QLIF project

Consumer Subproject SWP 1.2.2.

Consumption of Organic Foods from a Life History Perspective:

An Explorative Study among Italian consumers[1]

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[1] This structure is based on the assumption that our analyses are guided by the theory of mind-changing (cf. Gardner, H. (2004): *Changing Minds*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press. Note that Gardner distinguishes changes of mind that occur apparently suddenly and abruptly (i.e. consciously and in an explicit fashion, such that aspects of the events, persons and processes involved tend to be remembered clearly), from those that occur gradually over time and in a manner that is virtually imperceptible. Both kinds of changes of mind are relevant to our study.

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INTRODUCTION

1 Exploring the Development of Organic Consumption in Italy

1.1 The development of the organic market in Italy

The Italian organic market has experienced its main growth at the turn of the century. After a slowdown in 2002-2004, both supply and demand has started to grow again, though at a lower rate.

1.1.1 Supply

Italy, with its 45,115 farms and 1.148 million hectares UAA in 2006, is the largest organic producing country in the EU, at least for what concerns primary production. Italy ranks fourth in the world for amount of land devoted to organic farming.

Since the late 1990s land farmed organically has grown exponentially to more than 6% of total agricultural land, with an average of 25.5 ha per company (vs. 5 ha for conventional farms). A negative trend started in 2002 and lasted until 2004. The decline in organic farmers and land area was ascribed to the changes in Rural Development policy and consequent decrease in public financial support which has severely affected the sector in Italy.

Although area and number of producers are still below the maximum reached in 2001 (respectively 56,440 farms and 1,237,640 hectares), production is growing again since 2005. However, growth is now affecting regions that previously had a low share of organic farming, while region like Sicily and Sardinia – which together used to account at almost 50% of organic UAA in 2000 – are still exhibiting a declining trend. In these regions, withdrawals supersede new uptakes.

Processing and importing business are growing at a higher speed, and in 2006 have reached a new maximum: organic processors account at 4,739 companies, while there are 194 accredited organic importers.

- Exports
Most of Italian organic production is exported. Fruit and vegetables account for the largest share of exports, together with wine. Italy is the largest European exporter of organic wine (Biobank, 2007). According to a survey by ISMEA (2007), exports of organic wholesalers account for 14.8% of their total sales.

1.1.2 Demand

The Italian market for organic food and non-alcoholic drinks is estimated at €1.7 billion in 2007, a rise of 8.5% on 2006. This is the best performance since 2003, the year of the organic sale crisis. Organic consumption accounts for approximately 1.4% of total national food consumption.

The growth rate of the organic demand in Italy is about 5-15% per year, and the Italian organic market is estimated to be the third largest in value in the EU, after Germany’s and the UK’s.

Academic research provides some reliable results concerning other issues like consumer attitudes and motivation, frequency of purchase, willingness to pay a price premium, but large quantitative surveys are lacking. Because there are no official data for the domestic market, quantitative estimates are based on the surveys carried out periodically by Ismea, the public Institute of Services for the agro-food market, in collaboration with AcNielsen. But the problem is that such panel data only cover products bought by families for their domestic needs (excluding therefore other channels, like catering, particularly important for Italy), packed and with the EAN bar code. All free range products and those packed without an EAN code are excluded, so the survey is just limited to supermarkets sales. Most direct sales are not included. In Italy there are around 2 thousand local farm gate sales and one thousand specialised shops, as well as about 200 farmers markets that regularly or occasionally sell organic produce. Herbalists’ shops, more widespread than organic shops (although they do not sell large amounts of organic products) are also excluded from these surveys (Biobank, 2007; Assobio, 2007).

According to the Nielsen Panel data, the level of domestic consumption, although still rather low compared with the other EU countries, seems rather stable over the last four years (2003-2006), with around 2% of consumers' budget share for the purchase of certified items. Among Italian consumers, only 10% can be classified as heavy organic users, i.e. those spending more than 10% of their budget on organic food; medium users (spending between 2.5% and 10% of their budget on organic food) account for 10%, and light users (spending less than 2.5% on organic food) for 20%. Non users (65%) are the majority. Most high users live in the north of Italy, they are often singles (and women) (Denver & Christensen, 2007).

