

*Stefania Valentini*

*Thyra Uth Thomsen, Dept. of Marketing*

“The Role of Green Consumption Practices  
in Defining Self-Identities:  
a Qualitative Research in Denmark and Italy”

*Cand. Merc. Strategic Market Creation*

*June 2011*

Copenhagen Business School

*Number of pages: 84*

*Number of STUs: 156.115*



# ***SUMMARY***

---

People's concerns for environmental issues are growing rapidly over the past few years.

Ethical discussions in general, from climate changes to workers conditions, going through fair trade or organic consumption, are extremely common nowadays among institutions, academics and individuals, and more and more consumers are becoming aware of the need to shift toward more sustainable ways of consuming.

Given that, this research focuses on consumers' behavior, aiming to investigate green consumers' assumptions, beliefs and habits. More precisely, its starting point is to study the role that green consumption practices play in the process of construction of people self-identities, with a double focus on Denmark and Italy.

The existing literature has highlighted that people behave in ways that are consistent with who they are and who they want to be, therefore they utilize products and objects in their possession to enhance and define their selves. As Belk (1995) stated, people are what they buy and possess, hence this research focuses on how green consumption practices contribute to the definition of environmentally conscious consumers' self-identities both in Denmark and Italy. Moreover, on what these practices communicate about individuals' identities, and conversely, on how people are expressing and reinforcing their values and beliefs, both intentionally or unintentionally, through their ethical purchase choices and habits.

Given these research objectives, I have collected in-depth interviews following McCracken Long Interview's method (1988), among Danish and Italian individuals, who already considered themselves green consumers.

Hence, the research is structured along three chapters.

The first chapter deals with an attempt to define the broad concept of sustainability and its meanings, and to delimitate the theory on which this study has been based. Afterwards, it presents the research questions, and the methodology used to collect the data.

The second chapter is centered around the codification and the analysis of the interviews' transcripts, presenting all the themes emerged.

Finally, the third chapter refers to the possible implications that might derive from the analysis, and therefore the future perspectives of this research.



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	p. 5
<b>Chapter 1 – Context and Framework</b>	p. 7
<b>1.1. What is Sustainability</b>	p. 7
<b>1.1.1. Consumers’ growing concerns for sustainability</b>	p. 9
<b>1.2. Theory Delimitation</b>	p. 11
<b>1.2.1. Symbolic consumption</b>	p. 11
<b>1.2.2. Self-identity definition through possessions</b>	p. 11
<b>1.2.3. The influence of possible selves on individual consumption choices</b>	p. 13
<b>1.3. Problem Delimitation and Research Questions</b>	p. 15
<b>1.4. Methodology and Data Collection</b>	p. 19
<b>1.4.1. McCracken’s Long Interview</b>	p. 19
<b>1.4.2. McCracken’s four-step method</b>	p. 21
<b>1.4.3. Selection of interviewees</b>	p. 23
<b>Chapter 2 – Analysis of the In-depth Interviews</b>	p. 24
<b>2.1. Preliminary Remarks</b>	p. 24
<b>2.2. Interviewees’ Point of View</b>	p. 25
<b>2.2.1. Green consumer</b>	p. 25
<b>2.2.2. Non green consumer</b>	p. 26
<b>2.2.3. Authentic green consumer</b>	p. 29
<b>2.2.4. Interviewees’ self-positioning</b>	p. 30
<b>2.3. Green Consumers’ Identity Matrix</b>	p. 34

2.3.1. The Voluntary Simplifier	p. 36
2.3.2. The Organic Consumer	p. 39
2.3.3. The Environmentalist	p. 43
2.4. Future Potentials Self-Identities	p. 47
2.4.1. Feared-for selves	p. 48
2.4.1.1. The non green consumer	p. 48
2.4.1.2. The very green consumer	p. 53
2.4.2. Hoped-for selves	p. 57
2.5. Barriers to Green Consumption	p. 60
<b>Chapter 3 – Findings</b>	p. 64
3.1. Implications	p. 64
3.1.1. Social Marketing perspective	p. 68
3.2. Conclusions & Perspectives	p. 74
<b>References</b>	p. 79
<b>Appendix 1 – Interview’s Guidelines</b>	p. 82
<b>Appendix 2 – Themes emerged from Interviews’ Codification</b>	p. 84

# ***Chapter 1 – Context and Framework***

---

## ***1.1. What is Sustainability***

The term sustainability spread widely in the 1980s, when people became aware of the growing global problems that were investing the world, as for example the uncontrolled environmental pollution, scarcity of natural resources, overpopulation, climate change, drought and famine.

In those years, the media and public opinion started to focus their attention on the concept of sustainability and people slowly became aware that development and environment were no longer mutually exclusive concepts, but complementary and interdependent instead (Pugh, 1996). A greater stimulus to the increase of population's awareness about the environmental issues, came with the publication of the Bruntland report from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, under the title *Our Common Future*. It defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. It highlighted the urgency of pursuing a sustainable development, that was not harmful to the environment, in order to reduce the uncontrolled utilization of natural resources (WCED, 1987).

The report put evidence specifically on the overexploitation of the environment, and on the fact that it would have not been able to meet the constantly growing human needs in the near future. Moreover, the Brundtland Commission identified three fundamental components of sustainable development: environment, economy and society. In fact, it is highly reductive to restrict the concept of sustainability just to a preservation of the environment in terms of natural resources, it also requires a stable and healthy economy, and a better quality of life instead (WCED, 1987). Sustainable development's activities are expected to improve the overall human condition in such a manner that the improvement can be maintained and sustained over time (Trzyna, 1995).

In 1991, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defined sustainable development as “improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity

of supporting ecosystems”. Moreover, it defined a sustainable economy as the result of sustainable development, and it identified nine principles that shape it, as for example conserving earth’s vitality and diversity; minimizing the depletion of non-renewable resources; keeping within the earth’s carrying capacity; changing personal attitudes and practices, and so on. Therefore, sustainable societies are those that follow the former principles, choosing for a sustainable use of natural and renewable resources (IUCN, 1991).

Sustainability can be retrieved in many different fields, in fact we can talk about environmental, operational, energy, health and welfare, safety and security, market, financial, economic, family, and social sustainability (Badiru, 2010). Given that, being sustainable implies the ability to sustain and maintain a process at a desirable level of utility, therefore managerial, functional, operational and technical requirements need to be satisfied (Badiru, 2010).

In fact, since sustainability contains in itself the radical idea that doing the right thing and gaining economic success are not two incompatible aims, it requires a complex and systemic approach, which is totally transforming the way companies operate (Grant, 2007).

It highlights that a better quality of life for the present and future generations is achievable by combining economic development together with social and environmental ones (Grant, 2007).

Therefore, based on the assumptions that it is possible to reduce the harm and damages to the environment while at the same time gaining commercial success, companies are more and more investing financial resources for the development of CSR strategies. Sustainability is more than just an internal reform movement, it has built a bridge to connect business and green (Grant, 2007). In fact, if properly managed, it definitely adds value in any organizational process, allowing a better management of the environmental resources, which in turn determines reduced long-term costs and increased productivity.

However, apart from the business perspective, the focus of this research is centered on the individual consumer and on his/her consumption choices and behaviors.



### ***1.1.1. Consumers' growing concerns for sustainability***

Given the growing awareness for environmental and ethical concerns of the late '80s, people's consumption habits started to turn toward more environmental conscious choices, with the aim to reduce their impact on the Earth in their everyday lives. In those years, many green consumption's guides were published and had great public success, as the one of Elkington and Hailes (1988), which suggested consuming carefully, rather than do not consume or consume less (Harrison, Newholm and Shaw, 2005).

The result was an extraordinary expansion of sustainable forms of consumption, proved by the growth of the fair trade products' markets, the organic food's consumption, the higher consciousness of the benefits of recycling goods, and the growing diffusion of consumption resistance or anti-consumption practices, as voluntary simplicity and boycotts.

Consumers started to search for sustainability, considering it as a benchmark for high quality products and services, and accepting to pay higher prices for goods that guaranteed sustainable methods of production. This type of buying habit has been defined as ethical purchase behavior or ethical consumption (Harrison, Newholm and Shaw, 2005).

Therefore, a green market's enthusiasm spread globally in those years, many companies began to offer environmental friendly products, and they felt the urgency to communicate to their clients their new ecological offerings and their increased efforts for the environment. The best example is the one of The Body Shop, which was the first cosmetics' retailer to introduce sustainable palm oil into the global beauty product industry (Crittenden, et al., 2011). Thanks to its declared greenness, and its guarantee to use only natural ingredients, not tested on animals, it won the UK Company of the Year Award in 1987, and it increasingly expanded its profits (Gosden, 1995).

Of course, people were still considering price and overall quality as important criteria for products' choice, but at the same time they started to take into consideration the effects of their purchasing choices not only on themselves, but also on the external world (Harrison, Newholm and Shaw, 2005).

Generally speaking, ethical consumption may be defined as the degree to which consumers prioritize their own ethical concerns when they make product choices (Shaw and Clarke, 1998; Harrison, Newholm and Shaw, 2005). For that reasons, they might refuse to purchase cheap items made in sweatshops to express their concerns about workforce exploitation, ride a bicycle to preserve the ozone layer, stop buying products tested on animals to protect their rights, purchase fair-trade and organic food to support environmental sustainability and human rights, as well as choosing to leave their high-paying job and move to the countryside to experience a simpler lifestyle away from urban pollution (Cherrier, 2007).

By choosing what and how to consume, consumers become active participants in the definition of ethical products and in shaping their ethical consumption patterns and lifestyles (Cherrier, 2007). Those individuals who actively engage in ethical consumption, can be defined as socially-conscious consumers who take into account the public consequences of their private consumption acts, and use their purchasing power to bring about social change (Webster, 1975; Newholm and Shaw, 2007).

Green consumerism is a moral matter, since it continuously raises questions of fairness and justice (Moisander, 2007), hence morality represents the basis of individuals' consumption choices, and orientates them among what is perceived as good or bad, and right or wrong.

Moreover, although many ethical issues are common and global, however, consumers from different countries and cultures are not homogenous for what concerns the meaningful issues for them (Shaw and Clarke, 1998). That is because moral values are socially and culturally constructed, and social and gender roles, as well as traditional rights, laws, and institutional structures may differ from one country to another (Belk, Devinney, Eckhardt, 2005).

Individuals' cultural backgrounds determine their perceptions about what characterizes a good and responsible consumption, and consequently what violates those moral norms (Belk, Devinney, Eckhardt, 2005), thus influencing the way consumers prioritize ethical concerns, and consequently their consumption attitudes and behaviors.

## **1.2. Theory Delimitation**

### **1.2.1. Symbolic consumption**

In 1959, Levy identified a consumer who was not as functionally oriented as he used to be, and was more engaged with the symbolic meanings of products instead.

Consumers still talked about price, quality and durability, but at the same time other features started to affect their buying habits.

Levy (1959) noticed that people buy and consume things not just for their functionality, but mostly for what they mean, personally and socially, and this is still valid nowadays.

Consumers are not mere automatons who receive information about products and make buying decisions that maximize their satisfaction (Belk, 1995). However, they buy certain products for their symbolic meanings instead (Levy, 1959).

All goods may have a symbolic character and they can communicate many information about people, as for example their personal attributes and the social status they strive to reach through consumption. Therefore, a product can be defined as a symbol and thus bought and enjoyed, especially when it reinforces the way consumers think about themselves.

Moreover, people behave in ways that are consistent with who they are and who they want to be, and they use products to enhance their sense of self (Levy, 1959).

The symbols attached to goods become part of consumers' individual identities, and they are able to define and express people's lifestyles and personal values (Levy, 1959; Belk, 1995).

They convey different kinds of information about consumers' gender, age, ethnicity, social class, personality and so on, therefore they help them to feel part of a group or conversely to distinguish from others (Levy, 1959; Belk, 1995).

In summarizing Levy's thought (1959), consumption of products and services carrying specific symbolic meanings is a way through which consumers define themselves.

### **1.2.2. Self-identity definition through possessions**

Consumption has the capacity to create meanings in consumers' lives, thus products and services become bricks used to construct a meaningful life (Østergaard and Jantzen, 2000).

Therefore, consumers use them to build and communicate their self identities, which are in turn enhanced by what they consume.

The possession of products helps people delineating who they are, and their sense of self, since objects can extend our selves both literally, as when a specific tool allows us to do things we would otherwise be incapable of doing, and symbolically, as when objects, such as a uniform or a trophy, can convince ourselves that we can be a different person than we would be without them (Belk, 1988, 1995).

Moreover, Belk (1988) highlights the relationship among people's possessions and their capabilities of doing and being, meaning that consumers want to possess something mainly in order to enlarge their sense of self, so that observing what they have becomes the only way to know who they are. Therefore, people seek, express, and confirm their sense of being through their material possessions (Belk, 1988).

Belk's theory of extended self focuses on the relationship that exists between people's possessions and their sense of self, which is not limited to external objects and personal possessions, but it also includes people, places, and group possessions as well as body parts and vital organs (Belk, 1988).

He affirms that we are what we buy, have and possess, thus goods and objects are seen as extensions of the self, and act as signs which create and express the self.

Given that, the world of meanings that constitutes people's identities literally extends into their surroundings through those signs (Rochberg-Halton, 1984; Belk, 1988).

Furthermore, the extended self comprises not only what is seen as 'me', the self, but also what is seen as 'mine', since the two concepts are strictly interwoven (Belk, 1988).

In fact, possessions remind and confirm people's identities by revealing their aims and values, hence, affirming that something is 'mine' consequently makes us believe that the object is 'me' (Rochberg-Halton, 1984; Belk, 1988).

Possessions are able to represent and express our identities in a powerful and pervasive way, and to provide a sense of who and what we are (Belk, 1988).

These are representations of the self (Rochberg-Halton, 1984), and are described as windows into consumers' inner selves (Richins, 1994).

Our everyday consumption allows us to create a language that we use to communicate about who we are, our goals and values, and who we wish and strive to be (Rochberg-Halton, 1984). The objects a person possesses and consumes are artifacts of the self, and narrate the developments of people's life stories, showing their self identities both as unique individuals and in connection with others (Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine III, and Allen, 1995).

Things can act as signs of the self, and they can actually objectify the self, by telling who an individual is, what he/she does, who and what he/she might become and who he/she is no longer (Rochberg-Halton, 1984; Kleine, Kleine III, and Allen, 1995).

Therefore, possessions create a connection among consumers' past and present, and anticipate the probable future developments of their stories (Kleine, Kleine III, and Allen, 1995).

The relationship between an individual and a specific material possession is called attachment, and it defines the consumer's self concept, since it is a mean used for the construction, and consequently the narration, of people's identities and life stories (Kleine, Kleine III, and Allen, 1995).

Furthermore, goods acquire meanings not only in the individual consumer's life, but also in his/her interactions with other consumers, thus consumption gains importance also for what it communicates to other people, whether they are from the same social group or not (Østergaard and Jantzen, 2000).

### ***1.2.3. The influence of possible selves on individual consumption choices***

Since consumption choices are means for symbolically investing self in possessions (Belk, 1988), and goods act as symbols in communicating about people's goals and values, their consumption practices can differ according to their personal self-concepts.

In fact, individuals are able to identify those products and services that can approach their hoped-for selves or can avoid the feared ones, and consequently decide what to buy or not (Patrick, MacInnis, and Folkes, 2002). Therefore, their consumption choices are influenced by their possible selves, which are the ways they think about their potentials in the future.

Markus and Nurius (1986) defined the possible selves as the ideal selves that people would very much like to become, as well as the selves they could become, and those they are afraid of becoming. These are the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, hopes, fears and threats, and they might influence individuals' consumption choices and patterns, because their behavior is mostly regulated by individuals' self-concepts (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

In their everyday consumption behavior, people strive to reach their aspirations and simultaneously avoid their fears, and the possible selves may include images of who they wish they could be, that is their ideal self, of who they think they might become, their expected self, and of who they hope to be or fear becoming (Patrick, MacInnis, and Folkes, 2002). Therefore, possible selves are able to make direct connections among motives and specific actions by showing how individuals think about their future, and consequently they have a deep impact on consumption choices (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Patrick, MacInnis, and Folkes, 2002).

