AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
http://ageconsearch.umn.edu
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

# Politics in Food Markets: alternative modes of qualification and engaging

Daniel Carvalho de **Rezende**[1]

**Abstract:** Consumers are increasingly practicing an alternative model of politics when they make food choices influenced by civic concerns. The new markets that emerge in this context carry specific modes of qualification that makes food products valuable not only for their intrinsic properties, but also for features associated with their production and distribution. This paper aims to describe the different modes of political qualification and consumer engagement that operate in food markets based on secondary data collected in papers, books, certification norms, and websites. Three distinct "political food markets" are identified: a) Fair Trade; b) sustainable agriculture; and c) vegetarian. Whilst the latter is based on a boycott of "bad" products, the other two focus on "good" alternatives. Different types of political engagement are associated to these markets, ranging from a delegation form in Fair Trade, empowered consumption in sustainable agriculture, to a lifestyle engagement regarding vegetarianism. Market devices such as certification play a major role in the growth of these markets, but also affect the type of engagement that is solicited from consumers.

**Key-words:** Political markets, food markets, food politics, market devices, organic food, fair trade, vegetarianism.

**Resumo:** *Os consumidores estão cada vez mais praticando um novo modelo de política quando fazem escolhas alimentares influenciadas por questões éticas. Nesse contexto, novos mercados emergem influenciados por esses valores e esses mercados possuem modos de qualificação específicos que valorizam os alimentos não somente por suas propriedades intrínsecas, mas também por atributos associados às formas de produção e distribuição. Esse artigo objetiva descrever os diferentes modos de qualificação política e engajamento do consumidor que operam em mercados agroalimentares, por meio de uma pesquisa com dados secundários coletados em artigos, livros, normas de certificação e sites da internet. Três tipos distintos de mercados políticos agroalimentares foram identificados: a) Comércio justo; Agricultura sustentável e c) Mercados vegetarianos. Enquanto esse último mercado está baseado no boicote de produtos indesejados, os dois primeiros focam na escolha de alternativas consideradas mais apropriadas. Diferentes tipos de engajamento são associados a esses mercados, variando de uma forma de delegação para o comércio justo,*

1. Universidade Federal de Lavras. Professor Adjunto. E-mail: rezendedc@gmail.com

*para um consumo mais participativo na agricultura sustentável, e para um engajamento do tipo estilo de vida para o vegetarianismo. Dispositivos de mercado como a certificação têm papel importante no crescimento desses mercados, mas também afetam o tipo de engajamento que é solicitado aos consumidores.*

**Palavras-chaves:** *Mercados políticos, mercado de alimentos, política de alimentos, dispositivos de mercado, produtos orgânicos, comércio justo, vegetarianismo.*

**JEL Classification:** M31.

## 1. Introduction

Consumers over the last few decades are increasingly practicing an alternative model of politics, when they make their consumption choices taking into account civic concerns. By buying, or not buying, certain goods in the marketplace, consumers can make themselves heard, and show their engagement with public issues (SIMON, 2011; MICHELETTI, 2003). The growth of ethical and sustainable consumption as a "new terrain of political action" (BARNETT et al., 2005, p. 41) is a consequence of late modernity conditions, which empower consumers to use consumption choices as a way to enact their political agency (MICHELETTI, 2003; LYON, 2006; DUBUISSON-QUELLIER and LAMINE, 2008).

Responsible, ethical or sustainable consumption, are examples of labels applied to this alternative of doing politics. This is a fairly important theme in the academic literature and general media, especially in developed countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, household expenditure on ethical goods has nearly doubled in the last five years (NEILSON, 2010).

The term used in this paper to describe this growing phenomenon, is *political consumption* (or political consumerism), to highlight the political character of such consumption. Political consumption is thus concerned with how consumption choices are organised and mobilised by social movement and other organisations, acting as a medium through which commitments are made, policymakers are lobbied, and claims are made on politicians (CLARKE, 2008; MICHELETTI, 2003). Defined as the act of selecting among products and producers based on social, political, or ethical considerations, political consumerism may provide people with an alternative mode to engage with public issues out of conventional political and civic behaviours such as voting or volunteering (SHAH et al., 2007).

Scholarly ideas on political consumption are expanding, but are not always grounded in studies of ethical consumption practices within the complexity of everyday life (ADAMS and RAISBOROUGH, 2010). Ethical issues conflict with other considerations such as convenience, price, and selection in daily shopping decisions (JOHNSTON et al., 2011 ; WHEELER, 2012).

Consumer decisions regarding food are among the most common, frequent and routinized. The main factors affecting food decisions are usually taste, price, safety, convenience and nutritional content. It is also widely recognized that food decisions embody important symbolic meanings (McCRACKEN, 1986). The incorporation of political values in food decisions affects markets, and generates new products that aim to incorporate these values. Political eating is not a simple set of rules for eating, but can be

understood as a cultural discourse with numerous dimensions – organic, fair trade, local, cruelty-free and so on (JOHNSTON et al., 2011). The new markets that emerge in this context carry specific modes of qualification that makes food products valuable not only for their intrinsic properties, but also for features related to their production and distribution.

