4 The art of recontextualisation:

How firms make sense of the European ecolabel

Johanna Richter & Tobias Kirchhoff

The globalisation of markets and gradual depletion of natural resources not only gave rise to fiercer competition, but also emphasised the need for sustainable production processes and business solutions (Golden, 2010, p. 10). Initially, legislators sought to tackle environmental issues by directly regulating the market through command-and-control instruments such as hard law, albeit with mixed success (Jordan et al., 2003, p. 562). The main criticism of command-and-control mechanisms lies in the fact that these often undermine a firm's competitive advantage (p. 564). As a response, legislative instruments have taken on a more market-based character, developed as a result of negotiations between policy makers, scientific experts, non-governmental organisations (NGO) and firms. The soft-law approach is considered more effective as it better reflects the interest of a firm; however, its environmental benefits remain a matter of debate (Iraldo, Testa, Melis & Frey, 2011, p. 213).

The European Union (EU), one of the leading economies in the world, adopted such a market-based policy instrument in shape of the EU ecolabel. The ecolabel was created as a voluntary scheme motivating firms to produce environmentally friendlier products and services (European Commission, 2011b). The label is awarded to a wide array of products, however, only if – after careful examination – they have met the ecological criteria agreed upon at the EU level (Locret & de Roo, 2004, p. 3). Besides the protection of the environment, ideally this approach also creates trust for the consumers and a competitive advantage for the firm (European Commission, 2011b).

However, the crucial point for this paper is the actual implementation of the policy. While at the EU level various stakeholders standardise criteria to ensure their widespread applicability for many economic sectors and products, the national competent authorities (NCAs) have to interpret the legislation in such a way as to ensure their practical use at the local level. Subsequently, firms that apply for the ecolabel have to re-interpret the legislation and adapt their resource selection, production, and distribution accordingly. This process – in this chapter referred to as the recontextualisation of standards – creates a tension between the European and the local level. In contrast to the previous chapters, we thus take a bottom-up approach to ecolabels and focus on their implementation at the firm level. In more detail, we seek to understand the internal processes within firms that applied for and have been awarded with the EU ecolabel. Most importantly, if a universally applicable standard is locally applied and translated into the day-to-day practices of a firm, does this even change the standard or label?

What we expect to discover in the course of our research is that the meaning of the EU ecolabel changes as a result of the process of recontextualisation. Whereas at an EU level the ecolabel is a market-based environmental policy instrument with the goal of protecting the environment, at an industry level the ecolabel is predominantly meant to protect the firm's interests. In other words, while at the European level a label is seen as a technical standard universally applicable, at the street-level the standard changes into a locally applied resource. Eventually, the effectiveness or quality of a label depends on the contextual circumstances and the ones giving meaning to it. To answer our research question, we have conducted interviews with managers of firms regarding their experience with the EU ecolabel, as well as the manager of a national competent authority responsible for the application process. We thereby aim at contributing to the academic debate on recontextualisation and its effects on the (re-)production of quality standards in the case of the EU ecolabel.

The structure of this chapter as appears as follows: firstly, we will set out the conceptual framework, which guides our analysis throughout the rest of this chapter. Here, we will engage in the scholarly debate on standardisation and recontextualisation. Secondly, we will briefly introduce our research design and methodology. Thirdly, we will provide some general information on the EU ecolabel and how firms apply for it. Lastly, we will present and critically analyse our case study findings. In doing so, we will follow a step-by-step approach and roughly divide this section according to the different phases of the application procedure. Conclusively, we will summarise our most important findings and discuss implications for future research.

Being “fieldworthy”:
The challenge of universal standards

In our everyday life, we are surrounded by standards. Even at the very moment that you are reading this chapter you are confronted with the results of standardisation, from the size of the paper you hold in your hand, to the line spacing, to the colour of the print. However, standards, standardisation and how they are put to work are concepts frequently referred to as “underresearched” in social sciences (Eden, 2008; Bowker & Star, 2000; Timmermans & Berg, 1997). Therefore, in this section we would like to review existing literature and engage in the academic debate on standardisation.

Bowker & Star (2000) define standards as “any set of agreed-upon rules for the production of (textual or material) objects” (p. 150). Standards work on several dimensions. Firstly, standards are often voluntary and serve as a means to streamline certain elements of a process. Secondly, standards are mostly imposed by legal entities such as (quasi-) state authorities as the European Union. Thirdly, standards are inactive and difficult to change, although it is not self-evident that superior standards always prevail (ibid.). Standards are predominantly based on scientific data and knowledge, but nevertheless subject to practical policy-making. In many instances, standards are actually defined by different stakeholders like the industry, state authorities and NGOs to name but a few (Boraz, 2007). Accordingly, every standard is the “result of negotiations and conflicts” and a consensus of different interests (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 157; Boraz, 2007), the basis of which is not always scientific knowledge. Related to that, Hébert (2010) argues in her study on salmon fisheries that standards, which are translated into individual production processes as a means to achieve higher quality, undermine singularity and lead to mass production (p. 34). Paradoxically, standards are thus meant to convey an image of quality, but in reality the quality is a standardised one, so that many producers can actually meet the standard (ibid.). Are standards thus truly delivering the quality they promise?

It is worth mentioning that Bowker & Star (2000) argue that standards should be ‘customised’ in order for them to be appropriately applicable. However, customisation compromises standardisation and vice versa (p. 151). Eden (2008) explains this problem in more detail. In a study of standardising labels for sustainable forestry, she discovered a tension between the peculiarities of objects and the universality of scientific theory (p. 1020). She argues that standards are not as rigid as one supposes. For her illustration, she uses the example of the certification procedure of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) (p. 1018). As she explains, standards are made universal in order to be applicable to a wide range of different objects and circumstances in her field of study. The dilemma of this situation is that the specific object in the field and the abstract criteria differ and make universal application of standards difficult. In order for a standard to be “fieldworthy” – in Eden’s understanding this means being applicable to the object in the field – a process of interpretation of the universal standard is necessary. Standards, in order to be applicable to a product, are thus always subject to interpretation by a third party, which is either producing or certifying a good with a label.

Whereas sufficiently detailed standards leave little room for interpretation, more universal standards require interpretative work to a much greater extent. Timmermans & Berg (1997) argue in a similar fashion, albeit from a somewhat different angle. In a study of medical protocols, they elaborate on standardisation and identify two opposite stages: the universal and the local. They argue that standards are necessary to have a framework of examination and cannot be uniformly applied to the object of research. Accordingly, this creates tensions between the universal definition and its local application. In their view, these tensions influence and eventually merge both levels to what they define as “local universality” (p. 275). In other words, while standards have a universal character, this very universality is being transformed when the standard is locally interpreted and re-appropriated. For Timmermans & Berg (1997) local universality “implies a context [...] of reappropriation, repairing, combining, and even circumventing [...] standards” (p. 298). The result is that not only the universal level influences the local, but also that the local level influences the universal.

In a nutshell, standards are a necessary means to facilitate and streamline production processes. Based on negotiations between various stakeholders, they are meant to be universally applicable. However, in order to be locally applicable, universal standards are prone to individual interpretation, which leads to tensions between both levels. In our case, the EU represents the universal level, while the firm acts at the local level. The standards behind the EU ecolabel are a result of negotiations at the universal level to streamline interests and best practices. At the local level, these universally applicable standards need to be re-interpreted by the firm in order to become locally applicable. It remains to be seen to what extent these standards are re-interpreted or even modified. Furthermore, it is interesting to see whether quality changes as a result of standardisation and re-interpretation. In the following section, we will explore this question in greater detail.

Making sense of standards:
Recontextualisation at work

The concept of recontextualisation has been used in various fields of study; however, it has received little attention in the context of labelling schemes. At this stage, we therefore would like to engage in the scholarly debate on the concept of recontextualisation with the aim to develop our own theoretical framework. In that sense, we will recontextualise a concept that has been coined by others for a different purpose ourselves.

In his study on discourse, Linell (1998) explains recontextualisation as a dynamic process in which certain elements of a text or discourse are being transferred to and made fit for another context (p. 154). More precisely, if a text or discourse is put in another context, its meaning is likely to change, as the narrator simplifies, summarises or re-emphasises what has originally been said or written. Bernstein (1990) approximates recontextualisation from a pedagogic angle, claiming that a simplified model of pedagogic discourse consists of three fields, namely production, recontextualisation and reproduction. Accordingly, while knowledge is created in the field of production – say, the university – it is taught in the field of reproduction – for example at school. The field of recontextualisation then serves as a moderator between the two and could be imagined as state agencies, which develop curricula for schools based on the knowledge produced in universities.

In his study on management and organisational discourse, Thomas (2003) develops Bernstein's analytical framework even further (p. 789). He agrees with Bernstein in that texts or discourses "are moved or appropriated from one place to another", a process by which some elements may be stressed while others are left out completely (pp. 785-786). However, Thomas (2003) argues that discourse needs to be seen from a wider perspective, meaning where the discourse originates from, and how resources are used and adjusted to facilitate discourse when moving from one sphere to the other (p. 786). In his own words, "[d]iscourse is modified to fit into the moral and social context of the acquiring conjuncture, and the discourse becomes a resource in constituting and maintaining social relations" (p. 789). Recontextualisation then sheds light on how meanings change as a result of transforming discourse in such a way as to make it fit for a different context (p. 789). As he puts it:

> In each case the recontextualization is constituted by the regulative discourse in each sphere: by the science and truth discourse of academics; by the business efficiency and marketing discourse of consultants and gurus; and by the pragmatic coping and control discourse of managers (pp. 789, 790).

Brannen (2004) takes a more cultural stance towards recontextualisation in her study on the internationalisation of firm assets. For her, recontextualisation is a concept that enables the researcher to detect a shift of meaning of cultural objects when they pass from one culture to another (p. 604). Taking the example of Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse, she argues that firm assets gain new meaning because the recipient culture has to make sense of and inevitably connect their own cultural meanings to the foreign object (ibid.). In her words, "recontextualisation is the process by which the consumer or transferee makes sense of the product, practice, or service transferred from abroad into his or her own culture" (p. 605).

Having gained a deeper understanding of the use of the concept by different authors, we will now transfer what has been elaborated on to the specific context of the label. We perceive recontextualisation as the dynamic process by which companies make sense of the EU ecolabel transferred from the EU level into their own firm culture. Here, the EU constitutes the level of production of standards, while the firm represents the level of reproduction. In the process of making the standard fit for the new environment, the firm modifies the standard into a resource or firm asset and thus gives new meaning to the ecolabel. This could, for example, have implications for the intended environmental friendliness that the EU ecolabel promotes. It is important to mention at this point that the NCAs constitute a meta- or meso-level as they serve as a mediator between the EU and the firm and actively interpret the standards themselves. In the following sections we will test these assumptions against our case study findings.

Research design and methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of the internal processes of a firm applying for the EU ecolabel, we chose to gather information by means of qualitative interviewing. We approached several firms in the Netherlands, whose products had recently been awarded with the EU ecolabel and conducted semi-structured interviews with four managers in charge of the application procedure. We spoke with a Research, Product Development and Legal Affairs Manager; a Product and Account Manager; a Senior Manager for Sustainability Quality and Sustainability; and a Staff Officer for Quality, Health and Safety. For reasons of confidentiality, we will refer to the firms as Firm 1, Firm 2 and so on. Firm 1 and 2 are producers of cleaning agents, Firm 3 produces electronic devices, and Firm 4 produces sanitary papers. The firms vary in size, organisational structure, type of product and number of ecolabels. Since the EU ecolabel is awarded to a wide range of products, we were thus able to draw a more general picture than merely comparing firms of the same sector, which might have had similar experiences with the label. Nevertheless, all four firms were Dutch and therefore had to deal with the same national legislation when applying for the label. To gain even greater insight and also learn more about the role of the national competent authorities in this process, we have also conducted an interview with the Manager of Non-Food at the Dutch national competent authority Stichting Milieukeur (SMK).

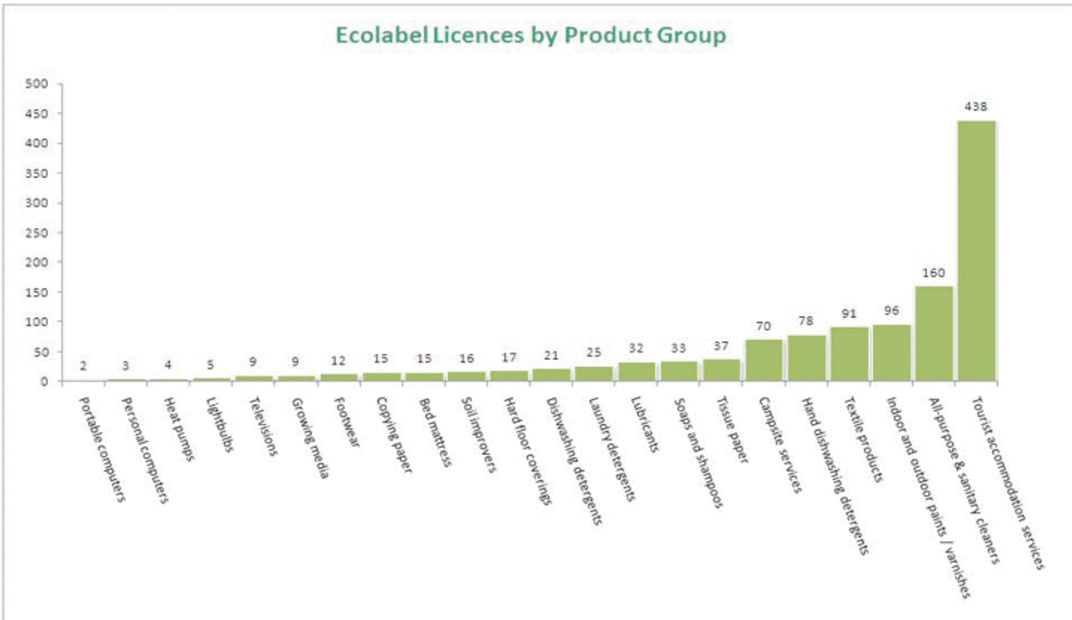
Interviews were conducted in May 2011 on site and via Skype™ and lasted approximately one and a half hours. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. For our analysis we cross-examined the data and looked for patterns between the interviews, while also taking into account the individual experiences of the distinct sectors. We categorised the information according to the steps a firm has to take when applying for the EU ecolabel. To complement our research, we relied on secondary literature as well as documents accessible through the electronic archives of the EU in general, and the ecolabel in particular. Finally, we analysed our findings against the backdrop of our conceptual framework.

The EU Ecolabel:
What it is and how to apply for it

Although quite an extensive body of literature on the EU ecolabel exists, few scholarly papers focus on aspects of standardisation and recontextualisation in relation to labels. Most authors study labels from a governance or consumer perspective, though rarely from that of the firm (Rex & Baumann, 2007; Cadman & Dolley, 2004; Jordan et al., 2003, Nadaï, 2001). Additionally, there is quite a lack of recent material, especially in the case of official implementation records and other impact studies (Locret & de Roo, 2004; Frey, Iraldo, Pratesi, De Clercq, Pots & Senesael, 1998). We therefore hope to add value to the academic debate, as well as to provide some more practical and up-to-date information on the European ecolabel. Before presenting the results and analysis of our interviews, we will first give a concise introduction to the EU ecolabel as well as the general proceedings of the application procedure. Furthermore, we will shed some light on past challenges of the labelling scheme, as presented in the reviewed articles and reports. Based on this background, we will go through the main steps of the application procedure based on the experience of our interview partners.

Originally, environmental policy instruments followed the command-and-control mechanism, which meant that companies were lawfully obliged to produce according to ecological criteria (Jordan et al., 2003, p. 562). This approach, however, was widely criticised because environmental targets were set too high for the firms to meet in a cost-effective way and often even undermined innovation (Stø et al., 2005, p. 35). Eventually, instead of improving the environmental performance of businesses, the problem "moved from one medium to another" without truly being solved (p. 34). In the face of poor implementation records and little demand for the label, the EU realised the necessity to directly include the industry in the development of criteria to achieve more cost-effective yet efficient solutions (Jordan et al., 2003, pp. 564, 569; Frey et al., 1998, p. 62). As a result, in 1992 the European ecolabel was created as a voluntary labelling scheme aimed at more effectively protecting the environment by means of "moral suasion" (Jordan et al., 2003, pp. 564, 569). In practice, this means that businesses were encouraged, though not legally forced to apply for the EU ecolabel and even take part in the negotiations of the criteria (ibid.). Additionally, environmental friendliness was no longer perceived as an uncomfortable regulatory measure, but rather a communication tool to provide information and create awareness for producers and consumers alike (Stavins, 2001, p. 37). Thus, firms themselves could choose to apply for the label, and if they did, 'proudly' carry their "award for environmental leadership" (Stø et al., 2005, p. 34).

The EU ecolabel can be classified as a Type I label based on the ISO 14024 criteria, which means it is voluntary, created and awarded by governmental organisations and used only for products and services that meet the scientific criteria (Stein, 2009, p. 286). Thus, the ecolabel is awarded only for products and services, but not 'greener' production processes (Stø et al., 2005, p. 34). As of today, the EU has established 21 product and service categories ranging from cleaning, furniture, and gardening to electronic equipment or tourist accommodation services. The important point here is that ecolabelled products shall constitute a 'greener' alternative to their non-ecolabelled counterparts, so that the consumer can make well-informed purchasing choices as regards the environmental impact of the product (ibid., p. 33; Locret & de Roo, 2004, p. 3). The general provisions for the criteria of the ecolabel are governed by the most recent Regulation 66/2010/EC. According to Article 6, a product may not consist of any toxic ingredients that may significantly harm the environment or human beings in order to carry the EU ecolabel (European Union, 2010). Each product group then has their own set of criteria stipulated in the respective EU decisions, ranging from lower emissions to water and air, chemicals, and other harmful substances as well as reduced energy consumption in comparison to regular products (Cadman & Dolley, 2004, p. 6). *Figure 1* presents an overview of the distribution of licenses between the different product groups.



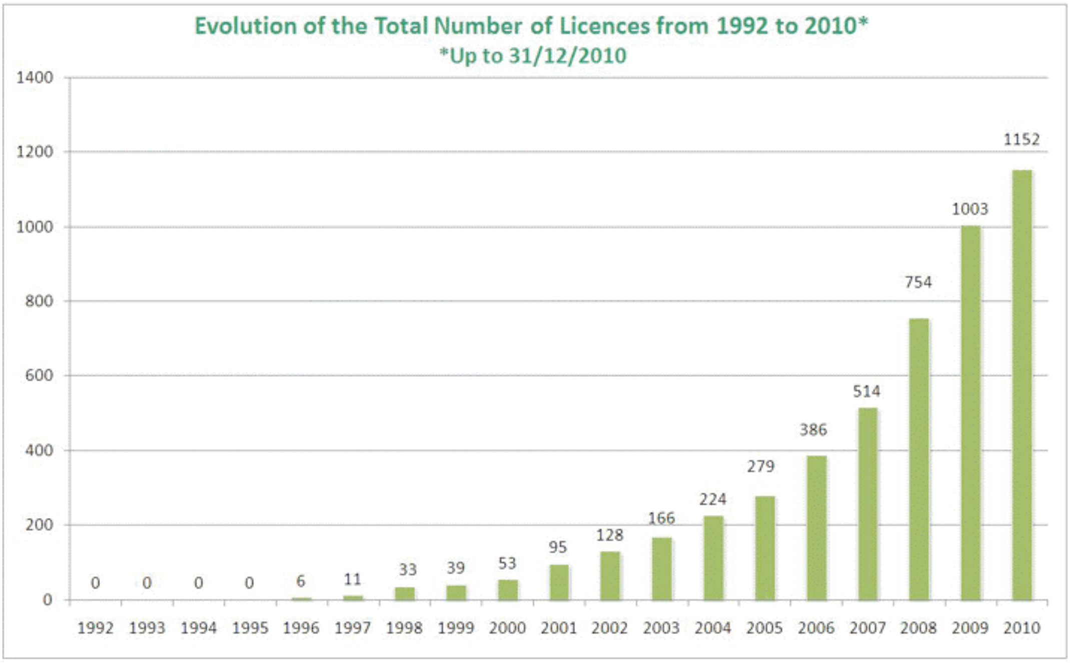


Figure 1: Ecolabel licensed per product group

Source: Commission of the European Union (2011c). Ecolabel- Facts and Figures. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/about_ecolabel/facts_and_figures_en.htm.

Initially, the policy was met with resistance and only few firms applied for the label, mainly due to the costs of production and marketing Additionally. the administrative fees were perceived as being too high (Jordan et al., 2003, p. 569). The voluntary nature of the scheme also led some to believe that there were little incentives to produce environmentally friendlier goods since consumers were not willing to pay higher prices (Stein, 2009, p. 293). Most importantly, the shared responsibility approach – meaning the involvement of various stakeholders in the development of the criteria – was subject to harsh criticism (Jordan et al., 2003, pp. 564, 570). Whereas NGOs demanded stricter criteria, the industry sought to negotiate the standard to a lower level so as to render compliance on their part more feasible (p. 570; Golden, 2010, p. 13). These discrepancies raised questions about the actual level of environmental quality, validity and accountability of the label. As was said by Nadaï (2001):

> [T]he apposition of a label on a product implies, as a prerequisite, a clear definition of the quality to be labelled – i.e. What do we consider as being "green"? … As the apposition of the label might deter the average quality on the market, regulators might be faced with a trade-off between the two impacts of a label: the increase in the expected value of information for the consumer, and the change in the average quality at market equilibrium. (p. 20)

As can be seen in *Figure 2*, however, there has been a gradual increase in the number of ecolabelled products. As of 2008, the ecolabel has significantly gained acceptance, which confirms the general trend for ecolabels (Golden, 2010, p. 15). At the time of writing this chapter, the EU was in the process of developing nine new criteria, which is due to the growing popularity of the label in recent years (Commission, 2011a).

The certification of goods is delegated to the Member States that either award products themselves through their Ministries of Environment or commission an independent certification authority (European Union, 2010). The application of products is to be submitted to a national competent authority in the country, where a product is produced or marketed. When a firm decides to apply for the EU ecolabel, it must follow the EU's official application procedure. First of all, the firm has to check the criteria the product must fulfil in order to be eligible for the EU ecolabel. The application pack, downloadable from the European Commission or NCA websites, serves as a guideline or checklist for the firm on how to correctly apply for the label and further stipulates a series of tests and declarations to warrant compliance with the ecological criteria. Last but not least, the firm has to include a detailed description of the intended use of the label and an up-to-date report on the state of compliance before issuing their application to the national competent authority. If the NCA has processed the files and found the criteria to be fulfilled, the firm is officially authorised to use the EU ecolabel. (Commission, 2011a; Commission, 2011b; European Union, 2010)

Having provided some general information on the application procedure for the EU ecolabel, we will now turn to our specific case study following the firms through each step of the course of action.

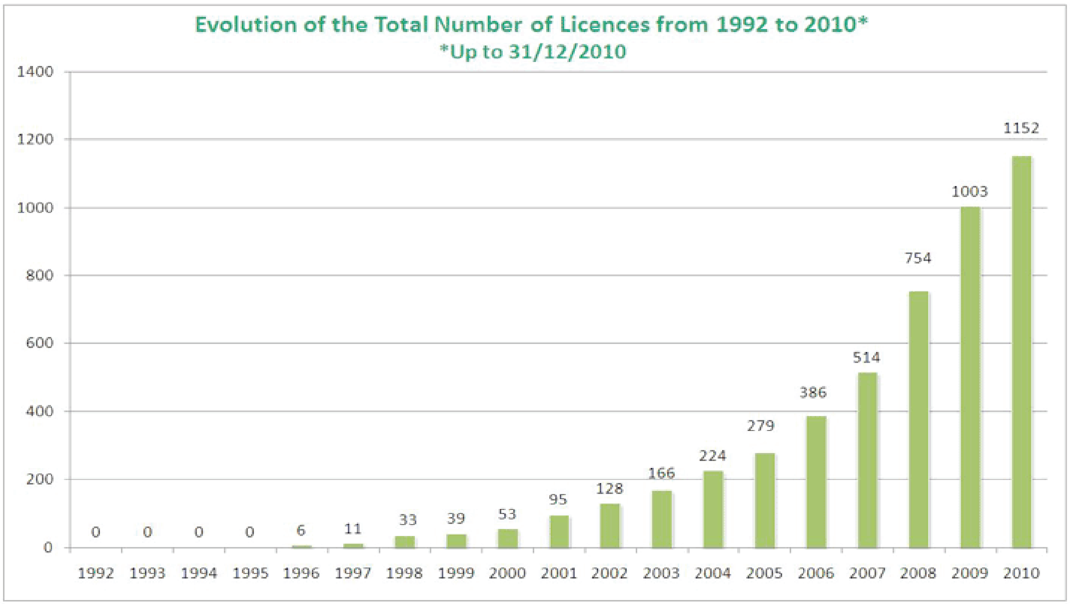


Figure 2: Evolution of the Total Number of Licences from 1992 to 2010

Source: Commission of the European Union (2011c). Ecolabel- Facts and Figures. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/about_ecolabel/facts_and_figures_en.htm.

Why firms apply for the EU ecolabel

The decision of a firm to apply for the EU ecolabel is undoubtedly one of the most crucial aspects for us to research. We were thus interested in why a firm decides to apply for the EU ecolabel, who is involved in such a decision and whether the expectations on the label have been fulfilled. Strikingly, the idea to certify a product in most cases originated at the marketing department, although one might expect the idea to come up in the sustainability department. Subsequently, the marketing departments took the idea to higher levels of management within the respective companies, as the ultimate decision laid with the respective managing directors.

Although the reasons behind the decision to apply for the EU ecolabel were manifold, most firms stated that consumer demand was the driving force behind the decision. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, demand for the ecolabel had only recently increased, which might explain why all companies we interviewed applied for the label within the last two years. In fact, all companies stated that the EU ecolabel was a trustworthy and recognisable label, known by consumers and the industry, comparably cheap and of good reputation. In their opinion, the credibility of the label seemed to catch up with the trustworthiness consumers attach to other national labels. The gradual increase of consumer awareness and general acceptance of the EU ecolabel thus apparently changed the firms' stance towards the ecolabel. As one manager put it: "I think the whole world demands it at the moment ... because they want to have [a] green image" (Firm 1, 2011). This already indicates the meaning businesses attach to the EU ecolabel. For companies it is not so much a tool to protect the environment, but more a response to increased consumer demand and expected increase in sales.

Related to this, the label was perceived of as an effective marketing and communication tool. According to classical marketing theory, analysis of consumer demand, screening of growing product markets, identifying a target group and ultimately positioning the product creates an opportunity for the firm to gain access to new markets (Rex & Baumann, 2007, p. 573). As one manager said:

> [Which] products you want to make is always coming from marketing. You have a marketing manager or marketing director who are thinking about how to market [a] product. And if you believe that it should be a red-coloured television then it is a red-coloured television and if you believe it should be an ecolabel, then we apply for an ecolabel. (Firm 3, 2011)

By displaying the EU ecolabel on products or company websites, the firms could effectively communicate their concerns for environmental protection to their consumers. A company awarded with the label could hence establish a greater amount of credibility than a company without ecolabelled products, and present itself as sustainable or environmentally friendly. In the words of one manager: "I think it's a good and clear environmental label ... it's more recognised and known in the market, you can use it as a marketing tool, since people and companies know what it means" (Firm 4, 2011).

Interestingly, our observations contradict earlier case studies, in which it was found that the label was not perceived as an effective marketing tool (Frey et al., 1998, p. 62). Accordingly, growing demand for ecolabelled products favoured an increase in marketing efforts on the side of the firm, although this often incurred high costs especially for first movers in the market (Jordan et al., 2003, p. 569). As one interviewee put it: "[m]arketing put a lot of effort to make the product known to the customers that it exists" (Firm 1, 2011). Again, this indicates a change of meaning of the label, as the firms were not so much concerned with producing environmentally friendly products, but to reach customers with green marketing strategies.