Since motivation can be defined as a set of possible selves, which represent an incentive for future behaviors, thus possible selves can influence consumers' decision-making process (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Furthermore, self concepts and motivation are strongly interrelated, which in turn explains the reasons why people decide to buy specific products and services in order to reach their hoped-for selves or to avoid their negative possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Patrick, MacInnis, and Folkes, 2002).

Consumers' motivation in the decision-making process is based on the individual set of identities, therefore his/her consumption choices and activities might be explained by his/her willingness to express his/her identity (Foote, 1951; Markus and Nurius, 1986).

### **1.3. *Problem Delimitation and Research Questions***

Given the identity theories previously highlighted, it strongly emerged an important linkage among the consumption of products and services and individuals' self-identities.

Belk (1988), in his extended self theory, stated that intentionally or unintentionally, consumers regard their possessions as part of their selves, therefore products and services help people to communicate their self-identities.

Material objects have the capability of revealing consumers' goals and values, and are consequently used as means to realize their aims (Rochberg-Halton, 1984).

Every people's possession conveys a broad range of information about their lifestyles, who they are, and also who they want to be. In fact, we are what we buy and possess (Belk, 1995).

Consequently, since material possessions can enhance consumers' self concepts, they behave in ways that are consistent with their selves (Levy, 1959), and consumers' consumption decisions and behaviors are in line with their present identities and ideal selves.

This link between consumption and identity highlights that people's purchase habits are not always rational, linear, and aimed at maximizing their benefits, but representations of their inner values and aims in life instead.

Therefore, considering consumption choices as linked to consumers' self-identities, gives us the possibility to perceive the values they are communicating and the goals they are pursuing through their purchasing decisions, and consequently to make assumptions on their future behaviors.

In the case of green consumers, it is interesting to study how their consumption habits are influenced by their ethical concerns and beliefs, and consequently how those people are communicating their deeper environmental consciousness through their everyday consumption choices.

Individuals' purchasing decisions are often guided by the sense of what is possible for them (Cross and Markus, 1991) and by their future aspirations.

Those possible selves might be either positive or negative, therefore they often motivate and encourage good behaviors in order to reach the hoped-for selves, or conversely discourage behaviors to avoid the negative and feared ones (Morgan, 1993).

Given that, it is possible to assume that also the consumption and disposition of ethical objects, products and services can reflect who consumers are, and who they want to be (Belk, 1988; Cherrier, 2007). In fact, the ethical consumer constructs and creates his/her self identity through his/her consumption's decisions, by consciously choosing those products and objects that better fit his/her image and meet his/her needs for a meaningful and authentic identity (Cherrier, 2007).

It is interesting to investigate the consumers' ability to identify on one side the potential selves, either positive or negative, and on the other side the specific consumption choices that define these possible identities.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to study the ways in which green consumers construct and define their self-identities through their everyday consumption choices, and at the same time, what their possessions or consumption practices communicate about their ideal and feared-for selves.

More precisely, I chose to focus on two countries, Denmark and Italy, in order to investigate whether the link among individuals' consumption behaviors and self-identities is influenced by people's cultural background.

In fact, Belk (1984) affirmed that consumers' behaviors is inevitably affected by their surrounding culture, since the nature and concept of self may significantly vary across different countries (Belk, 1984b; Mehta and Belk 1991).

Given that, I expect the analysis of green consumption practices in both countries to provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon, rather than the analysis of just a single one.

In fact, even though there might be some differences among how Danish and Italian consumers link their consumption choices to their self-identities, however, I expect the whole analysis to be enriched.

Given these premises, the first main research question and sub-questions are the following:

- How do green consumption practices contribute to the construction of one's self in Denmark and Italy?
  - How does green consumerism add to the consumers' sense of self in Denmark and Italy?



- What do these green practices communicate about green consumers' identity and what do green consumers try to communicate through those practices?

Furthermore, it is reductive to consider the consumption experience as just an individual act in the marketplace, while it is rather a social experience (Carù and Cova, 2003, Cherrier, 2007). Since identities are intrinsically relational, consumers are not rational and meticulous economic agents, but they construct their identities by using societal influences, by relying on opinion leaders and sharing identifications instead (Cherrier and Murray, 2007).

Therefore, consumers' behavior is the result of a collective participation, which creates a link among consumers and their friends, family members, but also the state and the market (Cherrier, 2007). Therefore, since identity represents a relation which embraces both our ability to recognize ourselves, and the possibility of being recognized by others (Cherrier, 2007), another important purpose of this research is to investigate whether green consumers try to become part of a group, or conversely to distinguish from it, through their consumption decisions and habits.

Once again, the consumption-identity link emerges as extremely useful to understand who people were, who they are, and who they will be, or would like to be in the future.

According to these theories, the second main research question and sub-questions are the following:

- How do green consumers express and reinforce their self-identities through green consumption practices?
  - How do green consumption practices help green consumers to integrate themselves in a specific social group, or conversely, to differentiate from others?
  - Do social pressures influence the individual decision to engage in green consumption practices?

Given the importance gained by the consumption-identity link, the purpose of the research is to study whether this linkage emerges among individuals from both countries, and what their purchase decisions and habits communicate about their selves, values and goals in life.

The objective is to investigate how consumers make their consumption choices based on their personal beliefs and assumptions, and whether their cultural background influences their decisions and behaviors.

Moreover, I am going to analyze first of all if differences among Danish and Italian's green assumptions and consumption choices emerge, and secondly whether these can be ascribed to the external influences of society and people's cultural background.

This research is mainly directed toward public administrations, governments and communication agencies, since they are the main responsible for spreading the knowledge regarding environmental issues, and building an ethical and green conscience among citizens and consumers.

Since green consumers are still a niche in the market, I do expect them to put evidence on specific needs they have which are not yet fulfilled both from institutions and companies.

Hence, the possible expected implications could be related to social marketing, which is aimed at a behavioral change for the good of both the individual and the society (Domegan, Davison, and McCauley, 2010).

Given this perspective, I am going to analyze how the linkage among green consumption choices and people's self-identities can be taken into account in order to promote green consumerism in the near future.

## **1.4. Methodology and Data Collection**

The aim of this research is to study green consumers, and their consumption behaviors, in order to identify the ways in which they create and express their identities as green consumers. Thus, the focus of the study is the individual, who consumes, and uses his/her consumption choices as bricks in the process of construction of a meaningful life (Østergaard and Jantzen, 2000).

Given these premises and the research questions I have identified, the best approach to follow is the interpretative one, therefore the most appropriate research method is the qualitative analysis with in-depth interviews.

More precisely, I chose to apply McCracken's Long Interview method (1988).

### **1.4.1. McCracken's Long Interview**

According to the author, this technique has the power to take the interviewer into the mental world of the individual, in order to get an idea of the categories through which he/she sees the world, and into his/her life and daily experiences. Therefore, the long interview gives the researcher the possibility to experience the world as the interviewees do (McCracken, 1988, p.9), and to access their individual spheres without violating their privacy or testing their patience, therefore allowing the interviewer to achieve important qualitative objectives within a manageable methodological context (McCracken, 1988, p.11).

Hence, I followed McCracken's principles in constructing the guidelines of the interviews and in proceeding with the analysis.

The first important assumption, related to a qualitative method, is that "less is more" (McCracken, 1988, p.17), in fact, a work with fewer people but conducted with greater care and deepness has a greater value, rather than a superficial investigation of a higher number of participants. Therefore, McCracken (1988, p.17) suggests carrying eight interviews, affirming that this number is sufficient to generate abundant amount of data.

Accordingly, I decided just to slightly increase the number of respondents, to eleven and twelve in each country I have studied, Denmark and Italy.

In fact, the objective of the research is not to represent a larger part of the population, but to get insights and to study the characteristics and logics of a determined culture instead (McCracken, 1988, p.17).

Qualitative methods of analysis allow the interviewer to discover the world from the respondents' point of view, therefore, it is fundamental that the researcher is absolutely unobtrusive and nondirective in order not to bias interviewees' answers (McCracken, 1988, p.21). They have to feel free of describing their own lives and experiences in their own chosen words and terms, and in the way that is more consistent with their identities, with no suggestions and influences from the interviewer.

The active listening, that consists in reading the hidden meanings in the respondents' speeches and in suggesting them the replies, it is absolutely forbidden (McCracken, 1988, p.21).

However, the investigator has to exercise some sort of control over the interview, since qualitative research may produce an extraordinarily abundant amount of data, which need to be manageable somehow (McCracken, 1988, p.22).

The author provides the interviewer with a set of tools to manage the extraordinary richness of data, and he suggests using the so-called prompts to better structure the interview.

Furthermore, what the interviewer has to take in mind is to avoid check questions, in order not to suggest any kind of biased framework to the respondents, to replace 'why' with 'how' and not to use yes or no questions, because they might seem too much inquisitive and consequently block the narrative flow and intimidate the interviewees.

In fact, the main goal of the research is not to get a rational and linear representation of the decision making process, but rather to let people narrate their experiences without any intrusion, and to get insights into consumers' selves and into the inner motives behind their consumption choices.

Since the concept of self identity is strongly cultural related, and may vary across different countries (Mehta and Belk, 1991), I decided to focus on two European countries, Denmark and Italy, which due to historical origins and geographical conformation had different cultural developments.

It is important to highlight that working within the interviewer's culture might be risky since he/she may tend not to have a critical distance from what he/she studies, consequently to use his/her assumptions to somehow direct and orientate the interview.

In order not to fall into this trap, McCracken (1988, p.22) suggests that the researcher manufactures distance with the respondents and their culture.

He/she has to help the interviewees to retrieve their hidden beliefs and assumptions, and let them narrate their own life stories and articulate what they normally take for granted (McCracken, 1988, p.23). For that reason, I firstly used grand tour questions, which McCracken calls floating prompts, in order to stimulate the interviewees to construct their own narrations starting from the point they prefer, using the terms and assumptions they like most. Secondly, I presented them some planned prompts, a series of stimuli consisting of two statements on which I asked them to comment and reflect. These are "I can make a real difference for the environment", and "Alone, I cannot influence the environmental condition". Furthermore, I showed them an imaginary line going from a non green consumer and a very, authentic green one, asking them first of all to clarify how would they have defined both typologies of consumers, and then to point where they would have positioned themselves, where they would like to be, and how they believe they would get there (see APPENDIX 1).

#### ***1.4.2. McCracken's four-step method***

McCracken (1988, p.29) proposes a four-step method of research, which divides the qualitative investigation into four subsequent phases:

1. review of analytic categories and interview design;
2. review of cultural categories and interview design;
3. interview procedure and the discovery of cultural categories;
4. interview analysis and the discovery of analytical categories.

The first step consists of an exhaustive literary review (McCracken, 1988, p.29), on which the interview is shaped. It is useful to better delineate the domain and topic that the research will explore and it helps in the construction of the interview's guidelines and in creating the right

distance for the interviewer. Finally, it aids the organization and assessment of the collected data (McCracken, 1988, p.29-31).

The second step is as important as the previous one to build the interview's guide.

It involves the interviewer's self-examination in order to gather all his/her personal beliefs, assumptions and experiences related to the topic of the investigation.

This is extremely useful to distance the investigator, in fact, knowing his/her cultural categories and configuration, helps him/her not to make mistakes during the interviews (McCracken, 1988, p.32).

The third step enables the interviewer to carefully construct the questionnaire, thus to determine the direction that the interview will take. It consists in the definition of the questions and in particular of what McCracken identified as floating prompts, and planned prompts (see APPENDIX 1). These should be set in order to identify key terms, minimize interviewees' distortion, and give them a generous time-frame that allows the respondents to narrate their own story implying their own terms (McCracken, 1988, p.41).

The fourth step refers to the analysis of the qualitative data gathered during the interviews. However, before starting with the analysis, there are some technical requirements that need to be fulfilled. First of all, the interviews must be recorded, and secondly it is fundamental to create a verbatim transcript of them, and not a summarized one (McCracken, 1988, p.41-42).

The goal of this phase is to determine the participants' categories and assumptions regarding the world in general, and the topic under examination in particular (McCracken, 1988, p.42).

The interviewer has to deal with the analysis' phase considering the literature review he/she has undertaken, his/her experience and assumptions related to the topic, and finally what emerges from the interviews.

These are the starting points of the analysis, and the researcher has to be prepared to any possible output, since the collected data may or may not be in line with his/her point of view or the assumptions emerged in the literary review (McCracken, 1988, p.42).

### **1.4.3. Selection of interviewees**

According to McCracken (1988, p.37), the interviewees are not a sample, therefore their selection should not follow the sampling principles, however, there are some few rules that the interviewer should take into account when selecting the respondents.

They should be perfect strangers; few, no more than eight; they should not have a special knowledge of the topic under study; and the respondent pool should present some contrasts in terms of age, gender, status and occupation, which in turn allow to maintain the distance among interviewer and interviewees (McCracken, 1988, p.37).

I followed some of these rules. Firstly, the participants in this study do have a special knowledge of the topic, and they self select themselves, because given the objectives of the research, I have interviewed people who already defined themselves green consumers. However, I did not provide them with my definition of green consumer, in order not to bias or influence their categorizations.

Secondly, they were perfect strangers to me, in fact I have looked for them within my network, on the internet, or within fair trade or environmental associations, and biological supermarkets. I also took advantage of the so-called snowballing effect, asking my first participants to provide me with further contacts among their networks.

Initially, I have experienced some difficulties in finding the Danish participants, unless I found a very involved person who provided me with many contacts.

For what concerns the number of respondents, I have interviewed eleven people in Denmark and twelve in Italy, from the age of 30 onwards. I have intentionally excluded young people, first of all because adults have a greater consumption experience, and secondly because younger people, for example students, might have monetary constraints which consequently influence their consumption decisions. Hence, I focused on adults assuming that their consumption choices would have been more conscious.

Moreover, they are not homogenous in terms of age, gender, origin, and occupation, since they all come from different backgrounds, therefore I expect very interesting results from this high heterogeneity.

# ***Chapter 2 – Analysis of the In-depth Interviews***

---

## ***2.1. Preliminary Remarks***

Prior to start the analysis process, I proceeded with the codification of all the interviews' transcripts. More precisely, I have underlined all the themes emerging from the participants' responses (see APPENDIX 2), that I have analyzed afterwards.

Furthermore, I want to stress the concept that the interviews were conducted among people who consider themselves green consumers, and I have not provided them with any a priori definition of the term. Therefore, everyone has freely decided to participate in the project, and gave me his/her personal beliefs and assumptions concerning the topic.

This preliminary remark is important in order to explain that the similarities in the respondents' answers are completely free from any external control.

In fact, even though I talked to quite different people, both in terms of country of origin and cultural background, as for example education, work and environmental commitment, nevertheless, I have immediately noticed some recurrent themes along their narrations.

They all share a deeper awareness and consciousness for everything concerns environmental issues in general, although everyone has his/her personal way to take care of the environment.

As an example, the Italian sample comprehends people who mainly focus on sustainable ways of transportation, therefore they prefer mostly riding a bike rather than using the car, some who are more socially committed, and work for fair trade or environmental associations, and others who are more focused on organic and biological food.

The Danish sample instead includes people who are more concerned on low energy consumption, some who are mainly focused on organic and biodynamic food, while others are more socially committed since they take part in NGO associations as the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, and Miljøpunkt, or hold offices in the Danish Consumer Council.



Anyway, even though each one of them, due to work or personal inclinations, is mainly focused on one aspect of the larger environmental issue, however, they all share the most common environmental friendly practices, as recycling, buying organic, energy and water saving, using sustainable way of transport, and so on and so forth.

Given this premise, I proceeded with the analysis by firstly considering how the interviewees define green, non green and very green consumers, in order to see whether recurrent patterns in participants' assumptions could be found or not.

## **2.2. Interviewees' Point of View**

### **2.2.1. Green consumer**

As I have previously stated, I interviewed people who self defined themselves green consumers, therefore it was interesting to know how they would have described a green consumer, in order to see how they perceive themselves and what they try to communicate about their identities, through their consumption practices.

