Italian Political Consumption Attitude Through Food Purchasing Choices: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

Currently, many consumers have expressed strong opinions about food production process, its distribution, and guaranteeing models. Consumers’ concerns about ecological and social sustainability issues can have significant impacts on both food demand and food policies. Sustainable consumption attitude has been analysed in the framework of Political Consumerism and Collaborative Consumption theories by administering six focus groups among Italian critical consumers. Findings provide insights that represent a fruitful starting point for deepening the analysis of critical consumer behaviour at a broader level in order to sustain and spread eco-socially production practices.

Keywords: Sustainable consumption, Political Consumerism, Collaborative consumption, Italian Solidarity- based Purchasing Groups, Focus Group.
1 Introduction

The public interest on sustainability issues has significantly increased in recent years due to concerns about climate change and environmental protection. Many authors agree upon the fact that consumers have expressed strong opinions about the process by which foodstuff is produced, distributed and guaranteed (Murdoch and Miele, 1999; Murdoch et al., 2000; Parrott et al., 2002; Aprile et al., 2012; Caputo et al., 2013a; Caputo et al., 2013b; Schnell, 2013). Beside, International Organizations are currently claiming for a critical consumer whose choice towards sustainable food could improve the overall environmental status and fight against climate change (OECD, 2008; UNEP, 2015). From the consumption point of view, the rational and critical decision to purchase certain products could involve a political action, as proposed by two recent and influential theories raised upon academic literature: the Political Consumerism (Micheletti, 2003; Stolle and Hooghe, 2003; Stolle et al., 2005) and the Collaborative Consumption (Botsman and Rogers, 2010).

Regarding food market, in countertrend with Bauman’s notorious “consumers of swarm” (Bauman, 2007), a new, critical consumer has appeared on the scene: he/she chooses more sustainable goods and services in environmental terms and is concerned about factors such as product seasonality, organic, origin, support of social cooperatives, reduction of packaging, and kilometres travelled. A demonstration of these new trends is well-represented especially within two rapidly growing phenomena in recent years: Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) (Goodman, 2002; 2004; Renting et al., 2003, Holloway et al., 2007; Kneafsey et al., 2008) and of Short Food-Supply Chain (Kneafsey et al., 2013; Bazzani and Canavari, 2013). These networks and practices of producers and consumers are characterized as alternatives to standardized food production and distribution systems (Renting et al., 2003) and spread new forms of political association and market governance (Wathmore et al., 2003). Within these networks food production and consumption processes are closely related in spatial (geographic proximity), economical (fair price for farmers and affordable price for consumers thanks to intermediaries elimination) and social (development of networks based on trust linked to mutual knowledge and to the reputation of each other) terms. Food cooperatives are arising worldwide allowing producers and consumers to interact without any intermediary and to obtain an added value for both. Farmers markets, solidarity-based purchasing groups, box scheme, shopping groups, ‘pick your own’, social shopping, and alternative certification methods for organic are all examples of sustainable consumption patterns involving thousands of people seeking quality and sustainable products and services at the best price. Consumers could be involved with different levels of commitment: there are cooperatives in which they should spend some hours a month to the logistics as for to the distribution strategies and organization in general (i.e. solidarity-based purchasing groups, Gruppi d’Acquisto Solidale, Italy), to those in which there is a total involvement (i.e. The People Supermarket, London, UK).

In this framework, consumers can effectively participate in the processes of sustainability as they become responsible for their purchasing choices. Consumer power (Micheletti and Stolle, 2008) should be the real market driving force: vote with your dollar (Barham, 2002) as an expression of consumers’ preferences and, consequently, an orientation for the market.

In Italy, since the mid-nineties, a massive development of collective purchasing strategies has arisen, showing a parallel growth in critical consumption aptitude. Italy represents therefore an ideal field for analysing those individual alongside with the collective factors that influence sustainable consumption patterns.

The aim of this study is to 1. analyse the extent of political drivers of ethical consumption within Italian alternative agro-food networks, 2. assess the role of eco-labelling system in orienting political consumption attitude, and 3. analyse the values behind the participation in collective movement of social shopping. Research questions have been designed accordingly. For doing so 6 mini-focus groups among critical consumers and representatives of solidarity-based purchasing group in the Northern, Central and Southern Italy (2 focus groups per area) were carried out.