Another reason to apply for the ecolabel was the opportunity to acquire a competitive advantage over private labels or bigger market players in general. This held especially true for the small to medium-sized businesses whom we interviewed and resonates well with other case study findings (Rex & Baumann, 2007, p. 570; Frey et al., 1998, p. 123). Firm 1 for example decided to use the ecolabel because the fiercest competitor in another country had already successfully established itself as an environmentally friendly company by an intelligent marketing campaign, albeit not being equipped with any labelling scheme. With the award of the EU ecolabel the firm intended to threaten their competitor's monopoly and establish credibility for their products. Here, the label should ideally also provide them with a competitive advantage over their competition, which means the label has actually turned into a resource by means of recontextualisation.

Finally, all interviewees stated their the choice for the EU ecolabel was a convenient one due to the transnational character of the scheme. In fact, most companies marketed their products in at least two Member States and were thus able to avoid the application for multiple national schemes because of the ecolabels transnational character. This was especially valid for companies, which already used national ecolabels and finally switched to save costs on sustaining multiple national labels. As was said by one manager: "So that was my advice, stop with the different national labels and go with the European label" (Firm 4, 2011).

This finding contradicts other studies, in which it was claimed that most companies stayed with national labels rather than applying for the European one (Jordan et al., 2003, p. 570). More recent material however indicates that the EU ecolabel is indeed more convenient for firms serving the whole European market. National labelling schemes might in fact protect domestic markets, since imports are required to meet the same ecological criteria as national, ecolabelled goods (Stein, 2009, p. 292). One firm explicitly mentioned this problem with Scandinavian countries, whose Nordic Swan labelled products make up a large share of the market (Rex & Baumann, 2007, p. 570). Thus, with the help of the EU ecolabel, some firms were able to penetrate other national markets more conveniently, which again indicates a shift of meaning.

Naturally, not all reasons for application were directly related to the firms' interests. For example, according to the manager at the competent Dutch authority, the EU policy on green public procurement is one of the main reasons for application. Member States are the biggest consumers in the EU, with a total spending of two trillion Euros annually. In the Green Public Procurement policy member states voluntarily commit themselves to use their market power for the purchase of goods with a low environmental impact. Companies that sell goods and services to the state are thus inclined to switch their products according to the needs of sustainable consumption and production. (Commission, 2008)

Furthermore, three of the four firms interviewed operate in the Business to Business (B2B) market, while only one company sold directly to end consumers. Interestingly, while the former experienced increased demand for ecolabelled products from other businesses, the latter claimed end consumers were not concerned with environmentally friendly products due to higher prices. However – regardless of whether demand originated from the government or the professional industry – all firms we have interviewed have experienced growing interest in ecolabelled products from their customers and reacted accordingly.

Additionally, our interviewees also took a more critical stance towards the label or their decision to apply for it, particularly in retrospect. Although all firms stated that the EU ecolabel functioned well as a communication and marketing tool, they were in most cases not able to achieve higher sales figures with ecolabelled products. Given the sometimes rather expensive application procedure in terms of administrative fees, repeated test runs and high marketing costs, there was no real return on investment to date. As one manager said: "[i]t's not really a turnover-maker ... by far, it's not" (Firm 2, 2011). Since all firms applied relatively recently for the EU ecolabel and were among the first to do so in their sector, most of them experienced the first-mover disadvantage in terms of high marketing efforts, which is also in line with more general observations (Golden, 2010, p. 22). Another downside was fierce competition with national labels, which enjoyed more recognition and widespread acceptance. Nevertheless, the ecolabel overall met the expectations of the firms.

To sum up, with the decision to apply for the EU ecolabel we can already see a shift of meaning: while at the EU level, the ecolabel is a means to protect the environment, at the company level it becomes a means to enhance the firm's interests. Thus, the environmental dimension of the label moves to the backbench and gives way to rather practical concerns of the firm to save costs, adhere to legal obligations and most importantly, serve consumer demand and boost public image. Hence this stage of the application procedure shows that at the firm level, the meaning of the label begins to change as a result of recontextualisation.

Spoiled for choice:
Which product will carry the trophy?

Having established the reasons and expectations of firms to apply for the label, we will now shed more light on another crucial phase, namely the choice of the product that shall eventually carry the EU ecolabel. Although this part of the process is paramount with regards to the recontextualisation of standards, little research has been performed on this stage of the application procedure. In the following paragraphs, we will thus rely predominantly on information stemming from our interviews.

In this phase the ecolabel standard had its first 'contact' with a possible future product. As described by Eden (2008), the universal standard for all products in one category and the specific object chosen by a firm differ. One interviewee mentioned, "the most critical step in the end [...] was to make a good gap analysis. [W]hat do the criteria demand? And how do we fit into that?" (Firm 4, 2011). Thus, at this point companies started to recontextualise the standard and roughly projected their preferences on a concrete product. Recontextualisation in this sense means that the theoretical knowledge stipulated by EU legislation is being re-interpreted and transformed into a physical product. Or as one interviewee put it, at this stage "you [the company] start the process of interpretation and you start to redesign your products so it can meet the requirements of certain labels" (Firm 3, 2011).

According to our interview partners, all companies chose from products they already had produced before the application for the ecolabel, but which had not yet fulfilled the standards thereof. In other words, companies usually did not develop new products, which from the beginning met the requirements for the ecolabel; rather, they adapted already existing ones. One manager explained this way of decision-making in the following manner: "You start the process of interpretation and you start to redesign your products so it can meet the requirements of certain labels" (Firm 3, 2011).

Thus, the adaptation of a product sometimes incorporated processes of reformulation of chemical components, as for example in the sector for professional cleaning agents. When companies chose from their existing range of products, they were not only guided by the categories offered, but also where they expected to have the least conflict between product and ecolabel standard. Hence in the professional cleaning agents industry, it was common to choose products that already existed and fulfil the criteria with "a bit adjustment" (Firm 2, 2011). The less the misfit between those two, the less interpretation occurred. Indeed, one interviewee described the modification of existing products as the easiest way to obtain a certificate. At first glance, this seems to be advantageous to the respective companies, as they are saving resources in terms of time and money. However, these decisions arguably undermine the efficiency of the EU policy in general. When a company chooses a product on the basis of the lowest misfit with the legislation, this also means that the products awarded with the European flower already are close to be environmentally friendly. Thus, the aim of the EU to protect the environment is not being used to its full potential. Quite to the contrary, products with a comparably low environmental impact are being improved, whereas products considered to be more environmentally harmful are left 'untouched'. From an environmental perspective, it would make more sense to improve the environmental impact of products that are considerably more damaging. Thus, we can assume that companies did not choose a product because they wanted to protect the environment by turning a very harmful product into a more environmentally friendly one, but chose it according to an economic rationale.

This problem is, however, closely related to the nature of the EU ecolabel. For some product lines and industries the criteria for the ecolabel are considerably tougher than for others. On the one hand, strict criteria are obviously a means to protect the environment. On the other hand, strong standards inhibit the certification of products that are by their very design more harmful than others and could thus never reach such standards. In practice this means that companies were not able to alter products, which were considered to be very harmful, because they would not be able to meet the criteria for such a product. As with regards to the negotiation of criteria, the industry puts considerable effort into renegotiating the criteria, to an acceptable and most importantly, feasible level. Thus, the EU arguably has to find a compromise between the feasibility of a policy and the scale of protection of the environment. In the words of one manager:

> The European Commission has to listen to a lot of people. Before they draft a legislation they have to listen to the Member States, they have to listen to consumer organisations, to NGOs, to the industry. On the feedback of all those stakeholders they draft a legal rule. (Firm 3, 2011)

The market-based approach encourages a greater number of businesses to take up environmentally friendly products or production processes, which generally speaking is a favourable achievement. In order to achieve such a wide impact on the market – reaching a far greater number of firms – it is however almost inevitable that the criteria agreed upon between the various stakeholders fall short of ecolabels with stricter criteria. For instance, one interviewee of the tissue paper industry mentioned that the criteria of the EU ecolabel and the Forest Stewardship Council only in combination are almost as good as the criteria for the Blue Angel in Germany. In fact, this particular company manufactures products, which consist of 100 percent recycled paper and thus produces better environmental quality than required by the label. As he put it:

> Sometimes I think ... it isn't fair that products with a more environmental impact can also be certified against the same criteria. But since the criteria are so – how shall I call it – so easily met, the other products also can certify ... I wouldn't say it's a problem, but you can ask yourself, is it fair? (Firm 4, 2011)

Thus, the Europe-wide labelling scheme has a profound downside to it, namely lower standards than those of national labels or more traditional environmental policy instruments. This perception is in line with that of the literature on the debate surrounding the actual quality of the ecolabel standard (Golden, 2010; Jordan et al., 2003; Nadaï, 2001).

Based on the abovementioned, at the selection stage there is arguably a clear crystallisation of different meanings the involved actors attach to the EU ecolabel. Whereas the goal of the EU is to protect the environment by means of a policy, it is not the primary objective of firms that use the label as a resource serving an economic rationale. The product selection process in most of our analysed interviews illustrates this economic rationale, which seemingly challenges the pivotal meaning the EU attached to the label.[71] Thus, when the standard is translated in the daily practices of a company, it is not so much altered in its content, but changed in its meaning.

---

71 We acknowledge the fact that the EU seeks to guarantee wide applicability of the label with a market-based approach. To some extent, the EU therefore does attach an economic rationale to the label. However, the overall intention is the protection of the environment, which seems to gain significantly less importance at the company-level.

Making products "fit" for standards

As already indicated in the previous section, the most crucial part is the time during which the product is made "fit" for the criteria. We were thus specifically interested in the testing period of the potential EU ecolabel carrier. In fact, our interviewees mentioned several difficulties in the application procedure. Among others, the greatest obstacle for the companies concerned the obtainment of data from their suppliers. Since products have to meet certain requirements, such as the maximum level of environmentally harmful substances or emissions, applicants need to provide proof to the national competent authority that they are not producing goods above the accepted threshold. Nowadays, many producers have outsourced the majority of their production, which means that many components are supplied by external partners. Consequently, firms are not completely in charge of their supply chains, meaning they cannot easily produce the information necessary for applying for the EU ecolabel (Frey et al., 1998, p. 63). One interviewee made a point when saying: "It's not that we can't fit or fulfil the [recommendations], but it takes time before you get the right information from your suppliers about products and product safety" (Firm 4, 2011).

For the interviewees, getting into contact with their suppliers was indeed a challenge. Certain information was simply not available as some data sheets had not yet been necessary to prepare. For example, the criterion for professional cleaning agents – biodegradability under aerobic and anaerobic conditions – is a relatively new one according to one firm. As a consequence, the affected firm had to first educate its suppliers, which caused several delays in the application procedure. Particularly in the electronic devices sector, one finds that production is often outsourced to non-European countries in which suppliers are not familiar with the ecolabel and do not understand the necessity of the request. Additionally, it often took several months to obtain a signature on the requested datasheets from the suppliers as this was of low priority to the latter.

Even more importantly, the firms we interviewed revealed that meeting the actual requirements of the label proved difficult. Finally, in possession of the relevant data sheets, step-by-step the companies had to examine the criteria listed in the EU legislation and compare them to the information of their already existing products. At this crucial stage, the person in charge discovered the misfit between product and standard. In fact, although products that came close the criteria of the label were chosen, some ingredients often had to be reformulated or redesigned. In that sense, the firms again heavily relied on their suppliers' ability to substitute environmentally harmful ingredients or compositions with more appropriate ones. These processes of reformulation took several months and were very cost-intensive, involving both on-going recalculations and laboratory tests.

In the case of professional cleaning agents, for example, it was not only imperative to meet the criteria of the EU ecolabel, but also to ensure efficiency and meet the consumer's taste as regards to the smell of the substance. Here, perfumes posed a major challenge: perfumes are often composed of environmentally harmful and slowly degradable ingredients such as lemonene, but constitute an essential component of the product. A new formula had thus to be invented, which dispended of harmful ingredients but nevertheless guaranteed a smell preferred by most consumers. Better than any other stage in the process of application, this phase represents the recontextualisation of the EU ecolabel by companies: out of the abstract prohibition to include a harmful ingredient, the company had to interpret the standard and find ways to adhere to it. As one manager put it: "[t]hat may be a bit of a compromise, but they [SMK] accepted that because we knew the exact formula and then they said: yes, it is all right because you are under the threshold" (Firm 1, 2011).

An interesting point raised was that of efficiency of the ecolabelled product. In the professional cleaning agents industry, for instance, the level of efficiency was not always the same as that of non-ecolabelled products and only appropriate for day-to-day use. In that sense, the ecolabelled product with a supposedly lower environmental impact was not necessarily environmentally friendlier in its practical use. According to the manager: "[i]f you then use a very soft cleaner you have no result and are even more environmentally harming than if you use a strong cleaner in very small quantities, which does the job right" (Firm 1, 2011). However, A producer of electronic devices stated that: "quality doesn't suffer, absolutely not. You can have a very good product and be ecolabel certified, but you can also have a very good product and not be ecolabel certified" (Firm 3, 2011). Nevertheless, this raises the question whether the EU ecolabel's purpose to protect the environment can really be satisfied. In the opinion of the SMK official, the ecolabel is indeed an effective policy instrument to protect the environment. Soft law achieves environmental protection in areas where hard law could never be agreed upon: products in an unregulated market. However, related to the points mentioned above, it seems the firm regards the ecolabel in a different light than the EU.

Referring back to the example of the cleaning agents industry, a firm would not add ecolabelled products to their inventory to supply consumers with effective yet environmentally friendly products. Rather, these ecolabelled products seemed to serve the purpose to successfully add to the company's profile or public image as a firm concerned with environmental issues. As one interviewee said, it even boosts sales of non-ecolabelled products because a firm gains new consumers with the help of the ecolabel, but ultimately offers them a much wider range of products to choose from. In that sense, again the label becomes a resource, a marketing and communication tool for the company to show their ability to protect the environment and adhere to high product standards. In contrast, the primary goal of the EU is to "encourage businesses to market products that are kinder to the environment" (Commission, 2011b). Although businesses act upon this call, the ecolabel serves more like a figurehead, whose effect spills over to the regular uncertified product range of a company. Hence, the different actors attach different meaning to the labels, which does not change its content but more accurately its meaning.

Coming back to the point we have touched upon earlier, there was general disagreement on the criteria for the label. While some referred to the criteria as too harsh or at times even inappropriate, others perceived them as too slack and not even scientific or environmentally protective enough. As one firm said: "[t]he legal rule how it has been designed has so many loopholes; it is a complete wrong interpretation on how you should measure these kinds of things" (Firm 3, 2011). Due to the fact that the scheme is voluntary and produced out of negotiations between several parties, the criteria merely represent an amalgamation of different views and more importantly, interests (Golden, 2010, p. 13). According to an SMK official "the criteria developing process is a process with multi-stakeholder consultation" (SMK, 2011). Where science, national and European politics as well as business economics come together, the negotiated result will always only be a compromise (Bowker & Star, 2000). The company which mentioned that the criteria were too lenient claimed that thereby less environmentally friendly products are treated in the same way as over-achievers, which would create an unfair advantage for the former. The remaining firms, on the other hand, thought of the criteria as too harsh already and expressed fears of current talks about renegotiating the criteria towards even higher standards:

> [T]hey are currently developing criteria for dishwashing agents for dishwashing products for [the] professional industry. And I know they are going to exclude one of the most important ingredients for these products. So, this is going to be a problem for us. (Firm 2)

At the same time the intense stakeholder involvement in the creation and revision of the EU criteria for the ecolabel is also an advantage. The interviewees appreciated that no actor was excluded from the process of criteria development and were thus able to influence the outcome in contrast to other national ecolabelling schemes. This way the industry was also able to influence and effectively alter the standard. Among others, the EU standard was hence altered as a consequence of the local application of a universal standard. However, in the following part, it will be seen how the standard is changed even more substantially than that.

The official application:
Recontextualisation at the meta-level

To finalise the application, the firm has to officially submit all the relevant documents and other required data to the national competent authority. This step marks the end of a process in which companies work on their application relatively independently. Contact to the competent authority was normally established at the very beginning of the application process, when a product had been chosen and companies needed basic help with the ecolabel in general and the standards in particular. The second point of contact with the NCA came with the submission of the formal application. According to a Stichting Mileukeur official, the submission of the final application often initiates a phase in which the company and the NCA are in more intense contact.

At this stage the full bureaucratic effort behind the application for an ecolabel becomes visible. All previous steps that the companies had to take have to be documented and are part of the final dossier, a large file comprising all relevant documents (European Union, 2010). Depending upon the kind of product and the number of components the dossier is an extensive body of work where sometimes over 40 pages per product have to be submitted. According to the interviewees, this took several months to more than a year. After the submission of the final dossier, the NCA usually needed a few months time to examine and analyse the details. When the NCA had questions or spotted criteria, which were not fulfilled, they informed the firm and asked for an explanation, readjustment, or exchange of components or formulations. As the SMK official described the usual course of events: after the dossier has been submitted, "[we] then usually come up with lots of questions [and] go back to the company" (SMK, 2011). This resulted in a dialogue between the company and the NCA, until the product could finally be awarded with the ecolabel.

Although companies had already recontextualised the standards and their products, this stage revealed that the NCAs might recontextualise the standards to an even greater extent. Arguably, the design and composition of products is so complex that the criteria developed by the EU can never be comprehensive enough to cover all the product's aspects. In fact, many components prohibited by the policy are themselves made up of several other components, as is the case with environmentally harmful perfumes in cleaning agents. Additionally, every company uses different components for their product although products from different companies might fall in the same product category. It is thus almost impossible for a legislator to standardise all different components and at the same time develop a universal standard for one product group. As a consequence, NCAs have to compensate for this problem and interpret and discuss unclear provisions on a case-by-case basis. Therefore the NCAs created a hierarchy of interpretation, recontextualisation, and discussion. As the SMK official stated:

> [We] have a very large network that if there is something we could not understand ourselves we start consulting a fellow competent body, we can also approach experts in our network,[or in] laboratories, in order to see whether we have a point ifsomething is doubtful with the documentation. (SMK, 2011)

According to her, NCAs are normally highly short-staffed, due to cuts in public spending, but at the same time they are in charge for the award of all kinds of product groups. Apparently, a single NCA cannot have the expertise for all the products they award. As one firm nicely put it: "[w]ell, I noticed the further we got in the application process, the more knowledge they got on paper production" (Firm 4, 2011). In order to facilitate a fair and competent assessment of application and criteria, they utilise independent experts and laboratories spread all throughout the EU. If the NCA has doubts over the formulation or composition of a component or doubts about the product itself it might be able to find the answer to their questions in an EU-wide database. This database consists of 'problems' NCAs have encountered and that are not covered by legislation. If an NCA is struggling with a problem that another NCA already dealt with, they can find their solution in the database. If a comparable problem cannot be found in the database, the NCA is able to communicate this to all the other NCAs in the EU on an internal platform.

Other NCAs might be staffed with an expert in the field or have more experience with this particular question. If even an exchange of information between the NCAs bears no result, the problem is brought to a "virtual competent authority" (SMK, 2011), which supersedes all the national competent authorities. The problem is then interpreted and indeed recontextualised in a discussion board, which commissions experts with the solution of the problem. Decisions are made on grounds of discussions in which for example aspects that have not been defined in the standard for the ecolabel are interpreted. At this stage, the actors give new meaning to the standards according to their own perception and understanding of how the standard was 'meant to be'. Problems, which have not previously been solved and are undefined in the EU standard, are relatively frequent; bearing in mind the diversity of product categories. According to the SMK official, such a discussion normally takes place once per week. The results of such discussions are then published in the database, which the NCAs can draw upon when encountering similar problems in the future. Furthermore, the criteria of the different ecolabel categories are under constant revision. The EU legislation and the universal criteria for each product group are adjusted to the problems faced by the NCAs every three years (European Union, 2010). Thus, interpretation and recontextualisation are in fact the general practice to make sense of and locally apply universal product standards.

Here, the different levels involved begin to unfold: the EU represents the level of production, because it issues the standard for the ecolabel. The company is the level of re-production because it tries to reproduce the standard developed at the production level and transforms it into a product. The opposite levels attach a different key meaning to the label. The meta- or meso-level between the two is the national competent authority, which actually constitutes the main level of recontextualisation. It mediates between the production and re-production level, explaining and actively interpreting the standard of the EU in order for a firm to create a product.

Accordingly the bulk of recontextualisation is done by the NCAs. The first steps in the process of recontextualisation are done by the firms, which try to contextualise the abstract criteria into a concrete product. But it is for the NCAs to decide and interpret if this recontextualisation is in line with the rationale of EU legislation. The NCAs therefore make the EU standards 'fieldworthy' in that they help the realisation of standards at the company level. The process is thus also a clear example of Timmermann & Berg's concept of local universality. The universal EU standard and the local product influence each other reciprocally. On the one hand, companies must develop formulations and compositions of their products to fit the EU standard. Thus, the standard influences the nature of the product in such a way as it stipulates what components the product has to consist of. On the other hand, the complexity of products challenges the universal definition of the standard, which first has to be recontextualised by the NCA and subsequently adjusted at the production level. Hence, the product or the reproduction level influences the nature of the standard in the short term through the interpretative work of the NCA and in the long term through the multi-stakeholder criteria developing process.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we asked which changes occur when a universally applicable standard is locally applied. Therefore we used the EU ecolabel as a case study and analysed its practical implementation on the street level. In contrast to the majority of existing literature on the subject, we took a bottom-up approach of examining the implementation of the EU ecolabel. We did so by conducting qualitative interviews with the responsible managers at four Dutch companies and the Dutch competent authority as main sources of information. We defined the EU as the universal level of production issuing universally applicable standards, and the company as the local level of reproduction, which locally applies the universal standard. In between these two levels we identified the NCA as a meta- or meso-level, which functions as a mediator between the EU and the company.

In this chapter, we claimed that when all three actors engage in a relationship with the ecolabel as a common denominator, not only the principal meaning attached to the label changes. Since the universal standard and the local product influence each other reciprocally, in the long run even changes to the standard as such might occur. Different stages in the application procedure have shown in which stage of this recontextualisation process the levels influence each other, which role each of the actors play, and which meaning the EU and the company attach to the label. We found out that throughout the whole application procedure, the companies acted according to their inherent nature: an economic rationale. In general this rationale attaches a different meaning to the ecolabel than the EU does. Whereas for the EU, the ecolabel is primarily a policy tool to protect the environment, for the company it becomes mostly an economic resource; a future asset and marketing tool. Naturally, profit maximisation stands at the core of most businesses. We were rather interested in the *processes* during which such change of meaning occurs.

It was beyond the scope of this paper to include other dependent variables in the analysis of our case study findings. Having only looked at the application process, we omitted other important stages the label goes through in its journey from legislation to the actual product. Since we approached the recontextualisation process of the EU ecolabel from a qualitative point of view, it would be equally interesting to consider this process from a quantitative angle. However, particularly in regards to the existing literature and material on the EU ecolabel, we have been able to shed a different light on and hopefully added value to the debate. We would thus highly appreciate further research into this exciting discussion.

For almost thirty years, policy makers at the EU level have followed a market-based approach to encourage environmentally friendlier production processes and products. Although this approach is generally considered a better alternative to command-and-control mechanisms due to its voluntary nature, criticism prevails. Involving multiple stakeholders in the formulation of policy allows for the harmonisation of different interests, the resulting quality of standards, however, remains a matter of debate. As sustainability increasingly gains in importance for future generations, it remains to be seen whether this policy approach truly meets the challenge of these times. The increase in demand for ecolabels from consumers and producers alike might signal the right direction. However, it might also mean that the mass production of environmentally friendly goods is a consequence of lower quality standardisation that enables many producers to meet the minimum requirements.

References

Bernstein, B. (1990). *The Social Construction of Pedagogic Discourse*. In: Class, Codes and Control. Vol IV.

Bernstein, Boraz, O. (2007). 'Governing Standards: the Rise of Standardization Processes in France and in the EU'. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions,* 20(1), pp. 57-84.

Bowker, G. C., & Star, S. L. (2000). 'Invisible Mediators of Action: Classification and the Ubiquity of Standards'. *Mind, Culture and Activity,* 7(1&2), pp. 147-163.

Brannen, M. Y. (2004). 'When Mickey Loses Face: Recontextualization, Semantic Fit, and the Semiotics of Foreignness'. *Academy of Management Review,* 29(4), pp. 593-616.

Cadman, J. & Dolley, P. (2004). *The Direct and Indirect Benefits of the European Ecolabel*. A Final Report produced for the DG Environment at the EU Commission. Issue 1. AEAT in Confidence.

Commission of the European Communities (2008). *Public procurement for a better environment*. COM(2008) 400 final.

Commission of the European Union (2011a). Ecolabel- Product categories. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from: h*ttp://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/ecolabelled_products/product-categories_enhtm*.

Commission of the European Union (2011b). *What is the ecolabel?*. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from: *http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/about_ecolabel/what_is_ecolabel_en.htm*.

Commission of the European Union (2011c). Ecolabel- Facts and Figures. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from: *http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/about_ecolabel/facts_and_figures_en.htm.*

Commission of the European Union (2011d). *Application Procedure*. Retrieved May 25, 2011 from:*http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/ecolabelled_products/application_procedure_en.htm.*

Eden, S. (2008). 'Being fieldworthy: environmental knowledge practices and the space of the field in forest certification'. *Environment and Planning D: Society andSpace,* 26, pp 1018-1035.

European Union (2010). Regulation (EC) No 66/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2009 on the EU Ecolabel. OJ L 27, pp. 1-19.

Frey, M., Iraldo, F., Pratesi, C. A., De Clercq, T., Pots, T., & Senesael, F. (1998). Project for the Promotion and Diffusion of the EU Eco-Label in Italy and the Benelux. Final Report submitted to the European Commission, DG XI.E.4.

Golden, J. S. (Ed.) (2010). 'An Overview of Ecolabels and Sustainability Certifications in the Global Marketplace'. Interim Report. Document #2010-10-01. *Corporate Sustainability Initiative.* Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions. Duke University.

Hébert, K. (2010). 'In Pursuit of Singular Salmon: Paradoxes of Sustainability and the Quality Commodity'. Programme in Agrarian Studies, Yale University.

Iraldo, F., Testa, F., Melis, M., & Frey, M. (2011). 'A Literature Review on the Links between Environmental Regulation and Competitiveness'. *Environmental Policy and Governance,* 21(3), pp. 210-222.

Jordan, A., Wurzel, R., Zito A. R., & Brückner, L. (2003). 'European Governance and the Transfer of 'New' Environmental Policy Instruments (NEPIs) in the European Union.' *Public Administration*, 83(3), pp. 555-574.

Linell, P. (1998). *Approaching Dialogue*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Locret, M.-P. & de Roo, C. (2004). The EU Eco-label – less hazardous chemicals in everyday consumer products. BEUC: The European Consumer's Organisation.

Nadaï, A. (2001). 'Consumers 'Sovereignty' and Policy Issues in the Development of Product Ecolabels'. Center for the Study and Improvement of Regulation, Department of Engineering and Public Policy, Carnegie Mellon University.

Rex, E. & Baumann, H. (2007). 'Beyond ecolabels: what green marketing can learn from conventional marketing'. Journal of Cleaner Production, 15, pp. 567-576.

Stavins, R. N. (2001). Experience with Market-Based Environmental Policy Instruments In Mäler, K.-G. & Vincent, J. (eds.) (2001), *The Handbook of Environmental Economics*. Amsterdam: North-Holland/Elsevier Science.

Stein, J. (2009). 'The Legal Status of Eco-Labels and Product and Process Methods in the World Trade Organizations'. *American Journal of Economics and Business Administration,* 1 (4), pp. 285-295.

Stø, E., Strandbakken, P., Scheer, D., & Rubik, F. (2005). 'Background: theoretical contributions, eco-labels and environmental policy'. *The Future of Eco-labelling Making Environmental Product Information Systems Effective*. F. Rubrik, Frankl, P., Sheffield, Greenleaf Publishing, pp. 16-45.

Thomas, P. (2003). 'The Recontextualization of Management'. *Journal of Management Studies,* 40(4), pp. 775-801

Timmermans, S., & Berg, M. (1997). 'Standardization in Action: Achieving Local Universality through Medical Protocols'. *Social Studies of Science*, 27(2), pp. 273-305.