During the codification phase, I have immediately noticed a general agreement on the ways used to describe and define the green consumer, which resulted not to be culturally biased.

In fact, both Italian and Danish answers were centered around three main concepts: awareness, responsibility and willingness to pay.

From the responses emerged that what distinguishes a green, environmental friendly consumer from the average ones, is for sure his/her environmental consciousness, which is reflected in responsible and coherent behaviors in order not to further damage the planet.

*for me a green consumer is a lot about responsibility – Charlotte*

*for me a green consumer is a consumer who, for every kind of consumption choice, choose something that is less dangerous for the environment and human health – Paola*

*one who shops with awareness, in other words they understand the implications of their purchases. Basically they know the origin, source of their product and more or less where it will end up after consumption - Kutloano*

*a caring and responsible consumer, not only for himself but also for what is around him – Stella*

A deeper awareness and care about environmental issues is fundamental, but the willingness to pay higher prices for certified and less harmful products appears to be as much important.

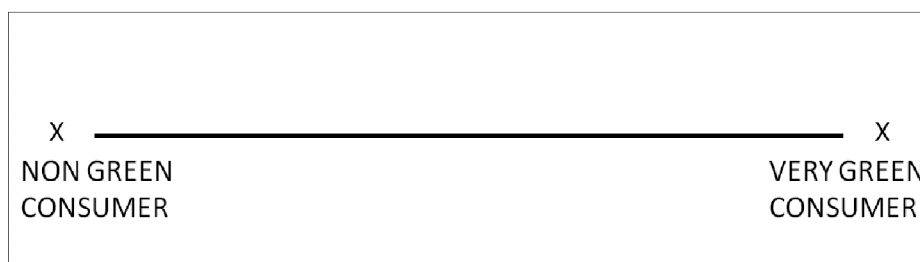
*well, a green consumer is in my view a consumer who is concerned about environment, but also a consumer who wants have a willingness to pay to some degree for it, it's not enough to talk about it and to say I would like to, a green consumer is someone who does it to some extent – Christian*

*I think is a person who pays attention in his purchases, who is aware [...] and given his awareness, when it comes to buy products, obviously based on his willingness to pay and personal considerations, he chooses among what offers the marketplace – Erica*

### **2.2.2. Non green consumer**

To help the interviewees narrating their beliefs and assumptions about the topic, I showed them what McCracken calls a planned prompt.

It consists of an imaginary continuum among a non green consumer and a very, authentic green one.



As I have previously stated, I did not want to bias their answers, therefore I did not give them any a priori definition of the two extremes, since my purpose was to collect their own definitions and considerations about them.

In fact, despite of the cultural differences among the respondents, what emerged is a shared definition and representation of the non green consumer in the interviewees' minds.

He/she is seen as the opposite with respect to the green consumer, and characterized by the total absence of awareness and care regarding any kind of environmental issues.

Furthermore, the interviewees identified the non green consumer with a series of precise consumption choices and behaviors that he/she usually puts into practice, and which consequently can be considered as representations of his/her self.

*The non green consumer I think is the one who doesn't pay attention to hmm who doesn't care maybe, who doesn't care acting for the welfare of the environment and who is a bit selfish – Erica*

*Hmm I think if first of all if you are ignorant, if you don't have an idea of the energy that you use, then you must be a non green – Kenneth*

High consumption levels are considered clear signals to identify a non green consumer.

*not caring about organic, not caring about consumption, that he just buys buys buys, my cell phone is an old one, a very old one, but it works [...] – Benny*

*[..] the non green consumer is the one who buys all the last things, technologies, non technologies, stuff, a lot of clothes, just because they are cheap, who buys buys buys buys – Daniela*

*well, a non green consumer is basically a consumer that doesn't have the issue about the environment, so they go for whatever they like and they don't think about the issues that now I'm consuming a lot of energy, or now I'm buying the stuff with a lot of chemicals in it, now there's a lot of packaging around these product but I don't care, it's nice and beautiful colors*

*and I throw it out in a week when I used it, and things like that, a non green consumer is a non aware consumer – Christian*

Basically, everybody ascribes the absence of concerns towards the environmental conditions as being superficial and selfish, and this is usually a consequence of the comfort and laziness in which we are used to live in the modern society.

In fact, they believe that the non green consumers are actually the average ones, who are completely embedded in the waste philosophy of this consumerist society.

*a non green consumer hmm I would really define him as the average consumer, who at every incentives or sale goes crazy [...] I don't know, you change your car because you have incentives, so you think oh, it's a great opportunity! Let's change car, but you don't consider all the dynamics that are behind the purchase of a car [...] I think yeah that the non green consumer is in a way slave of these realities, which are more comfortable, so he consumes more comfortable stuff, already packed, but that terribly flatten your life, and the more you flatten your life the more you want to buy these sort of things, so it becomes a vicious circle from which you cannot escape – Daniele*

*[...] in my opinion what distinguishes among a green consumer and a non green consumer is insofar as one follows everything related to advertisements, everything that is commercial [...] – Beppe*

Therefore, through the analysis of their responses emerge that interviewees define the non green consumer by using a series of consumption practices, as not paying attention to organic and biological labels, buying always the latest models of every product without considering their impact on the environment, and so on and so forth.

All these habits represent his/her identity as a non aware consumer.

Therefore, as stated by Belk (1988), people are what they buy and possess, and non green consumers' indifference and non consciousness about environmental issues emerge from their uncontrolled consumption.

### 2.2.3. Authentic green consumer

Right now, we have noticed a general agreement among all the participants on the definitions and characterizations of non green and green consumers, without any cultural differences based on their country of origin.

For what concerns the authentic green consumer, instead, I could notice a slight difference in the respondents' assumptions.

More precisely, among the Italian interviewees, few of them appeared to be more skeptical than others, especially regarding the combined use of the terms 'consumer' and 'green', in the authentic meaning.

*[..] hmm this idea of the green consumer..is like saying that I'm a warmonger pacifist, I mean one cannot be a consumer and at the same time be green [...] I don't think these two words fit together, in my opinion a green is one who consumes as little as possible, then he is green, while one who consumes is less green, for example one that consumes a lot of bio plastic bags, is he a green consumer? Well, maybe he is a green consumer because they are made of bio plastic, but for me he is a consumer, more consumer than green – Franco*

*[..] the term green consumer is a paradox itself, I mean if one is really green usually he loses his consumer status, that is, first of all you have to shorten the distribution chain, so to go directly to producers or even produce things yourself, as an example for me a green consumer he would never buy bread, I mean you would bake it yourself, therefore actually you are not a consumer anymore [...] – Daniele*

*the authentic green consumer is for sure one at the top, uncompromising, but I mean if you want to be perfectly green than you have to be an hermit, so living by candlelight, producing everything by yourself, not using electricity [...] – Erica*

Anyway, despite of these extreme and very skeptical assumptions, which argue the possibility itself of being really green and still being a consumer, however, the rest of the respondents, both Italian and Danish, mainly agree in their definitions about the very green consumer.

They define him as an extremely responsible and aware consumer, who takes into account the environment in every choices he/she makes, without self excluding from the society.

He/she is still a consumer to a certain extent, but always going for the greenest solutions.

*the authentic green consumer is the one who 100% in every action he makes he puts the environment, the respect for nature and for the environment, at the first place, compared to his personal needs [...] – Paola*

*that's one that really really thinks about every single aspect of the product he buys, if I buy this kind of fish what happens to the sea instead of this kind of fish, and if I buy the fish from that market instead of that market what does it mean in terms of transport and stuff like that, people that really really research before they go to the grocery stores and shops – Charlotte*

*there (very green consumer) you hmm in every choices you make, for buying new stuff you would be concerned, think about the consequences, as how far has this product been transported, what kind and does it contain any chemicals, who has produced it, under what kind of working conditions, and so on and so forth – Majken*

#### **2.2.4. Interviewees' self-positioning**

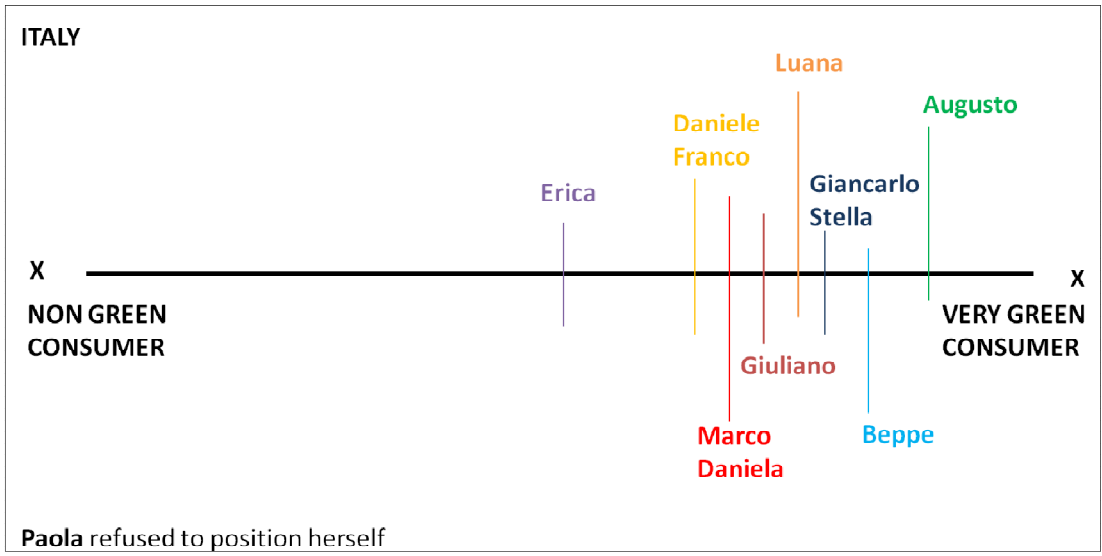
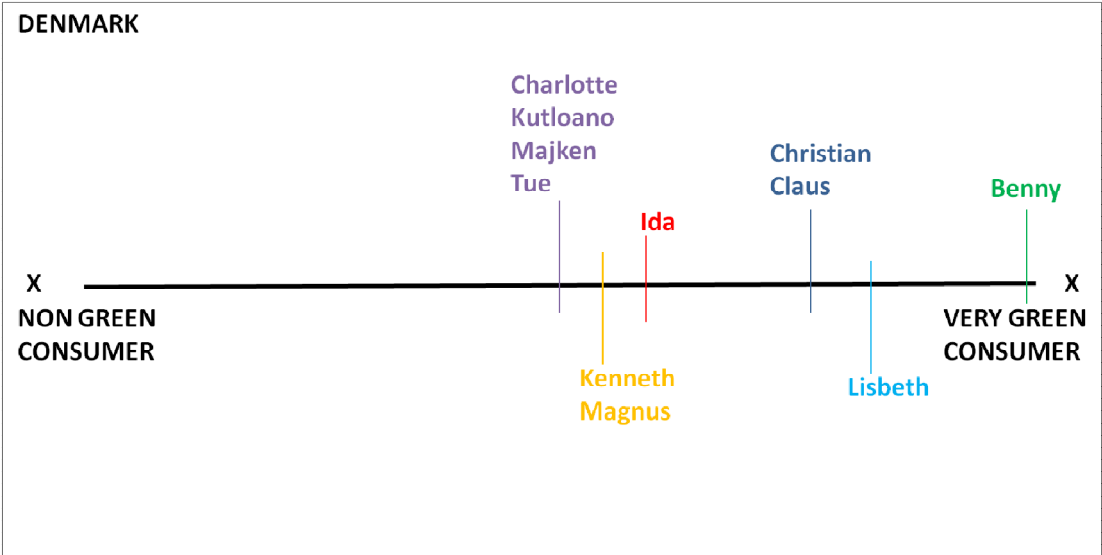
After having collected the participants' considerations about non green, green, and very green consumers, I asked them to position themselves along the continuum previously shown.

My purpose was to see how they considered themselves as green consumers, where they would have graphically represented themselves on that continuum, and thus if there was a connection among their green consumption choices and their self positioning.

Certainly, this depends on how each person defines the two extremes of the continuum, therefore on his/her terms of comparison.

*hmm it depends on who we compare with, because a farmer in Afghanistan is probably very green consumer because he has no energy to spend except of the bonfire, so that's of course a green consumer but he is not aware that he is a green consumer so – Kenneth*

Therefore, this positioning is absolutely subjective and has to be considered as so. Anyway, I proceeded by creating a graphical representation of all the respondents' self positioning, by putting them all together according to their indications, and I realized two continuums, one for Italy and the other one for Denmark. Even though Danish and Italian mostly agree on the definitions of the non green, green, and somehow also the very green consumer, however, I decided to keep them separated, mainly because usually when people make assumptions, they tend to compare themselves with their reference group, friends, colleagues, or fellow citizens. Hence, the aim of these graphics is just to give a visual representation of the respondents and the way they consider themselves, and not to make comparisons among them, since these would be meaningless.



From a preliminary consideration on the two continuums, it appears that the Italian one tends to be more oriented toward the very green side, because all the respondents self distribute themselves along the second half of the line.

On the contrary, the Danish one is more balanced toward the center of the continuum.

This might depend on the level of involvement of each interviewee, therefore, by coincidence, I could have talked to more involved consumers in Italy, and less involved ones in Denmark.

Another explanation can be related to the social and cultural context in which the respondents interact, which should be always taken into account in order to get a complete understanding of the topic under observation.

Moreover, we have to remember that interviewees' terms of comparison are really important when they self judge themselves. In fact, if Italian consider themselves in relation with the Italian context, usually known as being less green than the Danish one, then they immediately appear very green with respect to the average consumers.

On the contrary, Danish participants might have compared themselves to a greener environment, consequently emerging as being just moderately green.

Concerning this, Denmark is generally considered to be on the cutting edge for everything pertains to environmental sustainability, mostly for its early attempts to regulate these issues.

In fact, it was one of the first countries to introduce a legislation regarding organic production in 1987, while in Italy we had to wait the 1991, when the EU regulated the biological agriculture at a communitarian level.

Undoubtedly, since Danish citizens got used to organic products earlier than everybody else in Europe, this has for sure influenced their consciousness and awareness about environmental and human health issues.

*in Denmark the organic farming got certified in '87 [...] and you could see products turning up in the stores, it started up with milk and some vegetables and stuff like that [...]*

*[about organic products] a lot of the stores, Irma, which is one chain, they have a lot, and also Super Brugsen has a lot as well, and is becoming more and more in most of them, also even Netto and Fakta which are the discount ones have more and more [...] – Claus*



*I know that the Danish standards are at least to my personal knowledge pretty high, we have been having small signs on all the products for hmmm I don't know for last 10 years at least, [...] saying this is some ecological product for instance especially on the eggs, butter, all kind of dairy products, [...] also for vegetables and meat, basically everything that we buy we can more or less see what it is, I think Danish consumers are very very conscious about it [...] talking about the pollution part then I think a lot of Danish are conscious about it, because it's something that we heard for very very long time, and I think we are very environmentally concerned in this country in general – Magnus*

Denmark was also the first country introducing a law on green accounts, which was amended in July 1995, and revised in 2002. This law obliges big companies to report about their environmental performances, with the aim to motivate companies to take their responsibilities and thus to increase their environmental prevention activities (Holgaard and Jørgensen, 2005).

*the biggest companies in Denmark have to report about what they are doing about social responsibility, which is good, because then we can see even if they are not doing anything they have to say okay we are not doing anything so, [...] I think it's about 11 hundreds companies and that 97% actually did report on what they did, but there were two other things that they had to do, for example they had to show how they were measuring, what were their progression, and also what they were going to do, and not a lot actually did that – Claus*

Furthermore, being the host of the COP15 also helped in raising Danish people's awareness about environmental issues.

*I think when we had the climate focus in Denmark around the COP15 meeting there's was a growing concern among citizens, but I think it was a city phenomenon, the common Danish citizen in rural areas didn't really mind – Christian*

At the same time, in the Italian's collective imagination Northern European countries appear to be much better organized compared to Italy.

