

Body Changes and Green Consumption. Embodying and Performing a Vegan Lifestyle

Modificazioni del corpo e consumo green. Incorporazione ed esibizione di uno stile di vita vegano

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Abstract

Veganism is usually addressed in studies on medical benefits or eating disorders as well as food identities that are able to shape and influence society. Through this article, the author aims to add a new interpretation of veganism by linking the anthropological topic of body changes to green consumption and dietary choices. Notably, the present analysis aims to explore the ideas of a lifestyle free of animal products and their embodied political significance using the ethnographic methodology. The approach used allows us to present veganism as a meaningful strategy that employs personal values as a response to wider world issues related to environmental degradation and animal safeguard. Therefore, in this dissertation, the implicit and explicit body modification and vegan expressions are crucial to understand how veganism is concretized in the Italian context.

Keywords: veganism; body modification; green consumption; free of animal products; consumption embodiment.

1. Introduction

How can we explain the relation among body, vegan lifestyle and green consumption? How can this relation be embodied by ethical, health-related and environmental justifications for veganism?

Even if previous studies have never addressed the analysis of the relationship between body change and green consumption as this article aims to do, here veganism is also interpreted as a sociocultural ideal transformed into lifestyle consumption. On the contrary, most researches are focused on the medical system that interprets veganism as a social deviance able to modify blood metabolites and body composition¹. Noting an increasing interest in plant-based eating patterns such as vegetarian and vegan in Western society, many studies acknowledge the potential effects on the body and brain². Furthermore, some researches highlight that in 2015, around 0.4–3.4% of US adults, 1–2% British adults, and 5–10% of German adults were reported to eat largely plant-based diets³. These findings have led to an increased awareness that requires a better scientific understanding of how plant-based diets affect human health, particularly potentially relevant effects

¹ Mekonen, Haile 2019.

² Medawar et al. 2019.

³ Mensink et al. 2016.

on mental health and cognitive functions. The debates are controversial in this field, even if most authors have suggested that plant-based diets exert beneficial effects on health with regard to obesity-related metabolic dysfunction, type 2 diabetes mellitus and chronic low-grade inflammation⁴.

Muelrath and Barnard⁵ address the myth of the nutritional benefits of dairy. After decades of efforts on behalf of the milk industry to advertise their product as a great source of calcium, they uncovered the epidemiology around the world reveals that the countries accustomed to consuming the most dairy, calcium, and animal protein have the highest rates of osteoporotic bone fracture.

Other scholars have noted that vegan diets tend to be lower in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D, calcium, zinc, and the infamous B-12⁶. In contrast to Muelrath and Barnard, other studies⁷ assert that low calcium levels are of special concern to vegans and non-meat eaters, as this can lead to low bone mineral density and an increased risk of bone fracture. As Craig claims, soy consuming can effectively counterbalance calcium deficiencies by inhibiting bone resorption. Omega-3 fatty acids are important for eye, brain, and cardiovascular functioning, and low levels in vegans should be counteracted by consuming DHA fortified foods.

Other scholars include the vegan phenomenon in eating disorders, especially widespread in Western culture, which emphasizes individuality, efficiency, the cult of the lean body, unrealistic expectations of perfection, youth, and beauty⁸. The most important reason for including veganism in the category of the eating disorder is related to the condition in which people are so concerned about the food that they cannot focus on anything else⁹. These researches combine vegan lifestyle with body dysmorphic disorders given that some scholars highlight cases where a person of normal-weight, afraid of being fat, transforms this preoccupation into socio-political and ethical reasons¹⁰.

The way the scientific community and society view veganism is a critical context for interpreting individual lifestyle decisions. Thus, many scholars highlight the importance of having a comprehensive context of the healthiness of a vegan diet on a physical and biochemical level. DeBoer¹¹ offers an interesting insight into the correlation between Western dietary standards and understandings (or misunderstandings) about health. She states that the demand for meat has increased fivefold in the last century, from 45 to 229 billion kilograms. This is partly due to rising population levels, but also to the fact that developing countries have begun to mimic the Western trend of eating high amounts of animal protein. This tendency has historical implications because the use of animals for multiple purposes was a way to distinguish status (i.e., those who consume more animal products have a higher socio-political, socio-economic status). However, it also deepens the misunderstanding of the value of animal versus plant-based protein. DeBoer refers to a Dutch study on plant-based protein substitutes, which ultimately showed the large psychological distance between consumers and experts in their view of protein sources and the merits of plant-based proteins. This

⁴ Le, Sabaté 2014.

⁵ Muelrath and Barnard 2015.

⁶ Craig, 2009.

⁷ Mann 2014.

⁸ Novák, 2010.

⁹ Soukup, Dvořáková 2016.

¹⁰ Motta 2010.

¹¹ DeBoer 2011.

implies, as DeBoer acknowledges, that the simple demand to reduce meat-consumption will not find much understanding among consumers and may even be counterproductive.

Some other works have addressed questions of vegan identity. Muelrath and Barnard¹² mention that plant-based diets need to be a sort of grassroots movement, with goals that can become acknowledged from an individual level that permeates to families and communities afterward. This applies to the vegan identity in that it inherently requires individuals to associate themselves as vegans in order for the movement to be understood and applied on a wider scale. Moreover, Capaldi¹³ discussed how food identities are shaped and influenced by society (i.e. how people associate themselves with what they eat). She identified several studies that show food-related values that are passed down from parent to child are more effective and more enduring than taste preferences. Capaldi claims that the most common plant-based diets become in a family context, that meat-eating becomes more an issue of values and less of mere preference. As a consequence, societal attitudes concerning meat consumption, and presumably, the transmission of attitudes towards meat from parents to children, becomes more substantial. Thus, the values that parents equate with certain foods play a significant role in the way children respond to those foods.

Finally, Corey Fields has introduced an important connection between identity development and behavioral decisions. Although his work has focused on female knitting groups, his approach has revealed concepts applicable to understanding vegan identity formation. The author notes that identity theorists have long demonstrated that identity structures our behaviors as we move through the world and interact with culture. In identity theory, identities are the meanings that individuals associate with themselves. These meanings set the standard for behavior and have implications for meaning-making and action. When behaviors are consistent with the identity standard, there will be internal and external validation of identity. Negative feelings arise when individuals do not live up to identity standards.

In general, people become vegans for different reasons, such as religious beliefs¹⁴, health reasons¹⁵, lifestyle changes¹⁶ or to support the cause of animal welfare.