5 Conceptual reflections on a cultural paradigm shift:

The example of Fair Trade

Mira Knauf

> It is so easy! At Coffeelovers we wanna make life enjoyable. Your life! Our coffee is just the thing to help us do that. (Slogan of a Dutch Coffeehouse Chain, 2011)

Would coffee farmers agree with this advertisement slogan? Is it really that easy to serve the consumer his cup of coffee, thus enriching his life? Geographically coffee belongs to raw materials that can only be imported from developing countries, which means the coffee industry is naturally a sector in which poverty and unfair trading relations have been prevalent, since coffee became a luxury commodity in Western countries. It is a highly competitive market, where marketing strategies play a particularly important role. Furthermore, it is an industry where the future guarantee of supply is an issue that needs to be explored with more sustainable strategies in order to provide the market with the required quantity of coffee beans. Therefore, it is also one of the prime examples of an industry where Fair Trade is of high significance, being one of the first markets where Fair Trade mechanisms were applied.

Fair Trade emerged in the context of the opposition between neo-colonialism and anti-globalisation movements. It is therefore clearly not limited to coffee farms. The United Nations reports that four billion of the world's inhabitants live on no more than four dollars a day, and of those, one billion must survive on less than one dollar per day (De Carlo, 2007, p.3). Colonialism and imperialism of the past, and not least the capitalist structures of today, created a global situation of inequality. In addition, the recent financial crisis of 2008 once again revealed certain deficiencies in the globalised system. Furthermore, environmental disasters such as Fukushima and hurricane Katrina have illustrated the need to tackle resultant problems brought about by climate change.

Industries are responding with a newly emerging emphasis on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that often includes Fair Trade certification and other sustainable concepts. Today it is not only environmentalists who point to the limited state of global resources. CSR became a popular term during the last decade. Business feels the need to include CSR strategies, on the one hand due to an increasing awareness that global resources are limited. On the other hand because sustainability is also something consumers have increasingly become interested in. Businesses operate within a different context than two decades ago; when concerns about environmental issues and social justice were limited to political and social movements. Environmental and global issues influence the requirements that business needs to fulfil. Firms and companies are "expected to conduct business ethically" (Filho & Pawlak, 2009, p.61), instead of just selling goods and increasing their profits.

On the other hand, terms such as "green consumerism" or "ethical consumption" have emerged as popular concepts in social studies. There is an increasing number of people who are starting to become "a bit more selective about the goods they buy" (Woodman, 2011, p.2). It is now possible to express ethical values through shopping, i.e. consumer behaviour.

One of the concepts that aims to establish an ethical notion in economics is Fair Trade. Fair Trade is an alternative trading approach that emerged during the 1950s and attempts to establish fairer trading relations between rich and the poor countries, thus achieving a fairer distribution of wealth. Fair Trade as a label is defined by certain standards, such as minimum prices, in order to improve working and living conditions of underprivileged employees in Third World countries. It is a "trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade" (De Carlo, 2007, p.3) and furthermore, should enable the consumer to "reduce poverty through their everyday shopping" (FLO, 2011).

In 2006, Joseph E. Stiglitz, former head of the World Bank and Nobel Prize winner, wrote one of the basic works concerning Fair Trade as an alternative economic principle. He stressed the need to reform the international trading system and claimed that the economic system does not by necessity entail unjust power relations. However, Developing countries must be empowered to profit from a stronger and integrative world economy (Stiglitz, 2006, p. 21).

When looking at the expansion rate of Fair Trade products, there seems to be a growing appreciation of the Fair Trade concept. This is apparent as the number of Fair Trade products has tripled, hundreds of new producer-cooperatives have joined the Fair Trade system and Fair Trade sales have increased an average of 40% worldwide during the last couple of years (Fairtrade Deutschland, Fair Trade Weltweit: Zahlen und Fakten, 2011).
Furthermore, there is a noticeable emphasis on CSR that was also "incorporated as an international goal in the action plan of the World Summit on Sustainability Development" in 2002 (Filho & Pawlak, 2009, p.61). Recently big market players such as *Nestlé* and *Kraft*

Foods have announced that they plan to shift parts of their import articles to more sustainable and responsible sources.[72] It seems that there has been a shift in society towards a growing appreciation of sustainable concepts of production. We can perceive that business strategies have undergone some change on the one hand, and notice increasing consumer interest in Fair Trade products on the other.

Therefore the question arises: Where does this new interest in the "logos of ethical labelling" (Woodman, 2011, p.2) come from? Is the growing concern with Fair Trade rooted in the conviction to apply a new strong marketing tool? Fair Trade was once founded on humanitarian motives and today we are witnessing big companies using Fair Trade as part of their CSR strategies. Can this be seen as a sign of a significant paradigm shift in cultural and economic values? The central question this chapter aims to examine is in how far it is possible to speak of a "paradigm shift" (Kuhn, 1996) in Western societies towards a value system based on fairness, sustainability, and environmental and social responsibility. The term paradigm is used here as an analogy for the way in which the term has been used in the history of science, referring to "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques ... shared by the members of a given community" (Kuhn, 1996, p. 175).

The Fair Trade initiative originated as a political movement (Micheletti & Stolle, 2007, p.162). Figures now indicate (see *Nestlé, Tchibo*) that big coffee companies are embarking on creating a label and thus on a market segment hitherto associated with the alternative sphere, maybe even referred to as counter-culture to the 1960s. Has there been a cultural paradigm shift that has taken place during the last two decades, which turned the Fair Trade label from an alternative label into a mainstream brand? What was this paradigm shift like, and what aspects in particular did it involve?

This essay presents reflections on the question of how product labelling and changes of cultural paradigms are intertwined. On the one hand, I will discuss whether there has been a paradigm change within the Fair Trade movement itself. To that end it will examine the niche where Fair Trade first emerged as a political and cultural movement. Did Fair Trade standards that were part of the original paradigm change over the last few decades? On the other hand, this chapter is also concerned with the values that define the Fair Trade movement; fairness, solidarity and sustainability. I shall deal with the question of whether and how these values have become part of mainstream society. It is this 'mainstreaming' of Fair Trade, that is the base of the paradigm shift that I discuss here. Therefore this chapter aims at describing and analysing the character of a (cultural) paradigm shift in general

72 Cornel Kuhrt, Senior Manager Food Corporate Responsibility Tchibo, interview with the author, 16 May, 2011

and in the context of the Fair Trade movement. I base my argument mainly on sources from those engaged in Fair Trade (including interviews). The claims that I make about attitudes and practices of the consumers are thus of an indirect and somewhat hypothetical character. It will be left to future empirical research to substantiate these claims, and the framework that is proposed in this essay by more detailed consumer studies.

Conceptual framework

In order to substantiate the cultural and economic changes of the Fair Trade movement and analyse the extent to which, and in what aspects the "counter-culture paradigm" has gone mainstream, this chapter will compare the motivation of the people who started the Fair Trade movement and the reasons why major companies use the label today. To examine the transition the Fair Trade movement has gone through, I will employ the conception of a paradigm shift, as it has been formulated by a historian of science, Thomas Kuhn.

Kuhn formulated his concept of a paradigm shift referring to the radical shifts in fundamental frameworks of scientific thinking or "scientific revolutions" (1996). The paradigms, as he calls these frameworks, guide and determine ongoing research. Accordingly "science enjoys periods of stable growth punctuated by revisionary revolutions" (Bird, A. 2004, p.1), which remove the old established paradigm, and a new one is held to be true from then on. I am not interested in the historical dynamics of science here, but I postulate that the term can also be usefully applied to account for changes in other spheres of culture. Paradigms can be regarded "as the constellation of group commitments" (Kuhn, 1996, p.181), given norms and values that determine human behaviour and constitute the consensus within a certain community. Thus, the standards of the Fair Trade movement originally served as a paradigm that directed the community's behaviour, and more precisely anti-consumption behaviour.

Accordingly, I define a paradigm as a set of "community's shared beliefs" (Kuhn, 1996, p.43), serving as a guideline for their behaviour and outlook on world affairs. By "shift" we understand that this set of rules is either totally or in parts adopted by, integrated into, transferred to other communities and at least partially also to the dominant culture. In this process these rules might have undergone a change themselves.

Paradigms have a cultural dimension because they constitute and express a community's identity. It is therefore necessary to theoretically substantiate the relation between culture, especially the role of consumerism in a given society (since we are dealing with cultural labels and the selling and buying of products and labels), and collective and individual identities.

Culture can be defined as "the complex unity of those practices that produce sense" (Mulhern, 1980, p. 32). Humans have to make sense of their existence in order to exist; they must come to terms with their past and plan their future. In order to do so, they must identify with themselves and the community and/or social unit that they live within, such as their family, neighbourhood, social group, general, ethnicity, gender etc. This is necessary in order to construct their identity.

Attributing meaning to one's existence, individually and collectively, is the essence of identity. But today the process of identity building is an increasingly complex and contradictory process. In the current period of increasing globalisation local and cultural patterns often conflict with different cultural idioms put forward by globalisation, that frequently and to a great extent include consumer behaviour.

Socio- anthropological research has been focussed on the dialectical relations of consumerism and culture for several years. In this context it is important to keep in mind that through globalisation, i.e. "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (R. Robertson, 1992, 8), the notion of identity has changed, but also the concept of culture. Culture, too, is constituted on a global and on a local level. The dialectical relation between culture, identity and consumption within the context of the challenging global situation requires an examination of the construction of identity in Western society and the notion of consumption that is related to the process of identification.

Jean Baudrillard describes Western society as a "consumer society" (Baudrillard, 1998) where "social relationships become more variable and less structured by stable norms" (Featherstone, 2007, p.15). The consumer behaviour thus constitutes an essential part of an individual's identity and significantly shapes the latter. Consumption can, on the one hand, favour "collective class experience" (Hearn and Roseneil, 1999, p.3) and thereby offer a way of constructing one's own identity; it can on the other hand also lead to a conscious rejection of conventional consumption and thus provide a mechanism of identification through resistance. I also claim that logos, such as the Fair Trade label, can form a base for the consumer's identity. Logos, labels and brands represent certain standards, a certain lifestyle, or a certain extra- quality; for instance fairness or environmental friendliness. Therefore we choose products that we think match our identity. Here the question arises as to whether Fair Trade functions as a way of constructing resistance identities to globalisation or also serves to partially shape the identity of the mainstream consumer.

For more than fifty years various sorts of theories have tried to make sense of current consumer society as a feature of post modernity. Baudrillard's socio-philosophical theory is one approach, trying to define the individual's place within postmodern consumer culture, which Baudrillard sees as a value-emptied society (Baudrillard, 1994). It is one theory, that tries to "make sense of the experience of life in the new urban spaces" (Featherstone, 2007, p.4) of consumer culture. More recently, scholars have started to distinguish between different spheres of consumption: green consumerism, ethical consumerism (Woodman et. al), and political consumerism (Micheletti, 2003).

In this context, labels have emerged as a major research field. Labels serve as mechanisms to identify a product with certain standards. Shopping has thus become one way to express one's identity, and labels work as identification tools. That is nothing new. However, we now believe that we can "express our personal ethical value through our choice of coffee" (Woodman, 2011, p.2) and this is in fact something new. In short, consumption is an essential part of the sense-creating process that we call culture, consumption is part of "all those practices (or activities) that signify" (Bennet, 1981 p. 79), or in other words attribute meaning to our life. Culture as "signifying practice" (Easthope, 1991) will therefore serve as a framework to analyse Fair Trade in the context of consumer society (Baudrillard, 1998) and postmodern identity construction.

The method applied to find substantial answers to the central questions this chapter puts forward is qualitative interviewing. I talked to a number of people in Germany, both representatives of industry as well as of NGOs involved with Fair Trade Labelling. As a representative of the business sector, I interviewed the Senior Manager of Food Corporate Responsibility from *Tchibo* and the former PR manager and spokesman of *Jacobs Kaffee* (later *Kraft Foods*), who now owns his own small coffee roaster. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with *TransFair Germany*,[73] the *Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen*[74] (BIZ), the *Senator for Environment, Construction, Transport and European Affairs* (Bremen).[75] Lastly, I talked to the manager of the *One World* shop[76] Bremen, as someone who has been with the Fair Trade movement from the beginning. During my interviews I focused mainly on the coffee industry, since the Fair Trade initiative started with coffee and bananas, it is exemplary for the Fair Trade development and, as previously mentioned, is a sector where unfair trading conditions with developing countries have a prevailing tradition. Coffee therefore provides a good way to understand what Fair Trade stands for. Kuhn and Baudrillard will serve as a theoretical framework in examining the

73 Full name in German: TransFair – Verein zur Förderung des Fairen Handels mit der „Dritten Welt" e.V.

74 Bremer Informationszentrum für Menschenrechte und Entwicklung (BIZ).

75 Senator für Umwelt, Bau und Verkehr Europa (Bremen).

76 One World shop is called *Weltladen* in German; it is a chain of Fair Trade stores, who purchase their products exclusively on a Fair Trade basis. Comparable to One World shops in the UK.

paradigm shift outlined above, in answering the question of whether there has been a mainstreaming of a paradigm, and the significance the Fair Trade label has had for the consumers' identity construction.

Before we turn to analyse these questions, it is however important to look at Fair Trade standards, the development of the Fair Trade movement and the introduction of the Fair Trade label. It is crucial in order to understand internal and external changes of the Fair Trade movement. Additionally, it helps to determine the difference between the identity construction of Fair Trade activists during the vintage years of the movement, as well as that of consumers who purchase Fair Trade products in mainstream supermarkets today.

Defining Fair Trade

The Fair Trade movement consists of several Fair Trade initiatives spread around the world. The movement has its origins in various countries, including the US and the United Kingdom. Some of Fair Trade organisations developed out of post World War II efforts to fight poverty and hunger in Europe[77] and evolved into Third World initiatives at a later point (DeCarlo, 2007, p.73). One major Fair Trade organisation is the *Fair Trade Labelling Organization International,* an organisation based in Germany, which has 24 partners in other countries. There are currently nineteen Fair Trade Labelling Organisations, one of them is *TransFair Germany.* The labelling initiatives sign licensing agreements with companies in their countries. Those companies have to fulfil Fair Trade requirements (such as minimum prices and avoidance of child labour), if they wish certify a certain products with the Fair Trade label. Furthermore, the labelling organisations initiate campaigns and awareness-raising events in their respective countries (Fairtrade Deutschland, 2011).

When we think about the concept of Fair Trade, the question arises as to whether and how it is possible to define and standardise fairness on a global level. Looking at the semantic meaning, the term fairness means "in its broadest sense … that any two individuals be treated equally" (Hooker, 2005), it also "precludes bias or inconsistency in the application of rules" (Hooker, 2005) and furthermore requires that "an allocation treats all economic agents fairly" (Black & Hashimzade & Myles, 2009).

77 Oxfam is one of the major Fair Trade organisations: *Oxford Committee for Famine Relief* was founded in the UK. Originally it was an organization that supplied women and children in occupied Greece with food during the Second World War. In 1995, several NGOs united and formed *Oxfam International*.

The manager of BIZ[78] emphasised the central aspect of Fair Trade as the attempt to achieve a decent humane life for small-scale producers in Third World countries. Thus leading to a situation whereby trading relations provide an appropriate and fair income for the farmers. Generally speaking, the Fair Trade label means "prices that aim to cover the costs of sustainable production, an additional Fairtrade Premium, advance credit, long term trade relationships, and decent working conditions for hired labour" (FLO, Standards, 2011). One great advantage *TransFair Germany*[79] underlined is the sustainability of the Fair Trade approach. It is not a beneficial charity project, but rather a participative concept, enabling the producers to improve their living conditions themselves. Moreoever, it tries to guarantee permanent access to new markets and a way of production that enhances sustainability in terms of environmental issues and better, healthier working conditions for producers.

Moreover, Fair Trade approaches unfair trading relations by trying to "remove exploitive middlemen" (DeCarlo, 2007, p.14). Small-scale producers therefore unite in local farmer's cooperatives which sell their products to importers (who are themselves organized as cooperatives).[80] These importers sell the coffee to roasters and retailers who then market the coffee as a Fair Trade certified product (DeCarlo, 2007, p.15). who in turn sell the Fair Trade coffee to those roasters and retailers that provide Fair Trade certified products (DeCarlo, 2007, p.15). As *TransFair Germany*[81] explained, the global structures are of course intrinsically injust and impossible to change as such. Fair Trade tries to work with the international trade system and the given circumstances, and thus tries to create fairer relations from within the system.

The first Fair Trade Label was initially introduced in 1988, when it was launched in the Netherlands. At this point, the first Fairtrade coffee from Mexico was sold in Dutch supermarkets. It was branded *Max Havelaar,* after a fictional Dutch character who opposed the exploitation of coffee pickers in Dutch colonies (The Fair Trade Foundation, History, 2011). After the Max-Havelaar-initiative was replicated in various countries during the early 1990s, the *Fairtrade Labelling Organization International* was founded in 1997 in Bonn, Germany.

---

78 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Bremer Informationszentrum für Menschenrechte und Entwicklung, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

79 Kathrin Schuster, TransFair Verein zur Förderung des Fairen Handels mit der "Dritten Welt" e.V., Telephone interview with the author, 19 May, 2011.

80 Such as the GEPA in Germany, which is an organisation that buys exclusively Fair Trade commodities.

81 Kathrin Schuster, TransFair Verein zur Förderung des Fairen Handels mit der "Dritten Welt" e.V., telephone-interview with the author, 19 May, 2011.

With regard to Western consumer culture and the impact that the Fair Trade movement had on the latter, it is important to notewhen the first Fair Trade Label was introduced. As said before, a label helps the consumer to identify the product with certain values, and at the same time the opportunity to express the consumer's attitude. It is especially important for the a consumer who does not purchase Fair Trade products in special Fair Trade stores, but rather goes to normal supermarkets. In the overwhelming mass of products, a label is required to single out Fair Trade products.[82] I shall now look at Fair Trade consumers, both "vintage" and mainstream, and their identity.

Identity construction and Fair Trade consumption

Increased awareness in the political, environmental and consumption spheres of society was part of the cultural developments of the 1960s. People who were part of the counter-cultures during that time began to develop a new kind of awareness about globalisation, unfair hierarchies, political structures, neo-colonialism and environmental concerns. Additionally, the notion of fairer trading relations found support during that time. Consumption is not only part of culture; at the same time "it also produces culture and cultures" (Hearn and Roseneil, 1999, p.1). The Fair Trade movement was initially one of those so-called "sub-cultures centred around consumption" (Hearn and Roseneil, 1999, p.1).

From the 1960s up until the present, everyday life in the Western world has been to a great extent determined by consumption. Fashionable clothes and luxury goods have made attractive consumption commodities for a long time. If we look at the food industry, things have recently changed. Buying food is not merely about satisfying human urges and natural needs. Through all kinds of scandals, food has become part of the "risk society"[83] and has "turned into a source of potential practical incompetence" (Dürrschmidt, 1999, p.138). Therefore, within the food industry labels have become highlypopular. Through the Fair Trade label an additional, rather abstract value is added to a product. In other words,

---

82 Silke Goethe and Kerstin Dahlbergg, Senator for Environment, Construction, Transport and European Affairs, Interview with the author, Bremen, 24 April, 2011.

83 German sociologist Ulrich Beck's term for the present situation (which in Beck's view began to take shape in the aftermath of World War II), which in his view is defined by the expansion of uncontrollable risks, i.e. risks which have no straightforward or direct cause and therefore no obvious or easy means of attenuation (climate change is the best-known example of such a risk). Beck is particularly concerned with new types of risk that have arisen – or may arise in the future – as a consequence of human action. (A Dictionary of Critical Theory).

Fair Trade certified products, entails the quality of fairness and the ability to "change the world by sitting round drinking coffee" (Woodman, 2011, p.46). There are several niches for all kinds of different consumers in the food industry: the cheap brand, the high quality product, the biological or organic food and environmental friendly and ethically impeccable products. The food industry uses a variety of labels and logos in order to help consumers find their way to their desired product. This helps the consumer to become aware of certain special qualities that surpass normal natural needs. Instead they have become part of a certain lifestyle, express political convictions and individual identity.

Once again, consumption is not merely about buying, it is also to a great extent about identification and identity construction. Postmodern culture is constructed in terms of consumption practices and identification with certain labels conveying a particular image and defining a consumer's personality. Symbols are one important component of cultures and cultural communities. They are essential to construct social identities and to create social coherence within a social group. In consumer culture, symbols also find expression in all kinds of labels and brands assigned to certain commodities. As Baudrillard says, "commodities are no longer defined by their use, but rather by what they signify" (Baudrillard, 1996, p.7), which also implies that objects are never "offered alone" (Baudrillard, 1998, p.3), but always as part of some sort of context. That is why consumers no longer define their relationship to the object through the utility a product provides, but relate the object to "a set of objects in its total signification" (Baudrillard, 1998, p.3) and meaning. Fair Trade coffee thus belongs to the whole range of Fair Trade products and the entire Fair Trade movement as a political conviction and social attitude. Fair Trade within the cultural context is "about shared meanings" (Hall, 2003, p.7).

Like Hall, Kuhn emphasises the importance of values that "do much to provide a sense of community" (Kuhn, 1998, p. 185). In fact, people no longer define themselves by reference to their religious or cultural community, but through means of global consumption. As time and space diminish and the world becomes a global village, the need to distinguish oneself from others becomes more important, although also more difficult. Through globalisation, the concept of (local) community has lost its significant meaning. Ulrich Beck sees the concept of globalisation and that of individualisation as antagonistic: "The individual is set free from the collective identities of class, family and nation into a life of one's own" (Beck, quoted in Dürrschmidt, 1999, p. 135).

However, groups that share common consumption patterns can offer a way of recreating their own community and therefore partly their identity. And thus, today, consumption (or anti-consumption) provides a new tool of expressing one's social identity and political attitude. That is exactly how the Fair Trade Label works: by selling "guilt-free products” (Woodman, 2011, p.42), the consumer can express his vision about a fairer world and at the same time experience some kind of redemption, being sure that he is at least not making things worse.[84] Fair Trade is a social movement, but it is also a way of expressing a consumer’s identity. By buying Fair Trade products the consumer shows an awareness of social injustices. Through consumption he is able to give a political statement about the unjust global economy and expresses his beliefs and values, which is what Baudrillard meant when he stated that an object always comes within an *a priori* context.

Twenty years ago these postmodern identification mechanisms worked to a greater extent within the Fair Trade movement. Then, purchasing Fair Trade products was not only about expressing values; by buying Fair Trade products, the consumer immediately belonged to a social movement opposing mainstream culture and economic globalisation. Hence consumerism is very much about social membership in a certain group or distinguishing oneself from the latter. Naomi Klein argues that the success of a certain product depends primarily on producing brands instead of products (Klein, 2001). A brand entails much more than just the simple product; it is about a certain lifestyle and about identity construction. Brands are iconic symbols, “they construct meaning and transmit it” (Hall, 2003, p.4). Furthermore, Klein maintains that an alternative approach to consumption is as such also a brand. Counter-cultures are obviously a “cultural community”, defining themselves through different and alternative ways of consumption, which means “No Logo” (Klein, 2001) paradoxically turns into a logo, incorporating a certain attitude and lifestyle.

Fair Trade was initially an alternative approach that resisted mainstream consumption. The Fair Trade logo was of secondary importance; Fair Trade consumers would rely mainly on One World shops, where 100% of the products were traded under fair conditions.[85] Over the few last years conscious consumerism or ethical consumerism (Woodman, 2011, p.2) has become more popular; mainstream consumers have become interested in Fair Trade products, and as a result, mainstream industrial companies have incorporated Fair Trade products in to their sales pitch. The label has been established for more recognition in conventional commerce. “No Logo” (Klein, 2001), a group opposing mainstream culture, has essentially turned into a logo. For the Fair Trade movement that means that even though the movement was meant to oppose conventional consumption and mainstream culture, it has become some sort of brand, including a “distinctive name, logo , trademark, or design

84 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

85 Susanne Mewis, Weltladen Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

… that signifies a particular company, product, or service" (Chandler & Munday, 2011, p.1). The Fair Trade label can be seen as one of the first steps towards the mainstreaming of Fair Trade.

Fair Trade – a cultural paradigm shift?

We have now reached the point where it is appropriate to further investigate the way in whichFair Trade developed from a counter-culture movement to a mainstream brand. There is sufficient evidence that there has been a value-change in society[86]. For example, the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility as an indispensable part of business strategies and company policies, which is a result of a certain "pressure to clean up the corporate act" (Filho & Pawlak, 2009, p.61). It is therefore important to have a closer look at this shift in business practices and the concept of CSR.

Big business and Fair Trade: changing patterns

Over the last few years, issues such as global warming, environmental destruction and financial problems have very much determined the media and were constantly in one way or another part of our everyday life. The emphasis on certain issues did not only change within the realm of politics, such as the recently shift from pro-nuclear energy politics to nuclear phase-out. When we look at corporate entities, such as big food companies, we perceive a shift in dealing with environmental and social issues. Global developments have urged big companies "to take the issue of corporate social responsibility seriously" (Iduwo & Filho, 2009, p.1). It is a development that seems to have been enforced by public opinion, and "societies' expectations from corporate entities have increased" (Iduwo & Filho, 2009, p.1) during the last years. However, the CSR strategies vary from country to country and sector to sector. Sustainable growth is of special importance to the coffee industry in order to guarantee the future supply of coffee. The Fair Trade concept is one aspect of developing more sustainability. As the Senior Manager Food Corporate Responsibility of *Tchibo* explained, the big coffee companies realised that they "do have an issue in their sector", i.e. challenges brought about by climate change and changing market structures (supply-driven market). In order to tackle these issues, companies need to "practise

86 As mentioned above: growing consumer interest in Fair Trade products, growing size of the Fair Trade movement, increasing Fair Trade sales (3,4 Billion Euro, i.e. sales increase of 15% compared to the previous year).

different ways of supply chain management", a form of management that incorporates more sustainable links in the chain and also involves cooperating with initiatives such asFair Trade, Rainforest Alliance[87] and other standard organisations: "Only as an integral whole and through cooperation will it be possible to bring about change to the coffee sector",[88] stated the Senior Manager of Food Corporate Responsibility of *Tchibo*. Whereas twenty years ago, companies were expected to produce and sell goods and maximise their profit, they are nowadays "expected to be socially responsible" (Iduwo & Filho, 2009, p.2) and deal with global challenges. It is a shift in corporate policy, a shift Gadwin et al. refer to as "paradigm change" (Gadwin et al. in Filho & Pawlak, 2009, p.62).

According to Kuhn, a paradigm shift within the sciences "commences with the awareness of an anomaly" (Kuhn, 1996, p.52), in other words with a violation of the old established paradigm. The contradiction is explored and when the paradigm has adjusted to the new insights, the paradigm changes, and the anomaly has become norm (ibid).

In a cultural context, anomalies can be for example, natural disasters or financial crises, in other words events that reveal contradictions or malformations within the current economic and cultural system. In this sense a new paradigm can be regarded as the establishment of guiding principles and rules in business practices. Hence, considering Milton Friedman's statement from forty years ago that "there is one and only one social responsibility of business ... to increase its profits" (Friedman in Filho & Pawlak, 2009, p.61), we can safely assume that there has been a considerable paradigm shift in what business now understands as guiding principles and "shared beliefs" (Kuhn, 1996, p.182) in business practices.

Fair Trade is one important part of CSR strategies and the practical implementation of sustainability in general. The values and beliefs constructed around the notion of fairer trading relations were first limited to a very small community of people. Contradictions or "anomalies" within the mainstream system led to a questioning of the established value system and a rethinking of the "old" paradigm. Thus, parts of different counter-culture communities (Fair Trade, Organic Movement, Rainforest Alliance etc.) were incorporated into mainstream society and will play an increasingly important role in the future. Thus a new paradigm, constructed around the notion of sustainability, has been established at least partially in mainstream society.

87 An international non-profit organisation dedicated to the conservation of tropical forests. The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behaviour.