The literature still lacks a nuanced examination of specific forms of political consumerism regarding food (MICHELETTI, 2003; WHEELER, 2012), as food consumption is directly connected to a bundle of practices performed by firms, institutions, the public sector and individuals in their everyday life. Consumers perform different forms of engagement with political markets, depending on the nature of the qualification process and their disposition to act politically. But what kind of political valuation regarding food products can be found, and how do they operate in daily practices? Therefore, we expect to identify relations between political qualification strategies and the modes of engagement and political action available to consumers in different markets. This paper aims to describe what modes of political qualification operate and which modes of engaging are incorporated in food markets. Secondary data was collected in sources such as articles, books, websites and certification norms. Three general modes of engaging and qualification were identified, characterising distinct "political food markets": a) Fair trade, b) Sustainable agriculture and c) Vegetarianism.[2] Each one operates with distinct qualification strategies and market practices, facing up specific constraints. This paper is structured as follows: the second section focuses on markets, politics and the citizen-consumer, the third on food markets and modes of political qualification and engagement, and in the fourth the conclusions are presented.

## 2. Markets, politics and the citizen-consumer

Consumer behaviour theory has shown increasingly concern regarding ethics in consumption. Recent attention to ethics issues has emerged in the last years, focusing topics such as sustainable consumption (KOZINETS, 2002; GORDON et al., 2011) and anti-consumption movements (ZAVESTOSKI, 2002; FIRAT, 2004; VARMAN and BELK, 2009). Most of this work has been either at the individual psychological level of consumer attitudes and actions or the macro-cultural level of institutions and culture.

Some marketing theory scholars have recently proposed a new way to analyse markets (ARAUJO et al., 2010), influenced mainly by economic sociology. They conceive markets as plastic phenomena that emerge from organizing and political actions of several actors, through a dense network of mechanisms and operations that allow market actors to coordinate their actions (CALLON, 1998). Market actors induce changes when they try either stabilize or create disruptions in markets; Stark, 2009)

Callon (2009) argues that the process of creating a market consists of qualifying goods, developing modes of exchange and configuring market agencies, in a huge and distributed collective effort. Different types of markets will differ in the specific configurations of calculative agencies mobilized and the distribution of power amongst these agencies. Calculative agencies are present on mechanisms and operations including trademarks, labels and prices, as well as advertising, merchandising, product design, retail spaces, purchasing, distribution and consumption (DUBUISSON-QUELLIER and LAMINE, 2008; CALLON and MUNIESA, 2005). In this sense, markets are the on-going results of different types of practices, producing

2. I am not stating that these markets are exclusively driven by political motives, on the consumer side. There are vegetarians worried only about health issues or religion attachment, or local food consumers that seek only for fresh quality products. It's difficult to distinguish political agency behaviours to other type of consumption motives (TRENTMANN, 2007), but we're aiming to analyze the political side of these markets, even though we recognize that other dimensions are important.

a view of markets as organized systems that facilitate economic exchanges (KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2010).

The main mechanism to format markets is the notion of a 'market device' – a simple way of referring to the material and discursive assemblages that intervene in the construction of markets, and range from "analytical techniques to pricing models, from purchase settings to merchandising tools, from trading protocols to aggregate indicators..." (MUNIESA et al., 2007, p. 2).

Thus, markets are "...produced and diffused through the interactions of many actors, shaped, negotiated, and contested rather than designed and implemented, providing both surprises and opportunities. The multitude actors who participate in producing markets engage in diverse practices and calculative mechanisms, which are often obscure to others, opaque even upon reflection, and never wholly determining of particular organizing initiatives" (ARAUJO et al., 2010, p. 8). They try to introduce new categories for valuation, such as quality standards, security and ethical/sustainable production (KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2010).

Because markets are an institutional apparatus that can be put to many social ends, they also provide space for political action. Political consumption happens when consumers refrain from individualistic behaviour and promote altruistic, citizen-driven behaviours. People can engage in politics when they buy several products, and in this sense, consumption is not only a purpose of the economy, but also equally a political issue. To engage in progressive political action, consumer citizens can act politically through their consumption patterns (ARNOULD, 2007). Moreover, social movements are recently recognized as important market actors (DUBUISSON-QUELLIER, 2010), when they defend values, identities or cultural codes.

Markets can be considered political fields where value, in terms of worth[3], is constituted by the efforts of both market actors and non-market actors to (re)define practices and norms of valuation (STARK, 2009; DUBUISSON-QUELLIER, 2010). For Micheletti (2003) markets constitute political arenas and political consumption describes a citizenship and political involvement for times characterised by individualism.

Individuals make practical choices in their everyday lives about how to live responsibly towards each other. A substantial number of people want to formulate their private strategy to raise a question and perform their individualised collective actions (LINDEN, 2005; MICHELETTI, 2003), or private actions that have a collective impact. Therefore, more individualized ways of acting politically arise, such as boycotting particular goods or institutions. Political participation in relation to microlocal contexts such as community engagement has also grown (HALKIER and HOLM, 2008).