In contrast to previous studies, the present analysis, starting from the concept for which the vegan body is socially constructed, aims to explore the ideas of a lifestyle free of animal products and their embodied political significance using an ethnographic methodology. Through a sample of twelve interviews with Italian vegans, the analysis details the significance of viewing veganism through a cultural lens.

The approach used allows presenting veganism as a meaningful strategy to use personal values through action as a response to wider world issues to understand how these values are embodied by the interviewed vegans.

Therefore, in this dissertation, the implicit and explicit modification of the body and new vegan expressions are crucial to understanding how veganism is concretized in the Italian context.

¹² Muelrath and Barnard 2015.

¹³ Capaldi 1996.

¹⁴ Sabate 2004.

¹⁵ Craig 2010.

¹⁶ Agrawal et al. 2014.

2. Ethnographic research

Thanks to the lens on body changes through food choices, the interdisciplinary approach of the present study is useful from different points of view. For example, it allows to focus the attention on food-related ways of production and food choices reflecting the ways some people explore the meaning of the current exploitation of nature and, at the same time, try to propose alternative eco-sustainable options. Moreover, it shows how food practices can promote significant individual changes also in their daily relationship.

By analyzing the portrayal of vegans in the Italian context, this study pays attention to four fundamental aspects of vegan diets: 1) definitions of veganism (including rules and systems of eating); 2) reasons for becoming vegan (including beliefs, motivations, values, and influences of veganism); 3) vegan practices (including where vegans get their food, what they eat, and how they prepare it); 4) vegan sociability (including whom vegans eat with as well as the social impact and consequences of being vegan). These social practices have helped me during the ethnographic research to deeply interconnect cultural values and vegans' body change thanks to the embodiment of these social meanings.

This ethnographic research took place over a period of six months, between May and November 2019, with the permission of AssoVegan – Associazione Vegani Italiani Onlus¹⁷ which provided the interviewees from over Italy. AssoVegan is a non-profit organization composed of health professionals, activists, and educators who are dedicated to educating the public on veganism and the interrelated issues of health, nutrition, ecology, ethics, and world hunger by creating a vision of a happier, healthier, and cleaner world for all.

The interviews were conducted both personally and on Skype. All people were interviewed in-depth, each for 60-90 minutes. I did short interviews of 15-20 minutes each with some people, depending on their availability, to better focus on some of their cultural values. The semi-structured interviews were data recorded and transcribed to analyse the repeated themes that emerged to develop a theory able to highlight the awareness of vegan ideas among the participants. The interviews were conducted informally and based on dietary habits and the motivations that support their food choices. Furthermore, during the interviews, I paid attention to gender, age, education, and occupation, to verify if this research agrees with some literary productions which suppose that vegans and vegetarians tend to fall into similar demographic backgrounds¹⁸. Since I asked for personal motivations and dietary or health stories, working with a small number of respondents was the best way to apply ethnographic research methods to the process. Moreover, during the interviews I wanted to gain a deep comprehension of how veganism makes sense for the people I spoke to and, following an inductive process, I wanted to understand how their choices could be embodied by them and modify their body.

Some important questions that I asked them were:

- How do you describe veganism and what does it mean to you?
- How long you have been practicing veganism?
- What kind of diet are you transitioning from?
- What factors inspired you to become vegan?

¹⁷ <https://www.assovegan.it/>

¹⁸ Aguilar 2015.

- Are some factors more important than others? (i.e. Animal welfare, costs, nutrition, environment, etc.).
- What social relationships have affected your shifts? (i.e. Vegan “gurus”, social acceptance, family, spouse, friends, etc.).
- What kind of eating habits did you have growing up?
- Did you educate yourself on a certain aspect of veganism? If so, how?
- How did you formally make the transition (gradual, all at once)?
- What is your “strictness” of veganism? (i.e. gelatin, makeup, leather, wool, honey, etc.).
- What is the most significant part of being vegan?
- Are there any tangible differences in health?

This study used a constant comparative method¹⁹ to identify emerging patterns across transcripts, the books examined and a hermeneutical method to interpret the data²⁰ and to move between the findings and the relevant literature²¹.

From my interviews, I captured similarities and differences between participant’s responses, from which I was able to conceptualize their meaning and capture the essence of what was discussed. This required to put together values, objectives, and rationales among participants in a cohesive and detailed way.

Following other studies²², I was able to see that vegans highlighted the benefits of veganism for animals, the environment and human health. For the vegan participants, witnessing the suffering of animals and realizing the dominant dismissive attitudes towards their suffering are the major challenges of veganism. For overcoming the barriers to veganism, vegan participants declared that they had searched for information on various related topics, cultivated cognitive and emotional strategies, and joined vegan communities. To deeply understand this information, it was useful to compare these responses with results from other research that also focused on non-vegans, who were not considering going vegan, and on non-vegans who were considering going vegan²³. As Souza et al. assert, the first group of non-vegans often do not consider being vegan because they believe that veganism is or may be unhealthy or “unnatural”. In the same research, the scholars also state that the participant belonging to the second group were concerned about some negative impacts of meat-eating on animals and the environment. Moreover, Souza’s study shows that non-vegans, who were considering going vegan, generally adopted intermediate positions between the two previous groups. In contrast to them, individuals who identify themselves as non-vegans and environmentalists, experienced cognitive dissonance (a specific type of psychological discomfort) when exposed to information about the environmental impact of the meat, dairy and egg industries. Therefore, the dissonance could have been a driver for the construction of beliefs by some participants, such as the belief that veganism was perceived as unnatural and harmful to human health and the environment. Povey²⁴ reaches the same conclusions as Souza et al., examining attitudes towards meat-eating,

¹⁹ Glaser and Strauss 1967.

²⁰ Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson 1997; Arnould and Thompson 2005.

²¹ Spiggle 1994.

²² Souza et a. 2020, p. 3.

²³ Ivi. p. 4.

²⁴ Povey 2001.

vegetarian, and vegan diets of 111 individuals in the United Kingdom, including 25 meat-eaters, 26 meat-avoiders, 34 vegetarians, and 26 vegans. Some of his most interesting results include the fact that only meat-eaters thought that eating meat was good, and that vegan diets were considered restrictive by those who follow other dietary practices. The scholar suggests that individuals should reaffirm their own dietary choices.

3. Body modification and Veganism: embodied knowledge of green consumption

Body modifications refer to any form of change in a person's natural physical appearance or anatomy. This can be achieved through piercing, surgery, exercise, makeovers, tattooing but also through dietary choices.

According to the "embodiment paradigm", the present analysis is founded on the premise that bodily experiences are fundamental to how we make sense of the world, and how meaning is created. All knowledge starts in the somatic relations with the world around us²⁵.