88 Cornel Kuhrt, Senior Manager Food Corporate Responsibility Tchibo, interview with the author, 16 May, 2011.

As Kuhn put it, "when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them" (Kuhn, 1996, p. 111). Therefore the question arises: What else changed? What are the cultural implications of the Fair Trade movement? How does this paradigm shift in business strategies affect the character of the Fair Trade movement itself?

Fair Trade – from the fringe to the centre

One of the central aspects that became obvious during the interviews is that Fair Trade has left the alternative niche and has become a broader movement. Industry, as well as Fair Trade organisations, emphasised that Fair Trade is no longer to be located exclusively in *One World* shops. Twenty years ago Fair Trade products "were still placed very much outside conventional retail".[89] Today Fair Trade is experiencing significant growth and has extended its product range considerably. It started as a movement concentrated on coffee and bananas; in comparison, it now involves all sorts of products such as flowers, cloth, cocoa, footballs and so forth.

In 2008, *TransFair Germany* reported a per capita expenditure for Fair Trade products of almost 25% in Switzerland and 15% in the UK, which are the leading markets for Fair Trade products. In Germany Fair Trade sales on the whole increased about 4-5% in 2010, Fair Trade coffee sales increased from 0,8% to 1,18% during the last few years (Statement Kaffee-Standards, 2011). *TransFair Germany* expects an increasing expansion rate and a broadening of the Fair Trade certified product range in the following years.[90]

Furthermore, the Fair Trade movement has professionalised in terms of marketing strategies, but above all in terms of product quality. Quality, and not only ethical motivation, is of course one requirement for Fair Trade to become part of mainstream commerce. "Quality first"[91] is after all still the most important business principle for a company. However, it was not only the Fair Trade movement that professionalised, but also the so-called alternative niche. *One World* shops in Germany, for example, worked on a coherent appearance within the *One World* chain, in order to create greater recognisability. They increased their PR work and organised regular advertising events to spread awareness. As a result, "media attention increased significantly during the last years"[92] as the head of the *One World* shop in Bremen claimed.

89 Susanne Mewis, Weltladen Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

90 Kathrin Schuster, TransFair Verein zur Förderung des Fairen Handels mit der "Dritten Welt" e.V., Telephone interview with the author, 19 May, 2011.

91 Cornel Kuhrt, Senior Manager Food Corporate Responsibility Tchibo, interview with the author, 16 May, 2011.

92 Susanne Mewis, Weltladen Bremen, Interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

Twenty years ago, it seemed to be complicated to find common ground in negotiations between the coffee industry and *TransFair Germany*. The former PR manager of *Jacobs Kaffee* emphasised the antagonism between representatives of capitalism, the big industries, on the one hand, and Fair Trade-*Gutmenschen* on the other.[93] *TransFair* apparently did not want to cooperate with the coffee companies and dismissed their attempts to find a solution suitable to both parties. On the other hand, Fair Trade organisations claimed that companies did not take them seriously at all and "called off meetings".[94] As a matter of fact, there were conversations between *Max Havelaar* and *Jacobs Kaffee* early in the 1990s. According to the former *Jacobs* spokesperson, it did not work out for two reasons: firstly, *TransFair Germany* did not "want to cooperate with big capitalist enterprises" and secondly, it would not have been possible to supply a big coffee company like *Jacobs* with the quantity of Fair Trade coffee it required. They would have needed 4,000 tons of coffee beans as a first consignment, which would have meant destroying the Fair Trade market at once.[95]

Today, things have improved considerably in every respect. Even though *Tchibo* agreed that the negotiation situation twenty years ago was somewhat "confrontational at the beginning", it is also a fact that "times have changed" and communication among the different stakeholders today is not a problem anymore: "Fair Trade did open up and made successful cooperation possible".[96] In addition, there has been a change of thought as far as the coffee roasters are concerned.[97]

Moreover, Fair Trade resources could acquire more contributors. There are far more cooperatives that trade coffee under fair conditions, which means big companies are able to purchase their coffee at least partly as Fair Trade certified coffee. However, it would still be impossible for one of the bigger companies to shift all of their products to Fair Trade coffee at once; there are still not enough Fair Trade resources. The movement needs some time to grow and develop to that extent.

---

93 *Gutmensch* generally refers to someone that does good things out of pure ideological and ethical conviction. The term contains a certain negative, ironic connotation.

94 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

95 Rolf Sauerbier, former PR manager and spokesperson of Jacobs Kaffee/Kraft Foods, interview with the author, 24 April, 2011.

96 Cornel Kuhrt, Senior Manager Food Corporate Responsibility Tchibo, interview with the author, 16 May, 2011.

97 Rolf Sauerbier, former PR manager and spokesperson of Jacobs Kaffee/Kraft Foods, interview with the author, 24 April, 2011.

As far as negotiations are concerned, the two parties converged to some extent, and similarities can even be found when we compare their marketing strategies. Fair Trade organisations today use marketing strategies that emphasise the "no-worries"[98] attitude of a Fair Trade product. Fair Trade image campaigns focus very much on the positive impact of Fair Trade, instead of pointing to poverty and misery. Fair Trade products "convey a positive attitude towards life" as the BIZ explained to me.[99] The Fair Trade movement used professional marketing concepts and thus "contributed to an image change of the Fair Trade label towards a mainstream brand" (ibid.). Fair Trade organisations focus on a positive feeling for the consumer, who can be sure of not doing damage to the producers but supporting them instead. Putting too much stress on the misery in Third World countries is mainly avoided. Mainstreaming is indispensable for the Fair Trade movement to really have an impact. It therefore also requires "classic brand marketing and "the right marketing mix" (Doherty & Tranchell, 2005, p. 174).

A change of thinking could be perceived on both sides. The former *Jacobs* PR manager emphasised that "there has been a rethinking on the coffee roasters' side",[100] and Fair Trade organisations stated that they do cooperate successfully with big companies, and whether companies apply "Fair Trade out of conviction or as part of their CSR strategies is still one and the same for the producer".[101] Moreover, BIZ acknowledged that "companies want to maximize their profits, which is not something that bad per se".[102] Figures underline the assumption of a rethinking, for example, a paradigm shift: in Germany alone, there are 180 companies who signed an agreement with *TransFair Germany*; on an international level, more than 2,700 companies provide Fair Trade certified products (Fairtrade Deutschland, 2011).

Companies became aware of the opportunity to improve their competitive forces through responsible action: providing information about CSR strategies turned out to be a good marketing tool to improve public perception and furbish the image of a firm. Furthermore, CSR has several advantages in addition to those of an ethical nature; NGOs

98 Cornel Kuhrt, Senior Manager Food Corporate Responsibility Tchibo, interview with the author, 16 May, 2011.

99 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

100 Rolf Sauerbier, former PR manager and spokesperson of Jacobs Kaffee/Kraft Foods, interview with the author, 24 April, 2011.

101 Kathrin Schuster, TransFair Verein zur Förderung des Fairen Handels mit der "Dritten Welt" e.V., Telephone interview with the author, 19 May, 2011.

102 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

have less to criticise them for, and customers will stick to the products of the company. Apart from being an attractive profit-maximising plan, CSR is also "no longer an option; it is now a business and moral requirement" (Iduwo & Filho, 2009, p.3).

According to Kuhn, a paradigm shift is always related to progress (Kuhn, 1966, p.167) and "puzzle solving" (Kuhn, 1996, p.36). Applied to the coffee-sector issue, we can definitely interpret the fundamental rethinking that took place as a strong indication of a paradigm shift in handling global problems, as well as in finding a common path for the different stakeholders involved in the process of creating a more sustainable market. The multi-stakeholder approach in the Kuhnian sense represents the "scientific community" that can be an "immensely efficient instrument for solving the problems or puzzles that its paradigms define" (Kuhn, 1966, p.167).

In general, as a result of a dialectical process Fair Trade values have been incorporated as attractive business principles into mainstream trade, whereas the members of the movement itself have learned their lesson from industry and modernised and professionalised, especially in terms of marketing and advertisement.

Civil society, Fair Trade and Fair Trade consumers

From an economic point of view, it is now a necessity for companies. Corporate policy today requires long-term thinking in order to guarantee a permanent share of the market and safeguard obviously limited resources. But CSR is also something society and, more precisely, the consumers seem to demand. Any company that does not demonstrate a responsible and proper handling of global resources and does not reduce its negative impact on producers and the environment "may not survive beyond the short term" (Iduwo & Filho, 2009, p.2). Therefore, Fair Trade and other initiatives that have a positive reputation, such as Rainforest Alliance and The Common Code for the Coffee Community (4-C Association)[103] have been incorporated into CSR strategies, especially in the coffee sector.

There is a large variety of different food-related labels that address the broader mass of increasingly conscious consumers nowadays, who perceive consumption as a "system of ideological values" (Baudrillard, 1998, p.15) and therefore find Fair Trade and fairer trading relations very pleasing. Fair Trade thus appeals to a broader range of more

103 The Common Code for the Coffee Community project (4-C) was founded as a public-private partnership initiated by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in 2002 (4-C, 2009), it is lead by a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee of producers, trade, industry and civil society groups and aims primarily to develop a more sustainable coffee sector, it does not focus on fairer trading relations.

mainstream consumers today. "In order to leave the alternative niche, Fair Trade decided to incorporate conventional market segments into their strategies".[104] Consumption in conventional supermarkets differs from purchasing products in *One World* shops. In order to better understand what has changed in terms of consumer behaviour, it necessary to look at an original Fair Trade activist.

From political activism to politicised consumerism

The central role of the consumer in establishing "unfair" exploitative production relations has been pointed out relatively early on in history. As early as 1800 activists, from the American Anti-sweatshop Movemement protested against the exploitation of workers. The activists argued that consumers have an important share in producing unfair economic relations. In 1891, the New York Consumers' League held consumers responsible for "some of the worst evils from which producers suffer" (Lowell in Micheletti & Stolle, 2007, p.161).

The Fair Trade movement focuses on an active and conscious consumer role and their responsibility in choosing ethically correct products. For both Anti-sweatshop activism and the Fair Trade movement, the market provided an "arena for politics" (Micheletti & Stolle, 2007, p.161), turning conventional consumption into "political consumerism" (ibid.).

The original Fair Trade movement is generally associated with the 1968 generation, the "*Gutmenschen* in woollen socks," as described by several of my interview partners. The movement was concentrated around a rather small circle of convinced Fair Trade consumers who were at the same time political activists. Fair Trade back then was usually part of a political attitude. It was a movement that defined itself in being opposed to conventional, mainstream culture, thus a movement that belonged to what was then known as counter-culture. The first Fair Trade initiatives emerged either out of political or religious motivation. Fair Trade constituted a niche "of *One World* shops and religious groups".[105] In Germany, Fair Trade products were then available in *One World* shops and church organisations, which supported the Fair Trade movement, for example by offering Fair Trade coffee after church.

The first Fair Trade Coffee, so-called "Nicaragua Coffee", also referred to as the "Nicaragua shock",[106] was a coffee of bad quality that was hardly drinkable. The former

104 Silke Goethe and Kerstin Dahlberg, Senator for Environment, Construction, Transport and European Affairs, interview with the author, Bremen, 24 April, 2011.

105 Susanne Mewis, Weltladen Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

106 Rolf Sauerbier, former PR manager and spokesperson of Jacobs Kaffee/Kraft Foods, interview with the author, 24 April, 2011.

Jacobs PR manager claimed: "*TransFair* back then knew everything about politics and nothing about coffee" (ibid.). The political Fair Trade movement was concerned with unjust global structures and neglected the quality aspect of products. It therefore had no appeal to the mainstream consumer whatsoever. And that, of course, limited the group of consumers to a very small political community, where the Fair Trade paradigm provided the guiding principles for group behaviour, while providing meaning and "community structure" (Kuhn, 1996, p.176).

Twenty years ago, a consumer who bought Fair Trade products clearly stated that he was part of a counter-culture. That counter-culture constituted, to a large extent the personality and identity of those people. A paradigm shared by a given group always entails the notion of symbols, which can be regarded as "those expressions, deployed without question or dissent by group members" (Kuhn, 1996, 182). In the scientific community those symbols are mainly restricted to formula and laws. Symbolism of this counter-culture in the 1960s, and thereafter found expression in political activism; wearing woollen socks and specific consumption behaviour, for example purchasing Fair Trade products, thereby constructing the individual's identity. In times of consumption-driven and homogenised needs and desires (Klein, 2001, p. 117), Fair Trade as a cultural pattern provided the members of the Fair Trade movement "with a moral and emotional framework" (Rex and Singh, 2003, p.7).

However, that has changed. Today the consumer does not need to belong to a political circle opposing globalisation in order to buy Fair Trade products; he does not even have to particularly visit a *One World* shop, that represents much more than just fair trading relations, but in fact "a piece of global politics" (Weltladen-Die Fachgeschäfte für Fairen Handel, 2011). Instead, it is possible today to just choose Fair Trade products in any conventional supermarket. The mainstreaming of Fair Trade products has resulted in an increasing number of Fair Trade consumers, and at the same time re-defines the consumer, or to be more precise diversifies the range of Fair Trade consumers. The political Fair Trade purchaser still buys Fair Trade products and still buys in *One World* shops. But today "different people have the courage to buy Fair Trade products".[107] Buying Fair Trade today is not necessarily a political statement. It is rather an expression of consumer awareness and social and environmental responsibility. It can however still be interpreted in connection with the consumer's identity, that still seeks to oppose the "seeming instability" (Baudrillard, 1998, p.7) of consumer culture by referring to ethically correct products. However, interest in Fair Trade is no longer entangled with membership in a certain group associated with a political, ideological attitude.

---

107 Susanne Mewis, Weltladen Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

Once again, Fair Trade has left the specific niche that used to focus very much on the "alternative, left-wing-orientated, middle-class consumer".[108] It now addresses a more mainstream, yet still conscious consumer. "It is not one particular group of consumers anymore",[109] as the *Senator for Environment, Construction, Transport and European Affairs* stated. All of my interview partners agreed that the Fair Trade consumer today differs from the former Fair Trade consumer; the vintage Fair Trade consumer still exists today. However, a broader variety of people can be found in the category of the Fair Trade consumer. Particularly younger people, students in particular, are now interested in ethical consumption.

Whereas you immediately expressed a certain identity, i.e. to be a leftist, politically correct person, when you bought Fair Trade products before, now you are someone buying a labelled product that stands for social responsibility and environmental awareness. As such this is the expression of a certain lifestyle, but is not automatically associated with counter-culture. In fact it is a rather controversial question as to whether there is still such a thing as a counter-culture. Litrell and Dickson refer to the Fair Trade purchaser as "cultural creatives" i.e. "college-educated, middle-aged, and middle-class" (Litrell and Dickson in DeCarlo, 2007, p.34), in other words the new young middle class, who have a particular political penchant for the Green Party. Or as the former *Jacobs* PR manager has it: Previously the Fair Trade consumers were the "wild youth, today they are the new Green-Party voters".[110]

As with most movements and concepts, there are always more strict and dogmatic followers and more conventional ones. Today we perceive a quite normal coexistence of politically convinced Fair Trade consumers and the more mainstream, less rigid ones.

The concept of the ethical consumer underwent changes, foremost because there has been a significant increase in "ethical awareness on the high street" (Woodman, 2011, p.2): Whereas before, ethical consumer movements were followed only by small groups that rejected globalisation and Western consumerism, it has turned into a mainstream phenomenon that is socially accepted. It has become an important part of Western consumer culture.

---

108 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

109 Silke Goethe and Kerstin Dahlberg, Senator for Environment, Construction, Transport and European Affairs with the author, Bremen, 24 April, 2011.

110 Rolf Sauerbier, former PR manager and spokesperson of Jacobs Kaffee/Kraft Foods, interview with the author, 24 April, 2011.

Twenty years ago, identity was predominantly expressed by either associating oneself with a counter-culture or by following more mainstream cultural patterns. Today those spheres have merged to a significant extent. The Fair Trade consumer does not have to belong to a certain group to buy Fair Trade products or organic food. Fair Trade is part of a lifestyle, but it is much less dogmatic than it used to be and no longer so political. Fair Trade consumers can decide to what extent they want to support the Fair Trade initiative. They are not immediately followers of a social or political movement, and they can decide in how far they want to "incorporate and legitimise the engagement ... in the motivational and practical context" (Hearn and Roseneil, 1999, p.143) of their living situation.

When we have a look at the notion of "voting with your dollar" (Johnston, 2007, p.1), i.e. the notion of substituting basic civil duties like voting with conscious consumer choice, it is probably a way of enacting democratic rights, which is too simple. However, the point is that values today play a different, important role in consumer behaviour, especially concerning the purchase of food. We are now in a different position that enables us to "express our personal ethical values through our choice of coffee, or chocolate or bananas etc." (Woodman, 2011, p.2). Consumers today "shop with their values and priorities" (DeCarlo, 2007, p.35). Again consumption is about identity expression; the consumer tends to identify with the values a product represents (expressed and certified through a label), because, after all, human beings find their identity by identifying. Certified products are important to the consumer because a label always guarantees certain standards and norms, which the consumer needs to "constantly sustain[s] certain personal standards of conduct" (Hearn & Roseneil, 1999, p.137) and to maintain a certain ease in everyday life.

To sum up, while previously the Fair Trade consumer was part of a political movement opposing globalisation and mainstream culture, it is now possible to just support fairer trading relations, without actively resisting globalisation and break with consumerism. In fact, the Fair Trade label and thus fairer trading relations have become part of consumption, whereas earlier the Fair Trade movement and the *One World* shops did oppose the notion of consumer society in general. What did not change is the importance of Fair Trade for all kinds of different people to attribute meaning to their lives. Fair Trade can either be part of a conscious lifestyle of the mainstream consumer, or it can be a holistic moral and ideological framework that guides individual and group behaviour (vintage Fair Trade community).

The paradigm shift did occur in as far as parts of the Fair Trade paradigm that were first limited to a very small community, have now been incorporated into mainstream society and thus become available to the mainstream consumer. The consumer's "perception of his environment" is being re-educated, he is learning "to see a new gestalt" (Kuhn, 1996, p.112) and internalise different values in his consumption behaviour.

Problems and dilemmas:
paving the way for sustainable Fair Trade

Before I conclude this chapter, I would like to devote at least a few paragraphs to problems within the Fair Trade System. Fair Trade certainly has its merits in making people aware of unfair trading relations and exploitation of Third World countries. As we have discovered, it is now part and parcel of consumer behaviour in Western cultures. Nevertheless, there are some current problems and dilemmas that hinder a more rapid spread of the implementation of Fair Trade practices as a sustainable principle in the long term.

As the BIZ pointed out, many systems run well on a certain small scale, but as they grow problems tend to become more complicated.[111] Control is for example one key issue, difficult to achieve when Fair Trade expands. Insufficient control is also something the former *Jacobs* PR manager criticised.[112] He claimed that the application of the Fair Trade label requires extensive administrative work for the licensee as well as for the Fair Trade producers. Nevertheless, it is quite unclear how much of the Fair Trade price the producer really receives.

Furthermore, Fair Trade aims to avoid the intermediary trade, because that is often where the exploitation starts. However, intermediary trade is often indispensable, since many coffee farmers are not able to transport their coffee to the big export companies. Therefore they unite in Fair Trade cooperatives that also receive and manage the Fair Trade premium. It is thus difficult to "measure the outcome for the individual farmer" (ibid.).

Opinions differ when it comes to the effectiveness of Fair Trade. As a matter of fact, it seems difficult to assess the efficiency of Fair Trade; additionally *Tchibo* confirmed that "impact measurement"[113] is something that needs to be improved. Data for the licensee are hardly available and long-term surveys do not yet exist. With the increasing growth of the Fair Trade movement, companies also demand results on paper.

It is indeed the aim of Fair Trade to become a larger, more successful movement, which can change something economic structures. It is at the same time easier to work with small companies and enterprises, since small-scale producers are the focus of Fair Trade. The big coffee companies require larger amount of resources. It requires more Fair Trade

---

111 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

112 Rolf Sauerbier, former PR manager and spokesperson of Jacobs Kaffee/Kraft Foods, interview with the author, 24 April, 2011.

113 Cornel Kuhrt, Senior Manager Food Corporate Responsibility Tchibo, interview with the author, 16 May, 2011.

farmers to be able to supply bigger companies; supposing that the industry is willing to increase trade under fair conditions incrementally.

However, the central problem remains with the consumer. The main problem in Germany that hinders a faster expansion of Fair Trade is the lack of consumers' willingness to pay more money for food. Naturally, Fair Trade must gain distribution in order to be successful in the long-run. But when it comes to food prices, the German consumer has been spoiled with dumping prices for years.[114] *TransFair Germany* claimed that "nowhere else are the discounter supermarkets as successful as in Germany".[115] Awareness of the Fair Trade initiatives and the label has in fact increased, but the consumer needs to be willing to pay higher prices. In Germany the price difference between conventional products and Fair Trade products is often too high to convince the consumer. In Switzerland, especially in the banana market, it is almost impossible to buy bananas that are not fairly traded. If there is no alternative, the consumer accepts higher (Fair Trade) prices; but with a striking price difference, the German consumer is most likely to choose the cheaper product.[116] The consumers' attitude is something that needs to change in order to make Fair Trade work. Here, Fair Trade organisations say it requires more education, initiatives like "educational events in primary schools for example, since consumptions patterns are established very early in people's lives".[117] Awareness-raising is one thing; time for people to get used to the notion of spending more money on food is another requirement in order to make Fair Trade successful in the long run.

Conclusion

Looking at the cultural, social and economic development of Fair Trade during the last two decades, one can conclude that there have been fundamental changes. Of course it is necessary to take into consideration that the question in how far this cultural paradigm shift is connect with consumer identities must be substantiated by future empirical

114 Rolf Sauerbier, former PR manager and spokesperson of Jacobs Kaffee/Kraft Foods, interview with the author, 24 April, 2011.

115 Kathrin Schuster, TransFair Verein zur Förderung des Fairen Handels mit der "Dritten Welt" e.V., telephone interview with the author, 19 May, 2011.

116 Kathrin Schuster, TransFair Verein zur Förderung des Fairen Handels mit der "Dritten Welt" e.V., telephone interview with the author, 19 May, 2011.

117 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

studies, generating data about actual consumer behaviour. However, when I attempt to sum up what my analysis has brought forward with regard to my central research question I can conclude that there has been a considerable paradigm shift. Mainstream culture has adopted many elements of what used to be shared beliefs of a counter culture.

From within, the Fair Trade niche had to come to terms with the new mainstream, competitive Fair Trade market. Even though Fair Trade products are still available in *One World* shops and people who promote the Fair Trade movement wearing woollen socks twenty years ago still do so today. However the alternative niche has changed or modernised and professionalised. NGOs and *One World* shops learned to appreciate professional marketing strategies and mainstream advertisement. Nonetheless, the mainstreaming of the Fair Trade paradigm did not lead to the elimination of the niche where Fair Trade originally emerged. *One World* shops will most likely exist in the future, if they continue to adapt to the new circumstances and the challenges a broader market of Fair Trade products entails. A smaller circle of convinced, maybe morally strict people will most likely continue to purchase their products in *One World* shops regardless, because these guarantee 100% Fair Trade products.[118]

A more noticeable transition is perceptible when looking at the industry. Today most of the coffee companies work with different sustainability concepts. In general, big companies have at least one product range that is Fair Trade certified with 4-C standards being applied to an even broader range of products. *Tchibo* plans to make sure that by 2015 25% of its coffee will be grown sustainably and responsibly. Additionally, *Kraft Foods* and *Nestlé* recently declared that they would work with more sustainable sources.[119] There is obviously societal and competitive pressure that requires change in the companies' policy towards integrating strong CSR strategies. For industry, changing paradigms mean adjustment to fairer standards and environmental friendly requirements. On the one hand, Fair Trade offers access to new market segments; on the other, Fair Trade standards are also controlled by external organisations and may thus restrict the company's freedom. However, initiatives such as the 4-C Association, as a multi-stakeholder initiative, can be seen as signifiers of change, too. The cooperation of different stakeholders, even formerly antagonistic ones, that aim to create a more sustainable economy including social aspects and environmental issues, is something that was hardly imaginable twenty years ago. Whereas in the past there were still severe tensions between the Fair Trade movement

118 Susanne Mewis, Weltladen Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

119 Cornel Kuhrt, Senior Manager Food Corporate Responsibility Tchibo, interview with the author, 16 May, 2011.

and big business, the negotiation circumstances now seem to be relatively ideal in order to establish long-term Fair Trade principles within business and society.

Does mainstreaming imply a softening of Fair Trade standards? Although major companies like McDonald's apply the Fair Trade label, the value-core and standards of Fair Trade have not changed. Fair Trade organisations still focus on the original standards. Those standards apply to every company wanting to sell certified products, no matter how powerful and influential they are.[120] It is, however, the image of the Fair Trade label that has changed as a result of its mainstreaming: "Today Fair Trade is just *en vogue*" (ibid).

An extreme change is also visible when we consider how Fair Trade is perceived and accepted in civil society. Consumers pay increasing attention to a company's environmental and production policy. A company's image highly important these days and the industry can no longer ignore social and environmental issues. To realise "profits and a good image among consumers" (Micheletti & Stolle, 2007, p.161), companies need to address global issues.

As far as the construction of consumer identities is concerned, I can conclude that Fair Trade is and has always been a way of expressing a certain conviction (differing in strength) that was true for the consumer of the early years and is still true today. However, the range of Fair Trade consumers has changed and also the degree to which an ideological/political view is expressed through the consumption of Fair Trade products. Identification with the purchased products in any case remains important for the individual who is "condemned to freedom" (Beck in Dürrschmidt, 1999, p.136) to make sense of postmodern society. The individual thus uses consumption as a point of reference to make sense of everyday life. Fair Trade can provide guidelines that help the individual to create stability. But there has been a change in the extent to which Fair Trade defines identity. Today we have so many labels around us that we can choose from all of them and thus construct and combine a multifaceted identity with different sorts of labels and brands and political convictions. The Fair Trade consumer today is still someone who "cares about things like sustainability, global justice, and climate change".[121] However, engagement in a consumer movement now does not necessarily mean resistance to globalisation, but is rather an "aspect of self-actualisation[122] in the context of a complex risk society" (Dürrschmidt, 1999,

---

120 Kathrin Schuster, TransFair Verein zur Förderung des Fairen Handels mit der "Dritten Welt" e.V., telephone interview with the author, 19 May, 2011.

121 Silke Goethe and Kerstin Dahlbergg, Senator for Environment, Construction, Transport and European Affairs, interview with the author, Bremen, 24 April, 2011.

122 Language is a representation of cultural meaning, therefore it is enlightening to have a look at the semantics of a term like self-actualisation, which refers to "the realization or fulfilment of one's talents and potentialities, especially considered as a drive or need present in everyone" (Oxford Dictionary of English).

p.136). Consumption is “a statement of contemporary society about itself” (Baudrillard, 1998, p.193) and furthermore, consumption “has acquired the force of common sense“ (Baudrillard, 1998, p.193). Nonetheless, what we actually consume is, according to Baudrillard, only the “idea of consumption” (Baudrillard, 1998, p.193). This assumption leaves the postmodern individual with almost nothing to refer to, just the mere “myth of consumption” (Baudrillard, 1998, p.193). Being part of a certain food-related movement “hands back to the individual some competence over one of the crucial issues of daily life” over the question of “what to eat?” (Hearn and Roseneil, 1999, p.139). Consumption-related movements are thus one way of finding points of reference in a world constituted by phenomena which have “no referent in everyday reality” (Chandler, D. & Munday, R. 2001). Ethical consumerism has become a popular way of expressing identity. The Fair Trade movement can be considered as an important movement that is part of our generation and can be seen as “part of a more general political process of creating new forms of responsible governance, locally, nationally, and globally” (Micheletti & Stolle, 2007, p.158). The Fair Trade consumer has undergone a change from a political activist to a conscious and aware consumer.[123]

However, for Fair Trade to remain truly successful and continue to grow in size and magnitude, the consumer attitude, especially in Germany, still requires re-education and sensitisation. Even though the Fair Trade initiative and label have gained significant recognition during the last years, although “awareness of the need for a greener lifestyle” is there, it is also the case that “the involvement in everyday life is keeping them [the consumers] from realising their good intentions” (Dürrschmidt, 1999, p.143). The German consumer in particular still needs to learn how to transfer awareness into shopping behaviour and increase his or her willingness to pay more money for sustainable products.