Nevertheless, it's difficult to draw a line between political and consumer choices, and the relationship between consumers and citizens has been debated in a number of contributions (ARNOULD, 2007; SCHUDSON, 2006). One important distinction should be made: consumer choice can be political, but political and consumer choices are not the same (SCHUDSON, 2006), because they involve different forms of knowledge, attitudes and potential consequences. Some authors analyse if citizen-consumers decisions and actions really can be named as political, a controversial subject (HALKIER and HOLM, 2008; KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2010)[4].

3. For Stark (2009), worth is an appropriate term to describe how economic and social valuations are simultaneously taken into account in consumer decisions.

4. For Kjellberg and Helgesson (2010) not all engagements become political, or when the issues are taken to another level that alters the mode of exchange. An engagement does not become political when every reaction, resistance, and controversy that result from it draws on the same mode of engaging. When, on the other hand, the effects of an engagement cannot be contained in this way- when a given engagement triggers alternative modes of engaging with the market – then issues tend to become more political (KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2010). This is a point of view that contrasts with others, like Arnould (2007).

In this paper, we consider politics in a broad sense, consisting of democratic public involvement in controversial issues, or, in other words, as a "practice that is occasioned by issues and dedicated to their articulation" (MARRES, 2007, p. 775). In this view, politics involve interactions among different spheres and levels of life, not bounded by the traditional political system. Consumers may act politically and thus must be considered as political agents.

Consumers' political agency comprises their motivations and possibilities to affect the market (PELLIZZONI, 2012). Consumer agency is considered a form of autonomy and ability to act and modify existing conditions in the market, but divergences arise regarding the potential of this agency to be exercised – in other words, if most consumers enjoy autonomy and are able to exercise choice. Thus, one important conceptual part of political agency is intentionality: are actions of citizen-consumers carried out with intentions of some consequence to the society? The other element of agency is autonomy: do citizen-consumers have resources and space of action to carry out their actions with intended consequences? (HALKIER and HOLM, 2008).

For some authors (MILLER, 2005), real emancipation is possible only if one develops a reflexive distance from the marketing code (i.e., becomes code conscious), acknowledging its structuring effects rather than just living up to it.

Recent studies have begun to illuminate several arenas in the politics of consumption. One emerging field of research has analysed consumption as a new resource of political identification and mobilization around questions of fair trade, "buy local", and related issues regarding social and environmental justice (TRENTMANN, 2007).

The fact is that political consumerism can be readily adopted because it involves familiar languages of action and interaction. It is kind of politics through other means, reflecting a shift away from institutional and formal modes of engagement. Instead, it is grounded in the belief that everyday life action might be a more effective way to achieve political ends by using the market to influence public policy and lead to changes in the society (SHAH et al., 2007).

In practical terms, individuals can incorporate political issues on their everyday practices, in which consumption is one of the most important activities. To do so, they need to engage with the markets in order to make their consumption a political activity that incorporates new values into products and services.

Modes of engaging is a term used to describe how agencies attempt to link the good and the real, or, in other words, to link values to markets (KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2010). Actors may engage with markets by attempting to introduce and establish new values to guide exchange practice. The classic boycott is an illustrative and prime example (KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2010), but other kinds of engagement can be found, either trying to produce new product values, assessing potential overflows or attempting to establish new values to guide exchange practice (government and NGOs are important actors in this regard).

Moreover, individual consumer acts of engaging with certain things and in certain ways need to be contextualized in relation to the ordering of social practices (EVANS, 2011). Individual choice has but a small role to play in explaining consumption practices (WARDE, 2005), as practices are habitual and routine at least as often as they are particularly rational and conscious (CLARKE, 2008).

Thus, political consumption intersects and overlaps with other practices and imperatives (EVANS, 2011). Successful and progressive practices of citizenship can take place through market-mediated forms in modern society because these are the templates for action and understanding available to most people (ARNOULD, 2007).

Whilst rationalistic methodologies measure gaps between individuals attitudes and knowledge of ethical alternatives and their purchasing behaviours (DE PELSMACKER et al., 2005; LAMB, 2007) and the need to interrupt

habitual actions, it seems clear that organisations interested in changing consumer lifestyles must bring such political issues into consumers' everyday discursive consciousness and facilitate change through the implementation effective interventions (GORDON et al., 2011)

The fact is that consumers struggle to integrate practices of political consumption into their everyday lives (EVANS, 2011). Consumption is shaped in a complex way by shared structures of knowledge, institutional frameworks and infrastructures of provision, as pointed by practice-theory framework[5].

The location of political participation in everyday material practice has been promoted as a way of making it more doable. Materialisation then figures as a solution to the problem of public engagement with environment or social issues. Action-based forms of engagement are seen as an alternative to epistemic framings, as they require a range of simple actions, rather than expecting citizens to grasp the complexity of environmental issues (MARRES, 2011).

An example is the strategy of labelling products regarding environmental, health, ethical or other aspects, making it easier to understand the contents of the product but also to guarantee that a product incorporate ideological aspects (LINDEN, 2007) and allow consumers to incorporate these signs easily in their shopping practices. Standards play a role in 'framing' activities within the market and standardizing practices create new realities that can, in turn, be the object of economic calculation. These calculations are always, in principle, contestable and political, because are comprised of both technical and ethical practices. It depends on technical devices and discursive rhetoric (politics) that will make calculation possible. Thus, actions to standardize and to regulate through a system of conformity assessment, can be viewed as "… highly political attempts to remove politics from the exchange process" (LOCONTO and BUSCH, 2011, p. 527). The consequences of these attempts on political food markets will be addressed later in this article.