According to Johnson, understanding is pre-linguistic, rooted in the patterns of our bodily activity²⁶. Meaning materializes in the realm of practical action as we engage in embodied creative dialogue with the world and with others around us. The structure of the body gives shape to what Johnson calls corporeal logic, which influences both the ways we perceive and the meaning we find in the world: «Reason does not drop down from above like a transcendent dove; rather, it emerges from the corporeal logic and inference structure of our bodily, sensorimotor experience»²⁷. Our bodies are not static, knowledge is transitive, and it is made up of our embodied engagement with material and social worlds. For "Embodiment" the French socio-anthropologist David Le Breton²⁸ suggests that the body is dislocated from the condition of the object to a cultural subject. He understands it as an existential territory. This idea is in agreement with Ortega, who adds: "The body becomes a creative space and a Utopia, a virgin continent to be conquered"²⁹. Therefore, the body becomes the object of intense semiotic scrutiny in the definition of personal identities and the circulation of social values³⁰.

Many authors highlight many possible of body modifications. These modifications range from simpler practices such as hair straightening and curling, to radical forms of body modification, such as body mutilation and plastic surgery, passing, of course, through body art (tattoos and piercing) and bodybuilding³¹.

Despite the many types of body modifications, as a result of the exploratory nature of the present research, I have focused my attention on the vegan issues able to modify the body of vegan people.

²⁵ Lakoff and M. Johnson 1999.

²⁶ M. Johnson 1999.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 86.

²⁸ David Le Breton 2013.

²⁹ Ortega, 2008, p. 13.

³⁰ Turner 1995.

³¹ Silva, 2011; Le Breton, 2009 e 2014; Featherstone, 2005.

Veganism is commonly explained as an individual and collective enterprise that aims to eliminate, as far as possible, all forms of animal exploitation. It involves, amongst other practices, the adoption of a diet free of meat, dairy products, eggs, and any other animal-derived product. In recent years, the vegan movement and diet have become increasingly popular. The extent to which individuals, institutions and groups all over the world adhere to veganism has crucial consequences for animals and the environment³².

Veganism differs from vegetarianism in that while vegetarianism advocates abstinence from consuming meat; it does not take a stance against the consumption of other animal products such as dairy products, egg, honey, silk, wool, leather, and the like. Preece states that «veganism starts with vegetarianism and carries it through to its logical conclusion»³³. Veganism is regarded as the most mature and post-conventional ethical stage that aims at extending the notion of social justice to non-human animals.³⁴

To deeply understand the embodiment of vegan ideals among the Italian vegans interviewed, I considered the human body as the essential instrument through which they personalize their desire to protect animals and the environment and to improve human health. In general, the area of body modification includes all bodily alterations that help to change the natural state of the human body into a body desired by the culture where one lives³⁵. In agreement with Soukup and Dvořáková, I observed, while discussing with the vegan interviewees, a particular way of disciplining their bodies to satisfy personal needs, specific treatment of the body in institutions, emotional management, and various types of activities that lead them to respond to certain issues through dietary choices.

To systematize the information collected among the interviewed vegans, the present study analyzes their journey through body change in six main narratives that include:

- narrative of the social circle;
- narrative of geography;
- narrative of education and self-education;
- narrative of health;
- narrative of ethics;
- narrative of the environment.

These narratives depict the shared behaviors, ideologies, justification, and influences behind veganism. The repetition of particular themes, emerged as symbolic vehicles of meaning during the interviews, show that each narrative is meant to interweave the stories of the interviewees with their experience of body changes. Therefore, in the present ethnography research, body modifications may mean a way for people to reposition themselves within a social connection and an affinity with a lifestyle free from the consumption of animal products.

- Narrative of the social circle.

One of the most important reference points for vegan people interviewed is the AssoVegan Association. Most people here can be engaged in daily activism and find in this virtual place forms

³² Souza et a. 2020.

³³ Preece 2008, p. 298.

³⁴ Singer 2009.

³⁵ Soukup, Dvořáková 2016

of education sharing conversation, lectures and books, blogs or articles. The online community is very supportive of the creation of a larger Italian vegan virtual group where people can experience a feeling of belonging, as well as support often through kind comments and welcoming conversations. In many of these cases, participants mentioned that these supportive people thought veganism was healthy thanks to the free animal diet.

But, to increase the values of veganism, the interviews highlight the importance of a direct relationship between vegan people. Surrounding themselves with supportive friends was imperative for the people interviewed to find the values and deeper significance of veganism. The social interactions between vegans reinforce inclusion and a sense of community. For older interviewees, friendships developed another sort of meaning, too: «Our friends support us in our veganism not necessarily because they are vegan, but because they wanted to preserve us, in terms of our health and our age» (Interview to Mario, Desenzano, 25th May 2019).

Two interviewees also mentioned the role of religion (Buddhism) and how this has affected their veganism. One person interviewed the religion: «Is very much in tune with veganism. All sentient beings suffer in an interrelated network. To cause no harm is one of the principles of Buddhism» (Interview to Matteo, Cernobbio, 12th September 2019). While the interviewee did not grow up in a Buddhist family but rather practices Buddhism as a parent in his own family, veganism is a way to reinforce and cement one's beliefs.

In some cases, respondents emphasized the role of the family as a significant, intimate, and trustworthy social setting where vegans can share their habits and values. In particular, for three young interviewees (aged between 22 and 29), there was a connection between family and the adaptation and the transition to veganism on two main levels: the influence of their parents and the lifestyle of their families, and the influence of being a parent and raising children. Each of these levels has its intricacies that express the elaborate relationship between the social environment of the family and veganism. In particular, the youngest girl interviewed (22 years old) had supportive parents and beneficial familial lifestyles that favoured their path towards veganism. She explained that:

«Her mom has been vegetarian since she was at university, and about five years ago she went vegan. I never grew up in the kind of family where you eat meat at every meal. And it was always just 'clean' meat that my mom would prepare, like chicken and turkey. As a child, I rarely ate red meat, maybe sometimes at my grandma's or when I had an occasional burger at a barbeque» (Interview to Cecilia, Treviso, 24th May 2019).