*[..] public transports that our municipality offers, Italy in general, they are not that perfect, rather than Northern Europe, at least I've been to Norway, I've been to Iceland, probably all smaller realities, but they are far more efficient [..] – Augusto*

*[..] there's a statement I really liked, it was from the Mayor of Copenhagen, during an interview someone told him well, the bicycle is not suitable for every season mostly here in Copenhagen, and he answered, look, the problem is not the bike, because it's always suitable, the only thing that couldn't be suitable is the clothing – Beppe*

### **2.3. Green Consumers' Identity Matrix**

This research aims to study how consumers communicate about their identities through their consumption choices, and what these practices communicate about their selves.

Given that, from the previous analysis it is possible to affirm that the respondents generally agree on the definition of non green, green and very green consumers, and they characterize each one of these identities with precise consumption practices and behaviors.

Therefore, starting from the previous analysis, I have constructed a green consumers' identity matrix, which is a sort of positioning map built on two axis, based on the recurrent themes that emerged from the interviewees' assumptions about non green, green, and authentic consumers.

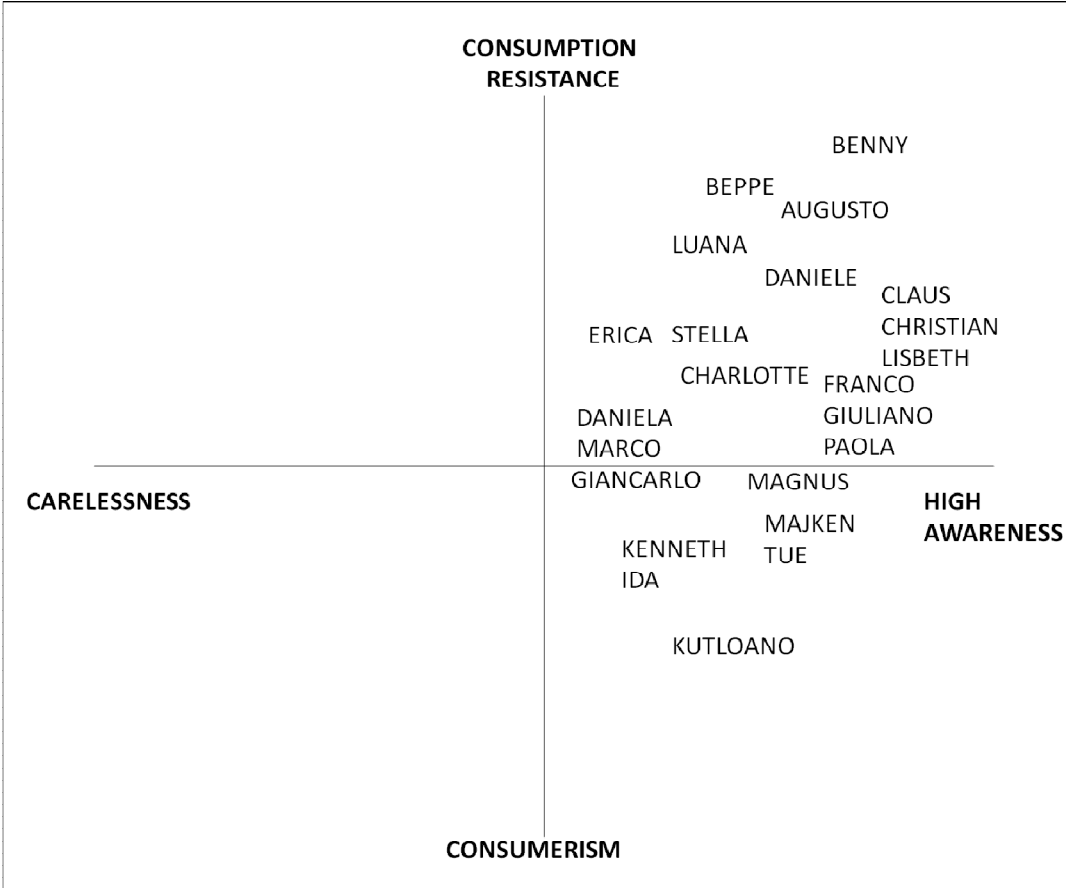
The horizontal axis goes from carelessness to an high awareness and care; while the vertical one goes from high levels of consumerism to a complete consumption resistance.

According to the interviewees' words, carelessness represents the complete lack of awareness, regarding both the environment and human health, which is reflected in non conscious consumption choices, due to superficiality and selfishness.

On the opposite side of the axis there is the total awareness and consciousness about the issues that are investing our planet, which results in green consumers' choices and behaviors. The vertical axis instead goes from high consumerism, which is the typical behavior of those consumers who buy compulsively, not to satisfy real needs, but just for the consumption process itself, and consumption resistance, in which purchases are completely erased or

reduced to their lowest terms. It consists of a rebellion against the market structure and actual consumerist societies, which can embody different behaviors, from boycotts to voluntary simplicity.

Given that, I tried to position all the participants in the matrix, according both to their self-positioning along the continuum and their green consumption practices and habits.



The map might appear a bit confusing, since everybody is positioned in the two quadrants on the right. Anyway, this overcrowd in the second half of the awareness axis can be easily explained by the fact that all the interviewees considered themselves green consumers, therefore they possess a deeper awareness and consciousness for everything concerns environmental issues. They are all well informed about what is going on with our planet and environment, so they behave accordingly, choosing one or more aspects on which to focus their attention and efforts.

I would like to stress that my aim is not to make comparisons among the interviewees, because any assumption in this direction would be meaningless.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that this map represents a conceptual framework in which I have positioned empirical examples, the respondents.

Their positioning in the map is the result of a synthesis I made among their behaviors and the indications they gave me.

They usually take various green consumption choices, which might reflect different locations in the map, in fact, even if people usually try to behave coherently with their inner principles, they might have to face specific situations or constraints and thus make different consumption choices accordingly.

Hence, while the matrix is conceptual, interviewees represent real examples.

As a matter of fact, the participants do not totally embody just one single identity, but on the contrary, in their daily lives they pick up characteristics, consumption habits and choices from different selves' locations, in order to create their own unique identity.

Therefore, their purchases' decisions and behaviors can be considered as personal identities' building blocks, since, after all, everyone makes his/her own choices based on his/her inner principles and morality.

To be more precise, they choose different elements from various selves, and by combining these consumption practices, they communicate about their own identity.

Nevertheless, from the interviews emerged different stereotypical identity positions, that I am going to analyze one by one.

### ***2.3.1. The Voluntary Simplifier***

The Voluntary Simplifier is situated in the upper quadrant on the right, in correspondence with high levels of environmental awareness and consumption resistance.

These are people who freely choose to simplify their lives.

More precisely, the Voluntary Simplifier has been defined as aimed at buying functional, healthy, non-polluting, durable, energy-cheap, repairable, recyclable or made from renewable raw materials, and through simple technology products (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977).

It is important to highlight once again that the participants, who occupy this particular location in the map, are only examples of this symbolic identity.

In fact, I am not affirming that they are Voluntary Simplifiers, rather that some consumption choices they make can be considered examples of this conceptual identities, and communicate the respondents' aim to live in a simpler way.

*I like it very much to try to undress me of all these infrastructures, of all these things that they impose on you, and look at things from a different perspective, then you often find answers to the simplest things [...] sometimes you should just undress yourself of certain stuff and try to look at things in a simpler way – Beppe*

*In my view with less money, less things, I'm actually experiencing it because I work 10 hours per week, you can imagine the salary I have [...] it depends always whether you accept this, try to improve your sobriety and start taking off some stuff and then you realize that you are perfectly good, that you don't need them, you can do it [...] we have too much, we are used to have too much, we need to take a step back, from material things – Augusto*

*[...] when I lived in Rome, I had a very different lifestyle, I had a car, I moved always by car, [...] thus for me moving to Modena has been an opportunity to hmm I gave away my car, and I realized that I liked that way of living, I mean I really liked the idea of giving up my car, and apart from being an economic decision I also helped the environment, thus it was an ecological choice – Luana*

Cherrier and Murray (2007) affirm that also the act of dispossession is important in the identity construction process, and it goes along with the phases of the consumption cycles: acquiring, consuming, disposing. In fact, identity is a continuous process of negotiating different dimensions of the self, and dispossession plays an important role in this process, as when people try to change lifestyle, an old self for a newer one, by giving away some of their material possessions (Cherrier and Murray, 2007). This might be the case of consumption resistance or Voluntary Simplicity.

However, as I said before, usually people do not embody just one stereotypical identity, but they make their own personal consumption choices, and behave according to their beliefs.

*You see, at the end one gives away just what he wants, you make choices, but if they are balanced I think you won't miss anything and you can try to improve a bit things at an environmental level – Augusto*

*But just to be clear, it's not that I have given up certain stuff, I did camp house and I didn't have certain stuff from the beginning and I never felt the need to have those things, that is different [...] moving from one house to another I had many things and little by little I just left some of them behind me, because I realized that I didn't need them and I didn't care about them, and I left them there, so for example I don't have the washing machine, I don't have the fridge, I don't have the car, hmm what else, I don't have the hoover, I don't have polisher, hmm basically I don't have hmm, I have 3 pans, some plates and few more things [...] so you go to the origin of the single things, undressing yourself of all the superstructures, and I don't have any kind of difficulties, but just to be clear, it's my personal dimension – Beppe*

Some of them also have a precise idea concerning the concept of time, more precisely the impatient search for time that the contemporary society is experiencing, which is connected with the simple living philosophy.

*I think everyone fights for time, I mean tries to have more time, even money is a function of time [...] but everybody hurries to have more time by having more money, because of course if you have more money then you can have the cleaning lady, the fastest car, you can fly instead of hmm I don't know, but I sometimes think that to do these things you have to work more to have more money, and to be allowed to do these things, instead I think if I give away different stuff and cut stuff to the essentials, then I end up having more time – Beppe*

*[...] white goods for example to bake bread, to make juices, all stuff that if you have more time, work a bit less, then you can do it yourself, take more time to do it, you are not in a hurry that you need the electric cheese grater because you have to go to work 8 hours, then*

*you get home.. it's a circle, work is important don't misread me [...] but also by working less you know you can devote yourself to your family, to your hobbies, it's another way of life, and consequently you have less material needs and you need to consume less, and this is also the discourse behind consumption, the more you consume, the more you pollute, the more you pollute and the more you need to move, and so on, it is all linked – Augusto*

*[..] I don't buy any can food, I just buy the meat and vegetables that I don't have myself, and prepare my meal just from the bottom, I don't buy anything ready-made for eating, because I know that the most food today is filled up with things that are not for consumption, chemicals to conserve food, I don't eat that, it's not for me, people just do that because they don't have time, they are too busy and have no time for it, it's easier just to open a can [...] – Benny*

### **2.3.2. The Organic Consumer**

The second stereotypical identity that emerged from the interviews is the Organic Consumer. Even though it is not clearly recognizable from the matrix, however, buying organic, biological, biodynamic and so on, is the most common and shared consumption behavior among all the respondents.

As I said before, Denmark was the first country to introduce a legislation about organic products, in 1987, and therefore to have those products certified by eco-labels as the European Flower and the Nordic swan.

This has certainly influenced Danish purchasing habits, at least toward basic products as organic milk and eggs, which appear to be highly diffused.

*[..] I think actually if you go to the stores you will find more eco-labeled products, so it's possible to make green products, and for food also, I mean I think milk has like 33% of the market [...] and also for eggs [...] I was thinking in Denmark and I guess Norway and Sweden as well, especially the group of people having kids are very focused on this, but also from an health perspective, the group from I think 28 till 38, that age group, is very much focused on eco-labeled and organic things – Claus*

However, even though it is becoming easier to find organic products in supermarkets and discounts too, some respondents still complain a lack of availability of those kind of goods.

*Availability [...] but also choice, I mean there's not so much to choose from, you can still only get maybe 2 kinds of cornflakes, whereas you can get 20 kinds of regular cornflakes, so you need to have different hmm what is called, product development, but it's coming I mean you can see, we are probably close to 1/3 of the products are organic by now so – Claus*

Given that, I could find a lot of examples of organic consumers among my interviewees. Those are the people who mostly care about themselves and their health and consequently about the environment, and who orientate their shopping choices toward organic products as much as they can.

*I'm eating organic food, do things organically, grow my garden organically [...] I remember my first garden, I didn't use any fertilizers, artificial fertilizers, I only used compost that used organic and people said, he's mad, he's mad, why don't he buy fertilizers? it's much easier! I didn't, I didn't, because I wouldn't have eaten something that is fertilized by artificial fertilizers – Benny*

*[...] buying directly from the biological producers it's important, also because I mean you buy fresh products, you don't have the packaging, no transports, you can work on many issues that otherwise you wouldn't have considered [...] it's not just a matter of health, it touches so many aspects, both social, because you finally have a relationship with the producer and seller of the products you buy, and political because you safeguard the territory and give to those who live there the possibility of having a fair profit for their work [...] – Daniele*

*I myself I actually prefer not eating meat if I have to eat it from conventional production, because I'm pretty sure that it gives me something, so there's two sides of it, it's for the environment but it's also for me – Lisbeth*



*But I have a philosophy that I believe that organic farming is good for the environment and hopefully is also good for me in the sense that I don't get pesticides when I buy organic farm food – Claus*

While in Denmark it is more common to find organic and eco labeled products in supermarkets, in Italy the organic buying is very much related to a consumption choice against the mass distribution logic of big shopping malls.

In fact, Italian participants appear hostile toward this kind of purchasing habits, which is typical of a consumerist society, and conversely they prefer a more direct relationship with sellers and even producers. Therefore, by buying organic products, Italian respondents actually do want to communicate their opposition towards large retailers' logic, which has vastly damaged all the smaller producers.

*I go shopping at the biological market where I can meet the producers, I buy there vegetables, except the fact that is extremely more satisfying to buy from them because you have a direct relationship with whom sells you stuff, that is different from the supermarket, I mean in supermarkets it seems that sellers know less than you, there instead you have a direct exchange with the producer, who tells you, look at this, it's fresh, I made it, I cropped it this morning, it's so good, try it, and so on, it becomes mostly a human relation which is so much better than just going to supermarkets – Daniele*

*[..] I go to the market as often as not, because I like it, there's a lot of people, the lady I called my biologist and she calls me the cyclist, who sells biological food, I mean we talk, she has a daughter who has just given birth to a son, it becomes a way to socialize, the same with the baker, then, if one says I don't care about the relationship with the sellers, who cares, I go to the supermarket where I pick up cans that have been probably made partly in New Zealand, partly in Canada, and packaged in Italy.. it's all right, I mean, also what can apparently seem a lot of wasted time, for me it's not – Beppe*

This latter aspect goes back to the concept of time in our society, that has been discussed earlier in relation to the Voluntary Simplifier identity.

Having more time allows people to stop and to focus more on building relationship, for example with sellers or producers. This specific need of more direct interactions with other people only emerged among the Italian interviewees, who tend to run away from the large retailers in favor of more simple and concrete relations with sellers and producers.

Moreover, a desire of a return back to the origin of a farmer's culture, and thus to a direct relation with the land emerged as well.

*[..] we had another experience with gardens, closer to the city, where we went ourselves there to crop vegetables, and it lasted a couple of years until those guys moved, but that guaranteed them the possibility to live there and gave us not only good and genuine products, but also the pleasure to go to the countryside to crop them, it was a bit hard because of course you had to go there and when there were hard works to be done, as weeding or stuff like that, we, the participants in that project, did them [..] – Stella*

For what concerns the identity's construction, these represent examples of behaviors that do not fully embody just one stereotypical identity, however, they can be symbols of many selves, communicating the different values and beliefs that coexist in one person.

In the respondents' words it was possible to notice two main behavioral lines of conduct.

On one side, those people who make more strict consumption choices, that can lead to the decision of giving up certain products because they are not coherent with their principles.

These practices are closer to consumption resistance.

