idea behind the recipes is to show to the members/readers of how to make use of the products they purchase in the coop, given that in the case of groceries they often do not get to choose and simply receive the seasonal products that the producer decides to cultivate.

Figure 7.1: Information and websites found in TROC magazine



- On an individual level. By educating and ‘awakening’ the reader/member of the cooperative on environmental and social issues (e.g. articles explaining dangers from G.M.O cultivations or from the territorial policies of the local and national government, climate change etc.). The purpose of TROC articles is not only to inform, but also to educate the individual member and reader on the grounds of his personal responsibility for the preoccupying environmental and social reality that is presented and to incite on his taking action.

Josep (Green Valley, TROC spring 2005): *We are a lot, too many human beings so that many of our habits-daughters of advertisement and stupidity (save yourself)-can worsen quite irreversibly the ecosystems that we pretend to inherit to future generations.... The motive of these*

words is simply, the suggestion of some small things and behaviours that, if not paliate, at least they slow down the degradation we provoke to the environment during the day...

The aforementioned activities prove the active engagement of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives not only in the practice of ethical consumer behaviour, but also in the promotion and establishment of ethical consumer behaviour. Individual and collective ethical initiatives are promoted, which aim at educating first the individual member of the cooperative and second the greater public. The latter objective is pursued more through campaigns, conferences and book publications, since the accessibility in seminars, visits in farms and in the magazine TROC seems to be limited for the cooperative members.

### 7.1.2 Main findings and discussion

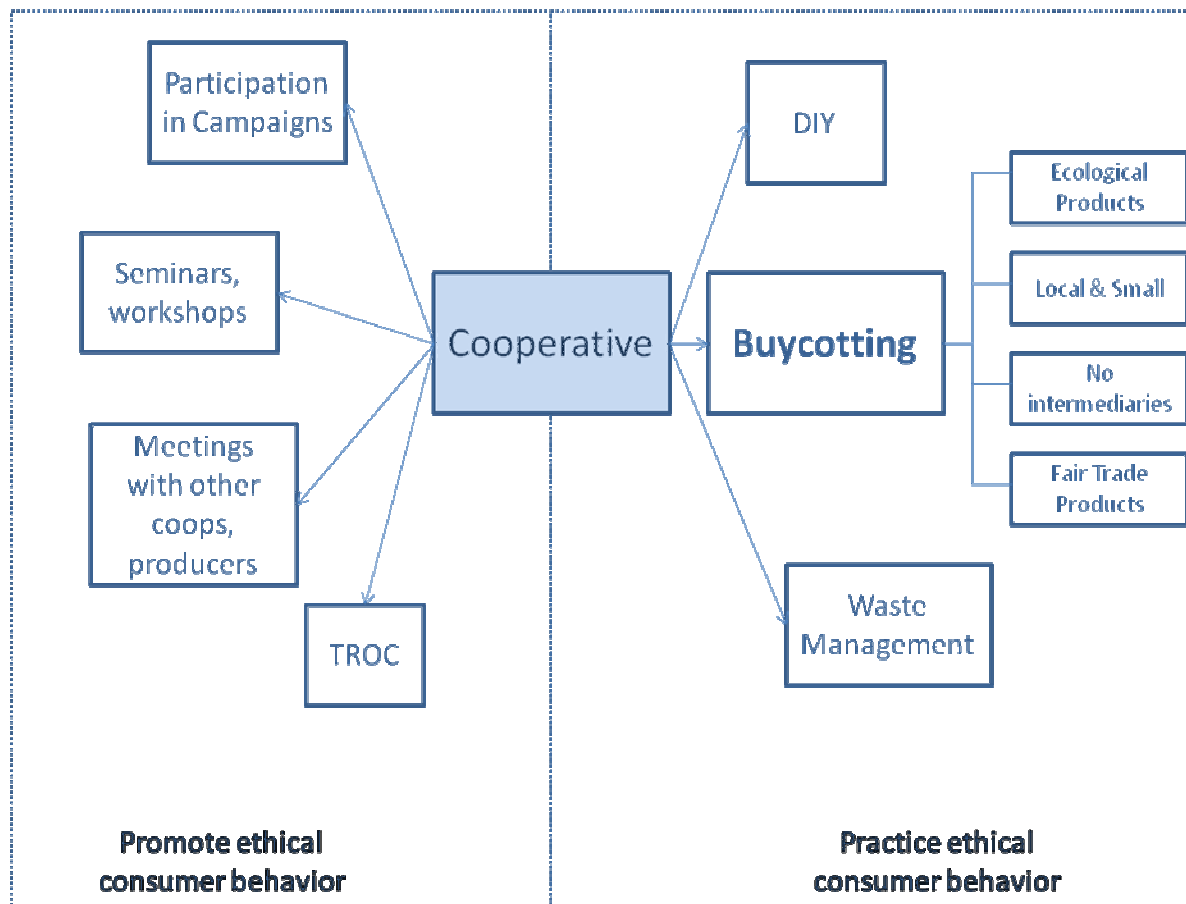
In this section, the emphasis was placed on the collective project of the cooperative of responsible consumption so that it could be understood in depth how this project is carried out. The gathered information led to the following conclusions:

- The main project of the cooperatives is of **boycotting nature**. The collectivities have set the criteria of '*small and local commerce*', '*ecological products*' and '*no intermediaries*' as their bottom line for purchase of products. Often, the products that comply with just one of these criteria are rejected, because they are seen as unfit with the philosophy of the cooperative -such as an ecological product that comes from far away or an ecological product from an intermediary. However, this is not always the case and **inconsistencies** were identified. The need for greater variety of products in the cooperative makes the collectivity less 'ethically' strict at times. This phenomenon is related to the *motivational diversity* of the people that participate in the coop (this will be further explained in the second part of the chapter).
- *Fair Trade* products are also included in most cooperatives. Nevertheless, Fair Trade was not mentioned as an important purchase criterion until participants were asked about it. This led to the identification of another **inconsistency**, since some of the participants claim to see a conflict between Fair Trade products and the ethical principles of the cooperative, given that Fair Trade products violate the proximity principle. Nevertheless, they include Fair Trade products in their product list, because it *fits* with the *general ethical character of the cooperative* and it broadens the list of available products in the coop. Moreover, Fair Trade products such as coffee, chocolate, quinoa etc. are not locally produced. Therefore, Fair Trade is the only ethical choice in the market as far as these products are concerned.
- Cooperatives are supposed to function according to the principles of self-governance and equal distribution of workload among the members. This includes the participation of the members in committees. One of the main committees is the Purchase committee. It is in charge of finding products that fit with the criteria of the cooperative and of making the purchase orders. In order

to ensure that the products are ecological, the Purchase committee visits the farms and workshops of the producers and checks the production process, the ingredients, and the overall quality of the products. Furthermore, the members of the cooperative try to establish a personal and direct relationship with the producer. They intend to build a *trusting relationship* with the producer. This is often seen as a more *credible guarantee* that the products are ecological, than the *existing official ecological certification system*.

- Not all cooperatives function in the same way. There are differences in the range of products they offer, in the number of their members, in the frequency of the meetings, in the way purchases are made (in advance or on a daily basis) and to their grade of openness to people outside the coop. Four different *models of cooperatives* were identified. The adoption of each was found to be related to the *location of the coop*, the *phase of development*, the *philosophy* of the members and the *prototype of cooperative* that they intend to follow.
- A definition of the cooperatives as collectivities that carry out a boycotting project would be incomplete. The cooperatives are involved in more projects than simply purchasing ethical products. They also self-produce part of the products (as a group or only some of their members) and intend to minimize waste as much as possible. They are collectivities that practice ethical consumption. Furthermore, they promote ethical consumption. They participate in campaigns, inter-cooperative meetings, seminars, workshops to promote ethical consumption. Some of them participate in ethical publications such as TROC. Hence, the cooperative of responsible consumption is a collective that both practices and promotes ethical consumption. The following figure intends to synthesize the collective ethical projects carried out within the cooperative.

**Figure 7.2:** Ethical Consumer Behavior as a Collective Project in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives



### 7.1.3 Individual Ethical Projects

Table 7.0 showed that the cooperative offers a specific range of products that in their majority satisfy the alimentation needs of its members. So, a question that comes up is what happens outside the coop and what kind of consumers decisions the participants tend to make for products and services unavailable in the coop. So, in this section the attention is placed on the ways that the participants decide to channel their ethical concerns through individual consumer decisions. The data gathered demonstrate that the participants use a wide array of behaviors to express their environmental and societal concern including boycotting, boycotting and downshifting. Each of these behaviors is presented explicitly in the following paragraphs.

#### 7.1.3.1 Boycotting

The term of boycotting is not invented by the doctoral student. It has been used in the ethical consumer literature (see Chapter 2, section 2.1.2), where academics such as Shaw et al. (2006b, 2007) have recently started to employ it to explain the positive act of buying to reward the seller of the ethical product/service. The cooperative of responsible consumption is obviously promoting boycotting, as its main function consists in purchasing products complying with the criteria set by the collectivity (local producers, ecological products, no intermediaries, small producers). The primary research revealed that the members of the coops often apply similar criteria in their everyday, individual purchases:

##### 7.1.3.1.1 Healthy, Natural Products

A common denominator for almost all participants is the purchase of products that are beneficial or at least not harmful for their health and their family's health. They look for natural products, with no additives and preservatives. They avoid prepared food and they look the products' composition and ingredients before making a purchase.

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): I like to look whether the product has 5 E1300 and..ehhh.. I don't know what more..ehh.. and another one that doesn't have any..Well, I prefer the second one!



Vero (Alternative Ways, focus group): **And then the components no? Dyes in clothing, no? With the children. Well sometimes I prefer to buy biological cotton, so that the dyes are not toxic..**

In that context, ecological products are desirable, since they comply with these requirements. Nevertheless, these consumers do not restrict their purchases only to ecologically labeled products.

For instance, many mentioned that they buy artisanal products because they consider them less manipulated, more natural and of better quality. They like to meet the artisanal producer and buy directly from him. For them, artisanal products are of such quality that they seem willing to pay considerably more.

Marti (New Tendency, focus group): **I am going to play in festivals and things like that and there is always a flea market and many things and shops and I buy there many times. It is such luck! For instance you know, this guy is making the cheese and sometimes this doesn't happen even in a village. Because there might be shops but they don't make the cheese. And I love that one guy makes the cheese and another one something else. And whenever I play, I get paid so you see the cheese and it costs 15 euros and you say I'll fucking buy it!**

#### 7.1.3.1.2 Small commerce

The support of the small companies and the critique of the big multinationals is one of the most saturated themes. When the consumer is in the process of choosing the appropriate distribution channel for products unavailable in the coop, the first choice becomes the small commerce.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): **First cooperative, whatever I do not find in the cooperative, I am looking for it in the shops, small commerce preferably, and if I do not find it there then I will go to the big commercial chains. But every time less..**

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): *We are more than a year in the cooperative so things that are more urgent like bread you'll have to buy it in a bakery shop. You intend that it is not one of the big chains, you intend that it is a traditional bakery shop, hmm ..what can be found actually because not a lot are left.*

Tony B (Green Wave, focus group): *I always buy in the public market, the municipal or in the coop.. I don't buy in any other place. Man! When I am absent-minded I might go to the super of the neighborhood but not in a big distribution channel! So, in the market you have the small producer and in the cooperative as well!*

As these examples show, the rationale is the support of smaller and more vulnerable businesses.

#### 7.1.3.1.3 Local commerce

The issue of the 'proximity' of the product appears to be decisive in individual consumer decisions. Consumers prioritize products and services of local producers and local companies or at least of national companies. All participants in the fieldwork mentioned it as a criterion when purchasing different types of products; from clothes to banking.

Int (New Tendency, focus group): *What are your criteria in general when buying?*

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *Outside the coop?*

Int (New Tendency, focus group): *Yes.*

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): *Hmm..That it has a catalan label of origin maybe.*

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *Yes, that too..*

Int (New Tendency, focus group): *Catalan?*

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): Well, it should be catalan or have the catalan label.

Tony B (Green Wave, focus group): Well,hm.. I prefer not buying clothes made in China, I prefer to buy clothes made in Spain, but it is difficult.

Merce (Green Wave, focus group): I think that the people that we are here, we use the same criteria for products that aren't in the cooperative. For example, I consume whatever is related to alimentation here (in the cooperative) and what is clothes or another type of necessity I am always looking where it comes from.

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): I think that the first thing I look at is whether the products are from here, from a local producer...

Int (Ecology Land, interview): Are you talking about food or about everything?

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): About everything..

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): The issue of the ethical banks is something that I started to think about lately. I was in la Caixa and then I started to hear about all the disasters that la Caixa makes like financing armaments and all that! So I started figuring it out, I went to the office of Triodos bank that is an ethical bank.. er.. But the problem..er.. is that it is from..er.. Netherlands..er.. Well, I am thinking about it. I was told that there is another bank that is from nearby but I don't know very well, so I want to figure it out.

Int (Ecology Land, interview): It bothers you that it is from Netherlands?

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): **No. It is not that it bothers me that it is from Netherlands. I just prefer it to be local, I prefer it! It feels like it is closer to me, no?**

### *Why local Commerce?*

Given that the proximity of the seller was an important issue for all the participants, it was considered necessary to figure out why this is happening. The justifications provided pointed towards three directions; support the local economy (economy), reduce transport at minimum (ecology) and perceive local produce as of higher quality (utility). In most cases, the reasoning of preference of local products was a combination of favoritism towards the local economy and environmental concerns concerning the accumulating packaging and increasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transporting products from far away. The following cites were selected after consideration to express these opinions:

- ◆ Support the local economy: Economy

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): **Because when you buy local produce, you are supporting the economy of your place. That is my point of view! I am buying from my neighbor and he is buying from me.**

- ◆ Reduce environmental impact of transport: Ecology

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): **Well the farther the product comes from, the more packaging it needs..even if we don't see it in the shop, they will need it for the transport and more transport. So, more transport more contamination, no? Contamination from CO<sub>2</sub> that the bus consumes to the ship and furthermore all the production of buses and ships to do all that..**

- ◆ Local is better: Utility

Tony B (Green Wave, focus group): **I think that it is of higher quality. I think that the local product is of higher quality because it is less**

elaborated. Which is an important criterion when buying food and for shopping in general.

#### 7.1.3.1.4 Trade-offs among ethical criteria

The criterion of proximity seems to be on the top of the list ahead from other ethical issues like Fair Trade for instance or ecological products. Consumers consider this criterion paramount and perceive a contradiction when talking about ecological and Fair Trade products that are transferred from other countries. They see these products as unsustainable, because their transport harms the environment. Furthermore, some consumers seem to have a strong local orientation in contrast to the global orientation of the Fair Trade consumers of Goig (2007). This means that they are more interested in what happens in their local community and society. So, they prioritize the problems of their community, ahead of problems elsewhere in the world. The following cites were selected to demonstrate the aforementioned.

#### Ecologic versus local

Albert (Alternative Ways, focus group): For instance, one difference with the people that eat ecologic products but they do not have an environmental and social criterion is that they buy ecological products from New Zealand. Ecological for your body but for the planet? So, a banana brought from New Zealand has travelled thousands of kilometers and this obviously can be relevant.

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): Right now a new cooperative has started in Altafulla and Torredembarra that say that they bring the ecological pasta from Italy. It is quite absurd... One of the problems we were seeing. In Tarragona there was a shop that used to sell ecological products. For instance, kiwi from New Zealand. And then you think.. Whatever they save from not using pesticides, they use it for fuel. So the contamination stills exists in the distribution.

### Fair Trade versus local

It was mentioned previously that Fair Trade products are available in most cooperatives and also, that Fair Trade remains a controversial criterion that other members accept and others no. Even if it is included in the products of the cooperative, some members do not buy them, because they find them unsustainable. They see Fair Trade as a questionable movement because it comes in conflict with the overarching criterion of proximity. Given that some of the products of Fair Trade such as coffee or chocolate are not locally produced, it is proposed to substitute them with local alternatives. For instance, chocolate could be replaced with carob pods and coffee with soluble cereals drinks.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): I do not buy Fair Trade apart from coffee and I don't drink a lot of coffee I am replacing it with soluble cereals drink, simply because I put first the distance issue, well if the producer comes from far away.

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): Man I like it (about Fair Trade), that's the truth..But I don't know till what point is really fair. I think that in order to be sustainable, that is the most important, the cycles should close closer. The cycles shouldn't be so big! Because like this, it would be fair for the environment not only for the people.. If we keep consuming like this chocolate and coffee and I eat a lot of chocolate! Maybe, local alternatives such as carob pods instead of chocolate or other things!

Furthermore, some argue that the need to support the local producers is more imperative than the Fair Trade producers that come from far away, due to the current situation of the agricultural and production activity in the area.

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): Fair Trade? Well perfect, Fair Trade! But well, if it comes from the other side of the world, I don't know till what point.....But you say oh man! Here we have so much work to do as well.. And when you see many producers that close here, close by or at 5 kilometres away..eh..before they produced..ehh..I don't

know...ehh how many kilos and now the market doesn't want..well, we should try to maintain sustainability here, no? And the justice, here..

### 7.1.3.2 Boycotting

The consumer behaviour of the participants is guided by conscious choices of certain producers and conscious avoidance of others. They present aversion towards certain types of purchases.

- ◆ Avoid what represents massive consumerism

This concept refers to the participants' aversion towards what represents massive consumerism. So, they appear unwilling to follow the massively promoted product packages.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): Travelling just for travelling doesn't have any sense for me..! We go to see Paris just to see Paris it doesn't satisfy me! I go to a route in Senegal to meet who lives there, I don't know, it should have a meaning.. If not you fall... Because when it is the time for holidays, ala! everyone with the children to go for holidays! Well, me many summers I just go to a colony and I don't travel, because holidays is means travelling, no? (with an ironic tone)

- ◆ Avoid multinationals and big distribution channels

A very popular practice is the boycottage of companies with whose 'morality' they disagree. While as it was seen before, the positive act of buying goes towards small and local producers, the negative act of boycotting goes towards the opposite direction towards big, multinational companies and distribution channels. In some cases, this is translated in complete and total rejection of any company that fits in the definition multinational and big company. What is in reality rejected is the social and economic model promoted by big companies (this is explained in more detail in section). In other cases a more selective process is taking place with specific targets to avoid. These targets might be categories of companies (e.g. products made in Asia) or specific companies.

- *All Exclusive: Total rejection of multinationals and big distribution channels*

The boycott is not against specific companies, but against what multinationals and big commercial chains represent for them. They find multinationals to be unsustainable and harmful.

Albert (Alternative Ways, focus group): **And I prefer not to buy from big multinationals neither directly nor through intermediates in the supermarkets... This is what I think about when I buy. Not the brand, or from whom is it or who does it. For instance Nestlé. Bad reputation that is much more than treating bad the employees. Bad reputation of the multinational companies is about treating bad the workers, the exploitation, generally everything..**

Int (Green Valley, focus group): **Is there a company that you would never buy from for some reason?**

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): **We do not have an obsession with a brand in specific. It is the model (of the multinational). The model in general.**

Rosa A (Green Wave, focus group): **In big distribution chains, in big distribution chains..er.. I never buy anything. From the neighborhood.**

- *Selective Boycott: Avoiding specific targets*

Instead of following the more extreme strategy of boycotting all multinationals, some participants selected targets and focused on them.

- 1) Rejection of American lifestyle' symbols<sup>9</sup>

Int (Ecology Land, interview): **Is there a company that you wouldn't buy from?**

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): **Yes of course. For instance, Coca Cola.**

Int (Ecology Land, interview): **Why?**

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): **Because it is yankee and not healthy..Both. But first because it is yankee..**

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<sup>9</sup> Referring to North America lifestyle.



## 2) Avoid multinationals with bad reputation

The participants identify and boycott specific companies due to associating them with negative rumors regarding their corporate behaviour. Nestle, Danone, Corte Ingles, Coca Cola, Carrefour and la Caixa are some of the companies more frequently brought up as unethical and so boycotted. It is interesting to note that during the fieldwork only negatives examples of companies came up, while no positive corporate examples were memorized. Such observation confirms the well documented phenomenon of asymmetric diagnosticity (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004).

Int (Green Wave, focus group): Which would be then your criteria when buying?

Rosa (Green Wave, focus group): More or less the same as them (other members have expressed opinions already)..er..Maybe what..er..I am doing is a bit relative. Well, for instance, I don't buy specific products and specific brands.

Int (Green Wave, focus group): Like which for instance?

Rosa (Green Wave, focus group): Like brands that are known for investigation with G.M.O or their societal behaviour. I don't buy Danone! (looking decided).

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): I get an allergy to buy from Corte Ingles, for instance.

Int (Green Valley, focus group): Yes? (encouraging him to continue)

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): I don't say I have never done and I will never do it, but certainly I don't like to buy in Corte Ingles, I am against.. Well, in the sense of the multinational and of the image it projects, it seems really ugly to me.

Int (Green Valley, focus group): In which sense?

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): Well, I know someone that works there, and what they require from the workers, the companies' ideology. Or other than Corte Ingles, Coca Cola. They are models of companies that provoke me allergy! And Carrefour, because I have worked in Carrefour and I know the policies for the workers. And if I can avoid to leave even one cent in Carrefour, I do it!

### 3) Avoiding sweat products

The high media coverage and the research by activist groups (Greenpeace and Setem anti-sweat reports are available in Spanish and Catalan) seem to have increased the awareness of these consumers, who deliberately use the available information to boycott the 'immoral' companies. However, the judgment of who is using sweatshops is not always based on the information contained in lists, reports and articles. Other signs are used for the identification of the products to avoid such as the '*Made in China*' label and the *surprisingly cheap price*.

Rebeca (Ecology Land, interview): I don't buy anything that is made in Asia. Well, I have that list that Green Peace publishes about the red, green and yellow companies that exploit children or subhuman labor conditions.. all that type of things..If I see a product from China, I don't buy it! All that issue that has come out from the off shoring of companies.

Marti (New Tendency, focus group): Sometimes you buy cheap things and you think... this is too cheap... This no. What is extremely cheap, I am not going to buy it.

Int (New Tendency, focus group): Why?

Marti (New Tendency, focus group): Because I see something missing. Someone took the money and got away with it.

Int: *A very low price worries you?*

Marti (New Tendency, focus group) nodes

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *It is suspicious..*

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): *You imagine from its price, it comes from a country far away and you don't like it and someone even if it is not a child has been exploited.*

### 7.1.3.3 Ethical Simplification

All participants declare an aversion towards excessive consumerism and towards the overuse of natural resources in order to comply with the demand that consumerism creates. They consider it unacceptable as a social model and are also worried for the environmental implications entailed in the increasing waste accumulation.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *What worries me is the excessive consumption and the opulence..Come on! We have money! Now flat screen and no reusall!..This, the excessive consumption.....I try to buy what I need, not a lot, a lot and then it is left.....To calculate during the week and buy according to that. Not having a stock and then everything is expired.*

Jose Angels (Green Wave, focus group): *I try not to buy. If I can, I avoid buying. If I can recycle, it doesn't matter if it is clothes or other things, arrange what I already have and keep going on, use something, give it another use, I do it. If I have to buy I am worried for the socio environmental 'backpack' of the product. If I know that, it is a criterion to choose it or not to choose it!*

Principally, this attitude is translated in a minimization of purchases to the absolutely necessary. Certainly, what each consumer perceives as absolutely necessary is subjective. These purchases are made, where possible, according to the criteria described in boycotting. It is interesting to note that the main project of the

cooperative is buying alimentary products, which is considered a basic need to cover. Actually, in more extreme cases consumption and purchasing is limited down basically to food. New products are not bought until they lose their utility.

Int (Ecology Land, interview): *On a personal level, for instance, in everyday life, have you tried to cut down on your consumption in some way?*

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): *I cannot cut down on my consumption anymore (smiling).*

Int (Ecology Land, interview): *What do you mean?*

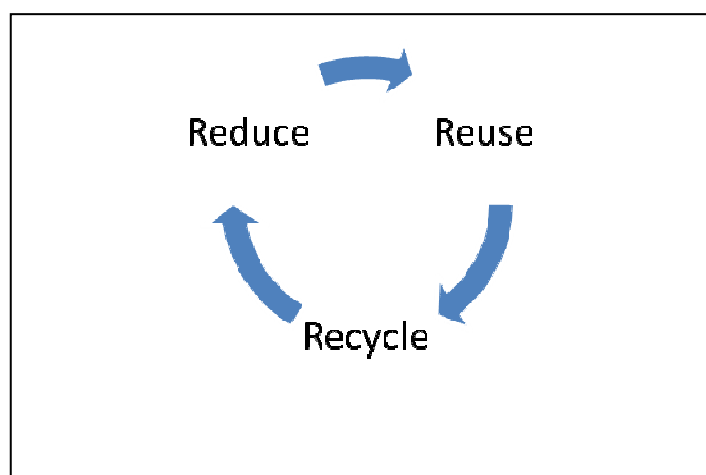
Marc (Ecology Land, interview): *I have cut down as much as I could. Basically I just buy food and my most extraordinary activity would be to go out and have a drink sometime.*

Judith (Environmental Hope, interview): *I have this for five years (shows her clothes) and I'll keep wearing them till they cannot be used anymore. I don't have a collection of clothes or a closet full of clothes, everyday other models, no! The same with the shoes. Until they have a hole and water enters...*

#### 7.1.3.3.1 Waste management strategies: the 3R model

Instead of buying, these consumers find alternative ways to satisfy emerging needs for products, or services, without generating more waste. Their general strategy is referred to as the 3R model consisting of three main elements, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. All three elements are interrelated and complement each other. The main idea underlying the 3R model is that the consumer achieves to reduce their consumption levels by reusing and recycling. Consequently, by reducing their general consumption levels, they generate less waste to be recycled.

**Figure 7.3:** The 3R model



Miquel (el TROC, Spring-Summer, 2003, Germinal-Rubi): **What is the model of 3 R based on? Each R corresponds to one word: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. And the order is very important. To make all the effort to minimize the quantity of waste, and a way to do it is with the second word (refers to reuse). Apart from taking advantage of the things that can be used (repaired), this effort is also centered on returning the reusable packages, so that the waste left is very little.**

Such strategy was found to be operationalized in the following ways:

- ♦ **Reduce energy consumption**

A common finding was these consumers' interest in reducing their energy consumption. They intent to achieve it by employing energy-saving practices such as using cold water, turning off the gas, walking and cycling instead of driving, installing energy-saving lamps or even becoming vegetarians, because breeding animals is considered as an activity that requires a lot of energy and so harms the environment. Furthermore, such practices are not limited only to one's personal life but in other spaces where he/she participates such as his work environment.

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): **So, when I am at work, I am switching off all the lights and they hate me! But come on man! (this is what they tell him). But they are not necessary. I seem like a contact breaker, if you keep switching off the whole day, no? But it doesn't cost me anything.**

Or to the other ones. But people are used to consume so impressively much!

♦ **Recycle everything**

Recycling emerged as one of the most common projects that consumers carry out. Almost all mentioned that they recycle their waste. They follow the rules suggested by the city halls; they divide their waste into plastic, paper, glass and organic garbage and throw it in the bins provided by the city halls. Nevertheless, some of the participants employ or wish to employ some less conventional and more natural methods in order to reduce more their waste such as fishes that clean and warms that eat organic garbage.

Tony B (Green Wave, focus group): The other day I was looking for fishes that clean the tank. There are some special fishes that clean the tank.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): I am going to tell you an anecdote. (she smiles). Twelve years ago..eh.. my sister gave to me..eh.. as a present a big black box with warms. Those earth warms, they were called bernis,..eh.. they only live in the darkness and they want organic materials. So the organic material in my house is for them.hmm.. I get a compost that is for the farmers or for my pots at home for the garden.eh.. What do these warms do not like? The orange skin,..eh.. the skin of onions, of the tomato. Well this goes to the organic (bin) of the city hall. So, if I buy and pay, I don't want to throw.

♦ **Reuse all type of materials and resources**

The participants try to make as much use as possible of all the materials and resources in their disposition. To do it, they do not follow a strict manual of 'must do' behaviors. Instead, they employ their imagination and creativity and apply the principle of reuse in their everyday reality.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): Me, hm.. for instance, hmm.. for the morning sandwiches I use small bags that I cannot use for the garbidge and I wrap them in kitchen paper, not in silver foil and I reuse everything.