Having eaten mostly vegetarian meals as a child, and a mother who went vegan before the interviewee, played a role in this interviewee's decision-making process, because plant-based foods were habitual, normalized in her home life. For others, spousal support: «Is imperative to becoming vegan in a family setting, like having a husband who cooks vegan dinners every night» (Interview to Monica, Milano, 1st June 2019). Many interviewees expressed the importance of the example of a vegan spouse, which acts as a control system («If they're eating this way, I should eat this way» - Interview to Cecilia, Treviso, 24th May 2019) and as a source of inspiration: «My husband has never made a specific verbal commitment [*to veganism*], but I'm watching him slowly change. He used to buy yogurt, but recently he came back with coconut yogurt instead. And I didn't tell him to» (Interview to Monica, Milano, 1st June 2019). But, overall, the most beneficial aspect of the familial social setting is simply that of encouragement, regardless of whether or not any other family member is a vegan. Family Support recognizes and affirms the individual's decision to become vegan, a

mechanism a mechanism for raising trust and continuing to practice veganism. It also encourages conversation:

«My closest relatives, so my mom, step-dad, and brothers, have for the most part accepted. They made jokes every once in a while, but they were never mean. We would have conversations about it. They feel like they need to eat meat for iron etc. And I reassure them that I can get my iron from beans. So, we have these conversations, and they're not antagonistic, but as the years go by, they're more interested, or they've incorporated things I make when I'm at home» (Interview to Claudia, Roma, 21st August 2019).

In this sense, a home environment that encourages open dialogue and personal choice is beneficial to veganism.

Thus, the influence of becoming a parent – raising children and expanding a familial network outside of what you grew up with – is a fascinating nuance in the vegan experience. Two interviewees, as vegan parents, wondered whether or not to raise their children in a vegan way. Both concluded that the decision to become vegan should be their child's, although presenting their children with vegan the rhetoric and ingredients to make vegan meals is a natural response. The two parents interviewed sometimes give their children eggs and salmon when they craved them or lacked proteins. In particular, one interviewee stated:

«When you raise very young children, you're exhausted. You try to maximize your energy. And you don't want to deprive your kids. So, I'm always facing choices: Am I going to feed my kids dairy and meat or not? I know some parents that don't want their kids to be plant-based. For that reason, the parents let it go» (Interview to Paolo, Torino, 2nd September 2019).

Therefore, there is a level of flexibility required when considering the diets of children to foster an environment where they can make their own informed choices. This is easier for some parents rather than others. For relatively young children, the complexity of choosing a vegan diet is not as prevalent as when it comes to interacting with non-vegans or to being able to cook their meals. For other families with teenagers, veganism can be typified as an imposition: «I'm trying to move my family more towards a vegan diet and it's hard. It got to the point where I realized that even using that word was a mistake. Don't classify the meal. Talk about what's delicious in it and leave it to the meal as is» (Interview to Lorenzo, Padova, 4th November 2019). So, balancing the desires as a parent about what to cook for the family with the reality of raising children is not an effortless process. The choice to become a vegan is strengthened by personal conviction, which is helped by the food and information that parents can provide but solidifies with the individual choice. Nevertheless, all interviewees expressed the importance of putting the health of their children first, something, which required a deeper understanding of the healthiness of a vegan diet. This sometimes makes it difficult for vegan parents, especially parents of young children, to deal with the medical community.

Other people interviewed had vegan friends who had stimulated their decision to try veganism for themselves. These friendships set an example of how and why to become vegan and were helpful because:

«Having vegan friends around was motivating. I think for me, ultimately, it was seeing the example of some of my friends, seeing how they had adapted so well, and talking to them about what

they had got out of it, and challenging myself to get out of the routine of my diet at the moment. I have a good friend who runs a vegan blog and I cook the food that she has advertised. And we would go to the vegan restaurants together during conferences. I lost the excuse of not being more plant-based» (Interview to Davide, Brescia, 25th October 2019).

Having someone to converse with, or simply to try new foods with, is encouraging. Furthermore, this reflects the value of having a close friend to work through the nuances of plant-based diets and how to guide a transition. Again, having someone to consult with is crucial:

«My friend is my role model on all of this: he had high cholesterol, which was the proximal cause of his becoming vegan, and of course veganism solved that. I saw his capacity to take control of his diet as something I could do... and I watched him and his fitness change. He lost 30 kg, and that was reassuring (Interview to Emanuela, Reggio Emilia, 15th July 2019).

What these interviews highlight is the importance of seeing the people, that you perceive as related to a certain social or collective level, making certain choices and actions that can be replicated. The changes become more attainable when someone, who admires them or identifies with them, can make the same choices or perform the same actions, too.

Thus, the social narrative during the interviews has illuminated several important subthemes for becoming vegan: identification with certain groups, religion, perceptions of veganism and justifications for the diet, how parents guide their children towards veganism and navigate through the difficulties of making food choices for or with them, how children can impact their parents through moral inquiry, and how friendships can inform and support individuals who attempt veganism. Each of these aspects emphasizes the value of connecting with others with whom one feels comfortable and comparable, to help adaptation and transition to veganism.

- Narrative of geography.

The geographical narrative can be described as how the physical location, where one has lived and currently lives, influences the adaptation to veganism. This was an important narrative for many interviewees, who addressed the role of places through the lens of accessibility and influence of local food options (e.g., the presence of grocery stores, restaurants that support and have plant-based options on their menus, etc.). Having relatively easy access to grocery stores and restaurants, vegans can feel their lifestyle choice more possible. In Italy, there are many grocery stores as well as restaurants that support vegan preferences. Nevertheless, geography can work for or against one's ability to be a vegan because not everyone has the same ability to find or afford fresh ingredients. Food deserts, or areas in which access to nutritious food is not available, are common in smaller Italian cities:

«If you live in a place with few grocery stores, and not enough produce, that's hard. So, where you are geographically localized, that's a barrier. [...] My friend lives in a small village in Val Camonica, and it is very difficult for him to find the products he needs. Furthermore, if you're in a place where it's harder to get these things, then they will cost you more» (Interview to Monica, Milano, 1st June 2019).

The other expressed veganism is becoming easier because of shifts in economic trends. Many restaurants, as well as grocery stores, have become conscious of the rise in veganism and have specialized in animal-free products. As the vegan woman interviewed above points out, these possibilities have started to be common in the biggest and tourist Italian cities, such as Rome, Milan, Venice, Florence, etc. or near them. Nevertheless, going out to eat is a big barrier for many of the younger, sometimes single vegans interviewed, for whom going out to dinner and trying new restaurants is an important part of their social life. Some interviewees described going out to eat: «As something not enjoyable» especially for those who are: «concerned about dietary strictness. I get stressed going to a random restaurant or a place I've never been before, because it's embarrassing to go to restaurants and change the ingredients on the menu in front of people» (Interview to Cecilia, Treviso, 24th May 2019). Vegans who are new to the lifestyle tend to feel uncomfortable changing menu items in this way, afraid of the way their friends or meal counterparts will see them. Trying new restaurants can be frustrating if they haven't had time to review the menu, or the restaurant is unwilling to make changes. Because of this, some other respondents recognized that the only time they had not been vegan, before formally making the transition, was when they had gone out to eat at restaurants.

