

**From the Street to the Shops:  
The Rise of New Forms of Political Action in Italy (?)**

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**FIRST DRAFT**

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**Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

*At about the same time as scholars of protest politics were arguing about the process of institutionalisation – which would have involved some of the actors responsible for the bulk of the mobilisation during the '70s and '80s in Western Europe – a new wave of protest burst onto the scene. Since the late '90s repeated protest actions and campaigns have periodically emerged. In some cases such an unprecedented number of people have participated that many observers have claimed the emergence of a new protest cycle.*

*However, if compared with earlier 'moments of madness', this new upsurge of mobilisations diverges substantially. A lot has been written about the transnational character of more recent conflicts. In particular, it is often pointed out that, in contrast to the past, the mobilised actors often target international actors/institutions, and the actions are often the result of networks of organisations coordinated at an international level.*

*There are, nevertheless, other distinctive traits of recent civil mobilisation that are worthy of attention. Beside forms of action, such as public meetings, demonstration marches, strikes and certain other forms of protest – which were also typical of earlier movements – an increasing number of citizens have undertaken a more 'silent mobilisation'. Over the past few years, even in countries where there was not this tradition, a growing number of citizens have been actively involved in consumer boycotts and other forms of action that employ a change in certain daily activities such as alternative ways of consuming, travelling and saving.*

*Our paper aims to explore these new forms of political action in Italy. We shall start by providing a brief description of some of the main experiences that have shown a rather interesting development over the last few years, i.e. ethical consumption, solidarity finance, fair trade, solidarity economy. After this introductory section, intended mostly to point out the peculiarities of these new practices, we shall focus on the characteristics of individuals who are more likely to support some kind of alternative way of spending and/or consuming. Our empirical evidence derives from recent national surveys on a representative sample of the Italian population by means of computer assisted personal (CAPI) and telephonic interviewing (CATI).*

*In particular we shall address the following questions: (i) How diffuse is ethical consumerism among the Italian population? Who are ethical consumers? What is their socio-demographic profile? What are their motivations? Are socio-economic solidarity practices linked to religious orientation and political affiliation? (ii) Are traditional consumers embedded in social networks? In particular, are ethical consumers distinguished by a higher involvement in traditional organisations, voluntary associations, community groups? Are ethical consumers more interested in political issues? What are their main sources of information? Are ethical consumers characterised by an idea of political citizenship different than other groups in society? (iii) What is the "participation style" of ethical consumers? What about their political engagement? Are socio-economic solidarity initiatives forms of involvement that crowd out conventional acts? Or do political consumers also use other forms of participation, and if so, which ones? (iv) Finally, what is the level of trust towards the government and institutions among ethical consumers? And what about their internal and external political efficacy?*

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Iref (Institute for Educational Research – Rome) and in particular to Marco Livia (General Director) and Cristiano Caltabiano (Research Director) who authorised us to use the results of the survey data on which this paper is based. Somedata presented here were already discussed in C.Caltabiano (ed.), *Il sottile filo della responsabilità civica. 8° Rapporto sull'associazionismo sociale in Italia*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2003; Acknowledgments also go to Ilvo Diamanti, director of LaPolis (Laboratory of Social and Political Studies), who allowed us to use data that emerged from recent national surveys conducted by LaPolis.

## **Introduction**

Contemporary societies have witnessed a profound mutation with regard to their citizens' forms of political participation. If on the one hand traditional means of political involvement, such as voting and party membership, over the last few decades have observed a sharp decline in all Western countries, protest and other unconventional activities appear to have become regular forms of political participation by citizens [Inglehart 1992; Dalton and Kuechler 1994; Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Norris 2002].

As claimed by the most common explanation for long-term developments in political participation, behind the shift observed in the modes of citizens' political involvement there are several processes, such as: economic growth, technological development, rising level of education, the expansion of mass communications, the development of the welfare state, the growing importance of the service sector. These processes have re-shaped the social structure of western societies and, as a consequence, the range of potential political conflicts. A variety of new problems have emerged and multiplied the reasons and leverages for protest – problems that, at least in part, are the unintended side effects of modernisation [Rucht et al. 1998].

On the one hand, the weakening of the old tensions that have characterised modern societies and their political and party systems – centre-periphery, religious, urban-rural cleavages, capital and labour [Rokkan 1982] – has allowed the diffusion of a plurality of new issues. On the other, the increase in personal skills, as a consequence of the improvement in educational levels and in the amount of information available to the public, has resulted in citizens who are more aware of societal defects and their underlying causes and who have greater capacities and means to articulate their dissatisfaction [Klingemann and Fuchs 1995].

Often seen as one sign of the development of a new style of citizen politics [Dalton 1996], unconventional forms of action represent a sort of indicator of the emergence of new tensions as well as a sign of a change in attitudes and modes of behaviour among citizens. Despite many political experts' expectations that protest politics would fade with spreading affluence, the unorthodox forms of political behaviour resorted to by citizens have continued to grow [Dalton 1996]. Not only protest has become a regular form of political citizens participation, the repertoire of citizen actions has continued to enlarge, adding new forms to the more traditional unconventional forms of protest.

Beside the forms of actions such as demonstrations, strikes, rallies, public meetings, occupations, blockades and light or heavy violence - which constituted all variants of the modern repertoire of protest [Tilly 1986; Tarrow 1998] – in recent years a growing number of citizens have started utilising other kinds of activities for political expression, such as boycotts of certain products, political consumerism, email petitions and various sorts of actions such as the recent *peace flag* protest, where many who wished to demonstrate their aversion to the war in Iraq have hung a rainbow flag out on their balcony<sup>2</sup>.

Political participation is evolving and diversifying not only in terms of the most commonly utilised forms of political expression ('how'), but also in terms of the type of actors involved in conflict ('who'), the reasons behind such actions ('why') and the targets of actions ('against whom') have also changed. In this regard, it has often been stressed that contemporary conflict has become increasingly *transnational* in

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<sup>2</sup> The Peace Flag protest has had an incredible success, at least in Italy. A recent survey (CATI method, n=1500) performed by Demos-LaPolis (17-26 November 2003) reports that 40.5% of Italians household have hung the flag out on their balcony

character. In particular, in contrast to the past, mobilised actors often target international actors/institutions, and actions are more and more frequently the result of networks of individuals and organisations coordinated at an international level [Bennet 2003].

Among new forms of citizen actions, *political consumerism* and other sorts of socio-economic solidarity actions - i.e. fair trade, but also ethical consumption, household economising and ethical finance and tourism – represent interesting cases as they capture the process of globalisation and individualisation that seem to be affecting how citizens participate in politics [Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti 2003]. As argued by Beck and Gernsheim: “Here citizens discover the act of shopping as one in which they can always cast their ballot – on a world scale, no less” [Beck and Gernsheim 2001: 44].

Critical consumers attempt to influence institutional or market practices by using their *shopping-bag power*, combining public and private aspects of altruism. Socio-economic solidarity actions consist of a sum of “individualised” [Micheletti 2003] practices. This sort of (qualitative) renovation and (quantitative) enlargement of political activities is strictly linked to the emergence of post-modern society, global issues and the increasing importance of global political actors. Critical citizens practice new forms of action, using the formal political arena but playing in the sub-political sphere [Beck 1999] directly addressing the market by making conscious choices every day regarding their personal lifestyle.

Our paper aims to explore the characteristics of socio-economic solidarity actions in Italy. In the following pages we shall start by providing some background information about the specifics of the “Italian case”. After this preliminary section, we shall focus on the characteristics of individuals who are more likely to support alternative ways of spending and/or consuming.