The paper is organized as follows: section 2 gives a review of the concept of sustainable consumption setting it in the framework of Political Consumerism and Collaborative Consumption theories; section
3 describes material and methods used in the administration of the focus groups; section 4 provides a discussion of the findings, and in section 5 conclusions are drawn.

2 Literature Review: from extractive capitalism to community-based alternatives

The Contemporary stage of global capitalism, its new frontier is, according to many authors (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Sennett, 2012; Harvey, 2014; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2014), the extractive capitalism, designed to maximize the ability of a small social subset (elites) to plunder resources. It implies the deregulation of the financial sector by creating hyper-financial economies subject to severe market manipulation by speculators. While extractive capitalism, in its original definition, implies agro-mineral extractive policies, it has now expanded its exploitative capacity extensively to every social infrastructure, and is applied intensively to every degree of abstraction within the productive machine (that is, to every level of organization of the global financial mode of production). Contemporary dynamics of extractive capitalism in the agricultural sector replicates under different conditions the historical process of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2003). The polarization is now between alternative, community-based and sustainable practices (towards a post-capitalist ecosystem), versus extractive capitalism led by public-private coalitions. The focus here is on those alternative agro-food networks of producers and consumers which are creating different and sustainable practices of consumption as a viable alternative to those typical of the extractive capitalism.

In this framework, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest on the concept of sustainable consumption, not only in academic literature (Spangenberg and Lorek, 2002; Tanner and Wölfing Kast, 2003; Gilg et al., 2005; Hertwich, 2005; Seyfang, 2005; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006; Alkon, 2008; Mont and Plepys, 2008; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008) but also in reports of policy makers and international organizations (OECD, 2008; UNEP, 2015; EU Sustainable Development Strategy COM(2001)264). This evidence is also demonstrated by the proliferation of terms which mainly refer to it as critical, ethical, responsible, fair, green, ecological consumption. In general, these expressions refer to a choice for products and services which consider environmental, social and energy effects and impacts of the entire life cycle of a product, assigning to these aspects the same value as for price and quality ones.

In 1994 the Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption linked sustainable consumption concept to the Sustainable Development one defining it as “the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.” (Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, 1994. Oslo Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption). In addition, in 2002, the World Summit for Sustainable Development emphasized the urgency of setting a comprehensive corpus of programs focusing on sustainable consumption and production (Hertwich, 2005).

In the present contribution, the concept of sustainable consumption has been analysed through the theoretical conceptualizations of two movements or theories which are strongly linked to it: the Political Consumerism, and the Collaborative Consumption.

Political Consumerism has been defined as “a ‘push’ factor that is reforming corporate globalization” (Micheletti and Stolle, 2008: 750). A practice with greater effect which falls within Political Consumerism, indeed, is undoubtedly the possibility of boycott multinational companies’ brands because of ethical issues such as lack of respect for workers’ rights, environmental and animal protection among others. These problems may clash with principles that characterize consumers purchasing decisions. In other words, Political Consumerism can have two practical effects: boycott and “buycott”. Using consumption choices under brands, products and producers to try “to change institutional or market practices found to be ethically, politically and environmentally objectionable” (Micheletti et al, 2003: XIV-XV.) Thus, boycotts ask people not to buy specific products because of
ethical, political and environmental issues, whereas “buycott” (politically-motivated shopping) ask citizens/consumers to buy products due to their ethical concerns and accordingly to their labelling system (e.g. eco-friendly, organic, fair trade, local products etc.). A meaningful demonstration of what it is argued is the birth of the so-called “values-based labels”. Elizabeth Barham has tackled this issue in a research devoted to systems and values behind the “eco-labeling” (Barham, 2002).