Here, I would like to come back to Kuhn’s thoughts once more. According to him, “scientists work from models acquired through education and through subsequent exposure to the literature often without quite knowing or needing to know what characteristics have given these models the status of community paradigms” (Kuhn, 1996, p.44). Applied to to cultural paradigms, that means that we grow up and get used to certain standards, without knowing why and how these standards came about. In the case of sustainability and more explicitly the need to increase social justice as cultural patterns, i.e. paradigms, are still quite new. Even though parts of mainstream society

123 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

already recognise and appreciate the new paradigm, society, as a whole, might need some time to adapt to those new paradigms.

As the former *Jacobs* PR manager said, it might need two or three generations to grow up with the new, different standards and ethical consumption practices in order for Fair Trade to become a natural part of the ethically correct "set of rules" (ibid.). Considering the popularity of the organic food movement, we could hope for the same positive development for the Fair Trade market. The BIZ stated that it is quite probable, that the organic movement is ten years ahead of the Fair Trade movement,[124] and also the *Senator for Environment, Construction, Transport and European Affairs* emphasised that the green movement needed time to establish itself and gain distribution,[125] and today the Green Party can be considered as one of the leading parties in Germany. Again I could refer to the Kuhnian paradigm shift, that there is not one moment that brings about the revolution or shift; it is rather a (long) process (Kuhn, 1996).

One way or another, it remains up to the consumer, who needs to adapt to new consumption standards. "The fairer we wish to be, the more we have to share",[126] said one of my interview partners quite correctly. Only then can "critical mass shopping" become an important part of the process "toward a more equitable world" (Micheletti & Stolle, 2007, p.166).

References

Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures.* London: Sage Publications

Beck, U. (1992). Risk Society: *Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.

Bennet, T. (1981). *Popular Culture : Defining our Terms.* Open University Press: Milton Keynes, London.

Bird, A. (2004). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Retrieved 26 May, from: *http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thomas-kuhn/*

Black, J. & Hashimzade, N. & Myles, G. (2009). *A Dictionary of Economics*. Oxford. Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Maastricht University Library. Retrieved 9 June, 2011 *http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t19.e3629*

124 Gertraud Gauer-Süß, Information Centre for Human Rights and Development Bremen, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 May, 2011.

125 Silke Goethe and Kerstin Dahlberg, Senator for Environment, Construction, Transport and European Affairs, interview with the author, Bremen, 24 April, 2011.

126 Rolf Sauerbier, former PR manager and spokesperson of Jacobs Kaffee/Kraft Foods, interview with the author, 24 April, 2011.

Buchanan, I. (2010). *A Dictionary of Critical Theory.* Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Maastricht University Library.
Retrieved 9 June, 2011, from: *http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview =Main&entry=t306.e611*

Chandler, D. & Munday, R. *A Dictionary of Media and Communication.* First Edition. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press.

DeCarlo, J. (2007). *Fair Trade- Beginners Guide.* Oxford: Oneworld Publications

Doherty, B. & Tranchell, S. (2005). Sustainable Development. *New Thinking in International Trade? A Case study of The Day Chocolate Company* (Vol. 13). Retrieved 1 May, 2011 from: *http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.ub.unimaas.nl/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1099-1719/issues?activeYear=2005*

Dürrschmidt, J. (1993). Individualised Milieux in a Complex Risk Society. In Hearn, J. & Roseneil, S. (eds.). *Consuming Cultures: Power and Resistance.* Basingstoke, Hampshire [etc.]: Macmillan.

Easthope, A. (1991) *Literary into Cultural Studies.* London: Routledge. *Fairtrade International,* (2011). Retrieved 2 May, 2011 from: *http://www.fairtrade.net/standards.0.html*. *FairTrade Deutschland* (2011). Retrieved 2 May, 2011 from: *http://www.fairtrade-deutschland.de/*

Featherstone, M. (2007) C*onsumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage.

Hall, S. (ed.). (2003). *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* The Open University. Milton Keynes, London [etc.]: Sage Publications.

Hearn, J. & Roseneil, S. (eds.). (1993) *Consuming Cultures: Power and Resistance.* Basingstoke, Hampshire [etc.]: Macmillan.

Hooker, B. (2005). *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy.* Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Retrieved 9 June, 2011 from:
http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t116.e858

Idowu, S.O. & Filho, W. L. (eds.), (2009) *Global Practices of Corporate Social Responsibility.* Berlin Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag

Johnston, J. (2008). The citizen-consumer hybrid: ideological tensions and the case of Whole Food Market. *Theory and Society,* Vol. 37(3), 229-270.

Klein, N. (2001). *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies.* London: Flamingo.

Kuhn, T. S. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolution.* Chicago [etc.]: University of Chicago Press.

Micheletti, M. & Stolle, D.(2007). A*nnals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences.* Mobilizing Consumers to Take Responsibility for Global Justice, Vol. 611(1), 157-175

Mulhern, F. (1980). *Screen Education*. Notes on Culture and Cultural Struggle. Vol. 34, 31-35. Wiley, Online Library
Oxfam International (2011). Retrieved 10 June, 2011 from: *http://www.oxfam.org/en.*

Rex, J. and Singh, G. (2003.) *Multiculturalism and Political Integration in Modern Nation-States - Thematic Introduction*. Vol. 5 (1). Retrieved, January, 2011, from: *http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001387/138796E.pdf#page=5*

Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage *Statement Kaffee-Standards*. Stand: März 2011. TransFair e.V. Retrieved 8 April, 2011 from: *http://www.fairtrade-deutschland.de/nc/top/news/detailseite-news-startseite/article/neue-fairtrade-kaffee-standards.html?tx_ttnews[backPid]=1&cHash=7c6f926aa698311d6fc9f1c874e3aa4b*

Stevenson, A. (2010). *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Retrieved 9 June, 2011: *http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e0750470*

Stiglitz, E. & Charlton, A. (2006). *Fair Trade. Agenda für einen gerechten Welthandel*. Hamburg: Murman.

The Fairtrade Foundation, (2011). Retrieved 15 June, 2011 from: *http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/*

Weltladen. Fachgeschäfte für Fairen Handel. (n.d.) Retrieved 15 June, 2011 from: *http://www.weltladen.de/#0*

Woodman, C. (2011). *Unfair Trade. How Big Business. Exploits the World's Poor-and Why It Doesn't Have To.* London: Random House Business Book

6 The complement of political consumerism: Political producerism in the German organic food sector

Birgit Gall and Tamara Wörner

> There is a lot to know about the food we eat. The ingredients for a jar of spaghetti sauce, a box of cereal, or a cup of coffee could come from around the corner or around the world; they could be grown with numerous pesticides or just a few; they could be grown on huge corporate organic farms or on small family-run conventional farms, they could be harvested by children or by machines; they could be stored in hygienic or pest-infested storage facilities; or they could increase or decrease the risk of cancer. A description of any food product could include information on a myriad of attributes (Golan, Kuchler & Mitchell, 2009, p. 1).

Food production nowadays is organised in a huge global system that is no longer a coordinated local network of producers and consumers but a network that links together spatially distant sites. The globalised food sector bears advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, Western consumers can choose from a wide range of products being supplied almost everywhere all year around, independently of season or origin of growth. On the other hand, mass production of foodstuffs globally violates worker's rights or animal welfare, and damages the environment. This arises partially from consumers' demand for low prices. Also, many producers seem to care more about quantity than quality, a credo that led to severe food scandals in the past, with Dioxin found in eggs and chicken meat being one of the most recent ones. Since often producers consciously put consumers' health at risk, a growing number of consumers already have withdrawn their trust from established production schemes and now pay more attention to what to purchase in the market.

Many scholars have written about the newly emerging emancipation of the consumer. Michele Micheletti (2003) coined the term "political consumerism", referring to those consumers that care about the ethical, social and political background of a product. These consumers came to realise that their consumption patterns do have an impact beyond their purchase, and that choosing one product over another can make a difference. In Micheletti's words, political consumers

> make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. Their choices are based on attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, or non-economic issues that concern personal and family well being and ethical or political assessment of favourable and unfavourable business and government practice (p. 2).

Because consumers mainly make their on-the-spot-decisions in the food market by looking at the information given on a certain product, labels play an essential role for political consumerism. Yet, an unquantifiable number of labels exist, and only sometimes labels reliably and sufficiently inform the consumer. Most of the time, they selectively display attributes and therewith serve as mere marketing instruments, turning the product at hand into something “natural”, “fresh” or “healthy”, at the same time lacking justification to do so. In fact, most labels do not reveal the hidden and real price of a product, and hence constantly mislead the consumers. The real price of a product must include its negative externalities such as damage of the environment, long transportation ways, or exploitation of workers. The author Matthew Rousu (2008) argues that there is a welfare loss from inadequate information and that with “ideal labels” (p. 1) consumers would stop to “mis-purchase” (p. 10). Therefore, with transparent and understandable information given on labels, consumers could buy products they really intend to buy. Yet, considering the limited space on a product, there always has to be a reduction of complexity in order to make labels useful.

To solve this paradox of labelling – the realities of limited space on products and the need for information – “political producerism” is needed, a concept we introduce in this chapter. Political producerism is the complement or even precondition for political consumerism. In order to balance out the reduction of complexity of information on products, producers and retailers must be willing to find other channels to give insight in the politics behind their products. For providing honest information, producers and retailers come together in networks to cooperate in promoting their ideas. We claim that it is indeed these networks that give sense to labels, bestowing them with credibility. Within such a network, the label therefore functions as a bridge of trust between the producers and retailers on the one side, and consumers on the other. The label as such bears no detailed information but refers to name of the network, making it clear to the consumer where the product at hand comes from and how it has been produced.

In this chapter we will show that there is a direct link between political producerism and political consumerism, meaning that labels and especially the networks behind them enable consumers to make informed choices and to voice their political opinion. So far, academics often assessed labels from an economic point of view, for example adopting a game theoretic approach or dealing with the problem of asymmetric information in the food market (Golan, Kuchler, Mitchell, 2009; McCluskey, 2000; Guthman, 2006). Other academics such as Hébert (2010) argue that food labels are mainly established to cater to the economy of qualities, referring to the creation of luxury niche-market goods. In contrast to these accounts and to other accounts of authors such as Vogl, Kilcher & Schmidt (2005) and McMahon (2005), we believe that producers and retailers indeed are important agents in politics of food labelling. Rather than merely following the demands of the market, we will show that producers and retailers who engage in political producerism mainly act according to their own beliefs and standards.

After theoretically establishing the concept of political producerism we present our case study of political producerism at work. We will investigate how the networks behind German organic food labels bestow their labels with credibility. Our case study in particular focuses on the three labels *Demeter, Bioland* and *Bio-Siege*l and is based on qualitative interviews with different stakeholders as well as on a discourse analysis of information material provided by the networks. We employ this material in a twofold way: as a source in order to get more information about the specific networks and as a topic in order to show how different actors discursively establish credibility and distinguish themselves from one another.

Analytical Background

> I wake up to the excesses of the night before. Washing up in piles. Open my bottle of Ecover and squeeze biodegradable liquid on to yesterday's plates crusted with residues of GM-free organic pizza. Fill a cafetière with Fairtrade coffee and boil a free-range egg. Take a 'not tested on animals' Lush bubble bath. Pull on my 'child labour free' Reeboks, 'made by 100% union labour' Levis, and 'never use furs' Chloe T-shirt. Spray my hair with a Wella non-CFC canister. Read the papers and learn about the latest McDonald's boycott. Remind myself to pick up a leaflet from the protesters on my next outing by jotting down a note on my pad of recycled paper (Hertz, 2003, p. 119).

The scenario Noreena Hertz describes in the above quote perfectly illustrates what Michele Micheletti (2003) calls political consumerism. The term stands for consumers that are knowingly targeting producers to express their views on justice, fairness, and issues related to self-interest, such as personal health. One way of doing this is to *boycott* a certain brand, meaning to refrain from buying a certain brand's products. The other way to consume politically by choosing one product over another – by engaging in what Micheletti calls *"buycott"*. In both ways political consumers make statements about favourable or unfavourable government and business practices, hoping that their actions to have political consequences (pp. 2, 14-16).

Micheletti (2003) believes that there are two kinds of political consumers. The first type is motivated by political, social or ethical considerations, and the second type is motivated by self-interest. The first type indulges in self-restraint or self-sacrifice by boycotting a certain product due to its unbearable background. Political consumerism for them is a way of expressing their political views and to show solidarity with others. For the second type, political consumerism is a means to solve private problems. These self-interested consumers are worried about their health and well-being, and therefore want to consume fresh, healthy, tasty and natural food (pp. 19-20).

Political consumerism needs a considerable amount of motivation, money and time and not everybody is willing and able to engage in it. We claim that even if these three preconditions are met, political consumerism additionally requires retailer and producer networks to engage in political producerism. Such networks employ different credibility tools, bridging the information gap between consumers and products. One tool is to use "guiding narratives" to help consumers relate to a label and possibly identify with it. This means that they create a story line surrounding the label, which justifies and stands for certain production processes. The second tool is what we call "communication style". This implies that different networks use different communication channels, communicating their message in different manners. The third tool is "quality control", which incorporates the different mechanisms that the different networks employ to prove their quality claims. In this context it must be clarified that political producerism includes the willingness to allow for independent third party control. We claim that these credibility tools and therewith the work of retailer and producer networks help to diminish or even overcome the problems persisting with labels that are not backed up by a network – or put differently, with labels where retailers and producers do not engage in political producerism.

We believe that it is political producerism that allows for what Micheletti (2003) termed *"buycott"*. Whereas consumer organisations such as "foodwatch" or "utopia" regularly warn consumers about food scandals and help them to *boycott* certain brands and to make a conscious choice *against* a product, it is the retailers and producers behind a label who provide consumers with the necessary information to make a conscious choice *for* a product. While the concept applies to various branches of the market, in our case study we focus exclusively on the food sector. We opted for the food sector as we detected multiple problems with labelling within the sector.

The biggest problem is the proliferation of labels. Some consumers experience these various consumption opportunities rather as a burden. Moreover, they are confused by the information given on the product itself. After all, what does it mean when a product claims to be "fresh" or "healthy"? As Pauline Ippolito (2003) discovered, health claims on labels increased significantly during the last years, becoming an ever more important component of advertisement and consumer bonding (p. 735). This kind of advertisement then becomes prevention for profit, with firms promoting their products for promoting health, and in the end only promoting their sale numbers (Freimuth, Hammond, Stein, 2003). Because often "business is telling the politicians what they can and cannot do" (Micheletti, 2003, p. 114) and governments fear over-regulation of the market and hinder free trade and economic welfare, regulation on the provision of information about production processes and the issuing of proper labels has still not been accomplished until hitherto. We will point out that this task has to be taken over by producers and retailers enabling the consumer to *buycott*. Yet political producerism still relies on governmental action in the sense that the state mandates third parties to counter-check the work done by the networks.

Case study:
Organic food labelling schemes in Germany

In order to make our conceptual assumptions more tangible, we conducted a case study on the German organic food sector, which will illustrate political producerism at work. We chose Germany because of the coexistence of state-regulation via quality controls and an own state label on the one hand and a long tradition of organic farming associations and their own labelling schemes on the other hand. The oldest one, *Demeter,* has been established since 1924 and developed a labelling scheme in 1928 (Demeter, 2011a). Today, 68% of the agricultural area which is farmed according to organic standards in Germany is cultivated by farmers who are member of one of the nine organic farming associations, the largest of them being *Bioland* (5.443 members in January 2011), followed by *Naturland* (2.441 members), and *Demeter* (1.387 members). In total, around 6% of the agricultural area in Germany is currently being cultivated according to an organic method (Bund Ökologischer Lebensmittelwirtschaft (BÖLW), 2011). Although this is almost three times as much as in 1996 (Bundesministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz (BMELV, 2011), the organic sector is still relatively small compared with the conventional food industry. Considering the relatively small size of the market it is surprising that it is highly segmented, as different organic food labels stand for different standards and quality claims. There are also significant price differences between the differently labelled organic products and studies have shown that consumers are willing to pay these higher prices for products bearing a specific label (BÖLW, 2011, pp. 27-28). This holds true for both labels of organic farming associations and the state-owned Bio-Siegel, which was established in 2001. Even though the latter has been formally launched later on to the market than the labels of the farming associations, it should be clarified at this point that ever since 2001 all organic products in Germany must bear the Bio-Siegel. Likewise, all organic products are required to undergo the same basic controls in accordance with EU organic farming Regulation. It is only when organic products apply to higher criteria than those of the Bio-Siegel that an additional association-label can coexist with the Bio-Siegel, whereby the product undergoes a more sophisted quality-check.

As such, it follows that the various actors in the German organic food market have been successful in establishing their own niche market. Moreover, due to price differences it can be claimed that consumers of organic produce make conscious choices for a specific form of organic food. The question arises how the different organic producers and retailers managed to bestow onto their labels a certain level of credibility that persuades consumers to purchase, and even pay a higher price for it. In order to answer this question, we chose to focus on the national Bio-Siegel as well as the Demeter and Bioland labels, with Demeter being the oldest and Bioland being the largest organic farming association.

We structure our analysis in accordance to the credibility tools introduced above. In order to account for guiding narrative, we will outline the political or philosophic mission of the different associations. For the credibility tool of communication strategy, we will demonstrate how the guiding narrative is communicated to the consumer and who is engaged in defining the criteria for the respective label. We will specifically focus on how the consumers are engaged in the labelling scheme. Finally, to account for quality control, we investigate how the different labelling schemes engage in controls in order to prove to control agencies the quality claims they are making to consumers.

We will demonstrate that although all three labels promote the focal value of organic food, the labels significantly vary in guiding narrative, communication strategy, and quality control. Therefore, it can be said that although all organisations unite behind the goal of promoting organic agriculture, each organisation constitutes one distinct political producer and retailer network. We will show that the different producer and retailer networks engage in political producerism by combining the different credibility tools in different ways. An important distinction in this respect is how the different networks define the role of the consumer.

Drawing on Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine (2008), we will distinguish between "empowerment" and "delegation" in consumer responsibility within the networks. Empowerment refers to "contractual mechanisms between consumers and producers and on the construction of collective choice", whereas delegation refers to "market mechanisms, such as trademarks and labels, which allow consumers to make their choice in the market" (p. 56). Thus, networks standing in for consumer empowerment place great importance on direct interaction between retailers, producers and consumers. Networks focussing on delegation place more importance on communication via the label. Since direct interaction is rather low here, third parties serve as a mediator of trust, as they check the claims borne by the respective label.

Demeter

> Rudolf Steiner was a clairvoyant person. He is one of the few people whom you can call an adept. In earlier cultures there were always adepts. In earlier times, those were the priests in the temples. Those were all adept people who could not only see the material world but could also see the spiritual that is behind it. The main idea of Steiner was actually just that everything material we can find here on earth is actually nothing else but condensed spiritual. Once there was somewhere the spiritual, the thought, which condensed further and further until it became matter. This transaction is of course hard to understand if you are stuck in the material world. Basically, Steiner could, due to his special understanding, see through the causal relations of nature. He could understand the things, which we can only see, on a higher level. He could, as it were, see the spiritual backgrounds of the world. Today that is extremely unfamiliar thinking. That's absolutely clear.

This quote is taken from an interview we conducted with a Demeter farmer. We want to mention at this point that all material we use in this chapter is originally in German, and we translated it into English. The interviewee above illustratively pointed out that the personal charisma of Rudolf Steiner, on whose principles Demeter has been founded, is an important source of credibility. Steiner nowadays is viewed as a spiritual person who always looked beyond the functioning of the material world. In line with the founding father's viewpoints, the guiding narrative central to Demeter's self-understanding is *Ganzheitlichkeit*. This term stands for a holistic philosophy that spans from the biodynamic production of goods over their sale in specialised shops to the way Demeter customers live, including a vision the improvement of the world. As the following section demonstrates, this guiding narrative is discursively constructed and socially enacted at the same time.

Thus, *Ganzheitlichkeit* is not only a quality which is being sold in form of food products, but also the structuring principle and a source of identity of the Demeter producer and retailer network, and therewith of Demeter's political producerism. Correspondingly, the anthroposophic philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner constitutes the spiritual centre, whereas Demeter farms, and to a lesser extent also shops, constitute the local centres of biodynamic agriculture.

Demeter puts great effort in the discursive representation of its philosophy: In a press statement (Demeter, 2010) on the quality differences between Demeter and other organic food, the association claims that farmers cultivating according to the biodynamic method will themselves develop insights into the spiritual background of the material world: "[t]hey do not only sense the concrete material substances, the physical forces of nature, but also the formative forces of the cosmos". Thus, the association managed to discursively connect Steiner's abstract philosophy to the concrete practice of Demeter farmers. As the Demeter farmer is presented as mediator between the spiritual and the material world, he can enact the discursively constructed guiding narrative of *Ganzheitlichkeit*. He therefore becomes an important bearer of credibility and an important figure of the network to which the consumer can relate personally. This interweaving of discourse and action is also an essential structural part of the biodynamic farming method. Special biodynamic substances form a middle position between anthroposophic inspirations and concrete standards for animal welfare or the strict prohibition of artificial fertiliser. It is claimed that biodynamic substances that farmers use as a sort of "homoeopathic fertiliser" make the soil "more vivid and fertile" (Demeter, 2010). According to this understanding, Demeter farmers do not only cultivate the material ground but also contribute to its spiritual enhancement. Thus, as the discourse goes, "Demeter farmers give back to nature more than they take from it" (ibid.). Also the Demeter farmers we interviewed stressed that the biodynamic substances could improve the energetic quality of food and soil.

The Demeter customer is also incorporated in to the holistic philosophy. The typical Demeter customer is conceptualised as well informed, environmentally responsible, socially concerned, and quality-conscious. The association suggests that by buying Demeter products, the consumer can prove that he meets the characteristics just mentioned. Although the Demeter farmers we interviewed stated that only a minority of their customers are anthroposophics, they emphasised that the majority of their consumers were very well informed and convinced of their holistic approach towards farming. Still, both the Demeter farmers and the owner of a Demeter store engaged in a categorisation of consumers, therewith suggesting that for different customers different aspects of the Demeter quality – such as animal welfare or consuming luxury products

– were most important in their purchasing decisions. However, all of them stressed that they did not want to judge the different motivation for buying Demeter products.

It can be therefore be said that through communicating the guiding narrative of *Ganzheitlichkeit* Demeter bridges the gap between the association and farmers who truly stand behind anthroposophy on the one hand, and consumers who may only be interested in an alternative model of agriculture, a more natural life style or simply high quality food on the other hand. Despite its strong ideological commitment, the association clearly opens up to a larger variety of consumers. If a consumer chooses a product bearing a Demeter label, he buys a product backed up by a strong producer and retailer network but nevertheless is still free to base his decision on the criteria most important to him.

In regard to the second credibility tool we found out that Demeter's communication strategy can be perceived as "controlled empowerment". It is not appropriate to speak of unconditional empowerment because consumers' engagement in discussions on quality criteria and farming practices is rather limited. To a certain extent this also holds true for farmers. Our interviews revealed that although farmers are encouraged to exchange their personal practices and new techniques and also engage in peer control, the core criteria of the association are still set in accordance to the founding father Steiner, and are safeguarded by the Demeter association. However, the communication strategy of Demeter goes much further than mere delegation.

Although the Demeter label on its own constitutes a mechanism of delegation, it should be viewed in a broader context. As our interviews revealed, organic consumers do look for the label in order to make their on-the-spot-decisions while shopping. Yet they do so mainly after having gathered information about Demeter at an earlier point via the different communication channels of the association. The label does not work on its own but could be seen as a condensed summary of a large information stream form the association to the consumer, as becomes clear with the following.

Firstly, the Demeter network provides for the possibility of direct interaction between consumers and producers on the farms. A search engine containing a list of producers who directly sell their products from the farm can be found online. This list provides all the relevant contact data of the farmer including address, e-mail address and telephone number, therewith enabling the consumer to choose his favourite type of communication. Demeter communicates that it lies at the heart of it to be open to inquiry, meaning that farms are open for visitors and ideally constitute a site of learning. This aspect was also constantly brought up in our interviews. One farmer told us that people who would like to visit his farm are approaching him regularly and he answers these demands as often as possible. Another farmer emphasised that "especially in a small farm shop customer advice is extremely important. We can tell something about every single product we sell, because these are products that we use and eat". It becomes evident that Demeter undertakes great efforts to make the acquisition of information as easy as possible for the consumer.

Secondly, the Demeter retailers actively promote Demeter's self-understanding: they seek to bridge the gap between the locality where the food is produced and the locality where the food is sold. At the point of retail there is again a combination of structural elements of the Demeter network and its discursive strategy. Structurally, Demeter products can only be sold in organic food stores – there even is a special programme called "Demeter active partners" within which stores establish a close relationship to the association through seminars and retail practices. Discursively, the Demeter association stresses that Demeter's products are only sold in places that represent Demeter quality and can provide skilled advice to customers (Demeter, 2010). This especially contributes to the establishment of a specific identity of Demeter retailers. In an interview with the owner of such a Demeter active partner organic supermarket, we found that the commitment of retailers to the Demeter community can be very high. The interviewee emphasised his special position as independent retailer and pointed at the high quality of Demeter active partners compared to franchise organic supermarkets and food discounters. He said that "you have to differentiate, because mostly entrepreneur-lead stores have a much stronger commitment and can communicate their philosophy much better to the customer" and "we do not only have sellers and cashiers, we have qualified personnel. That's a huge difference to organic discounters". The active partners serve as a Demeter representative in the urban context, thus enabling a personal relationship of trust for consumers living further away from farms.

Thirdly, the *Demeter Journal,* a quarterly magazine for customers, as well as the Demeter website, play a crucial role in communicating with the consumer. They promote the Demeter self-understanding and create a Demeter consumer identity. The Demeter website (Demeter, 2011b) features a number of farm portraits and the Demeter Journal regularly contains the section called *Vor Ort,* on site, which tells the story of a specific Demeter personality or farm community. These articles and photographs obviously want to show that Demeter farms are not merely an agricultural production site but a life-space that is shaped by the families living and working on the farm. The main themes are community, inter-generationality, tradition and social responsibility. For instance, the spring 2011 issue of the Demeter Journal features the life of Lily Ackerman who has been involved with biodynamic farming since the 1930s. She states that "farm, agriculture and nature all cry for people who create an atmosphere, who live and preserve culture, who open up to the world of the elements and make developments possible. If you are alone, it is only toil. In a community you can create something" (Demeter Journal 01/2011, p. 11). Such descriptions trigger consumers' childhood ideas of ideal farm life and thus give them an incentive to identify with the association.

In regard to the Demeter customer identity, the website promotes structural initiatives, for instance consumer associations and local Demeter cooking meetings. Discursively, the Demeter Journal seeks to create a Demeter customer identity and community feeling. For example, in the spring 2011 issue (p. 6) the "fastidious customers" are asked to seek direct contact with producers as well as engage in an online discussion about the qualities of Demeter on the Demeter facebook page. Just next to this appeal there is an advertisement for a product line with the slogan "fair and social starts next door" appealing to the consumers' social conscience. Additionally, the global responsibility that Demeter consumers are supposed to take by purchasing their products is communicated. In Demeter Journal 01/2009, for example, there is a description about a Demeter project in Egypt that is believed to have made the desert fertile again (pp. 8-13). The customer is taken to a literary journey to a Demeter oasis outside of "boring monocultures" and "smelly chicken-farm-like high rise buildings", where "family Abouleish is conquering desert land since 1977" with the support of the "Sekrem Friends Germany". Furthermore, having established a whole network of farms and villages, which are "well cared for with electricity, drinking water, mail, road-network – thanks to the economic strength of the Sekrem group". This kind of rhetoric invites consumers to relate to the initiative. He is asked to feel that by purchasing Demeter he directly contributes to the success of such initiatives and thus contributes to making the world more just and sustainable in line with the guiding narrative of *Ganzheitlichkeit*. These actions of Demeter demonstrate that they do not only inform but also try to educate the consumer, which constitutes the controlled empowerment communication strategy of the Demeter network.