### **Socio-economic actions: the main experiences and their development in Italy**

What is striking about the rise and diffusion of socio-economic solidarity actions in Italy is their notable diffusion over the past few years. Unfortunately, the lack of comparative research on political consumerism and other forms of citizens actions that employ a change in certain daily activities - such as alternative ways of consuming, travelling and saving - makes it very difficult to precisely state whether or not Italy represents an exceptional case. However, though we refer only to the Italian case, there is no doubt that the phenomenon has recently become quite important and interesting.

In December 2003, the most influential Italian economic newspaper, *il Sole 24 ore*, dedicated an entire page to Fair Trade entitled *The Fair Trade Explosion*: “The data of such an explosion speak clearly. Estimated fair trade sales for 2003 in Italy will be about 41.5 million euro (with 75% realized through foodstuffs and the remaining through handicrafts), while in 2002 fair trade sales reached about 300 million euro worldwide”. As Giorgio Dal Fiume of CTM (Cooperativa Terzo Mondo), one of the major fair trade organisations in Italy, stated in the same article: “The evolution of our sales reveals that what happened in Europe over decades has been accomplished in Italy in very few years”. As the article concluded: “The sale of *ethical products* has exceeded its traditional niche. Economic evidence demonstrates that such products have become products of widespread consumption”.

Although in Italy the first fair trade experience dates back to 1976, with the constitution of the co-op Sir John di Morbegno [Saroldi 2003], it is only lately that the number of fair trade shops and organisations has started to grow. In fact, more than ten

years passed before the constitution of CTM in 1988. More recently, CTM's experience has encouraged the emergence of other similar organisations. At present Italy counts quite a large number of organisations that, like CTM, represent a *bridge* between producers in developing countries (usually small autonomous local co-ops where minimum working rights are guaranteed) and the BDM (Botteghe del Mondo - One-World Shops), shops where these products are sold to western citizens. Among the most important are: Commercio Alternativo, RAM, Roba, Equoland and Equo Mercato.

The number of BDM in Italy has also increased sharply over the past few years. In 1993 the number of shops selling fair trade goods was 91, which had increased to 273 by 1998 [Rinaldi 2000]. At present the number of one world shops in Italy is estimated around 500, distributed (though not evenly) all over the country. Fair trade products have also recently started to be sold even in supermarkets and other sorts of more *conventional* shops. In fact it is possible to buy these kinds of products at large-scale retail stores such as *Coop*, a supermarket which is a cooperative association of consumers, and also at "pure" commercial businesses like the supermarket chain *Esselunga*.

Critical consumption also concerns alternative ways of banking. In Italy there are now a growing number of ethical alternatives - in particular should be mentioned the Ethical Bank (Banca Etica), founded in 1999. At present the Ethical Bank, which has now few branches in a limited number of Italian cities, offers a variety of services such as checking accounts, credit cards, savings accounts and other bank services such as mortgages and loans.

Over the last few years, Italy has also observed the spread of initiatives and groups promoting alternative styles of consumption such as the GAS<sup>3</sup>, which are groups of citizens that buy products directly from *fair and organic producers*. We must also mention the "Bilanci di giustizia" (Balance Sheets of Justice), a campaign launched in 1994 by the Beati Costruttori di Pace (Blessed Builders of Peace), a religious group that proposes alternative lifestyles. The campaign, although restricted to only a few hundred of citizens, promotes the consumption of ethical and fair products, in all forms and variants, as a way to achieve social justice.

The number of publications and reviews<sup>4</sup> covering the different issues regarding alternative ways of consumption, household economising, and ethical tourism has also increased considerably over the past few years. In 1996 the first *Critical Consumption Guide* was published by the Centro Nuovo Modello di Sviluppo. The guide provides a plethora of information concerning major national and international corporations, such as their labour practices, environmental policies and boycotts in course against their products. The Guide is updated regularly each year and constitutes the major point of reference for ethical consumers, having sold thousands of copies since its first publication.

The "fair trade explosion", as well as the recent success of the other sorts of initiatives aiming to promote alternative ways of consuming, trading and spending, clearly reflect an increasing awareness among citizens in favour of global justice and fairness; this awareness seems to have linked, as a sort of underlying "master frame" [Snow and Benford 1988], the various public demonstrations that have occurred in Italy since the so-called "Battle in Seattle" - the demonstration against the 1999 ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation.

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<sup>3</sup> GAS stands for Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (Responsible Purchase Groups)

<sup>4</sup> Such as *Altreconomia* or *Cittadini*.

There seems to be quite a clear connection between this silent *mobilisation*, made up by a sum of individualised acts, and the increase in citizen protest over the last few years. Overall, as scholars interested in the cyclical dynamic of contention have argued, it is precisely when protest starts to increase that new repertoires of action emerge and spread [Tarrow 1998]. As our empirical analysis also suggests, socio-economic actions do not crowd out more established repertoires of protest, but rather they complement and reinforce them.

### **Some considerations on the Italian case**

Over the last four years or so, similarly to what has happened in other western countries, in Italy a new eruption of protest has also burst onto the scene. Since the late 90s, repeated protest actions and campaigns have periodically emerged [Aguiton 2001; Andretta, della Porta, Mosca, Reiter 2002; Ceri 2002]. These have been able, in some cases, to gather an unprecedented number of people [della Porta and Diani 2004]. Protest has not only been particularly intense, it has also involved quite a wide range of new and old actors, including trade unions, eco-environmentalist organisations, churches, volunteer associations and a myriad of other groups active in several social issues.

The increase of protest over the last few years is quite interesting in the Italian case for at least two different, though highly interrelated, reasons. Firstly, the spread of protest among different groups underscores the greater autonomy reached by civic society from political parties. Secondly, the characteristics of contemporary citizen upsurges seem to indicate the emergence of a new system of alliances among groups once pertaining to two different (and opposite) political cultures (leftist and Catholic).

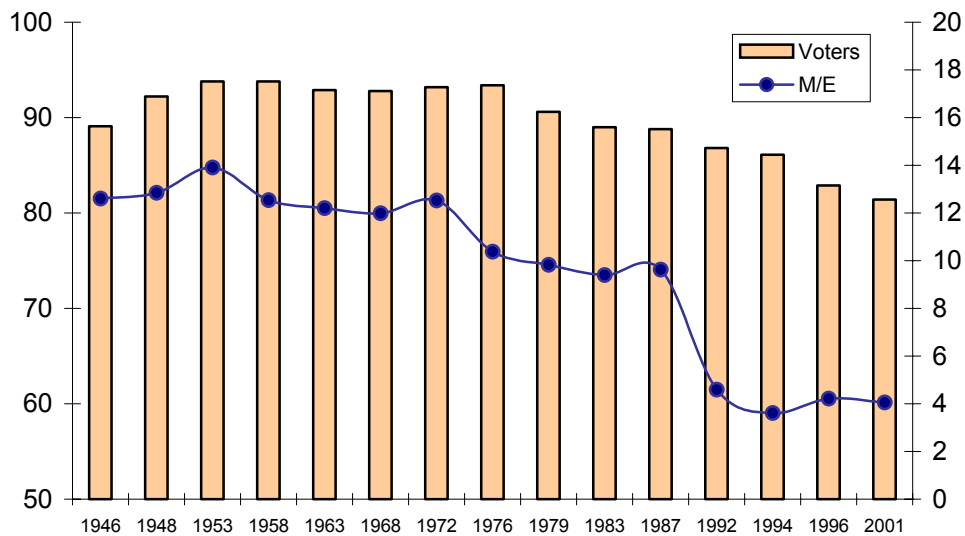
As often argued, in Italy, the ways groups and citizens participated in politics has traditionally been influenced by the dominant role played in the political system by the two main political parties: the Communist party and the Christian Democracy party. In a way, as often pointed out, Italian civil society was shaped by political parties, to an extent not comparable with other democratic European societies [Pasquino 1993; Morlino 1995]. For this reason, the model of participation of groups and citizens was also defined as “institutionalised participation”- a term that emphasises the role political parties played in the mediation of interests that emerged at the societal level [Barbagli and Maccelli 1985]. Political participation used to be carried out prevalently through political parties, and in reality the challenges that arose were always highly ideological and politicised - until more recent times. This factor has been accredited, for example, as one of the main reason behind the delay observed in the emergence of the so-called New Social Movements in Italy [Diani 1995; Giugni 1999].