In this category, I also include some barriers that made veganism a challenge for the interviewees. I chose to include these difficulties for respondents because I consider them as concrete factors able to influence their ability to act and real factors that had to be overcome as part of the process of becoming vegan and maintaining the lifestyle. These include going out to eat, cooking at home, traveling that polarize the vegan community from the non-vegan community.

Most interviewees stressed the importance of knowing where and how to cook. Indeed, for those who did not know where to cook, they also said they had difficulty in knowing how to prepare food in the best possible way. As asserted by interviewees, vegan cooking requires creativity for food to taste good and be presentable and requires knowledge for meals to be nutritionally complete. As a vegan woman affirmed: «Being a vegan is a huge job» (Interview to Monica, Milano, 1st June 2019). For other interviewees, cooking was a challenge confounded by having non-vegan family members, such as children, as it appeared to be an action not belonging to the usual family context. In addition, family members may have different palates and preferences, and attractiveness for everyone at mealtimes is a challenge for non-vegans. To convince some relatives, an interviewee asserted:

«I need to have more infrastructure where I not only talk about why it's important but show people how to do it. The place where I buy and cook food is very important to me. (...) Confidence and knowledge of vegan cooking are fundamental» (Interview to Federica, Parma, 21st May 2019).

Nevertheless, cooking is a place and time-consuming, for both vegan individuals and vegan families. This represented a barrier for some interviewees because: «We live in a culture where you think 'fast, fast, fast.' But you have to cook. You have to spend time in the kitchen. And you need to have a refrigerator with food that will go badly if you don't cook it» (Interview to Federica, Parma, 21st May 2019).

Furthermore, travel has been an obstacle for interviewees who have conducted field research and whose professions lead them outside their county. For example, one interviewee conducted research in India and Greece, which required a yearly field trip. Although India is largely vegetarian: «they cook in clarified butter, so it's really hard to avoid ghee and yogurt. (...) Moreover, in Greece was difficult as well, given that seafood is their culture» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019).

- Narrative of education and self-education.

I consider educational narrative as the way in which one has had access to resources, the effort to actively seek information and participation in an environment able to influence the adaptation to veganism.

For two interviewees the period of the university was crucial to inform their decisions. Given that all the interviewees have completed or are in the process of completing (at least) a bachelor's degree at university, this narrative could probably be pertinent by further reflecting the significance of higher education for veganism. University was depicted as influential for two interviewees for several reasons such as by moving away of the home, community development, the period of their education, and what they chose to study.

For those interviewed who described the importance of their living situation, this transition meant moving from a home with their parents. This was particularly important for topic because it meant loosening the grip on their family's eating habits: «As soon as I got to university and my mom didn't cook for me, I stopped having meat at all» (Interview to Claudia, Roma, 21st August 2019). This feeling was reiterated by the other interviewee: «when I was able to make these decisions, to work out, to eat better, to research nutrition and the benefits of veganism, I wasn't at home. So, I didn't have to involve my parents, who are both sometimes unhealthy» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019). So, for those who feel unable or restricted by the dietary practices ingrained in their home life, the transition period of the university can open the door for independent choices.

One interviewee who fell in older age group (60+) discussed the relevancy of the timing of their international undergraduate education and how it has aligned with the early rights movements and periods of intense activism in their generation:

«I got to university (in the 1970s) thinking I can't kill animals. So, I definitely shouldn't eat them if I can't kill them. So, this was strictly on ethical grounds. A lot of these considerations were going on. The '70s seemed like a time of new thoughts, and people were considering new things, new values. Those values are still in the foreground today – especially veganism, because even 10, 15 years ago we didn't understand what it was at all. I went to study engineering in Paris and students back then really believed they could change the world. What were peripheral issues during the 1970s - Civil rights, the environment, and feminism - became core values in many countries. Maybe, for those reasons, I started to be interested in animal rights when I got to university, and I remember there was a group of students on campus about an animal right. After some years, I started reading about how cheese and other animal by-products were produced» (Sergio, Ancona, 13th November 2019).

As the interviewed vegan person asserted, sometimes universities can support and host groups of students, which means that they can unite individuals of the same age with the same interests.

One interviewee expressed the value of studying science in a high level context to inform a transition to veganism: «I received my training on veganism through university courses and my work, and as a biologist I felt more exposed to it than the average citizen» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019). The pursuit of a science degree is valuable because it can introduce individuals to reliable, research-based data. Nonetheless, this should not trivialize the importance of pursuing other degrees and learning about vegan ideals in other ways: «I have read a lot for my philosophy work on animal rights, and I realized that the consumption of dairy products and eggs involves as much violence as the consumption of meat» (Interview to Monica, Milano, 1st June 2019). Therefore, the values,

rationality and goals of veganism are interdisciplinary, making possible its exposure to them possible through diverse approaches.

Moreover, a significant number of interviewees have pursued training as a profession becoming professors. Because of this, each of these interviews included a discussion about the “platform” of being a professor – what it means to be in an educational position as a vegan, and how, if anything, they combine their scholarship and life choices:

«I studied biology at university. So, I’m aware of food production practices, how this affects the environment and access to food, how we are using our resources to feed people, and how we might reconsider them. Even if I wasn’t vegan but, in a field, also scientifically related to environment. After a few years, I built my job on this knowledge, and now I’m a dietary consultant» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019).

Another interesting point of discussion for this kind of narration is the way to self-education. The latter is well represented by the following sentence asserted by a person interviewed: «Sometimes, even when you deprive the body of things, it is to get in deeper contact with the self. We lose something that enriches the self or others. It is the body that speaks to the world» (Interview to Francesco, Verona, May 2nd, 2019). The practice just explained associate vegan habits with a sort of spiritual practice of food taboo. There are many examples in anthropological literature of dietary norm which can govern particular phases of the human life cycle and can be associated with special events such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and – in traditional societies – preparation for hunting, battle, marriage, funeral, etc. On the other hand, food taboos have a long history and one ought to expect a sound explanation for the existence (and persistence) of certain dietary customs in a given culture. However, this is a much-debated view and no theory may explain why people use special food taboos. Even if most research focuses on “exotic” contexts where food taboos are applied to determinant circumstances, it has rarely been addressed to study taboos of green consumption food as well as vegan food taboos.