The most relevant categories in 2006 remains Milk & dairy and Fruit & vegetables. The fastest growing product categories in 2006 are: Meat products, Bread, Oils, Sugar & other colonials (see Table 1). Meat production remains lower than demand, the shortfall being made up by imports from Germany and Austria.

Table 1: Organic packed food consumption by households (Source: ISMEA, 2007)

Category	2005	2006	Change 05-06	Share on organic food	Share organic/total food
Milk/Dairy	58.093.842	63.871.640	9,9%	20,5%	1,0%
Fruit & Vegetables	41.911.072	46.698.180	11,4%	15,0%	1,8%
Cookies and sweets	39.070.669	39.795.434	1,9%	12,8%	0,9%
Soft drinks	33.631.130	33.163.344	-1,4%	10,6%	4,6%
Eggs	22.628.014	23.669.608	4,6%	7,6%	7,5%
Sugar, coffee & tea	16.215.966	20.668.226	27,5%	6,6%	1,5%
Oils	11.105.762	15.297.278	37,7%	4,9%	1,4%
Rice, pasta	13.211.598	15.072.348	14,1%	4,8%	0,7%
Baby food	12.941.361	12.878.126	-0,5%	4,1%	4,1%
Bread & bakery	6.175.421	9.698.496	57,0%	3,1%	1,6%
Honey	6.795.418	7.484.047	10,1%	2,4%	11,1%
Ice creams & frozen food	7.650.768	6.886.355	-10,0%	2,2%	0,4%
Other organic food	5.403.609	5.469.239	1,2%	1,8%	0,5%
Sauces & seasoning	4.503.082	4.072.475	-9,6%	1,3%	0,9%
Dietetic products	2.763.934	2.544.205	-7,9%	0,8%	0,8%
Sausages & meat products	1.367.971	2.540.714	85,7%	0,8%	0,3%
Alcoholic drinks	1.984.854	1.925.278	-3,0%	0,6%	0,1%
Total	**285.454.471**	**311.734.993**	**9,2%**	**100,0%**	**1,2%**

The level of organic consumption in Northern Italy accounts for 68,8% of total household consumption, Central Italy and Sardinia have a share of 27.4%, while South and Sicily account for the remaining 9.4%. This uneven distribution pattern can be explained by income differentials that still remain high among different regions of Italy and by lower availability in the South. Besides, in the South many households either grow their own fresh fruit or vegetables, or have relatives or friends who own a farm or an orchard (Naspetti and Zanoli, 2004).

On the consumer side, surveys show that the level of product awareness of organic food is relatively high (90%), while the levels of information and product knowledge are still quite low even among organic consumers: there is still a lack of information about product characteristics, certification bodies, labels, etc. All recent surveys (Zanoli and Naspetti, 2002; Zanoli, 2004), reveal that consumers ask for more information. They want to choose with more freedom, and knowledge is an instrument, but they are also interested in more “natural” products: certification and labelling are seen as a starting point, food safety is a desirable target, but most of all they desire to understand and to be aware about how organic production and processing actually differ from conventional methods, and how organic products can be distinguished. Lower prices and better distribution, of course, would help to increase the demand for organic products. At the same time, potential organic consumers want good-tasting as well as easy-to-use products that aren’t perishable. In terms of product development, better packaging and sensory quality standards appear to be a target for organic farmers and processors.

Organic consumers do not want to be driven by the market; they want to eat healthy and at the same time are not prepared to give up the pleasures of life. The “health” issue is clearly the key-word in this respect, but it should be coupled with implicit reference to value states such as hedonism, pleasure and achievement, which also act as driving forces (Naspetti and Zanoli, 2004).

In Italy, the large number of different certification bodies (16) and organic labels is one reason for consumer confusion about the organic concept and the lack of awareness of the principals of organic production. In the independent Province of Bolzano also operate some certification bodies based in Germany (Abcert, Imo, Inac, Qc&i) or Austria (Biko).