Over the past few decades, however, several processes such as social modernisation, religious secularisation and ideological crises considerably weighed upon the capacity of traditional political parties to filter and aggregate citizens' demands. The detachment of citizens from these traditional channels of interest mediation has often been seen as one of the main causes behind the Italian regime crisis in the 90s. As shown in Figure 1, since the early 80s, political parties have rapidly been losing their capacity to engage citizens. Electoral turnout has declined, although not so sharply as party memberships.

The detachment of civil society from traditional political parties became final with the crisis of the so-called *First Republic* (Diamanti 2003). Moreover, in regard to protest activities, the breakdown of the political system and its reconstitution was important as it fostered the conditions for the emergence of a new system of alliances

among actors active in similar issues who had previously remained separated because of traditional ideological divisions [Forno 2003]. The dismantling of the parties at the centre of the political spectrum (and in particular of the Christian Democratic party) and the electoral success of new political actors with distinct populist and right wing profiles - such as the Northern League and Silvio Berlusconi's party Forza Italia - not only brought about a new polarisation of the party system, but also considerably altered the *political opportunities* [Eisinger 1973] for protest.

Figure.1 **Voter turnout (General election) and total party membership (M/E), 1946-2001\* Italy**



\* The 2001 data of total party membership (M/E) refers to 1998, Source: Mair e Van Bieze [2001, 9].  
Voter turnout of year 1946 refers to Election for the Constituent Assembly.

Source: www.cattaneo.org; Raniolo [2002, 114]; Mair e Van Biezen [2001, 9]

As we will show while discussing our data, *political consumerism* and other sorts of socio-economic solidarity actions - i.e. fair trade, ethical consumption, household economising and ethical finance and tourism - represent interesting cases as they capture the process of *convergence* among actors once ideologically very distant (or even opposite). In Italy, in fact, alternative ways of consuming, saving and travelling are encouraged and promoted not only by 'new' organisations but by a broad range of traditional and fairly institutionalised actors such as the Church, with its myriads of parish groups, as well as by well-established leftist organisations. This base helps to explain the fast diffusion of these practices among quite broad sectors of society.

Although socio-economic solidarity actions have observed a quite impressive diffusion, in Italy to date only a few attempts have tried to reach a greater understanding of this phenomenon [Volpi 2003]. In the following parts of this paper, we will try to partially fill this gap by analysing and discussing ethical consumers' characteristics, attitudes and values.

### Who are ethical consumers?

In the following parts of this paper we shall focus our attention on certain social characteristics related to the likelihood that people will support and adopt certain

socio-economic solidarity actions. To capture the different aspects distinguishing ethical consumers we will use data coming from a national survey, conducted in 2002, which is representative of the entire Italian population<sup>5</sup>.

Our discussion starts by tracing ethical consumers' socio-economic profiles and discussing the main motivations behind their actions. Then we discuss whether political consumerism is linked to other political participatory acts by questioning if ethical consumers show a higher propensity than non-ethical consumers to be involved in volunteer associations. Moreover, we try to understand whether ethical consumers differ from non-ethical ones with regard to their involvement in other forms of political participation, either conventional or unconventional. Finally, we question if people who support certain kinds of socio-economic solidarity actions also share a higher level of trust for institutions and if these people tend to believe more than non-ethical consumers that citizen actions can successfully influence the decision-making processes.

In particular, some issues addressed in the following analysis are:

- a) How diffuse is ethical consumerism among the Italian population? Who are ethical consumers? What is their socio-demographic profile? What are their motivations? Are socio-economic solidarity practices linked to religious orientation and political orientation?
- b) Are ethical consumers embedded in social networks? In particular, are ethical consumers distinguished by a greater involvement in traditional organisations, volunteer associations and community groups? Are ethical consumers more interested in political issues? What are their main sources of information?
- c) What is the "participation style" of ethical consumers? Are ethical consumers characterised by an idea of citizenship different than non-ethical consumers? What about their political engagement? Are socio-economic solidarity initiatives forms of involvement that crowd out conventional acts? Or do political consumers also use other forms of participation, and if so, which ones?
- d) Finally, what is the level of trust towards the government and institutions among ethical consumers? And what about their internal and external political efficacy?

#### *Diffusion, socio-demographic traits and ethical consumers' main motivations*

As fairly predictable, the majority of Italians (71,5%) are not ethical consumers (Fig. 2). Among non-ethical consumers we should distinguish between two different positions: the majority (59,3%) have never got involved in socio-economic solidarity initiatives because they simply did not know about them, while a minority answered they knew about fair trade, ethical consumption and so on, but they were not interested (12,2%).

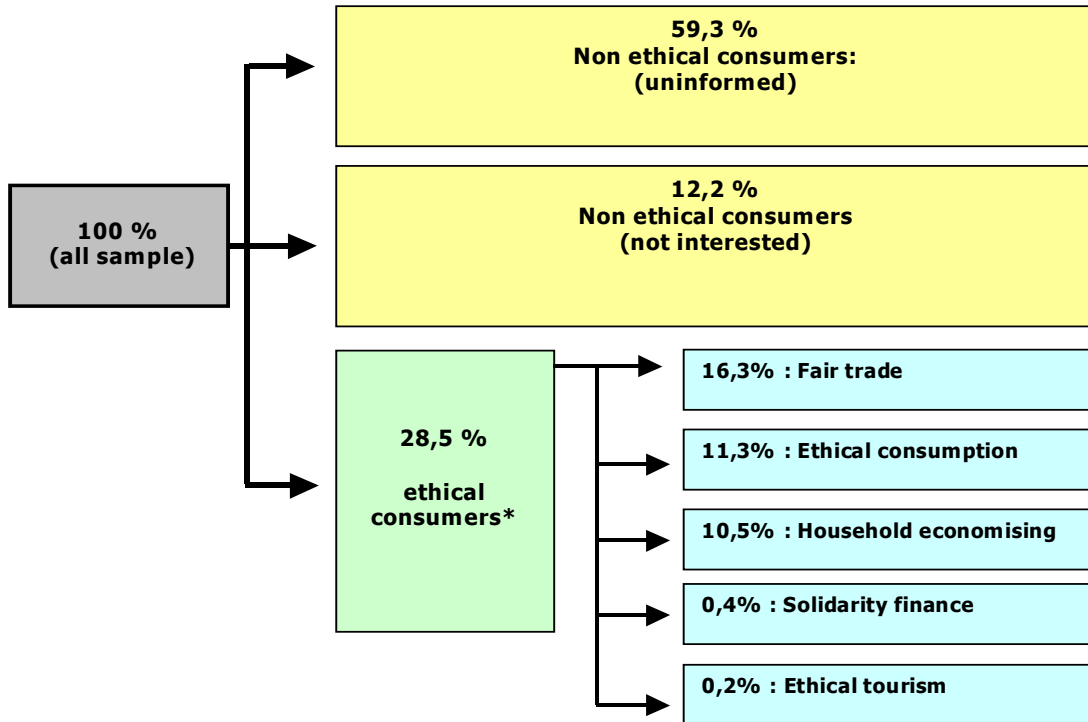
Nevertheless, although the majority of our sample do not support alternative ways of spending and/or consuming, the percentage of people who stated that, during the twelve months before the interview, they had undertaken at least one out of the four ethical acts mentioned in the questionnaire is not negligible as it actually regards

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter we refer to the Iref survey (CAPI method, n=1000 ) carried out during November 2002. In some cases Iref data are supplemented with results coming from recent LaPolis surveys (in footnotes).