## 3. Food markets and modes of political qualification and engagement

Food purchase, preparation and consumption are maybe the most common domestic tasks that constitute what can be called "food consumption practices". Domestic activities in themselves are highly complex social everyday phenomena (WHEELER, 2012). Their behaviour is much restricted to the private sphere and highly routinized (LINDEN, 2005).

The food market is one of the most important arenas for political consumption and several market devices were implemented in the last years to frame exchanges incorporating political values. Food politics, which involves appreciating what foods are politically correct and environmentally defensive (JOHNSTON et al., 2011), must be incorporated in "food engaged practices". Food engaged practices should include activities undertaken by people that reflected key elements of the ethical and sustainable eating repertoire (JOHNSTON et al., 2011).

Over the last decades, we have witnessed a huge growth in the search for alternative ways of buying food in several countries. This trend relates directly to a reaction to the dominant food distribution model established after World War II, in which the control, calculability and predictability, orchestrated across long distances by a few large-scale economic actors, usually transnational corporations, have been established as the most important dimensions on food markets (RITZER, 2008; MURDOCH *et al.*, 2000).

5. In this sense, practice-theoretical approach can guide empirical analysis in this field (WHEELER, 2012; KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2010). A practice forms a "block" comprising a number of different elements, including bodily and mental activities, background knowledge, technical know-how, material infrastructure, institutional frameworks and cultural conventions, whose existence depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements (RECKWITZ, 2002). In order for a practice to come into existence, it must be regularly performed. Consumption is "…not itself a practice, but rather a moment in almost every practice" (WARDE, 2005, p. 137).

The dominant conventional model is being challenged, as it presents some important vulnerabilities: food safety issues; the obesity epidemic; the erasure of long-standing crafted knowledge, practices and livelihoods associated with traditional farming systems; difficult to serve smaller and more differentiated markets, difficult to develop a trusting relationship with consumers (consumers often distrust large global firms); social and environmental problems (e.g. food shipped from the far corners of the globe, requiring refrigeration and huge logistics costs as well as the pollution of soil, water and atmosphere caused by industrial farming methods) (KNEAFSEY, 2010; HENDRICKSON and HEFFERNAN, 2002).

One common feature regarding the evolution of alternative (political) markets for food is the last few years come from the introduction of new product qualities which are not related to the product features (such as taste, convenience, composition or price) but from the features of its mode of production: an environmentally friendly farming process (as in the case or organic food), a re-connection with local farming by short supply chains (local food) or fair relationships in the supply chain (fair trade products).

To incorporate political issues in food consumption, new markets have been developed, including products that incorporate desired values. These features are now valuable in the market, and may be identified as a quality in exchange processes. Social movements have been acting as real market actors, and succeeded in introducing and stabilizing new consumers' preferences that firms decided to take into consideration in order to capture these growing markets. Several market devices were introduced, such as independent stores, new standards and brands, advertising and educational devices. These markets are political fields where value is constituted by the efforts of both market actors and non-market actors, as NGOs and the State, to define practices and norms of valuation (DUBUISSON-QUELLIER, 2010).

Political food markets are thus assembled – or at least stabilised – by retailers, nutritionists, national authorities, market researchers, social movement organisations and other actors (DUBUISSON-QUELLIER, 2010; CLARKE et al., 2007). One example is the growing number of Fairtrade cities, which support Fairtrade products as a public strategy.

In general, three generic political food markets can be found: a) Fair trade, b) Sustainable agriculture, and c) Vegetarian. Table 1 describes the main characteristics of each one, its justification, how political qualification operates, and the constraints involved.

The different political markets are configured in certain ways that allow consumers to engage differently to the market practices. In the

**Table 1.** Political food markets and their characteristics

| Political food market | Justification | Political Qualification (Market devices) | Constraints |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fair trade | Fair trade guarantees ethical/fair relations that help third world producers | New value incorporated on the certification of fair-trade products | High prices, lack of information |
| Sustainable agriculture | Organic/Local products are produced and distributed through sustainable practices that helps the environment through reduction of food miles and non-use of potentially harm inputs | Certification of organic products. Specific channels of distribution and information, with close relationships between producers and consumers | Seasonality, lack of convenience, high prices |
| Vegetarian | Vegetarianism defends animal rights claiming for a individual sort of boycott to meat and other animal related products | Disqualification of animal related products – animal products don't carry an important ethical value (boycott, but usually not collective organised and with no legal implications) | Social restrictions, Practical constraints (limited number of specialized stores and restaurants) |

Source: Elaborated by author.

description of these markets that follows we will address the most common forms of political engagement regarding each of these markets, despite the fact that there are multiple ways of doing so.