- Retail channel

The over one thousand (1,094) specialised shops, most of them (two thirds) located in the North (Biobank, 2007), are still the elected place for organic products purchases. Thanks to the wide range, good service and personalized advice, they challenge supermarket competition, especially regarding basic reference price. Although supermarkets have been eroding the market share of specialised organic shops, albeit not their overall sales volume (Zanoli, 2003), these shops can be considered the backbone of organic product distribution in Italy. They are now able to cover the necessary quality gap towards a modern and professional management of outlets (Naspetti and Zanoli, 2004).

Specialised shops are not always able to play on their own. Those not having the skills and the tools, bring into play the aggregation tool as their strength. Networks seem to successfully work, with the classic franchising formula or with the new aggregations sponsored by organic food traders. One of the best-known organic franchising supermarkets is the NaturaSì chain. It started in 1992 and since then has extended its network to some 44 shops in many Italian regions. It has also has opened 4 outlets in Madrid (Bertino, 2006).

Organic food available in supermarkets has a very recent history. Some organic products have been previously sporadically introduced in large-scale retailing, but only in 1999, the first organic private label was launched. Esselunga was the first retail channel to launch its own organic products, during the BSE crisis. Today the leading stores with private organic labels, counting over 300 references each, are Coop and Esselunga, followed by Carrefour with 221, Rewe Italia with 160, Auchan with 100, Despar with 80 and others with under 50 references (Bertino, 2006). Such trend is going to be strengthened by further developments in the marketing of some product categories, like meat, which probably will have a remarkable impact on the organic consumption. Recently, in the second semester of 2007, some hard discounts (LIDL) also introduced a small range of organic products

After years of continuous growth, in 2005, consumption rates have declined slightly. Due to this fall organic brand-named ranges are x-rayed and analysed and only the products which pass rotation and profitability per linear metre exams stay on the shelves.

Consumers having different perceptions about different outlets, choose supermarkets because of convenience and for some practical reasons: product assortment (wide range) and location convenience (good location), which in the consumers' mind represent a practical and comfortable way of shopping (is practical/convenient). Supermarkets provide for easier shopping for the increasing number of time-impoverished consumers and also more leisure time to avoid anxieties. Nevertheless specialised shops still offer more in terms of "service" and information than supermarkets. This may influence the trust and confidence of consumers towards organic products. Occasional consumers appear driven by practical motivations, rational thought and common sense. Regular consumers, while preferring the organic shop, do not disdain the supermarket whenever it solves their need for a practical, comfortable, and time-saving way of shopping. Shopping in organic shops is perceived as more self-relevant than going to a supermarket (Naspetti and Zanoli, 2004).

- Traders

The top five companies sharing the whole organic trading sector are: Ecor, Ki group, Probios, La Finestra sul Cielo, and Baule Volante.

Among these, Ecor is the leader in selling to specialised shops in Italy. In 2005, with a staff of 140, it exceeded a 60 m Euro turnover. Ecor's strengths are supply chain and logistics. Fresh produce is a strategic area, with 800 references, including the range of frozen food, dried and non-food products. It counts around 3,500 references distributed nationally, with three deliveries a week. It has about 400 suppliers with only 20% of purchases made abroad. Another important point is qualifying service in the sales point. Over 270 shops, participating to the B'io project, obtain advice on marketing, Information Technology, accounting, finance & control and merchandising.

The second-ranking company in trading to organic shops is the Ki Group, with a turnover of over 24 m Euros in 2005 and 2,000 references of both food produce (fresh and dried) and non food. The Ki Group's strong point is related to the range of prestigious brand-names which distinguish organic produce among specialised products. The "Great organic brand-names" project launched in 2005, in partnership with about one hundred specialized shops, aimed to promote exclusive Ki brand-names among consumers.

Three other distributors are in the top positions with a turnover of approx. 10 m Euros. The third distributor is terms of turnover is Probios with a catalogue of 650 "strong" references. A lot is invested in innovation focusing on food products for sports-practicing people and rice-based products. At the end of 2005 Probios has opened a German sister-company in Monaco and in spring 2006 they inaugurated the Paris branch. La Finestra sul Cielo, an historic company (founded in Turin in 1987 as a macrobiotic centre) has about 800 references, almost all self-branded, and a strong interest in special health products: those for allergies and food intolerances. Last, but not least, Baule Volante with a catalogue of 1,500 products, half of them with their private label and 2,500 regular customers in organic shops, herbalist's shops and chemist's (Bertino, 2006).