- Narrative of health.

The health narrative can be described as the way in which the tangible and deeper understanding of the relationship between food and health influences adaptation to veganism. For some interviewees, a question related to their own or their family’s health was the catalyst for attempting veganism. A variation on this theme was the way respondents dealt with genetic predispositions, from family or personal history with diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, lactose intolerance and obesity. An interviewee discussed:

«There’s a history of diabetes on Dad’s side of the family, and Dad himself is in the early stages of pre-diabetic. I know red meat is a driver of that. Also, high cholesterol and high blood pressure run in my family. I do not want to put myself in a situation where any of that would be an issue» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019).

For many interviewees who prioritized health in their adaptation and transition to veganism, the physical responses their bodies received were important for the recognition of the power of food, and the way they engaged in lifestyle. As one interviewee suggests:

«The reason I changed was because of my health. And I've seen things improve. The drugs I was taking I no longer had to be taken. It got worse before it got better, because it was a detoxification process. But just by eating differently, your body feels different. I decided to keep doing it, which made my life better, instead of having to take medication» (Interview to Emanuela, Reggio Emilia, 15th July 2019).

She concluded by mentioning: «I'd rather pay a higher price in food than in medicine». This particular interviewee opened up about her history of blood clotting; she had two blood clots in her legs in 2012:

«So I got genetic tests done, which revealed I have a genetic mutation that makes me clot. I decided to seek medical advice, but after following their recommendations and taking their medications for a year, it didn't seem to me that my health was improving. Two weeks after I changed my diet the swelling went down immediately» (Interview to Emanuela, Reggio Emilia, 15th July 2019).

These physical reactions were reiterated in other interviews. An older interviewee affirmed:

«What helped me stay with veganism initially was the blood test. I did the blood test before I started and pretty shortly after. My blood chemistry changed so dramatically in three weeks, that was all the incentive I needed to stick with it. There it was, in black and white. Because other things are harder to assess. This was very demonstrable, something that can be measured» (Interview to Davide, Brescia, 25th October 2019).

During the interviews, several other important physical answers were raised to become vegans. Nonetheless, weight loss was never discussed as the sole motivation for becoming vegan. Other health responses included increased energy and a renewed ability to exercise, migraine loss, and a normalized menstrual cycle three months after becoming vegan.

An important aspect of the health story for older interviewees was ageing. One interviewee had: «A desire to age as healthy as possible in healthy conditions, which involved deciding that animal products were not good for you» (Interview to Mario Desenzano, 25th May 2019). The interviewee continued to assert that:

«I think typically young people do it for ethical reasons when they realize that they need to stop participating in this behavior. Whereas people that are my age come to it for more selfish reasons, such as personal health. We start thinking about mortality. We recognize our really bad family history of heart disease. So, I guess we all eventually end up having the same values» (Interview to Mario Desenzano, 25th May 2019).

The interviewee reiterated the value in taking into account one's own health, such as questioning one's life span and what it means for one's immediate social circle. Nonetheless, the vegans interviewed were able to recognize the multitude of lifestyle benefits. For example, if one's intentions were for health, one could recognize its significance for animal ethics. If one's intentions were for animal ethics, one could recognize its significance for health.

Many interviewees appreciated and stressed the importance of health awareness when practicing veganism because it requires careful decision-making and conscious choice.

Veganism slows down the entire process of eating by requiring an understanding of the ingredients of something before consuming it. For some interviewees, this recognition allowed them to reflect on their previous eating habits: «You see the exchange of food as something completely utilitarian. Food in and food out. You stop thinking about it. Now I think about eating more as if food was the energy of an engine. It's a much more practical way of looking at food» (Interview to Emanuela, Reggio Emilia, 15th July 2019). The experience of eating becomes more enjoyable and comprehensible by looking at food in this light. Moreover, for this interviewee the pleasure of eating differed between a non-vegan and a vegan diet: where the previous one concerned indulgence, the latter transformed eating into an experience that required the application of knowledge.

This consciousness has allowed vegans to understand what foods make them feel better:

«I feel so much better physically, it's hard to explain. I just feel this lightness. I have a heightened sensitivity to junk, to anything that is fried or heavy, even if it is vegan. I'm more aware of how my body reacts to food now, and it's much easier for me, even when I have a casual craving for candy or sweets, it's easier for me to not eat them because I know plant-based whole foods make my body feel better» (Interview to Emanuela, Reggio Emilia, 15th July 2019).

The recognition of how one's body reacts physically to the foods you put into it is therefore an important source of motivation for vegans. For some interviewees, this made the understanding of certain bodily reactions understandable and addressable. For example:

«When I craved protein, I ate beans. I remembered to put them in almost every meal...And at some point, I realized that B12 would make me lethargic. So, I now take B12 pills once or twice a week. And since there aren't many vegan sweets, my sugar consumption has dropped considerably» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019).

Food-awareness lead to body-awareness, and being vegans, many interviewees were able to better assess what their body needs and why. As one interviewee stated: «I am more conscious about how much I eat. I tend to eat less and enjoy it more now» (Interview to Mario Desenzano, 25th May 2019).

Lastly, with the awareness of the benefits of vegan foods came the awareness of the detriments of non-vegan foods. For one interviewee, this meant processing his thoughts on dairy products:

«It's mostly about health, but also about how disgusting it sounds. We are the only species on the planet that consumes milk from another species. Would it be socially acceptable if we drank rat milk or cat milk? Or even other human beings'» (Interview to Davide, Brescia, 25th October 2019).

A more robust discussion about the interviewees' responses and feelings towards non-vegan food production can be found in the discussion of ethical narratives.

- Narrative of ethics.

Vegan people could be inserted in the largest community of animal liberators and advocates of deep ecology who are concerned about different units – whole species, or habitats, or individual animals, and sometimes come into conflict (Garner 2015; Nelson et al. 2016). Compassionate morality can be linked, in the words of vegan people interviewed, to ecological justice which refers to solidarity between species and frames several concerns such as the situations of animals used in

the medical and food production industries. The ethical narrative is perhaps the most related to veganism. Ethical concerns are important for many vegans because they emphasize altruism and awareness in everyday behavior. How or why individuals can value altruism, and how or why individuals can be empathetic to others, is somewhat inexplicable to the vegans interviewed. As one interviewee felt: «It's not just the arguments in favor of ethics, it's something about affection or emotion that is the glue that binds us to those insights. And that's the deep mystery of ethics» (Interview to Francesco, Verona, May 2nd, 2019). There is something more in the ethical narrative than the simple recognition that mistreating others is wrong. The moral considerations of the animal agriculture industry can precipitate strong and often overwhelming emotions for vegans. These emotions are what commit them to the cause.