28,5% of respondents. In particular: 16,3% declared they had bought some *fair trade* goods, foodstuffs and/or handicrafts made in poor countries<sup>6</sup>; 11,3% had looked for and bought “sweatshop free” goods, selecting what to buy on the basis of conscious choices among different brands; 10,5% had followed some *household economising* practices - in order to save electrical energy and so on. Lastly, although it refers to a small minority, some answered they had used the Ethical Bank 0,4%, and 0,2% answered that they had chosen an alternative way of travelling.

Figure 2. **Ethical consumption and ethical consumer acts in Italy, 2002**



\* Percentage of respondents that said they had undertaken at least one of the following actions in the previous 12 months

Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

<sup>6</sup> A recent LaPolis survey carried out during the summer of 2003 reports that 27% of Italians had bought - at least once in the previous twelve months - some fair trade products. The survey was conducted by Demos-LaPolis (CATI method, n=1400) during the period 25 June - 8 July 2003. The same research reports that 44.5% of Italians donated some money to support local associations and 36,3% in favour of national or international organisations. This is quite an impressive number of people, and it seems to have considerably increased compared to November 2002. In fact the Iref survey to which we refer in this paper reports that only one year earlier these percentages were 16.3% and 27%. Moreover, if the boycotting of products is taken into account, both these research studies also reveal a considerable increase from November 2002 and July 2003 of such actions. The percentage of people engaged in boycotting certain products was in fact 6.5% in November 2002 and 15,5% in July 2003. Maybe this difference could be explained in part by the diverse methods of data collection (CAPI and CATI) or because of the different sampling plan or questions asked. Nevertheless, one should also bear in mind that the period between the two surveys was marked by the beginning of the Iraqi war, that provoked an intense mobilisation which included a number of collectivist collective actions as well as individualised collective actions such as boycotting US or UK petrol companies, products, etc.

Having said this, in order to better distinguish the characteristics pertaining to ethical consumers, in the following analysis we have grouped our sample into two different groups labelled: i) ethical consumers (n=285 cases); ii) non ethical consumers (n=715 cases).

Table 1 below shows some aspects of ethical consumers that regard their socio-economic profile. In particular, we wanted to understand whether or not traditional debates on protest politics that have emerged since the 70s also hold true for ethical consumers. Contemporary research on protest politics has often revealed that the people who are more likely to embark in new repertoires of action were prevalently members of the so-called 'new class', therefore better educated, younger, and more affluent people usually working in public sectors [Wallace and Jenkins 1995; Dalton 1996].

Confirming the result obtained by other scholars who have focused on *political consumerism* [Micheletti, Stolle, Hooghe 2003<sup>7</sup>], our data show a higher percentage of women among ethical consumers. As it is possible to see in the table below, in fact, 31,2% of women included in our sample had undertaken some ethical consumption acts; a percentage higher than that regarding the men (25,5%). This is a rather interesting finding, as men traditionally tend to get more involved in political participation than do women.

Regarding age, it is quite interesting to note how socio-economic solidarity actions involve people who are younger than 55 years old; in particular, 37,9% were 18-24, 31,1% were 25-34, 38,9% were 35-44 and 32,4% were 45-54 years old. Their percentage is higher when compared to the sample average (28,5%). However, the percentages of ethical consumers among people older than 55 years old are much lower: 22,4% of 55-64; 18,1% of 65-74; and just 9,3% of people older than 74.

The educational level also clearly influences the propensity of people to get involved in these kinds of actions. As illustrated in the table below, the percentage of people who adopt some type of socio-economic solidarity action is usually highest among the highly educated, passing from 0% in the case of people with no qualification to 49,8% among those who had graduated from university. This statistic clearly evidences that education is an important resource that plays a rather central role in people's disposal to engage in some sort of critical consumption act.

Looking at occupational status, the percentage of ethical consumers is higher among those who are self-employed, such as entrepreneurs or professionals (52,8%) and among managers and directors (56,2%). The share of ethical consumers is also high among white-collar workers and teachers (48,1%). Finally, the percentage of ethical consumers recorded among students is also high (47,9%). On the other hand, blue-collar workers show a lower propensity to adopt these kinds of political participation practices (18,6%), as do housewives (26,3%), pensioners (14,4%), the unemployed (22,2%) and craftsmen and tradesmen (27,9%).

The highest share of ethical consumers is found among people living in larger cities (bigger than 100.000 inhabitants), while the number of ethical consumers is definitely

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<sup>7</sup> We are aware of the fact that our findings are not directly comparable with Micheletti, Stolle and Hooghe's. In order to define political consumers, Micheletti, Stolle and Hooghe [2003] have in fact taken into consideration three different dimensions: i) behaviour; ii) awareness and motivation; iii) frequency and habit. In particular, the concept is defined as <<consumers' choice of producers and products based on a variety of ethical and political considerations>>. Our definition of *Ethical Consumers* is much weaker and less precise. The discrimination between ethical consumers and non-ethical consumers was in fact only whether respondents had practiced one of the five activities (see Figure 2) mentioned in the questionnaire over the previous twelve months or not.

lower in the case of people in small villages (43,4% vs. 17,7%). Finally, a higher share of people that have engaged in socio-economic solidarity actions is observable in the case of those living in the centre and north of the country, while the percentage of ethical consumers is definitely lower in Southern Italy.

**Table 1. Socio-economic profile of ethical consumers in Italy**

	Ethical consumers		
	YES	NO	Total
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	25,5	74,5	100
Female	31,2	68,8	100
<b>Age</b>			
18-24 years old	37,9	62,1	100
25-34 years old	31,1	68,9	100
35-44 years old	38,9	61,1	100
45-54 years old	32,4	67,6	100
55-64 years old	22,4	77,6	100
65-74 years old	18,1	81,9	100
Older than 74 years old	9,3	90,7	100
<b>Level of education</b>			
None	0	100	100
Primary school	8,9	91,1	100
Secondary school	26,8	73,2	100
High school	49,3	50,7	100
University degree	49,8	50,2	100
<b>Socio-economic condition</b>			
Entrepreneurs, professionals	52,8	47,2	100
Craftsmen, tradesmen	27,9	72,1	100
Managers, directors	56,2	43,8	100
White collars	48,1	51,9	100
Blue collars	18,6	81,4	100
Housewives	26,3	73,7	100
Students	47,9	52,1	100
Pensioners	14,4	85,6	100
Unemployed	22,2	77,8	100
<b>Geo-political area</b>			
North West	32,4	67,6	100
North East <sup>(a)</sup>	39,3	60,7	100
Centre <sup>(b)</sup>	32,8	67,2	100
South	18,9	81,1	100
<b>Municipality size</b>			
< 5.000	17,7	82,3	100
5-30.000	26,6	73,4	100
30-100.000	24,5	75,5	100
> 100.000	43,5	56,5	100
<b>ALL SAMPLE</b>	<b>28,5</b>	<b>71,5</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>1000</b>

(a) Including the following three regions: Veneto, Trentino A.A. and Friuli V.G. This area was named the "White Zone" for its electoral orientation toward the Christian Democrats and for the rooted presence of the Catholic church and its associations.