*if I have to, for some reasons I have to buy stuff that is not what I really wanted and hmm if I have to buy conventionally grown stuff, especially meat, then I actually lose my appetite, so it's only if I have to hmm I would rather not eat, I would rather just eat when I can get it, it's not much vegetables, but it's more for meat, I really get vegetarian when I have to eat meat – Lisbeth*

*[..] only the idea that my friends invite me out for a pizza hmm I basically don't go, because it's a product that is really poison for me now, so I just don't go, then somehow I went a bit away [..] I don't go neither to the barbecues, because they use very bad meat and it's always*

*a fight because I try to get them convinced and sometimes we see each other, but only when I cook the things I have bought and I invite them [...] – Daniele*

*[...] you don't have to buy everything organic, you can, I don't know, you can say okay I need 10 things I'll buy 5 of them organic and then maybe buy less [...] – Charlotte*

*I actually choose not to buy products because they are not organic [...] I choose not to buy, and I go to Irma around the corner here, which has a lot of organic for example but which is also more expensive [...] – Claus*

On the other side, it is not always possible to be 100% coherent, due to external contingencies as for examples prices, availability, and so on.

*[...] sometimes it's me that disobey, it happens sometimes that I need the yoghurt and I buy it close to here, and my son told me, have you seen which brand is it? Yeah, they have overcome me, because sometimes I tend to buy, I don't like it, but the need forces me to buy the closest product [...] I could have been more careful and I could have bought my yoghurt the day before, not the very last minute, and sometimes I don't even pay attention to the brand since I'm focused on the product itself, the yoghurt, and I feel sorry when it happens, because that means I'm not that careful [...] – Stella*

*[...] then you don't have money and you just need to do it, cause you need to get something to eat, and I'm not becoming a vegetarian just I mean just because I'm buying the same standards as everybody else, so yeah it happens quite often, but now with my new job it won't happen anymore – Magnus*

### **2.3.3. The Environmentalist**

*I think I'm known as The Environmentalist among friends and family, and lot of friends, family they ask me about technical issues, as we are going to paint the kitchen, what kind of*

*paint should we select? And things like that, how about the Christmas tree, should we go for this or that [...] – Christian*

*[...] with my friends I've often been the leader, the puller of the situation, I've always tried to convince other people, friends, and I've quite always succeeded – Giuliano*

This could be identified as another stereotypical identity, among the interviewees' narration. Undoubtedly, these people are extremely informed about environmental issues, and can actually be considered experts, and thus act as reference points for family and friends.

From the examples that I got, they do not have to be authentic green consumers, but instead most of them are involved politically or socially in associations aimed at informing and educating the citizenship toward a higher respect for the environment, and they also take an active part in actions organized to attract the attention of both the public opinion and the administrations.

*well, I think I'm the typical academic member, I know a lot about what is going on technically, politically, and I'm concerned about it and I'm looking for solutions in, you could say, in the academic society, but also practical solutions, for example I'm a member of the eco-labeling council in Denmark and there I work for the European Flower, the Nordic Swan as the two eco-labeling [...] I do also in my work I do some blogging about green lifestyles – Christian*

*[...] when you start seeing environmental disasters, when you become aware, even if ahead of the time, that certain situations will inevitably bring to disasters, I remember that the first times we started talking about climate changes it was about 20 years ago, so it's since 20 years that we have been called prophets of misfortunes [...] so when you start realizing that, of course you want to commit yourself to spread this awareness outside, to spread the word in the best possible way, [...] when you believe that the structures of an economic and social system will inevitably bring to disasters hmm you really want to fight this system to try to change it, that's just it – Giuliano*

A general and diffused belief among all the participants is the need that people change their consumption habits, orienting them toward more sustainable behaviors.

To realize this aim, all the respondents highlighted the importance of informing and educating people, firstly about the environmental issues that our world is facing, and secondly about what everybody can actually do on his own.

Of course, the information flow should start from the administrations, but at the same time those people who are particularly aware and spend their time working or volunteering for environmental associations, have a sort of personal mission to try to raise the consciousness of as many people as possible.

*I try to raise the awareness of what is going on [...] we are trying you know to inform people but also give them advices on how to act, what to go, look for when they shop [...] I try not to be moralizing, I don't want to be the one, you have to.. I try not to raise my finger and pointing at people saying you have to do better, I try to be very understanding of why people choose not to, but I try to inform [...] I think the way for it is to you know tell people what actually is going to happen, and give them tools to act themselves, easy tools to act – Claus*

It does not imply everybody to be authentic green consumers in every consumption choices they make, but it is important to be informed and conscious about these concerns, and try to act accordingly.

Even small actions and behaviors can determine a difference for the environment.

*you don't have to change every single aspect of what's wrong with environmental issues, you can just find one thing that you think is really really important, therefore I of course think I can make a real difference for the environment, that's the right attitude to have – Charlotte*

*if everybody becomes aware of their behaviors, then surely you can see real and concrete consequences [...] therefore consumers' strength lies in choices that everyone puts into practice, so don't buy this product instead of the other one [...] all together we are stronger, and in this respect also individual choices are important – Giuliano*

*I have a feeling that I can make a real difference for the environment and I think that's due to my knowledge about issues in the environment, I understand that if I didn't know that much it would be more difficult for me to realize that I could do it, make a difference – Christian*

*[..] on the world level I'm not even an ant, but with one drop, and then another drop, finally they reach the river and it goes to the sea anyway, therefore I think that what I'm doing is a little drop for the environment [..] and I can influence my neighbor so we become two, and we influence other people becoming four, then eight, and so on – Erica*

*whatever you can do at home, of course you can save on the electricity, you can put the rest of your vegetables in the compost in the garden, you can grow your own vegetables, you can go by train instead of driving a car, everything you can do is a little drop of course in the big ocean, but also you can of course spread the word to your neighbor, to your family, to your friends, you can even join some groups and make something happen there – Claus*

*[..] in my own small way I can do a lot, I mean better than nothing, what I'm doing actually means stopping the current worsening, [..] it's fundamental to start from the individual to find other people [..] everyone should be aware of his power to change things, this awareness has to be into all of us, otherwise things don't change [..] – Paola*

*Small things count. If people feel that they do not have to change their entire lives to make a difference, then there might be more cooperation.. – Kutloano*

Given that, all the participants do believe that they can make a difference for the environment, and that they are actually doing it, but at the same time they are conscious that their actions alone are not enough. Therefore, since they have a deeper knowledge and awareness about environmental issues, each one of them, in his own small way, tries to talk, to inform, to influence others and their behaviors.

*[..] alone you clearly don't change the state of the environment, but the point itself that you somehow have a different lifestyle, I mean someone will be curious, not everybody will think*

*you're crazy and maybe someone will think that it is worth to behave in that way, and for me this is already a great result – Stella*

*I'm not alone, because if I talk to other people about what I use, of course I can affect by my behavior, at least in my own family and the friends that I have – Kenneth*

Therefore, all the respondents can be examples of an environmentalist self, in the way that they are conscious about issues regarding the environment, and they constantly try to spread this knowledge among those who are not yet aware.

## **2.4. Future Potential Self-Identities**

As Markus and Nurius (1986) stated, individuals' consumption choices are influenced by their possible selves, their potentials in the future. These are selves that people would very much like to become, could become, but at the same time they can also be selves that people are afraid of becoming (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

Hence, individuals' consumption choices and behaviors are very likely to be influenced by these possible selves, since people, in their everyday decision-making processes, are constantly striving to reach their goals and avoid their fears.

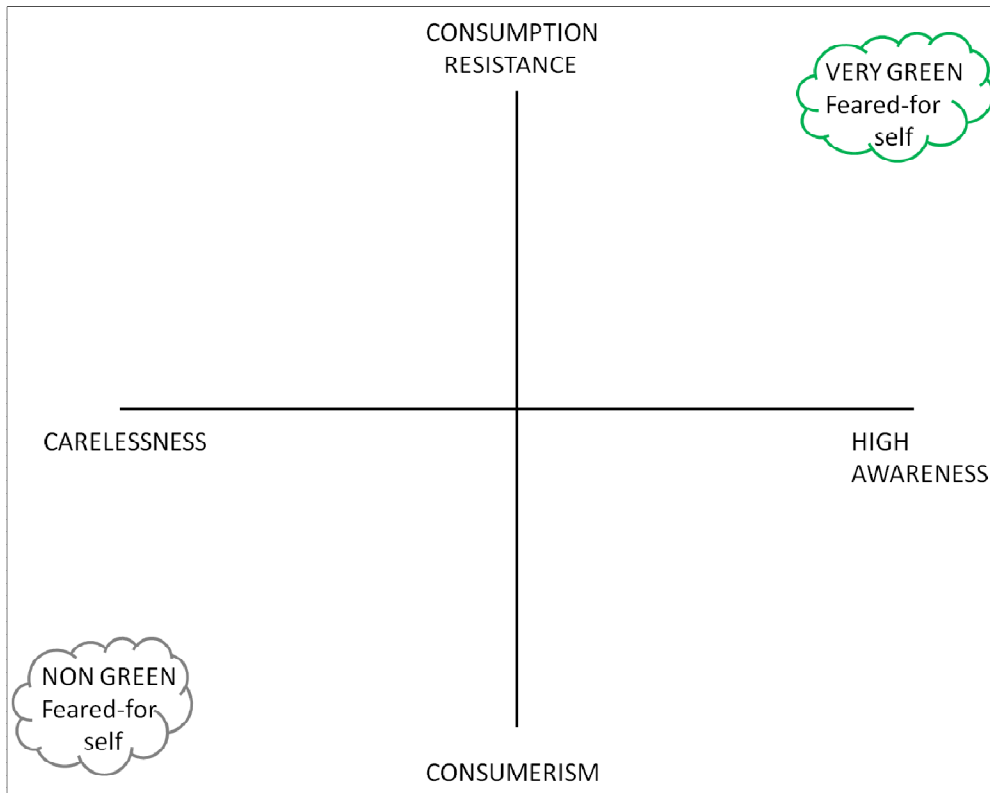
Given that, during the interviews' codification phase I immediately noticed the presence of both ideal selves and feared-for ones in the interviewees' responses.

Even though they do not directly refer to them, especially to feared-for selves, however, from their stories and beliefs, it is possible to assume how they represent these possible selves, and more precisely which consumption patterns and behaviors they identify them with, and consequently try to avoid.

Therefore, as affirmed by Belk (1988), green consumption products and practices are able to reflect not only consumers' identities, but also their aspirations.

### 2.4.1. Feared-for selves

The analysis highlighted the predominance of two feared-for selves, which are self-identities that threaten people, who in turn behave in consistent ways in order to avoid becoming these negative selves.



#### 2.4.1.1. The non green consumer

The first feared-for self that can be identified in the interviewees' words corresponds to the non green consumer. As I have previously shown, he/she is described as a very negative self, both according to Italian and Danish's assumptions.

They have identified a list of conventional behaviors and actions, which in turn become symbols representing this negative self in their minds.

The non green consumer is positioned in the bottom left corner of the identity matrix, by the highest levels of consumerism and carelessness.



Hence, he/she is defined as a totally unaware person, who actually does not care about what is happening to the environment, and does not pay any attention or efforts in trying to minimize his/her impact on it. Furthermore, he/she is usually characterized by a high degree of selfishness, which in turn determines high levels of consumerism.

*Ah, the non green consumer [...] he is the one who doesn't recycle, but who doesn't neither look at the quality of the products he buys, who doesn't pay any attention when he purchases consuming goods, such as a car, and so he might buy the biggest car which consumes the most, as for example the SUV, so hmm, who doesn't neither show respect for the environment when he goes walking in the mountain, he doesn't pay attention in preserving and not spoiling [...] – Giuliano*

*I guess a non green consumer is somebody who is just not conscious at all about how his or her spending will affect the environment, how are going to affect the animal welfare, and who basically doesn't care about it I guess, and would never spend just 1% more on neither of these products, I guess that would be a definition of a non green consumer – Magnus*

*Ah, silly, silly [...] it should be done this to all of us, when you throw a cigarette butt in the sea you should find it immediately in your coffee, or when your son is bathing and gets out from the sea and you have thrown the butt when he was there, [...] he should have the cigarette butt on himself, the ash, or it should be in the fish you eat, because it is actually in the fish you eat, but you can't see it, you should clearly see the butt, I think this would help, because it's really stupid, because you don't have consciousness at all about nothing [...]he's a completely non careful consumer, because otherwise you wouldn't dirty where you live – Stella*

*non green consumer, you don't give a damn, then you just buy something, the first thing you look at, you have some completely other priorities when you buy some products – Majken*

Consumption practices as non recycling, not purchasing organic or fair trade labeled goods, continuously buying products that do not correspond to a real need, not showing respect for

the natural environment, going by car instead of using public transportation, and so on and so forth, these can be all considered as symbols used by the interviewees to represent the identity of a completely unaware consumer.

In fact, all these consumption habits clearly communicate the absence of environmental concerns and attitudes, which characterize non green consumers' identities.

Since this is what the participants really fear becoming, they behave accordingly, or rather in the opposite way with respect to the non green or average consumers, trying to reduce, as much as they can, their damages on the environment.

*I would hate sitting in a car, first of all because it takes forever and there's you know queuing up on a highway, and also because it pollutes much more than going by train, [...] so when we moved out, both my wife and I work here in Copenhagen, so we wanted to be close to a train station so that we could you know take the train instead of going by car – Claus*

*for me it's a punishment to go to Coop (supermarket), I mean each time I have to go there it's a punishment, so when I have to, I go there during lunch breaks so that I have less time and I have to be quick [...] - Stella*

These are examples of people who freely chose to avoid, or would very much like to avoid, some of the typical behaviors of the non green consumer, as the high levels of car consumption, and the habit of going shopping into supermarkets.

Moreover, when it happens that they are forced to behave in those ways, they experience them as punishments. Therefore, interviewees mainly blame the contemporary society's system for having standardized and flattened all the modern consumers' lives.

In fact, everybody does all the same things, owns the same products, behaves in the same ways, thus these standardized consumption patterns symbolize everything the interviewees really want to escape.

*it was very early in my life that I started living green, I think it's because I could do something different that not just behave like all people, like everybody else, but doing something that is me, you see, unique – Benny*

*In my view maybe we would also have some sort of sensitivity, but it's so locked, so entrapped, due to the system's daily life that somehow forces us to live a bit angry, very angry – Augusto*

*why do we always have to sell more, produce more [...] the point is that we need to go away from material growth to non material growth, so we need to have services and stuff like that instead of buying products all the time – Claus*

*we have this cultural aspect, well it's not cultural anymore for people who use television or other stuff, by now it's a forced act that you have to move within a predetermined dimension, you have to hoard money because it's the only thing that gives you safety and assure you certain stuff, etc, therefore I mean you move again in that forced way – Beppe*

The non green consumer emerges as the average consumer who is completely absorbed by the contemporary society he/she lives in, and by its busy life's rhythms.

This system somehow standardizes people, who hence look all similar, as stereotypes who behave exactly in the same ways.

*Everything lies in the understanding of which are the real things, because otherwise is the external world, the society who labels you, therefore you end up doing specific things that don't interest you anymore because you are influenced by the external world [...] well it is more comfortable for everyone to be part of that society at a certain point, but at the end you have also to understand what are your things [...] – Beppe*

*[...] for some time I have worked in building, I made wooden floors, and I saw people building their houses who were satisfied just in buying houses as they were without caring about how would they have been heated, how would they have been powered, the heat losses [...] people just tend to step aside – Daniele*

*the intervention on the territory of the big supermarkets' chains has really devastated the culture of the country [...] few days ago I've been to Coop and I've seen that they put some products with the lowest prices' labels, I mean, one who buys these products either is really poor and then it's okay, but if you have a family, children and a job, then you can't allow yourself to buy that stuff, because for sure are very low quality products, and if you give them to your children then you will poison them, you will really poison both their palate and thus they will never recognize good quality products anymore, and their minds, because people will keep on thinking that it's sufficient to enter a supermarket to buy stuff [...] you will always look for buying 3 for 2, 4 for 3, and so on – Daniele*

*few years ago in the center of Modena I've seen a beautiful writing which said, pale people, and it really impressed me, because in my view it contains a whole wisdom, of many things of our distracted society [...] when you are in the middle, in a supermarket, in the center, even from little behaviors, little situations, you see that people always throw out negative feelings, you really feel these tense situations – Augusto*

*in my view, it means really being stereotyped, they are really like that here, don't you think? It's terrifying.. look, one thing I've noticed coming back from Africa, from Brazil, from certain areas, is that when you get here they are all penguins, all exactly the same behaviors and attitudes, the majority of them at least [...] real penguins, all standing in a line, who own the same stuff, same attitudes, not only in doing, but also in saying, in expressing concepts in common discourses, everyday simple ones, they are really stereotypes, pale people, hmm there's a bad virus out there, apart from that arrogance and insolence, that is in my view one of the Italian's labels [...] small silly things, but you really see people who flash you, honk you, who are stuck to the back of your car.. these are just small things, but every day for a whole life then they bring you that inner anger, that closeness, and that way of judging people without being informed, I think that the all system here is wrong [...] – Augusto*

*surely consumption gives us satisfaction, but this satisfaction needs to have limits, it cannot go beyond because these are negative satisfactions if you just keep going this way – Giancarlo*

This extremely critical attitude toward contemporary society has emerged mostly from the Italian interviewees.