According to the author, this new labelling system “represents part of a larger effort to create ethically and spatially situated alternative economies. Labelling groups are proposing these alternative economies as counter-norms to globalizing markets of commodified values” (Barham, 2002: 350). Through this kind of labels, we are witnessing to a shift, at least in part, from the competition rules to cooperation ones as a basis for goods exchange into the market. The rational decision to purchase products using values-based labels regards a political action or the effect of political consumerism act, in agreement with the idea of Micheletti. Consumption attitude includes indeed social, ethical and political as well as economic issues related to goods quality and price. Most of the time political features of a product are latent or invisible, but they become evident when people assign them a public meaning (Micheletti, 2003). Furthermore, according to the view of several scholars, certification systems of organics, fair trade goods, as well as environmentally friendly methods and products, characterize the concept of political consumerism (Stolle and Hooghe, 2003; Levi and Linton, 2003; Micheletti, 2003).

On the other hand, Collaborative Consumption, starts from different assumptions. Originally it was defined as a process in which “one or more persons consume economic goods or services in the process of engaging in joint activities with one or more others” (Felson and Spaeth, 1978: 614). However, in recent years, this concept assumed different nuances. Its current main theorists are Botsman and Rogers (2010) who claim that our era marks the final farewell to the Twentieth Century and to the “culture of the Ego”. This trend arises from the changing of economic opportunities that are taking place: the economic boom in which the dominant imperative was to accumulate products gives way to a society that has fewer resources and it is organized bartering, renting and borrowing goods, services and skills (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). In other words, we are switching through the economy of excess to the economy of access. The basic element of collaborative consumption is the dis-intermediation, through bottom-up organizations that are autonomous and independent. Non-profit, decentralized, cooperative organizations are growing worldwide, turning personal needs into collective action. Collaborative consumption is linked to four key factors which are particularly important in the present study: 1) community trust based on reputation; 2) social networks based on peer-to-peer connections; 3) pressure from environmental problems; 4) the global recession, which has widely changed consumer behaviour.

With regard to food market, a demonstration of these new trends described either by Political Consumerism and Collaborative consumption, is represented by food cooperatives that are arising worldwide allowing producers and consumers shortening the supply-chain and obtaining added value for both of them (e.g. Real food market, UK; Park Slope Food Coop, USA; Nature et Progrès, FR; Campi Aperti, IT; Keystone Foundation, IND; Rede Ecovida de Agroecologia, BR, just to mention some of them). From one hand, indeed, producers can gather a price which is fair and suitable to production costs, and from the other, consumers have the possibility of purchasing genuine, fresh, healthy and environmentally-friendly products at reasonable prices.

In Italy solidarity-based purchasing groups are community trust based on reputation, as defined by Collaborative Consumption theory, that were first developed in the mid-nineties. In the last twenty years, we have witnessed to a massive increase in number and popularity of these groups. They have already been analysed in the framework of political consumerism especially for profiling their members (Graziano and Forno, 2012; Migliore et al., 2012), or for comparing individual vs. collective political action (Forno and Graziano, 2014). In this paper, the focus is not only on members of solidarity-based purchasing groups, but also on critical consumers who join other alternatives purchasing schemes (i.e. box schemes, home delivery, farmers market etc.) in order to provide new insights on sustainable consumption literature.
3 Material and methods

Six mini-focus groups (4-5 critical consumers in each) were carried out between May and September 2015, two in each Italian regional area previously identified. The choice of administering mini-focus groups lies in the evidence that a smaller size of group allows for a deeper exploration of different topics with greater opportunity of sharing experiences and points of view (Krueger, 1988).

The values behind sustainable buying behaviour have been analysed by borrowing the three main categories identified within Political Consumerism theory for the analysis of political purchasing attitude: i) frequency and habit, ii) awareness and motivation, iii) behaviour (Stolle and Hooghe, 2003). To these, an unexplored dimension was added: participation and involvement. Participants to the mini-focus group have been recruited accordingly. All selected members, indeed, were involved in consumer cooperatives and/or in solidarity-based purchasing groups and/or in box schemes practices and/or claimed to frequent regularly city/farmers’ markets typical of short food supply chain distribution strategies.

The moderator’s instruction and some guidelines on transcription and formulation of results for analysis were developed according to Krueger (1988). The moderators’ instruction has been designed considering the four dimension previously discussed and consisted of the following sections:

- section on buying/non-buying attitude (frequency and habit)
- section on values-based labels (awareness and motivation)
- section on participation in food cooperatives (participation and involvement)
- section on consumption behaviour of ethical products (behaviour)

Each mini-focus group was led by the same moderator. Before starting the discussion, a short introduction on the subject and on the purpose of the meeting was given to the participants and thereupon they were asked to provide a brief self-introduction. According to Krueger (1988), participants were asked to always refer to their personal experiences in order to avoid off-topics and stereotypes.