An interesting finding was that most of them make an effort to cut down on their water consumption and reuse the same water for different uses. The tricks used include the use of rain water or of the cold water from the shower for other purposes such as watering the plants or flushing the toilet. It should be mentioned that Spain and Catalunya have suffered water shortage problems for the past years, so this seems to have created a higher level of sensitivity regarding water waste.

Laura (Ecology Land, focus group): *Well, water consumption, I collect rain water...*

Int (Ecology Land, focus group): *Really? How?*

Laura (Ecology Land, focus group): *The simplest way is to put a bucket and when it rains, here you are! Then, you can as well, collect the water from the roof. I have a small terrace with a drain. And through the drain there are the pipes and I put a bucket quite big below the drain. And then I use all of it to water the plants. There are many tricks! Another thing is when water comes out when you want to shower, while you wait till the water is hot, you put all the water in a bucket and it is cold water. I just don't dare to shower with cold water at certain times.. So I use the water in the toilet. Instead of flushing, I throw the water in the bucket.*

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *Or with the water we reuse it. We shower in a big bucket and then for the plants. Till you get hot water you use it for the plants.*

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): *It's 5 litres till hot water starts to come out. It's incredible!*

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *5?*

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): *Well in my house yes.*

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *Or the water when you clean the vegetables also for the plants.*

♦ **Repair and reuse**

Their main idea is to reuse the products they already possess and repair them if necessary, instead of buying new ones. They consider that new purchases contribute to a new cycle of production with all the energy and resources required.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): **If a part of the fridge is missing I am going to look for repair parts. I have an old bike and I am repairing it. Reuse! Before buying a part missing, ask if anyone has a spare one!**

♦ **Opt for reusable products**

Another practice that was mentioned is the replacement of disposal products with their reusable equivalents. The purchase of reusable products implies the existence of a more organised and long-term plan of the consumer to achieve the maximum reuse of all kinds of products and to minimize his/her waste.

Laia A (Alternative Ways, focus group): **For instance..er.. now..er..I use a monthly menstrual pad instead of using tampons or disposable menstrual pads.**

♦ **‘No packaging’**

This category refers to the avoidance of any type of plastic or other packaging that would result in more waste. Previous literature (Cherrier, 2006; Chan et al., 2008) has placed attention on the specific behaviour of Bringing Your Own Bag (BYOB). Indeed, the avoidance of plastic supermarket bags and its replacement by cloth ones appears to be very popular among the participants. Nevertheless, the ‘no packaging’ category encompasses more behaviors than the BYOB. The participants intent to avoid all types of packaging, especially if made of plastic, as a source of undesirable waste and they apply it anywhere they can in their everyday life. The following discussions that took place in two focus groups are presented as illustrative examples.

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): **When I buy ham, maybe I could buy it in Guisona but then it has a lot of packaging , while I go the market with the tupper and..**

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): **You go with the tupper?**



Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): *Not always but yes..*

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *Look I go with one of these bags (she takes one cloth bag from her handbag and shows it to me).*

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): *Or with the shopping cart.*

Vero (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Sometimes I seem a bit weird, when I go and ask not to put plastic between jamon Serrano's lonches and he looks at me "without plastic"? And I have to repeat it many times and with the cheese as well. And you have to put an effort continuously because if you doubt for a while, they tell you. You have to repeat it, no? I normally take the bag with me when I go to the supermarket.. er..the bag from textile..er.. it is another form..*

Laura (Alternative Ways, focus group): *The cloth bag..*

Vero (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Well in some supermarkets make you discounts..yes I know it's all politics! But ok, they make you discounts if you bring your own bag. It doesn't seem like a bad idea even if it is ridiculous.*

Araceli (Alternative Ways, focus group): *I tell them when I go to the supermarket after work: "do not give me the plastic bag! Because when I go home, I will throw it!". And almost always they say "well, it's true".*

Laura (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Or in the pharmacy! The f..ing paper of the pharmacy! Why is this paper so necessary? (in a surprised and upset tone)*

#### ♦ **Interchange products**

Another common practice is the organization of interchanges of products sometimes without the exchange of money reminding barter economies of previous times. During the primary research, some of the members of the cooperative Ecology Land were participating in one interchange of clothes.

Rosa B (Green Wave, focus group): I try not to buy. Recycle and interchange clothes between friends. With the clothes, well interchange and use it, make interchanges with friends.

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): For instance, to get clothes we put on (referring to some of the members of the coop) an interchange market this Saturday in Tarragona. They are different ways to do get what you need.

Furthermore, another member of the same cooperative reveals that she often participates in such interchanges.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): For instance, we arrange interchange markets among friends, we reuse each other's clothes and sometimes stuff for the house and there was a time we used to give loans to each other. We used to say I am travelling a lot so I am leaving you this appliance and you give me another. Or interchange furniture and other kitchen utensils.

#### ♦ **Regiving networks**

It refers to the existence of networks where people give away things that they don't need anymore instead of throwing them. It represents one modern form of gift economy but with a more ecologic orientation. For instance, Xavier and Clara (New Tendency, focus group) describe one such network that they use:

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): Now with internet it is much easier. There are databases of things being offered.

Int: Like?

Xavier and Clara (New Tendency, focus group): [www.reutil.net](http://www.reutil.net). There are people that offer things.

Marti (New Tendency, focus group): That offer?

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): Yes, it is about interchanging things.

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): No, it is not about interchanging. I have an old cabinet and I don't know what to do with it, so I offer it. I upload the photo and someone comes and picks it up.

♦ **Buy second hand products**

In case that a product has to be bought, because it cannot be found otherwise, the consumers prefer a second-hand purchase. The idea is that the already fabricated products should be used instead of 'feeding' new production cycles that result in waste of resources during the production and in accumulated waste after the production.

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): I also interpret that when I buy, I accumulate more sh...t to the world, because in the end when you buy something, it might be plastic or something else, it is going to accumulate more waste. It doesn't matter how much you intent to reuse stuff.. So what do we do? Or you reuse, you buy only if you need it or you buy something already fabricated so that they make something new for you..

♦ **'Do It Yourself'**

This type of strategy is being used by a number of the respondents/members of cooperatives as an alternative to purchase. It refers to the self-production of what one needs instead of buying it. The members that choose to self-produce, find more joy through personal creation rather than consumption.

Kat (focus group, New Tendency): Also when I can prepare myself something at home, why buy it? Before, I used to buy frozen puff pastry..Then I was tired of that and I begun to make it myself.

Clara (focus group, New Tendency): Or the croquettes, no?

Kat (focus group, New Tendency): A lot of things!

Xavier (focus group, New Tendency): And the yogurt? You prepare it yourself or you buy it?

Kat (focus group, New Tendency): I don't know how to do it..

Xavier (focus group, New Tendency): **It's not difficult..You basically need milk..**

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): **My daughter likes a lot Fanta with lemon. So, now what we do? We take the juice of two lemons and put it in a bottle with water. And you make lemonade. It is that easy! It's just about looking for alternatives and stop buying Coca Cola for instance.**

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): **Now I have a small urban garden in the terrace and I plant tomatoes, lettuce, chards...**

In addition, some of the participants get together with their friends (that might be or not members of their coop) to find together solutions to satisfy their needs. For instance, some of the members of the coop Ecology Land have their own garden where they plant vegetables and fruits, given that in this coop they administer basically dry food.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): **We have a garden to sustain ourselves with fruit and vegetables...We are 4 from the cooperative implicated in the garden.. This year though the space will be reduced (they rent it) and we are going to be left with a garden three-meter wide but ok, we are 7 active and for us it's sufficient. And we plant vegetables all the time and we sustain ourselves for the whole season.**

It can be observed that most of the examples mentioned refer to alimentation, since for these consumers this is the basic need that should be covered first. Nevertheless, home 'remedies' are found for other, more 'luxury' needs such as wine tasting.

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): **Tonight we have wine tasting and dinner at home. A girl from the coop that is enologist and many other friends that we know each other from different places we prepare this but without participating in the system. We pay 5 euros maximum and we do what we**

would do somewhere else paying 50 or 60. I don't know. It's about looking different ways to organize yourself without having to give up on anything. Well, give up has his own meaning.

#### 7.1.3.4 The project of information search

Different authors (Duncombe & Heeks, 2002; Harrison et al., 2005) remark the importance of awareness as a precondition to consume ethically. While the possession of information on ethical issues is not always translated in action (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Berry & McEachern, 2005), ethical action usually presupposes that some kind of information search has been carried out. In the definition of ethical consumers provided by Harrison et al. (2005), information recollection appears as an integral and crucial part of their decision making. Hence, this section is dedicated to describe the strategies that the participants undertake to be updated as a group and as individual consumers.

##### *Within the cooperative*

Indeed, as explained in Section 7.1.1, the boycotting project of the cooperative is linked to an active search of producers that comply with the criteria of the cooperative (ecological, local, small, no intermediates). The members of the cooperative usually constitute a special committee that should be in charge of searching products and producers. Nevertheless, it was observed that in some cooperatives, each member is responsible of finding one producer; e.g. one member is responsible of finding a supplier of cereals, another member should find a supplier of bread etc. This type of organization was come across twice in relatively ‘younger’ cooperatives (Environmental Hope, el Garrofet).

In order to find the producers, an informal search process was identified. Some of the members of the cooperative know personally certain producers, whom they suggest to the rest of the members.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, pre-interview chat): **Well, Manolo** (another member of the cooperative) **knew a guy that could supply us with mandarins, so there you go..**

Also, there is knowledge sharing among cooperatives. Producers are suggested from one cooperative to the other, either through reunions or because contacts between members have been established. In addition, various suggestions of producers can be found in every issue of the magazine TROC. The section ‘Who do we buy from?’ is

especially dedicated towards that purpose. In this section, members of cooperatives write their experience from recent visits to the producers or from working with certain suppliers for some time. Nevertheless, information search is not limited to passively receiving it and passing it on. Often, the members responsible of finding the producers visit the farms where the production takes place to corroborate information about the production process and to meet the producer. At times, different cooperatives organize common visits together to producers.

### *On an individual level*

Many of the participants carry out an active project of information search in order to remain updated. Internet appears as an important source of information.

Sometimes the participants visit specific sites to source information, while others they simply google it. Manolo (Ecology Land) mentions the example of the website of Al Gore where he finds advice on how to save energy and Rebecca (Ecology Land) the annually updated listings of Greenpeace about the companies that use sweatshops. In some cases, the web search becomes a more organised and systematic project.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): **There are small manuals or sites where you can click. I also prepare documents** (with the information she finds).

Environmental and social organizations like Green Peace and Setem are seen as rich sources of information. Some of the members do not only visit their sites but also they are subscribers and members such as Judith (Ecology Land) and Carmen (Organic Veggies) and have more access to information.

Other participants claim to take certain decisions on basis of previous personal experience. For instance, Xavier (Green Valley) boycotts Carrefour because he had worked there in the past and Clara (New Tendency) tries to buy from local shops because her mother used to have one.

Some of the tricks to achieve consumption and waste reduction are a result of imagination and creativity. Nevertheless, there are consumers that intent to learn more through courses and seminars.

Int (Ecology Land, interview): **And these things just occurred to you? You read about them? They told you about them?**

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): Well this about the shower (reusing the water) it's just occurred to me..Then I saw many people doing it. And now I see many people doing it. And it's a bit by bit. It's not like I did something in concrete suddenly to change, no? But I did a premaculture course and that was..

Int (Ecology Land, interview): Premaculture?

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): Premaculture is a kind of design tool, to design the things of a garden in the city, the things in your house, of your work..eh..Prema..eh is like maintaining culture, no? How to maintain a sustainable culture, no?

Int (Ecology Land, interview): In general..?

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): Yes and they have many tricks.

In the cooperative Organic Veggies there are ethical publications available such Opcions, so that the members can get informed. One of the members of the cooperative, Carmen, uses this information and to complement it she has subscribed in mailing listings.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): And also having information from mails, articles. Four months ago I ehh.. subscribed...eh and I receive weekly ..eh I registered in these small conferences about Fair Trade, of earth movements in Brazil. So, for the last 4 months I receive daily around 10 articles. For instance how is the situation of cultivations in South America. And then you pass it here (the coop). And you see what is going on and you accumulate. Well, really you update yourself on a global level.

As Carmen mentions, another source of information is the social interaction among the members of the cooperative. She learns things and communicates them to other coop members. This is common in most of the cooperatives.



Kat (New Tendency, focus group): *We have a mailing list and information circulates about some conferences, some seminar about consumption.*

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *We are daily in contact.*

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): *For instance, something that just crossed my mind that here we do not have it, is aromatic herbs. And they tell you, go there (other members)..hmm.. Well coordination works!*

#### 7.1.3.5 Inconsistencies

According to Newholm (2005), ethical consumers are not seen as impeccable. So, interest should be placed not on their inconsistencies but on how they act at all.

In line with Newholm (2005), the unfeasibility of leading a 100% coherent ethical life is acknowledged. The participants of this study are individuals that haven't chosen extreme alternative lifestyles such as isolating themselves in alternative communities. Nor they are found in a context where the authorities impose regulations towards more ethical lifestyles (e.g. compulsory recycling schemes, obligatory use of Fair Trade in organization like in Fair Trade cities). They are striving to be ethical within their more 'mainstream' lives.

Nevertheless, unlike Newholm, interest is placed both on their ethical projects and their expected inconsistencies. The rationale is to get a more holistic and pragmatic view of their reality and also understand the difficulties of being an ethical consumer in the context where they are found. It was considered important to acknowledge the context of the study, since till now empirical findings represented experiences from Anglo-Saxon and Northern European countries. However, differences in market and institutional structures raised questions with regards the generalizability of their findings, since carrying out the same type of practices could be experienced differently in different contexts.

In this section, the participants identify situations where they are less 'strict' with their consumer and lifestyle choices and do not behave as ethically as the previous sections describe. So, here the participants discuss their inconsistencies.

A question that came up during the fieldwork was to whom they attribute the blame for their inconsistent behaviour. Chatzidakis et al. (2007) used neutralization techniques to explain the inconsistencies of the ethical consumers. They describe the main neutralization techniques as proposed by Strutton et al. (1994 in Chatzidakis et al., 2007: 90):

- 1) *Denial of responsibility: "It's not my fault I had no other choice"*
- 2) *Denial of injury: "What's the big deal in stealing? Who is going to miss it?"*
- 3) *Denial of victim: It's their fault. If they had been fair with me, I wouldn't have done it".*
- 4) *Condemning the condemners: "It's a joke they find fault with me after the rip-offs they have engineered"*
- 5) *Appealing to higher loyalties: "To some what I did might appear wrong but I did it for my family"*

Their main argument is that consumers deny responsibility of their inconsistencies and attribute their actions to external factors that leave them no choice than behaving as they do. They argue that denial of responsibility, denial of injury and appealing to higher loyalties are the most widely used neutralization techniques to explain inconsistencies in the context of Fair Trade consumption.

In part, this was observed. Two neutralization techniques were identified; **denial of responsibility** and **appealing to higher loyalties**. Consumers deny the blame for the inconsistencies and they attribute it to broader institutional and market factors that they have no control of, such as the lack of availability of ethical alternatives in the market, the inefficiency of the existing ethical alternatives, the difficulty in obtaining information and the high prices of the ethical alternatives. Furthermore, they appeal to higher loyalties in order to explain their inconsistencies such as complying with social obligations or with their children's wishes. The children's influence in purchase decisions is also referred to as pester power in the literature (Carrey et al., 2008). The aforementioned types of inconsistencies were categorized under the general title 'Perceived External Limitations'.

Nevertheless, it was considered that the framework of neutralization techniques cannot fully describe the spectrum of identified inconsistencies. It was observed that

there are situations where consumers acknowledge their personal responsibility and might even question their choices in certain cases. They accept that they are not perfect and that at times they weight more which choice is more convenient for them. The second type of inconsistencies is labeled 'Perceived Individual Limitations'.

#### 7.1.3.5.1 Inconsistencies in consumer behaviour decisions

##### Perceived External Limitations

For most participants, the root of the problem is the fact that the ethical market is still in an early phase of development. They consider that there are not many alternatives and there is very few information about the existing alternatives. Furthermore, the limited offer is very expensive and not as efficient as the alternatives of the conventional market.

##### *Lack of availability of ethical alternatives*

One of the most saturated themes was the inexistence of ethical alternatives to choose from. The participants always present it as an inhibiting factor that does not allow them to buy according to their principles. Therefore, they end up buying one of the alternatives that the marker offers.

Judith (Environmental Hope, interview): *There are no options. It is a very, very small system.. So there is no offer..*

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): *When we go out, we often go to a restaurant etc. But you cannot find the ecological beer, you just cannot find it! In a bar.. You cannot be responsible in that case!*

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): *It is true that to do everything in the house is very difficult. You don't find carpenters and in a good price. So you end up buying things in IKEA like Xavier says. Well,eh.. not always you can do what you want to do..*

##### *Lack of transparency of information*

Another important obstacle to purchase ethically is the difficulty of obtaining information about the production process of the products. Some participants find it complicated to answer questions such as: How was the product fabricated? Where does it come from? So, they feel unable to make an informed and responsible decision either because the production process is not transparent and there is no easy access to information or because the existing ethical companies listings are incomplete.

Int (Green Valley, focus group): *If I understand correctly it is difficult to buy outside the cooperative according to your criteria?*

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): *If it is difficult? Yes it is difficult because there is no information and transparency.*

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): *In the end it is very difficult to know how the clothes we are wearing were made of. And yes the campaign 'Roba Neta' is very good but it examines only big brands. But if you talk with a small producer of clothes, the clothes he sells he also buys them from China and Nicaragua. In reality we focus in the big brands but the smaller ones do the same! How do you explain it that you go in a shop and the clothes cost 10 euros?*

Int (Ecology Land, interview): *And in that case what do you do?*

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): *I buy it.*

Int (Ecology Land, interview): *From where? The big brand or the small brand?*

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): *From wherever.*

Kat (New Tendency, focus group): *With other products like electronic products it is difficult, because the contact with the information of these things is more difficult, no?*

Judith (Environmental Hope, interview): *It is purely a matter of how the market works. There is a big market and you intend to be here, but one*

way or another you have to enter.. Because of the price or because you don't know, I don't know. If you know something, tell me.. Tell me and I'll join, I'll try it..

Furthermore, the marketplace, as Newholm (2005) also points out, is dynamic and constantly changing. Given that "*businesses change hands and products change specifications*" (p. 108), the desire to make an informed and conscious consumer decision requires constant search and information updates.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): Since the 80's these big companies bankrupt and they buy them..eh.. for instance Danone was catalan. It's not anymore. Now we don't know who has it. So of course. You don't know.

Nevertheless, it seems that the biggest problem is not the lack of information but the quality and credibility of the existing information. Some consumers experience it as an overload of information which makes them unsure of what is really true. Others feel they don't have enough information to decide. Nevertheless, in both cases the problem is located in that the existing information comes from non reliable sources. So the main concern is whether the information is credible or just urban myths. Therefore, besides the lack of information, they raise as a more important issue the **legitimacy** of the existing information.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): Also, there are many things that you know them from a third person, no? There isn't someone that has studied it about the topic, instead you get online and find information. So you have to confirm the information you find and say whether this is a criterion that I can use or not. Sometimes, I feel that so much information comes to our hands that I don't know what to believe, unless some more evident things such as the thing with la Caixa, that for me are a criterion that I don't ignore.

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): When you start becoming more conscious of things, you try to escape and become more conscious.. I

don't know.. You hear about Nike or the shoes made in China. But these things are still urban myths.

### *Limited Budget and High Prices*

The high prices of the ethical alternatives in the market have been raised as an issue in previous studies (e.g. Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). Most participants confirm this by arguing that some of the ethical products and services are too expensive for them and they have a limited budget to spend. They consider that ethical alternatives tend to be expensive because they represent a 'marginalized' sector. So, there is too little offer that results in high prices.

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): For instance there was an exhibition show in Manresa and there were all type of products, from solar panels to things for the house, beds but this sector is in the margin. There is not a lot of information and there are not a lot of products. And even if you want they are expensive, because they are a few. You want to invest in a house using this criteria and it so costly! Adapt your house to that! It is expensive, still very expensive! I want to say that it is very difficult to find information and when you do it is really expensive to apply it. We were looking for things but it is very expensive to apply it. You have to think about it very well and do it a bit by bit. If not..

Int. (Ecology Land, interview): And other initiatives like ethical banking or ethical tourism, what do you think? These tendencies and alternatives?

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): Well, I love them! But even if I am totally supporting them eh.. the ethical banking..Here in Setem we promote that..eh..I am working now in a bank so I have to have everything there by obligation, they put my monthly salary there.. eh.. I am not rich! If I had millions, I would put them in an ethical bank like Triodos or to Ecocredit o Fiare, but I don't, so?

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): In the case of the bank.hmm. Well I have a monthly salary but the financial situation of the family doesn't permit us, there is no money to invest. We still have a mortgage..

### *Inefficient ethical alternatives*

Another problem mentioned by some of the participants is their dissatisfaction with the existing ethical alternatives. The main concern is that there is such limited offer that if a consumer wants to buy ethically, he/she has to compromise with the existing ethical choices .While, these choices satisfy the ethical requirements of the consumers, they do not meet other criteria that are also seen as important such as functionality or style and design.

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): (about how she buys clothes) Because fair trade clothes are so few and they are..hmm..so..There is no variety. I only know one shop in Gracia that they have quite a few bags, quite a few trousers, quite a few tops but I don't like them! Maybe I might have bought a top once.....And to have the account in Triodos, which is the bank with most services, it wouldn't work out anyway because it is in Barcelona and you don't have a debit card and you cannot have many services with them. So for the moment I am not using it.

### *Keeping up with Social Obligations*

It should be reminded that the participants haven't chosen extremely alternative lifestyles, living in isolated communities like the members of the New Consumption Communities of Bekin et al. (2005; 2007). They are leading mainstream lives and do not always interact with people that share their principles. This makes them compromise when sometimes they have to comply with their social obligations.

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): We were invited to a birthday in McDonalds. Well, we had to eat potatoes instead of hamburgers, but ok! Nothing weird is gonna come out from your head right? It cannot be so dogmatic..

Ferran (Germinal-Sarrià, TROC Winter 2003): ...sometimes from laziness or tiredness I was eating things that, even if I knew that they didn't cover my basic quality criteria, I felt like to eat them because my friends were eating them and they were there so happy..

### *Pester Power*

By pester power is defined the influence that children exercise on their parents' purchase behaviour by nagging and demanding specific products (Gunter & Furnham, 1999). Pester power has been discussed previously in general consumer research (Cook, 2003) and ethical consumer research (Carrey et al., 2008). Some of the consumers refer to it as a reason of their inconsistencies, either because their children refuse to consume ethical products, or because they insist and persuade their parents to buy unethical products. The following cites are used to demonstrate it.

Antonia (Green Wave, focus group): And about cutting down on consumption! Uff! With a teenager daughter and a small son, this throws us against! Every hour, every five minutes! (tone of despair) Now we were coming (her son is present and she is showing him) and he wanted me to buy him something from the One euro shop. Whatever, it didn't matter, but of one euro. Well, I was almost falling for that when we were coming here, a blackmail! But at last I didn't fall. But I almost did.

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): Some of us are really happy to practically not going to the supermarket anymore.

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): The least possible!

Irene (Green Valley, focus group): Well, we go! Because we have children and because there are things here that they don't like. Bit by bit we introduce the food to them, but it's difficult, no? You want a cookie and they don't like the ones here or the cereals. Well, we buy them outside. But the majority of the products we buy them here.



### Perceived Individual Limitations

Nevertheless, there are cases of participants that accept their individual responsibility and discuss their inconsistencies on that basis.

#### *Opting for the easy choice*

Besides their strong ethical orientation and awareness of existing alternatives, some of the participants might not prefer it because it requires more time and energy to carry out. So, they prefer the easiest and more conventional option.

Tony B (Green Wave, focus group): I don't have time to think about things. Or to go and look for an energy-efficient alarm clock. I will just put batteries, all the time batteries because it is the easiest thing for me to do.

Rosa (Green Wave, focus group): ..For me and for people I know. Sometimes it is about making an effort not to go to the supermarket besides your house and walk for 10 minutes till the Fair Trade shop. It is about going there. Sometimes is not even about time. I think it is difficult.

#### *'Noone is perfect'*

In various cases, the consumers accept their individual limitations and the fact that they cannot be ethical all the time and with all type of purchases. Therefore, they assume it as an unchangeable reality.

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): With respect to your question, when I am going to buy furniture or clothes, my criteria fall to what is available, no? In the sense that I have accepted that if I don't do what I do here (in the cooperative), if it doesn't have to do with this world, then I am one more citizen, I am not paying more attention to things. Because I don't know how to do it... I think in the end we all fall because we have an account in la Caixa, a mobile that if it isn't with Telefonica, it is with Vodafone and we put gasoline from Repsol. In other words, we cannot..

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): *We are sinners in the end!*

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): *It is true that we cannot be 100% sure of what we avoid..*

Marti (New Tendency, focus group): *There are many products that I even don't think about it. Like in cds. It never occurs me to think: Who has made it?*

Jose Angels (Green Wave, focus group): *Sometimes we do the big things but in the details we are not careful.*

Rebecca (Ecology Land, focus group): *You have to be 100% informed constantly and become paranoid so that.. Well, I don't buy in Zara and Inditex companies, because they are outsourcing..eh and all the child exploitation issues and sweatshops. But for sure there are things that you don't pay attention. I am trying to be alert no? But there are many things I miss..*

### *'Change takes time'*

One of the most frequently emerging concepts is that becoming an ethical consumer is a slow process that takes time. For some of the interviewees, the starting point is the participation in the cooperative. Then, it is about realizing the alternative options and about adopting them as habits. Nevertheless, this is not an immediate change for them. Instead, it implies a series of changes towards a greater consciousness. In the meanwhile, inconsistencies take place.

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): *Well..hm.. I think that bit by bit I am starting to pay attention. You start with the food and then you apply it everywhere, no?*

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): I suppose it is about evolving a bit by bit, no? If you think in some things you start collaborating bit by bit in things that you see as more real.... Clearly, you are in one world and then in another one. During this time you don't say I throw this and put this. You have to do it slowly.. You get in slowly.

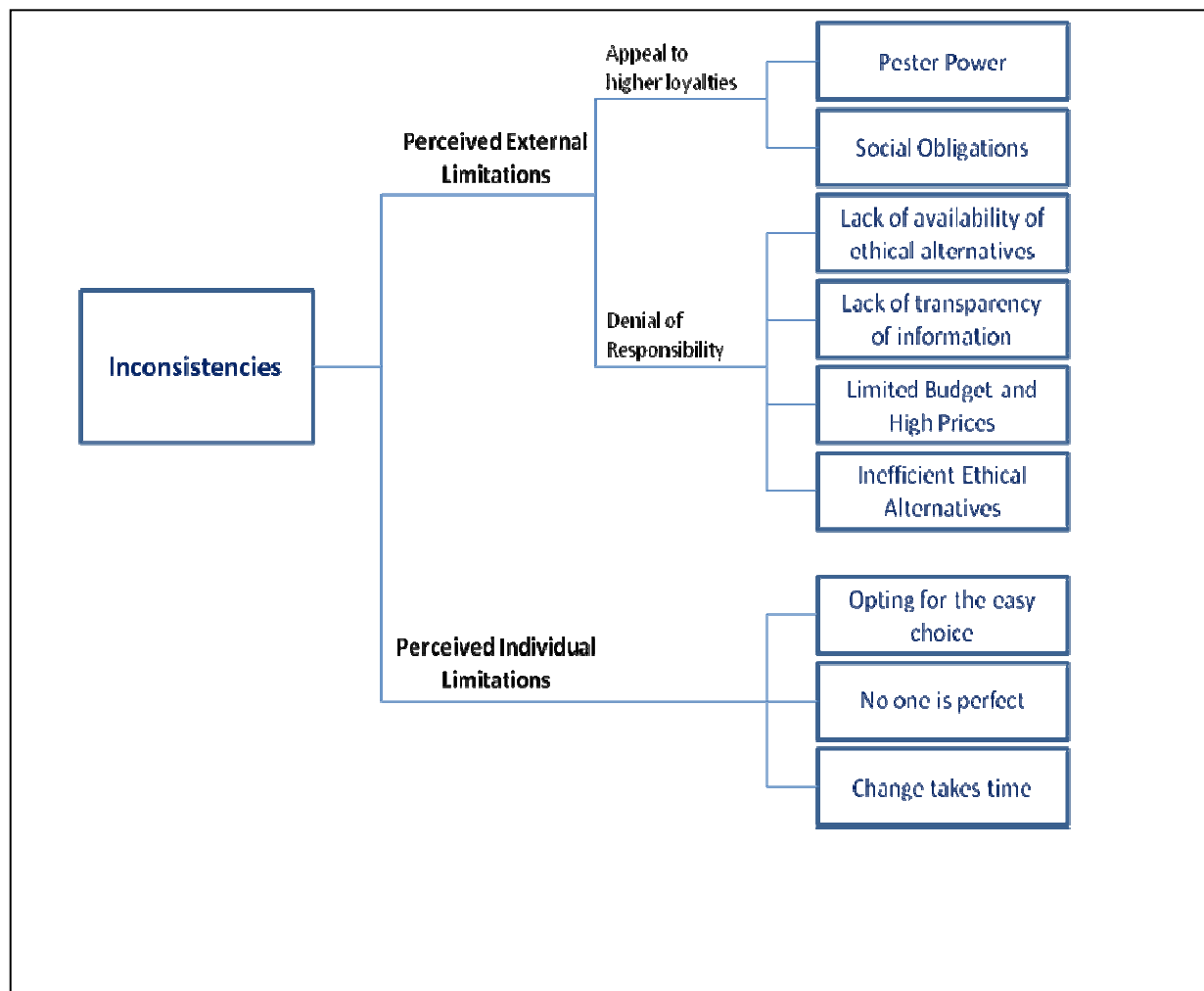
Rosa (Green Wave, focus group): Change your usual habits take a lot (putting emphasis on lot) of time..