The Demeter association claims to provide the highest quality of organic food and therefore places great importance on proving this quality by controls and transparency. As explained in the beginning of the case study, there is a basic official state-initiated annual control, which checks the technical details that *all* organic farms in the European Union must comply with. The controlling authority also investigates additional criteria established by the Demeter association. For example, whether the biodynamic substances are stored in an appropriate way. Thus, Demeter puts its additional quality claims up to be tested by the state. Furthermore, there is an additional peer-control mechanism. During the so-called farm conversation, the Demeter farmer has to invite two colleagues in order to discuss the general situation of the farm. In contrast to the control conducted by the agency, these farm conversations do not so much aim at technical details but at assessing the overall atmosphere of the farm. One of our interviewees described such peer-control the following way: “It’s not so much about production-related issues. We all agree on those . . . But you know what really determines what is going on at the farm are the people who work there and how they are doing. That is the kind of conversations that are taking place then.” In the interview, he emphasised that mutual trust is very important for peer-reviews, as it is hard to scientifically control whether biodynamic substances have been used or not. Often the farmers assessing each other also cooperate in the production of biodynamic substances and regularly meet in regional groups. Thus, both trust and control are increased. Additionally, our interviewees pointed out that often the wholesaler conducts additional spot tests, thereby even further expanding the net of trust.

Also the structure of Demeter farms contributes to quality assurance. Demeter promotes the farm community as an alternative model to agricultural mass-production. This means that Demeter farms should be family-led enterprises that do not specialise in one product, but cultivate plants and farm animals at the same time. Furthermore, Demeter farming needs more space than conventional farming due, for example, to animals being kept in significantly bigger rearing stables than conventional animals. These preconditions make sure that Demeter food cannot be produced in an industrial manner. This greatly differs from the Bio-Siegel discussed later in the chapter, where conventional and organic produce can coexist on a farm and where therefore the danger of an accidental fusion of conventional and organic farming exists.

Finally, Demeter puts great emphasis on transparency, which is important for the credibility tool of communication strategy as well as the credibility tool of quality control. As consumers are actively encouraged to visit farms they can see themselves if they are convinced by the quality promises. Furthermore, our interviewees stressed that in case of abnormalities in certain products, these are immediately taken from the market and consumers are informed about that. Thus, Demeter even manages to use food-scandals among its own producers as a proof of the functioning of the control system. As one interviewee told us, his customers do not perceive scandals in the organic sector as breach of trust as they are relatively few in number, and always detected due to strict controls. In contrast, they think that within the conventional food sector scandals are the rule rather than the exception; however they are not detected reliably due to a general lack of control.

Bioland

Bioland stands for down-to-earth ecological responsibility in agriculture and politics. This guiding narrative is central to both discourse and structure of the organisation. In contrast to Demeter, Bioland does not operate on the basis of a spiritual philosophy. Rather, the motivation behind the association is the practical goal of giving organic agriculture a central role in society.

One of the Bioland farmers we interviewed told us that Bioland had been founded as a counter-movement against an increasing specialisation in agriculture as well as an intensified industrialisation of Germany starting after World War II. As she put it, family-run farms did not want to be pushed aside by industrialisation but wanted to show that they were "doing things right" and worked for giving agriculture a more prominent place in society again. Her motivation to join Bioland was "that it is a very honest, very straightforward agricultural commitment". Although she did not deny that the biodynamic practices of Demeter could work out, she is sceptical about putting Steiner and his philosophy at the centre of agricultural practices. She made clear that "I do not have this background and I could also not adopt that anymore and that's why we opted for joining Bioland". She believes that taking responsibility for the earth and the people who live on it and lead a sustainable, orderly life-style is a central human value that does not need reference to Steiner. Another farmer expressed it like this: "I always thought I want to stay normal, and I think I still am. I'm not radical or something. I never wanted to be that … and Demeter, I did not want that, with that philosophy story, moon phases and stuff. That was too … This is just not my world. Bioland is just closer, more real. A middle way."

As the central goal of Bioland is to give organic farming a more central place in society, strong political involvement of the higher levels of the organisation is a central part of the self-understanding as well. The Bioland board regularly publishes statements and opinions on ongoing political discussions on topics related to sustainability and organic farming in general. Besides, they use a practical hands-on approach. At the moment, they run a petition against the introduction of genetically modified food in the EU (Bioland, 2011a). They also engage in lobbying on the national as well as European level (Bioland, 2011b). Currently, they try to influence the reform process of European agricultural politics. In the past they have been very successful on the national level: when the national Bio-Siegel was introduced there have been attempts to prohibit additional organic food labelling schemes of the organic farming associations. However, as all our interviewees pointed out, Bioland was successful in preventing this measure. Nevertheless, the Bioland association officially welcomed the introduction of the Bio-Siegel because it fosters their goal of further spreading organic agriculture in society (Bioland, 2001). It became evident that the Bioland consumer is invited to feel that he supports a political project by buying products carrying the label.

Bioland's communication strategy enables consumer empowerment more than Demeter. Whereas Demeter aims at educating its consumers, Bioland tries to mobilise them for political action. On the homepage of the Bioland website we immediately faced an overview of agro-political issues that it currently engages in, as well as a number of links connecting the visitor to standards, quality, or general information. The website transmits the impression that the association does not want to waste any time and space on persuading the consumers of a philosophy but rather wants to keep the website's visitor focused on relevant information, telling him in a way: these are our quality standards – this is what we stand for. The "About us" section in particular speaks this language of clear standards and a down-to-earth, practical hands-on-approach. It does not sound like an idealistic vision but rather like a list which can be ticked off:

> Bioland is the leading organic farming association in Germany. Our way of farming is based on closed circuits – no synthetic pesticides, no chemical-synthetic nitrogen fertiliser. Animals are reared in species-appropriate conditions, comestibles are gently processed. This enables an environmentally friendly and sustainable food production. (Bioland, 2011c)

On the website, there are also detailed descriptions about the quality standards Bioland farmers must comply with as well as special articles about different types of animals and plants. These articles are all structured the same way: firstly, they provide general and rather technical information about an animal and its organic rearing. Secondly, a table with three columns accounts for the organic method of rearing, the conventional method of rearing and an explanation why the organic farmer chose organic methods. The table is thirdly followed by some extra details about the history of the species, a link to recipes and a statement that the addresses of farms rearing these animals can be obtained from the Bioland press bureau. Several photos illustrate the living-conditions of animals in organic farming. These illustrations ask for the consumers' positive feelings towards the approach of the association. This transparent and clearly structured type of information provision underlines the hands-on-approach of Bioland.

Whereas the Demeter public relations channels via the Demeter Journal or the Demeter active partner shops are numerous; Bioland's communication is concentrated on direct, local interaction. There is no special consumer magazine for the broader public, only one for farmers and students of agriculture. The clear focus lies on direct contact and down-to-earth advice. One of the farmers told us about an incident when she convinced her neighbours about the advantages of an organic diet:

> I have a neighbour, just down there, next to the fields. Her husband has problems with the muscle between his gullet and his stomach. He always has to vomit, her husband. I often told her, you have to change, you must not give him so much glutamate-stuff and so on. One year, two years, I told her again and again, you have to change, you have to do that. And she did. And we became friends. She waters my fields together with her husband. I don't have to do anything. That's great. And in exchange she of course takes all she needs from my field. This is how she slowly changed. Today she buys a lot of organic products. But it was a long way. She had to taste it herself.

The farmer reported to us that for her, political activism takes place on the personal level, as can be seen from the quote above. On a daily basis, she spreads the word and takes every occasion to convince people of the advantages of organic food. Indeed, it is this personal involvement that she perceives as the basis for change. "This is how my shop works, personal contacts, relations . . . For example, I have a customer who always tells me when he cannot come around for his shopping. That's how it works. Personal contacts. I think that's great!" This real life experience is also backed up by the Bioland website, which promotes direct contact as central element of the Bioland idea, referring to the fact that "approximately every second Bioland farmer sells part of his products directly from the farm; in contrast to only every 10th conventional farmer. In this way, Bioland promotes more regional proximity" (Bioland, 2011d). As is made clear by the above, direct personal relationships with the producer and retailer network are an effective way for proving quality and establishing trust.

What is more, consumers can become members of the Bioland association. Although they do not have the right to vote they have the right to bring up proposals (Bioland, 2008). In contrast to Demeter, Bioland therefore follows a participatory approach that wants to empower the consumer to act politically. Bioland places great importance on its basic-democratic structure. Farmers who are members of the association meet in regional groups to exchange their ideas and practices. They can also become politically active via the regional delegate conference or be a candidate for the national delegate conference, the highest decision-making body of the association (Bioland, 2011e). It is legitimate therefore to say that farmers have a significant influence on Bioland practices, criteria and politics which enhances the political producerism of the network, as more power is given to individual actors.

When considering the credibility tool of quality control, Bioland, just as Demeter, makes great effort to promote its products as high-quality organic food. They prove their claims by having their standards tested by state-initiated controls. During the same annual control, the EU standards are being tested as well. A certain level of structural control stems from the strict Bioland standards. Like Demeter and unlike the Bio-Siegel, Bioland only allows for organic produce on the site, and does not approve of the coexistence of organic and conventional farming. However, in contrast to Demeter, it is easier to run a larger farm, operating according to Bioland standards. Peer control is less formalised but it also exists. On the one hand regular regional meetings contribute to trust-building and mutual transparency amongst farmers. On the other hand, farmers often take their commitment to Bioland standards very seriously and therefore report incidents of misbehaviour they observe on behalf of their colleagues. One of our interviewees described the following incident: "I had a colleague here and I saw how she sprayed chemical herbicides and I was really angry about that. You can't do that, it's prohibited. And then I reported her, because I was so angry, because I think that is just not right."

Finally, due to the fact that direct communication is central to the Bioland association, the farmers are exposed to regular visits and questions of their customers. Next to that, there are numerous sub-regional producer co-operations that jointly sell their products or deliver them directly to the customer. Certainly, those farmers also engage in peer-control, as they have to stand in for the quality produced by their colleagues. This again illustrates how retailers and producers interact by coming together in a network.

Bio-Siegel

In contrast to the Demeter and Bioland labels, the German Bio-Siegel is not a private but a state-owned label. It was in the broader framework of the *Agrarwende*, – a term describing an overall change in German agriculture after the year 2000, with the forgoing occurrence of many BSE-scandals – that the minister for agriculture, nutrition and consumer protection (BMELV), Renate Künast, introduced the Bio-Siegel. Since her focus in policy making was particularly on consumer protection, she initiated the establishment of an organic food label in order to provide guidance to consumers. To help the consumer to make thoughtful decisions, therefore was the main motivation behind the introduction of the Bio-Siegel. The label's guiding narrative hence is of a more political and practical nature, especially when compared to a rather spiritual-based label such as Demeter. According to the deputy spokesperson of the BMELV, the Bio-Siegel was designed to cater to consumers that do care for their diet and prefer to consume healthy and tasty food in the first place, but are less interested in organic ideology and agro-political action. Thus the Bio-Siegel differs here from Demeter and Bioland, respectively.

The Bio-Siegel is a voluntary labelling scheme that firms have to register, but not to pay for. Thus, the Bio-Siegel is less exclusive than the two labels analysed above. It is the main aim of the Bio-Siegel to include as many companies, products and customers as possible in the organic idea. Clearly, it is the guiding narrative of inclusiveness that lies at the core of the Bio-Siegel. Therefore, farmers who want to use the Bio-Siegel do not have to agree to a certain ideology, but only have to comply with European organic standards. The Bio-Siegel products must be completely free of GMOs and colouring, and largely free of pesticides and fertilizers, to name a few. In April this year, 3.872 corporations used the Bio-Siegel on more than 62.200 products (Bio-Siegel, 2011). The latter numbers impressively illustrate how the overall network of retailers and producers uniting behind the idea of organic farming has grown over the years.

Since the Bio-Siegel is the base for all organic foodstuffs in Germany, it is the label with the least stringent criteria. For some, the Bio-Siegel is not really organic when compared to the higher standards of Bioland, for example. One of our interviewees is convinced that:

> For me, the Bio-Siegel is borderline. It is a compromise – being organic but at the same time allowing for more than 45 different additives in production. That's why people can buy products with a Bio-Siegel also in a discounter or in other conventional grocery stores . . . I'm personally going for Demeter and Naturland, because these are the strictest organisations. Take Demeter, for instance. You would not find any allowed additives, no input that cannot be found in nature. And that's the biggest difference.

It is tempting to argue that the Bio-Siegel is a watered-down version of the general organic idea. This is because some criteria of the label are rather vague, especially when considering that the Bio-Siegel "protects soil, water and air", "stands for species-appropriate animal-husbandry", or "reduces energy consumption and conserves natural resources" (Bio-Siegel, 2006, p. 8). Additionally, because Bio-Siegel products can consist of up to 5% conventional inputs, allow for certain additives and also can be found not exclusively in certain stores but also in regular supermarkets and in discounters such as Aldi and Lidl, one could argue that this does not serve the general organic idea. As one farmer put it, "it is the CEO sitting in his office and thinking, yes, let's follow suit and launch some organic products".

Yet it is important to look at the Siegel from another point of view. As many more organic products are available in the market today and sold at discounters, organic products are accessible to more consumers, and especially also to those that would not normally consider buying organic produce. The deputy spokesperson of the BMELV calls the Bio-Siegel "a complete success story", as the number of products bearing the Siegel is still increasing today, after more than 10 years of its launch on the market. Undoubtedly, the Bio-Siegel is the most widely used and the most popular organic label in Germany, with recognition on side of the consumer being supposedly relatively high. As the deputy spokesperson put it,

> Thanks to the Bio-Siegel consumers can rely on a state-based label that makes it easier for them, and even enables them, to choose a product that stands for organic production methods also paying attention to the well being of animals. Out of a multitude of products they can pick the products of which they know how they were produced.

Additionaly, some of our interviewees who have a Demeter or Bioland background confirm that the organic idea becomes increasingly disseminated by the Bio-Siegel. Because more consumers encounter organic products, they might be tempted to taste them once, and eventually might start to consume them on a more regular basis:

> I don't see why the Bio-Siegel should be a competitor of ours. I think that – at the end of the day – it is good that there's a Bio-Siegel and a Demeter-label, for instance, and that the consumer can decide himself what he wants to purchase. The consumer must have the right to choose.

When the Bio-Siegel was established in 2001, some farmers were furiously saying that the "Künast-Siegel" betrays the overall organic idea. Yet the Bioland and Demeter associations interpreted the Siegel as an opportunity and chance to expand the organic market in Germany, as a means "to support the labels of the organisations which already exist" (Bioland, 2001). In line with the argument made above, they also believed that the Bio-Siegel was a way to lead more consumers towards organic produce and in particular, those that have never heard of it before.

Different from the two organic farming associations, Bio-Siegel's credibility tool of communication strategy is restricted to delegation. The Bio-Siegel is a state-owned label. Therefore, the drafting and introduction of it was mainly state-based, with the criteria defined by the BMELV with its minister Renate Künast. There was criticism that the public was not involved when the standards were drafted, and that there should have been more transparency. It is also argued that the Bio-Siegel has a highly complicated participation procedure, meaning that farmers have to consult the government, which must decide whether it proposes the suggestion made to the authorities in Brussels or not. Estimates show that "it would take two or three years to change the regulations, even if all went smoothly" (Amstel, Driessen, Glasbergen, 2006, p. 7).

However, Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine (2008) make clear that mechanisms of delegation are not necessarily inferior to mechanisms of empowerment. Rather, the two different methods are suitable for different groups of consumers. Hence, also delegation can be a powerful tool in consumer involvement. Germany already had to comply with Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 on organic farming since 1991 (European Commission, 2011). However, it was only with the introduction of the Bio-Siegel in 2001 that consumers were actually being informed about this standard. This hexangular symbol was to show consumers that a certain product complied with the EU organic food standards. The Bio-Siegel therefore visualises the stipulations of the 1991-regulation. Since the national label highly increased consumer information, the Bio-Siegel can be considered as effective in regard to communication strategy.

The *Ökobarometer* of 2010 supports the latter statement. It showed that consumers know what the Bio-Siegel is, what it stands for, and what they can expect from the products labelled with it. Consumers who buy organic produce follow their personal credo of "once organic – always organic", and use the Bio-Siegel to make their decisions. All in all, trust in the Bio-Siegel among German consumers is high. It is important to realise that *all* organic products in Germany are labelled with the Bio-Siegel, also those that comply with the standards of Demeter, or Bioland. The main difference is that the latter products additionally carry the association's labels. Yet, all organic products in the first place bear the Bio-Siegel and comply with its standards.

In 2007, the EU organic food regulation was reformed. Since July last year, it is obligatory for German organic products to bear an EU-wide organic food label with the shape of a green leave of stars on green ground. The label was introduced to create more uniformity, and aims to replace the national organic labelling schemes, including the Bio-Siegel. As it stands now, organic products are allowed to carry both labels, the label of the EU and the Bio-Siegel. While the idea of having a uniform label is generally a good one as it would diminish the proliferation of labels in case all national schemes would disappear, it is unlikely that the EU label will prevail, as the deputy spokesperson of the German Federal Ministry for Consumer Protection (BMELV) believes: "Consumers in Germany so far pay little attention to the EU label but always look out for the Bio-Siegel. The Commission is not promoting it enough, and it does not explain to the public what the label represents. The popularity of the Bio-Siegel won't diminish".

Therefore, the Bio-Siegel as such plays the biggest role in assuring the consumer of organic principles. Credibility building takes place on behalf of the state, which is the main actor to provide guidance, answer questions, and educate the citizenry about the Bio-Siegel. In accordance to this, retailers such as Aldi and Lidl always refer to the state when it comes to the label, as can be seen on their web pages. Personal or expert advice on site are rare, because regular supermarkets usually also supply conventional produce and the personnel are not trained sufficiently to provide background information on organic food. The contact between consumers and farmers is less direct and less intensive. Therefore, consumers rely more on the label as such, and on the information on the label they have received earlier, which is almost exclusively provided by the state – with rich material to be found on the internet.

In order to keep the promises that the Bio-Siegel gives to the consumers, there are checks conducted by state-mandated yet private and independent agencies once per year. They visit the entire production facilities and go through the records of the farm, which the farmer is asked to always keep updated, to enter expenses, means of production, and output. These controls aim to prevent infringement of the regulation on organic farming and in the worst case can withdraw the permission to place the Siegel on products (Bio-Siegel, 2006, p. 6). Hence, the annual control is the same as for Demeter and Bioland-operated farms. However, the quality control of the Bio-Siegel only relies on the credibility established by the state, as consumers are not encouraged to directly interact with retailers and producers. This illustrates the delegation-approach the Bio-Siegel adopted.

Conclusion

With our chapter we introduced the concept of political producerism as a complement of political consumerism. We coined this term in order to account for the political producer and retailer networks behind labels which are necessary to make them work. Our case study on organic food labelling in Germany showed that labels have a higher potential to establish credibility if there is trust and dialogue between producers and consumers. In such a network labels can function as a bridge between the farmer and the consumer. While it is the label that communicates quality, it is the network behind it that enables the label to do so. As became clear in the case study, such networks can be built up both by the state and by private actors.

Even though all labelling schemes analysed in this paper unite behind the common idea of organic farming, they constitute three distinct producer and retailer networks. They mainly distinguish themselves in the way they employ the three credibility tools introduced, namely guiding narrative, communication strategy and quality control. The three networks engage in political producerism by establishing credibility around different guiding narratives. Whereas Demeter is characterised by *Ganzheitlichkeit*, Bioland focuses on a hands-on-approach, and the guiding narrative of the Bio-Siegel is inclusiveness, meaning organic products for everyone. As the labels differently interpret the focal value of organic food, they provide the consumer with the possibility of supporting with his purchase a distinct form of organic farming. Hence, the consumer is empowered to engage in *buycotts*. It became evident that all three labels do not work independently, but serve as a representation of trust created by a political producer and retailer network behind the label.

As has been acknowledged in this chapter, organic food controls can never provide a guarantee that consumers are not being deceived. Yet, the crucial difference between organic and conventional food producers is that the former allow independent third parties to check their quality claims. While the conventional food industry uses marketing slogans to turn their products into something healthy or environmentally friendly, the organic food sector has to prove that its products meet such claims. This makes both unjustified quality claims and scandals far less likely. By clarifying and proving what their products stand for, producers and retailers enable consumers to make an informed choice. Hence we identify political producerism to be a precondition for effective political consumerism.

References

Amstel, M., Driessen, P., Glasbergen, P. (2006). Eco-Labeling and information asymmetry: A comparison of five eco-labels in the Netherlands. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, pp. 1-14.

Bioland (2001). *"Künast-Siegel" – ein bedeutenders Schritt für die Ausweitung des Biolandbaus*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.bioland.de/presse/pm/010905.htm*

Bioland (2006). *Biosiegel hat sich als staatliches Prüfzeichen bewehrt*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.bioland.de/presse/pressemitteilung/article/36.html*

Bioland (2008). *Bioland Satzung*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.bioland.de/fileadmin/bioland/file/bioland/Bioland_Satzung_2008.pdf*

Bioland (2011a). *Willkommen bei Bioland*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.bioland.de/bioland/startseite.html*

Bioland (2011b). *Wir über uns*. *http://www.bioland.de/erzeuger/*

Bioland (2011c). *Der Anbauverband stellt sich vor*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.bioland.de/bioland/bioland.html*

Bioland (2011d). *Starke Argumente für Bio*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.bioland.de/wissen/starke-argumente/wahlfreiheit.html*

Bioland (2011e). *Bioland und seine Strukturen*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.bioland.de/bioland/bioland/strukturen.html*

Bio-Siegel (2011). *Zahlen & Fakten*. Retrieved 21/05/11 from *http://www.bio-siegel.de/*

Bio-Siegel (2006). *The Bio-Siegel at a glance*. Retrieved 20/05/11 from *http://www.bio-siegel.de/english/basics/frequently-asked-questions/what-does-bio-mean/*

Bund ökologischer Lebensmittelwirtschaft (2011) *Zahlen, Daten, Fakten: Die Bio-Branche 2010*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.boelw.de/uploads/media/pdf/Dokumentation/Zahlen__Daten__Fakten/ZDF2010gesamt.pdf*

Bundesministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz (BMELV), (2011). *Bio-Siegel*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.bio-siegel.de/startseite/*

Demeter (2009). *Demeter Journal (Ausgabe 5)*. Retrieved on 18/04/11 from *http://www.demeter.de/ebenenangleichung/zielgruppe/schnittmengen/kennenlernen/demeter-journal/?MP=14-1492*

Demeter (2010). *Demeter als Qualitätsführer – Mehr als der kleine Unterschied im Vergleich zu EU-Bio*. Retrieved on 24/05/11 from *http://www.mitkochzentrale.net/pager.do?page=higru&cont=/higru/quali&sel=comen1*

Demeter (2011a). *Biologisch-dynamisch von Anfang an*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.demeter.de/ebenenangleichung/zielgruppe/schnittmengen/kennenlernen/historie/?MP=14-1492*

Demeter (2011b). *Herzlich Wilkommen bei Demeter*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://www.demeter.de/*

Demeter (2011c). *Demeter Journal (Ausgabe 9)*. Retrieved on 18/04/11 from *http://www.demeter.de/ebenenangleichung/zielgruppe/schnittmengen/kennenlernen/demeter-journal/?MP=14-1492*

Dubuisson-Quellier, S. and Lamine, C. (2008). *Consumer involvement in fair trade and local food systems: delegation and empowerment regimes*. GeoJournal 73, 55-65.

European Commission (2011). *Organic Farming: Good for nature, good for you*. Retrieved on 19/05/11 from *http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/eu-policy/legislation_en*

Freimuth, V. S., Hammond, S. L., Stein, J. A. (2003). Health advertising: prevention for profit. *American Journal of Public Health*. 78(5), pp. 557-561.

Golan, E., Kuchler, F. & Mitchell, L. (2009). The Economics of Food Labelling. *Economic Research Service*: pp. 1-41.

Guthman, J. (2006). Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California. *Geoforum* 39 (2008). *pp. 1171-1183*.

Hébert, K. (2010). In Pursuit of Singular Salmon: Paradoxes of Sustainability and the Quality Commodity. Science as a Culture, (19/4), pp. 553-581.

Hertz, N. (2003). The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy. Harper Collins.

Ippolito, P. (2003). Nutrition and Health Advertising. Novinka Books: USA.

McCluskey, J. J. (2000). A Game Theoretic Approach to Organic Foods: An Analysis of Asymmetric Information and Policy. *Agricultural and Resource Economic Review* (29/1), *pp. 1-9*.

McMahon, N. (2005). Biodynamic Farmers in Ireland. Transforming Society Through Purity, Solitude and Bearing Witness? *Sociologia Ruralis*. (45/1/2). pp. 98-114.

Micheletti, M. (2003). *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action*. Palgrave McMillan.

Rousu, M. C. (2008). Estimating the Welfare Loss to Consumers When Food Labels Do Not Adequately Inform. *Journal of Agricultural & Food Industrial Organization*. 6(3), pp. 1-16.

Ökobarometer (2010). *Verbraucher haben die Vorteile im Blick*. Retrieved on 25/05/11 from *http://www.oekolandbau.de/journalisten/studien/*

Vogl, C. R., Kilcher, L. & Schmidt, H. (2005). Are Standards and Regulations of Organic Farming Moving away from Small farmers' knowledge? *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture* (26/1), pp. 5-24.

7 Tactical consumers:

The re-appropriation of organic food labels in everyday practices

Louisa Weiss

The logic of consumption […], can be defined as a manipulation of signs. (Baudrillard, 1998, p.114-15).

Everyday practices – realities of consumption

It is a vast array of product choices that presents itself to consumers every day. Consumers therefore need to develop criteria on which they can base their decisions. Such criteria are in turn influenced by many circumstances, amongst these the information received and processed by the shoppers. One aspect of such information, addressed towards the consumer, is the labelling of organic food. Displayed on the package of products that are found in the shelves of supermarkets and organic food stores, these labels are meant to function as guides of organic and thus more ethical, righteous or environmentally friendly purchase in the jungle of choices of products provided. But how do consumers really perceive these labels? This question has increased in relevance in recent time, both for researchers interested in ethical and political consumption, but also for the consumers themselves. It is them who are making and are (indirectly) asked to make the relevant decisions in their everyday practices of shopping. Their individual reflections on labelled and unlabelled organic foodstuffs are therefore of special interest to the analysis of contemporary consumption.

This volume has already covered some of the most important issues on ecological and organic labelling schemes, their history (Savadkouhi, 2011), how they were established and incorporated (Gall & Wörner, 2011) and also the aspects of their social construction (Münch, 2011; Kirchhoff & Richter, 2011). Apart from that, a vast literature on ethical consumption practices with studies from the fields of marketing, business and sociology is available. Most of them aim at an identification of consumer choice behaviour with regard to organic produce (e.g. McEachern & McClean, 2002; Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008;

Shaw, Newholm & Dickinson, 2006). Due to the fact that most research so far has worked with quantitative empirical findings, merely tendencies and trends in consumption patterns have been analysed in these cases, whereas underlying attitudes and motives did remain elusive (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008, p.167). Statistical data does not further our understanding of the actual factors underpinning individual shopping practices (De Certeau, 1984, p.34). Furthermore, it does not reveal any insights into the process of how individuals give meaning to products and how the idea of ethical consumption is defined by the consumers themselves (Spaargaren, 2000, p.57).

In summary, what has not been paid enough attention to so far is the study of the individual consumers who are addressed with labelled organic products. What do consumers do with the information given to them? Are labels trusted, used and paid attention to? More clearly, the question must be asked: how do consumers give meaning to the labels and appropriate them into their daily shopping decisions? In this chapter I aim to address the above mentioned research questions on the consumer side of labelling as a complement to this book. Due to the fact that grocery shopping is the kind of purchase that consumers engage in most often – many people do it almost daily – I chose this particular shopping activity as a focus of my research. The labels referred to in the following are thus organic labels of foodstuff.