(b) Include the following four regions: Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria and Marche. This area is traditionally named the "Red Zone" for its electoral orientation toward the left wing parties

**Source:** Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

As it is possible to see in Tab.1 above, the share of ethical consumers is particularly high among people living in the northeast area of the country. This is an interesting finding as it points out the existent importance of the organisational network of the Catholic world in the diffusion of these practices. This area was in fact in the past called the *white zone*, because of the link between the DC (Christian Democratic party) and the Catholic Church with its network of associations. This seems to hold true especially for what concerns the diffusion of *fair trade*. In fact, the northeast of Italy is the area in which the percentage of respondents who stated they had practised fair trade is highest (23,9% vs. 16,4% of the sample average).

What is the main reason behind citizens' choices for socio-economic solidarity initiatives<sup>8</sup>? In order to understand the motivation behind socio-economic actions, interviewees were asked to choose among a list of items suggesting some fundamental aspects regarding the aim or specific characteristics of ethical consumption. As shown in Table 2, the majority of ethical consumers answered that their choice was motivated by the fact that consumption should also have a social aim (55,6%). The second reason chosen by the sample was that such actions were taken in order not to contribute to social injustices like the exploitation of child labour (46,5%). The percentage of people who indicated the need to support developing countries as their main motivation for supporting socio-solidarity actions is also rather high (40,7%).

Table 2. **What was the most important reason that motivated you to adopt some ethical consumption acts ? (max two answers)**

	First answer	Second answer	First+Second
Because consumption should have also a social end	34,2	21,4	55,6
To avoid contributing to social injustice such as exploitation of child labour	25,8	20,7	46,5
To help developing countries	17,9	22,8	40,7
To help NGOs and organisations working in this field	13,5	12,6	26,1
Because of the quality of these products	3,7	8,4	12,1
Other	4,4	5,1	9,5
No other reasons	0	8,9	8,9
N.R.	0,5	0	0,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>285</b>

Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

Moreover, cross tabulating the first the and second answers, it comes clear that behind the choice to practise ethical consumption there are two different main motivations (see arrows on Table 2):

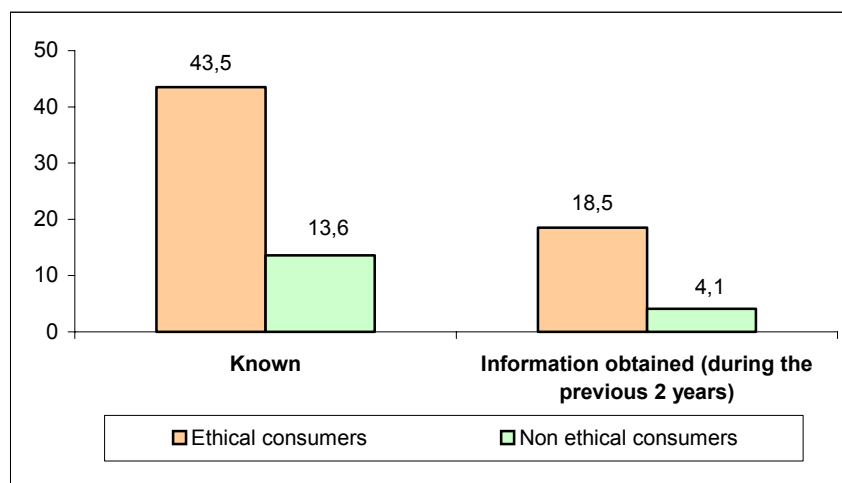
a) The first regards a diffuse *social concern* among ethical consumers. In the data there is a clear connection between people who demonstrated a particular concern about the social end of consumption (indicated as first answer) and the intention of not getting involved in social injustices (indicated as second answer) – for example, not wanting indirectly to participate in child labour exploitation (34,4% of respondents chose it as their second answer);

<sup>8</sup> The question included in the questionnaire was the following: *What was the most important reason behind your choice to adopt some ethical consumption acts?* Interviewees could give two answers.

b) The second recalls a feeling of *solidarity* towards emerging countries, as shown by the link between people who gave as their first answer that they did not want to participate any way in the exploitation of child labour (chosen as first) and who answered as a second reason that they adopted solidarity actions because they wanted to support developing countries (42,9% chose it as their second answer).

As Table 3 below shows, ethical consumers are also more involved in charitable *donations* than non-ethical consumers. In fact, it can also be assumed that monetary donations are probably motivated by values very similar to those behind the adoption of alternative ways of consuming and spending. Finally, as shown in Figure 3, although only a very limited percentage of the sample (Fig. 1) declared they had made use of some sort of *solidarity finance* – Ethical Bank or ethical funds – alternative finance is known about by 45,5% of ethical consumers. As it is possible to see, moreover, 18,5% of ethical consumers had also looked for more information about ethical finance; this fact renders the orientation of ethical consumers a little more explicit and reveals that they are sensitive and actively involved in a wide range of socio-economic solidarity activities.

**Figure. 3 Interest showed in solidarity finance by ethical consumers and non ethical consumers**



**Source:** Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

Confirming what has already emerged earlier on, Table 3 reveals that ethical consumption seems to be linked with a rather strong religious faith, which in Italy refers almost entirely to Catholicism. If ethical consumption is broken down by religious practice, it is possible to see that those who support political consumerism are more likely to be churchgoers than non-ethical ones. On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be any difference in the proportion of ethical consumption among those who do not go to church. This evidence probably means that to be a churchgoer, and to share the Catholic solidarity system of values, only partially explains the reasons behind political consumerism. There are, in fact, other factors that also seem to influence this choice.

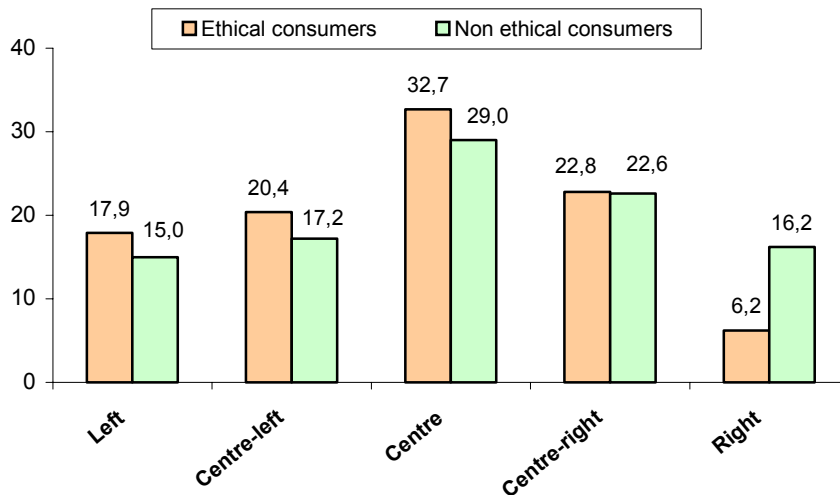
**Table 3. Frequency of donations and church attendance of ethical consumers**

	Ethical consumers		
	YES	NO	Total
<b>Donations (during 2001)</b>			
Twice or more	23,4	10,6	14,2
Once	40,7	32,6	34,9
Never	35,9	56,9	50,9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Frequency of going to church</b>			
Churchgoer	36,5	28,4	30,7
Occasionally	38,6	47,6	45,1
Never	24,9	24,0	24,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>1000</b>

Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

In fact, when the left-right political self-placement is taken into account, it emerges that ethical consumers are more centre and left wing oriented (Figure 4). This result indicates in part that these practices are linked with both of the two traditional political cultures: catholic charity and socialist solidarity. However, on the other side, this also reflects the pluralistic composition of the anti-globalisation movement. This sort of contact point between these two political and cultural perspectives is particularly interesting in relation to the Italian case, where the traditional socio-political cleavage, as argued earlier on, has mainly run along left – catholic division.