### 7.1.3.5.2 Summary of Inconsistencies in consumer behaviour decisions

The participants acknowledged and discussed their inconsistencies, attributing them either to external factors or to their personal limitations.

Most of the findings confirm what was found in different contexts. Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004) have suggested that difficulties in obtaining information, high prices and lack of alternatives were the obstacles for ethical consumption in Finland. Carrigan and Attalla (2001) had concluded that UK consumers would consider the most convenient choice, while more a decade ago Strong (1996) was predicting that wider availability and high quality of ethical products would contribute to the growth of the ethical market. The following figure illustrates diagrammatically all the identified and explained inconsistencies in consumer behaviour.

**Figure 7.4:** Summary of the observed inconsistencies



### 7.1.3.6 General Lifestyle Choices: Consistencies and Inconsistencies

During the fieldwork, many participants mentioned other types of decisions that they have taken related to their general lifestyle. In some cases they appear to be consistent with their principles, while in others they claim that they cannot escape the ‘bad choice’. With regards their inconsistencies, they seem to question their choices, but accept that they give in because they see them as the most feasible ones. It was interesting to note that most of their concerns were about their travelling by airplanes, which they consider a highly contaminating activity.

Nevertheless, their ethical concerns guide them in many other decisions such as planning or shunning careers.

#### Inconsistent Lifestyle choices

##### *Energy Consumption*

Most participants do not limit their concerns to making ethical purchase decisions. They are concerned with the impact of their lifestyle on the planet. They find that their travelling by airplane and the use of car are polluting the environment. Even if they continue with their lifestyle options, they express feelings of guilt in doing so.

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): Normally, I go to Argentina once or twice per year and this an amazing CO<sub>2</sub> consumption, no? You produce so much CO<sub>2</sub> , no? The airplane.. The other day I was looking one of these calculators that calculate your total consumption and of course I can have many energy efficient lamps, but every time I go to Argentina, I destroy all the savings I have made. And I consume much more than any person that doesn't have any type of consciousness. So, I have to reduce even more.

Kat (New Tendency, focus group): Transport pollutes! This is one of my thoughts.. but..eh.. it cannot be done otherwise sometimes. For instance, my village is in Sardinia. Well,eh.. I would love to go by boat where many people travel and so it is more ecological than the airplane, but I can't! I

have to spend four days travelling and it's impossible, come on! It is possible when one doesn't work and has nothing to do!

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): We have solar panels that are much more expensive, but I need to put gasoline in the car..hmm..I need the car to go to work. Well, ehh.. finally, a percentage of my consumption is more or less like everyone..ehh. The difference is that you are thinking it over and sometimes it makes you feel bad, it makes you rethink stuff and or ...eh.. I don't know you take initiatives or you think on the consequences of what you do.

### Consistent Lifestyle Choices

The ethical concerns of the participants are seen in other decisions unrelated to consumption. In an effort to be consistent with their ethical principles, the participants get implicated in other social movements; Christian, environmental, social or even consider changing jobs.

#### *Participation in other collective movements*

A frequently emerging finding was that the participants were very active and participative in various collective movements that were related to social, environmental or even religious issues.

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): It's that the majority of people, we are involved in many movements. Because Rebecca is in the cooperative, then other people of the cooperative are involved in CGT or in Ateneu. People from Ateneu are in Creixement. It's that there is a handful of us that we are in everything. That is why it is so difficult to meet with us. Because if we are not in a meeting, we are doing another or doing an action. Well, there is no much movement. There are few people moving. But those that move, move in many spaces.

Tony A (Green Wave, focus group): I am part of a christian organization. I have relatives that need help..So part of our monthly salary goes there. By option..

Rosa B (Green Wave, focus group): You know what happens? we..eh..the majority that we are here, we first are in other places and because of the neighborhood and I don't know what we are here..

### *Work*

Some of the participants see their work as unfit within their ethical self. They see themselves as supporting the system they criticise, which makes them question their work.

In the case of Laura (Ecology Land) resulted in making her change her work. Laura has studied naval engineering and for years she was working in a company that makes luxury ships. She decided to leave it because she disagreed with the whole concept of the company. They were using toxic materials to make ships destined for very rich people. She considered the whole process as a waste of resources and very environmentally unfriendly. Then, she was offered a work in Repsol. After thinking about it, she turned out the job because she considered it inconsistent with her ethical principles.

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): Look, some time ago Repsol offered me a good job. So, I started evaluating it and I didn't have a job and if I had a job, it would a bad pay job because all the jobs I was finding were bad pay and bad quality. So, I decided to work in worse conditions. Because, of course, as an engineer in Repsol, 4-8 hours and a work I am comfortable with. I am close by my home and I am ok and I can put it in the curriculum. Or you can work in a grocery shop, they pay so low, you have to do an effort, you have to work extra hours and on Saturdays. You say ok, you choose, but it's difficult no? At that moment, I decided that I didn't want Repsol.

A similar story was narrated by Albert (Organic Veggies) in a post formal interview conversation in the streets of the city of Reus. He turned out a job in a bank years ago,

even if he knew it would offer him more security than his current job as an informatics engineer in a small cooperative. He did it because he considered it inconsistent with his ethical principles.

Manolo (Ecology Land) also finds his job inconsistent with his concerns. He has studies in chemistry and he works in the petroquimical industry in Tarragona.

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): I don't care about my work at all. But I need some income to live and in chemistry you can earn a lot of money. But it's not worth it.

As a result, he has started studying a new career, so that he can later change his work. Judith (Ecology Land) also feels that her work, or better the company she works in, is not consistent with her general ethical lifestyle. So, she has searched for other jobs but she hasn't encountered any.

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): But everyone is full of hypocrisies, because it is true! I work in la Caixa, I don't work in the offices, I work in the department of Human Resources and Social Work, but ok..I can be in this department or in another and it's the same. It's a bank ! People that are conscious and work in the bank..Well! I find it incongruent.. To myself I find it weird to say: You are working in a company that has good and bad stuff..! And from the other hand you are in Setem and you have very clear what has to be done and what you have to do! Do you understand me? Me, my life is a bit incongruent and hypocritical as well. I need money at the end of each month, to be honest they pay well, I have very good conditions of salary and schedule and .... Well I stay there because I don't find anything better.. I have tried to work for a cooperation but I haven't succeeded for the moment.



### 7.1.4 Main Findings and Discussion

The gathered data lead to the following conclusions:

- Most of the participants in the study express their ethical concerns in different aspects of their everyday life. On the basis of these concerns they take decisions of difference importance; smaller (e.g. clothes, food) or bigger (e.g. solar panels) purchase decisions according to the compromise they require, lifestyle decisions such as changing their jobs and cutting remarkably their consumption by reusing and recycling as much as they can. Therefore, *their participation in the cooperative is a fragment of a more general ethical lifestyle* that isn't pursued only through consumption. This agrees with Haanpaa (2007) who introduced the notion of green commitment as a lifestyle. In this case, *ethical commitment* guides the lifestyle of the participants, where consumer decisions are only an expression of it.
- The participants apply very similar criteria in their individual consumer behaviour to the ones they apply as members of the cooperatives. They value locally produced products, they avoid multinationals and big distribution channels and they look for healthy, natural products. On one hand, this suggests a coherence of the collective and individual self of the participants, since they try to pertain the same criteria in all aspects of their consumer life. On the other hand, it raises a question. These 'ethical' criteria were the reason of their joining the cooperative or a consequence of it? This issue is further discussed in Section 7.3.
- Furthermore, most authors usually talk about ethical consumers that either boycott (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Klein et al., 2004), or buycott (Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006; Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Shaw & Shiu, 2000; 2002) or cut down on their consumption levels and simplify their lifestyles (Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Cherrier, 2005; Miller & Gregan-Paxton, 2006). Nevertheless, this study shows that the participants might employ all three strategies according to the circumstances and their needs. Their main objective is to maintain their ethicality through their behaviour, so they employ a range of strategies towards that purpose.

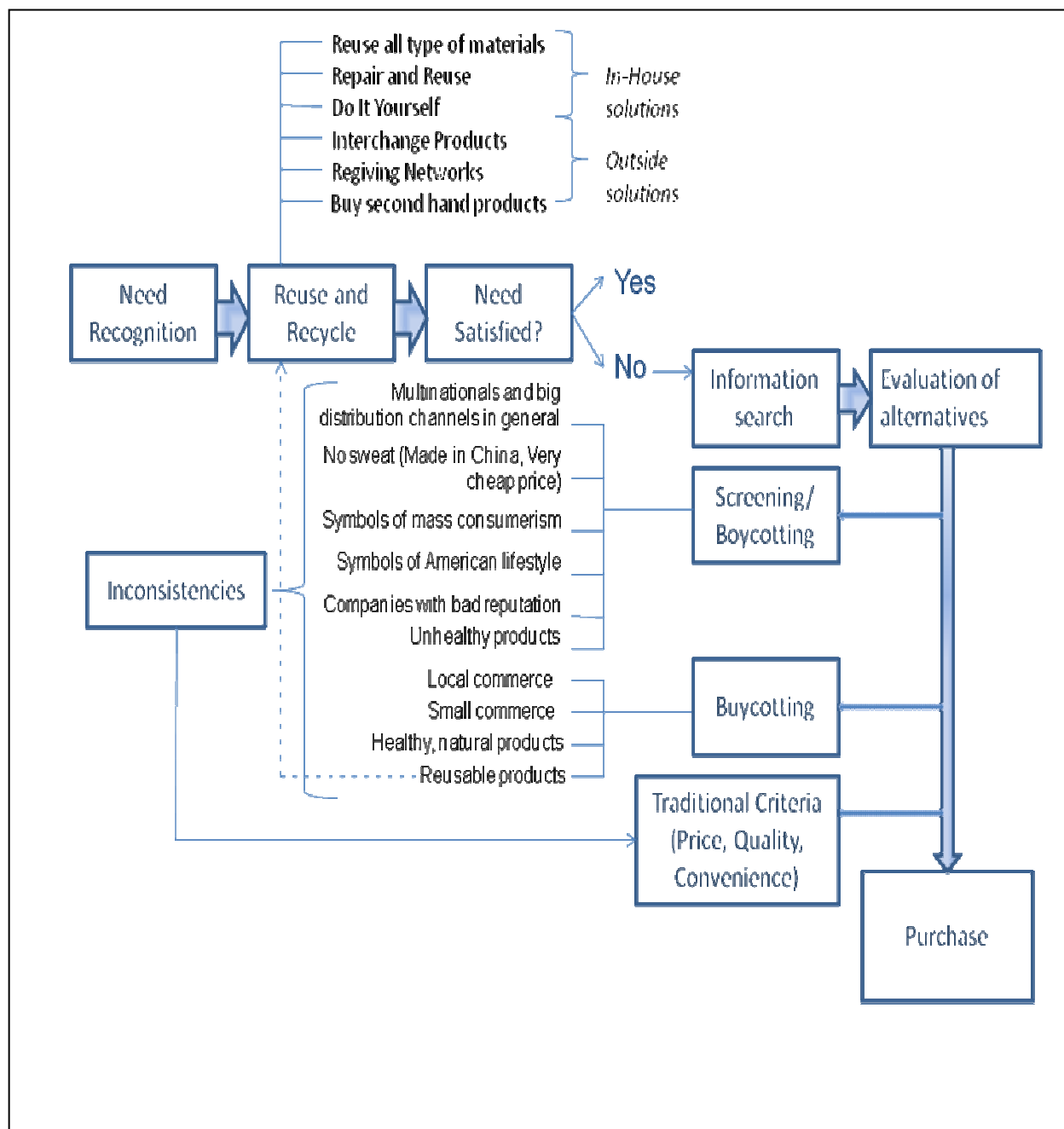
- As it was expected, the participants cannot be always consistent to their ethical principles. In various occasions they accept and discuss their inconsistencies. Remembering the neutralization techniques framework that Chatzidakis et al. (2007) used to explain ethical consumer inconsistencies, it was found that the participants often use two types of neutralization techniques to justify their lapses; denial of responsibility and appeal to higher loyalties. They put the blame on market and institutional factors such as lack of ethical alternatives or inefficient ethical alternatives among others (denial of responsibility) and to the pressure created by their children and their social obligations. Pester power had previously emerged as an obstacle to ethical consumer expression in the study of Carrey et al. (2008). Nevertheless, it is considered that the participants do not always externalize the reason of the problem. After all, their ethical consumer projects are an implicit acknowledgement of their taking responsibility of their actions. Hence, in some cases they accept their personal limitations and admit that at times they are consciously inconsistent and look for the easy choice.
- Most participants place attention not only on the consequences of their consumption but of all their actions. In an effort to be as respectful as possible to the natural resources, they try to reuse all types of materials and resources; water and energy. Furthermore, when they need products, they intend to reuse what they have bought already or they turn to second hand products in friends' interchanges, regiving networks or in second-hand shops. All these strategies have a common objective: to respect the natural resources of the planet and prevent their depletion. They do it directly when they reduce their water and energy consumption and indirectly when they refuse to buy new products that contribute to new cycles of production and exploitation of the natural resources.
- The decision to amplify the research scope to all types of ethical projects that the participants were involved in (both individual and collective) seems to be accurate. A limited focus on their participation in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives would have falsely led to catalog these consumers as buycotters. However, a more holistic view of their behaviour reveals that they approach more what the literature has defined as ethical simplifiers. Their intention to cut down on their consumption levels, achieve simpler lifestyles and avoid waste accumulation comes before their buycotting and boycotting projects. In more

extreme cases, they limit their consumption to the absolutely necessary like food. Instead of buying, they opt for reuse and recycling to cover their needs. If this strategy is not effective, then they enter in the classic consumer decision-making process that Kotler et al. (2002) has suggested; information gathering, evaluation of alternatives and purchase. This is illustrated in the following consumer behavior framework that was built upon the empirical findings (based on the classic buyer decision making framework in Kotler et al., 2002: 215<sup>10</sup>).

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<sup>10</sup> The Kotler et al. (2002) consumer decision making framework was chosen because it is quite generic and can explain the decision-making of the participants. Peattie (1995) had previously based his green consumer decision making framework on the same model.

**Figure 7.5:** How do the participants satisfy their consumer needs?



## **7.2 Why do these consumers engage in ethical collective and individual projects?**

In the previous section, the range of ethical projects that the participants carry out on an individual and collective level was described. This section will be devoted to answer the second research question and understand what urges these consumers to be ethical and what meanings they derive from such behaviors.

In order to make better sense of the projects and behaviors that were expressed in the previous section, it should be first comprehended how these people construct their social reality. It is understood that their ‘truths’, perceptions and worldviews guide their behaviour and actions.

Then, the motivation to carry out specific projects within their constructed social reality will be explained beginning from their participation in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives.

### **7.2.1 How do the members of the cooperatives construct their social reality?**

Both the collective and individual projects are a consequence of how these consumers construct their social reality. During the research, the emergence of certain perceptions emerged from different sources; the interviews, the focus groups, the TROC magazine and the participant observation of La Repera meetings. Among the most saturated perceptions the following are encountered:

#### **➤ ‘There is no democracy’**

The members of the cooperatives feel that the existing democracy is not up to the meaning of the word. They express a clear dissatisfaction with how the current democratic system works and in specific with the following:

- ◆ Lack of participation in the decision making: They consider that their participation in the decision making and taking is minimal. It is limited to their voting every four years that does not give them the sense of ‘having their voices heard’.

Marc (Ecology Land, interview,): *We cannot opt for the easy thing always. If not, with the elections every four years we would be happy. Because this is very easy.*

Sheila (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Because as citizens they don't give a s... about us and this democracy is so supposed, well at least we can as consumers participate in a democracy that reduces us to vote every four years.*

Furthermore, they find that voting which is their only via to participate in the existing democratic system is no functioning, since they think that the decisions taken by their elected representatives are not taken on the basis of the best common interest, but instead, they follow the economic interests of big multinational companies.

Sebastian (Tota Cuca Viu, TROC Winter, 2004): *In order to have more skiable surfaces or more highways to transport goods, the Generalitat has sacrificed Spaces of Natural Interest, European projects of global environmental protection...*

Josep (Cydonia, TROC Winter 2003): *In Barcelona we are so lucky, because the urbanistic model promoted from our city hall permits that we all have a Carrefour or a Continent 5 minutes away.*

Critique of the authorities is quite common especially in the bulletin TROC. The criticised authorities represent all levels of governing; the European Union, the national government, or the local authorities such as the city hall.

Jordi (Germinal-Rubi, TROC spring 2003). *In an article named 'Another democracy is possible?': The politics should be the ones that sell their closed and partisan program or it should be us the civilians that have to consent what we want at all moments? We only can choose who governs (decides), the bad or the worst? Is this liberty? Is this democracy?... The 'Representative' democracy is bleeding to death and this can bring us to the dictatorship (pure and harsh) or to the promising 'Participative' Democracy (real)..*

Pedro (Green Valley, TROC, winter 2003): In an article named 'There is no democracy without a right': Politics is the scenery of ambition and power. It is that simple and clear. The time has come to strip out any Samaritan attribute that exists in our imagination.

♦ Lack of Transparency of information:

Another prevalent perception is the one of asymmetric and non transparent information. They consider that the “powerful” social agents, such as any level of public administration (local, national etc.) and the multinational companies, have information that should be publicly available, because it affects the consumers. However, they do not wish to share it. They avoid disclosure of information that could harm their economic interests. This refers mainly to hiding information about products that the multinationals ‘push’ to the market such as the Genetically Modified Products (which emerges as an issue of vital importance in the magazine TROC with articles in almost all issues from 2003 to 2008) and inefficient, non ecologic products or about sustainable alternatives that could replace the inefficient ones.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): I remember that when I was in the university, eh, year 1977, and they taught.. eh.. all the theoretical part of the fridge (of how the fridge works), so that you can have an idea.. Two identical rooms. In one, eh.. an electric heater and in the other one a fridge. You put the plug and calculate the energy flow. (she laughs). How much each of these devices delayed to heat the room and the temperature? Well, it was more efficient to leave the fridge's door open than the electric heater. And then you think.. If they know this since 1977 that they explained it to me, 20 years have passed, why do these devices keep existing when there are more sustainable models? So, you start seeing contradictions, in which world you are in... You say, here something is not working. And you stay in the same place.. I am telling you since the 1980's, I started to see the contradictions and that there

are economic interests looking to take out the maximum profit, when there are alternatives but no one pays attention because there is no businessman behind..

Albert (Germinal-Sants, El Troc, Tardor 2004): The public administration of Catalunya has hidden and archived various cases of genetic contamination.

Ferran (Germinal-Sarria, El Troc, Primavera 2003): The laboratories say that they have everything under control but they do not explain how they control it and how the *G.M.O* can hurt or benefit us. For example, they do not let that the food labels mention that the product has *G.M.O* ingredients.

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): Many people do not know it. If everyone knew and could see directly what is going on, how the commercial food system works and what we are eating and what we put in our bodies, there would be many people that would say no to many, many stories.

➤ **‘Capitalism brings problems’**

The participants criticise heavily capitalism considering it the mother of many ills. Their prime concern is that the capitalistic system has conceded too much power to multinational and big companies. They perceive of living in a society where multinational companies impose their rules and standards, given that their primary objective is the maximization of their profits against the social benefit.

For them, the only driver of these companies is their desire to enlarge their market share and become more profitable. Hence, most of the participants remain skeptical when these companies promote their social responsibility certificates and announce their social responsibility programs and their ethical initiatives.



Laura (Ecology Land, interview): The truth is that the other day, it's not a multinational, but a big company, one from here, who has certificates of social responsibility and compromise with the workers. And then, compromise with the workers is offering them free tickets to Port Aventura! Well, if that got them the certificate...

More than that, in the magazine TROC multinationals are described as the 'enemies'.

Xavi (Gleva, el Troc, Tardor, 2004): The enemies, known and unknown want you. They are called Coca Cola, Panrico, Nestle, ... Caja Madrid, it's called Repsol, Endesa, Adidas, la Caixa, Unilever-best food, Telefonica...

For them, the perceived social and economic consequences of capitalism are many:

- ◆ 'Unsustainable progress and growth'

For the participants, the words 'growth' and 'progress' are used as the showcase argument of multinational companies for the implementation of their tactics. They perceive that companies sham that growth and progress can be achieved through an industrial model that can improve the quality of life of people and offer jobs to them, while in reality they only search for bigger profits. In order to achieve them, they are willing to compromise on aspects such as the **protection of the natural resources** and of the **environment** and people's **health**. Together with the emergence of environmental and health issues (such as more frequent cases of cancer and of genetic disabilities due to pollution or environmental accidents or genetic contamination of cultivations), they perceive the current industrial model as a generator of **environmental** and **health risks** from.

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): It doesn't work..the capitalism, it doesn't work. Well, I think that the capitalism has contaminated everything, how to cultivate, the market. You only look for economic benefits and production. It doesn't matter if it will contaminate more and if in the future it will provoke some harm to the ecosystem or the environment... Do you know that all growth is based on petroleum, on the energetic change? I visit often a web called [revoltapereldecreixement](http://revoltapereldecreixement) or you just

put decreixement or decrecimiento in catalan and the theory comes up. Well the theory of downshifting in general says that we keep growing and growing. But, logically the planet is finite. The planet cannot grow anymore. So, actually we are consuming the planet. And there is an equilibrium point. The energetic quantity that we can get without consuming the planet. So, since our energetic model is based on petroleum and the energetic sources, the petroleum is being consumed and is not generated as quickly as it is being consumed. And there will be a moment that it will collapse. The production will start to decrease but the consumption will keep going up. And there will be a moment that it will be ended. And then what it will happen?

Xavi (La Gleva, TROC, spring 2005): In the article 'Doing your bit': Don't become carried away by a false lecture of progress and commodity... Don't become seduced that the industry gives work to your neighbors. Being an executioner is also a job.

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): From an agricultural model because 50 years ago it was an agricultural model, now we are in a model absolutely industrial. They wanted an easy economic model. Without taking into account the health of people, the territory or the management of the natural resources. Because a farmer has more consciousness of how to manage water, than a guy that has a family and goes to the factory every day.

- ◆ 'Injustice in the marketplace'

A very common finding is the perception of lack of fairness in the marketplace. According to the participants, the powerful economic agents such as multinational companies and big distribution channels take advantage of their position and exploit

workers and small producers. They impose minimum salaries to their workers in developing countries, very low selling prices and specific varieties to small producers leading to a highly unfair distribution of wealth.

Sebastian (Tota Cuca Viu, TROC, Winter 2004): **Instead of revising the rising external debts, the International Monetary Fund obliges to adopt an exporting model of single cultivations (whose price keeps falling) and that obliges thousands of farmers to abandon their land and their associated lifestyles.**

Therefore, they perceive the corporate behaviour of big multinationals and big distribution channels as responsible for the **exploitation of the workers and farmers**, the consequent **disappearance of the small producers** all over the world and the **lack of territorial sovereignty**.

Sheila (Alternative Ways, focus group): **Supermarkets suffocate the producers with the prices they impose. There is a big quantity of producers and consumers, but the very few intermediates manage to take advantage to impose prices and varieties.**

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): **Nestle is one of the principal causes for the price paid to small producers of cacao all over the world, Cape Verde.. What else does it do? It uses lecithin of soya as a thickener in the majority of packaged goods. And I know that the majority of soya production is genetically modified and has destroyed countries such as Argentina...**

I have statistics from 'Veterinarians without frontiers' that say that in Spain for the last ten years the arithmetic mean shows that 11 small producers and 9 farmers disappear daily.

Araceli (Alternative Ways, focus group): **The best would be to achieve with less effort of any type that all territories have a certain degree of self-sufficiency. I don't know, I don't like this model of colonialism, the world is my farm and to the ones in the Ivory Coast it's their turn to**

produce cacao and if they don't like chocolate who cares. They are not going to eat it.

While the participants seem to be concerned with the unfair consequences of global commerce, most of them seem to be more preoccupied with the implications it has in their local context. They seem especially worried that the agricultural activity is manipulated and slowly fading away in Spain and in Catalunya, especially since **agriculture** constitutes a **tradition** in the area for years. This perception emerged during interviews and it was later confirmed by informal chats with members of different cooperatives in the second meeting la Repera. For them, the autochthonous varieties and the local producers are a part of their **cultural identity** and they are currently in danger. That is why there are cooperatives like la Pera that have banks of seeds to maintain the native varieties.

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): Reus till the 50's had production and everyone lived from agriculture. And you have grown up with this because your grandfathers had some land or even the scenery you are watching. And now everything is changing so quickly...And then you take people from their territory and you put them in a factory to work...I don't know if this is a natural process, or if this is the change of a model but we are losing a cultural value, ok?

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): The objective of Organic Veggies would be to protect the territory through alimentation.

Sebastián (Tota Cuca Viu, TROC, Winter 2004): Have the right to land/water/seeds (carry out a campaign to declare the seeds patrimony and make banks of seeds to avoid the disappearance of species and native crosses against the G.M.O) against to what WTO (World Trade Organization) dictates that has to be eaten.

- ◆ Existence of a fake reality that promotes materialism

For the participants, the capitalistic system and the multinational companies create and promote a fake reality that suits their interests and doesn't let the consumers see all the aforementioned perceived implications of the economic, political and social status quo. One of the participants, Manolo (Ecology Land) parallelizes this with the movie Matrix and uses the Allegory of the Cave of the Greek philosopher Plato to illustrate the fake reality of the ones 'trapped in the system'.

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): In the myth of the cavern by Plato there is a cavern and some prisoners that have been there for all their life. So, they are looking towards the end of the cavern. So, in the end they see shadows with lights. This is their reality, the only reality they know because they have only seen this. So, one prisoner escapes and goes outside the cavern. In the beginning, the light blinds him. This happens to you when you understand that all of it is a lie, that there is another reality and it blinds you. And you say oh man, there is so much to be done! The myth of the cavern represents this, the light and then you see the reality, what really exists. Oh man! This is a plant! and so on.. So, the prisoner goes back to the cavern and says this is not reality, what they teach us is a lie. It is just a representation of what exists outside and more than that, it has nothing to do with this.. We have only two colors. And the others say: "No, no, do not let us free. We like this. What exists outside doesn't matter to us". You know? The myth of the cavern explains perfectly what is going on.

This created fake reality refers to the promotion of a **materialistic lifestyle** through advertisements and marketing. **Excessive consumption** is seen to be marketed as the solution to all problems.

Ferran (Germinal-Sarria, el Troc, Tardor 2004): If you feel depressed, buy three sweaters, if they treated you bad today in your work, order a new kitchen and if you have problems with your partner, you can make it better with a new purchase. Buy and you'll feel better.