Concern for animal welfare was the most notable value during these conversations, something that tended to incite major grief, especially with regard to the lack of empathy on the part of the non-vegans, and the living conditions, the treatment, and the ultimate demise of the animal. There were personal experiences and general awareness of the realities of the industry that triggered these emotions for the vegans I interviewed. For one vegan, this was described by a family trip to a farm decades ago:

«It left an impression when I saw a cow that was slaughtered when I was about 8 or 9 years old. My brother and I were looking for rabbits on this farm, and we came across the slaughter area. It was right there, out in the open. Anybody could see it. And we were just in total shock» (Interview to Cecilia, Treviso, 24th May 2019).

Having a visual association, as heartbreaking as it may be, was influential. Because, as another interviewee reiterates: «If you see animals being killed in front of you and then say here's your dinner, you're much more likely to give it up. It's so easy to disconnect what you buy at the supermarket with what's on your plate» (Interview to Paolo, Torino, 2nd September 2019).

However, not all interviewees had a direct experience with the death of an animal that generated feelings of affliction. For one, they claimed:

«My veganism was triggered by seeing a pig stick its head out of a tiny opening in a large pigsty. And pigs are like dogs. I began to imagine the specific experiences of organisms. How they have the same intelligence, the same connections to other organisms, and specific personalities. I no longer saw how it was possible to eat them» (Interview to Matteo, Cernobbio, 12th September 2019).

A consciousness, an applied effort to understand the reality of factory farming, has been instrumental in influencing ethical decision making. Another interviewee mentioned: «I'm truly not interested in eating animals, and factory farming is wrong, and I really can't understand how we have convinced ourselves, as a nation, that we can sustain ourselves on a system that is horrifically cruel to animals» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019). It is important to recognize that many people can dissociate the treatment and life of an animal from the food on their plate. Something that probably stems from the fact that the mechanical food industry is deliberately obscured.

Furthermore, a deeper understanding and recognition of animal welfare is what can distinguish ethical vegans from vegetarians. The horrors of the dairy industry are, for many, just as real and as distressing as the horrors of the meat industry. As one interviewee mentioned:

«I don't want any animals to be killed, but the most important thing to me is not to support industrial egg and dairy operations. The hens are trapped in tiny little cages, the fact that 'free-range' means the chickens have a three-square foot opening at one end of the building, the cow racks...it's just a horrific life they lead» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019).

Other interviewees described feeling very upset at the thought of that male chicks are slaughtered immediately after birth because of their uselessness in the egg industry. Notably, only female hens and cows are exploited in the egg and dairy industry, because eggs are the result of an ovulation cycle, and milk (and its byproducts) are the result of forced insemination pregnancy. For vegans that identify as feminists, as one interviewee expressed, this is a further rationale for their choices. The lives of male animals are similarly short: chickens for meat are killed after five to seven weeks, and beef cattle are killed after eighteen months. There are other important ethical considerations that vegans can value: like addressing speciesism, a "hierarchy of being," and animal intelligence. These are issues that have similarly engendered emotional response and feelings of distress in the interviewees. As far as animal intelligence is concerned, one interviewee argued poignantly:

«People are invested with the idea that animals are stupid, and that they don't know what is happening to them...Because of this falsehood, we are more ignorant than insightful about what animals want and need. We say, "animals don't know what's happening to them" because it makes them feel more comfortable to use them» (Interview to Matteo, Cernobbio, 12th September 2019).

Has highlighted by the interviewee, by belittling the intelligence of animals, people can justify their reasons to kill them, as if intelligence or sentience determined the value of life. I found this idea pivotal and moving. respondents seemed to see a very thin boundary between practicing violence against animals in everyday life and practicing violence against other human beings. Many people interviewed, influenced by ethical reasons, strongly value principles of non-violence and altruism in their own lives. One interviewee mentioned:

«I try to live a non-violent lifestyle as much as I can. I see my veganism linked to into this broader philosophy. So, it started by thinking about what it meant to harm animals, by not eating meat first, and then eliminating animal byproducts » (Interview to Matteo, Cernobbio, 12th September 2019).

In this way, incorporating veganism into one's ordinary life is a way to practice the values of non-violence. In general, these values permeate every aspect of the personality and behavior of the people interviewed who have addressed this notion as "moral blindness," because the treatment of animals is deliberately concealed by industry. For many vegans, the mistreatment of animals, the violence inflicted on them, and the moral blindness of much of society result in feelings of pessimism.

- Narrative of the environmental issues.

In general, people are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental impact of their food choices. In particular, the environmental effect of factory farming is now well acknowledged. The

production of meat is associated with widespread degradation of forests due to livestock grazing of livestock³⁶ and produces a substantial carbon footprint³⁷.

The perspectives of animal rights' and ecological concern share a unifying element of non-anthropocentric ethics and concern for individual animals, species, or entire habitats. All the vegans interviewed share concerns about the entire ecosystem. One interviewee was also particularly passionate about overfishing and marine health, given that the impact and ethics of consuming seafood are not considered nearly as much as the impact and ethics of consuming terrestrial animals. This interviewee said:

«My degree is in marine studies, so I know a fair amount about this kind of stuff, overfishing and its policies, but most people don't think much about marine life. It's because you can't see it every day. If wild animal species disappeared at the rate of marine animals, we would notice it, and we would care, whereas what's underwater doesn't affect us in the same way» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019).

This interviewee went on to discuss the dissonance between ethics for terrestrial and marine animals by using the octopus as an example: «The other thing I can't really manage is the octopus, because they are really smart, too...like pigs» (Filippo, Napoli, 29th October 2019). The species is known, among other mental capabilities, for the use of tools in foraging.³⁸

Therefore, the care and understanding for the intelligence of species in all habitats are especially incentivizing when paired with an awareness of broad environmental impacts, like overfishing. Nonetheless, while a few interviewees noted the significance of veganism as it relates to environmental issues (i.e. the meat production process requires a great deal of water), its relevance for adaptation to veganism was not as prevalent as the in other narratives. This does not mean that the environmental narrative is less significant. As the literature review suggests³⁹, veganism is an especially useful mechanism to combat climate change, but one that will, perhaps, take on greater significance over time. As climate change scenarios become more common and severe, veganism can continue to emerge as a strategy to address it.