**Fig. 4 Left-right self-placement, by ethical and non ethical consumers<sup>9</sup>**



Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

<sup>9</sup> Several interviewees did not answer this question. Figure 4 is based on only 476 cases (163 ethical consumers, 314 non-ethical consumers). Among non-placed: ethical consumers were 19.6%, non-ethical consumer 26.5%, all 24.6%. Among those who did not answer, ethical consumers were 23.2%, non-ethical consumers 29.6%, all 27.8%.

*Volunteer associations, political interests and main source of information*

Is there any link between ethical consumption acts and other participation forms, such as social activities in traditional organisations, volunteer associations and community groups? Are ethical consumers interested in political issues and where do they get their information? In particular, it is interesting to find out if people who practice political consumerism are involved in other civic activities.

Table 4 shows that ethical consumers are usually more involved in social activities than non-ethical ones. In particular, as it is possible to see in the table below, ethical consumers are more frequently members of cultural, social or sports organisations than non-ethical consumers. The table below shows that ethical consumers participate more in cultural and religious organisations (28,9% v. 16,5% in the first case and 20,6% vs. 9,3% in the second).

**Table 4. Membership and social participation of ethical consumers in Italy**

	Ethical consumers		Total
	Yes	No	
<b>Member of a...</b>			
Cultural/social/sport...organisation	34.0	11.9	18.2
Workers organisations	17.5	10.3	12.4
Craft / professional organisations	9.5	4.3	5.8
Political parties	6.0	2.0	3.1
Citizen action groups	4.6	1.5	2.4
<b>N</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>1000</b>
<b>Type of cultural/social/sport... organisation</b>			
Sport	33.0	35.3	34.1
Cultural	28.9	16.5	23.1
Charitable	21.6	17.6	19.8
Recreational	20.8	25.9	23.2
Religious	20.6	9.3	15.3
Socio-medical	9.3	8.1	8.7
Professional orientation and instruction	8.2	0	4.4
Educational	5.2	3.5	4.4
Third world cooperation	5.2	0	2.7
Civil rights defence	5.2	1.2	3.3
Environmental	3.1	1.2	2.2
Pacifist	1.0	2.3	1.6
Consumer defence	1.0	1.2	1.1
Patriotic / veteran	0	4.7	2.2
<b>N</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Frequency of participation in organisation(s)</b>			
At least once a week	33.3	20.2	26.1
Some times during the year	31.9	36.9	34.6
At least once a month	22.5	14.9	18.3
No participation	12.3	28.0	20.9
<b>N</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>306</b>
<b>Current volunteer worker</b>	29.8	9.2	15.1
<b>N</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Those who do volunteer work by means of an organisation....</b>			
Parish groups	43.7	21.8	34.1
National organisations	19.7	27.3	23.0
Non institutionalised groups	12.7	9.1	11.1
<b>N</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>126</b>

Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

Those who support alternative kinds of consuming and spending not only show a higher propensity to become members of associations, they also actually get involved more often than non-ethical consumer in activities sponsored by various organisations (at least every week 33.3% vs. 20.2% of non-ethical consumers).

People supporting socio-economic initiatives are also more keen than non-ethical consumers in doing some volunteer activity: three times more than non-ethical consumers (29.8% vs. 9.2%). Here the link existing between religious organisations and ethical consumption re-emerges. As it is possible to see in Table 4 above, in fact, 43,7% of interviewees that declared to be active in volunteer work actually do volunteering in parish groups.

Critical consumers not only show a higher involvement in social activities, they also seem to care more about politics than non-ethical ones (36.1% vs. 13% of non-ethical consumers).

**Table 5. Level of political interest, main sources of political information and the use of Internet by ethical consumers in Italy**

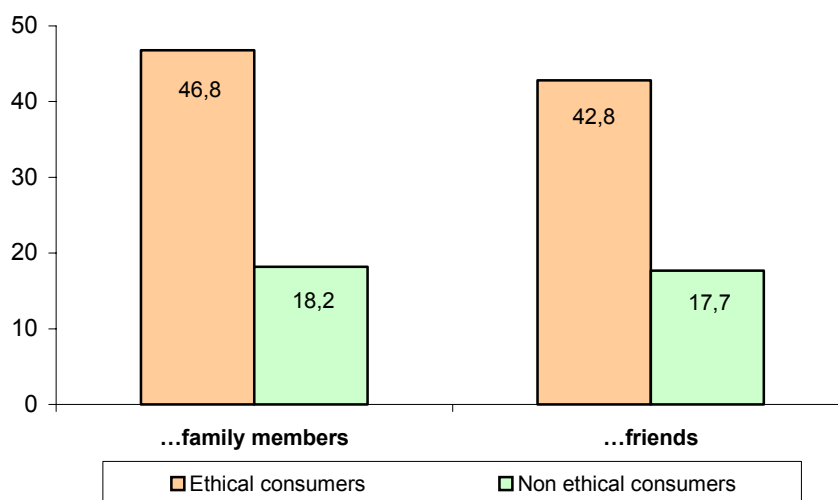
	Ethical consumers		Total
	YES	NO	
<b>Level of political interest</b>			
Very high	7.0	2.1	3.5
Fairly high	29.1	10.9	16.1
Not that high	41.1	34.1	36.1
Not interested	22.8	52.9	44.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Main source of political information</b>			
Political talk shows	28.2	22.6	24.8
Daily newspapers	21.4	28.0	25.4
Weeklies and periodicals	25.9	19.3	21.9
TV News	10.0	6.8	8.1
Party manifestos and elector programs	11.8	8.3	9.7
Trade unions	10.0	4.2	6.5
Political parties	7.7	4.2	5.6
Institutional web sites (Government, Gov. departments, Parliament, parties...)	8.6	3.6	5.6
Volunteer organisations	4.1	3.0	3.4
Internet forums, news groups	5.5	0.6	2.5
Other sources	3.6	9.8	7.4
<b>Use of Internet (during the previous 3 months)</b>			
No	55.4	81.0	73.7
Yes	44.6	19.0	26.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Frequency of Internet use</b>			
Every day	34.1	24.3	29.0
Every week	48.8	51.5	50.0
Less frequently	17.5	24.3	21.0
Total	100	100	100
<b>N</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>1000</b>

Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

Moreover, as Tab5 above shows, it is interesting to note that the ethical consumers' use of the various media is in all cases higher than that of non-ethical consumers, with the only exception being daily newspapers. This is generally true both for "traditional media", which includes unions and parties, as well as for what concerns *new media* such as visiting internet web sites, participating in news groups, forums and so on. This finding seems to point out that the "Digital Divide", in this sense, is quite wide between ethical consumers and non-ethical ones and that a sort of "Virtuous Cycle" seems to have taken place. In fact, as Pippa Norris has argued in her criticism to the *Media Malaise Thesis*, the attention to new forms of media is positively linked to political participation [Norris, 2001].