It becomes clear that the participants disagree with excessive consumerism and try to escape from this created and fake reality. For them, materialism doesn't have any meaning and only serves to keep them busy and alienated from the real world and the real problems. It is even portrayed as a sickness spreading in the modern society. It becomes clear that they perceive excessive consumption as wrong and harmful. This concept was named 'Anti-Consumerism'.

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): *Consume just to consume is only stupidity. You have to consume the necessary. Have more clothes? What for? The fashion changes. The people follow the fashion and this leaves you with a loot of clothes in the closet. Of the same season. You'll put it one time, two times, three times, four times? The wealth distribution. Why are there people that can consume a lot and people that can consume so little? It's all related. Consumerism is a like a sickness of the 20<sup>th</sup> century till the beginning of this century. And it is the result of the brutal capitalism. They say: Buy, buy, buy!! You are activating the economy. And look what we have. The worst crisis in history. Tell me, how do you explain that? There is no meaning.*

A comic sketch in the magazine TROC (Winter, 2004) illustrates more emphatically the same argument; excessive consumption is seen as a sickness. The comic is placed in the pre-Christmas period, which is considered as the peak of consumerism during the year, since the issue came out at the same period.

Figure 7.6: Excessive Consumption as a sickness



Following this line, some add that individuals lose all other identities like their role as citizens and are left with **consumption as their only via of expression**. This irritates them because consumption keeps them within the system they criticise.

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): *Right now, there is dominant discourse in the media of communication that the position of the consumer is above the rights of the citizen. So, the word consumer irritates my ears.*

For the participants, overconsumption is by definition immoral. Answering to the dilemma placed by Barnett et al. (2005) (see section 3.1.5), these consumers see consumption as the means of action when it is limited to the buying the absolutely necessary. When it exceeds that level, it becomes the object of moral evaluation. They are very critical when it comes to excessive consumerism, even if the products consumed are ethical or green. That is why they place more attention on cutting down their general consumption levels, before refining their purchase criteria.

Laura (Alternative Ways, focus group): *What happened to me is that if this is ecological and the whole thing of being alternative but you really stay in the same consumerist line. And come on! Toys for the children, a lot! But it's fine they are from wood (with ironic tone). For me this is more than the needed.. Without a doubt, continue with the things that are necessary. Man, I think this is much more responsible..Than if it is from wood or I don't what..*

- ◆ Alienation of consumer from production

A distance is perceived between the consumer and the producer and the production process. For them, modern consumers, including themselves, are not aware of how products are produced because they are used to the abundance of products offered by the capitalistic market. Borgmann (2000) describes this as an implication of the new industrialized paradigm of consumption.

The participants see that they are the final receptors of products whose production process they ignore; who made them, how they are made and whether they are

seasonal. They understand that their getting used to finding everything all year long in big supermarkets has cost them their detachment from production.

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): You go to a big supermarket and you have anything you want. Well, in a big supermarket you don't think that much when you buy the products, where do they come from, how they were elaborated and if they are seasonal or not. It's the same. Since, you can find anything, you pick it up and take it home!

Kat (New Tendency, focus group): Because we are used to the supermarket. You want tomato? Tomato, you want chards? Chards, whatever!

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): The majority of us don't know how to grow a lettuce! A lettuce that grows from almost nothing!

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): I am an analphabet of the earth and I have been raised among people that cultivate nuts.

It is not only alienation from the production process, but also estrangement with the producer of the product. Consumers see that they do not know anymore who produces the product they consume, because the intermediation and outsourcing enlarge the cycle between consumption and production and prohibit the direct contact between producer and consumer.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): For instance, I was living 4 years in Vilaseca and you were buying the vegetables and fruits directly in the houses. The housewife or the farmer directly opened the door of their house and there were three big boxes of what was left from their self-production. So, you were buying directly. Like you had to buy the meat and the fish... The contact was more local and direct. This now does not exist.

- Perception of lack of freedom and control of one's life



The perception of lack of freedom is related to all the aforementioned perceptions. The participants feel that they are **no options** in the current economic and political environment that allow them to take their own decisions. They are forced to a social, political and economic model with which they do not agree. For that, they put the blame on the multinational companies and governing authorities.

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): **There are big companies that manage the market, monopolize the market and put the prices they want..**

They show a deep distrust in multinational companies and governing authorities, because of considering that the powerful social agents create and oblige them a reality that deprives them from their liberties and rights.

First, their participation in the decision making is seen as inexistent and reduced to voting every four years for politics that don't even represent them.

Second, they consider that information is asymmetric and in a great part unavailable to them.

Third, they feel trapped in a system where consumption is considered the only joy and where they have to keep working to afford consuming.

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): **When people start to wake up, they (authorities and multinationals) start to cut liberties..eh..to cut...eh.. in the society. We have to work to produce. And the benefit of the person that works to produce is found in consumption. It is a cycle.**

The consequence of this system is a materialistic lifestyle where the participants have **time** only to produce and to consume.

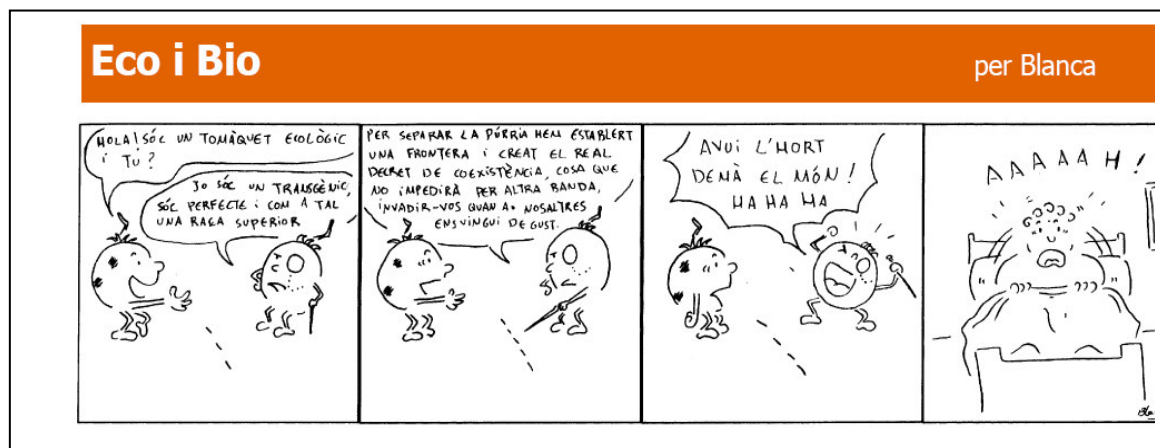
Pedro (Green Valley, TROC, autumn 2003): **In the article "Time or life?": The psychological necessities of consumption and the legislation (control society), we cannot work less hours or less time. We are working clones.**

Tony B (Green Wave, focus group): **Because sometimes what we do is run 24 hours a day and a million things, million stories and maybe there is no time to buy in the market, because it results that the market closes at 18:00. And we have to work till 20:00. So your options have come out**

long before and they have to do with your time and your capacity to decide. You can do it if you have the option to decide, if you are stressed 24 hours a day, then you have to choose.

Fourth, they consider to have lost control in basic, everyday activities such as choosing what products to consume, since they have to compromise with what is offered in the market. The example of the G.M.O. cultivations in Spain illustrates that. An interesting parallelism is made in the following comic sketch about G.M.O in the magazine TROC. The G.M.O. are presented as Nazi German soldiers that invade and expand, leaving no choice for ecological agriculture. It lavishly shows their feeling of impotence to make decisions about what is being cultivated in their country and about what products are available for consumption.

Figure 7.7: The invasion of the G.M.Os



Furthermore, words such as *impose*, *slavery*, *invasion* are often used (especially in the magazine TROC). They are indicative of the lack of freedom and choice that they feel, since they perceive to be obliged to accept decisions that others make for them, without their consent.

## 7.2.2 Why do they participate in the cooperative?

An important observation that was made about the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is that they are voluntary ethical spaces, not legislated ethical spaces (Low & Davenport, 2007). This means that their appearance and existence was not imposed through government regulation like in other cases, e.g. China's ban of the use of plastic bags and establishment of fines for non-compliance<sup>11</sup>. The emergence of the cooperatives was a result of the collective and voluntary effort of individuals. The emergence of spaces where people participate voluntarily evokes the question of why. Here, the findings to answer the respective question are presented.

### 7.2.2.1 Motivations of the participants: What were they looking for initially?

The analysis of the primary data helped to unveil the motivations of individual consumers that decide to found or to participate in Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. The main question to be answered here is what they were looking for when they decided to join or start this project or in other words, which were the needs that the participation in the cooperative was expected to cover.

The motivations vary but similar patterns were identified in different cooperatives. It has to be clarified that in many occasions, the respondents were driven by a combination of reasons to join. Nevertheless, three main types of motivations were identified; utility, social interaction and politics.

#### 7.2.2.1.1 Utility

One basic reason to join the cooperative was the access to the type of products that could be bought and consumed within the cooperative. The main activity of the coops is the purchase of ecological products of local producers, so the coop is basically serving as a distribution channel where ecological products could be encountered.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/consumer/story/2008/01/08/china-bags.html>. Access on 12/02/2009.

Marc (La Pera, interview): For us the cooperative is a just a tool, where we can find ecological products.

So, the following question appears; why did these people want to buy ecological products and which are the benefits from buying them in the cooperative?

### *Ecologic means Quality*

This type of motivation was encountered quite often during the data analysis. In many cases, the decision to participate or even to found a coop was taken on the basis that the participants would be able to consume products of high quality. They define quality products with regards the following:

- **Healthy products.** Ecological agriculture avoids the use of pesticides and chemicals that are currently used in the conventional agriculture. This is an important issue for the consumers as the cites below show:

Irene (Green Valley, focus group): We entered in the cooperative in the beginning to eat more healthy food, without pesticides etc, but you didn't know much more than that.

Ivan (New Tendency, focus group): You have this need, no? Since I was little I had the opportunity to eat ecological products, no? Produced not with so many chemicals and pesticides. And I had friends telling me that I could have that again, friends that were participating in the cooperative.. I had to wait a lot of time because many people wanted to join, so in a festival there was a stand promoting the cooperative and I found the chance to do it.

- **Tasty products.** Quality is also reflected on the taste of the products. Apart from being healthy, consumers seemed to be searching for the “real” taste of the products.

Ana (Alternative Ways, focus group): When I came to the cooperative, I was looking for products I used to remember as small. It is carrot and it tastes like carrot.

Int (New Tendency, focus group): How did you start thinking that I don't want the perfect apple, I need something different?

Jordi (New Tendency, focus group): I want taste!

### *Cheap Ecological Products*

Some of the consumers decided to participate in a cooperative because they considered it a good way to find ecological products at a reasonable price.

In the market, there are shops where consumers can find ethical alternatives. For instance, they identify Spanish ecological chains such as NatureEco, Veritas and Vegetalia, as well as the herbolisterias as alternatives to buy from. Nevertheless, they consider their products to be too expensive. By participating in a coop, consumers pay a regular fee for maintaining the operating costs of the coop, but the price of the products is lower than what can be found outside the coop.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): My boyfriend talked to me about the cooperative and he said: "look it is a formula", because before we lived in Mataró and used to consume ecological products, so he said "it is a formula of consuming ecological products at an affordable price".

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): When buying in Veritas (an ecological shop), it is much more expensive with the same products we have here. Ours are much cheaper. It might be more expensive to buy one lettuce, but the total purchase is much cheaper.

Irene (Green Valley, focus group): For instance, the ecological yogurt is double price outside the cooperative.

It has to be mentioned that there are exceptions that question the affordability of the prices in a cooperative. This leads to other alternatives to get ecological products at a cheaper price outside the coop, such as weekly boxes of fruits and vegetables that the producer personally delivers or simply self-produce of the needed products.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): *But the price in the cooperative is not cheap. We place a quantity of products as minimum to order so that the cost of transport will not be extremely high. Even so, the products are expensive... I am a member of the cooperative but I have the majority of the garden produce directly delivered by a local producer...It costs me half than it would cost me in the cooperative.*

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): *For some time I did the weekly thing with the vegetables, but it seemed exaggerated. I had a garden before and the selling price seemed extremely high. Really high. Because it was a small box, costed 6 euros and you didn't have enough to prepare a dish... So with Rebecca, I don't know if she mentioned it, but we have a common garden for the vegetables produce.*

This heterogeneity in perceptions concerning the affordability of prices seems to be related to the location of the cooperative. The members of urban cooperatives located within the metropolitan area of Barcelona find the products cheap enough in comparison to the alternatives provided within the city. But the members of the cooperatives in the province where there is a possibility of direct contact with the producer and even option for owing land and self-produce, the price seems too expensive. This leads to the observation that the price is judged according the different subjective frames of understanding based on the spectrum of available options to obtain products.

#### 7.2.2.1.2 Social Interaction

Another driver was the desire to create a social circle by creating or joining a cooperative. In those cases, the cooperative is perceived as a social space consisted by

people sharing the same interests and ideologies. Here, it was considered useful to make a distinction among the people that were motivated enough to found a cooperative and the ones that joined afterwards.

- Members that founded a cooperative

In this case, the intention was the creation of a social space of people with similar principles and objectives that would work collectively for the promotion of these objectives and principles. For them, the social interaction was an attractive and indispensable element of the whole process.

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): I remember I was in the university and I wanted to do it (create a cooperative) for the simple fact that you could ask from the producer to bring things at home and you distribute and meet up with people every I don't know how frequently, meet and distribute and talk and like this...I imagined it as a group open to start debates between them looking for alternatives.

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): And I really liked the whole mess of having a group of people that meet for something more than simply have fun.

- Members that joined afterwards

The members that joined afterwards were trying to become part of the social space that the founding members had already created. All of them were new in the city and needed to integrate themselves more by meeting more people similar to them. Therefore, the participation in the cooperative was more an act of integration to the community they had started living in. Here it should be reminded that the cooperatives are constituted by individuals living in the same neighborhood. So, in more simple words, for these members joining the cooperative was also a way to meet the neighbors.

Clara (Civada): I lived before in Mataro, so I didn't know anyone here. I wanted to have a social network. And the truth is that it worked out well.

Xavier (Civada): It was also a form to find people with common interests. Neither I was from Sant Cugat, I have been living here for just 4 years, so it was a way to meet people. That is why we came to the cooperative.

Xavier (Cydonia): Besides the products, I came to the cooperative because it was not long since I had come to the city and I knew that here I could find people that had the same way of thinking and living. And that I could meet people that think very similarly in terms of ideology to my thinking. About what I am looking for in life and what is the act of consumption.

#### 7.2.2.1.3 Politics

Many of the participants took the decision to get involved with a cooperative, because they saw it as a form to react to the existing economic and political structure. They wanted to **create an alternative social dynamics** and they considered the cooperative as a suitable via. These people valued two main aspects of the project when they entered or founded the coop; the **social impact** of the group purchase of the cooperative and the form of **functioning** of the cooperative.

For them, the establishment of the criteria of ecological products, local and small producers and no intermediates helped towards a greater cause. They would manage to provide support to the small farmers that tried to sustain the ecological agriculture in the broader zone of Catalunya. At the same time, they would ‘punish’ the big multinational firms that try to impose their products in the market and suffocate the small producers. Furthermore, the proposed disintermediation would come as an answer to the existence of long chains of producers resulting in unfair trade relations and badly treated and paid producers. In this way an **alternative economic system** would be established with the objective to help and protect smaller, local, ecological producers against the existing unfair reality.



Int (Ecology Land, interview): *What did you join? What were you looking for?*

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): *It was because I didn't want to give up on a healthy diet and at the same time support..eh..an initiative that was outside they system that is actually functioning. It is about promoting the alternative economy of the system. Even if it is inside the system, because it uses the same currency etc. etc. but it has other ideology that is not merely commercial.*

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): *And break the chain. Well one of my main preoccupations was..eh..you go to the talks and they show you data that the supermarkets control 80% of the global distribution, so when you hear this you say, I don't want to be part of it. I don't want to feed all this.*

The benefits of the cooperative project would be directed towards the support of the producers seen as more vulnerable. At the same time, the idea of many participants was the establishment of the cooperative model as a feasible option for those consumers who shared their ideas and principles.

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): *Create an alternative. Say that you don't always have to go and shop in the supermarket but there are alternative forms of buying that work and in reality they are much better for your economy, the economy of the producer and your health and the health of the planet.*

Other participants stress the attractiveness of the functioning model of the cooperative. Self-government, equality, consensus are some of the main tenets of the cooperative model. This motivated some of the members to join the initiative.

Albert (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Well, me in the beginning I didn't know what Aixada was about. Marta (his wife) learned about it and she told me: "Let's go to the meeting!". So, we went. Once you work, you start with other criteria, ehh., other than consumption. One was self-*

governance, stop believing in political statutes, you believe in people and in the social fabrics of the neighborhood and you understand that this is a new form of organization in the neighborhood, criteria to meet people very interesting from different areas, different than you. You learn to discuss, to converse, you learn to listen. When you come out from here, we are used that people listen and they respect your words, but then you go in meetings outside, a meeting of neighbors and I am amazed, eh! And I am about to leave because people do not respect you when you talk etc, etc. And this in Aixada since the beginning was something new.

Int. (Ecology Land, interview): You have been for short time in the cooperative. Which was your motivation to enter?

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): Well a responsible consumption. A different way to act. I have a friend in Barcelona that was saying that it was very interesting the form of organization and it functioned very well and it was completely opposite to the model that they have sold us, that there is a president, a person that decides and us shut up! I don't know. It was like a rotary form, I was really interested in that and well, another way to consume.

#### 7.2.2.2 Diversity of motivations and Conflicts

A finding that was confirmed from all the participants is the great diversity of motivations of the members within the same cooperative. In all cooperatives, there were members belonging in each of the three general categories of motivations that were described above. Some participants looked for ecological products, others were interested in the cooperatives as an alternative of consumption and as a new social fabric, while others entered to expand their social circle and meet more people with common interests.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): There different ways of thinking. There are people that are more extremists and people that are not that much. Some come here for one motivation, and some others for other...

Nevertheless, there were cases that this diversity in motivations has created problems and has led to conflicts among the members of the cooperatives. Two types of conflicts were the most common ones.

The first conflict is among members that have joined for practical reasons, such as finding cheap ecological products and those that see a political sense in their participation and want to create a different social dynamics outside the conventional market. One such ongoing conflict was identified in the cooperative Ecology Land during the fieldwork.

The problem came up when the members of the cooperative were trying to decide whether to buy or not from an ecological distribution channel that worked as an intermediary. Interviews with the members of the cooperative showed the different views on the subject and the conflict that was going on. Some of the members agreed because their main motivation was the purchase of ecological products. However, others were not in favor of the ecological intermediate considering that such inclusion would violate the no intermediates criterion and would question whether the cooperative was really creating an alternative option of consumption. The following cites show the opinions of some of the members on the issue:

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): *We have some 'fights' going on because we have to decide whether we want to be a cooperative of small producers or whether we don't mind to have big producers like Vegetalia. These are small things to argue about because there are members really sensitive about these things.*

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): *If you want products from Vegetalia you can go and look for them in the shops in Tarragona. It is not necessary to have them in the coop. That is why I am not willing to spend not even one minute on this topic. I told you about all the things I am actually involved in, so I will not play along for this company.*

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): It depends on the motivation. The ideological consumption of each person is derived from the idea of each one to keep in line with his principles. Ideological.. So, in the coop there are people that care whether there are intermediaries or not, maybe they don't care where the product comes from, from Himalaya or I don't know where. Some people just look for healthy products for their body and their family! They join just because of that.. There is no other principle!

Int (Ecology Land, interview): You think that the solution would be to have a basis with people with the same ideas?

Manolo (Ecology Land, interview): No, no. I am not going over there..All people fit in the same place. But the people that enter cannot deduct the ideology of the rest. I mean man take whatever you want from what I have built and don't deduct the rest, understand? If there are three principles; sustainable, biologic and no intermediates, take the biologic and leave the rest. The rest should still be respected. I mean the people should take one and nothing more. From these three take one and that's it. And then you don't worry because you know that the principles are there and you don't have to defend them and that's it! This has started to change! So the dynamics is still the same and it's the same if you consume biologic products just for your health, because you don't care that they pollute. Meaning it's just for your health. This decision is good but while you take advantage of that, take advantage of other things as well. There are people that are here only for this, so everyone has his own motivations and intends to defend the ideas of the beginning, the people that are here for more ideological reasons. You want to come? Well, very well, but this and this and this have to be satisfied, which is the minimum... If not, you always are in the same thing, the same dynamics of consumption.

While as Manolo mentions, members with different motivations fit in the same cooperative as long as each member respects the motivations of the rest, others disagree. During the second la Repera meeting, informal chats with consumers that had just started or were about to start their cooperative project refer to the same conflict. However, given that they were in the process of accepting members, they argue that they were not willing to admit people in the cooperative whose only motivation was access to cheap ecological products, especially since their objective was to establish a new alternative of consumption.

The second type of conflict was related to the ‘free riders’ of the cooperatives. By ‘free riders’ are defined the members who joined the cooperative, because they wanted to purchase healthy, ecological products, but barely participated in any activity carried out within the cooperative (committees, assemblies etc). Such behaviour implies that they belong in the first category of utilitarian motivations disregarding the rest. Given their lack of general willingness to participate, no interview was conducted with this type of members. All information was sourced from interviews with their co-members, who complained about it.

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): It is true that one problem is that some people do not understand self-governance and cooperativism and they do less, they do much less, the minimum... Well, each one does what he can. Well, if there is some bad point is this..The lack of implication of some people.

Free riders were identified in all participant cooperatives independent of their size, age and location. Their existence was also confirmed in other cooperatives according to articles in the magazine TROC.

However, there were differences in how the phenomenon was treated. Different patterns of reaction were found that were related to the **age** and **size** of the cooperatives. The members of the younger and smaller cooperatives seemed to react more with this diversity in motivations and consequent participation of the members.

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): Like in all groups of people, there are those that push more or less forward, no? And the level of consciousness. There are people that come and their maximum

motivation is consuming ecological products. And that's it. And there are people that their motivation is not only consuming ecological products. And you note that. Sometimes we try to make meetings and we put a point about making the order, the products and other point that are the seminars..eh other things that we can do. And in the end you would see people that only had motivation to make the order and would come with the plan: 'I come here, I buy and that's it!' And this has started getting worse.

The fact that the cooperatives were young might imply that the members haven't established processes to deal with these problems. They are still in a stage of learning and maturing. This interpretation is confirmed by the other findings.

More established and mature cooperatives acknowledge it as a problem in the functioning of the cooperative, but they know by experience that this type of members are naturally 'eliminated'. Since they don't keep up with the principles of the cooperatives and the prescribed tasks, this type of members remain voluntarily in the cooperative only for short term.

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): *Maybe there are many people that don't understand self-governance, that say I am doing the minimum and then no! It happens to all groups.. Among 45 there are people that are more and others that stay for a while, they stay for one year, others for three months. They think it is one thing but then no..*

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): *The people that we are here it's because we are comfortable. Because there is no obligation to be here and if people enter and they are not comfortable, without motivation, it's not long till they disappear. So, this is also a filter.*

An exception in the last pattern is the example of the cooperative Organic Veggies. Organic Veggies is the largest and oldest cooperative in Catalunya and so in the study. Even though, the problem of free riders is present.

Albert (Organic Veggies, interview): *Very few are implicated in an active form maybe fifteen out of one hundred and something that we are. We held an assembly a week ago and we were 20. But if you get the statutes and look who is fulfilling then you have to release 80% of the members.*

Given that at the moment of the study, the number of members reached 170 family units, there seems to be a proportionally bigger percentage of free riders.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): *Now I am a member and it seems that the people have less time every time to dedicate to things. There are personal interests. So you have to renovate the council. Let's see the members! Put me this one as a reserve, that's it.. and in some months you in the council because there are no people, it's difficult.*

Int (Organic Veggies, interview): *Lately or it was always like this?*

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): *Always like this. But lately maybe a bit more because the cooperative has not grown.*

It seems that the organization and culture of this particular cooperative have contributed to the phenomenon. First, unlike the other cooperatives, it has three employees that carry on activities that in other cooperatives are performed by the members (e.g. logistics of the products). This has the advantages of higher efficiency, better organization and daily opening of the cooperative, but it implies less compromise and less interaction among the members. One of the employees and members, Sara, said in an informal chat that many members do not see each other maybe for more than a year. Second, according to Carmen and Albert, the members of Organic Veggies that were interviewed, the cooperative functions according to a spirit of openness in all aspects. It is open both for members and non-members and it accepts as members people with different motivations and principles.

Both conflicts originate from an identified diversity in motivations. The first one because there is a diversity in the type of motivations and the second one because there is a diversity in the intensity of the motivations and the consequent willingness

to participate. In any case, some of the members claim to be saturated and consider to quit participating in the cooperative.

Laura (Alternative Ways, focus group): **But I don't want to be a troublemaker and mention the difficulties but this all seems like a bed of roses, f..ck! It's not true! There have been moments that I have thought about deserting. I haven't thought about it seriously, but I was thinking if there is any meaning in this, eh? Exactly now..in this period that we are I feel so decompensated, very! In level of implication, people that are very implicated, people that are not implicated at all and so there are always times that you have more time and more availability and times when everything is in favor of participating, but you cannot do that always, no? But there is a minimum and there are minimums that are not covered. So, this brings crisis in the group and you say f..ck! And you put it as priority and the other one comes here to buy and that's it!**

Birchall and Simmons (2004) refer to the aforementioned concept as **satiation**. Alternatively, the concept could be denominated as 'tiredness' or 'deception' but the term 'satiation' was finally chosen to describe the phenomenon. The feeling of saturation and tiredness because of the conflicts makes some of the members consider their opportunity costs. They sacrifice other activities to participate in the cooperative that does not always fulfill their expectations. Nevertheless, besides the negative feelings they value more the positive experiences from their participation in the coop.

Montse (Alternative Ways, focus group): **Being here doesn't let you or limits your participation in other things and for me this was a bit of carambola.. I had already my participation in other things and in my case I started to reduce other things and well sometimes I am satisfied in some things but other times you say: 'All this work just to have this? But if you are here is because you are looking for something.**



### 7.2.2.3 What meanings do the participants attach to their participation in the cooperative?

Previously, the needs that drove the participants to enter or start a cooperative were described. However, most participants have been members of the cooperative for a long period of time. The oldest member found was Albert who founded Organic Veggies thirty years ago, while the average time of participation of the respondents is between 4 and 5 years.

During this year long participation, a renegotiation of meanings and motivations takes place, which will be further discussed in section 7.3. Given that the membership in the cooperative project is not labor-free, it should be understood what drives participants to keep on with the project for so long and what it represents for them.

In this section, the different meanings attached to the members' participation are discussed in an effort to delve deeper in the rationale behind the collective project of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives.

#### Coop as a Social Space

As explained previously, some of the participants joined or created the cooperative valuing the fact that the cooperative would be a space of social interaction among people with similar interests and principles. This was particularly attractive for those individuals that were new in the city and didn't have any social circle formed.

As it turns out, most of the participants appreciate and take pleasure in interacting with the rest of the members. After many years of working in the same project, some of the members have become friends or at least they have formed a stable weekly social space. They enjoy going to their cooperative, not only to find ecological products but to meet and chat with their co-members. This finding is common for most respondents, but with less intensity maybe for the members of Organic Veggies. The following cites from two focus group discussions were chosen when the participants were asked to explain what the cooperative represents for them.

Ivan (New Tendency, focus group): **It is like a family reunion you know? It's once per week.**

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): **Yes, I've made friends..**

Marti (New Tendency, focus group): **Yes, I know other type of people and I am extending my relationships here in this village, because I was in my own world!**

Laia (Alternative Ways, focus group): **And the human relationships!**

Araceli (Alternative Ways, focus group): **Man, come to Barcelona and come to Alternative Ways!**

Int (Alternative Ways, focus group): **This goes for everyone? The human relationships?**

**Everyone says yes**

Montserrat (Alternative Ways, focus group): **Yes, even for me!**

Everyone is laughing and someone asks: **What do you mean even for you?**

Montserrat (Alternative Ways, focus group): **Look, one day..eh (people still laughing).. One day well..eh.when my daughter was 6 years old and she was playing the cooperatives and I asked her: 'What is a cooperative? And she told me, it's a place where people know each other..**

It was interesting to observe the cooperatives during the distribution of products. They seemed like social gatherings where people would come with their partners and children to chat and to update each other on their news. The cooperative Alternative Ways, for instance, had reformed the entrance of the cooperative as a type of playground with toys and a small sofa where children were playing, while 'grown-ups' were talking during products' distributions and assemblies. They also had a small yard in the back where they organised dinners and gatherings.