All the meetings were audio and video-recorded. The discussions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Table 1. shows participants key characteristics by Italian regions.

[Insert Table 1.]

A transcription, word by word, of the recordings of each mini-focus group was made and afterwards, the content analysis was performed and has been divided into two phases as follows:

1. word-count analysis;
2. text coding;

Furthermore, the semantic analysis has been carried out and it has been divided into:

3. analysis of co-occurrences allowing the aggregation of similar and related topics, and
4. interpretation of results.

All the above-mentioned phases were carried out using the software NVivo.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Content Analysis

The content analysis has produced 28 dominant topics which have been aggregated in sub-themes based on co-occurrences and reciprocity of the subject examined. The flow chart presented in Figure 1. shows the themes and the sub-themes on which data analysis was conducted1. Thus, the following section will report the exploratory findings of how these themes and sub-themes influence critical consumers’ behaviour.

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1 Figure 1. reports the 24 topics more discussed.
[Figure 1.]

In general terms, the topics more discussed are those which refer to mutual knowledge among consumers and producers (KNO), certification and control (CC), access to information on products/production methods (INFO) and price (P).

Table 2 shows the topics emerged, the number of references in which the arguments have been discussed, as well as the aggregated items.

[Table 2.]

Below is represented the hierarchy chart (Figure 2.) of aggregate themes according to the affinity of the topics treated and to their dominance.

[Figure 2.]

Looking at the aggregated themes, it emerges that the topic that refers to networks of consumers-producers (NET), which includes issues as direct knowledge among consumers and producers (KNO), trust (TRU), Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) and solidarity-based purchasing groups (GAS), proves to be the most debated with 141 recurrences (25,8% coverage on the total references).

Secondly, organic (ORG) theme - which aggregates the topics of organic regulation (REG), certification and control (CC), access to quality food products (ACC), direct purchasing (DP), and appearance (APP) - reaches 21% of the total coverage of the issues discussed.

In addition, ethical products (EP) theme, involving workers’ rights (RIG), environmental concerns (ENV), seasonality (SEA), and health issues (HEA) gets an amount of recurrences equal to 15% on the total references.

Finally, issues related to distribution channels (DIS) as well as to large-scale retail channel (LSRC) prove to be of interest of participants for a coverage of 11,4% on the total of the topics discussed. These themes are those most debated among Italian critical consumers interviewed. Nevertheless, in the following sections, they are discussed in more details together with the remaining issues according to the semantic analysis performed in the framework of the four categories previously identified.

4.2 Semantic analysis

4.2.1 Frequency and habit

Consumers’ habits and frequency of purchasing represent a crucial aspect in answering the first research question on the extent of political drivers of critical consumption. Participants in the focus group claim to usually boycott multinational companies and industrial food from large-scale retail channels. Distribution represents indeed a fundamental driver for critical consumption. Nevertheless, this aspect obtains two different points of view in relation to ethical productions. Whereas some participants try to avoid big distribution channels and favour small economic powers in accordance with previous research investigating the motivation behind ethical consumption (Brenton, 2003), others see positively the large-scale distribution of ethical and quality products as a source of widespread access to a broader audience. Furthermore, participants claim to usually read the label in order to get as much information as possible about the products they are going to purchase. As for the price, critical consumers associate quality products to a higher price, often because of quality certification and this aspect represent a discouraging issue for respondents. This point is well-summarized by one participant who stated: “I refuse the idea that a fair, healthy, and environmental-friendly product should cost so much to bar everybody’s chance to purchase it!”. By contrast, it has also emerged that the intrinsic value of a product lies in the relationship with producers rather than in its price. The origin of a product is another issue frequently considered when purchasing food product. It is generally associated either with the enhancement of local productions and to the reduction of carbon emissions. Finally, the belief that ethical consumption habit represents a political act is
demonstrated by the own statements of participants. In particular, one of them claimed that “what we are doing is a political act: buying a product from a small farmer rather than from a big retailer, indeed, is a political act.”