- School canteens

School canteens are an important sales channel in the organic sector. There are over 650 organic canteens in schools in Italy, serving every day over 900,000 organic dishes, or dishes containing some organic ingredients, especially in nursery and primary schools. The number of organic school canteens is still increasing, by 8% in 2006 (Biobank, 2007). Some schools offer a complete organic menu, others a few organic products and others still just one organic dish. The role of school canteens is essential for the development of the organic sector, not only in term of sales but from an educational point of view, as this choice educates small children and sets an example for adults and for the community (Bertino, 2006) .

- Organic Holiday-farms and restaurants

Holidays farms are another important sales channel, actually there are more than 800 farms offering organic produce (often perceived as healthier, tastier), together with hospitality, a pleasant environment, landscape, biodiversity and traditions (Bertino, 2006). This kind of holiday is growing and spreading in regions close to the well known queen of hospitality and landscape (Tuscany): Marche, Umbria, Abruzzi and some northern regions are also successively developing organic holidays-farming system.

Organic restaurants, but also restaurants with special organic proposals are also increasing. In 2006 around 274 organic restaurants declared to use at least 70% organic ingredients: 171 were restaurants and 103 holiday-farms which cater as restaurants too. Most of the organic dishes are vegetarian, but in many cases the traditional cuisine matches the organic choice. Holiday-farm restaurants, thanks to the strong bond with the local territory, offer both typical and traditional dishes using organic ingredients (Bertino, 2006).

1.2 Objectives and methods

This study[2] is aimed to explore the development of organic food consumption behaviours among Italian consumers by mean of semi-structured consumer interviews. Consumer narratives and biographies have been explored in Italy (and in other two UE Countries: Denmark and Great Britain) by a qualitative approach. The results of these qualitative studies, combined with the findings of a quantitative analysis on household purchases of organic foods in the three Countries, are intended to determine the potential future trends in consumer buying behaviours. For this reason this study seeks to understand the evolution of individual consumer behaviour as a way of informing the development of the total organic market.

The theoretical framework, objectives and methods employed in the qualitative investigation are outlined in what follows.

1.2.1 Research framework

Consumer narratives and biographies have been explored by a qualitative analytical approach aimed at producing useful understanding of consumer decision making and behavioural temporal patterns in purchasing/consuming organic foods. Broad ranges of ethnographic data have been collected employing interviews and participant observation (see appendixes).

Taking into consideration individuals' cognitive/reasoning process, and assuming that eating organic food involves (or, possibly, has involved at some time in the past) changing one's own mind about food experiences and food habits, we have been inspired by the work of Gardner (2004) on this topic, with particular reference to the following points:

a. according to Gardner, when someone undergoes a change of minds (or attempts to change the mind of another person) the process of persuasion usually involves concepts, stories, theories, and skills. We have tried to recognize concepts, stories and theories consumers mention into their discourses when speaking about organic food perception. (Skills are difficult to be analysed in a cognitive way since they are related to abilities or talents and not to people reasoning).
b. "Seven levers" may influence a mind change: *reasons* (the cognitive[3] component, based on rational and utilitarian explanations), *research* (relevant data), *resonance*

[2] The study is part of a wide EU-funded research project: QualitativeLowInputFood. For further detail see: www.qlif.org. (Subproject 1.2.2 "Determine potential future trends in consumer buying behaviour")

[3] *Cognition* consists of mental (thinking) responses, such as knowledge and beliefs about a particular product. While *affect* refers to consumer feeling responses, such as whether they like or dislike a product (Peter et al., 1999).

(the affective component), *re-descriptions* (mutually reinforcing images of what will result from the change), *resources* and *rewards* (perceived cost-benefit relationship), *real world events* (wars, hurricanes, terrorist attacks, depressions, etc.), and *resistances* (motivation stimulated by opposition). He also asserts that over time, people become more resistant to change. Set in their ways, determined to protect their "comfort" and "custom".