In the mailing list of New Tendency, various mails were about activities and gatherings among the members of the cooperative or in cooperation with other cooperatives.

Maia (New Tendency, mail about Sant Jordi celebration, April 2008): Hi people!!!  
I am reminding you that in New Tendency we want to celebrate the day  
of Sant Jordi!!!!!! How???? With a good company and readings. BRING A  
READING TO SHARE, A POEM, A STORY, A SONG-..... even better if  
you wrote it ☺...and something to dine, also to share...starting from  
20:30, more or less,... after collecting the box (of vegetables and  
fruits)...ah! And those who aren't from New Tendency you can also come,  
eh?????? Gentlemen and others! So, until Wednesday! maia

### Coop as a Militancy/Protest

Other consumers considered their participation in the cooperative as a form of militancy. For them, it was a way to **protest** and **fight** against the socio-economical and political system which they severely criticise (see section 7.2.1). The cooperatives allows them to implicate actively in issues that are of concern to them, such as the constantly reiterated issue of the G.M.O. cultivations in Catalunya.

Kat (New Tendency, focus group): I don't know, for me it is a bit like militancy because it is about start changing your habits and when this you share it with other people, it is the beginning of a change. And as he says (showing Martí) there are more people that are interested and so this is an action, it's not talking, it's about changing the way to organize the society..

Antonia (Green Wave, focus group): I know..eh..it's true..eh..when I am thinking about the coop, I am thinking about it as an act of militancy. Yes,..eh..it's true. No, because..eh..I just eat vegetables here and it's not profitable for me. Because as I told you, I prepare a very special type of diet. And all the effort and dedication just to consumer vegetables, well what it supposes it's that all this exists, no? And more things come up, that go further..

The main motivation and concern of these consumers is the establishment of alternative models as a reaction against the current status quo. This is also represented in the language used. Words such as *fight*, *enemies*, *war* and phrases such as *challenge*, *swimming against the current* were often used by the members of the cooperatives both in interviews and in the magazine TROC.

### Coop as a space of Authenticity

As discussed in section 7.1.2.5, the participants acknowledge and discuss their inconsistencies in their everyday behaviour. The main conclusion that was drawn is that there is no perfect ethical consumer and that each participant tries to channel his concerns through the projects he/she selects according to the circumstances and the context. In this way, the project of the cooperative is for some participants a form to be authentic to what they believe in and coherent with their principles. The cooperative allows them to express their real ethical self, which is very difficult for them to do in everyday life on an individual level.

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): For me it is a space of socialization and also you think that this is my share of coherence. You think in your ideal and then you reality is different and in my case it goes very linked and the cooperative forms part that there is a correspondence between the ideal and the reality, no? And it expands to other areas because here you can meet people that introduce you to worlds and form part of this ideal.

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): For me it is an oasis in the life we are leading and you see that a part of the utopia is possible. And look, demonstrate that there are other forms to function and there are certain things that you are doomed to them, no? And when you meet this you say it is possible to escape even if I don't know what. In some things we cannot escape and we have to fall but look! Demonstrate it is possible.

### Coop as a way to Gain Control

One of the main perceptions of the participants is the lack of freedom and control of one's life. They consider that the existing representative democracy and the domination of the markets by few, powerful multinationals leaves them without any power to exercise their rights. So, they feel unable to participate in decisions that concern them such as what is produced in their country and what products are available for purchase. By participating in the cooperative they feel that they gain more control over their life.

#### - *Control over production process*

First, the members recuperate the direct relationship with the producers of the products. The current economic system of intermediation and outsourcing seems to deprive them from that. It also makes highly intransparent the whole production process. Consumers do not know who produces the product, where it is produced and how it is produced, but in the cooperative they manage to regain control over the production process.

First, they carefully choose their producers and suppliers. As already explained the producers should usually comply with their criteria of small, local, ecological and no intermediates. This procedure takes place before making any arrangements with the producer by the commission of purchases of the coop. But this does not exclude later controls of the production process through regular visits. This offers a greater sense of control in three main aspects of the production process:

- Control of the produce: The committee in charge has to make sure that the producer complies with the criteria. It is reassured through regular visits that no pesticides are used and that the products are ecological and healthy.

Marta (Green Wave): **Because of my work I have a lot of contact with producers and a personal relationship with them. And I trust them... So, I go there and he explains me how he (producer) does it and maybe I agree with him, maybe not. But I prefer this over a brand that they tell me that the production process respects the society and the environment. I prefer to know and see myself..**

Furthermore, the fact that the members of the cooperatives are considering the establishment of an ecologic quality standards system for the evaluation of the products other than the established by the Catalan government is another element that is worth of discussing. As mentioned in section 7.1.1.4, ecological certificates, such as CPPAE, are currently used as certificates of ecologic quality for the group purchases of the cooperatives, but doubts have been raised regarding their suitability. The creation and implementation of a certification system by the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives creates an alternative route for the quality control of the produce. In addition, it further proves the intention of these consumers to take more control and defy existing market structures, even when these structures refer to ecological agriculture.

An interesting contradiction that should be mentioned is that while the participants are able to control better how the product is produced, they delegate control over to the farmer as to which products will be produced and so consumed. This means that the members accept that the farmer will decide what types of vegetables and fruits will be cultivated and supplied. It should be clarified that this is not a matter of personal preference of the farmer, but of producing the seasonal products since a naturalistic perspective of production is adopted. Therefore, while the member controls the quality of the products, the farmer indirectly controls the diversity and the type of diet of the members of the cooperative and of their families. The farmer provides his seasonal produce to the cooperative, independently of whether all the members like it or not. The delegation of control is observed more in the cooperatives that do not have a shop (Type B) and receive on a weekly basis boxes of fruits and vegetables (Type A & C), given the greater variety and availability of products in the cooperatives of Type B. The members of New Tendency, a Type A cooperative explain this experience.

Kat (New Tendency, focus group): **Now it is a surprise!** (referring to the box of fruits and vegetables that arrives each week). **What is there going to be? I like cooking things that I had never eaten. Me, the pumpkin? I had never eaten it before the cooperative. Or the beet. It is an experience..**

Marti (New Tendency, focus group): **Xavier doesn't like beet!** (he is laughing and Xavier is smiling)

- Labor conditions: The members make sure that their suppliers do not treat unfair their employees (when there are employees, since often the producers are family businesses).

Sheila (Aixada): **It is better to consume something within a coop than from a multinational because like this, I know the labor conditions that it was made. This is one of the joys when we consume here.**

Other authors (Cherrier, 2005; Bekin et al., 2007) have also come to the same conclusion. Ethical consumer behaviour represents a search for control. Nevertheless, their findings are different compared to the results of this study.

This motivation is related to the need for greater control of the production and consumption process.

- Consumer empowerment: Control where my money goes.

Consumer empowerment has been previously identified in the literature (Dickinson & Carsky, 2005; Shaw et al., 2006a) as a driver of ethical consumer behaviour. Wright et al. (2006) in the special issue of Research and Markets about consumer empowerment defines it as *'a mental state usually accompanied by a physical act which enables a consumer or a group of consumers to put into effect their own choices through demonstrating their needs, wants and demands in their decision-making with other individuals or organisational bodies in the marketplace'*

Dickinson and Carsky (2005) employ the metaphor of voting in the marketplace to describe how consumers use their purchase power to send a message to companies by choosing or avoiding them, just like voters do to political parties in elections.

The data analysis revealed that the members of the cooperative felt empowered because of their participation in the cooperative, because they were able to decide who to support through their group purchase. The following cites were selected to demonstrate this:

Sheila (Alternative Ways, focus group): Obviously, I feel that I have more power as a part of a group than as an individual. We have the opportunity to participate in the changes going on, not just in the Aixada, but in general to replicate this structure.

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): If I am in the coop, it is because I want to help the people that really need it and who I am interested to support.

A related concept is the perception of the effect that the participation in the cooperative has on the marketplace. This theme is called **Consumer Effectiveness**. It is a term that has been borrowed from the literature, because it is considered to describe adequately the concept. Previous studies have found that low consumer effectiveness act as a barrier for taking action (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Mohr & Webb, 2001; Carrigan et al., 2004). But, the empowered members of the cooperatives understand that their actions are effective. They perceive that change is generated, which motivates them to carry on.

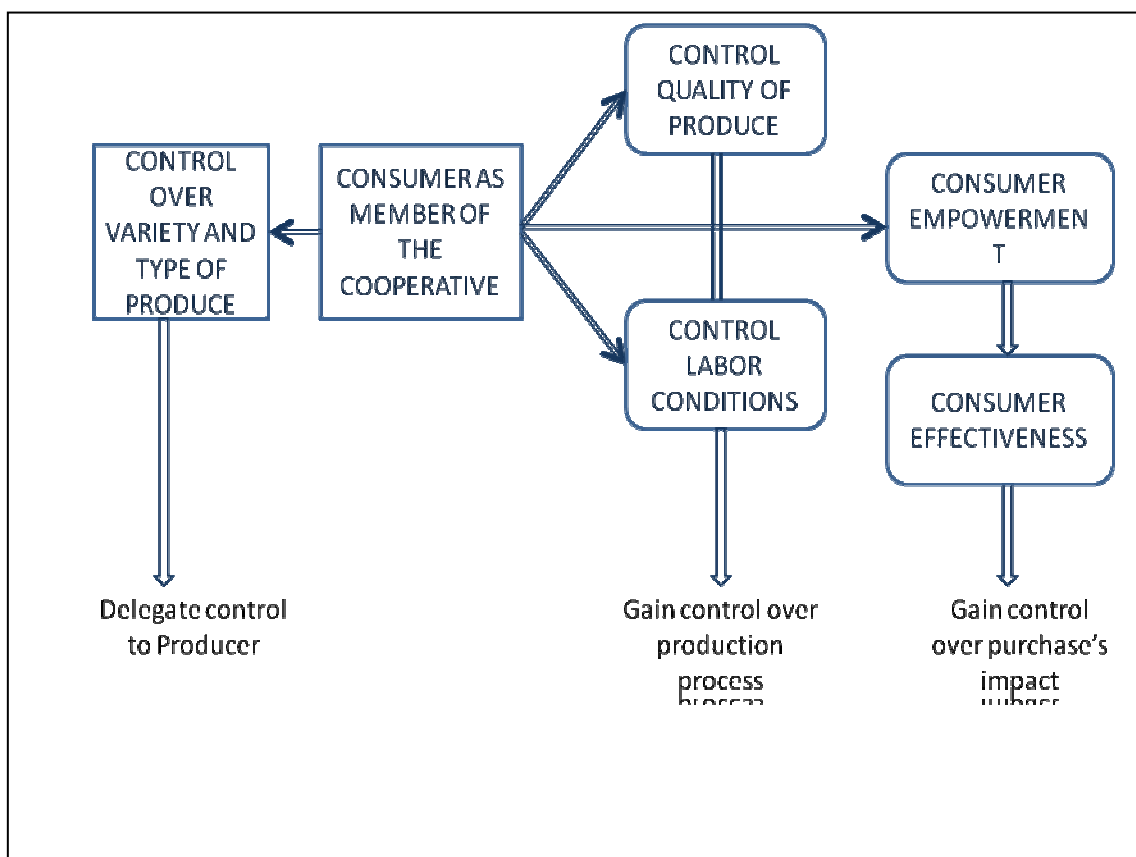
Marti (New Tendency, focus group): You don't have to do anything, but it just happens. Everyone wants to enter and companies every time think more in these things. I think that we don't have to do anything else but coming here and buying and everything will happen.

Angels (Green Wave, focus group): But there many, many things that are more positive, no? That also new forms of consumption come out such as the cooperative. We are a few but they come out. And it is curious that they come out now and not 25-30 years ago they didn't exist. But now, yes there are!

The following figure demonstrates how the consumer gains and loses control from his participation in the cooperative. Nevertheless, the delegation of control over to the producer is seen in a positive manner and does not affect the general perception of the participants of gaining control as members of the cooperative.



**Figure 7.8:** Gaining control from Participation in the cooperative



*Coop as New Learning and Experiences*

Another meaning attached to the participation in the coop is related to the new experiences and knowledge acquired. Most participants didn't expect that they could learn new things within the coop. Nevertheless, it was an additional benefit from joining the project.

The members learn new things because of their active implication in the project and also because of their interaction with the 'experts' of the cooperative. The 'experts' are those members that are perceived to have wide knowledge around issues related to the project (ecology, diet, ethical market alternatives etc) and that are leading stricter ethical consumer lifestyles for longer terms. This is common in micro cultures (Sirsi et al., 1996). Nevertheless, while Sirsi et al. (1996) used different methods to identify the experts in the micro culture of their study, such as objective knowledge scales and self-ratings, in this study the experts were identified by nominations (the 'title' of expert was designated to certain members by their co-members). The reasoning was that it was not of the thesis's interest to identify the experts of the cooperative in the

most objective way possible, but to explore the subjective perceptions of the participants.

One such expert was identified during a focus group. During the focus group New Tendency, Xavier, one of the members, started to explain the ethical projects that he was undertaking on an individual level such as taking his tupperware to the market to avoid waste accumulation, preparing his own yogurt and to give details about issues such as glass recycling. He demonstrated a stricter ethical lifestyle and a greater general knowledge on ethical issues than the other participants. This led some to call him *hero* during the focus group as recognition of his ‘expertise’.

Marti (New Tendency, focus group): **You are a hero!** (talking to Xavier while he explains that he brings a tupper when buying ham with a look of admiration)... **A hero is always informed and not all are like this. One should be informed. And not all are that informed.**

As a result, the members admit that their interaction with the experts teaches them.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): **And also it is a space of reflection I think..eh..because you meet people..eh..that think like you more or less, no? More or less extreme and you meet in the assemblies and you learn things such as that you should take the tupper to the market and these are people that think and with the same resources as you that make an effort for their ideals.**

Furthermore, the cooperatives organize and participate in campaigns, seminars, courses related to environmental and social issues (see section 7.1.1.5). All these result in educating the members of the cooperative and make them more socially responsible and active.

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): **I like my work, no? And my work I can enrich it with all the information I get. We do conferences, activities and now I put mathematical problems with social implications. For instance, you have to plant...And you search and search.. All this enriches me in my work and educates me. So, I have changed some courses like PC courses and of PowerPoint and audiovisuals. So, eh..**

because I am tired and I don't have a lot of time to practice. So, I change these things for this. Courses and education with a meaning! Well, I have never been quiet, but this (the coop) has paid my courses.. If I have changed? Not a lot. But now with the *G.M.O's* campaign, it has obliged me afternoons, weekends to go and receive, give, get out in the street. I had never gone out to the street to collect signatures and now yes. I am going to the street!

The members say that they enjoy **new learning** and **different experiences**. The nature of the project has made them adapt their own lifestyle in general. For instance, the fact that the producer decides what vegetables and fruits to cultivate and supply the coop, has led the members to change and enrich their diet. The members interchange recipes and try new dishes.

Irene (Green Valley, focus group): And then when we make assemblies, we make dinners. Each brings his dish, we try it. Delicious!

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): Varied buffet!

Irene (Green Valley, focus group): Yes, there are so many dishes that we didn't know..

Jordi (Green Valley, focus group): When we came, we didn't know tofu, or seitan or vegan hamburgers. Things that you don't know, maybe you comment it and they say, look I prepare it like this, I barbecue it..

Moreover, given that the cooperative is usually open once per week or less for the weekly distribution of products, the members have learned to adapt their needs in such ways that the weekly purchase covers their needs for the whole week. They organize themselves so that they will not lack or throw any product in between the products' distributions. In this way, they manage to *minimize their needs* and their levels of consumption outside the coop.

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): And there is something important. That it is not a shop. We don't come to buy whatever we feel like. You have to establish some criteria of order of purchase. We buy, we supply

ourselves on a weekly basis. We buy everything for one week. And this is good, because it orders what you want to buy. It reduces your necessities. If you don't have one thing, you consume another. Me at least I didn't do it like this before. I consumed a little bit, what I felt like. So now, I open the fridge and what is left are peppers or vegetables and for sure I organize food on that basis. For instance, last night I did that. And it is fantastic! And really we don't throw food.. And when you look the calendar, from Wednesday to Wednesday that we come here to buy, almost never we have food left or we lack food. And it helps us to organize ourselves very well. I think that it is the case for many!

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): In the beginning it was difficult, eh!

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): In the beginning it was, but now..

Finally, the direct relationship with the producer, the seasonal products, the frequent visits to the farms have contributed for a *stronger bond of the members with nature*. They stress how much they have learned about the earth and the production process. They understand which products should be produced in each season. All this, brings them closer to nature and helps reviving lifestyles of the past, when people would consume according to what the earth would produce and offer.

Cesilia (Green Wave, focus group): What the cooperative intends is give this. I entered a while ago. But it is a bit go back in the past, more locally to what the earth has to produce and when it is supposed to produce it, tomatoes etc..and to disengage from the supermarket.

Then, another of the implications of the participation in the cooperative is *learning how to discuss and to decide by consensus*, since this is the form that the decisions are taken in the cooperatives. In the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, the members do not decide by voting. They promote the participative style of democracy and take decisions only when they all reach a consensus. While, they describe the whole process as a difficult and slow path, they argue that they learn from it.

Sheila (Alternative Ways, focus group): Time is necessary to reach in consensus that I certainly think that it is a method much more difficult, slow and enriching and presupposes a personal labor..eh...breathe at times no? Because we are not used to consensus, so sometimes our basic instinct when you are 2 hours in a reunion is 'I fucking wanna leave! Can someone decide so I can go home?' Well, all this process has helped me learn a lot!

As it was described, the participants perceive the cooperative as a space of self-realization, where they learn, they try new experiences and they go under a process of *personal change*. Most of them didn't imagine it when they first joined but their experience in the cooperative has enriched them with this additional and important motivation.

#### **7.2.2.4 What meanings do the participants attach to their general lifestyle?**

As explained in Section 7.1.2, the participants employ a wide array of projects when taking consumer decisions on an individual level. These include boycotting and boycotting but in the context of more simplified ethical lifestyles.

This means that the participants have set as a more general objective a sustainable, simple lifestyle through the reduction of their consumption levels of all types of products and materials. Their consumer behaviour is complemented by other decisions unrelated directly to consumption such as abandoning ‘unethical’ jobs or participating in different kinds of social and environmental collectivities.

The participants consider unethical to overconsume, even if it is with ethical products. Therefore, positive buying and avoidance of products takes place when they consider that they have no other choice but consuming. Certainly, the intensity of these behaviors vary from people who limit their consumption only to food to individuals who are more selective and they decide for instance to avoid to use their car as much as possible.

This section discusses the meanings they draw from the lifestyles they have selected.

##### *Simplified Lifestyle offers liberty*

Most of the participants have voluntarily simplified their lifestyle. They have reduced their consumption levels by reusing products that they had previously purchased or by recycling through friends’ interchanges, regiving networks. They avoid excessive consumption in any of its forms such as water and energy consumption. Several opt for simpler solutions when travelling such as going to colonies or backpack trips. Furthermore, some extend their concerns as to what job they do for living, going for lower paid jobs as long as they fit with their ethical lifestyles.

For many of the participants, a simplified lifestyle is a form to regain their liberty by freeing themselves from the materialistic model imposed to them. They find happiness in consuming less and in this way they reverse the Production-Consumption cycle that was explained in section 7.2.1. They find more attractive the

idea of stop working for long hours, which makes them to have more **time** to enjoy in activities other than consumption.

Tony B (Green Wave, focus group): This is interesting, because what anti-consumerism does is free! When you don't consume, you free something. Or you have more money because you don't spend or you have more time and each decides where to dedicate it, everyone has his options. The option of non-consumption is important, because apart from collaborating with development, you also free energy for I don't know what.. It is a concept that seems interesting to me. If you buy less, you need less money and you don't need to work that much. And if you don't need to work that much, you have more time to dedicate in other things.

Tony A (Green Wave, focus group): You have other possibilities in life. Each makes his own effort.

Rosa B (Green Wave, focus group): It is true what Tony says. The Tonies. Time is freed. You free time and money. Some yes, others no. You don't waste energy in consuming. And normally, you dedicate this time in community, one way or another. Well, come on, I don't know! Here, many of us we are in local organization, of the neighborhood or more general. Or implicated in some form of work that already implies a social charge. And I think that this is common. And the people that we are organised in this type of cooperatives, if not all many, we dedicate our time to promote non-consumption.

In some more extreme cases, a simplified lifestyle is translated in periodical unemployment and voluntary reduced income. This is accompanied by a more generalized refusal to 'give in' more conventional choices –such as paying a mortgage or a rent, having a stable job- because it is considered as a new form of slavery.

Marc (Ecology Land, interview): When I am telling you that I am not working, this is also an option. I have been 6 months without looking for a job, living from saving for 6 months. Non-consumption makes that you

are dependent of work and this is a new form of slavery. The rent as the rents are here and the mortgages are a new form of slavery. The uncertainty that there is in the working environment is also a form of slavery. In that you cannot claim for anything in your work, out of fear to lose it. Why? Because then you know that you'll have to lower your life standard. Dining and eating outside the house, you can dine in the house!

*Simplified lifestyle and participation in the cooperative as a form to maintain tradition and revive the past*

Another saturated theme was the decision of the consumers to lead simple lives avoiding excessive consumption and participating in the cooperative as an effort to revive the past and maintain traditions. Many consumers' intention is not other than reproduce the lifestyles that their families taught them as morally correct. A basic idea is that overconsumption is morally wrong and unnecessary.

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): They are very self-sufficient (her parents) and not over consuming at all! But my mother is very bright and my father as well, especially with politicians. And my mother says: 'This is too expensive and people only watch television all day'. They are very normal. And not alternative. But you see that they have taught you things that before I never thought about them and now I do and before I didn't, no? You spend the whole day buying and you think what you are going to buy..eh..how to spend. You spend, just to spend and buy. Why do you use so many clothes? Well, they never let me buy too many clothes and now I don't buy either, but you understand right? That in my house the philosophy is like this. And I have just realized it..hm.. recently. To be honest very recently.

The participation in the cooperative is also a way to reproduce the past in four main aspects: recuperate the direct, personal relationship with the producer, avoid



overconsumption, recover the relationship with the earth and consume quality, healthy products like in childhood. Two passages were selected that show these:

- Recover the relationship with the earth and avoid overconsumption

Cesilia (Green Wave, focus group): *What the cooperative intends is offer this..I entered a while ago. But it is a bit go back in the past, to the local, to what the earth has to produce and when it has to produce it, tomatoes and to disengage from the supermarket. To wake up and not fall in the temptation of consumerism, buy because yes! Go back in the past and retake the whole story. Do what people did before. Recycle clothes between friends, the ways to buy. I suppose..eh..go back learning what we have become to be and what we are now.*

- Eat quality, healthy products as in childhood

Ana (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Well, what he (Albert) said when he entered in Alternative Ways looking for something social and political, what I wanted were the products that I remembered as child. It is carrot and tastes like carrot.*

### *Boycotting and Boycotting empowers the consumer*

The main argument of the participants when they purchase according to their social and environmental criteria is the sense of power they get from these behaviors. Both boycotting and boycotting allow the consumer to choose and so, make a statement, send a message to the marketplace. The analysed data confirm the theory of consumer voting<sup>12</sup> (Shaw et al., 2006a). Consumption is not simply based on the maximization of the consumer's utility, but it becomes symbolic. It symbolizes the support to whomever they choose as the final beneficiary of their 'economic vote'.

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): *When you buy this generates a profit, but a profit for whom? If you can choose who will be the*

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<sup>12</sup> The metaphor of consumer voting was first introduced by Fetter (1911) in support of the free market as democratic and empowering for the individual consumer: '*The market is a democracy where every penny gives the right to vote*' (p. 394).

beneficiary of your consumption, if I can choose it, I prefer to choose it. Choose someone that needs it than someone that will become more multimillionaire than what he already is. It takes effort to earn money, so at least I try to choose to whom I am giving it to.

A look at the data collected shows that many participants see consumption as a form of political action and participation in the decision making. Reacting to their inexistent participation in the democratic system, some of the respondents consider their roles as consumers as more effective than their roles as citizens.

Sheila (Alternative Ways, focus group): And I think that we can fight more as consumers than as citizens...In my case I am choosing consumption like a political option.

Anselm (El Rec de Sant Andreu, TROC Spring 2003): Another reflexion I propose, it could be simplified with a phrase from the first issue of the magazine *Opcions*, a magazine that I recommend to you. The phrase is: "the votes in the stores are more influential than the votes at the poles in elections". (translated from catalan)

However, there are participants that accept the effectiveness of consumer action, but they add that the marketplace is just one of the many battlefields. Individuals make a statement through their consumption choices, but this does not mean that they should consider consumption as the only form of action. Instead, they suggest that emphasis should be also put on their general role as citizens.

Anselm (El Rec de Sant Andreu, TROC Spring 2003): I think that we should be in alert, so that responsible consumption is not converted in an individual action that each carries out in an individualistic form in the store. I believe that the collective, political work is very important. It is true that we have power as consumers, but we also have power as citizens and we have to exercise it. For instance, it is meaningless if we try to consume fuel as less as possible, or avoid it if we can, without putting political pressure so that renewable energies are developed. (translated from catalan)

Furthermore, the outcomes of the pressure created by them are not always welcomed and desired. For instance, they heavily criticise that the multinationals and big commercial chains take into account the existence of the ethical consumer niche and intend to target it by offering ethical products in the market. While some of the consumers see it as a positive consequence recognizing that it might serve the more traditional consumers, most participants fiercely disagree and refuse any ethically masqueraded initiative that comes from the big companies, who they perceive as enemy. For the latter, action should not simply aim at greater accessibility to ecological or Fair Trade products, but also at the establishment of more fair production and consumption systems that question multinationals' dominance in the marketplace. Two examples that express both opinions are cited.

Vero (Alternative Ways, focus group): Well, in some supermarkets they make discounts..eh..it's their politics, but they discount if you bring your bag. I don't think it's bad even if it is ridiculous. Actually, when in the companies..eh..and more in big companies, well..eh..where we work, they can have ethical policies or more towards..eh... Make propaganda of our model, because people start listening more, no? Me, I find ecological in the super. Well, I don't find it bad, because not everyone goes to a cooperative. These small things are because they sell more, but well I don't find it bad no?

Josep (Green Valley, TROC winter 2003): Next year, maximum in two years, the big commercial chains of the big and small cities of the country will offer eco-biological products. God Bless! There we will find rustically decorated sections where the fruits and vegetables will be piled in a mess -like in the villages, following the advice of the very professional marketing departments of the companies in question. The educated ladies will serve us, conveniently dressed as farmers, taking advantage of the rush hour to distribute plastic warms and dry leaves among the apples and lettuces. Finally, we will be free from the obligation to go the cooperatives of consumption. (translated from catalan)

### 7.2.3 Which factors affect the perceptions and the consequent behaviour of the consumers?

Most of the members of the cooperatives argue that the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives are characterized by a great diversity of the type of people that they attract.

Albert (Organic Veggies, interview): *In the beginning we were few and more homogeneous but now you can see people from everywhere. This is logical because the group grows...*

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): *Here there is political diversity and of football teams, don't think otherwise. The people here..eh..not all think the same way..*

Nevertheless, it seems that many of the participants followed similar paths to form their worldviews which led them to taking action and finally to the cooperative. During the analysis of the data, certain themes kept emerging as to which **experiences** and **social processes** had influenced the participants in the course of their lives until the present.

#### 1. Simple-living families

- **'I am from a village!'**

The formation of perceptions such as alienation of consumer from production and aversion to excessive consumerism were directly related to the fact that they come from a village and to the way they were raised there. So, they are trying to revive the simple and strict lifestyles that they learnt as little through their participation in the cooperatives and through other ethical projects.

They describe multiple benefits from growing up and living in a village:

- *Being closer to nature.* These participants identify the alienation of the consumer from production, because they have been in contact with a complete

different reality in the past. Once when they were small, they could eat tasty, healthy fruits and vegetables without pesticides. Once when they were small, they knew how products are produced and in which seasons.