For the empirical part of my study, I employed the methodology of qualitative semi-structured interviewing as described by Seale (2004, pp.179-91). This implies that the twenty interviews, which I conducted, had an open conversational structure, with no fixed set of questions being asked. However, I used a topic guide in order to receive comparable results (ibid, p.212). Conversations commenced with questions about the knowledge and purchase of, and opinion on, labelled organic produce. In most cases, this resulted in a broad elaboration on the respondents' attitudes and a wide discussion of any related topics deemed relevant by the consumer.

The interviewees were chosen in different ways: some belong to a convenience sample (Rohall, Milkie & Lucas, 2011, p.58) of friends and acquaintances, others can be categorised as belonging to a random sample (ibid) of people I recruited in the shopping streets of the cities of Aachen and Mannheim, or met in the train travelling between the two destinations. Overall, most interviews were conducted with German middle class consumers from the region of South-West Germany. Furthermore, most of them can be classified as non-intensive organic food shoppers. I want to state explicitly that this limitation to a certain area, coupled with the relative small number of twenty interviewees, chosen for my specific approach, implies a limited validity for the generalisation of my findings. But such generalisation has not been attempted by this study, which has more of an exploratory character aiming at an understanding of very individual attitudes, motives and behaviours (Seale, 2004, p.182). It thus follows the line of studies aimed at the exploration of the meanings attached to individual behaviour (e.g. Shaw et al. 2006; see also Blumer 1969 on social constructivism).

The viewpoint and methodology adapted throughout the chapter is aligned to the sociology of consumption of Michel de Certeau (1984). In 'The Practice of Everyday Life' he lays out his theory of individual consumer *tactics*. Furthermore he points to the fact that these individual practices with their *tactical* character cannot be grasped by statistics. Statistical studies can give insights into trends, homogeneity and the material of the consumer's practices, but not their individual "ways of operating" (pp. xi-xix; p.34). In addition, individual paths of information perception, decision making, the choices and uses of products must be looked at in more detail (p.xix). Furthermore, an analysis of the use and understanding of signs, images and language is needed (p.xviii). Through such kind of analysis the study aims to reveal the ways in which organic products are perceived, appropriated and used by ordinary people in their daily shopping praxis.

The chapter will start with a review of the sustainability debate and some relevant theories of the sociology of consumption. Secondly, the theory of de Certeau will be laid out. It serves as the main viewpoint on consumerism that I will adopt throughout the chapter. I will than discuss the results of my own empirical research. These will be connected to the aforementioned literature, as well as sociological and behavioural theory. Furthermore, the results have been grouped into four relevant topics: the perception of organic food labels, ethical identity formation, local food shopping and food safety. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings for a better understanding of consumer behaviour in the context of organic food consumption, especially in relation to labelling schemes and the common notions of political and ethical consumerism as well as consumer empowerment (Shaw et al., 2006).

An introduction to consumerism: **environmental, ethical and political dimensions**

Consumption has mainly been the concern of economists, market analysts and behavioural scientists for a long time (Babutsidze, 2007). But in recent decades the topic has found its way into the social sciences and thereby developed to become a much discussed research field (ibid, p.4ff). Prominent examples are Miller's examination of the emergence of mass consumption and the department store (1981) and Bourdieu's treatise on class divide as determinant for consumer behaviour (1984). Also Baudrillard's (1998) 'The Consumer Society: Myth and Structures' can be named one of the basic works in the sociology of consumption. The aforementioned examples point to a crucial facet of consumer sociology: its scrutiny of "consumerism" as a social activity that does not stand on its own but is embedded in the wider cultural context of the public sphere of life. Therefore, the sociology of consumption includes the public discourses that are relevant for consumerism into its analysis (Spaargaren, Mol and Buttel, 2000, p.9).

Since the 1970s, the most important discourse that entered the public sphere and shaped the way consumption and production are perceived nowadays, especially from the sociological perspective, is the debate on ecological modernisation (Spaargaren et al., 2000, p.8). The first phase of the debate centres on de-modernisation theories, initiated by the publication of the report of the Club of Rome, *Limits to Growth* (Meadows D.H., Meadows D.L., Rahnders & Behrens, 1972). In their work the authors relate the exponential growth of the world's population to the finite sustaining capacities of the global ecological system. With the prediction of limited resources running out soon, together with a collapse of the environment if continuously exploited, they indirectly suggested a stop to current ways of consumption, initiating the radical discourse of survivalism (Dryzak, 2005, p.25). A few years later the Brundtland Commission issued the report *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 1987). It provided substantial grounds for a more reform-oriented debate centred on possible solutions to the problems Meadows et al. had been pointing at and started a new phase with an emphasis on sustainable development (Dresner, 2002, p.1). The concept is famously defined by the Commission as:

> [...] development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs (UN WECD, 1987, ch.1, point 49).

Having found its way into the public sphere, the discussion created a growing awareness of environmental and social consequences of capitalist economy as well as the impacts of Western consumerism on the global ecological and social system (Johnston, 2008, p.262). Furthermore, as Spaargaren notes, the debate initiated a restructuring of the economic order in the sense that, "[i]t also implied a redefining of the role of the state vis-à-vis civil society, with both market actors and environmental movements redefining their former roles" (Spaargaren, 2000, p.56).

In the 1980s the ecological modernisation debate was tackled through the state by environmental policies targeting institutional actors (ibid, p.56). One of the policy tools implemented was the establishment of labelling schemes, which aim at an approval of ecological production methods. One of the earliest examples was the 'Blue Angel' *(Der Blaue Engel)*, which was founded in 1978 in Germany (see Chapter 1, Savadkouhi). It represents a so called eco label, primarily addressed the manufacturing of household products such as paper, cleaning devices and eco friendly electronics (see Chapter 3, Kirchhoff and Richter, 2011). In the 1990s a change occurred towards an increasingly producer led incentive towards sustainability with the emergence of an increasing number of "green" product lines in all sectors. Especially the food industry underwent significant changes due to a new tendency for retailer led governance. This turn was especially observable with retailers in the United Kingdom, which started to offer organic product lines of their own private labels (Marsden, Flynn and Harrison, 2000, p. 73ff). With a growing number of state owned and private labelling schemes the organic food sector is now a constantly expanding business sector across the globe (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008, p.163).

On the side of consumption, two reactions developed out of the above mentioned discourse on ecological modernisation and sustainability: the radical standpoint of ecologism (survivalism), which called for a stop to contemporary mass consumerism (Dryzak, 2005, p.15). Secondly, an ameliorative approach, which focuses on conscious ways of consumption with an eye on matters of sustainability (Gabriel and Lang, 1995, p.23; Johnston, 2008, p. 238). This demand on individual actors to integrate the rationales of sustainable development into their daily shopping decisions leads to the conceptualisation of citizen consumers (Micheletti, 2001, p.12; Spaargaren, 2000, p.56). The citizen consumer can express the social and environmental concerns that impact them as citizens, while sustaining a commitment to a consumer ideology based on perpetual economic growth and sovereign consumer choice without having to limit himself drastically (Johnston, 2008,p. 263).

The emphasis on free choice has led to the conception of consumer empowerment (e.g. Shaw, Newholm & Dickinson, 2006), political consumerism (Micheletti, 2001) and ethical consumption (Johnston, 2008; McEachern & McClean, 2002) within the sociology of consumption. Consumer empowerment, as Shaw et al. explain, "is manifested in attempts to redistribute the power between consumer and supplier" in the way that consumers willingly exert influence on the market through selective purchase of products (p.1050). This phenomenon of selective consumption has been termed *buycott*. In the view of Michele Micheletti (2001), it constitutes a tool for the expression of political opinion (p.50). The author claims, that deliberate *buycotts*, but also stronger forms of consumer actions such as public boycotts and participation in consumer activist groups, transform consumption into a venue for political participation (p12). In this way, consumption or its conscious avoidance in relation to distinct products becomes a tool for individuals to express their concerns and disagreements with the current capitalist economy and economic political directions in the way that they regulate the market by mechanisms of demand and supply.

The term of the ethical consumer refers to those in the market that show a strong concern for social values of justice (Johnston, 2008, p.12). These people may consider sustainability of the environment or display anti-corporate attitudes, such as going against the maltreatment of animals in mass production sides (ibid, p.238; McEachern & McClean, 2002, p.86). They do so in their everyday shopping, particularly while shopping for food. As Johnston explains:

> Although ethical consumption activism has taken on multiple targets, food has been central to the struggle. Food shopping is not simply a banal, private concern, but represents a key private/public nexus, as well as a potential entry-point to political engagement. This understanding draws from feminist understanding of social reproduction, which emphasise that food choices are not neutral, private matters, but rather represent a politicised, gendered, and globalised terrain where gendered labour and households intersect with states, capital, and civil society in varying balances (Johnston, 2008, p.239).

It is exactly this private/public nexus, the intersection between household and public sphere that lends consumption, and especially the daily shopping for groceries its political dimension. Johnston uses the term "citizen consumer hybrid" to describe the phenomenon of the consumer who through conscious choice of products can enact a political opinion and at the same time satisfy his own needs (ibid, p.229). By carefully choosing the way they consume by the choice of products, but also of consumption sides, individuals can demonstrate their ethical attitudes and social commitment, while still serving their own interests and restrain themselves only in some respect (p.263). Such citizen-consumer behaviour can be realised, for example in the form of supporting small shops and farmers instead of buying at the discounter or by choosing fair-trade products instead of conventional alternatives (p.260; Varul, 2009).

However, Johnston is critical of the concept and points to inherent tensions in the concept and its manifestation in branding strategies of corporations which suggest that there is some moral regulation acting on the marketplace. He criticises:

> The notion of consumers "voting with their dollars" has obvious populist appeal. As buying guides frequently remind shoppers, every shopping decision is an opportunity to cast a vote. But do the transformative aspirations of ethical consumption activism enable transformative outcomes, particularly when they are taken up by corporations? (Johnston, 2008, p.240)

The rhetorical question posed in the end clearly shows Johnston's scepticism towards the effect that a supposedly 'ethical consumption' of products of organic labels might have. He especially points to the fact that such labels are often merely used as marketing strategies of supermarkets, such as the Whole Food Market he examines in his case study.

Despite such insecurities about the purpose and effect of organic labels, some consumers are consciously politically active or have political intentions while shopping. But not all consumers who buy organic food are. There might be other motives for them to engage in certain consumption patterns such as the purchase of organic foods (Zapeda & Deal, 2009, p.697). In acknowledgement of this fact, Micheletti distinguishes between *private and public virtue traditions* when talking about politically oriented consumption. Those political consumers following the public virtue tradition are characterised as "public-oriented citizen-consumers [who] practice their public principles in everyday settings and actions that are not conventionally conceived as political in orientation" (p.19). These consumers choose their products according to political, ethical and social criteria. They engage in a personal boycott of some products, inform themselves about the politics of those products they aim to choose and follow labelling schemes that help them to choose those products they approve as righteous, ethical and politically correct purchase. According to Micheletti, by means of these alternative choices, those consumers use "exit, voice, and loyalty" in order to express a political opinion and do so for altruistic reasons directed to the social public (p.16).

In the second case, the *private virtue tradition* of politics, consumers are driven by egoistic motives in their choice for alternative product lines (p.20). Private concerns can range from a certain illness of a family member, such as neurodermatitis or food intolerances, to quality concerns and the aim to go for the healthiest option. As Micheletti points out, it is important to admit that "...[s]elf- interest can play a constructive role in democratic political development" (p.21). Although the motivation varies, the choice of product may still be the same as in the case of a public virtue oriented shopper; in both cases the consumers deliberately avoid conventional produce, while acting upon the politics of the products they choose (pp.20-24). It is therefore a way of "voting with their dollar", voting for or against certain production methods, corporate hegemonies or social injustices of trade (Johnston 2008, p.229).

Micheletti connects this new form of political engagement with broader political and social changes in Western societies, such as the emergence of sub-politics connected to "new ways of political identity formation" (pp.31-32). In this context, the growing trend of individualisation, as observed by Ulrich Beck (1991), also plays a role. It concerns a move away from a society with rigid class distinctions, a process that opens new ways of and possibilities for identity building (Micheletti, 2001, p.30ff; Beck, 1991). In the context of the public debate on ecological modernisation and sustainability, one such identity might be that of the ethical, politically oriented consumer, who consciously buys certain products and avoids others, goes to distinct shopping spaces and leaves out conventional ones, all that with having in mind certain attitudes, motives or private or public interest and intentions.

The question arises whether such theorising about consumer activism as outlined above, is commensurate to the actual reality of every day practices of consumers. Do consumers really engage in some form of public virtue tradition politics while shopping or are they mainly driven by egoistic motivations such as needs and desires or seduced and guided in their choices by the images of the media (Spaargaren, 2000, p.57;)?

Two ways of operating:
of strategies and tactics, writing and reading

> As unrecognised producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce through their signifying practices something that might be considered similar to the "wandering lines" ("lignes d'erre") drawn by the autistic children studied by F. Deligny (17): "indirect" or "errant" trajectories obeying their own logic... (Certeau, 1984, p.xvii)

In his treatise 'The Practice of Everyday Life', Michel de Certeau (1984) sketches a picture of the consumer that differs from that employed in mainstream literature. De Certeau acknowledges the great number of studies on the organisation of contemporary society and consumer behaviour (p.xii). But he advices us to go further in our analysis of the phenomenon of consumption in a way that acknowledges the ways in which people in their every day practices *make use* of the social spaces in which they operate, be it the cities, the supermarket or spaces of social interaction (ibid, emphasis mine). By an examination of these uses he aims to reject the common notion of the consumer as passive absorber, guided and seduced by 'established rules' (p.xi). Instead, consumption is according to de Certeau:

> [...]devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order. (pp. xii-xiii)

In order to understand these activities, the author stresses the importance of including a survey of images and language, conveyed to the people through public media into an analysis of (consumer) society (pp.xii - xxiii). This study in turn has to be amended by a closer look at what the consumer of these images and words does with them, how he makes sense of them and how he incorporates them into his action repertoires in his very individual way (p.31). Consumers are no homogenous mass that can be classified, put into boxes and analysed alongside stringent categories (p.xvii). Consumers are individuals, who in their daily shopping practices engage in an art of re-appropriation of the information and stimulations given to them by their environment (p.xiii). According to de Certeau, the consumer must be seen as an artist, who skilfully, witty and artistically creates his own paths through the jungle of everyday worlds.

De Certeau describes their ways of operating as movements through space and time, like trajectories (p.xviii). But he gets the impression that the notion of the trajectory is misleading and it fixes user action to something that can be drawn as a red line through space, which would be a wrong assumption (ibid). So instead, and for the sake of a better description of what is happening out there in the world of consumption, he introduces the notions of “strategies” and “tactics” (p.xix). These notions standing for somewhat opposing action repertoires can be analysed in two ways: firstly, by the use of the discipline of rhetoric, which distinguishes them as two ways of practicing language, which are the acts of writing and reading or in other words seducing, persuading and making use of it (pp.xx). Secondly, de Certeau emphasises their difference with relation to their use of social spaces:

> But what distinguishes them at the same time concerns the types of operations and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces. (p. 30)

A strategy is therefore an act of organisation, of management and a rationalisation of the outer environment that it deals with. Political, martial or scientific attempts to gain power of the world through ways of organising are to be seen as strategies. Their counterpart concerning action repertoires, the tactics of users, are calculations within the predefined terrain of strategic laws, regulations and languages. They are dependent on time insofar as they must use the opportunity, seize the moment and skilfully use the predefined spaces, controlled by another power, for their own sake (p.xix). Such tactics are apparent in the everyday practices of people and consumers:

> Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many "ways of operating": victories of the "weak" over the "strong" (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, "hunter's cunning," maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike. (ibid)

The consumer's witty, sometimes spontaneous, more often habitual tactics, their dealing with consumption spaces, products and information must therefore be the focus of a study of individual consumers. Only then can we grasp an understanding of the real motives, attitudes and behaviour of individuals without seeing them as fixed entities but rather as momentous influences that act upon those engaged in consumption practices.

This outlook on consumption and the strategic use of signs and language as it is led out by de Certeau, contributes to an understanding of ways of information processing and use by every day actors. I will employ his insights for an analysis of my own empirical findings in relation to the re-appropriation of organic food labels by individual consumers in their daily food shopping practices. I will analyse these labels and the labelling schemes that stand behind them as strategies. They are strategies of an economic order imposed on the market and created by rules and regulations, but they are tactically used by consumers in their own specific ways, which may circumvent and manipulate the rigid character of these rules.

Labelling schemes:
written strategies, symbols and obscurity

> Reading is only one aspect of consumption, but a fundamental one. In a society that is increasingly written, organized by the power of modifying things and of reforming structures on the basis of scriptural models (whether scientific, economic, or political), transformed little by little into combined "texts" (be they administrative, urban, industrial, etc.), the binominal set production – consumption can often be replaced by its general equivalent and indicator, the binominal set writing – reading. (De Certeau, 1984, p.167)

A great number and variety of food labels are to be found in stores and supermarkets. These can be labels that indicate the nutritious value of the product, eco labels that assure an environmentally friendly production, or organic food labels. The later ones may stand for alternative agricultural methods, animal welfare or may as well incorporate ecological criteria. The focus of this research has been set on organic food labels, which are available on the German market. These include a great number of labels, of which more than thirty are organic quality assurance labels, about fifteen can be categorised as general quality assurance labels, partly certifying organic methods, six are trade labels, such as fair trade. Additionaly, there are ten labels for regional products (label-online.de, 2011, '*Labeldatenbank*'). The different labels all stem from diverse forms of labelling schemes, some are privately owned labels of supermarket branches (e.g. REWE Bio), some belong to organic agriculture corporations (such as Demeter or Bioland) and some are state owned labelling schemes, such as the German Bio Siegel. In addition there is an EU wide label for organic food, which has been established in 2010 and guarantees the same standards as the German Bio Siegel (biobay.de, EU Bio Logo, 2011).

This listing clarifies that behind each label stands a certain system of principles, control schemes and policies, sometimes even a whole philosophy, as in the case of Demeter, the oldest German organic food label, established in 1928. Despite their inherent differences, all labelling schemes have one common goal: to ensure that the distinction between organic and high quality, non organic, conventional foods is visible for consumers. The label stands as a signifier for certain guidelines of production and is put on the product in order to make these regulatory frames visible to the shopper. Thus, these labels have been implemented in order to reveal a part of the product's politics to the consumer, which he can agree with or not by choosing to purchase these products or by refraining to do so (Micheletti, 2001, p.51). By doing so, they enable an empowerment of the consumer who is "free to make the choices as he sees fit" (Marsden, Flynn and Harrison, 2000, p.48, Koerber and Kretschmer, 2001, p.279). The best example in this case is probably the fair trade label, with its politics of social justice, which guarantees appropriate loans, the prohibition of child labour and a fair distribution of means in trade between the global north and the south (Johnston, 2008, p.241; biobay, Fairtrade, 2011).

In view of the vast number of labels available on the German market with a trend towards growing numbers of internal privately owned labels of supermarket branches and discounters, (Marsden, Flynn and Harrison, 2000, p.73ff, McEachern and Warnaby, 2008, p.414) the question remains to be answered how ordinary consumers react to the signal of the label if they see it in the supermarket. In the style of de Certeau, we could also ask: how do consumers act upon the labelling schemes that present themselves as *strategies* of the state and the supermarket corporation? I regard de Certeau's term of the strategy as suitable here in order to describe food labels, due to the fact that their aim is to control the consumer in a certain way by guiding his choices. Secondly, labels are strategies because they are based upon an entire apparatus of rules and regulations, which is in turn guided by economic and political laws. Finally, labels are information laden images written on the products and leaflets of stores, which aim to convey a certain message to the consumer by the use of strategic language used in science and economy.

I want to investigate the question, what consumers make of this information in the form of pictures and scriptures given to them. How do they read the strategies laid down in front of them and re-appropriate them into their *tactics* of everyday consumption?

In order to answer this matter, I conducted several qualitative interviews. In the beginning of the interviews, the interviewees were shown a list of the most common organic labels used on the German market. They were asked if they recognised any of the labels and whether they had bought products identified with these labels. The list contained of nine labels displayed in the following order[127]: Bio Siegel, EU Bio Logo,

127 The list was taken from the article "Bio Report"; in the journal eat smarter, pp.18-23. The labels mentioned on the list stand in abbreviated form for the following guidelines of production:

1. Bio Siegel and EU Bio Logo: both stand for the EU Standard of organic production and are often displayed in addition to many supermarket owned labels, they are a standard requirements for any other organic food label.
2. Bioland: biggest cooperation of organic agricultural in Germany with stricter rules than the EU standard.
3. Demeter: biological-dynamic production according to the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner.
4. Naturland: various standards including ecological production and social justice.
5. Biokreis: marketing of regional products.
6. Biopark: organic agriculture in conservation areas.
7. GÄA e.V.: former East German cooperation of organic agriculture.
8. Neuland: mainly species appropriate animal treatment.

Bioland, Demeter, Naturland, Biokreis, Biopark, GÄA E.V. and Neuland (eat smarter, *'Bio Report'*, March 2011). The first state owned Bio Siegel appeared to be well known to all interviewees, with one respondent commenting that "you see that one everywhere now". About five respondents recognised three to four of the labels, in most cases the Bio Siegel, Demeter and Bioland; sometimes the EU label was also familiar. Only two respondents knew more than four of the presented certificates. Secondly, I asked for labelled products purchased and the location of purchase. Most interviewees said that they had seen and bought them in the supermarket or discounter that they frequently visit, such as Edeka, Rewe or Aldi (German supermarket chains, L.W.). Only very few respondents had been to a specific organic (food) store and had bought their products there. This reveals an important insight; that most of the consumers who have been questioned in this study did not belong to the category of so called 'frequent organic buyers' (Zapeda & Deal, 2009, p.698), but instead engaged in the purchase of organic products infrequently and, as we will see, often based on *ad hoc* decisions and for various motivations.

Subsequently, interviewees were questioned as to whether they pay attention to organic food labels in their purchase decisions. Thereafter, I inquired as to whether they trust these certificates and their motivations for doing so. A majority of the respondents immediately started to complain about the confusions created by the high number of labelling schemes and the lack of information regarding them. Many noted that they did not know what the labels actually represent in terms of the production criteria that they are supposed to guarantee. One young man justified his reasons as to why he often did not choose the organic option of some products, as a result of the confusion arising from multiple labelling:

> I think that the labels represent different standards. The framework requirements are not comparable. For one product it might be more important to look at this or that, for the other it might be irrelevant. But I can maybe not judge that at all, I just built my own opinion on that. One really needs to see what kind of organic product is that and what label. But there are in fact thousands....

He reveals that due to the fact that he does not have enough information on the distinct labelling schemes and their advantages in comparison with conventional products, he feels unable to judge which would be the better choice. Many interviewees voiced demands for a clearer labelling system, which they would better understand. One interviewee proposed:

> One does not know what it exactly means. There is a product with an organic label, but what does that mean then? Free range eggs or so... It would be good if there was one label only, that would be regulated on a national or European level, to make it more clearly laid out.

His statement shows that he had no knowledge about the fact that the Bio Siegel represents EU wide standards and that an EU label exists at all. Many respondents showed a similar lack of knowledge concerning the existence and detailed criteria of organic food labels. This ignorance of the production criteria behind the distinct labels causes a general mistrust voiced against organic foodstuff available in conventional supermarkets, as reflected in the answer of one woman:

> I also buy organic products in the supermarket, but I am never sure there, whether this is really organic. I think that in the supermarkets there are again other standards and guidelines are not as strict.

Similar scepticism is apparent in the answer of another interview partner:

> There is also Bio available in the discounter, but then we are again talking about these labels. I don't know what I am supposed to think about them. Well, if there would be uniform standards...But because they are not there I do not really have a high opinion on these labels.

On the other hand, many respondents indicated that they were not willing to invest much time and effort into information gathering concerning the labels' standards. When I asked a young man whether he would look up information about labelling schemes on the Internet, he answered: "No, I am a person who does not care enough about his diet". The choice of food is apparently not a priority in his life, which leads to a disinterest in details of foodstuff. Another factor might be that such engagement simply does not fit into the everyday practicality of food shopping, as one young man told me:

> Well on the other hand, what do I want actually? I go shopping and maybe buy myself a pack of sausages. But then I do not want to read an instruction manual of ten pages, about how the sausages were produced. It is not of interest to me and I do not want to bother myself with it.

What this statement makes clear, albeit in a very drastic way, due to the language that this respondent employs, is the reluctance of consumers to engage in time consuming practices of information gathering. As McEachern and Warnaby (2008) note, the cost of acquiring adequate information is perceived as much higher than the value of the product and therefore not engaged in (p.421). Furthermore, the study of labelling scheme descriptions on home pages of producers or the intensive reading of retailer leaflets are activities that do not fit into the everyday routines of consumers, whose consumption is geared towards practicality and the satisfaction of daily needs.

This leads me to the remarkable observation that despite the lack of information and the reluctance to gather it, many interviewees reported that they nevertheless bought products with organic labels. The most prominent reason named for these actions was to feel better about ones purchase:

> Well, yes, I know that one cannot trust them (the labels, L.W.), but following my feeling I would decide after that criteria.

As the statement by this respondent exemplifies, labelled products were often bought due to the fact that consumers attach a 'better feeling' to the purchase of this choice. This component of having a better 'feeling' may relate to aspects of healthiness, social justice in production or animal welfare, as the answer of one elderly lady shows:

> I am not a big BIO buyer. I shop a lot at the Lidl (cheap German supermarket chain, L.W.), and then I buy the organic products that are available there, well at least the eggs. I hope a little bit, that what stands behind it is adequate animal housing.

The above statements make it clear that people overcome their scepticism by telling themselves that it is nevertheless the 'better' option and that there must be good standards behind the label, although they have no knowledge of them. But this ignorance is omitted in the tactic of everyday consumption. Here, only the quick purchase of quality food is important to the consumer. This is why despite his lack of detailed knowledge of labelling schemes he takes the label as assurance of such quality.

This makes us also reconsider the scepticism that the respondents voiced: it is possible that they engaged in a kind of 'front stage' management of their identities (Rohall et al. 2011, p.130; Goffman, 1959) in the way that they aimed to convey to me the impression that I was talking to reflexive, thoughtful citizens who do not buy everything that the media tells them (de Certeau, 1984, p.187-88). In the following section, I will discuss the phenomena of identity building and lifestyle in relation to ethical consumption which might account for some of the sceptical voices raised against some of the organic food labels.

Walking between worlds:
ethical consumption, lifestyle and self identity

The purchase of organic foodstuff can also be part of a certain conscious or ethical lifestyle. Lifestyle research (*Lebensstil Forschung*) is a field of sociology that has been used for market and target group analysis and the study of social transition processes in general. It has been initiated in the 1980s in Germany by the sociology of Ulrich Beck (Risk Society, 1986) whose conception of tendencies of individualisation (*Individualisierungstendenzen*) was based upon the observation that previously held social structures, which divided society into classes by objective criteria of income and job positions were no longer applicable to current societies (Empacher, 2003, p.1). In Beck's own words the structural changes in society occurred in the following manner:

> In this "individualization process", people fall out of the nest of binding and guiding traditions, "set free", in Marx's term, from the limits and securities of class cultures and traditional milieus; they are thus confronted with themselves as the pivots and hinges of their own lives. (Beck 1991, p.40)

Dissolved from the old class structures, people engage in new forms of identity building and lifestyle formations. Due to the importance of consumption in our present societies and the decisive role that this action plays in the process of identity formation, (Bourdieu, 1984) lifestyle research is a welcomed tool for target group modelling in the field of consumer studies (Empacher, 2003, p.2).