On the other side, even though Danish consider the non green consumer as a negative self as well, nonetheless, they did not mention at all the issue of a stereotyping society.

This might have different reasons: it could depend on the involvement of the participants in the topic itself, since I have not chosen them from the same reference group; it could also be the result of the direction that the interviews took, in fact I tried to let them talk as freely as possible, therefore each one of the interviewees focused more on one aspect rather than others; and finally, it could be explained on a cultural basis.

To be more precise, I have noticed a general attitude, among Italian participants, to talk more openly and to ramble on the initial topic.

On the contrary, generally speaking, Danish participants were more discrete, and their discreteness could be perceived as a lower predisposition to talk.

Nevertheless, this could be due to a lower involvement too, since those who talk more freely were the ones really into the environmental topic.

Anyhow, what can be gathered is that all the respondents identified the non green consumer as a feared-for self, and this identity is communicated through a series of negative behaviors, that they believe have to be avoided.

#### ***2.4.1.2. The very green consumer***

At the direct opposite of the non green consumer, in the up right corner of the map, there is another feared-for self, the very, authentic green.

Earlier in the analysis, I have shown how Italian and Danish define this identity.

There are few skeptical among the Italian interviewees, who consider the authentic green as a pure one, who is not even consuming anymore.

However, generally speaking, Italian and Danish both agree in considering the very green consumer as a person who takes into account the environment in every decisions he/she makes, and in orienting his/her consumption choices toward the products or solutions with the lowest impact on the Earth.

*[..] the authentic green consumer is the one who tries maybe to be a little less selfish, to look beyond his limits and boundaries, who tries to gaze into the distance – Luana*

Apart from the specific definition, respondents from both countries actually think it is a non achievable identity, which sometimes characterizes those people who are a bit fanatic and a little bit over the hedge. Basically, although everybody is very concerned about environmental issues, however, almost none of them would like to achieve this self identity, because that would mean totally transforming their lives, to the extent of self excluding from society.

*probably the greenest persons I know are the Elves who live in Tuscany, in Garfagnana, I met some of them, but it's a radicalism that I don't really feel to share, I mean I would never live in that way, because honestly I don't believe you have to reach those levels, to give up on energy, or hmm [...] on everything that is a normal life to feel close to the environment, it seems a bit too extreme for me – Daniele*

*well the very green, those that I came across they almost hmm I mean their consuming behavior is almost like a religion and then become too much I think, it's becoming fanatic, and I think it destroys their lives and it destroys their surroundings, because it's really annoying that you have to.. that you have to always think can I eat this? Can I eat this food? Or can I buy this food? Is that okay? – Magnus*

*[..] hmm I think being a 100% green consumer is almost impossible, I don't know, even for moving [...] so being like that 100% it becomes quite complicated, so one does what he can according to his possibilities and capabilities – Giuliano*

*I don't know if authentic ones really exist, also because I mean everyone chooses those aspects where he wants to do less, to do more [...] I like having new books and keeping them, so what does it mean, more paper production [...] neither the Amazon indigenous are authentic, also because at the end we all produce something, and we all consume, it's unavoidable, zero waste doesn't exist [...] so the authentic green, or social or environmental doesn't exist, they are very few, and these have a lot of difficulties – Augusto*

*the very green I think it's very few still, and these would be people you know who have solar panels, who drive electric cars or maybe don't have a car at all, they don't travel because they take care of..they grow their own vegetables organically, and focus very much on hmm they don't even buy things, and maybe are organized in some organizations, telling others what to do, not to waste and things like that – Claus*

*in the reality in which we live, it's impossible to be an authentic green consumer, absolutely impossible, because even if you have a bit of sensitivity and try to do something, the context around you in which you live doesn't allow you to do so, starting from moving without using the car, it becomes really difficult – Paola*

Therefore, from these examples we can highlight two main beliefs: one relates to the fear of becoming authentic if this means reaching high levels of radicalism and stopping consuming any kind of products; the other one refers to the difficulties that a person encounters in living in a greener way, due to the structure and peculiarities of the society we live in.

It is thus difficult to be the only one trying to behave differently, when everybody else around you goes in the opposite direction.

Moreover, it is not always possible to behave as a green consumer in every consumption decision you make, because of various constraints that need to be faced every day.

*[...] you always have to make compromises toward the place where you live, I mean you have to move with the car, and also in our association we are not perfectly green, we import a coke that uses brown sugar from Malawi, goes to England to be produced and then we import it for Italy, it's not perfectly virtuous, I mean it's true, we help Malawi, but.. – Erica*

*I think, I think about it, but I also like to just be able to have a normal life and not have to consider everything I put in my mouth or on my face or whatever, so I'm aware but not in this very strict way as I think they are – Ida*

*in my opinion everyone has to act in his own awareness [...] I mean if at a certain point of my life, during my day, it's satisfying for me to do certain things, I don't think they should be all erased – Beppe*

*I fly, still, and I considered that non green and hmm I'm thinking more and more about not flying, but it's cheap and you get far and fast so hmm yeah it's not the subject maybe but I think it's a part of my identity in this respect about how green consumer I am, in which way I transport myself as well [...] I would like to be less possible to be a non green consumer, of course I would like to be more green – Tue*

*I know many people who are green in certain aspects and less green in others, I mean our lives are really rooted in a certain way of consuming, that you find great difficulties in pursuing entirely a specific consumption philosophy, let's take my example, I'm very careful for everything that is food, and also goods' consumption, clothes for example, now exist a lot of clothes' lines in biologic cotton or wool, so I pay a lot of attention also to these things, but on the other side for example I'm forced to use the car [...] – Daniele*

*I'm always green unless when I'm flying to very far destination, then I fall just down here (non green), but I like to travel, to meet other people, their cultures, their ways of living – Benny*

These are examples of compromises that people reach in order, from one side, to follow their inner principles, and from the other side not to be completely excluded from the society they are part of. Therefore, they are sometimes under its influence, and thus, they accept to make less greener consumption choices, in order not to be totally excluded from their family and friends, even though they would have not taken these decisions under different circumstances.



*you live in a way in which you have to share certain things with your family, friends, and so on, so you can't always be the outsider – Franco*

### **2.4.2. Hoped-for selves**

The possible future self-identities might be either negative or positive.

The hoped-for selves are those selves that people would really like to achieve, positive identities that they would very much like to embody.

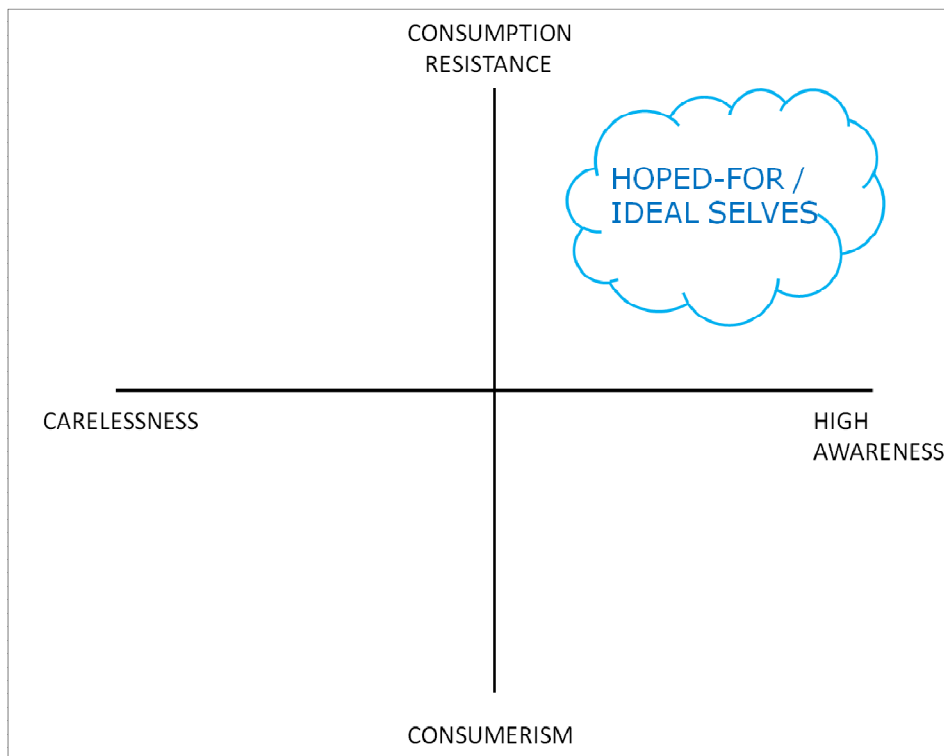
When I showed to my interviewees the continuum among the non green consumer and the authentic one, after having asked them to position themselves, I also asked if there was a point they would have liked to reach along that continuum. I was expecting them to be quite sure about their ideal selves, but actually just one drew the point she would have liked to reach.

The same motives that make the very green consumer a feared self, play an important role also in this respect. In fact, the ideal selves that the respondents would like to become, have to continuously face the constraints that living in a modern society can imply.

People have to make daily compromises, and to manage new issues every day, from the simplest actions as going to work from where they live, take the children to school, do the grocery shopping, and so on. Therefore it becomes sometimes difficult for them to make long-term plans, even though they do have aspirations, since everybody would like to improve his/her being green. Hence, I could not get a precise location in the identity matrix for the ideal selves, as it was for the feared-for selves, nevertheless I have identified a possible area where they could be positioned, which goes of course toward very high levels of awareness and consumption resistance.

All the respondents would like to improve themselves toward a greener location, more precisely they have some consumption habits they would really like to change.

Undoubtedly, this is a shared feeling among all the respondents, but at the same time, it very much depends on the individual subjectivity, values and aspirations, since everyone makes his/her own choices based on his/her inner principles and morality.



From one side, most of the participants' consumption behaviors are focused on near future choices, and are mainly based on their willingness to spend.

From the other side, they also have very long-term objectives, but unfortunately they cannot be totally sure whether these will be achieved or not.

*I would certainly like to improve myself, because I notice that when I'm closer to the environment and nature, I'm feeling better, I have a better relationship with others, but I have to say I'm not working so much on that, because I mean if you have to do a cake in a certain way then you need white sugar, so it's okay.. – Stella*

*I'm not a super green consumer and that is probably because I have quite away from where I live to my work, and I often take the car, because that is the most practical way to do it [...] if I was living in Copenhagen I would be a greener consumer than I'm today [...] because I live 25 km away and it's not hmm when I need to fetch my kids on my way home or I need to buy stuff on my way and it's not possible when I take the bus and the train [...] so I'm not fully*

*pleased with myself I would like to be further in the very green consumer direction – Christian*

*I will for sure improve in my life's structure [...] I would like to find a job closer to where I live, that allows me to reduce my usage of the car [...] and then maybe one day I will have a family and I will have to buy a new house, and there, I think, you can do a lot of things – Daniele*

*I don't live in a green house, I don't have solar panels on my roof which I would love to have, but at the moment we don't have the money for it [...] I would love to have a little windmill in the backyard and solar panels, but also there's local regulatory things that say you can't build too high, and you have to get a permission to put solar panels in your house, and your neighbors think it's ugly to look at it, and you have an issue there, so it's not easy– Claus*

As we can see, the constraints dictated by our lifestyles often prevent people to behave totally green. All the participants would very much like to improve their behaviors, and since they are pretty much aware of all the environmental issues, therefore their ideal selves are all related to improvement in their consumption choices and purchases.

However, at the same time, they are perfectly conscious about the presence of external contingencies, that will for sure delay the achievement of these selves.

*first of all I would like to start buying biological, not caring about Coop promotions, buy less things, also less clothes, give away more things [...] – Daniela*

*we just bought a house and that would definitely be areas where we could be better, but there's also the problem [...] that it's expensive, when you buy the solutions, but in the long term you might have an advantage within, so it can be difficult to just go ahead and make everything perfect at the beginning, but I think is our ambition to make the house as energy efficient as possible throughout the years – Ida*

*I would like to improve by having more sustainable means of transports, that I can easily take, thus I would like to become greener also in this field, and I would like to have a car less hhm I have a LPG car but it's still a compromise.. but I mean it doesn't exist yet a car that is a 100% compatible [...] – Giuliano*

*We want to buy a big house for the children and in that way I'm looking very much into energy reports and what can I do to improve [...] I'm looking at how to continue having the focus and the more I can save the more I will save if it makes sense of course [...] It's a balance of course, so there's of course an economic influence on the decisions – Kenneth*

These are all examples of goals that people are willing to achieve, and are pursuing through their everyday green consumption decisions.

Unfortunately, given the various nature of compromises that our society forces us to reach, they are all aware that it will not be easy to attain their personal objectives.

Anyway, although the respondents do not know whether they will achieve these aims or not, nonetheless, they are pretty sure about the consumption decisions they have to put into practice in order to try to become greener, and even more conscious.

Making their houses more environmental friendly, limiting the usage of the car, or even giving it up, buying not only organic food, but also organic clothes and other objects, and so on, are all consumption habits that will help respondents in reaching their goals.

Therefore, by behaving according to these principles, people communicate the achievement of specific objectives, thus defining their hoped-for selves and positive identities.

## **2.5. Barriers to Green Consumption**

Interviewees identify the non green consumer as an extremely negative self, characterized by consumption choices which communicate a total carelessness regarding the environmental issues and high levels of consumerism.

At the same time, they define the direct opposite of the non green, that is the very, authentic green consumer, as a feared-for self too.

The motives relate to the society in which we all live, because, in the participants' point of view, at the wealth levels reached, it would not be possible to become authentically green, without necessarily giving up all material possessions, and living as an outsider.

Furthermore, for what concerns the ideal selves, the interviewees' responses were vague.

They do have potentials selves they wish they could become in the future, nevertheless, they are not sure what they actually might become, because every day they have to face many constraints, dictated by the society's structure.

Given that, I thought it would have been interesting to hear participants' opinions about reasons behind non green consumers' choices, and I have found a general agreement regarding this topic, too.

As it was expectable, the first variable acting as a barrier to a greener way of consuming is price. According to the interviewees' point of view, most average consumers base their purchase choices only upon price, which is often the first element taken into consideration, sometimes even to the detriment of quality.

*people have been used to spend less and less for their food, without worrying about all the dynamics that lie behind the production phase [...] therefore you have a lower quality product, but that people are more willing to buy because it's cheaper [...] I'm not sure people, at the welfare level we have reached now, are willing to modify their lifestyles to consume clean, in my view this has always been and still is a problem of information – Daniele*

*a lot of it it's because it's more expensive, a lot of people think it's too expensive to buy organic if you consider the non organic, so they buy non organic because it's cheaper – Charlotte*

*it's difficult to find perfectly eco-friendly products, made of non pesticides cottons or without animal killing [...] and even if there would be a car a 100% environmental compatible, then you have to see if you can afford it, there are also economic constraints – Giuliano*

*it's often cheaper to, you know, pollute than to be careful and take care of the environment [...] if it's way more expensive he would probably choose the conventional thing as well, I*

*think that for a lot of consumers this is how it is, they want to, but when they see the price and see that it's 2 or 3 times as much, then they buy the cheap one – Claus*

*certainly you have to take into consideration your willingness to pay, because usually these products cost a lot more – Luana*

Anyway, there are also other elements influencing consumers' choices and behaviors, as for example the comfort connected to the conventional products' purchases, but also the low availability of eco-friendly goods, and the low consumers' involvement in these issues.