We have also studied the character of product loyalty using the Dick & Basu (1994) approach to loyalty, since in marketing terminology, a regular consumer is, a "loyal" consumer. The substitution strategies, that occur when a given product proves to be unavailable while shopping, have been identified. Five different situations have been distinguished with reference to the possible substitution strategies:

- *Close Substitution*: when the consumer decide to substitute the missing organic product with a different organic product in the same shop.
- *Re-try*: when the consumer decides to come back to same shop in the near future to search for the product.
- *Re-locate*: when the consumer decide to look for the missing organic product in a different shop.
- *Surrender*: when the consumer decide to renounce the attempt to find the product without deciding to look for it in the *near* future.
- *Treason*: when the consumer decide to substitute the missing organic product with a similar but conventional (or integrated, low-calorie, etc.) variant within the same product category.

In such a framework three consequences of customer loyalty have been explored:

1. how likely a customer is to search for an alternative (search motivation),
2. how resistant a customer is to counter-persuasion (of competing, substitute products; stores, etc.), and
3. how likely a customer is to make word-of-mouth recommendations to others.

These three factors are closely related to consumer loyalty or relative attitude and repeat purchase behaviour. Loyalty strategies are discussed in chapter 4.3, while the likelihood that a consumer tells others about his organic choice and meals are presented in section 3.3.

1.2.2 Data collection

Overall, 19 interviews have been conducted from February to June 2007, in Italy. The sample includes organic consumers (both occasional and regular) and non consumers, in different percentages according to the recruitment protocol.

In order to compare different types of consumers, interviewees were recruited in two main areas of the Italian territory. Approximately half of the respondents (10) were recruited and interviewed in central Italy, specifically in Ancona (interviews id: ITA-**AN**-Consumer Group-PS[4]), the main town of the Marche region, and the other 9 in a big city of a northern region (Turin in Piedmont) (interviews id: ITA-Consumer Group-**TO**-PS id). Both locations were chosen for offering a favourable context for organic product purchase and because of an early start of the organic market development (compared with southern regions) (Table 2)

[4] In the next sections any reference to the interviews both in Ancona (AN) and Torino (TO) will contain the short form *PS*, when referred to a principal subject (ITA-Town-Consumer Group-**PS**); *SS*, when referred to a secondary subject (ITA-Town-Consumer Group-**SS**), or *ST* when the user was interviewed during the shopping trip (ITA-Town-Consumer Group-**ST**)

Table 2- Consumers interviewed

	ID	Age	Gender	Secondary Subject Characteristics	Household Composition
REGULAR USERS	ITA-TO-Regular-PS1	35	Female	Husband	Young Couple, no children
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS2	55	Female	Close Friend	Single, no children
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS3	52	Female	Close Friend	Single, no children
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS4	46	Female	Husband	Couple, children <11
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS1	49	Female	Husband	Couple, Children > 11
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS3	46	Female	Husband	Couple, children <11
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS6	61	Female	Husband	Elderly Couple (55-69), no children
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS8	31	Female	Husband	Young Couple, no children
OCCASIONAL USERS	**ID**	**Age**	**Gender**	**Secondary Subject Characteristics**	**Household Composition**
	ITA-TO-Occasional-PS5	46	Male	N/A	Single, no children
	ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6	42	Male	Wife	Couple, children <11
	ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7	33	Male	Wife	Young Couple, no children
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4	36	Female	Husband	Couple, children <11
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS5	58	Male	N/A	Single, no children
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS9	37	Male	Wife	Couple, children <11
NON-USERS	**ID**	**Age**	**Gender**	**Secondary Subject Characteristics**	**Household Composition**
	ITA-TO-PS8	50	Female	N/A	Elderly couple, no children
	ITA-TO-PS9	30	Male	N/A	Single, no children
	ITA-AN-PS2	53	Female	Daughter	Elderly couple, children > 11
	ITA-AN-PS7	34	Female	Mother	Single, no children

Recruiting was made by Dr. Simona Naspetti in Ancona and Dr. Luca Bracchi in Turin.