4.2.2. Awareness and motivation

Regarding the use of values-based labels as a driver motivation of purchasing choices (the second research question of the study), Fairtrade receives some attention by some respondents but most of them stated that this label does not motivate their purchasing choices because fair trade products come mainly from remote countries and they are concerned about kilometres travelled issue. Besides, organic prove to be the label most discussed even if in a critical way in particular with reference to the organic regulation. Official organic certification, indeed, is seen as “a condition neither necessary nor sufficient” in the choice of organic foods. In particular, most respondents see as a crucial point the lack of a constant updating of the regulation. Moreover, the standardization of the norms of production among organic agri-business and smallholders is seen as illogical and unfair. In addition to that and in accordance with findings of some authors (Yiridoe et al., 2005; Eden et al., 2008; Jassen and Hamm, 2012) a general skepticism on the reliability of organic label has been recorded. As for the aspect linked to the access to quality foods, some critical consumers have expressed the concern that it could be not easy for any consumers and that the direct purchasing could, to some extent, mitigate this condition. Topics as ingredients and appearance of organics receive less attention from respondents. In Figure 3, it is shown the dominance of the topic aggregated together within the organic food issue.

[Figure 3.]

4.2.3 Participation and involvement

As for the final research question, there was a general agreement among consumers on their commitment of being part of a network of relationships when choosing of orienting their buying behaviour towards certain products. In this framework, the mutual knowledge among producers and consumers is of paramount importance in the development of a broad trust-based system. Furthermore, another topic that has strongly emerged is the one related to Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). These schemes are “locally focused quality assurance systems [that guarantee organic] producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange” (IFOAM). These systems represent an alternative to the mainstream organic certification: the attention of critical consumers interviewed on this aspect is twofold. From one hand, Emilia-Romagna is the first region in Italy that has issued a Regulation (RL 19/2014) that recognizes the importance of the adoption of Participatory Guarantee Local Systems as a model that ensures environmental and social sustainability (Sacchi, 2016). The Regulation was strongly advocated by many informal groups and agro-food cooperatives. Consequently, interviewees of the focus groups in Emilia Romagna were particularly sensitive on the importance of adopting these systems. From the other hand, in Apulia region, the network of solidarity-based purchasing groups, has embraced their own PGS strategy for ensuring the credibility of organic producers not certified which includes the intervention of an agricultural expert. This expert is a member of one of the Apulian solidarity-based purchasing group which verifies and approves - or does not approve if a producer does not comply with organic production standards - reliability of products of those smallholders supplying the groups. The interesting aspect relies on the fact that the purchasing groups act as a consulting service for certification. Once producers improve their selling and profits, indeed, they are required to apply for the formal organic certification. Finally, the topic linked to participation on a solidarity-based purchasing group was discussed in particular for underlining its role in shortening the supply chain and in enhancing the value chain. Figure 4. shows up the dominance of the topics aggregated within the networking issue.

[Figure 4.]
4.2.4 Behaviour

As it is possible to infer from Figure 3. and in line with Brenton (2013), the most important characteristics in the choice of an ethical product were mainly associated with workers’ rights and with environmental concerns. For respondents, an ethical product must guarantee a fair income to producers and, at the same time, it has not to be obtained by the exploitation of workers. The latter aspect received particular attention in Southern Italy where many scandals on workers’ conditions were made public in recent years. As for the commitment on environmental concerns, some ethical purchasing groups stock up from producers within a 25-km area thanks to a collective agreement for reducing the consumption of CO2.

Surprisingly, even if issues as seasonality, health claim, taste, and animal welfare were partially discussed, they receive much less attention compared to the former two as demonstrated by the following statement of one participants “I do not consider organic food for the health claim, every time I buy an organic product, my vote goes to an agriculture that uses fewer resources.”

In Figure 5. it is possible to verify the dominance of the topic emerged.

[Figure 5.]

5 Conclusions

Nowadays many consumers have expressed strong opinions about the process by which foodstuff is produced, distributed and guaranteed. Consumers’ concerns about ecological and social sustainability issues can have significant impacts on both food demand and policies. Furthermore, consumers’ choice towards sustainable food could improve the overall environmental status and fight against climate change.