Angels (Green Wave, focus group): **In Mediterranean countries there are seasons and I have learnt that since I was little.**

- *Ecological, simple lifestyles.* For the participants, living in the village implies a simpler, sustainable lifestyle that respects the environment, because the villagers tend to avoid excessive consumption and to reuse as much as possible. The routines of their families in the village act as a guide for them. The principles of reusing everything and avoiding excessive waste and purchases are part of the mental schema that they have incorporated since they were small.

Vero (Alternative Ways, focus group): **And my father comes from the village and there they use everything! And my grandmother with the cannelloni! It is a process of saving, using everything..**

Araceli (Alternative Ways, focus group): **Well, I remember because I am before the consumerism society. Well it is true, you have grown up in a consumerism society, before you had the villages and me as I grew up in a village there is a model of happiness while we waste and throw things that are of no interest to us. People from the villages came that had some common sense. I don't know..eh..I think that previously..eh..previously from here, well..eh.. we cultivated. For instance, my mother in the house used to tell me: 'Wasting is meaningless and it is not right'. Both things. And I think that this is an esquema that I always had and that makes you happier and it's ok.. It was not ok ethically!**

Furthermore, some of the participants' families are or used to be farmers. Therefore, the participants have experienced at first hand the difficulties of being a farmer. This makes them more sensitive to their problems and more willing to take action against

the **injustice** that they perceive in the marketplace. The example of Judith explains this:

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): One thing that I think it is very important in me and I think about it, is that I am from a village. From here, from the mountains of Tarragona, of the province. My parents are farmers and also hunters. And my grandfather has always had the rabbits, the turkeys. And my family is delighted to be farmers and to live in the countryside and to have their garden in the summer. They are so, so proud of their tomatoes and of how they came out and how good they taste! And my grandmother: 'Take the eggs, to make an omelet or you prefer a rabbit?' Because they have them at home! Or wild pig. Well, basically I eat meat only from my house almost. And I think that besides that they are so self sufficient, they are farmers and that it why I was telling you about the local commerce, because I know that the farmers work a lot and get paid very little. And when you are going to buy something in a shop, even if it is expensive in reality it doesn't mean that the producer has gained a deserving wage for what he has produced. The majority of times the money goes to the intermediates. And I find this in my house. Let's say, my parents the olive oil, the olives they go well but the nuts go really bad and everything goes really bad. But how can you eat then? Well, they eat because many things..eh..they produce themselves and what they don't..eh.the friend of the next village does that he has lambs or he is a butcher..

Hence, it seems that many of the participants share common cognitive schemas that had incorporated when they were raised in villages. These cognitive schemes lead them towards simpler lifestyles of their past and increase their sensitivity towards issues such as the alienation of the consumer from production or the injustice in the marketplace.

- **'Puritanism'**

This theme is related to the previous category. Both consider how participants were raised as an important influence that marked them and guides them till now. For most respondents, the aversion to excessive consumerism was partly perceived as a result of having being raised in austere environments where everything was reused and nothing was thrown. These participants try to replicate such lifestyles.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *Well..eh.. I think it comes from my family.. My grandfather was very obsessive with the recycling thing...He was very catholic and a very simple person and he had 9 sons and he had to feed everyone and he was very strict with the numbers and how to reuse everything in the house and in the nature and like this.*

Montserrat (Alternative Ways, focus group): *My house was also very austere. By necessity we couldn't afford many things.. And..eh..well..my mother was very austere.*

As a result, both themes were found to be related to the formation of certain perception and contributed to the adoption of simpler lifestyles and the participation in the cooperative.

Here, it has to be clarified that not all the members in cooperatives come from austere, simple-living families and have spent their childhood in villages. Nevertheless, **having been brought up in simple-living families provides the individual with cognitive frames that make him/her perceive the alienation of consumer from producer, the immorality of excessive consumption and the injustice in the marketplace with more intensity, pushing him/her to reproduce his childhood lifestyle and partly justifying his/her decision to participate in the cooperative of responsible consumption.**

## **2. Learning broadens ethical horizons**

Two other factors that appeared as relevant since they were repeated a lot, were the fact that individuals broadened their horizons by gaining more knowledge on ethical and social issues or by meeting alternative cultures such kibut and hippy communes.

### - **Learning in the university**

It has been mentioned before that the creation of a socio demographic profile was not one of the intentions of the current thesis, given that previous research towards that direction does not reveal a solid profile (e.g. Balderjahn, 1988, Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Shaw & Shiu, 2002). The research followed a qualitative approach with purposive sampling aiming at a greater understanding of the consumers participating in a cooperative and not their socio-demographic delineation. Nevertheless, two observations were made.

During the fieldwork, it was interesting to note that most of the participants have a relatively high educational level. Many of them are involved in education; some are professors in the secondary school, others are PhD students and researchers, others are doctors of sciences. This was observed first in the seven cooperatives, since the interviewees would respond questionnaires with basic socio-demographic and lifestyle questions after the sessions. Furthermore, a relevant comment was heard in a focus group discussion.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *We, because we are people with a relatively high studies level, this is the profile here, that we are worried and we reflect* (Xavier nods agreeing).

Then, it was also seen in the inter-cooperative meetings of la Repera, where the doctoral student came across various PhD students and some university lecturers. Characteristic is the case of the participants of one cooperative in Manresa called Cal Cases where according to two participants (both PhD holders), half of the members of the cooperative are PhD candidates or Doctors. Given that the sample of this study is far from representative of the population, the high educational level should be taken as an observation that should be further researched in the future.

Nevertheless, the type of education of many of the members seems to be related to their increased sensitivity towards environmental and societal issues. Even if there is a variety of educational backgrounds, the members had often graduated from degrees related to environmental sciences, chemistry, biology and agricultural engineering. As a result, these members have a wide knowledge around issues related to the environment or the production process of products. This made them see that information in the marketplace was intransparent and asymmetric.



Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): I am an agricultural engineer. So, in the university I learnt many things when I was seeing what we are eating every day. So, then it was an overdose of information. So, there was a moment that when I was eating things from the others, I was feeling a bit panicked, no? When you work in the agricultural world and you see how the system works, you say: Am I going to eat this tomorrow? Oh man! What have I eaten and what am I going to eat? There are things that most people don't know and don't see. But when you see the things that they are doing when cultivating and you think that you and other people are eating this, really you understand that when I can escape, I will escape running!

It should be reminded that the aforementioned observations do not intend to profile the member of the cooperative of responsible consumption, so percentages and further quantitative data with regards the level and type of education were considered unnecessary.

- **‘Meeting Alternative cultures’**

Some of the participants consider that the experience that marked them was their coming into contact with alternative communities, whose culture influenced them deeply till the present. It served them as their wake-up call.

Laura (Alternative Ways, focus group): I went for a trip that I stayed for 9 months in kibu type communes. I don't know if you know it but they are self-governed communities and there I freaked out! There is no personal property, the income is distributed, you give your income to the community and they distribute it according to the children you have, the cars are shared, there is a school, there is a geriatric and I thought: 'But how?'. And the will of the people and the group and the self-governance, this made me click and woke me up. It made me see that there are other ways no? And this is what I looked for in Alternative Ways, the self-governance.

Vero (Alternative Ways, focus group): Me something that affected me a lot when I was young..eh..I went as a volunteer in a work field and there were the greens of Germany. A hippy commune, but not hippies, they were doctors and I was amazed. They were so into ecology, that 25 years ago no? And these are things that soak you bit by bit.

### 3. Observing the context

#### - **Polluted Environment and Expansion of Industries**

Another factor that influenced the intensity in which some perceptions appeared is the environment of the participants, or more simply where they live. Given that cooperatives are neighborhood based, some perceptions are automatically related to the location of the cooperative. It was observed that the participants from the region of Baix Camps (Tarragona, Reus) were much more concerned about the health and environmental problems that the industrial model evokes. The existence of petrochemical companies and nuclear plants in their cities appears as an issue that preoccupies most of them. For them, it is responsible for malformations, sicknesses, and pollution. The lack of scientific proof of their fears is attributed to the existence of asymmetric information, since they consider that the authorities hide it from them. Furthermore, they condemn the installation of these companies, because it has replaced the agricultural tradition of the area.

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): The sperm in Tarragona is one of the less fertile. I don't know if it is one of the least fertile in Spain. Recently, there was a study about it. And here, in Sant Joan hospital there is the biggest oncology section of all Catalunya. This might still be an urban myth like the Mc Donalds stories. You talk about things that you listen, you know, that they say..hmm but it is clear. The administration doesn't inform. This is very clear!

Judith (Environmental Hope, interview): Interiorly maybe I had conscience but I was always going to the easiest thing, you know? Then, when I

changed chip, as you asked,hmm.. a bit changing my habits. Eat healthier. And what really interests me is to eat products from here, my country. To promote that, no?...More than anything, because of the zone where we are living in. You see what is most important. I am from Reus and all my parents and grandfathers are from here. And you see the change of these last years and we are a bit ..hmm.. there is the social and political part and you see how the city evolves and at least you want to maintain what there is, what has been and what will still be here...

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): The only thing you were saying was: I live in Reus because my parents had to leave the village. Why? Because they had a little bit of earth, but the earth doesn't feed you. And you ask yourself why? Olives, almonds are not enough for eating? Then what do you eat? And you come here that the earth is plain and there is water and neither... And you say: Why is there a petrochemical and not farms? And this is a system that you see every day on a global level... We say that if Catalonia was a building, in the attic you find Girona, Barcelona is on the first floor, Lleida besides the building like a warehouse and Tarragona,.. we are the underground! Here we have to deal with nuclear energy, the waste, the petrochemical companies.. I am not saying that we have an inferiority syndrome, but here it is the worstly treated territory in Catalonia.

#### **4. Experiences that increased the intensity of need for healthy products**

##### **- 'Having children'**

According to some participants, an experience that changed their lives and their ways of thinking was the birth of their children. After that, they became more sensitive about health issues. They started to collect more information and take care of their diet and then finally they joined the cooperative.

Joan (Green Valley, focus group): The thing of having children made us say..eh.start..hmm.. to learn more..eh. about some diet issues, things we didn't do well and so we started looking. Until we met some friends that used to belong here and they explained it to us. We didn't know.

Montserrat (Alternative Ways, focus group): Well..eh..then..my daughter was born and this was an important change. Because what happened to me was what happened to him (shows Albert, another member)..eh..with the health ok, I thought..eh..we are ok. But then my daughter was born and then you think how should I raise her..

- **'Dealing with health problems'**

Some of the members turned to the ecological products in part because they needed to follow a healthy diet due to health problems that they were facing. This need for ecological products contributed finally to their joining or founding the cooperative.

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): I think that consuming ecological products is an issue of health as well. I had fungus in my body called candida and it's normal but I had it so often and with medical treatment it didn't work, so through diet I managed to recover from this fungus. And well..eh..then I don't know..many illnesses like this basics..eh...I recovered from them not with normal medicine, but with traditional medicine through healthy diets and ecological products.

## **5. Factors that contributed in ethical taking action**

- **'Having money and stability'**

Many of the participants claim that while they were ethically concerned, they didn't behave ethically due to lack of money and stability. While the ecological products bought in the cooperative are cheaper than in ecological shops such as Veritas and Natureco, they still are more expensive than conventional products. Furthermore, the active implication of the members in the coop requires some kind of stability, both

financial and in terms of mobility, because the participation in the coop is a compromise. For instance, according to the members of Green Valley, the students do not survive much in the cooperative, because they don't have established routines and they have to move a lot. Drawing from personal experiences, some of the participants affirmed that their lack of financial independence and stability was a barrier to their taking action even if ethically concerned.

Xavier (New Tendency, focus group): *Well, when did I start to think about it no? In the moment that you feel more responsible of your actions. When you are in the house with your parents, in some way you continue with their steps, what they do no? And you don't think what do I consume, you do what your parents do, until you leave home and you have to take decisions. You have to buy and you do it progressively. Most of all because you don't have a lot of money. And this is an important factor, have money till the end of each month.*

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): *Let's day that I entered in the cooperative when my lifestyle permitted it. When I could have stability in terms of income and residence. Permit me to be part of a system like this no?*

## 7.2.4 Main findings and discussion

In this second part, the focus was placed on understanding what drives these ethical consumers to engage in ethical collective and individual projects (which were described throughout 7.1). The findings suggest the following:

- The ethical projects of the consumers are a consequence of the way they have constructed their social reality. Three more general perceptions were identified; inexistent or unsatisfying democracy, critique of the capitalistic model and of its multiple repercussions and lack of liberty and control of one's life. The first two perceptions contribute in the emergence of the third one.

The participants express their dissatisfaction with the existing economical, political and social status quo. They feel that they don't participate in the decision making and that the powerful social agents, the multinationals and all levels of authorities, impose their rules to them. Their rules include the infliction of the capitalistic industrial model that:

- ruins their quality of life by causing environmental and health problems,
- creates injustice in the marketplace by exploiting the small producers and by destroying the traditional agricultural activity of their country,
- promotes materialism as the lifestyle to follow and
- that estranges them from reality.

As a consequence, they feel like they have lost control of their lives and their liberty. Their taking action is their reaction to aforementioned. They are trying to create new social dynamics and establish new alternatives in the market. In order to accomplish that, they adapt their lifestyle and engage in individual ethical projects and collective ethical projects, where the cooperative plays a central role. The rationale is that it offers them a greater sense of consumer effectiveness and so greater consumer empowerment. First, because they exercise directly control over the production process. Second, because the expansion of the model and the collective nature of the project make more feasible the possibility of change (see Figure 7.2). Therefore, from a holistic

point of view their ethical projects are seen as an effort to regain control, their liberty and the right to decide and to participate.

- The central ethical project under study is the participation of the consumers in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. Consumers' decision to participate is guided by three main categories of motivations; utility, social interaction and politics. Most participants took the decision to join or found a cooperative on the basis of one of these categories, while some were driven by a combination of them. Some were looking for tasty, healthy products, others wanted to extend their social circle, while others wanted to change the social dynamics and create change. Nevertheless, the experience of the participation in the cooperative yielded additional benefits such as learning and new experiences.
- Previous research has unsuccessfully tried to relate ethical consumer behaviour to socio-demographic variables. For Shaw and Clarke (1999), personality and socio-demographic variables are insufficient to predict ethical behaviors. Instead, they find more appropriate to look how ethical beliefs were formed at all. In line with them, the current study did not aim at a socio-demographic profile of the participant consumers, but at understanding whether there are any similar patterns in their stories. According to the findings, there are recurring themes that seem related to the formation of the aforementioned perceptions, to their participation in the cooperative and to their overall taking action. They are presented in the following table:

**Table 7.2:** Influence of factors on formation of perceptions and on taking action

<b>FACTOR</b>	<b>FORMATION OF PERCEPTION</b>	<b>TAKING ACTION</b>
'I am from a village'	'Alienation of consumer from production' 'Injustice in the marketplace' 'Anti-consumerism' 'Unsustainable growth and progress'	Simplified lifestyles Participation in the cooperative
'Puritanism'	'Anti-consumerism'	Simplified lifestyles
'Learning in the university'	'Lack of transparency of information' 'Health and environmental Risks'	Participation in the cooperative Boycotting Buycotting
'Dealing with health problems'		Consumption of ecological products
'Polluted environment and Industries'	'Unsustainable growth and progress', 'Health and Environmental Risks', 'Losing traditions'	Support of local commerce, Participation in cooperative
'Having money and stability'		Buycotting, Boycotting, Participation in the cooperative
'Meeting alternative cultures'	'Lack of participation in decision making' 'Unsustainable growth and progress'	Participation in the cooperative
'Having children'	'Unsustainable growth and progress', 'Health and environmental dangers'	Consumption of ecological products Participation in the cooperative



### **7.3 Is there a renegotiation of meanings, ideas and behaviours taking place in the cooperative leading to a collective shared identity?**

During the data analysis, it was observed that a renegotiation of meanings takes place within the cooperative. The participants acknowledge that they entered with other types of motivations than the ones they currently have.

As seen in section 7.2.2, their initial motivations are grouped under three main categories; utility, social interaction and politics. Most participants joined looking for one of them, while some came for all of them. Nevertheless, their participation in the cooperative should be seen as a dynamic process, where meanings, ideas and behaviors are negotiated because people interact with each other and influence each other.

In terms of behaviours, consumers say to learn from each other and especially from the experts of their groups (see Section 7.2.2.3). In their cooperatives, they are taught new tricks to cut down on their consumption and on the waste they generate, they are advised on how to purchase ethically outside the cooperative and they are shown original recipes on how to cook the products bought within the cooperative.

Furthermore, a general observation is that the consumers that participate for some time in the cooperative tend to incorporate the principles and the purchase criteria of the collectivity and start to apply them also on an individual level. In other words, a process of assimilation of meanings and ideas takes place within the cooperatives. This is observed in both participants that entered for politics and utility. The following cites were selected to demonstrate how meanings were renegotiated.

#### **- From Politics to Utility**

Albert (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Me when I entered here, I had some motivations that had nothing to do with ecologic food. Because I had never eaten ecological and I didn't pay any attention to it, for instance I am smoking (everyone laughs). A smoker is the cooperative. But I am referring that I didn't have any obsession at all. I bought*

ecological and I thought that it was a type of consumption very elitist. It is still very expensive and few people afford it. And I started to worry about the social issue behind consumption. That is why I started to support purchases that were done within the cooperative of products and not ecological but with a social meaning behind etc, etc. And there were people more worried for health issues than for political issues and absorb like this one from the other. And then you start getting informed and you are worried about the part of health, pesticides. You start reading. In work issues I also read and then you understand that we don't anything about what we are eating. And in the food control, it is supposed that there is but it is much less than what we think. And local criteria that many people already mentioned. Or the consumption of carburant, intend to buy local produce.

- From Utility to Politics

Ana (Alternative Ways, focus group): Well, what he was saying (she shows Albert) that when he entered in Alternative Ways he was looking for something social and political. Me? I was looking for the products I used to remember as child. It is carrot and tastes as carrot. And like him, by relating to the people I have understood the criteria, how the cooperative enriches you. Like: 'What do you say? I had never thought about it..'

Int (Green Valley, focus group): So, the initial motivation is not the same for everyone. There are some that entered to eat healthy and ecological, right?

Irene (Green Valley, focus group): Like us in the beginning... But there are members that are here for a long time and you learn from them. Of their ideas, they transmit them to you.

- From Politics to more Politics

Int (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Before entering in the cooperative, you didn't apply the same criteria to your everyday life?*

Laia (Alternative Ways, focus group): *In an individual level, I was boycotting the big multinationals, G.M.Os because of my educational background and because of the people I met in biology, yes. But starting buying locally or no intermediaries, this happened more here.*

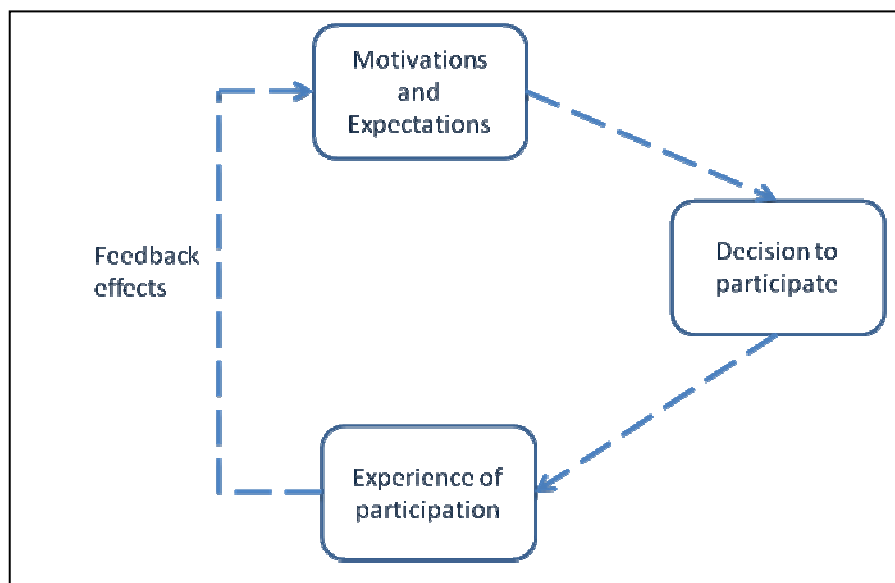
Hence, the motivations and the derived meanings from the participation in the cooperative are constantly re-negotiated in the space of the cooperative. The members interact with each other, interchange opinions and influence each other. After some time of participation, the members' principles and criteria start to assimilate more. This is well explained in the following cite.

Araceli (Alternative Ways, focus group): *Well for me, the case of Albert and Ana simplified it a lot. There are not only two types of motivations. There is a motivation that is more green and ecological and healthy we would say. Some people came for the green and others for the red. And other people came for the red and have gone towards green.*

Figure 7.8 is borrowed by Birchall and Simmons (2004: 484) to show the dynamics of the members' motivations. It adequately captures the dynamic process of renegotiation of motivations and expectations from participating in the cooperative.

Nevertheless, the interaction among the members is not the only cause of change. The experience of participation that Figure 7.8 describes also refers to the closer relationship that consumers develop with the producers and with nature. Through cooperatives, consumption becomes more personalized. It brings closer the consumer and producer. In this way, the consumer enters in what is described as a process of conscientization (awakening of consciousness) that has implications on the general lifestyle of the individual and on his purchase decisions outside the cooperative.

**Figure 7.9:** Dynamics of members' participation



Source: Birchall and Simmons (2004: 484)

Silvia (Environmental Hope, interview): I don't know. It's like becoming conscious, I don't know how. But you end up having it. And it is not because of the work we do here. But when the farmer brings you the vegetables! Fff.. Only getting to know him.. hmmm.. You know where the product comes from and you talk with him. This creates you a conscience so that afterwards you cannot buy a product in a supermarket. You just can't...

In addition, the existence of the cooperative proves the feasibility of carrying out successfully an ethical project. The complexity of engaging in ethical consumer behaviours was discussed in Section 7.1.2.5.1, when obstacles such as lack of credible information appear and lead to unavoidable inconsistent behaviours. Nevertheless, the participation in the cooperative empowers the consumer by offering him direct control over his purchases. This sense of control motivates the participant to try harder for a more extended application of ethical criteria in consumer behaviours outside the cooperative.

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): When you enter this door, there is something that make you move. If not, you would keep buying in Carrefour or Alcampo or Mercadona. But once you are here and you can experience

consumption in certain ways..hmm..this makes you accentuate these criteria and when you are outside you drag them with you.

### **Towards a collectively shared identity**

Such assimilation in ideas, meanings and behaviours leads to the creation of a collective identity among the consumers that participate in the cooperative. For Cherrier (2007), collective identity represents a shared cognitive framework, whereas for Brewer and Gardner (1996: 86) it reflects 'internalization of the norms' and identification with the group. In the case of the members of the cooperative, their collective identity is affirmed in two ways:

- Their identification with the group
- Their feeling of being different with regards to outsiders to the group.

Indeed, a common finding is that these consumers tend to feel different from many people they interact with in their everyday life. Almost all claim to have friends, relatives and colleagues that do not share their principles and convictions and who might disagree, ridiculize or remain plainly indifferent towards their ethical concerns and actions. The narratives of experiences during the interviews and in the magazine TROC reveal a gap among the members of the cooperatives who are ethically concerned and behaved and the rest. The conflict is evident.

The members of the cooperatives criticise their indifferent friends, relatives and colleagues as trapped in the comfort of their bourgeois lives. The participants consider that they are reluctant to engage in any kind of action, because it would mean that they should give up on their comfortable, easy and pleasant lifestyles.

Jose Angels (Green Wave, focus group): *Consuming less..hmm.it's complicated, eh! The life we have now is impossible unless we steal from others and so it's not only about giving up on consuming so much, but giving up on the lifestyle we have. It is complicated.*

Cesilia (Green Wave, focus group): *And men are selfish. If they want to live in a certain way, with the comforts we have..hmm.. we just don't care how it is done.*

Judith (Ecology Land, interview): Those that don't understand me are my friends... Idealist, Idealist! (how they call her) pfff.. I think that deep inside they value me for what I do. But they think it is idealism, an utopia..better live life to the maximum, going out, to the bars, in the shops....Sunday afternoon go to the cinema to see the Hollywood movie, the last stupidity that is out. I am not saying that Holywood doesn't produce any good films, eh! But you know.. This is their way of living.

According to the narratives of the participants, the lack of willingness to act upon social and environmental issues when it involved any kind of effort and the avoidance of acknowledging and taking responsibility are two elements that differentiate the out-group from the members of the cooperatives. In other words, even if severe critiques of powerful social agents take place, the members of the cooperatives claim to accept their individual responsibility and the need for individual action to change the current situation, while outsiders don't. Below, the ironic sketch in the magazine TROC is an example of how the participants perceive the outsiders. This sketch shows people drifting the blame for water shortage to politicians, while they overconsume water in everyday activities such as taking a bath, watering, cleaning, swimming in the pool.

**Figure 7.10:** Lack of individual responsibility



This leads to the classification of these consumers as comfortable bourgeois by the members of the cooperatives. In this way, they mark the ideological boundaries of the in-group (members of the cooperatives) that is conscious on social and environmental

issues and acts on them and of the out-group who prefers to live in their 'middle-class lie'. However, the identity clash does not end there.

The participants discuss how people outside the group treat them. In various occasions they claim to receive strange reactions because they engage in ethical projects, both individual and collective. During the research analysis, this experience was titled 'Strange Reactions'. In some cases, these reactions are explicitly expressed. For instance, they are named close-minded and they are laughed at. In other cases, the strange reactions are not explicit and limited to looks that the consumers perceive as making fun of them or looking at them in weird ways. The following cites were selected to describe this type of situations.

Laura (Ecology Land, interview): *Sometimes they look at me like saying this girl is stupid!*

Rebecca (Ecology Land, interview): *Well, at times people laugh at me, but anyway they know me already..*

Carmen (Organic Veggies, interview): *We made a conference in October in the centre of environmental resources. A wine producer invited us that he has a farm of ecological turism and two members of the cooperative so that we talk...eh..about the producer and consumer...eh...consumption and sustainable turism. We did it there and then in the end he said to us: "Well you people are so close-minded". But we are just survivors after so many attacks that we see from outside! We have the shop open, we give information, they invite us and we go. I think that there are false concepts. They say, these people, the people from Organic Veggies are weird.*

Clara (New Tendency, focus group): *People look at you weird..*

Kat (New Tendency, focus group): *But you have to get over it! (Clara and Kat are laughing)*

Moreover, later discussions classify the engagement in vegetarianism and the exclusive consumption of ecological products as a new food disorder called ortorexia. This is commented in the magazine TROC.

Ferran (Germinal-Sarria, TROC winter 2003): I didn't understand how my *vegan choice, even more ancient than carnivorism, could be catalogued as an obsession. I found it surprising that the fear and preoccupation for hormones, dioxins, genetically modified products, dangerous additives and other food components that are ingested by many people is considered a sickness. I cannot be, according to this new shitty globalization thing, a responsible consumer that is worried for what he ingests; I cannot know what food there is in each season; I cannot check the labels of the products that I buy. All this is just another story and they say that I am ortorexic.*

In less violent situations, the out-group does not openly reject ethical lifestyles because of judging them as weird or abnormal. Instead, the focus is on the limited effectiveness of such lifestyles. This leads to denominations such as hippy or idealist.

Therefore, the consumers do not only feel different but also they are treated differently explicitly or implicitly. These differences contribute to the construction of the collective identity of the group by disengaging from the out-group and by asserting 'who they are not'. In other words, the members mark the difference between themselves and the people outside the cooperative and create an oppositional identity by defining what they are not.

At the same time, they express a sense of belonging in the group of the cooperative, because as they say, they are people that share the same principles and preoccupations.

Xavier (Green Valley, focus group): *Man, here we are! People thinking in a different way for sure..*

Such renegotiation was more evident in consolidated and well functioning groups. The assimilation of principles and ideas presupposes that consumers respect and agree with their co-members. In groups such as Ecology Land, where there was a great diversity of motivations resulting in conflicts in the form of action, it cannot be argued that the process of assimilation has started. At the same time, this shows the lack of a collective identity in the specific group, since the participants do not feel that they



collectively work for the promotion of the same objectives. They feel different within their own group.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT

## **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS**

## Chapter 8: Discussion & Conclusions

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### 8.0 Introduction

While consumer researchers have made remarkable progress to the knowledge base in the area of ethical consumer behaviour during the last thirty years, there is still room for further advances in the study of the changing ethical consumer. The general objective of the present thesis was to contribute to the current state of knowledge by providing a more thorough and broader understanding of the ethical consumer and by covering gaps that were identified in the literature review. Hence, the research efforts were directed towards the understanding of the holistic subjective experience of the ethical consumer, both individual and collective.