### *3.1. The fair-trade support practice: caring at a distance*

Consumers exercise commitments and responsibilities towards remote (across time and space) and unknown others and in doing so practicing an ethic of caring at a distance (EVANS, 2011; TRENTMANN, 2007). Fair trade is maybe the most important example. This regime of delegation (DUBUISSON-QUELLIER and LAMINE, 2008) is close to Micheletti's (2003) concept of individualized collective action. In individualised collective action, citizens can express individual goals within collective and political perspectives, but without committing themselves to collective action. Fair trade allows consumers to express their choice for fair trade foods while doing their ordinary shopping.

Fair trade began with a network of alternative trade organisations in Western Europe and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, and then took off globally in the 1980s. The fair trade model encompasses a range of practices that seek to replace exploitative terms of exchange with beneficial ones connecting Southern producers and Northern consumers, and establishing the setting of minimum prices, direct purchasing, and the provision of credit and technical assistance to third world farmers. The certification of fair trade foods has spread from coffee and bananas to tea, sugar, honey, chocolate, juices, soybean, nuts, dried fruit and others (TRENTMANN, 2007; RAYNOLDS et al., 2007).

Fair trade, in this view, has introduced a new set of ethical practices into the politics of everyday life (TRENTMANN, 2007), creating a new market available for consumers who want to engage politically in their everyday life consumption. For fair trade markets, the main qualification mechanism involved is the incorporation of ethical values into specific products through the establishment of specific standards, guaranteeing a better deal for third world producers. Complex calculative devices were designed to translate fairness into production and distribution practices (mainly on the farmer-trader relationships) and economic values associated, providing a reference to all actors involved.

Even with the establishment and publicizing of these practices and rules, an individual can consume Fair trade without being a Fair trade supporter – for example when Fair trade becomes the standard option in particular places and retail outlets and an individual can count themselves as a Fair trade supporter without always consuming Fair trade. In this sense, consumption is neither fully reflexive nor constrained because reflexivity is always bound within the organized practices individuals are engaged in (WHEELER, 2012).

Fair trade markets seek to link the good with the real by asking what it is that is being produced by the economic exchanges taking place in this particular market. The central process is detecting and measuring the overflows in relation to conventional framing of a market (KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2010) and offering a new market framing based on a different value system. Another way of viewing this is considering that "...instead of launching a product in the world, fair traders attempt to launch a world into their products" (NEYLAND and SIMAKOVA, 2010). This world is distant and unknown, but filled with clearly established political principles.

### *3.2. Engaging with sustainable agriculture: empowered markets*

Sustainable agriculture comprises organic and local food, and consists of an ideological frame of sustainable consumption rationale, for which organic/local food are the result of a production and distribution method more in harmony with the environment and local ecosystems.

Organic agriculture is defined as "a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological

processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects..." (IFOAM, 2011). Organic food is mostly traded in short, local distribution circuits.

For organic/local products the main political qualification mechanism is the incorporation of sustainable values into specific products through "face to face" relationships (farmers markets, local stores, Community Supported Agriculture – CSA) or certification (especially in the organic case, but sometimes for local food when it comes to retailers schemes to promote local food).

At the early stages, organic agriculture relied on a set of market devices based on shared values and informal norms rather than on formal criteria. Product differentiation, trust and transparency were organised through specific marketing channels: farmers markets, specific brands, contract farming, local-producer-consumer associations and specialised shops (DAVIRON and VAGNERON, 2011).

Empowerment initiatives in which social/domestic mechanisms of qualification can be implemented are still important and are in the core of sustainable agriculture. Dubuisson Quellier et al. (2011) made an important study on how this alternative is operated in France through case studies on food activist groups.

CSA is another important arrangement within sustainable agriculture markets, consisting of a network or association of individuals who support one or more local farms. The risks and benefits of food production are shared between producers and consumers. Press and Arnould (2011) identified CSA as places of moral superiority in American society, which they demonstrate by expressing opposition to the industrial food system. CSA producers are said to have a personal and spiritual connection with the land, broader environment, and with customers. The participants on CSA schemes, either producers or consumers, are encouraged to judge themselves and others in relationship to this moral universe, and deeply engage themselves in this specific food consumption practice (PRESS and ARNOULD, 2011).

These examples show that a group of consumers who choose local, organic foods seek to engage in a alternative type of relationship with farmers and food producers, based on reciprocity, trust, and shared values (WEATHERELL et al., 2005). But this usually requires important adaptations in food purchasing, preparation and eating. It also requires shifts in family budgeting and usually a greater allocation of income to food purchases. The consumer has also to deal with the uncertainty and seasonality (if you decide to shop on farmers markets, you will have to adapt to their working days, usually 2 days a week) (BINGEN et al., 2011).

The growing adoption of organic labels and the adoption of organic, local products by large retailers has made things easier for consumers, and allowed the market to grow. On the other hand, this can be viewed as a "re-commoditization" of food chains through the incorporation of sustainability standards allowing the growth of alternative valuation mechanisms, but incorporating the same logic used by the conventional model (DAVIRON and VAGNERON, 2011). An asymmetrical relationship is established in this situation, as customer's calculability capacity is limited on information provided by standards and this requires a lower intensity of engagement, acting as an "anti-political device" (LOCONTO and BUSCH, 2010, p. 527).