Although sustainable consumption still represents a minority movement compared with the mainstream mass consumerism, it holds the potential of threatening it. The choice of approach to an asset or service could determine the orientation of the markets; therefore, it is particularly important to pay attention to novel collective movements which are practicing alternatives to the mainstream models of production, distribution, and consumption. Consumers knowledge depend on channels they make their purchases: in short food supply chain as farmers’ market, home delivery, solidarity-based purchasing groups, fairs, on-farm sales, the farmers themselves trade their products and they establish a solid relationship based on mutual trust and support.

In the present study, values and factors affecting Italian critical consumers attitude have been analysed by applying the categories used in the study of Political Consumerism behaviour. As seen, knowledge among consumers and producers proved to be the most important aspect for the participation and involvement of consumers in alternative agro-food networks. Furthermore, consumption habits are influenced by different distribution channels and by information available on products. In addition, behaviour of critical consumers towards ethical products appears mainly affected by social and environmental concerns such as workers’ rights and carbon emission reduction. Finally, organic certification and values-based labelling system do not represent a driver motivation for consumers’ purchasing.

The current proliferation of customized lifestyles has led to a new, reflexive way of consuming. In other words, it seems that some recent consumption models have gone beyond those synthetized within the Political Consumerism theory. This is demonstrated by the emergence of a consumer who is critical even of those signals (values-based labels) that would serve and help in driving his/her political consumption action. These findings represent a fruitful starting point for deepening the analysis of critical consumer behaviour at a broader level in order to sustain the spread of eco-socially production practices, as strongly advocated by international organizations and collective movements.
6 References


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Table 1. Characteristics of the participants in the six mini-focus groups performed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Italian Area</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>N. of consumers</th>
<th>Place of residence</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Education level*</th>
<th>N. of children average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>Emilia-Romagna</td>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 urban</td>
<td>4F-1M</td>
<td>20-65</td>
<td>5 superior</td>
<td>0,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parma</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 urban</td>
<td>1 rural</td>
<td>4F-1M</td>
<td>31-65</td>
<td>0,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Lazio</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 urban</td>
<td>3F-1M</td>
<td>31-65</td>
<td>4 superior</td>
<td>0,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 urban</td>
<td>2 rural</td>
<td>2F-3M</td>
<td>20-45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Sicily</td>
<td>Catania</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 urban</td>
<td>2 rural</td>
<td>4F-1M</td>
<td>20-65</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trinitapoli</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 urban</td>
<td>3 rural</td>
<td>1F-3M</td>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>0,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20 urban</td>
<td>18F</td>
<td>20-65</td>
<td>12 medium</td>
<td>0,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Education level: medium or secondary school; superior or university.
Table 2. Topics emerged from the content analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>N. of reference</th>
<th>% coverage</th>
<th>Aggregate reference</th>
<th>% coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KNO</td>
<td>Mutual knowledge (cons/prod)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11,90</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Certification&amp;Control</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8,06</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFO</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7,88</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7,33</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSRC</td>
<td>Large-scale retail channel</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6,96</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGS</td>
<td>Participatory Guarantee Systems</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6,41</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORG</td>
<td>Organic food</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5,49</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>21,06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>Ethical product</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4,76</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>15,02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIS</td>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4,40</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>11,36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIG</td>
<td>Workers’ Rights</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3,66</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3,30</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORIG</td>
<td>Origin of the products</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3,11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Local Origin of products</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3,11</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV</td>
<td>Environmental concerns</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2,93</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Direct purchasing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2,93</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPGs</td>
<td>Solidarity-based Purchasing Groups</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2,38</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Access to quality food products</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2,01</td>
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* The total amount of aggregate references differs from the total amount of references since not all topics were aggregated with other ones.

Fig. 1. Flow-chart of main themes and relative sub-themes emerged
Figure 2. Hierarchy chart of aggregate topics

Figure 3. Hierarchy chart of the topic *ORGANIC FOOD*

Figure 4. Hierarchy chart of the topic *NETWORKING*

Figure 5. Hierarchy chart of the topic *ETHICAL PRODUCT*