Chapter 4 introduced the gaps that this thesis intends to cover and the research questions that guided the project. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 described the planning and operationalisation of the research process, while Chapter 7 presented the results of the analysis. The purpose of this final chapter is to discuss the main findings of the primary research of the doctoral research project. It is structured in five sections, as follows.

In section 8.1, the main findings from the analysis are discussed in relation to the research questions and the literature review. Section 8.2 proposes a conceptual framework that emerged from the conceptualization process in the data analysis. Section 8.3 demonstrates how the research objectives were achieved and outlines the theoretical and practical contributions of the present thesis. Finally, section 8.4 discusses the limitations of the study and section 8.5 presents the implications for future research and practice.



## **8.1 Interpretations and conclusions of the primary research**

This section presents and considers the main findings of the research in relation to what has been found in previous studies. To facilitate understanding, the section is structured according to the research questions and subquestions as outlined in Chapter 4.

### **8.1.1 How do these consumers consume ethically?**

The necessity to ask this question emerged during the literature review. One of the main observations was the fragmentation of research on the ethical consumer. Most previous studies focus on a specific type of practice. Often, researchers study the purchase of Fair Trade products, such as Fair Trade coffee (e.g. De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; 2006) or Fair Trade groceries (e.g. Shaw & Shiu, 2002; Ozcalgar-Toulouse et al., 2006). Some examine the Bring Your Own Bag (BYOB) practice (e.g. Cherrier, 2006; Chan et al., 2007), whereas others study boycotting or voluntary simplified lifestyles (e.g. Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Cherrier, 2005; 2007). Nevertheless, all these studies (with the exception of voluntary simplicity that reveals a different lifestyle approach) examine a very specific fragment of a consumer's everyday life and behaviour. Moreover, all of these behaviours seem to classify as ethical the individual that performs them.

Thus, current ethical consumer research is dispersed and fragmented. Individuals are named as ethical consumers because of engaging in one type of behaviour, but it remains unknown if they are engaged in other ethical projects. Therefore, the first research question was aimed at a holistic understanding of the subjective experience of the ethical consumer and intended to map all the possible outlets for the expression of ethical concerns.

Furthermore, an additional objective was to cover a gap of the literature on the limited research about collective expressions of ethical consumer behaviour. For that purpose, a purposeful sampling strategy was followed. The ethical consumers of this thesis are represented by members of Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, a social trend that is increasingly popular in the region of Catalunya in Spain.

The findings that answer this first research question are structured according to its subquestions:

#### 8.1.1.1 How do these consumers treat ethical consumption as a group project?

The literature review revealed a lack of research on the collectivities that promote and practice ethical consumption. Even though they exist (in section 6. there are examples of collectivities that express the boycott principle, the boycott principle or voluntary simplicity communities), they have been largely ignored by researchers. Low and Davenport (2007) provide a list of legislated and voluntary ethical spaces and briefly present them, but without further exploring any of them. Perhaps the most interesting study until now, with regards collective ethical projects, is the ethnographic study by Bekin et al. (2005; 2007a; 2007b) of the UK New Consumption communities, which are voluntary simplicity communities.

Contributing to this gap, the first research subquestion intended to describe the collective project of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives.

According to the findings, **the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives are a collective project that constitutes a practical expression of the boycott principle.**

This means that the main project carried out is related to positive buying according to environmental and social principles. To be more explicit, it refers to the group purchase of products that comply with the principles set by the collectivities. Interestingly, although a number of different cooperatives were contacted, the set of criteria was the same for all: **ecological, healthy products, local, small commerce and disintermediation.** Most of them also include the purchase of Fair Trade products as acceptable in their list of products, but it didn't appear as a critical factor for group purchase. Moreover, Fair Trade is questioned by the members that emphasize the criterion of proximity and favour local products.

The ideological basis of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is the collective purchase of healthy, natural products directly from small and local producers. Hence, their interest is not only on the quality of the purchased products, but also on who is producing the product. They intend to support the producer through the purchase of his/her products. Therefore, boycotting has a bottom line of supporting and protecting a specific system of production by contributing to its financial viability.

Another element that deserves attention is the functioning of the cooperatives. They all function according to the principles of **self-governance** and **equal participation**. All members have equal rights and obligations. They promote a *participatory system of democracy* where decisions are taken not on the basis of voting but through consensus among the members. Furthermore, they are supposed to participate in the functioning of the cooperative: they must contribute to the operating expenses, work in one of the committees of the cooperative and participate in the activities organised by the cooperative.

Various models of cooperatives were identified during the fieldwork, which show that while starting from the same ideological basis not all the cooperatives treat ethical consumption in exactly the same manner. The most popular models are two: first, the cooperative that is closed to the public, offers products only to the members, opens once per week and has a maximum number of members, and second, the cooperative that is open to the public, has a shop open almost daily and a greater variety of products and the members benefit from discounts when buying. The differences in the models do not only refer to organizational differences, but also imply different cultures and different achievable levels of self-sufficiency from purchasing only in the coop.

The cooperatives that are open to the public have a culture of openness, because their objective is to provide 'ethical' products to a wider public than the members of the coop and they don't put a limit on the number of members they accept. They place more emphasis on the project of group purchase and they offer a greater variety of ethical products. However, at the same time they compromise more with the principles of self-governance and equal participation due to their large size.

Certain factors that incite the adoption of one or another model were identified; the philosophy of the cooperative, the prototype of cooperative it follows, the location of the cooperative (provincial or urban). Finally, the phase of development seems to define the capacity of the cooperative to carry out the model it selected. Some cooperatives have partially adopted a model, but it is a transient model until they mature as a cooperative and reach their ideal model.

Besides the main boycotting project, the cooperatives engage in other types of ethical activities such as minimization of waste generation and DIY projects. They intend to

self-produce part of the products either as a group like in the New Consumption Communities of Bekin et al. (2005), or individual members act as suppliers of some products such as toothpaste, wine and soap.

Nevertheless, the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives shouldn't be seen only as practicing ethical consumption. They have a twofold function; the **practice and promotion of ethical consumer behaviour**. They promote ethical consumer behaviour in various ways; they intend to promote the cooperative model, they actively participate in campaigns that promote different ethical practices (boycotts of big supermarkets, political pressure against Genetically Modified Products, mainstreaming of BYOB) and they organize seminars. Some of them participate in the publication of el TROC, which was used as a data source in the present study. This magazine includes information that facilitates and promotes ethical consumer behaviour (e.g. tips for energy saving, presentation of new ethical alternatives in the market such as ethical banks etc.).

This double facet of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives differentiates it from other collectivities that only focus either on practice (e.g. the voluntary simplicity communities of Bekin et al., 2005; 2007), or on promotion of ethical consumer behaviours (such as Non Profit Organizations: Oxfam, Setem etc).

On the basis of the aforementioned, the array of possibilities of collective projects available to ethical consumer should be broadened to include the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives.

#### 8.1.1.2 Do they undertake other ethical consumer projects on an individual or collective level?

The intention of the present thesis was to yield a holistic understanding of the consumer behaviour of the participants. Is the participation in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives the only ethical practice of the consumers?

According to the findings, the participants are also engaged in individual projects of various types in their everyday lives. Their participation in the cooperatives is just a one part of of their ethical lifestyles that also involves boycotting, buycotting, waste management, recycling, Bring Your Own Bag practices etc. All these are found in the

context of ethically simplified lifestyles, since most participants express an aversion towards excessive consumption and try to minimize their consumption levels.

When a need emerges, they try to satisfy it first through reuse and recycling, instead of buying new products. These consumers consider over-consumption immoral, because it feeds a materialistic lifestyle that they want to escape from. Consumption leads to new circles of consumption, destruction of natural resources and finally to increasing waste accumulation.

To avoid this, they employ various practices, which are distinguished among in-house and outside solutions depending on where the individual finds the resources to satisfy his/her needs. The following practices were identified:

- Purchase reusable products
  - Interchange products
  - Use regiving networks
  - Buy second hand products
  - Reuse of all materials and resources
  - Recycle everything
  - Reduce energy consumption
  - Repair and reuse
  - Self produce what they need
  - Avoid products with excessive packaging and employ the BYOB practice
- Outside solutions*
- In-house solutions*

Many of these practices have been encountered in previous research such as the consumption of ecological produce, avoidance of genetically modified food, vegetarianism, recycling, repairing and reusing, finding new uses for old products or buying second-hand products (Dobscha, 1998; Durning, 1992; Papanek, 1995; Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Newholm, 2005; Bekin et al., 2007). To these, Bekin et al. (2005; 2007a; b) added domestic production but as a practice carried out in communities.

The similarities indicate that independently of the cultural context, individuals employ similar ways to achieve their objective, which is cutting down on their consumption levels. Nevertheless, Catalan ethical consumers do not only reuse their own products,

but also engage in circulating second hand products through regiving networks and interchange of clothes and other products. In this way, they avoid creating new markets of old products such as the second hand, thrift and charity stores. Furthermore, they show a greater sensitivity for the unnecessary waste of water, given the water shortage problems that the region has suffered for years.

Furthermore, while the BYOB has been examined in previous research (Cherrier, 2006; Chan et al., 2007), it hasn't been discussed as a strategy for simplified lifestyles. Here, it is suggested that it should be included, since the objective of the practice is to minimize waste generation. Moreover, it is found within the wider context of waste reduction practices, such as avoidance of products with too much packaging or asking the seller to use less packaging (e.g. less plastic when buying ham, refusing the plastic or paper bag when buying small things), that individuals employ in their everyday life. These findings help to understand the precise nature of ethical simplicity and how Catalan consumers practice it.

Certainly, different levels of intensity were observed among the participants. If we employ the classification proposed by Etzioni (1998), the participants should be placed between the downshiffters and strong simplifiers categories<sup>1</sup>.

All of the participants claim to avoid luxuries and unnecessary purchases. They reuse products until they are not useful anymore, they cut down on their water and energy consumption and when they cannot find a use for their products they might offer them in regiving networks or they recycle them according to the recycling system suggested by the city hall.

Nevertheless, some have restructured their entire lifestyles. The strongest evidence of this is the decision of the stronger simplifiers to change their jobs. Nevertheless, unlike Etzioni (1998), the decision to shun a career is not only because the individual is looking for a less stressful job, more time and more quality of life. It is also because of the need to lead a coherent lifestyle, and this requires that the individual has a job that fits with his ethical self. If not, inner conflicts are produced. This description fits with the UK ethical simplifiers of Shaw & Newholm (2002). Such consumers were also identified in the doctoral research thesis of Bedford (2000) carried out in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> It makes more sense to understand the levels of intensity that Etzioni (1998) proposed as a continuum instead of strictly defined categories, since the participants do not fit exactly to one of them. They are found in-between.

For Etzioni (1998: 5), the strictest level of ethical simplifiers are the holistic simplifiers, those who *'adjust their whole life patterns according to the ethos of voluntary simplicity'* including moving out from the cities to the countryside to lead simpler lives. This description fits more with the consumers of the New Consumption Communities of Bekin et al. (2005; 2007a; b), but not with the participants in this study. Most consumers in this study are individuals leading mainstream lives with normal jobs, families and living in the city. Within their more mainstream lives they strive to maintain coherence between their ethical self and their actions. To accomplish that, they have simplified their lifestyles by cutting down on their general level of consumption. Although there is the need for consumption, they intend to be critical and selective, as they say. On that basis, they boycott using a similar set of criteria as in the cooperative. Furthermore, they engage in boycotting that is against multinational companies as an economic and social model or in less strict cases against specific targets e.g. companies that have a bad reputation, symbols of American lifestyle like Coca Cola, products that have been produced in Asia or are extremely cheap, so much that they suspect the use of sweatshops. Unlike the findings of Connolly and Prothero (2003) and Shaw et al. (2006), the participants clearly prioritized cutting down on consumption ahead of other ethical consumer practices if related to unnecessary purchases.

These findings **justify the decision to look for a holistic view of the behaviour** of the participants instead of focusing on their known ethical project, the cooperative of responsible consumption. An exclusive focus on the project of the cooperative would have falsely led to identify these consumers as boycotters, while they are more than that. They are voluntary ethical simplifiers that when they have no other choice than buying they intend to be consistent with their ethical beliefs and they employ boycotting or boycotting. The fact that the cooperative of responsible consumption covers mainly the basic needs of alimentation fits with this conclusion. In other words, they mainly engage in traditional consumption that Corrigan (1997:10) describes as *"Traditional consumption is quite fixed: there is a finite number of needs to be filled, and the only wants and desires anyone might have would relate quite directly to this narrow sphere"*.

On the basis of these findings, an alternative definition of the ethical consumer could be provided:

**‘Ethical Consumer is the individual that adopts a macro-perspective of the impact of his consumption on society and the environment and accordingly defines his consumption levels and choices.’**

In other words, the ethical consumer envisages the chain reactions provoked by his purchase decisions. The ethical consumer considers that any purchase supports a specific kind of market structure. According to the logic of the consumers in this thesis, when they purchase from a multinational for instance, they contribute to the survival and growth of the multinational company and so, to a capitalistic system with severe social implications.

Furthermore, it would be false to consider that the ethical consumer has to consume. His/her ethical concerns can be expressed both by consumption choices through boycotting and boycotting or by a reduction in consumption. It should be clarified that consumption refers to all kinds of consumption such as energy and water consumption.

#### 8.1.1.3 What difficulties do they experience?

The third research subquestion intends to complete the picture with the inconsistencies and difficulties that the consumers face. Agreeing with Newholm (2005), the perfect ethical consumer is unattainable. Therefore, while they engage in ethical projects, there are other types of behaviours that are inconsistent with their ethical self. The intention of the doctoral student was not to make consumers narrate their reality and judge them on the basis of their errors. Instead, it was important to understand what they perceive as inconsistent from their part and discuss it, since it is part of their experience as ethical consumers.

Indeed, various inconsistencies were inevitably identified. Most of them were related to purchase decisions, while some were linked to the general lifestyle of the individuals. For instance, a frequently appearing theme was the guilt that consumers felt when travelling by airplane because they considered it a highly contaminating activity. Nevertheless, they tried to justify their action by stressing the impossibility of doing otherwise.



The attribution of the blame was the criterion for the classification of the appearing inconsistencies. The framework of neutralization techniques was employed as proposed by Strutton (1994).

Neutralization techniques have been used in consumers ethics to show how consumers neutralize their feelings of guilt when they proceed with an unethical act (e.g. Cohn & Vaccaro, 2006). Recently, they have been applied in ethical consumer behaviour (Chatzidakis et al., 2007).

In this case, the neutralization techniques made sense to partially explain the attribute of the blame. Consumers externalized to a great extent the responsibility for being inconsistent and they blamed external factors such as inefficient market and institutional structures or the need to comply with the social context. These inconsistencies fit with two of the neutralization techniques that Strutton (1994) proposes; appeal to higher loyalties and denial of responsibility. They were categorized as follows:

- Appeal to higher loyalties
  - ✓ Pester Power
  - ✓ Social Obligations
- Denial of Responsibility
  - ✓ Lack of availability of ethical alternatives
  - ✓ Lack of transparency of information
  - ✓ Limited Budget and High prices
  - ✓ Inefficient Ethical Alternatives

Nevertheless, it was thought that the neutralization techniques could not fully explain the attribution of blame, simply because the participants did not always externalize their part of the fault. In some cases, their inconsistencies are a consequence of their own individual limitations. The following themes were identified:

- ✓ Opting for the easy choice
- ✓ No one is perfect
- ✓ Change takes time

The aforementioned findings present a holistic image of the ethically concerned, ethically behaved but imperfect consumers of the present thesis.

### **8.1.2 Why do the participants consume ethically?**

Having described the diversity of the ethical projects that the consumers are involved in, the analysis delves deeper into consumers' motivations and meanings. This section provides answers to the second research question of the present thesis by seeing a more thorough understanding of the why of ethical consumer behaviours.

This section is also arranged according to the research subquestions that were presented in Chapter 4.

#### **8.1.2.1 What motivates them to participate in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives? What meanings do they attach to this ethical project?**

Given that the common ground of all the participants was their participation in the collective project of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, the first aim was to empirically examine the personal meanings that the individuals attached to their membership in the cooperatives.

An increasing research line within the interpretive stream of ethical consumer behaviour focuses on this type of questions. Among the existing projects, we find studies looking for the hidden meanings behind voluntary simplified lifestyles (Cherrier, 2005), BYOB (Cherrier, 2006) and boycotting (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998) (for more detail see Section 3.2.1.4). Nevertheless, very little research (Bekin et al., 2005) looking for the hidden meanings that drive ethical collective participation was identified.

The analysis of the data demonstrated that the participants were driven by a great diversity of motivations. Furthermore, the meanings derived from the participations in the cooperative were renegotiated during their experience in the cooperative. This means that a dynamic process took place and that the initial motivations of the consumers were changed as time passed by and the individuals were being incorporated into the cooperatives. For that reason, we distinguish among the initial motivations of the consumers when they first joined the cooperative and the meanings

that they derived from their participation after spending some time as members in the cooperative. Here, it should be reiterated that the sample consists of members with varying years of participation ranging from 3 months to 30 years (at the moment of the interview). Such variation was sought to identify differences in the discourses of the participants. According to the data analysis, the participants came to the cooperative guided by three types of motivations:

- Utility: One of the most frequently appearing motivations was the search for easier access to quality products. For the participants, quality is defined as healthy and tasty (when it refers to alimentation) products. Indeed, the most frequent motive behind the purchase of ecological products was found to be health concerns (Magnusson et al., 2003). Moreover, the reasonable pricing of the ecological products in comparison to outside channels was another advantage of the cooperative in some cases. The latter was associated with existence or not of cheaper ecological products outside the cooperative and the capacity to self-produce, which was frequent in the provincial cities.
- Social Interaction: Others came looking for a social circle. They saw the cooperative as a social space where they could meet people with the same interests and principles as themselves. This was quite common for members that had just moved to the neighbourhood of the cooperative. But it has to be clarified that this motivation was never the single motivation for the decision to participate. It was accompanied by one of the other two categories of motivations.
- Politics: For others the cooperative had a different meaning. Their participation took the content of political action, since through the collectivity they tried to react against the current economic and political status quo. Their intention was the initiation and establishment of an alternative system whereby they could invite more people to participate. The features of the cooperative that served that purpose were two: i) the group purchase on the basis of social and environmental criteria, ii) the participation in a collectivity where equality, participation and self-governance were the principles to be applied.

The spectrum of derived meanings from the participation in the collectivity was amplified as time passed. The participants that came looking for ecological products,

incorporated the political motivations of their co-members and vice-versa. So, during the participation some of the aforementioned motivations were strengthened, while more were added. This led the participants to derive multiple meanings from their participation in the coop:

- Coop as a Social Space
- Coop as Militancy/Protest
- Coop as a space of Authenticity
- Coop as a way to Gain Control over the Purchase's Impact and over the Production Process
- Coop as new Learning and Experiences
- Coop as a way to Revive the Past and Maintain Traditions

These findings explain why the individuals joined, founded and continue participating in the cooperatives after years of membership (the average participation was found to be between 4 and 5 years<sup>2</sup>).

When comparing the meanings derived from the collective ethical experience to the individual ethical experience, the following similarities and differences are observed. A common meaning derived from ethical consumer experiences, both collective and individual, is the seizing of control and empowerment. This was also found in other studies (Cherrier, 2005; Shaw et al, 2006; Bekin et al., 2005; 2007a; b). Cooperative consumers feel empowered from participating in the cooperative. They feel they can make a change and that they can control the impact of their purchase on society, especially since they do it as a group. Shaw et al. (2006: 1059) also found that consumers felt more empowered because of belonging to '*a much larger vaguely articulated collective group of consumers*', but in the case of the cooperatives this feeling becomes more tangible due to the formalized nature of the group.

Furthermore, control has more meanings. It refers to the direct control the participants exercise upon the production process in terms of how the product is produced and who produces it. The cooperative project allows for stricter and more rigorous quality checks in the ingredients, the origin and production process. The shorter production-

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<sup>2</sup> Minimum participation in the cooperative was 3 months and maximum 30 years.

consumption cycles offer a greater level of transparency fighting against the ‘papaya’ phenomenon that Cook describes (2004).

Moreover, the collective nature of the project presents the cooperative as a space of socialization and learning, because of the interaction that takes place among the members. This differentiates ethical collective projects from the ones carried out on an individual level.

When compared to the New Consumption Communities of Bekin et al. (2005; 2007a; b), some consumers seem to perceive their participation in the collectivity more as a resistance to the current economic and social system, whereas the consumers in Bekin et al.’s study perceived their collective projects as positive alternatives, but not as resistance. In this study the collectivity becomes a means of changing the social dynamics and key words such as ‘fight’, ‘war’ and ‘enemies’ indicate the militant character of the ethical initiative. The reasoning for the identified difference might lie in the isolation of the New Consumption Communities of Bekin et al. (2005; 2007a; b) from the world. Some of the respondents even claim that the New Consumption Communities are their safe haven, their escape door from the world. However, in this study, consumers haven’t given up on their usual lives; they haven’t selected alternative lifestyles away from the city noise, but strive to be ethical within the context of their more mainstream lives. This difference and their everyday confrontation with recurring themes in the analysis such as materialism, capitalism and contamination might be the cause of more tension leading them to think that there is a ‘war’ going on.

### 8.1.2.2 How have these consumers constructed reality? What are their perceptions, worldviews and concerns?

This research sub question tried to look even deeper and understand what motivated the participants in the first place. It is understood that behaviours such as the participation in the cooperative or the other ethical projects are a product of the interaction of the participants with their surrounding reality. Dembkowski and Hanmer-Lloyd (1994) refer to them as global values.

Hence, the most saturated perceptions of the consumers of their surrounding reality are the following:

#### *1. There is no democracy*

The participants feel unsatisfied with the existing participatory democratic system and in specific with the following:

- Lack of participation in the decision making

A frequently emerging finding is a perceived lack of decision-making power. The existing representative democracy is highly criticised because it limits the participants to voting every four years in order to select representatives that do not really stand for their best interest. Therefore, they see this as being situations imposed to them that they have not selected and that might harm them, since they serve the interest of powerful social agents such as the authorities (all levels: local, national, European) and large multinationals.

- Lack of transparency of information

Besides the lack of an official and effective means of participation in the system, the participants feel that information is not publicly available and accessible. They blame the powerful social agents for the asymmetric information the powerful social agents. In this way, they leave the consumers/citizens uninformed and powerless, vulnerable to accept what the multinationals and big companies push on to the marketplace.

#### *2. Capitalism brings problems*

Although not explicitly, ethical consumers have been defined as anti-capitalists in previous research, since they attributed social injustice and inequality to the

capitalistic system and the overarching dominance of multinationals (Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Shaw et al., 2005). This study confirms and extends these conclusions. The participants disapprove of the negative effects of capitalism beginning with the condemnation of the concentration of power among multinationals and big supermarket chains. As found in Shaw et al. (2005), the consumers show distrust in the multinationals, especially when they present a poor ethics record. Nevertheless, in this study consumers show little faith in all ethical and socially responsible initiatives considering them as another marketing trick. Such skepticism was also identified in the studies by Webb & Mohr (1998) and Carrigan and Attalla (2001).

Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that the problems caused by the capitalistic system do not end there. For them, the related social and economic consequences of capitalism are as follows:

- Unsustainable progress and growth

For the participants, the capitalistic system is responsible for giving a negative notion to the words ‘growth’ and ‘progress’, since they have been both used for the implementation of an industrial system looking only for the maximization of profits of the multinationals. Setting the maximum profit as the paramount objective has led to an overuse of natural resources such as petroleum and of a planet that they consider finite and weak. So they relate capitalism with the emergence of **environmental** and **health risks** that threaten them. This view is consistent with the concept of risk society that Beck proposed (1992; 2006). Nevertheless, in this case consumers are not waiting for the appearance of unknown threats. Multinationals and the industrial model that capitalism has fed are the responsible and therefore are seen as the ‘enemy’.

- Injustice in the marketplace

As mentioned before, this finding confirms the previous empirical results of Shaw et al. (2005). Similar to the UK consumers of Shaw et al. (2005), it is expressed that the control and dominance of multinationals in the global economy and in specific in the food and beverage sector create unfair and unequal trade relations. The ‘injured’ part are the small producers that are **exploited** and finally **disappear**, since they are not able to survive the low prices that multinationals impose to them. Nevertheless, the participants in this study stress a further point of importance. They perceive that the

actual economic system and the multinationals dominance have put in danger the territorial food sovereignty of the countries. As one participant mentions, multinationals hold the attitude that ‘the world is my farm’. In this way, they prevent countries from holding a level of self-sufficiency in terms of food production.

The issue of **food sovereignty** appears as of crucial importance for the participants especially since they perceive that the local agriculture of their territory is put in danger. Such a loss would symbolize an attack **to their culture and tradition**, since local agriculture, local producers and autochthonous seeds appear as a part of their culture. This finding emerges as an important cultural difference with previous results mainly sourced from UK.

- Materialistic life model and the existence of a fake reality

Another finding of this study that hasn’t been previously identified before is the perception of many consumers of being unconsciously trapped in the system that powerful social agents have imposed on them. One participant parallelizes this with the movie Matrix and the Allegory of the cave of Plato. Both intend to demonstrate that individuals are trapped in a fake reality that they do not control. They are ‘plugged into’ the system and they ignore reality. Furthermore, participants claim that most people do not want to escape this fake reality, because it is much easier for them to carry on living like this.

This fake reality refers to the materialistic model of life that multinationals propose. In this way, individuals become accommodated to their role as consumers and satisfy all needs and problems through overconsumption. Besides creating an illusion of happiness and life, overconsumption and materialism are considered by many participants in the study as inherently immoral and wrong, since it keeps feeding its generator, capitalism. The narratives of the participants are embedded in the immorality of consumption that Borgmann talks about (2000).

- Alienation of consumer from production

Borgmann (2000) previously discussed the disassociation of production and consumption, which contributed to the dominance of materialism. The participants acknowledge their alienation from the production process and their estrangement with the person who produces what they consume. But they see more negative connotations to this. The main consequence is losing contact with nature. One



participant explains this by calling herself an analphabet of the earth, unable to self-produce to feed herself, ignorant of what the seasonal harvest should be and totally dependent on what big supermarkets arrange offer to her.

*3. Lack of freedom and of control of one's life*

It could be argued that the lack of freedom and control can be sensed in all previous perceptions. What was previously explained shows the lack of control that these consumers feel in terms of making their own decisions in all facets of their lives. They feel that the economic and political status quo doesn't offer them options. Instead, a fake reality is forced upon them, a reality that alienates them from what really happens around them. Within this reality, they are passive observers of the rules that powerful social agents impose, while their role is limited to working, producing, gaining a salary and spending it consuming.

### 8.1.2.3 What factors affect their perceptions of reality and consequently their behaviour?

Previous research has tried to profile the ethical consumers (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). For that purpose, socio-demographic and psychological variables have been used but they were considered insufficient in terms of accurately indentifying the ethical consumer. Furthermore, given the great diversity of ethical consumers it would be overly simplistic to consider that Fair Trade consumers would fit in the same profile as ethical simplifiers given their different projects. The main conclusion of previous research is that research that has focused on the delineation of the ethical consumer has not been successful in describing the ethical consumer. Cherrier (2007) adds to that by implying that voluntary simplifiers transcend class structures and variables such as gender, age, profession or sexual orientation cannot give answers around whether there is a common pattern among the people that adopt a simplified lifestyle. Haanpää (2007) agrees and attributes the absence of background variables to profile green consumers to the complexity of certain variables such as income and education.

Therefore, while information regarding basic socio-demographic (age, gender, education, profession, income) and lifestyles variables (type of diet, transport used) was gathered, it was understood from the outset that these might not have any influence on the formation of ethical perceptions or the performance of ethical behaviours. It should be reiterated that the purpose of this study was not to offer a profile which would have required a quantitative design and larger samples, but to explore the existence of factors that might influence the formation of ethical beliefs and the engagement in ethical projects.

So, as Cherrier (2005) suggests the search was more towards the identification of common story lines among the participants. Starting with no pre-formed hypotheses in mind, as Glaser and Strauss (1967; 1977) advise, factors that could have some type of relevance were searched.