### *3.3. Vegetarianism: a lifestyle engagement*

Vegetarianism is a boycott practice of which consumption is just one moment. Absence of animal flesh consumption distinguishes a vegetarian diet, but there is flexibility on the intensity of engagement with such practice. Some vegetarians adopt a diet which excludes only meat, whilst others, like the vegans, also avoid dairy products and eggs. The most constrained completely avoid animal products in food, clothing and other products (KLEINE and HUBBERT, 1993).

The literature identifies various reasons for becoming a vegetarian. These include ethical

motives based on concern for issues as animal rights, environmentalism, or world hunger, and self-improvement reasons involving health, religion, or personal growth (KLEINE and HUBBERT, 1993; LINDEN, 2005). Although ethical reasons are common they are not always the main driver to vegetarianism.

Vegetarianism search, not just through one's diet, but also by activism (in the sense of awareness mainly), fight against speciesism, a term used to describe the exploitation of one species over another. Vegetarians seem to practice political consumerism in a variety of ways. They tell friends about their vegetarianism and have gained respect for their standpoint and eating practice. In a wider perspective some of them support organisations on environmental, animal rights, or human rights issues, but only a few seem to work actively in the relevant organisations (LINDEN, 2005). Social networks enabled by the Internet play an important role in the dissemination of vegetarian philosophy, but the individual consumption still seems to be the main political act within vegetarian practice.

The change from an omnivorous to a vegetarian diet requires significant alternations in an individual's food consumption and shopping patterns. Vegetarianism can be considered as a lifestyle political practice regarding food, as it requires a number of changes in daily activities and the incorporation of new habits. This explains the reasons why vegetarians usually face problems to behave in accordance with their political principles, as they must find information and/or specific business that specialize in vegetarian food. Vegetarian boycott is not specific to an organisation, but to the products, which makes it different from other boycott practices.

The marketplace has responded to this trend. Plenty of information is increasingly available in libraries and bookstores, restaurants menus and veg shops. Mainstream food retailers offer increasingly more products that fit a non-meat diet. There is a growing number of small shops that are fully engaged with vegetarian causes and specialize in vegetarian suited products.

Nevertheless, research shows that vegetarians are still not satisfied with the market (RODRIGUES, 2012). It is difficult to sustain a completely meat free diet overtime. Finding good restaurants to go with friends and socially challenging situations are some reasons that make vegetarian practice difficult to be fully accomplished. Shopping is sometimes a difficult task for vegetarians, as shopping places must be carefully selected (LINDEN, 2005; KLEINE and HUBBERT, 1993).

For vegetarian markets, the main justification is the disqualification of animal products. This disqualification is performed mainly by the highlighting of overflows generated by meat production, which comprise animal "pain" and environmental problems. The exaltation of non-industrialised and organic products is a secondary process of qualification operating in this market.

### *3.4. Three set of practices for food political engagement*

The results have shown that food political engagement can be performed by at least three non-exclusive set of practices: fair trade, sustainable and vegetarianism. New markets allow the performance of these engagement, in which producers, retailers and other actors incorporate political values in the food products, using market devices such as certification, farmers local markets, CSA, etc. Another way to respond to consumer political decisions is to exclude products with negative values, as in the case of animal products in vegetarian consumption.

In general, these set of practices are available for those consumers who have higher income and can afford to pay prices above average for alternatives that match the criteria established by standards, norms or cultural factors. It is clear that not all individuals are able to participate as citizen-consumers due to the fact that these more socially accepted forms of consumption behaviour are usually more expensive than the most common behaviours, and thus structural

factors such as social class and income determine levels of political consumption (WHEELER, 2012).

The delegation regime, in which consumers delegate to the standard-making organization or the labelling scheme the operations of selection and control, is in the core of organic and fair trade labels, while in the empowerment model, as in some specific cases in CSA schemes and vegetarianism, consumers are actively involved in the construction of the production and marketing system (DUBUISSON-QUELLIER and LAMINE, 2008) The delegation model depends on the presence of credence attributes, which cannot be discovered even after production consumption, and this means that a strong information asymmetry between consumer and producer is present.

## 4. Conclusions

Political consumption is associated with political practices, and incorporated in everyday life. Individuals may choose several forms to engage politically, some of them representing market engagements through individual actions. The forms of engagement will lead to specific purchase and consumption routines that are intrinsically associated with these practices.

Food political engagement can be performed by at least three non-exclusive set of practices: fair trade, sustainable and vegetarianism. New markets allow the performance of these engagement, in which producers, retailers and other actors incorporate political values in the food products, using market devices such as certification, farmers local markets, CSA, etc. Another way to respond to consumer political decisions is to exclude products with negative values, as in the case of animal products in vegetarian consumption.

Vegetarian markets justifications are based on the negative overflows caused by meat production and consumption, and consumer engagement is made from the boycott of meat (and sometimes other animal products) rather than the "exaltation" of non-meat alternatives. Fair trade and sustainable markets, on the other hand, consider the negative overflows of conventional food chains (unfair prices, food miles costs, non-sustainable agriculture), but their engagement is made through the promotion of fair trade, organic and local products rather than the boycott of mainstream food products. Consumers can be simultaneously engaged with more than one political market, both promoting fair trade, organic or local products and boycotting animal products, but most of these behaviours are performed through individual actions, often invisible to other people.