Most regular and occasional consumers have been contacted through the specialised organic shopkeepers in both towns (Ancona and Turin). Recruitment was done inside shops during the opening hours. In most cases the shopkeepers helped by giving suggestions about customers who could meet the requirements of the recruitment scheme (see the recruitment scheme) and provided phone numbers & addresses. Then the interviewers asked for an appointment to submit the recruitment questionnaire and later (if feasible) the main interview with the principal subject. In some cases a snowballing technique was used to recruit occasional consumers (in Turin), and in others organic consumers were recruited in supermarkets (COOP, GS) selling organic products. Non organic consumers, particularly interested in food quality, have been quite difficult to find but the snowballing technique and recruitment outside grocery shops was used to contact them. At least two of these consumers (ITA-TO-Regular-PS2, ITA-TO-Regular-PS3) accepted to be interviewed essentially out of kindness or for the incentive.

It was quite difficult to find older couples with no offspring living in the household, since in Italy children use to live longer with their parents even though they become economically independent. This is why we have included two of these couples in the sample anyway.

Due to the needs of the recruitment questionnaire (see appendixes) it was sometimes quite difficult to exactly identify regular and occasional consumers defined on the basis of the frequency of organic product purchases (Table 2). In at least three cases, consumers seem to be regular consumers for two of the organic food categories listed in the questionnaire, and occasional consumers of the other two product categories. In both cases the respondent consumption profile was later checked during the in-depth interview and only in one case it was classified as a regular consumer.

Table 3 - Allocation to user group according to self-declared organic purchases frequencies

	ID	Dairy Products	Bread	Egg	Fruit/ Vegetable
REGULAR USERS	**ITA-TO-Regular-PS1**	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS2	No	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	No
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS3	Less then 1 time / week	One or more times / week	No	One or more times / week
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS4	Less then 1 time / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS1	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS3	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	No
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS6	One or more times / week	Less then 1 time / week	One or more times / week	Less then 1 time / week
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS8	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week
	ID	**Dairy Products**	**Bread**	**Egg**	**Fruit/Vegetables**
OCCASIONAL USERS	**ITA-TO-Occasional-PS5**	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week	No
	ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6	Less then 1 time / week	No	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week
	ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7	No	No	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4	Less then 1 time / week	No	No	Less then 1 time / week
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS5	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week	No
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS9	No	No	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week
	ID	**Dairy Products**	**Bread**	**Egg**	**Fruit/Vegetables**
NON-USERS	**ITA-TO-NonUser-PS8**	No	No	No	No
	ITA-TO-NonUser-PS9	No	No	No	No
	ITA-AN-NonUser-PS2	No	No	No	No
	ITA-AN-NonUser-PS7	No	No	No	No

In a single case a respondent (occasional) left shortly after the main interview (not in table 1). Complaining of job problems, she never accepted the next appointments, nor the shopping trip or with the secondary subject. This subject was excluded from subsequent analyses.

In sum the sample includes 18 households strongly interested in food quality, half in Turin and half in Ancona, aged from 25 to 61 years (table 1). Quotas also take into consideration household composition, the type of consumer and gender (table 3).

Table 4 – Sample quotas

Sample characteristics					
Household composition	**Singles without children** (considerable age differences within this group)	**Young couples without children**	**Couples with children <11 years**	**Couples with children >11 years**	**Older couples with no children living in the household**
	6	**3**	**5**	**2**	**2**
Organic consumer Type	**Regular users**	**Occasional users**	**Non-users**		
	8	**6**	**4**		
Gender	**female**	**male**			
	12	**6**			

As regards ***secondary subjects'*** interviews, it was quite difficult to recruit these subjects in the case of single-person households. In two of these cases (regular consumers), it was possible to interview a close friend, but results in terms of data collection (especially in one case, where the friend was not Italian and had some language difficulties) are really poor. In some other cases (1 non-user and 2 occasional users), the secondary subjects interview could not be done. The husband of a married non-user refused the interview, too. In sum we have 14 secondary subjects interviews: most of them are with partners (3 male, 7 female), two with friends (both females) and we have a mother and a daughter.

Participants (both principal and secondary subject) interviewed received a small incentive: a 25.00 Euro petrol voucher.