Also *word-of-mouth political communication* is more common among ethical consumers than among non-ethical ones. As it is possible to see in Figure 5 below, people supporting socio-economic solidarity actions are also the ones who talk more about political and public issues with family members and friends. The proportion is nearly one to three, and this is true both for what concerns political discussion with friends (42.8% vs.17.7%) as well as with family members (46.8% vs. 18.2%). This confirms in a certain way the different and deeper involvement of ethical consumers in public issues, which probably lies at the basis of their attitudes and behaviours.

Fig. 5 **How often do you talk about politics with.....(very + fairly often)**



Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

### *Electoral, conventional and unconventional participation*

Are ethical consumers characterised by a specific political participation style? In line with what has emerged so far, ethical consumers show a rather high political involvement. As it is possible to see in Table 6, over 60% of ethical consumers affirmed that they had followed political debates, though they weren't actively engaged in politics; the percentage is almost twice as high compared to the case of non-ethical consumers (31.5%). Although limited in number, among those who supported alternative ways of spending and/or consuming there is also a higher percentage of those who affirmed that they were politically engaged (4.9% vs. 1.3%). Consequently, among ethical consumers only a minority describe themselves as not

interested in politics (16,8% vs. 27,8% of non-ethical consumers) or totally disaffected (16,8% vs. 27,6%).

When asked to answer what it means to be a “citizen”, a remarkable difference emerges when ethical consumers are compared with non-ethical ones. As it is possible to see in Table 6, those who support alternative ways of spending and/or consuming are also the ones who affirm more often that ‘to be a citizen’ means being active in social organisations aiming to defend weaker people’s rights (79,3% vs. 57,3%). Also, the percentage of ethical consumers who asserted that it is important to vote is considerably higher when compared with non-ethical consumers (73,6% vs. 63,7%). In the view of ethical consumers, it is central to participate in decisions affecting community life (52,0% vs. 38,1%) and the share of those saying that it is important to actively engage in political parties or unions’ initiatives is also significant (18,2% vs. 8,7%).

The higher percentage of ethical consumers who affirm the importance of being active in organisations aiming to defend weaker people’s rights or of joining political parties or unions appears to underscore that people involved in socio-economic solidarity actions, that is in *individualised collective action*, do judge being active in more traditional forms of *collectivist collective action* as very important as well [Micheletti 2003]. This suggests that among ethical consumers there seems to be a diffuse consciousness that social justice can only be achieved as a product of collective work. What is interesting here is that this collective work combines two approaches: making conscious everyday choices (such as undertaking political consumer acts or other ‘solo’ actions) and participating in aggregating organizations.

Table 6. Ethical consumers’ political self-definition and the ‘ideal of citizenship’

	Ethical consumers		Total
	YES	NO	
<b>Political self-definition</b>			
I am politically engaged	4.9	1.3	2.3
I am abreast of politics but I do not actively participate in it	61.4	39.5	45.8
I am not interested in politics: professional politicians have to deal with it	15.4	23.7	21.4
I feel a refusal towards politics	16.8	27.8	24.7
N.R.	1.4	7.7	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>To be a citizen means...</b> (6 point scale, reported only the 2 highest scores)			
To be active in social organisations aiming to defend weaker people’s rights	79.3	57.3	63.5
To be a voter	73.8	63.7	66.6
To participate in community decisions	52.0	38.1	42.1
To engage in a party/union	18.2	8.7	11.4
<b>N</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>1000</b>

Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

Ethical consumers used a wide variety of forms of political actions (Tab. 7). In the last Italian general election the percentage of ethical consumers who cast a vote was higher than that recorded for non-ethical consumers (87.7% vs. 82.8%), a fact that seems to point out that political consumerism, as a new participation style, does not crowd out conventional acts.

From the table below it emerges that both conventional and unconventional forms of participatory actions are used more frequently by ethical consumers than non-ethical ones. The gap is quite wide in every action considered (at least 2-3 times more, on average). In particular, ethical consumers have a higher propensity to become engaged in unconventional actions such as the boycotting of products (12,1% vs. 3,1%), sending protest letters to politicians or newspapers (7,4% vs. 1,0%) or in participating in protest marches and demonstrations (14.0% vs. 4.5%).

As the last line in the table reveals, the percentage of ethical consumers who stated that they are “ready to take part in political protests even if it does not concern their own personal interests” is much higher than in the case of non-ethical consumers (37.4% vs. 25.1%).

The higher inclination of people supporting socio-solidarity actions to get involved in conventional forms, such as voting and elections, as well as in more traditional repertoires of protest thus indicates that political consumerism is simply another tool in a variety of forms of political participation.

**Table 7. Electoral and political participation acts carried out by ethical consumers in Italy**

	Ethical consumers		Total
	YES	NO	
<b>During 2001 general election...</b>			
Cast a vote	87.7	82.8	84.2
Blank or spoil ballot	0.4	2.1	1.6
Non-voter intentionally	4.2	5.3	5.0
Non-voter for other reasons	6.7	4.5	5.1
Other / N.R.	1.1	5.4	4.1
<b>Participation acts (during the previous 12 months)</b>			
<b>- Conventional</b>			
Signed a petition	30.3	9.8	15.6
Contacted competent public authorities for a local problem	25.3	6.7	12.0
Participated in an authorized strike	18.7	7.4	10.6
Attended a political meeting	14.0	4.9	7.5
Tried to convince friends or relatives to vote for a candidate or party	11.6	8.0	9.0
Attended a religious meeting	10.6	3.9	5.8
Worked for an electoral campaign	5.6	2.7	3.5
Donated money to a party or candidate	2.5	0.8	1.3
<b>- Unconventional</b>			
Boycotted a product/service	15.1	3.1	6.5
Participated in public demonstration about social or political issues (anti-globalisation, labour or educational system reforms..)	14.0	4.5	7.2
Sent protest letter to politicians or newspapers	7.4	1.0	2.8
Participated in other protest march	6.7	1.2	2.8
Participated in a non authorised strike	2.8	1.8	2.1
Occupation of factories/public buildings	1.8	0.3	0.7
- I am ready to take part in political protests even if it does not concern my personal interests	37.4	25.1	28.6
<b>N</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>1000</b>

**Source:** Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

In sum, as our data point out, ethical consumers are quite keen to use a wide range of political means to influence political decision-making processes: from conventional forms - including voting - to a wide range of unconventional repertoires of actions -

like protest marches as well as “individual(ised)” actions. People supporting alternative ways of consuming and spending move within different dimensions of political activism: global and local (community), collective and individualistic (engagement), parties and less institutionalised organisations, formal political and sub-political arenas. To use a suggestive image, they are, like *amphibians* - in other words they are able to move between different environments.

*Critical consumers and institutions: trust, personal and external political efficacy*

The information on general trust in institutions and the sense of political efficacy provides other important details to complete the profile of Italian ethical consumers. In brief, based on our data we can say that ethical consumers are characterised by a higher level of trust in institutions. As the synthetic index reported in Tab. 8 points out, the average trust shown by ethical consumers is 53.3% vs. 47.7%, by non-ethical ones. This seems to be an indication of how these people are characterised by a higher social capital (Putnam 1993).