Food political markets are among the most important political arenas for citizen-consumer acts, as food production and distribution directly affects each individual, and food consumption is carried out on a daily basis, involving several decisions and strictly related to routinized practices. The evolution of alternative, politicised markets for food is certainly dependent on how easy engagements can be performed. My argument offers a different view on the nature of this engagement in different markets. It also stresses different levels of engagement that emerge and are directly related to which extent political markets can be normalised and political qualifications stabilized.

On the other hand, routinized non-reflexive behaviour (e.g. through opaque standardisation) may affect the potential for the political agency of consumers and consolidate the power of dominant market actors, such as large manufacturers and retailers. Lifestyle and boycott-type engagements seem to be less affected by standard procedures, while positive enforced markets may be subject to standardisation processes directly affecting daily consumption practices. This point needs further investigation.

Future research should focus on the detailed history of the evolution of each of these markets, considering the shifts in the qualification process through time, which would provide a better comprehension of the market making and the role of market devices and engagement practices.

Cultural differences could also be explored in future research, as different cultural background seems to affect the way the engagement practices evolve. Cross-cultural studies should be placed in the research agenda for this field.

## 5. References


ADAMS, M. and RAISBOROUGH, J. Making a difference: ethical consumption and the everyday. *British Journal of Sociology*, v. 61, n. 2, p. 256-274, 2010.

ARAUJO, L., FINCH, J. and KJELLBERG, H. Reconnecting marketing to markets: an introduction. In: ARAUJO, L., FINCH, J. and KJELLBERG, H. *Reconnecting marketing to markets*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 1-12.

ARNOULD, E. J. Should consumer citizens escape the market? *Annals of the American Academy of Political and social Science*, v. 611, p. 96-111, 2007.

BARNETT, C. et al. Consuming ethics: Articulating the subjects and spaces of ethical consumption. *Antipode*, v. 37, n. 1, 2005. p. 23-45.

BINGEN, J., SAGE, J. and SIRIEX, L. Consumer coping strategies: a study of consumers commited to eating local. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, v. 35, p. 410-419, 2011.

CALLON, M. Introduction: the embeddedness of economic markets in Economics In: CALLON, M. *The laws of markets*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 1-57.

CALLON, M. Civilizing markets: carbon trading between *in vitro* and *in vivo* experiments. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, v. 34, n. 3-4, 2009, p. 535-548.

CALLON, M. and MUNIESA, F. Economic markets as calculative collective devices. *Organization Studies*, v. 26, n. 8, 2005, p. 1229-1250.

CLARKE, N. From ethical consumerism to political consumption. *Geography Compass*, v. 2, n. 6, 2008, p. 1870-84.

CLARKE, N. et al. The political rationalities of Fair-Trade consumption in the United Kingdom. *Politics and Society*, v. 35, n. 4, p. 583-607, 2007.

DAVIRON, B. and VAGNERON, I. From commoditisation to de-commoditisation... and back again: discussing the role of sustainability standards for agricultural products. *Development Policy Review*, v. 29, n. 1, p. 91-113, 2011.

DE PELSMACKER, P., DRIESEN, L. and RAYP, G. Do consumers care about ethics? Willingness to pay for fair-trade coffee. *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, v. 39, n. 2, p. 363-385, 2005.

DUBUISSON-QUELLIER, S. The contribution of social movements to the creation of new norms of valuation. In: *MPIfG Workshop*, Cologne, Germany, December/2010.

DUBUISSON-QUELLIER, S. and LAMINE, C. Consumer involvement in Fair Trade and Local Food Systems: delegation and empowerment regimes. *GeoJournal*, v. 73, n. 1, p. 55-65, 2008.

DUBUISSON-QUELLIER, S., LAMINE, C. and LE VELLY, R. Citizenships and consumption: mobilisation in alternative food systems in France. *Sociologia Ruralis*, v. 51, n. 3, p. 304-323, 2011.

EVANS, D. Consuming conventions: sustainable consumption, ecological citizenship and the worlds of worth. *Journal of Rural Studies*, v. 27, n. 1, p. 109-115, 2011.

FIRAT, F. Consuming Activism: Peace, War, and Consumer Research, In: KAHN, B. E. and LUCE, M. F. (Eds.). *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 31, Valdosta, GA: Association for Consumer Research, 2004, p. 611-14.

GORDON, R., CARRIGAN, M. and HASTINGS, G. A framework for sustainable marketing. *Marketing Theory*, v. 11, n. 2, p. 143-163, 2011.

HALKIER, B. and HOLM, L. Food consumption and political agency: on concerns and practices among Danish consumers. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, v. 32, p. 667-674, 2008.

HENDRICKSON, M. K. and HEFFERNAN, W. D. Opening spaces through relocalization: locating potential resistance in the weaknesses of the global food system. *Sociologia Ruralis*, v. 42, n. 4, p. 347-369, 2002.

IFOAM – International Federation of Organic Agriculture *Principles of organic agriculture*. Disponível em: <www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/principles/index.html>. Acesso em: 10 dez. 2011.

KJELLBERG, H. and HELGESSON, C. F. Political marketing. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, v. 3, n. 2, p. 279-297, 2010.