Interestingly, certain themes kept emerging. While Cherrier (2005) identified unpredictable events (e.g. rape, divorce) that made the participants question their lifestyles and made them turn to more simple lives, this is not always the case as the findings of this study suggest. According to the participants, the adoption of simpler

lifestyles and the formation of the aforementioned perceptions was not the result of an abrupt change but of a slow process.

First, the emergence of certain perceptions and the consequent engagement in certain ethical projects was related to the formation of cognitive frames during childhood. Many of the participants try to reproduce what they have learnt as moral and sustainable in their families. Then, it was observed that many of the participants were coming from **simple-living families** and they were often brought up in villages. There, they learnt the importance of self-sufficiency and the reuse of everything to cover their needs, while overconsumption was criticised as immoral. Furthermore, they created a close relationship with nature which they tried to regain through their participation in the cooperative. Finally, the fact that their families used to be or still are farmers makes them more sensitive towards their difficulties of survival.

Another relevant factor was the **type of education** that the participants received, since many were graduates of environmental sciences, chemistry, biology and agricultural engineering. The relevance lies on the fact that during their studies they received an '*overdose of information*' as one participant mentions, which increased their knowledge and ethical sensitivity. Nevertheless, for others learning took place outside the university in **alternative communities** where they lived for some time. These experiences showed them that alternative lifestyles are feasible.

For others, the observation of the context made them point out the seriousness of some of the consequences of capitalism such as health and environmental risks and the replacement of the agricultural tradition by the industrial model, since the effects are obvious in their surrounding environment.

Then, specific experiences such as **having children** or **health problems** created or intensified the need for more healthy products, which finally led the consumers to the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives.

Another factor that was seen as important for taking action was the achievement of **economic stability** and **financial independency**, because it permitted to the consumers to make their choices when buying and put first criteria other than price.

### **8.1.3 Are the aforementioned re-negotiated within the cooperative?**

Given the limited research on ethical consumer communities, an issue that hasn't been addressed is the dynamic negotiation of practices of ethical consumption within such communities. This study offers interesting findings with regards this question.

First, it confirms that the participation in an ethical community is a significant source of information, experiences and learning. The respondents say that they learn from each other and especially from the members of the cooperative that have been identified as the experts and more ethically committed individuals. Information about a range of individual ethical strategies is offered. The respondents claim to gain valuable knowledge on how to cut on their consumption and waste and they are suggested ethical alternatives when shopping outside the cooperative.

Second, a process of assimilation of meanings and ideas takes place in the cooperative. Most members claim to have changed their way of thinking during their participation in the collectivity. For instance, members that came looking for healthy and tasty products started to consider the political nature of the project and vice versa.

Third, most members have incorporated the principles and purchase criteria of the collectivity (local, small, ecologic and no intermediates) as their bottom line when buying on an individual level. The participation in the cooperative has functioned as the awakening of their consciousness and this has implications on their general lifestyle. Furthermore, the existence of the project shows the feasibility of an ethical lifestyle and motivates them toward a more extended application of ethical criteria in consumer behaviours outside the cooperative.

Fourth, this assimilation in ideas, meanings and behaviours leads to the construction of a collectively shared identity among the members. They mark ideological boundaries between the in-group (members of the cooperatives) that is conscious on social and environmental issues and acts on them and the out-group who criticise the effort and effectiveness of ethical lifestyles.

It has to be mentioned that the assimilation of ideas and meanings was observed in consolidated and well functioning cooperatives.

A basic limitation to answer this research question was the limited time frame of the research. Most respondents were already members of the cooperatives for some years,

so the process of co-production and assimilation of meanings and ideas was described by them, but not observed by the doctoral student.

## 8.2 Development of the conceptual framework

In the previous sections, the main results of the primary research were briefly presented and discussed. The purpose of this section is to integrate the knowledge that emerged during the data collection and analysis into a conceptual framework.

This conceptual model intends to offer a holistic view of the subjective ethical consumer experience, given that this was the unit of analysis in this study. The objective is to advance the existing knowledge on ethical consumer behaviour by answering the main research questions: ‘How the participants consume ethically?’, ‘Why they consume ethically?’ and ‘Are the aforementioned re-negotiated within the ethical space of the cooperative?’.

Each layer of the model answers the research sub-questions that were formulated in Chapter 4 and consequently, the more general research questions of the thesis.

The model starts with the factors that were identified as relevant in the formation of the participants’ worldviews and social constructions of reality. The most saturated concepts were those of (i) growing up in simple living families, (ii) learning because of getting in contact with alternative cultures such as hippy communes or kibuts or because of having studied sciences related to environment and nature, (iii) living and observing a context where industries expand and nature is polluted. All of them contribute to the formation of cognitive frames to judge the world and the ongoing changes.

The second layer describes how the participants view their external world and what type of perceptions they shape. As it emerged from the data analysis, the consumers feel that the modern version of democracy that they live in deprives them from their basic rights such as participating in the decision making. Decisions are imposed to them from the powerful social agents (authorities and multinationals) and for that, they present an aversion towards what capitalism represents and produces. All these, deprive them from their liberty and do not let them control their lives. Even if, these perceptions are more general and not only specific to ethical consumer behaviours, they are the inner motives that drive their behaviours.

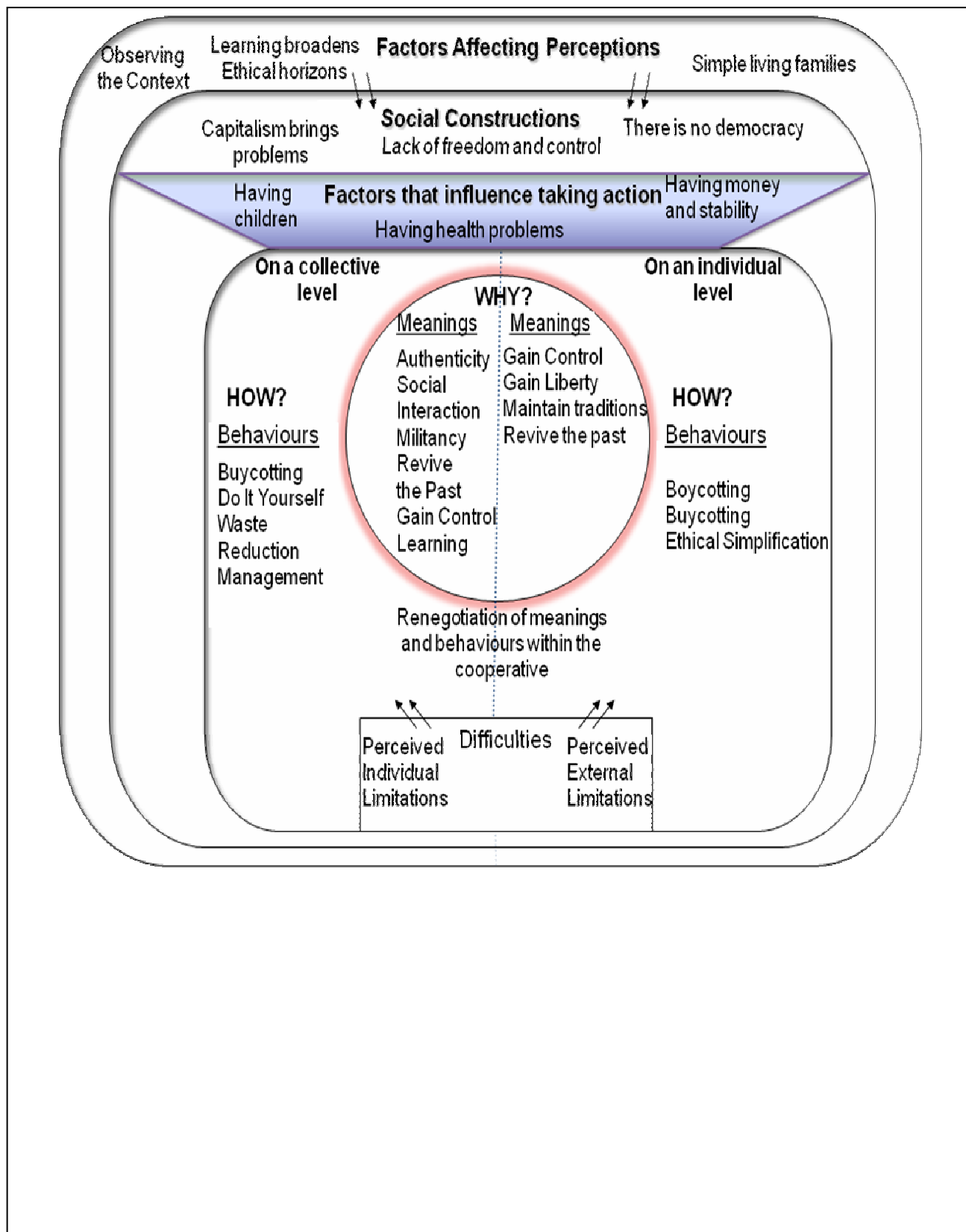
In-between layers are found some factors that partially explain what urges the ethical consumers to act on their ethical concerns and adopt more specific behavioural

strategies. Nevertheless, it is not claimed that an exhaustive list of such factors is provided. Future research could identify more factors that facilitate the adoption of ethical lifestyles such financial stability in this study or simply intensify the need to act, like having children o health problems.

Moving from general to specific, the final layer shows the ethical strategies employed by the ethical consumer both on a collective and individual level and the respective meanings derived. Nevertheless, the perfect ethical consumer is unattainable. Thus, there are situations where the ethical consumer might compromise given the difficulties he/she encounters.

Here, special attention should be placed on the renegotiation of meanings and behaviours that takes place within the ethical space of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives. The participation in such projects changes the ethical consumer, who reevaluates the implications of his/her actions and finds new behavioural outlets to express himself/ herself.

**Figure 8.0:** Conceptual Framework of the subjective ethical consumer experience. Understanding how and why individuals consume ethically





### 8.3 Accomplishment of the objectives set

At this point, it would be useful to check whether the research objectives set in Chapter 4 were achieved. To ensure that, research objectives are reviewed one by one.

<p><b>1. To describe the strategies that consumers undertake to express their ethicality both in an individual and a collective level.</b></p>
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This objective has been fully accomplished. Previous research has focused mainly on one type of behaviour, either boycotting, buycotting with an emphasis on Fair Trade or voluntary simplicity. Nevertheless, the holistic perspective of this study has showed that the aforementioned strategies are not necessarily carried out by different types of ethical consumers, but can fit in the same lifestyle.

In this case, the participants were selected because they are engaged in a collective ethical project, but this is just a fragment of how they channel their ethical concerns. From a holistic view, the participants try to simplify their lifestyles and reduce their consumption levels. New insights are gained with regard the strategies they employ to satisfy their emerging needs. Furthermore, the collective project of Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is detailedly described, given that there is very limited research conducted on collective expressions of ethical consumer behaviour.

<p><b>2. To explore the meanings they derive from their actions and their respective motivations</b></p>
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This objective has been achieved as well. The meanings that consumers derive from their behaviours are explained in the second part of the results chapter (section 7.2.2 & 7.2.3). Different meanings are derived from the collective project and the individual projects. Nevertheless, the need for more freedom and control over one's life are common denominators in all actions.

**3. To comprehend how they have built their external social reality**

This objective has also been achieved to a great extent. Section 7.2.1 explains how the participants have constructed their surrounding reality and it can be seen how these social constructions influence their behaviours and lifestyle.

**4. To examine whether the participation in a social network and ethical space such as ethical cooperatives influences the individual members through the renegotiation of meanings and perceptions and through the sharing of a collective identity.**

This objective has been partially achieved. It was observed that a renegotiation of meanings takes place within the cooperative. For instance, consumers that were interested mostly in their health, became more attracted to the political nature of the cooperative and vice versa. Furthermore, others admitted that they incorporated the criteria of the cooperative on a personal level. Nevertheless, we had access to the result of this process, but not in the process itself. This would have required probably a much longer ethnographic study, where the renegotiation that took place could have been observed as it was happening. Nevertheless, the resources available, especially in terms of time and cost, didn't allow it.

**5. To provide empirical findings that represent a different reality than UK and US, keeping in mind that the perception of ethics might be culturally-bound.**

This objective was clearly achieved. The empirical findings describe the narratives of Catalan ethical consumers and broaden the scope of knowledge of ethical consumer experiences in Spain. Even if similarities are found when compared with the widely researched contexts of Northern Europe and US, there are culturally bound differences that justify the undertaking of research in different contexts.

## 8.4 Contributions of the Study

This section presents the theoretical and practical contributions of the study comparing the findings with previous empirical research.

### 8.4.1 Theoretical contributions

- A first theoretical contribution would be to provide an insight into collective expressions of ethical consumer behaviour. The primary reason for doing this would be to ensure the fit between reality and social science, given that collective expressions of ethical consumer behaviour exist, but they are not well represented in the literature. The exception would be the study by Bekin et al. (2005; 2007a; b) who studied voluntary simplicity in communities. This study principally focuses on how boycotting behaviour is carried out in a communal context complementing the sole focus on individual behaviour.
- This study has contributed to achieving a more profound and detailed understanding of the collective ethical consumer experience. Not only the ethical collectivity is described, but also the collective ethical consumer experience is explored in depth. This has led to the identification of a diversity of meanings that the individuals derive from their behaviours, pointing out the differences and similarities between individual and collective ethical experiences. For instance, while both individual and collective ethical boycotting are projects that empowered consumers carry out in search of control (Dickinson & Carsky, 2005; Shaw et al., 2006), control and empowerment are gained in different ways. In individual boycotting, empowerment is achieved indirectly by viewing the purchase as an economic vote that has to be cast upon the fair and good. Here, the control refers to the impact of the purchase. Nevertheless, in the case of the cooperatives, control is gained in different ways; the support of certain production systems, the establishment of new ecologic certification systems and the direct control over the production process. By cutting out the intermediaries and establishing direct

relationships with the producer, increased transparency and control are gained that further empower the consumer.

Furthermore, the sense of community that the cooperative provides and the learning that takes place are additional benefits that the consumer considers and receives. In addition, compared to the New Consumption Communities of Bekin et al, (2007a; b), some consumers seem to perceive their participation in the collectivity more as a resistance to the current economic and social system, whereas according to Bekin et al.'s results the consumers in her study perceived their collective projects as positive alternatives, but not as resistance. In this study the collectivity becomes a means of changing the social dynamics and key words such as 'fight', 'war' and 'enemies' highlight this difference.

- Another important contribution is the proposal of a conceptual framework that integrates the knowledge that emerged during the data collection/ analysis. This framework provides a broader and more in-depth view of the ethical consumer experience. Furthermore, the holistic perspective of the consumer behaviour of the individuals allows understanding that behaviours previously considered as competing can fit within the same ethical lifestyle given the broad scope of consumption. The consumers in this study adopt simplified lifestyles guided by the principle that overconsumption is immoral. So, they satisfy emerging needs through reusing, recycling and self-producing. Nevertheless, they find themselves obliged to participate in the conventional market structures to satisfy some of their consumer needs. In these cases, purchasing is required and unavoidable. But, in order to ethicalise his inevitable purchase, the individual uses it as a means for political and social change by boycotting and buycotting. This answers the debate with regards to ethics and consumption (Sorrell & Hendry, 1994; Barnett et al., 2005; Bekin et al., 2005) on whether consumption should be the means for change seen as a form of political pressure or it should be seen as immoral and feeding the capitalistic system of overproduction and consumerism. The modern sophisticated consumers can be placed in-between both positions and adapt according to their circumstances.

- It gives a comprehensive insight into how simplified lifestyles can be achieved. A list of strategies that allow cutting down on consumption and reducing waste were identified. While some of the practices have been encountered in other studies (Dobscha, 1998; Durning, 1992; Papanek, 1995; Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Newholm, 2005; Bekin et al., 2007a; b) the findings of the present study show a number of further practices that simplifiers use. The frequent and common use of interchange markets among friends for clothes and electric appliances and of regiving networks reveal how the participants manage to cut down their consumption through outside solutions but without creating new markets and new consumption spaces such as the second-hand shops, thrift and charity shops found in Williams & Paddock (2003), Williams et al. (2005) and Bekin et al. (2007a; b). Furthermore, it is proposed that practices such as BYOB and avoidance of packaging when purchasing should be included in the array of voluntary simplicity behaviours, since they aim at reducing waste and simplify consumption.

First, it is proposed to divide these practices into two categories; in-house and outside solutions, depending on where the individual searches simplified and sustainable solutions for his needs. For instance, domestic production or finding new uses for old products would be an in-house solution, whereas buying second-hand products would be an outside solution.

- It provides empirical findings for the contexts outside the UK and the US. This is useful, because the perception of ethics in the UK and the US cannot be facilely generalized to other contexts. Ethics is bound to the context and the culture of the consumers, since the intensity of the need to act upon certain ethical concerns- what Shaw & Shiu (2002) call ethical obligation- follows different priorities in different contexts. For instance, most participants appeared very concerned with water shortages and try to reuse water as much as possible; collect rain water, reuse shower water to water plants or to flush the toilet. These findings cannot be decontextualized, since in Spain water shortage is a frequent issue leading to a greater awareness on the part of individuals. Another example is the support of local produce. This is seen as imperative in their consumer decision making. They prioritize local produce because they see local agriculture as a part of their cultural identity and tradition that they need to protect. Therefore, by boycotting projects

they are not only consistent with their ethical self, but also with their Catalan self. These findings call for more research on ethical consumers in diverse cultural settings.

#### 8.4.2 Practical contributions

- The implications of the emergence and study of ethical collectives are important for the evolution of the ethical consumer movement, given that a traditional obstacle for aspiring ethical consumers has been the limited perceived impact of individual ethical action (Burgess et al., 1995; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Mohr et al., 2001; Shaw & Duff, 2002; Carrigan et al., 2004; Eckhart et al., 2006). However, according to the findings the membership in the cooperative increases the empowerment that the individual feels and makes the social change more tangible. At the same time, the participation in the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives overcomes the confusion that can be created from individualized ethical actions when individuals with the same goal – e.g. help the poor of underdeveloped countries by buying Fair Trade- engage in different actions – e.g. as buy Fair Trade from supermarkets or from alternative shops- and send different market messages (Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Shaw et al., 2006). Instead, the group purchases of the cooperatives send a unified message to the market. The study of this project shows that ethical action is formalized and standardized within the cooperative, resulting in a homogeneous, stronger and more effective strategy.
  
- The presentation of the model of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is offered as a possibility for the concerned consumers who wish to challenge current market structures and search pathways to act on their ethical concerns. The advantages of such project are:
  - Feasibility: It is carried out within the context of more mainstream lives without requiring important sacrifices from the part of the participants such as moving out from the city like in the case of voluntary simplicity communities and premaculture villages.
  - Effectiveness: Consumers do not exercise an indirect control over the market like in other cases of boycotting or boycotting. The charm of the cooperatives is that they are actively involved in generating alternative networks of production and consumption. They are not told to whom their money goes, like in Fair Trade. They check and control it themselves. Moreover, the

increasing expansion of the cooperative model in the region and the inter-cooperative meetings strengthen the sense of effectiveness and empowerment, since they are not single individuals acting alone, but part of a greater network that works towards the establishment of an alternative economic and political system.

- Additional benefits: Other benefits that emerge from the participation in the cooperative are the sense of belonging in a community and the creation of a social circle, as well as new learning and new experiences.
- Even if exact figures are not available, the project of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives is gaining increasing popularity especially after 2000. This shows the existence of a growing segment of the population willing to pay higher prices (given that ecological products are more expensive than the products of conventional agriculture) for products and to adapt their consumer habits to fit with the cooperative project. As it emerged during the research, in many cases the cooperative members have to adjust their consumption, so that their weekly purchase from the cooperative covers their needs. Furthermore, in many occasions they do not get to choose what they will consume.

Nevertheless, all these are compensated by the fact that they get access to healthy, quality, ecological products, that they manage to support local agriculture and that they increase the transparency of the production/consumption cycle. The importance that this group gives to the aforementioned criteria should be taken into account by companies who wish to target them. Even if most participants present an 'aversion' towards multinationals, the limited offer of 'purely' ethical and accessible alternatives leaves room for ethical initiatives of more mainstream companies. For instance, corporate disclosure for greater transparency in the production process could be welcomed by these consumers.

Furthermore, the interest that these consumers show in any ethical initiative that exists in the market (e.g. ethical banking and ethical tourism), makes them a possible target group for ethical businesses. Indeed, some cooperatives have created accounts in ethical banks.



## 8.5 Limitations of the study

As described in the previous section, this thesis has made its contributions to the area of knowledge of the ethical consumer. Nevertheless, as in any research project, there are a number of limitations that should be discussed in order to allow a more objective evaluation of the empirical findings. This section presents the limitations of the current project. The weaknesses of the present thesis could be covered by future research leading to further advances in the body of knowledge.

### Sampling

A first limitation is related to the final sample of the participants. As mentioned in Chapter 7 some of the members in the cooperatives have minimal participation in the cooperative activities (free riders). It would be interesting to sample some of them, so that they can give their insights into what drove them to the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives, into the meanings derived from their participation and into the possible individual ethical projects they might be engaged into.

Nevertheless, these members either did not agree to participate (when asked by the doctoral student or the gatekeeper in the cooperative), or they did not even learn about the research project due to their minimal participation in the cooperative project. For instance, when the doctoral student was asking how she could get in touch with these members and interview them, another member of the cooperative replied that it was not feasible, because even she hadn't seen them for almost a year. Information about these members was only accessible through the interviewees.

As a result, it should be noted that the final sample consists of people with a great interest and a significant implication in the cooperative project. This could possibly bias the results of the research.

### Research Method

A second limitation was identified in relation to the research methods that were employed. As already mentioned, their complementary use sought a more holistic view of the collective and individual experience of the ethical consumer of the study. Nevertheless, difficulties arose in the use of focus groups when in one case the doctoral student could not control the number of the participants. This resulted in

more participants than expected and to relative dominance of four members in the beginning of the discussion. To compensate, the doctoral student had to continuously encourage the other members. While this was achieved, it resulted in a focus group of about 130 min, which was 40 min. longer than what the participants had been informed. No one complained about the longer duration, but signs of tiredness could be identified in some of the participants. Furthermore, their busy schedule did not facilitate follow-up interviews, to fully compensate for this incident.

Furthermore, in some cases it was perceived that some of the members were reproducing the traditional roles they play in the community; the shy individual that doesn't talk unless asked, the extreme ideologist, the one that tries to dominate the conversation. This was an implication of that the members of the cooperatives all knew each other. Nevertheless, this decision was consciously taken, because when the participants of a focus group know each other already, they are more likely to provide an authentic self-presentation (Wooten & Reed, 2000), a major issue in ethical consumer research. Fortunately, an advantage of these groups that compensated the aforementioned weakness is that they are 'trained' in the dialogue, since all their decisions related to the cooperative are taken by consensus. Therefore, they would immediately 'conform' when the moderator would seek equal participation of everyone.

Moreover, the complementary use of observation, focus groups, in-depth interviews, netnography and document analysis offered a more complete view of the collective ethical project of the cooperative. Nevertheless, information on the individual ethical projects was sourced almost exclusively by focus groups and interviews. The drawback of these techniques is complete reliance on consumers' narratives.

### Context

A third limitation is the exclusive focus of the study on the Catalan region. The cultural context of Catalunya could influence or bias the results. While, the increasing popularity of the cooperative model in this region could justify this decision, but future research could provide further insights in other parts of Spain, especially given the cultural diversity within the country, or in other under-researched contexts.

### Data Analysis

A fourth limitation is related to the data finally presented compared to that observed and collected during the fieldwork. Qualitative research can yield a very rich amount of data, but it is difficult to discuss all of the data. Black (2006: 319) discusses this issue and attributes it to the complexity and richness of qualitative data: “*Simply put, how can words fully express the meaning inherent in our observations, personal interviews and pictures when so much of it is subtle, hidden and contextually bound?*”. The richness of the data collected did not allow its full exploitation especially given the time frame of the project.

### Results

With regards to the results it would be unreasonable to claim that a formal, grand theory has been provided. The contributions refer to certain aspects of ethical consumer decision making, such as a description and interpretation of collective ethical behaviours. The researcher presents a holistic view of the ethical consumer experience and narratives from new cultural contexts that can be used as a basis for comparison with existing empirical evidence from the widely researched contexts of the UK and the US or with future evidence from under researched contexts.

In addition, the limited time frame of the project did not allow to spend more time in the field and observe for instance the renegotiation of meanings and behaviours within the ethical space of the cooperative, as well as the formation of a collective identity shared by the members.

## 8.6 Recommendations and directions for future research

On the basis of the aforementioned conclusions and limitations, different lines of investigation come up that could direct future research.

- Test in other contexts to compare results. This refers both to other Spanish regions and other countries where Responsible Consumption Cooperatives have emerged (such as France). Both qualitative and quantitative research could be undertaken. Qualitative research could focus on the discourses of ethical consumers in others contexts. It could be examined whether they share a common identity and whether they perceive their surrounding reality in similar ways. Quantitative research could be undertaken on the values and attitudes that underpin ethical lifestyles.
  
- Engage in ethnographic research to study the renegotiation of meanings within collective spaces such as the cooperatives. It would be particularly interesting to examine newly established cooperatives where the members hold different ideas and principles and the collectivity is in search of an identity. In that case, it would involve immersion of the researcher in the micro-community over a long period of time. Due to time restraints, this was not feasible in the current project.
  
- Conduct further qualitative research on the process of ethical decision making, where the unit of analysis is not the individual, but the family. For instance, an interesting finding in the case of the cooperative of responsible consumption is that the members are not individuals, but family units. According to the respondents, the decision to join the cooperative was welcomed in some of the cases or ignored in others. Therefore, it would be interesting to see how family dynamics affects consumer decisions that involve all the members of the household. This would contribute to a new path of research (Grønjøj, 2006; Carey et al., 2008) that examines ethical consumer decision making on a family level. Previous studies in ethical consumer behaviour have tried to understand how the

social processes that take place within a family guide towards the adoption of certain ethical practices such as recycling (Grønhøj, 2006). The application of ethical consumer lifestyles in a family is definitely more complicated than when applied by an individual, given that they might require the consent of the family members.

- Use of original research techniques for the study of the individual ethical consumer like diaries or online focus groups. While this technique was considered in the present thesis, it was then rejected due to the high rate of non-returnable diaries. Nevertheless, such techniques would offer a new methodological perspective for the study of the ethical consumer, since the use of longitudinal research has been quite limited until now.

- Focus on other formalized collectivities that promote different types of ethical consumer behaviour such as Oxfam and Setem.

- Extend the research on ethical consumers engaged in extreme ethical lifestyles such as individuals that have chosen to isolate themselves in rural self-sufficient houses and compare their lifestyles and perceptions to those leading more mainstream lives. Do they experience ethical consumer lifestyles in similar ways and do they achieve their goals?

- It was seen during the fieldwork that the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives are not single collectivities acting alone. Cooperation and know-how sharing was very frequently observed. Furthermore, most of them participate in a larger network that aims at promoting ethical consumption by organizing campaigns and creating political pressure, by establishing routes of communication and cooperation among the cooperatives (inter-cooperatives meetings, common visits to producers), by facilitating the emergence and establishment of new cooperatives. This directs future research to the study of the Responsible Consumption Cooperatives as a new social movement. Of particular

interest is to explore the collective identity of the movement, but not just in terms of content, but also in terms of processes through which it is produced within a group. For this, it is proposed the ‘intervention’ methodology by Touraine (1981), but as Melucci (1989, 1996) modified it<sup>3</sup>. For more information see Touraine (1981), Melucci (1989, 1996) and North (1998).

- A final suggestion is the identification of factors that influence ethical consumer behaviour. In the literature, there was no distinction between the factors that form ethical perceptions and the factors that make consumers act upon their ethical concerns. In other words, how ethical concerns are formed and what makes individuals act on them? This study has contributed towards that area, but it is considered that the findings are not exhaustive and that more research should take place to validate, reject or extend the existing findings.

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<sup>3</sup> One of the differences between Melucci (1989, 1996) and Touraine (1981) is that the first rejects Touraine’s belief that only the sociologist can understand the true meaning of a social movement, overlooking that individuals give meaning to their actions.

## 8.7 References

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# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

RAW DATA FROM PRIMARY RESEARCH CAN BE CONSULTED IN THE  
ATTACHED CD.