In particular, in comparison with non-ethical consumers, people supporting alternative ways of spending and consuming show a higher trust in the European Union (70.7% vs. 58.2%), consumers’ associations (74.3% v. 59,2%), social co-ops (60.9% vs. 46.7%) and in social movements (44.6% vs. 32.9%). They are instead more sceptical about armed forces (61.7% v. 68.7%), public TV (36.9% vs. 42.5%), commercial TV (30.3% vs. 38.9%) and the G8 (26.0% vs. 28.9%).

**Table 8. Trust in institutions and organisations by ethical consumers in Italy**

	Ethical consumers		Total	Gap [a-b]
	YES [a]	NO [b]		
<b>Confidence in the following institutions/organisations</b> (Degree of trust very + fairly)				
Volunteer associations	86.7	74.7	78.1	12.0
President of the Italian Republic	74.5	63.2	66.5	11.3
Consumers’ associations	74.3	59.2	63.5	15.1
European Union	70.7	58.2	61.8	12.5
United Nations	68.8	61.7	63.7	7.1
Catholic church	63.3	58.3	59.7	5.0
Armed Forces	61.7	68.7	66.7	-7.0
Social cooperatives	60.9	46.7	50.7	14.2
Region (local government)	55.1	45.6	48.3	9.5
Province/Municipality	52.7	46.8	48.5	5.9
Social Movements	44.6	32.9	36.2	11.7
National press	42.3	37.7	39.0	4.6
Trade Unions	38.2	29.3	31.9	8.9
Public TV	36.9	42.5	40.9	-5.6
Commercial TV	30.3	38.9	36.4	-8.6
G8	26.0	28.9	28.1	-2.9
Political parties	18.3	17.8	18.0	0.5
<b>General trust (average)</b>	<b>53.3</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>49.3</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>1000</b>	

Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

The higher level of trust shown by ethical citizens for institutions and different organisations is linked to a level of *external political efficacy* that also seems to be higher among people supporting alternative ways of buying and consuming than

among non-ethical consumers. If there does not seem to be much difference in the *personal* sense of efficacy between the two groups, as the data in Tab. 9 show, ethical consumers definitely have a greater belief in the capacity of institutions to satisfy society's needs.

As the table below shows, among both groups there is in fact a percentage of people that do agree (strongly + somewhat) that "citizens are able to influence decision making processes" - around 38%. Only in the case of those who respond "strongly agree" is it possible to see a difference between ethical and non ethical consumers (6.0% vs. 2.8%). However, this is not what makes the two groups different.

By looking at the external political efficacy of the two groups, clear differences in intensity and pattern emerge. As shown in Tab. 9, ethical consumers are more confident in the capability of the different levels of government institutions to satisfy society's needs. The synthetic index shows a score of 40.3% among ethical consumers and 37.1% in the case of those who are not involved in these actions. Yet what really marks the difference between them is the pattern that lies behind this higher sense of external efficacy felt by political consumers. As the data point out, those who support alternative ways of consuming and spending have a deeper confidence in the *responsiveness* of the local institutions (such as regional, provincial and local municipalities) and in the European Union. On the other hand, non-ethical consumers seem to be more confident in the capability of national institutions like the Government and Parliament to satisfy society's needs. Arguably, this reflects the current Italian political situation. At present, Italy is governed by a centre-right coalition while, as we have seen earlier on, ethical consumers place themselves on the centre-left side of the political spectrum.

**Table 9. Political efficacy felt by ethical consumers in Italy**

	Ethical consumers		Total
	YES	NO	
<b>INTERNAL POLITICAL EFFICACY</b>			
<b>Are citizens able to influence decision making processes?</b> (degree of agreement)			
Strongly	6.0	2.8	3.7
Somewhat	31.7	34.8	33.9
Not very much	45.1	42.7	43.4
Not at all	15.5	14.0	14.4
Do not know	1.8	5.7	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>1000</b>
<b>EXTERNAL POLITICAL EFFICACY</b>			
<b>Institutional capability to satisfy society needs</b> (degree strongly + fairly)			
Government	29.3	33.4	32.1
Region	38.0	35.2	36.0
Province	43.2	35.2	37.5
Local municipality	48.9	39.6	42.2
Parliament	32.0	34.3	33.7
European Union	50.2	44.7	46.2
<b>Synthetic index of the sense of external political efficacy</b> (average)	<b>40.3</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>38.0</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>1000</b>

Source: Iref, 8<sup>th</sup> Report on Social Associationism in Italy, November 2002

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the diffusion and characteristics of ethical consumerism in Italy. We started by reviewing the main positions in the debate on political participation. After a general introduction we focused on the specifics of the Italian case, providing background information about some of the main experiences related to socio-economic solidarity practices and their development over time. Finally, the characteristics of individuals who are most likely to support some kinds of alternative ways of spending and/or consuming were analysed in detail.

In Italy ethical consumerism has recorded an impressive growth over the past few years. As our findings revealed, the percentage of people who got involved in these practices was about 30% of the Italian population as measured in November 2002. Our findings revealed that socio-economic solidarity actions are not an outlet for political outsiders; often just the opposite appears to be true. In fact, our analysis confirms that, as in the case of other forms of actions that have emerged since the 70s, socio-solidarity actions are also best described by the *resource model*.

In particular our analysis has revealed that ethical consumerism is positively related to gender. Women are in fact more inclined to participate in this kind of action than men. Our data also indicate the influence of age. These practices are diffused not only among the young, but also among middle-age people; this statistic seems to confirm a general tendency also pertaining to other forms of protest activities. As pointed out in other cases, in fact, age difference in protest seems to indicate the existence of a *generational pattern* of changing participation styles. Though it may be true that the young usually have a greater propensity to engage in unconventional forms of actions, nevertheless it is unquestionable that protest is aging (Putnam 2001). The likelihood of getting involved in ethical consumerism is higher among better educated people. Moreover, these practices appear more widespread among professionals and among those employed in the service sectors. People supporting socio-economic solidarity actions are more likely to live in bigger cities, especially in the north and centre of the country. Finally, in Italy, such practices are linked with a rather strong religious faith and are clearly more popular among people that place themselves at the centre and left sides of the political spectrum.

Ethical consumerism is also positively related to greater activism in associations such as traditional organisations, volunteer associations and community groups. People supporting these practices are in fact often active members of organisations such as sports clubs, cultural and charitable organisations, recreational centres and parish groups. In general, ethical consumers show a higher involvement in social activities of all kinds, and they also appear to care more about politics than non-ethical consumers. They defined themselves as well informed and up to date with current political debates. They are keener than non-ethical consumers in following political talk shows, in reading weekly periodicals and have a higher propensity than non-ethical consumers to use the Internet.

As the analysis of the findings pointed out, political consumerism does not definitely crowd out other forms of political participation, but rather the buying and boycotting of products and services based on political and ethical values represents an *enlargement of the modern repertoire of protest*. As shown, in fact, ethical consumers have a high propensity also to get involved in all other kinds of political actions, both conventional and unconventional. Those who support alternative ways of consuming and spending moreover seem to be involved in different dimensions of politics: global and local, collective and individualised, in parties and social movements.

Finally, ethical consumers also share an elevated trust in institutions and have a sense of *external political efficiency* considerably higher than people who do not get involved in these practices. In particular they have a deeper confidence in the responsiveness of the local institutions (such as regional, provincial and local municipalities) and in the European Union.

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