4. Green consumption related to free-animal products: an understanding through body modifications. Inputs for the next analysis.

Body modification is a good buffer in the comprehension of veganism and, in general, of green consumption. Like every human practice, veganism as well as different kinds of consumption philosophies, can be visualized through the body. Therefore, this latter can be thought as an identity instrument able to connect cultural values and habits to consumption. Body images can reflect, in Western society, the experimental changes of the person through which he or she aims to explore the aesthetic possibilities to present themselves to the worlds. Every person, through the body, aims to highlight particularities able to differentiate themselves from the others.

³⁶ Pimentel, Pimentel 2003.

³⁷ Baroni et al. 2007.

³⁸ Mann, 2013.

³⁹ Gerbens-Leenes, Mekonnen, Hoekstra 2016.

One of the most contemporary social issues is the concern for environmental pollution as well as animal safety. Climate change concerns have also prompted new forms of green consumption in which vegan people can usually be included. In this way, veganism, environmental safeguard, and consumption can be blended to better understand how people, through body modification, aim to communicate their ideas about the strong current debate such as environmental degradation.

Environmental degradation is also hitting the headlines lately. News articles and documentaries around rising seas, declining air quality and declining animal populations are more common than ever. In this context, companies in different sectors are adopting strategies to provide more attractive offers to present green values through their products or brands, increasing the sustainability agenda.

Environmental concerns have had a great influence on the marketing strategies of leading firms in several industries around the globe, including oil and gas, automobile, aviation, utilities, fast-moving consumer goods, cosmetics, personal care, nutrition and health. Green strategies are not only limited to the supply of green products but are widespread at all stages of the supply chain, right from procurement of environmentally safer raw materials to the safe disposal of used products and packaging⁴⁰.

Even if the authors in the 90s were initially inclined to inculcate the general marketing concept with an emphasis on ecological aspects such as energy saving, waste minimization, natural environment, reuse of resources, recycling, etc., and moved to focus on customer needs including the 4Ps of marketing namely product, price, promotion, and place⁴¹. After the year 2000, various strategic changes in firms and industries have gained momentum in the domain of green marketing covering the areas on new product development, product modifications and changes in the production process. According to the following points of view, green marketing should not only be implemented by companies, but is a collective activity where all intermediaries have opportunities to contribute to sustainability. In these situations, sustainable food consumption covers one of the most important aspects of green marketing development. In these circumstances, the consumer is the focal point of green marketing as the acceptance of green products depends more on his or her choice. He or she is the one who desires to reduce his or her environmental footprint through sustainable consumption⁴² the marketers' efforts are focused on meeting his or her needs⁴³.

Nevertheless, being subjects that interpret the world, people always respond to these drives in a cultural and local ways, also leaving a possible margin of errors for companies as well as marketers. Therefore, the anthropological lens can be useful to analyse the ever-changing socio-cultural responses of people. Furthermore, anthropological interpretation can also help to understand the process of reconnecting community to the socio-cultural importance of food. Moreover, such processes may also offer pathways to develop a deep engagement and long-term commitment to sustainable living practices based on the development of new forms of environmental or ecological citizenship.

Vegan consumerism can be part of this complex set of arguments. Veganism can be considered an overarching system of meanings for people working as a catalyst to make visible, in a pragmatic way, the connections among various stances revolving around ethics, environmental sustainability,

⁴⁰ Jones et al. 2008; Seuring, Muller 2008; Chan et al. 2012.

⁴¹ Kangis 1992; Pride and Ferrell 1993; Harrison 1993; Reinhardt 1998; Fuller 1999.

⁴² Laroche et al., 2001.

⁴³ Polonsky 1994; Prakash 2002.

consumption and well-being embedded in overarching ideological discourse and identity politics, including through body changes. Veganism is considered the core philosophy and fertile ground from which the boundaries of social justice extend to include, through such connections, all stakeholders of life such as non-human animals, human animals, and the natural environment.

The ethnographic research has shown that vegan people espouse many core characteristics and qualities of consumer resistance and make ideological and political statements both personally and collectively.

A powerful characteristic perceived during the interviews with vegan people is that the values of veganism are embodied through empathic experiences of others living beings with visceral depth. Of course, this has happened on different scales. Robert Hay (2005) can help to understand this processes, which indicates the many ways in which we fail to care for ourselves or our environments in contemporary Western society, pointing out that empathic understanding is the seed of ecology of perception in which embodied experiences with the world can build a moral obligation to the environment⁴⁴.

Delving deeper into how ethical and sustainability vegan practices are embodied as performances in a tangible, somatic way provides an emotional understanding of what animal rights mean in everyday life. The animation of ethical and sustainability praxis, linked to ecological concerns, with somatically embodied experiences allows interviewed vegan people to reach full affective potential able to theoretically influence the discourse, policies, and infrastructures that promote and facilitate sustainability practices thanks to their examples. In general, this approach recognizes the procedural aims of sustainability, in which, rather than aiming at imperatives of global scale, that are expertly defined and merely conveyed to the rest of the population, sustainability emerges from the intersection of expert and non-expert practices and discourses.

In daily life, the vegan people interviewed emphasized their veganism and green lifestyle as positive practices of dietary restrictions. In other words, while maintaining a priority on body discipline through dietary control, they express a sense of freedom through consumer choice.

Furthermore, the participant observation method allowed to highlight the signs of identity that characterize the people interviewed. Aware of the need to deepen the subject, I was able to observe some common aesthetic characteristics among the interviewed vegan people. All of them seemed to want to externalize their deep ties with animals. While the anthropological observation method allowed to decode some common aesthetic features linked, for example, to dress style (i.e. many people interviewed wore large and light-colored clothes), an exhibition of “deep-values-style” was shown through a particular bodily attitude (i.e. most vegans interviewed spoke slowly and this behavior seemed to be related to their discourses about their positive perception of the slowness in daily life). Indeed, modifications of the body are also through particular behaviors and spoken manners proper of all people interviewed who can be understood as a community thanks to many values and habits that they share. On the other hand, through the slow movement of their body (which is also reflected in other situations of their life, such as alternative schools for their children rather than public ones, focused on natural rhythms of children), they seemed both to communicate their disapproval of the stressed lifestyle typical of Westerners society and to create their own community in which to share not only food preferences, but also the same lifestyle as well as philosophy.

⁴⁴ Hay 2005.

Also this article can be considered just as a starting point to other investigations on the modification of the body through vegan ideology, it can build the basis for future studies on the negotiation of identities through the manipulation of the body in a context of food consumption, where the body is one of the major components able to create human identity.

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