*hmm I would say for comfort, for ignorance maybe, in the positive sense, that maybe television, media just push you toward certain choices instead of having your own idea, I don't think it's lack of information because nowadays with the Internet, if you really want, you can be perfectly informed, maybe yeah for comfort, for opportunism too, I think awareness is the basis for everything, I mean, in the exact moment you know things, they show and explain them to you, then you can't remain careless – Erica*

*it's so abstract, you cannot feel the causes directly, the consequences, like when you touch a warm plate you can feel it immediately, but there it's really abstract, you cannot see the connection between what do you do and what happens to the environment, and also because it's so difficult to actually find out what is the right thing to do, because you get so much information [...] if you are not into it and have to spend your time in something else, maybe it's not so obvious that you should act, unfortunately – Majken*

*look, for two main reasons, first because we are always complaining but we live in a very comfortable way, second reason, which I discuss often with friends, is that people say, okay petrol will be finished in 40 or 50 years and so on, but what can I do? Then people just don't face an issue if they already know they don't have any kind of power, because it creates only anxiety and worry about their own future and that of their children, when they don't have tools to face it [...] in my view we all try to bury one's head into the sand, to hide ourselves to avoid facing issues on which the individual citizen actually doesn't have any control – Franco*

*availability as well, I mean you have hundreds meters of frozen goods, and you have 2 for biodynamic, you have hmmm conventionally grown is hundred meters and biodynamic you just have to choose from 4, yeah, and then there are some things you push away because it's not life threatening to you, so why should I bother considering it, I mean people have done this for many years now and there's no consequences for me, so maybe also lack of knowledge actually – Lisbeth*

*the rush of life, the hurry of our life, it often moves our attention on the immediate future and not on what is really important or upon a positive behavior, then being living over stressed doesn't allow us to stop and reflect upon these themes, that in reality would cost us far less efforts than we can imagine [...] – Giancarlo*

*I think that is very much about distance, you need to feel a direct effect on you as a person, so if I for example if I save some water, it's very difficult as a citizen to record any difference, what does it do for me if I save some water, I can't see it, so why should I do it? Well, there are some reports, but I don't read reports [...] – Christian*

Sometimes people hidden their ignorance, considered here in terms of non awareness for what relates to the environment, behind their skepticism regarding the production methods used by biological producers, and the real difference among organic and conventional products.

*people want to buy organic, but they also look for excuses for not to buy, and because it is expensive it's better to say oh they cheat and I read about these farmers and so and so [...] – Claus*

*often you hear people saying biological is all a fraud, all these stupid things that don't have neither rhyme nor reason, I mean cheaters are both in the biological and in the conventional [...] – Daniele*

# Chapter 3 – Findings

---

## 3.1. Implications

Given the analysis, it is interesting to reflect on how these knowledge can be applied to promote green consumerism, and what are the possible implications of this research.

As it emerged from the interviews, all the respondents are pretty conscious about environmental issues, and about what can and has to be done to downsize the damages to our environment.

Everybody actually believes that people can make a real difference for it, but at the same time they are realists in affirming that all alone they cannot go much further.

It is fundamental to involve other people, and in this respect everyone can make a difference just by trying to influence others' behaviors.

What emerged as being really missing in modern society is information about environmental issues, and moreover education about what each individual can do in his/her own small ways, in order to slow down this worsening that appears as unavoidable.

Actually, with the Internet and new ways of communicating, it would be extremely easy for everyone to be informed about what is happening on an environmental level, however, most of time what prevails is the indifference and selfishness of people instead.

They do not really feel the urgency of these topics:

*we are always very individualistic, so we think that we can do whatever we want and everything should be allowed to us, we don't want to be limited in our personal liberties, that are not actually liberties, but more like expressions of selfishness, because one doesn't pay attention to anything else [...] – Giuliano*

*that is very much about distance, you need to feel a direct effect on you as a person [...] when you are not an academic you don't know what to believe in, and you are not sure you are really making a difference, and many people are not very focused on knowledge, they are more focused on here and now, what does it mean to me? Kind of, how you could call it hmm,*



*based on feelings right now, here and now, feelings, I want to do, why shouldn't I do that? Someone says it's not good for the environment but I can't see the difference, so well, I do it anyway – Christian*

*you spend 15€ for your car's fuel oil and only 3€ for the olive oil, I mean you can change your car, but your body will be the same for the rest of your life, so you use a worse oil for it than for your car [...] in my view there's a lot of ignorance – Daniela*

They complain a lack of knowledge among the average consumers about those issues, therefore it seems that if they are not forced to do something then they would not do that on their own.

*But also if you tell people that they should save electricity by buying energy efficient lights, they will not do it until the day they cannot switch on their lights. All green messages have to be linked to life's realities like dollars and cents – Kutloano*

What is really missing is the culture that allows people to understand that what is going on with the environment is a serious problem that has to be faced somehow, and that we are the main responsible for it. The culture needed to become conscious that these issues are concrete, and real, and people should take actions now, in their everyday lives.

*[...] because there is no culture, it has not been created, I think that if we want to change people's behaviors, we should create awareness about what is needed [...] – Giuliano*

*I think it's a matter of education, just education, I think that much of my students are trying to do like me, I'm telling them to do these things, to be free..but it takes many years before people are educated good enough to change their minds, old people can't change in this respect – Benny*

*[...] to leave the burden of getting informed to the people it's difficult, I mean, it's a so much slower evolution, because unluckily not everybody has the cultural qualities needed to*

*recognize certain things in the right way [...] so if you are not looking for information then you need some channels that bring it to you – Daniele*

Basically, all the interviewees share the belief that people are not able to get the right information by themselves, because of lack of time, lack of interest, lack of cultural background.

Since all the respondents recognized the absence of powerful signals from the public authorities, hence a strong action needs to be taken by politics and public administrations.

In fact, even though all the interviewees believe they are actually making a real difference for the environment by talking to others, and trying to inform and involve them, nevertheless, they are also aware that this is not enough. That is because the influence of an individual's action on other people is still very limited, in terms of reach, to his/her family, friends, colleagues, whereas actions from politics might potentially affect the whole population.

However, it should not be imposed, it is always better to let people reflect themselves about the consequences of their actions, anyway the reach of a public campaign is so much broader compared to the one of a single action from an isolated environmental friendly consumer.

*there are some things that you can't change by the good will [...] you could do that by changing the law, by changing the economic incentives and we have suggestions as an NGO for that, but that needs to be the government that takes some decisions, so I think I can make a real difference yes, but there need to be taken decisions on a higher level to make greater differences for the environment – Christian*

*a big information campaign is needed, [...] but a real one, so that people become aware that the conventional product is cheaper now, because that product doesn't consider all those costs related to environmental destruction, work overexploitation, that are all taken into account by a conscientious biological producer instead – Daniele*

*information [...] people should know what they are actually getting – Claus*

*for sure information, and not to be so obvious let's say also education, anyway an information aimed at educating our behaviors, this is without doubts the main point, and then there should always be someone who begins, who differs from others and given that, he could catch the attention and be the puller of an interior change, that it doesn't appear immediately today, but sooner or later can give results [...] – Giancarlo*

*I guess more information, and more information in the right way [...] it needs to be on a broad level, it needs to be on a political level, and it needs to be collaborations with the industry and the consumers and politicians – Magnus*

*I think that the biggest lack is the lack of attention from politics, I mean politicians have never been far-sighted, careful to these issues, and unfortunately we would have to pay this, because if they didn't make prevention politics in the past years, now they need to run after, but always very very late, and always less than what should be really done, [...] it's a lack of culture, determined in my opinion by the politics, because culture is created when someone starts spreading the knowledge, informing that these are real problems, and not just of a minority group of people [...] – Giuliano*

A change into people's minds is really needed, and it will consequently bring a shift into their behaviors, but to be attained it requires an intervention on a higher level, the political one.

*in my view, what is really important is the need to shake everybody's minds, so that, little by little, everybody realizes that each one has to do something, because it's really killing all of us [...] everybody should try to understand and take actions in order to safeguard public welfare, territory, and citizens' health [...] and it's hard, because you can't find the same sensitivity that you have in others, and thus in my view we need a strong cultural shift to change things – Paola*

*I think that it's the system that has to change, and it's too large I think to get into, and then people like hmm take a step back and just continue as normally because it's the easiest thing to do, it's too much to get into it.. I would like to be hmm there would be any kind of forcing*

*from I don't know from the state or from another authority to do that, I think that would be the right step – Tue*

*I believe that public administrations have a great responsibility in what is happening, I mean, do some campaigns in which you show that you are sending the exhaust emissions of your car directly into your children's lungs, maybe someone will reflect on it [...] if we really want not to worsen our planet then we need to work on people awareness [...] now we have again the garbage men that everyday collect the garbage, clean hmm I mean, are we joking?! This is a cost for the community, isn't it better to work on the good education of the citizens? – Stella*

### **3.1.1. Social Marketing perspective**

In 1952, Wiebe raised the question “Why can't you sell brotherhood like you sell soap?”, which implied the general ineffectiveness of the sale of social causes compared to the sale of commodities such as the soap (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971).

Moreover, in 1971 they defined social marketing as a promising framework for planning and implementing social change, with the aim of using marketing skills and tools to increase the effectiveness and the success of actions promoting social causes.

Social marketing consists of behavioral change for the good both of the individual and society, combining individual factors with institutional, organizational and policy variables (Domegan, Davison, and McCauley, 2010).

Furthermore, social marketing campaigns might have various effects on different levels: on a micro level, which is the individual one, on a group level, that of a community or an organization, and on macro level, which can be both national or international.

A behavioral change at the micro level will determine an individual lifestyle's shift in the long run, whereas a policy change at a macro level in the short term will end up, if well managed, in a cultural shift and evolution of the whole society in the long run, as shown in the table below (Domegan, Davison, and McCauley, 2010).

**Table 1: Types of Social Change, by Time and Level**

<b>Change</b>	<b>Micro Level (Individual)</b>	<b>Group Level (Group/Community/ Organisation)</b>	<b>Macro Level (Society/Nation)</b>	<b>Macro Level (International or Global)</b>
Short term	<i>Behaviour change</i>	<i>Changes in norms/administrative change</i>	<i>Policy change</i>	<i>Policy change</i>
Example:	Attendance at stop-smoking clinic	Removal of tobacco advertising from outside a school	Banning of all forms of tobacco marketing in Ireland	Banning of all forms of tobacco marketing, e.g. in all EU countries
Long term	<i>Lifestyle change</i>	<i>Organizational change</i>	<i>'Socio-cultural evolution'</i>	<i>'Socio-cultural evolution across societies'</i>
Example:	Smoking cessation	Deter retailers from selling cigarettes to minors	Eradication of all tobacco-related disease in Ireland	Eradication of all tobacco-related disease in the EU

Source: Domegan, Davison, and McCauley, 2010, Adapted from MacFadyen et al. (1999: 702).

As it emerged from the analysis, environmental issues, and thus the need to transform our society into a greener one, are concrete problems that have to be addressed and faced as soon as possible.

Social marketing campaigns appear as the right tools to create value at each level, from the macro to the micro one.

In fact, marketing skills and competencies can be used to promote and spread the knowledge about a social cause in order to influence consumers' behaviors in a permanent way. Nonetheless, in order to create a tangible and lasting shift in people's lifestyles, it is necessary to have cooperation among policy makers, local communities and organizations, and lastly consumers, so that virtuous circles of positive behaviors can be activated.

From a macro level perspective, policy makers should discuss environmental issues in depth, and should provide the citizenship with behavioral guides, concerning what they practically do in their daily choices, in order to remedy the past mistakes.

What the society needs, are clear objectives, that certainly have to be challenging, but at the same time achievable, because citizens need to comprehend and embrace them entirely.

From the interviews emerged the diffused tendency of average consumers to prefer more comfortable ways of consuming, focused only on their self interests, therefore, politicians should probably think about setting up norms, and laws, aimed at forcing people's behaviors.

This is a faster way to try to get some positive results for the environment, or at least to slow down a bit its worsening. In fact, a behavioral change starting from the individuals' side, at the micro level, needs much more time before resulting in a lifestyle shift of the population.

After the normative framework has been set up at the macro level, then the group one, which comprehends public administrations and communities, has to get the laws abided by the citizenship.

However, from the interviews has emerged the serious absence of a complete and specific communication flow that clearly informs consumers about the issues that are investing our planet. Right now, environmental issues are not on the top of politicians' agendas, but they need to be taken into consideration soon and in an exhaustive way.

Furthermore, beyond the common belief that a strong signal in this direction is needed from the State and the institutions, it could also be noticed a slight difference among Italian and Danish regarding the focus that this action should have.

Danish appear to be more focused on organic and biological food consumption, probably due to their early legislation, and they highlighted the need of a clearer communication in this direction. In fact, they report that most people still do not believe in organic food, but they are actually skeptical about organic producers instead.

Therefore, respondents complain the absence of a specific communication aimed at informing the population about what is there behind both conventional and biological food, and moreover, of transparency for what concerns organic prices.

*people should know what they are actually getting, and this is one thing that we are working on here at the Consumer Council, we are going to look at hmm we have this working title called, why does it have to be more expensive to be green? why do the people who want to do something good for the environment why do they have to pay more? Shouldn't it be the way around? [...] And also we are going to be looking at how is the law, how is the tax and put together to see if there's something that can be done there, maybe we have to raise the taxes on the things where the pollution is not included in the price and lower the taxes on organic*

*and eco-labeled and fair trade, we are going to try to find out why [...] politicians have to set up different rules so that the prices can be reversed, and also in Denmark there's also a bit of discussion on you know why is it called organic milk? Why isn't it called simply milk? and then the other kind of milk why isn't it called pesticide milk? – Claus*

Therefore, they are asking for a clear stance from politics, regarding organic goods and in particular their prices.

Although consumers themselves have a lot of responsibilities, because they should act instead of waiting for someone else to make something happen for them, however, it is also true that the main responsibilities are both within the politicians and the businesses.

Companies have their faults as well, because they often complain a lack of demand for eco-friendly products, but the problem is that consumers are not sufficiently informed, so it is not possible for them to demand a specific product if they do not even know about its existence.

*when I talk to the producers and retailers they always say oh we need to have the demand for these products, we need the consumers to demand these products, and we are saying no, you have to supply them, you have to put them out there before people can demand them, if they don't know it's there they can't demand it, so it's a never ending discussion – Claus*

*I guess it's just a question about a supply and demand, without being an economy, then if it's only a few who are buying, then it's not really worth for the industry to act according to these environmental standards, and they just keep producing the same crap [...] it needs to be collaborations with the industry and the consumers and politicians – Magnus*

On the contrary, Italian appear more focused on general issues regarding high levels of consumerism and waste. From the interviews, emerged their concerns about the possibility of shifting toward a more sustainable way of living, for example using renewable energy.

Hence, their main skeptical objection relates to the consumption rates of the actual society. They highlighted the need to educate people to be more parsimonious in terms of consumption choices, and to evaluate the impact that these choices might have on the environment.

*I don't believe that a green economy would be possible, if you mean substituting what comes from fossil fuels with other energy sources [...] I'm sure that is impossible to maintain a country's actual lifestyle and industrial level with solar panels, photovoltaic and wind power, and with hydroelectric neither, I mean, it really makes me laugh – Franco*

*a clean energy campaign should be carried on by energy producers, and run parallel to a campaign aimed at reducing energy consumption, because one criticism to clean energy is that it's not enough to sustain actual consumption, but in fact, we consume too much, so what is needed is without doubts a clean energy campaign, but also telling people to consume less, and that means less white goods, less car, it means less of everything, and these projects have to be carried on at the administrations' level, since leaving at one's conscience these choices is risky, because one uses his conscience as it's best for him [...] today in our society, it is very complicated to make a cleaner and greener consumption choice, I mean, you really have to put efforts by yourself, and unfortunately this is not always possible [...] – Daniele*

Therefore, while Danish are more focused on practical ways to try to improve at least one aspect of the bigger environmental issue, as the organic farming, Italian respondents are more judgmental and critic toward the values that this society is pursuing, these of profit, consumerism and indifference.