Indeed, many of the respondents attempted to define their social and consumer identities when they talked about their shopping behaviour. Very often they made use of categorisations in order to define others, thereby engaging in a process called social categorisation (Rohall et al., 2011, p.135). By describing others people deliberately, they set themselves apart from these "other groups" of consumers and their shopping. I asked one of my interviewees why he did not go to the small biological store in his hometown. With his answer containing a description of the presumed attitude and expectations of others towards the food they buy and eat, he deliberately set himself apart, declaring that he has no such demands:

> It is like a religion for these people. They want to keep their bodies in good health, live long. These people have certain expectations towards food, which I for example do not have. [...] The Abraxas (name of the organic store, L.W.) is like a pharmacy, there is also a lot of show. But it is a good thing and there are people who consciously decide to spend more on food, like others on cars or arts.

Another man told me about his brother, a frequent organic food buyer, but vehemently distinguished himself from his brother's lifestyle:

> My brother for example, he is far more of an '*Öko*'[128] than I am, I am not an Öko. But he lives for 70%, I would say, off the organic store. [...] I have later set myself apart from this a little.

Despite his partition from his brother's Öko lifestyle, he does engage in ethical consumption, having chosen to not to eat meat anymore due to the maltreatment of animals in meat production. As such, he buys his eggs in the organic store in town and deliberately goes for the Bio brand of his favourite supermarket. But he defines himself also as someone who does his food shopping quickly (*Schnelleinkäufer*) and admits going for the look and familiar taste of products that he already knows. When asked for his product choices in the supermarket in his day to day shopping, he defines himself as "relatively normal" and shamefully admits to be "rather inconsequent" in his conscious purchase behaviour, also with foodstuff:

> I also really like to have bread rolls, and then they do not have to be Bio. I like the taste. And then I rather eat something which I like and where I feel good afterwards. But if I always eat Bio, like brown pasta or organic Pizza – they really do not taste well – then I do not gain anything. I disapprove everything that is too selective and exaggerated. One has to somehow find his own way. Like: Ok I can take responsibility for that. Else I would have to stop driving my diesel. I would have to buy myself a hybrid car which I cannot afford or use my bike more often [...]. So, I am not consistent, but I try.

---

128 The term Öko is used in German colloquial language. It refers to a person who might be very conscious in his purchase and behavior with respect to the impact on the environment, his own physical and mental health and social justice.

Overall, the reflections of the respondent identify him as very informed about environmentally friendly, healthy and conscious behaviour and with a positive attitude towards it. However he has to justify that his behaviour is not always oriented along these guidelines and thus calls himself inconsistent. This self critique refers to the kind of ideal type identity that the man holds of himself or at least strives for: an ethically oriented, responsible self.

This processes of self description and guiding of attitudes, intentions and actions people engage in has been termed "ethical selving" by Varul (2009) in his study on ethical consumption patterns, examining the case of fair-trade products. Within this process people not only distinguish themselves from others, but also define their own identity's characteristics and formulate categories of self perception. Such "ethical selving" shapes, in principle, the attitudes and beliefs of morality or morally righteous behaviour of the people. The term ethical selving combines two factors that play a crucial role in the formation of an ethical identity: ethical obligation, the feeling that one has to do what is considered right, and self identity or self affirmation, the fact that people try to act alongside their self image. Also Varul notes that obligation and self perception are factors which shape and are at the same time shaped by the practice of ethical behaviour. This means that in an ideal situation an ethical consumer reinforces his self image and acts according to the obligation he feels in every consumption choice he makes. But one cannot always say which factor prevails:

> It is difficult to disentangle consumer motives between an ethically driven desire to be responsible, and more selfishly oriented desires to feel and to be perceived by others to be socially responsible (ibid, p.183).

The factor of social responsibility makes clear that ethical selving is a process embedded in existing social discourses, such as debate on sustainability and ecological modernisation as stated above, which serve as a frame of reference for the modelling of an "ethical self" (p.187). But one can also be aware of these social obligations, have an ethically oriented self-perception and attitude, but still not engage in conscious consumption. For example, in the case of one young man, his first statement to me was: "[o]f course one buys Bio, are there any arguments against it?" Later on, however, it became apparent that he "would" only choose the organic variant of certain products, but does not do so in reality, although he never directly admitted this.

This observation leads to certain reflexivity concerning the verification of the interview responses: the discrepancy between attitudes and actual behaviour reveal an aspect of identity formation that Joseph Huber calls the phenomenon of social desirability (Soziale Erwünschtheit) (2001, p.400). Huber explains that in recent times the dominant public social norm has emerged, in that one must have a "green consciousness" but in fact most people have a rather lax attitude towards environmental issues. He talks of a double moral standard in which there is a significant gap between this declaration and their actual consciousness and behaviour, which is mostly utilitarian in nature with an emphasis on personal wishes. Many also externalise environmental concerns, push it towards others and see it not as their responsibility to change their behaviour. But in order not to appear "unethical" they talk as if they were very conscious in their choices:

> In the course of the social assimilation of environmental consciousness and an establishment of environmental politics have environmentally oriented attitudes and behavioural variants become a common social norm. One cannot dare to go against it without putting at risk his reputation and social connection (ibid).

Buying organic foods seems to have become a virtue in our society with certain people putting high emphasis on such selective purchase, be it for personal or altruistic reasons. Despite the general acknowledgement of ethical/organic consumption, it was observable that the distinction between these motives was important for some respondents. Especially those frequently buying organic products and those who placed an emphasis on shopping locally analysed their own attitudes and intentions. Sometimes this also served as a rationalisation and evaluation of their own behaviour and practices. One woman who is very conscious about her grocery purchase stated:

> Well it is a lifestyle issue, which one can support. But its right, I think many people go to the store, because their neighbour goes there and because it has become a virtue of some sort. But with me it's always like that, I do it out of my own incentive. And always within the framework that I always set for myself.

Some of the more consciously oriented consumers were also very critical about their own behaviour and the inconsistencies its shows. Consequently, they defined themselves in a way reflected by these considerations:

> I estimate myself as a walker between the worlds (*Ein Wanderer zwischen den Welten*); I try to find a balance between that, what suits myself and what I can approve as responsible purchase.

What this interviewee describes as two worlds are the two motivations that guide human purchase behaviour in general: egoistic motives (satisfaction, well being or health) and altruistic motivations (social justice, support of rural communities or animal welfare). In her daily shopping behaviour she feels she has to reconcile these two worlds constantly. Through this negotiation between the two streams of motivations and obligations (towards herself and others) she becomes a citizen-consumer, as she successfully combines citizenship and consumerism (Johnston, 2008).

Her actions can be described as the *tactics* of her consumption. By finding her own way through the spaces of shopping opportunities, she attempts to reconcile that what is demanded of her by rules and regulations, ethical norms and values of conduct, with that what is suitable for herself as individual. By doing so she makes sure that she is defined as a member of society who acts righteously in terms of behaving ethically and socially appropriate. As de Certeau expresses:

> [...] [T]he restriction opposed (through sacrifice) to the indefinite will of each individual makes coexistence and conventions possible among members of a group; in other words, the practice of renunciation and self-sacrifice permits plurality and contracts, that is, a society: the acceptance of a limit is the foundation of the social contract (1984, p.64).

Buying locally:
matters of transportation, trust and community

Zapeda and Deal reveal in their qualitative study how consumers started talking about locally produced foodstuff and aspects of sustainability, when asked about their shopping habits in relation to organic foods (2009, p.702). They name various reasons for the emphasis on local produce such as mistrust in the choices available in supermarkets, the support of the local community and environmental and health concerns (p.697). For rural citizens, the emphasis on the purchase of local products can be an important part of their identity as a member of rural communities (Zapeda & Deal, 2009, p.702). As Johnston points out, the variant of shopping local produce constitutes in fact the ideal type of citizen-consumer involvement (2008, p.260). It gives them an ideal venture for the so called “citizen consumer hybrid”, which combines duties of citizenship, such as sustaining the community with personal wishes of consumption (fresh and healthy food). Furthermore, it is observable that people do take this option with the rejuvenation of small shops, coops and farmer's markets (ibid). Buying local foods is therefore another aspect of conscious consumption next to the purchase of organic products that comes to the fore when studying consumer attitudes.

In the case of many of my interviewees, especially rural citizens, this choice was highly prominent and altruistic motives of citizen value and support of local farmers as well as job markets were voiced alongside the more egoistic motivations of freshness, healthiness and the feeling of trust towards the personal acquaintance of the farmer. The first kind of motivation is represented in the reply of one consumer whom I asked whether he sees buying local as a citizen obligation:

> Yes sure. One also creates opportunities for work this way, for example in the local asparagus production.

More egoistic motives are supported by a statement of one woman, coming from a rural area, who frequently buys directly at the farm shops in the neighbouring village. Her answer also reveals that the issue of trust is of great matter to the local consumer:

> In wintertime I go to a certain farmer at the entrance of the village, because he has comparably fresh products there. In summer, as soon as they open, I switch to a farmer opposite the street. They really have regional products, where I even know the very origin, were they come from, sometimes. Potatoes for example, I get them at a certain farm. There I know someone who leases her land to them and there I can be sure, that they cultivate that ecologically. We also get our strawberries there. You can actually buy them without hesitation. And the cost-performance ratio is top.

Her proposition makes it clear that the creation of trust is an important topic in the context of food purchase. Whereas in the supermarket trust is channelled through labelling schemes, frequent controls and the presence of skilled personnel, we can denote from the quote above, that in their everyday reality people prefer to trust other people, such as their friends or the farmer and value knowing the site of production and the people who produce there. In the case of the woman quoted above, she trusts the potato and strawberry farm, because she knows someone who rents their land to this farmer. Her personal acquaintance enables the creation of a sufficient amount of trust, which she reassures in another statement:

Well, it's a matter of trust. And I assume that, here in Germany, especially here in the area, and I can observe that with the vine dressers here, that an immense rethinking has taken place for years now. Mr. Schäfer, for example, vine maker of personal trust to me...I know that he tries to use as least "chemistry" as possible.

This demonstrates how personal acquaintances seem to have a considerable affect on the level of trust given to certain produce. This explains why a great number of conscious consumers whom I have interviewed preferred local products over organic food from the supermarket. In the case of the woman quoted above, she furthermore concluded from her observation of the farmers' practices a switch in thinking in agriculture in their area in general towards more organically oriented methods. This way of concluding that local farmers must produce in an organic way, was mentioned by other consumers as well. It seems to give them a further justification for local purchase practices.

As already indicated, when interviewees raised the topic of buying local, they said that they even preferred such products over any organic food available in the supermarket. One middle aged female from Aachen phrased her explanation in the following way:

I prefer local products to any organic ones. If I know that a farmer from the ambit of 30 kilometres delivers somewhere, than I prefer these products. [...] Bio to and fro, it also depends on the freshness of the stuff. If Bio comes from Costa Rica, then there are not vitamins in there anymore either. So I also try to buy seasonal products.

Here statement makes clear the importance of the associated higher amount of nutrients contained in fresh food. This criterion even prevails before the equally common notion of organic food being more nutritious and healthy (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008, p.164). In the case of organic food coming from abroad, freshness is not guaranteed anymore. The preferred variant is to avoid such produce and buy seasonal and local foods. One interviewee, coming from the rural area around Stralsund in the North of Germany, even talked about "black sheep" in this regard:

You should not put an organic label on everything, because unfortunately there are also "black sheep", who smash Bio on something where there is no Bio inside.

What would be such a 'black sheep' you were talking about?
Eggs from Bavaria for example.... I mean, it can very well be that they come from the countryside, but just alone the transportation distance the truck has to make,

> that makes it no Bio anymore. In that case I prefer to buy the produce that is freshly available at our area up there to eggs from Bavaria. The same is with the fish, which we have right from the sea in my area. When it is really fresh, at best it is taken out of the water in front of my eyes; that is real Bio for me (my emphasis). [...] Also, when I think how many exertions the potatoes from Italy have gone through, than I rather go to the farmer close by. With rural products coming from the ambit you can go there and check where it actually comes from.

For this man, the local origin and freshness of the foodstuff defines it as *real bio*, two criteria with which products that had been transported cannot compete and thus he deliberately avoids them. In relation to this man's definition of 'real Bio', I want to mention the hypothesis raised by Stolz (2004) concerning the reasons for people to lay such an emphasis on local food buying. He argues that in recent times confusions have arisen as a result of public media with respect to food scandals, labelling and quality concerns of food products in general. Influenced by these messages and confronted with a vast array of options in the supermarket, consumers search for simple solutions. This together with a lack of knowledge about the distinction between conventional and organic produce leaves the consumer undecided. Stolz therefore suggests, consumers "take the easy way out" when choosing local products (p.488). This choice is furthered by another aspect that the author concludes from his own results in focus group discussions: organic production methods are not known well enough to the wider public. Even intensive organic food buyers have no proper knowledge of the entire system of organic agriculture. Their ignorance leads consumers to conclude that the local farmers are producing according to organic standards (ibid):

> I will say, if it comes from the region, than you assume, that it is 'nature', that the vegetables are 'untreated', I assume that, but I can of course not guarantee it. But I assume that it is decent stuff.

The lack of knowledge about production methods leads consumers to make assumptions about the agricultural uses that may not directly be observable to them, but are nevertheless trusted and viewed positively due to the factor of locality. However, some of the respondents were also very critical concerning their trust in local farmers and their agricultural land use practices:

> Well, there is the question of trust. Do I trust a certain label? Or do I trust the slaughter from my village or the retailer coming from the region?
>
> **So for which option do you mostly go?**
> Well, I trust my shopkeeper, if he tells me he doesn't use this and that "chemistry". But what always irritates me is that when I drive along the highway and I see all these vegetable fields to my right. Then I ask myself, where does that all go to? It goes to the regional market. Is there maybe also a "Martinshof" (*the Bioland farm she often buys her vegetables from*) close by? Or how does that work out? This farmer for example, the Martinshof, who does not use pesticides, where does he have his land? If it is placed in an area where there are constantly cars driving by and there is chemicals used in the surrounding, well then....

Their observation of agricultural practices made them sceptical concerning the question: "Where does all that "Bio" come from?" as another respondent framed it. The main reason why they ask this question is due to so called food safety concerns related to the use of pesticides and other 'chemistry'. I will discuss this in the following section.

In this part of my analysis it has become clear that many consumers, particularly rural citizens attempt to buy local products whenever possible. Lesser ways of transportation, the support of the community, the direct acquaintance with farmers or the freshness of foodstuff from the area were criteria that create an overall positive attitude towards the purchase of local produce. However, alongside the hypothesis raised by Stolz (2004) we can also interpret this choice as an escape road, a witty tactic, of consumers, who are unable to cope with all the confusing and contradicting information they receive from the public media. Buying locally is their tactical solution to overcome insecurities about labelled produce in the supermarket due to the fact that they can raise more arguments for this choice.

"Chemistry" versus "nature": **health, taste and prices**

Concerns over food security can be a driver to buy organic products. Here several aspects play a role, which work on the consumer and shape his attitude on the topic. Amongst those factors are the influence of scandals and their publication in the media, general information regarding foodstuffs received by the consumers and their own framing of

what food safety means to them (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008).
An interesting observation in connection to this matter has already become apparent in some of the quotes above: consumers use their own language when talking about food security. They employ such notions as "chemistry" or "nature". They do not use them in their usual scientific meaning, but instead they attach them to certain methods of production. When talking about chemistry, for example, consumers usually express their concerns about the use of pesticides and chemicals in agricultural practices. This fear mostly stems from the consumers concern for their own health, which results in their intention to buy healthier foodstuff. The criteria for healthy food are first and foremost ensuring that it is high in nutrients and does not contain any additives, pesticides or genetically modified components as these have been portrayed in the media as being harmful to a person's wellbeing (ibid, p164).

Health consciousness in relation to the resulting food safety concern is therefore one of the factors that can form a favourable attitude towards buying organic products. This is due to the fact that organic production methods are associated with a less chemical intensive, more natural land use and treatment of food stuff:

R: I think it is not good with respect to your health. So when I see, formerly I never thought about that, when I saw during my holidays what they do with the apples…its masses…Also when I look at it here in the region, how much fertilisers they use. This cannot be healthy! And then I wonder how long some products last for, you really ask yourself why. […] You really ask yourself what they put in there, so that this is possible.

S.W.: This means your own health is your major incentive to buy organic food and go to the market?

R: Yes, first and foremost I am concerned about my own health and about that of the other people, because they indeed handle people's health very loosely in favour for their profit.

We can nicely see in this description how the interviewee's attitude towards conventional practices has changed over the time and how she became more sceptical towards conventional products, also due to their unnaturally long shelf life. Furthermore she denotes her opinion about the high risk of conventional foods due to the perceived fact that the industry's interest is firstly profit and not public health (McEachern and McClean, 2002, p.86). Similar concerns were voiced by a very sceptical young man, who remarked that:

The question is do I really want that? Organic products are generally more expensive, but are they really better for the quality of life? That's the question. I am sure they also use feeding stuff with those chicken that run around freely.

So you think the difference between conventional and organic is not decisive?
Sure they also just want to make profit. And also, is a chicken that gets additives in his feeding stuff really unhealthier than a chicken that does not get them? I cannot answer that.

Indeed, this man was very critical about the organic food industry and also deliberately distinguished himself as a non organic food buyer.

Others were more convinced about the fact that organic products were a better choice for them in many respects. For example, the healthiness of products and their better taste were often mentioned in combination. This may be due to the reason that organic products have been promoted as being better in general in the media and by famous chefs and celebrities (see for example eat smarter, march 2011). That taste is a dominant criterion becomes apparent in response from a woman, who to the greatest extent possible tries to buy her products at a Bioland certified farmer, who visits the local market. I asked her for the reasons why she preferred the products of the farmer to those in the supermarket and she replied:

Well, it tastes better. I think one lives better, it is certainly healthier. And I realized that when I have bought a lot of vegetables from the Martinshof, that I feel better. Maybe this is an illusion, I don't know. I simply think it is healthier not to eat foodstuff that has been treated with fertiliser. And what I absolutely do not buy anymore, before I get these ready-made sauces sometimes with preservatives and additives, but I do not buy that anymore at all, because I realized it does not taste well.

Another respondent who also frequently bought from an organic farmer said:

With groceries I meanwhile buy a lot of organic produce and a lot at the market, because I realized, it tastes much better. For example, carrots, there I realized it, they taste so good so intensive. They really taste like carrots tasted back in childhood!

Other consumers were more sceptical regarding the better taste of organic food, as one interviewee critically answered: "One trusts in the fact that it tastes better, but you can never say One respondent analysed his feeling of better taste in the following way:

> I don't know whether it is true from an objective standpoint, but from a subjective one it is in any case. One has the feeling to buy something good and automatically it tastes better. Presumably I wouldn't realize the difference. Just when there is Bio written on the product there is automatically a chain reaction started...its good, healthy, tasty.

He assumes that the better feeling towards his purchase (having done something ethically correct or bought something which is apparently good for his health) deludes him into the feeling of a better taste. The feeling of having bought something "better", in terms of being healthier or more righteously produced, gives the consumer the impression of a better taste or even as one interviewee pointed out a feeling of well being:

> Well it's also a matter of feeling. You have a different feeling, dependent on whether you buy a chicken that has lived with at a farm and gotten normal feeding or whether you have one that was raised in a factory in a small cage and has received medicals. You really have to admit that you will feel better with a chicken from the farmer.

The feeling of having bought something "better", in terms of being healthier or more righteously produced, gives the consumer the impression of a better taste or even as one interviewee pointed out a feeling of well being.

In this section we can see that the 'good feeling' towards their food purchase matters to consumers. This better feeling can be created through the purchase of organic labelled products. The label is then re-appropriated by the consumer as an assurance for quality and healthiness of the produce. The ignorance about the details of production does not matter for the 'user' in this case. It is circumvented by the consumer reformulating the language of the label in his own ways, that suit his needs at that very moment.

Conclusion:
Circumvented obscurities and making do in everyday practices

> "When science is pulled out of its home context, and applied to problems in the public domain, it can fail: fail to win the trust of interested parties, fail to recognise its own social assumptions, and fail to deal adequately with messy features of real world problems. It takes luck or hard work of a sort that is both political and technical to successfully apply scientific or technical expertise to public issues (Sismondo, 2004, p.172)."

One can be tempted to see the above discussed obscurity of labelling schemes and the mistrust that is often voiced against them as a failure of political and scientific bodies to convey their message in an appropriate way to the wider public. However, the growing market segment of organic food products (Shaw et al., 2006, p.1050) is proof that consumers do nevertheless engage in the purchase of labelled produce.

Despite the repeated claim made by several studies (McEachern and McClean, 2002, p.91; McEachern and Warnaby, 2008, p.421; Varul, 2009, p.704) that knowledge about the labelling schemes in question is paramount to their purchase, as we have seen, consumers engage in purchase of organic food despite sceptical attitudes towards the labels as such. This shows that the wider context of the shopping decision has to be taken into account.

Factors that have shown to be of influence on consumers' decision to buy organic food range from egoistically oriented motives, such as health and well being to more altruistic aspects of social responsibility, environmental degradation, animal welfare and community. How strong single factors are for the individual and in how far they really matter cannot be grasped in general rules, it rather seems to be question of the very situation and hidden factors of personality, past and habits, which even this qualitative study could not reveal in detail. What became clear however is the fact that consumers do appropriate the information of the public media, of other people and of product covers such as labels, in their own way. The aim of which is to make it fit to their everyday practices of consumption, although they are often ignorant of any details. Moreover the results of this study show that consumers do in fact circumvent their knowledge deficits by incorporating labels into daily shopping practices in a way that fits them individually and for the momentous situation. I have called this way of acting *tactical consumption*. Consumers all use very individual tactics in order to include the appropriation of food labels and other information into daily shopping practices. By doing so, they become tactical consumers in their daily purchase of groceries and other products.

It has also become clear that consumers are not as passive and seduced as they are often portrayed (Varul, 2009, p.185), but instead are smart and active and use the rules and regulations of the market for their own empowerment. This view sheds light on the consumer and his power and ability to be the leader of his own culture, the so called "consumer culture". Tactics of consumption do create a parallel consumer culture formed by the consumers themselves. This culture is somewhat opposed to the rigid strategies of the world of science, economy and politics that attempts to rule over them. The activities of consumers that are tactical in character and that form their own culture have a political power on their own. Therefore, the activities of consumers are political in a way that they gain power over the prevailing economic structures, oppose their own opinions on them and create their own culture by using the laws and rules of science, economy and politics in an art of their own:

> The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices (de Certeau, 1984, p.xvii).

References:

Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* (50), p. 179-211.

Babutsidze, Z. (2007). *How do consumers make choices? A summary of Evidence from Marketing and Psychology*. UNU MERIT. Working Paper Series. retrieved at 04 April, 2011, from *http://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/wppdf/2007/wp2007-005.pdf*

Baudrillard, J. (1984). *The Consumer Society: Myth and Structures*. London: Sage. London.

Beck, U. (1986). *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Beck, U. (1991). *Ecological Enlightenment. Essays on the politics of the risk society.* Humanity Books: New York

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Routledge: London.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method.* Boston: Prentice-Hall.

Certeau, M. de (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press: Berkeley.

Certeau, M. de (1988). *Die Kunst des Handelns.* Merve Verlag: Berlin.

Dresner, S. (2002). *The Principles of Sustainability.* London: Earthscan

Dryzak, J.S. (2005). *The Politics of The Earth*. Environmental Discourses. (Second Edition). Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Eat Smarter (March 2011). *Bio Report*. online portal *http://eatsmarter.de/*

Empacher, C. (2003): *Was kommt auf den Teller? Lebensstile und nachhaltige Ernährung.* Beitrag auf dem 6. aid-Forum am 27.5.2003 in Bonn: „Nachhaltig ackern und essen – Praxisfähige Modelle für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft“. Retrieved at 02 June, 2011, from *http://orgprints.org/1701/1/empacher-c-2003-lebensstile.pdf*

Gabriel Y. & Lang T. (2006). *The Unmanageable Consumer.* Second Edition. London: Sage.

Huber J. (2001). Allgemeine Unweltsoziologie. Westdeutscher Verlag: Wiesbaden

Johnston J. (2007). The citizen-consumer hybrid: ideological tensions and the case of Whole Foods Market. *Theor Soc* 37, 229-270.

Koerber, K. von und Kretschmer J. (2001). Die Preise von Bio-Lebensmitteln als Hürde bei der Agrar- und Konsumwende. *Ernährung im Focus, 1 (11/01)*, 277-282. Retrieved at 02 May, 2011, from *http://www.was-wir-essen.de/download/EIF11_01_278282.pdf*

Marsden, T., Flynn A. and Harrison M. (2000). Consuming Interests. The Social Provision of Foods. UCL Press: London

McEachern M.G. and McClean P. (2002). Organic purchasing motivations and attitudes: are they ethical? *International Journal of Consumer Studies. 26 (2),* 85-92.

McEachern M.G. and Warnaby G. (2008). Exploring the relationship between consumer knowledge and purchase behavior of value based labels. *International Journal of Consumer Studies 32,* 414-426.

Michaelidou N. and Hassan, L.M. (2008). The role of health consciousness, food safety concern and ethical identity on attitudes and intentions towards organic food. *International Journal of Consumer Studies.* 32, 163-170.

Micheletti, M. (2003). *Political Virtue and Shopping. Individuals, Consumerism and Collective Action.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

Miller, M.B. (1981). *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois culture and the department store.* London: Allen &Unwin.

Nilsson H., Tuncer B., Thidell A. (2004). The use of eco-labeling like initiatives on food products to promote quality assurance-is there enough credibility? *Journal of Cleaner Production 12,* 517-526.

Reijonen Satu (2011). Environmetally friendly consusmer: from determinism to emergence. *International Journal of Consumer Studies.* London: Blackwell.

Rohall D.E., Milkie M.A., Lucas J.W. (2011). *Social Psychology. Sociological Persepectives.* Second Edition. Boston: Prentice Hall.

Seale, C. (2004). Qualitative Interviewing. In Seale, C. (ed.) *Researching Society and Culture,* pp. 179-191. Second Edition. London: Sage.

Shaw D., Newholm T. and Dickinson R. (2006). Consumption as voting: an exploration of consumer empowerment. *European Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 40 No. 9/10, 2006, pp. 1049-1067.

Sismondo, S. (2004). *An introduction to Science and Technology Studies*. Oxford: Oxford: Blackwell.

Spaargaren G. (2000) *Ecological Modernization Theory and Changing Discourse on Environment and Modernity*. In Spaargaren G., Mol A.P.J. and Buttel F.H (eds.). (2000). Environment and Global Modernity. London: Sage.

Spaargaren G., Mol A.P.J., Buttel F.H. (2000). Introduction: Globalization, Modernity and the Environment. In Spaargaren G., Mol A.P.J. and Buttel F.H (eds.). (2000). *Environment and Global Modernity*. London: Sage.

Stolz, H. (2004) Warum deutsche Verbraucher Einzelmerkmale des Öko Landbaus starker bevorzugen als das Gesamtsystem Öko-Landbau. Marktforschung. 487-490. Retrieved from: *http://orgprints.org/3381/1/3381.pdf*, retrieved at 06 May, 2011.

Szmigin I., Carrigan M. and MeEachern M. (2009). The conscious consumer: taking a flexible approach to ethical behaviour. *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, 224-231.

Varul, M.Z. (2009). Ethical selving in cultural contexts: fair-trade consumption as an everyday ethical practice in the UK and Germany. International *Journal of Consumer Studies 33,* 183-189.

Zepeda, L. and Deal D. (2009). Organic and local food consumer behavior: Alphabet Theory. *International Journal of Consumer Studies 33,* 697-705.

Websites:

Biobay (n.d.) Biosiegel und Gütezeichen. Retrieved at 20 April, 2011, from: *http://www.biobay.de/biosiegel-guetezeichen/1/*

Demeter. (n.d.) Historie. Retrieved at 15 June, 2011, from: *http://www.demeter.de/ebenenangleichung/zielgruppe/schnittmengen/kennenlernen/historie/?F=2&MP=2093-2118*

Label Online (n.d.) Retrieved at 20 April, 2011, from *http://www.label-online.de/label-datenbank?labelcat=27*

Our Common Future, Chapter 1: A Threatened Future (n.d.). From: *A/42/427. Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*. Retrieved at 12 June, 2011, from *http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-01.htm#II*