KLEINE, S. S. and HUBBERT, A. R. How do consumers acquire a new food consumption system when it is vegetarian? *Advances in Consumer Research*, v. 20, n. 1, p. 196-201, 1993.

KNEAFSEY, M. The region in food – important or irrelevant? *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, v. 3, p. 177-190, 2010.

KOZINETS, R. V. Can consumers escape the market? Emancipatory illuminations from burning man. *Journal of Consumer Research*, v. 29, n. 1, p. 20-31, June 2002.

LAMB, H. The Fairtrade consumer. In: WRIGHT, S. and McCREA, D. *The Handbook of Organic and Fair Trade Marketing*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. doi: 10.1002/9780470996096.ch3

LINDEN, A. L. Private food strategies and political consumerism. In: BOSTROM, M. et al. *Political consumerism: its motivation, power, and conditions in the Nordic countries and elsewhere*. Nordisk Ministerråd: København, 2005. p. 203-224.

LOCONTO, A. and BUSCH, L. Standards, techno-economic networks, and playing fields: performing the global market economy. *Review of International Political Economy*, v. 17, n. 3, p. 507-536, 2010.

LYON, S. Evaluating fair trade consumption: politics, defetishization and producer participation. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, v. 30, n. 5, p. 452-464, 2006.

JOHNSTON, J., SZABO, M. and RODNEY, A Good food, good people: understanding the cultural repertoire of ethical eating. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, v. 11, n. 3, p. 293-318, 2011.

MARRES, N. The issues deserve more credit: pragmatist contributions to the study of public involvement in controversy. *Social Studies of Science*, v. 37, n. 5, p. 759-780, 2007.

MARRES, N. The costs of public involvement: Everyday devices of carbon accounting and the materialization of participation. *Economy and Society*, v. 40, n. 4, p. 489-509, 2011.

McCRACKEN, G. Culture and consumption: a theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, v. 13, n. 1, p. 71-84, 1986.

MICHELETTI, M. *Political virtue and shopping: individuals, consumerism and collective action*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

MILLER, M. Materiality: an introduction. In: MILLER, M. *Materiality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

MUNIESA, F., MILLO, Y. and CALLON, M. An introduction to market devices. *The Sociological Review*, v. 55, n. 2, p. 1-12, 2007.

MURDOCH, J., MARSDEN, T. and BANKS, J. Quality, nature, and embeddedness: some theoretical considerations in the context of the food sector. *Economic Geography*, v. 76, n. 2, p. 107-125, 2000.

NEILSON, L. A. Boycott or boycott? Understanding political consumerism. Journal of Consumer Behaviour, v. 9, p. 214-227, 2010.

NEYLAND, D. and SIMAKOVA, E. Trading bads and goods: market practices in fair trade retailing. In: ARAUJO, L., FINCH, J. and KJELLBERG, H *Reconnecting marketing to markets*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. p. 204-223.

PELLIZONNI, L. In search of community: political consumerism, governmentality and immunization. *European Journal of Social Theory*, v. 15, n. 2, 2012, p. 221-241.

PRESS, M. and ARNOULD, E.J. Legitimating community supported agriculture through American pastoralist ideology. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, v. 11, n. 2, p. 168-194, 2011.

RAYNOLDS, L. T., MURRAY, D. and WILKINSON, J. *Fair trade*: the challenges of transforming globalization. New York: Routledge, 2007.

RITZER, G. *The Mcdonaldization of society*. Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2008.

RODRIGUES, A. *A construção da identidade social atraves do consumo vegetariano*: um estudo etnografico. Dissertação de mestrado. Universidade Federal de Lavras. Lavras, MG: UFLA, 2012.

SCHUDSON, M. The troubling equivalence of citizen and consumer. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and social Science*, v. 608, p. 193-204, 2006.

SHAH, D. V. et al. Political consumerism: how communication and consumption orientations drive "lifestyle politics". *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, v. 611, p. 217-235, 2007.

SIMON, B. Not going to Starbucks: boycotts and the out-scouring of politics in the branded world. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, v. 11, n. 2, p. 145-167, 2011.

STARK, D. *The sense of dissonance. Accounts of worth in economic life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

TRENTMANN, F. Before "fair trade": empire, free trade, and the moral economies of food in the modern world. *Environment and Planning*, v. 25, p. 1079-1102, 2007.

VARMAN, R. and BELK, R. W. Nationalism and ideology in an anticonsumption movement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, v. 36, n. 4, p. 686-700, dec. 2009.

WARDE, A. Consumption and theories of practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, v. 5, n. 2, p. 131-153, 2005.

WEATHERELL, C., TREGEAR, A. and ALLINSON, J. In search of the concerned consumer: UK public perceptions of food, farming and buying local. *Journal of Rural Studies*, v. 19, n. 2, p. 233-244, 2005.

WHEELER, K. The practice of Fairtrade support. *Sociology*, v. 46, n. 1, p. 126-141, 2012.

ZAVESTOSKI, S. The social-psychological bases of anticonsumption attitudes. *Psychology & Marketing*, v. 19, n. 2, p. 149-165, feb. 2002.