Therefore, they are very much looking for a shift in consumers' consciousness and way of thinking, which appears kind of utopian and very difficult to achieve in the actual society.

*I think money is the responsible, I mean living in a society based solely on money, on profit at all costs, then everything else falls on a secondary level and that is unavoidable, so we really need to change the way of seeing, to be green, to become a green consumer I think we need to change the world's ways of seeing things, and cannot everything be based on profit, because environment doesn't make profit, so there's not much to do, it's difficult to change things [...] – Paola*



But at the same time,

*When we buy, we make choices – Luana*

*If I spend 1€ in that direction then the market will go in that direction [...] I believe that everyone as an individual can actually influence, he is constantly influencing everything, what he cannot do is to see the results of this evolution, he could never see that – Beppe*

*little behaviors if experienced collectively will determine a change, if lived individually are a witness [...] – Franco*

Therefore, what can be extracted from this research is that the next step toward a more environmental conscious society has to be taken by politicians and public administrations. Conferences and meetings among the powerful personalities of the world are not enough, if they are not translated into practical instructions for citizens.

Politicians can actually influence the state of the environment if they try to involve people's consciences and modify their behaviors, through norms, laws, directives, and most of all communication.

Furthermore, governmental communication agencies should utilize a social marketing perspective to give rise and maintain customers' engagement in the pursue of social environmental causes.

It is fundamental to recognize the importance of these issues, because even if it seems that they do not have an immediate effect on us, they will heavily affect future generations, therefore interviewees are asking to our institutions to take a strong stand, now.

Realizing effective information campaigns is probably the right way to proceed in order to involve the entire population, because after all, are the individuals, with their collective actions, who can determine a real shift in consumption behaviors, and consequently make a concrete difference for the environment.

## **3.2. *Conclusions & Perspectives***

Belk (1988, 1995) affirmed that consumers intentionally or unintentionally regard their possessions as expressions of their self-identities, therefore everybody is what he/she buys and possesses.

In this respect, material objects reveal individuals' values and goals (Rochberg-Halton, 1984), therefore consumers actually communicate about their identities through their consumption choices and behaviors, which are usually consistent with their aims and aspirations for the future (Morgan, 1993).

In particular, this research has analyzed the consumption of ethical and eco-friendly products in two European countries, Denmark and Italy, in order to study how these practices actually contribute to the shaping of people's identities.

From the interviews' analysis, twelve in Italy and eleven in Denmark, many recurrent and shared behaviors among the respondents emerged.

These can be used to actually define and identify a green consumer among the average ones, who conversely can be recognized by other symbolical consumption practices.

More precisely, greener consumption choices convey many information about the consumers who put them into practice.

For example, buying organic products, or on the contrary deciding not to purchase a specific item because it is conventionally grown, it is the result of workers' exploitation, it has been tested on animals, it comes from another country determining high transport's pollution, and so on and so forth, these are all precise choices that communicate about the individuals' deeper awareness and sensitivity for what concerns environmental issues.

Hence, these are all representations of their values and beliefs.

On the other hand, also the non green consumption's practices, that respondents have identified very precisely, communicate a lot about consumers who behave in these ways.

In fact, these consumption choices definitely characterize a person who is completely unaware and unconscious about what is going on environmentally.

For example, are defined non green those consumers who do not consider the origins of products, whether they are conventionally or organically grown, if they are the results of

children or animals overexploitation, who do not recycle, who use the car for every movements even the shortest ones, who buy products wrapped up with big packaging, and so on and so forth.

The identities emerging from these practices refer to those people who simply do not care about environmental issues, probably because they ignore the urgency of these concerns.

Moreover, their consumption's choices are aimed mainly at satisfying their self interests, rather than trying to have a lower impact on the environment.

Therefore, from this analysis has emerged that consumers do communicate various aspects of their identities through their behaviors and consumption decisions, both consciously and unconsciously.

Of course, they do not always reflect on what they are buying and on how they are behaving, because purchasing greener products has often become part of themselves, of their identities. Nevertheless, all the respondents are consciously trying to inform and influence the people around them, by talking, but also through their everyday consumption choices.

In fact, they are perfectly aware they are communicating specific messages through their behaviors, and moreover they really hope to raise people's curiosity to their ways of living and their green purchasing habits.

*in my family I try you know to act instead of saying, I don't want to be the good green guy saying to my cousins and stuff like that, oh I just bought this and this and these, I just hmm whenever they come to my house they can see what I have [...] – Claus*

*the point itself that you somehow have a different lifestyle, I mean someone will be curious, not everybody will think you're crazy and maybe someone will think that it is worth to behave in that way [...] – Stella*

Therefore, green consumption practices actually communicate the deeper consciousness of green consumers and their commitment in trying to change average consumers' purchase habits. This might appear ambitious, but at least, they are trying to inform people that when they buy, they do have the possibility to choose among various options, and to go for environmentally friendly products.

They are perfectly conscious that through their actions, and buying decisions they can, on one hand, influence the market, and on the other hand communicate to other people that it is possible, and mostly worth, to think about different ways of consumption.

Furthermore, at the same time, green consumption practices become a mean to differentiate themselves from others, in particular to go away from what they mostly fear, the negative self that everybody identifies with the non green consumer.

In fact, they define him/her with precise consumption choices, from which they are actually trying to escape, in order to avoid these negative possible selves.

Conversely, they try to inform about environmental issues by spreading the knowledge among their families, friends, colleagues, and the overall citizenship, in case they are involved in environmental associations.

Hence, given their high awareness about these topics, with respect to their reference groups, they try to influence them through their involvement and consumption's choices.

Nonetheless, this is not always possible, and sometimes they record difficulties in being totally consistent with their principles, because usually their families and friends do not really understand their commitment, and consequently they are sometimes forced to reach some compromises in order not to be totally cut off from their network of relations.

*I do talk a lot about it for my neighbors, but they don't understand what I'm doing, I can live this way but I think it's nice to do it, they are wondering just wondering, I can't get them to do it, to have my way of life – Benny*

*you feel somehow against the tide, but I mean I'm happy, I like going against the tide, try to go against the tide, because I still have a lot to do, but sometimes it's hard because you feel alone you know, I have this feeling, I feel a bit alone, and you can lose the courage, and also your friends, because they see you are different from them – Augusto*

Therefore, from the interviews emerged that their consumption choices and behaviors are also means to differentiate themselves from others, and to build their unique identities, through the combination of different purchasing habits and decisions.

In fact, I could not affirm that one of them was the stereotype of a precise identity, because they actually mix various choices and behaviors that allow them to create and thus to communicate unique identities.

The common goal pursued by all of them, is to differentiate from the average non conscious consumer, even though, also the authentic green identity appeared to be a feared-for self.

That is because, even though they absolutely prioritize environmental issues when making consumption choices, however, at the same time they are part of a group, and being really authentic would probably mean to live as an outsider, an hermit.

Hence, they all reach some compromises for their families, children, friends, in order not to be completely excluded from society, but they always try to inform and educate the citizenship as much as they can.

In conclusion, I can affirm that generally Danish and Italian agree on the definition of both the green and the non green consumer, therefore they highlighted the same consumption choices and specific possessions as being indicators of these self-identities.

This research is of course limited in terms of number of interviewees and width of the sample, since I chose to specifically focus on Italy and Denmark.

Nevertheless, these topics really need to be further studied and researched, and they will probably be in the foreground of the politicians' agendas in a very near future, because more and more people are starting to be concerned about environmental issues, and hopefully the amount of green consumers is going to increase during the next years.

Given that, there are various ideas that could be further studied and explored.

It would be interesting to study the effects of a social marketing campaign on the average consumers' awareness and consciousness, therefore how the information message is received and elaborated by non green consumers, and whether or not it determines a shift in people's consumption behaviors.

Moreover, it could be of interest to reverse this research, and study non green consumers' points of view, thus their consumption habits, the motives and rationales behind their choices, and how they perceive a green or very green consumer.

Even to study a smaller segment of consumers can be meaningful, for example young couples with children, who one of the interviewees has identified as being the most involved segment when it comes to organic consumption, especially in Northern countries.

Furthermore, by changing perspective and focusing more on companies, it would be interesting to study the impact of corporate social responsibility on consumers' demand, although this topic is gaining more and more attention at the academic level.

Another option would be to explore the ways in which companies can drive the demand for greener products, trying to educate their customers to more sustainable buying habits.

Moreover, there could also be conducted more specific researches about each different aspect that constitutes green consumerism, as for example fair trade, organic food, organic clothes, but also renewable energy, sustainable transports, recycling, eco-compatible houses, boycotting actions, voluntary simplicity, and so on and so forth.

Nowadays, it is possible to make a real difference in many ways, but it is important to be conscious about the problems that are investing the environment, and act accordingly.

It is often impossible to be totally coherent in every consumption choices one makes, therefore it might be sufficient to find a small niche of the market on which to focus, which consequently becomes worth of further researches.

The issues regarding the environment are going to increase in the next years, and moreover, they will necessary become part of our everyday consumption's decisions.

Hence, they need to be studied, faced and addressed simultaneously by politicians, authorities, businesses, individual consumers and academics.

## References

---

- Badiru, A.B. (2010). The many languages of sustainability. *Industrial Engineer*, November 2010: 30-34.
- Belk, R.W. (1984c). Cultural and Historical Differences in Concepts of Self and their Effects on Attitudes Toward Having and Giving. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol 11.
- Belk, R.W. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol 15: 139-168.
- Belk, R.W. (1995). Studies in the New Consumer Behavior. In: D. Miller (ed.) *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*. London: Routledge, 58-95.
- Belk, R.W., Devinney, T. and Eckhardt, G. (2005). Consumer Ethics Across cultures. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, Vol 8(3): 275–289.
- Carù A. and Cova B. (2003). Revisiting the consumption experience: a more humble but complete view of the concept. *Marketing Theory* 3(2): 267-286.
- Cherrier H. (2007). Ethical consumption practices: Co-production of self-expression and social recognition. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 6: 321-335.
- Cherrier H. and Murray J.B. (2007). Reflexive Dispossession and the Self: Constructing a Processual Theory of Identity. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, vol 10(1): 1-29.
- Crittenden, V.L., Crittenden, W.F., Ferrell, L.K., Ferrell, O.C. and Pinney, C.C. (2011). Market-oriented sustainability: a conceptual framework and propositions. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol39: 71-85.
- Cross, S. and Hazel, M. (1991). Possible Selves across the Life Span. *Human Development*, 34: 230-255.
- Domegan, C., Davison, K. and McCauley, V. (2010). Realising the Management Challenges for Science Communication Outreach: A Social Marketing Perspective. *Irish Journal of Management*. 89-108.
- Elgin, D. and Mitchell, A. (1977). Voluntary Simplicity. *Strategy and Leadership*, vol 5(6): 13-15.

- Elkington, J. and Hailes, J. (1988). *The Green Consumer Guide*. In Harrison, R., Newholm, T. and Shaw, D. (2005).
- Foote, N.N. (1951). Identification as the basis for a theory of motivation. *American Sociological Review*, 16: 14-21.
- Gosden, R. (1995). Greening all the Way to the Bank. *Arena Magazine*, vol 16: 35-37.
- Grant, J. (2007). *The Green Marketing Manifesto*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester, UK.
- Harrison, R., Newholm, T. and Shaw, D. (2005). *The Ethical Consumer*. SAGE Publications, London.
- Holgaard, J.E. and Jørgensen, T.H. (2005). A Decade of Mandatory Environmental Reporting in Denmark. *European Environment*, vol 15: 362-373.
- IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), 1991, "Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living", with the UN Environment program and the World Wildlife Fund, Gland, Switzerland.
- Kleine, S.S., Kleine III, R.E. and Allen, C.T. (1995). How is a Possession « Me » or « Not Me » ? Characterizing Types and an Antecedent of Material Possession Attachment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol 22, December: 327-343.
- Kotler, P. and Zaltman, G. (1971). Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change. *Journal of Marketing*, vol 35: 3-12.
- Levy, S.J. (1959). Symbols for Sale. *Harvard Business Review*, 37: 117-124.
- Markus H. and Nurius P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, vol 41(9): 954-969.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The Long Interview*. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, California.
- Mehta, R. and Belk, R.W. (1991). Artifacts, Identity, and Transition: Favorite Possessions of Indians and Indian Immigrants to the United States. *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol 17: 398-411.
- Moisander, J. (2007). Motivational complexity of green consumerism. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 31: 404-409.



- Morgan, A.J. (1993). The Evolving Self in Consumer Behavior: Exploring Possible Selves. *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol 20: 429-432.
- Newholm, T. and Shaw, D. (2007). Studying the ethical consumer: a review of research. *Journal of consumer behavior*, vol 6(5): 253-270.
- Østergaard, P. and Jantzen, C. (2000). Shifting Perspectives in Consumer Research: from Buyer Behavior to Consumption Studies. In: Beckhmann S. and Elliott R. (eds) *Interpretative consumer research. Paradigms, methodologies and applications*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 9-24.
- Patrick, V.M., MacInnis, D.J. and Folkes, V.S. (2002). Approaching What We Hope For and Avoiding What We Fear: The Role of Possible Selves in Consumer Behavior. *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol 29: 270-276.
- Pugh, C. (1996). *Sustainability, the Environment and Urbanization*. Earthscan Publications Limited, London.
- Richins, M.L. (1994). Special Possessions and the Expression of Material Values. *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol 21: 522-533.
- Rochberg-Halton, E. (1984). Objects Relations, Role Models, and Cultivation of the Self. *Environment and Behavior*, vol 16(May):335-368.
- Shaw, D.S. and Clarke, I. (1998). Culture, consumption and choice: towards a conceptual relationship. *Journal of Consumer Studies & Home Economics*, vol 22(3): 163-168.
- Trzyna, T.C. (1995). A Sustainable World, Defining and Measuring Sustainable Development. Published for IUCN – The World Conservation Union by the International Center for the Environment and Public Policy, California Institute of Public Affairs, Sacramento and Claremont.
- WCED (World Commission on Environment and Development). (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press, England.
- Webster, F.E. (1975). Determining the characteristics of the socially conscious consumer. *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol 2: 188–196.
- Wiebe, G.D. (1951–52). Merchandising Commodities and Citizenship in Television. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol 15: 679–91.

## ***Appendix 1 – Interview's Guidelines***

---

### ***Grand tour questions, floating prompts:***

- Please, describe yourself.
- How do you define a green consumer?
- What is the story behind you being a green consumer?
  - What is your first memory of you being a green consumer? How did you feel?
  - How do you feel when you behave as a green consumer?
  - When is the last time you felt a non green consumer? How did it happen? How was your feeling?
- Please, describe green consumption in your surroundings. How is your relationship with your family and friends?
- Who is the greenest person you know?
  - Would you like to be like him/her?
- How is it possible that people are not concerned about environmental issues?

### ***Planned prompts:***

- Can you comment on these two statements? / Please, tell me what you think when you read these.
  - 'I can make a real difference for the environment'
  - 'Alone I cannot affect the state of the environment'
- This is an imaginary continuum among a non green consumer and a very, authentic one:



## ***Appendix 2 – Themes emerged from Interviews’ Codification***

---

- Barriers / obstacles to green consumption
- Consumption resistance and Voluntary Simplicity
- Cultural differences
- Definition of green consumer
- Definition of non green consumer
- Definition of very green consumer
- Green consumption practices
- Habits’ change
- Hopes for selves / future aspirations
- Individual as part of a society
- Need for a change – how should people behave?
- Need for education and information
- People’s indifference
- Personal consumption choices
- Personal experiences
- Personal feelings
- Personal green beliefs and assumptions
- Political implications – public administrations’ level
- Relationship with family and friends
- Relationship with sellers and producers
- Relationship with the city / urban context
- Relationship with the society
- Time management