Shopkeepers[5] were also interviewed for both regular and organic users recruited in organic specialised shops. In some cases shopkeepers had some difficulties to remember the shopping habits of one of these subjects consumer.

Shopping trips were carried out when possible. Two non-users and some occasional consumers refused it, because of time constraints. In all the other cases they took place in their principal shopping place: the specialised organic shops (Torino: Claudia Avonti, Alimenti Biologici, via Bertola: Ancona: La Macina, Via Maratta), the specialised supermarket (Ancona: Naturasì, Via Martiri della Resistenza) or the generic supermarket (especially for occasional users and non users) (Torino: GS, via Tripoli, 12; Ancona: COOP, Via Maratta,– SMA, Via tavernelle – GS, Via Brecce Bianche) (Table 5).

Ancona has 100,000 inhabitants and Turin about 900,000. In both towns there are few specialised shops for organic products (including Macrobiotic outlets), as well as several supermarkets (Coop, Conad, GS and Sma) located in most city areas, selling both organic and low input food. In most cases conventional Supermarket Chains have their own private labels to sell organic products and low input food.

Table 5- Shopping venues characteristics

Name	Location	Kind of venue	Brief description / characterization of the outlet
COOP	**Ancona** central area	Large supermarket	Large supermarket located in one of the most important residential areas. Has a dedicated area where most of organic food products are sold. Broad range of customers

5 One shopkeeper was initially quite diffident towards the research aims and reluctant to being interviewed. It was decided to offer a shopping voucher valid for her shop (instead of the petrol voucher) to have her collaboration.

La Macina	**Ancona** central area	Organic specialised shops	Small organic shop, located in one of the richest zones of town. It sells every kind of organic and food including meat, fruit and vegetables as well as personal care and housecleaning products. Usual customers are middle to upper class and elderly consumers familiar with the old small neighbourhood shops
GS	**Ancona** outside the principal centre	Mid-range supermarket	Mid-range supermarket located in a peripheral residential area. Has a dedicated area were most of organic food products are sold. Broad range of customers.
Naturasì	**Ancona** outside the principal centre	Specialised Organic supermarket	Mid-range organic supermarket located in the periphery. Broad range of customers, many from outside the town.
SMA	**Ancona** outside the principal centre	Mid-range supermarket	Mid-range supermarket located in a peripheral residential area. Has a dedicated area were most of organic food products are sold. Broad range of customers.
Claudia Avonti, Alimenti Biologici	**Turin** Downtown	Organic specialised shops	Small organic shop, located in downtown Turin. It sells every kind of organic and food including meat, fruit and vegetables as well as personal care and housecleaning products. Usual customers are middle class women and white-collar workers with downtown jobs.
GS	**Turin** outside the principal centre	Mid-range supermarket	Mid-range supermarket located in a peripheral residential area. Has a dedicated area were most of organic food products are sold. Broad range of customers.

Qualitative interviews with different respondents groups were conducted by 2 trained interviewers in their own region: one was responsible for the Torino area and the other for the Ancona area. This decision was taken in order to reach the different quotas of the project recruitment scheme. The interviews were conducted indoors, sometimes in the consumers' home (or office), or in the interviewers' office. The latter solution allowed at the same time quiet and a professional image in order to conduct a fruitful interview. Just in few cases (ITA-TO-Regular-PS3, ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7), in Turin, the respondents asked to be interviewed in a small bar close to the shopping place

The length of the interviews varied considerably between interviewees, but we can assume that they lasted on average 50 minutes, ranging from 30 minutes for an interview with a non-user to a maximum of 1 hour and 20 minutes for a regular consumer. Overall interviews took 28 hours. The average length of the shopping trip interviews was around 20 minutes and that of interviews with secondary subjects was 30 minutes.

Interviews were recorded and a video-tape recorder was also used during the shopping trip to obtain an acceptable audio. Verbatim transcriptions were used for data analysis.

Data analysis was done at a qualitative level using NVivo, a processing software which easily allowed the coder to structure participants' statements and code them. The coding was carried on using a meta-code book, an index tree jointly developed by the Italian team together with the Danish team. Using the set of codes agreed and tested by the two teams, two independent Italian judges carried out the classification process for the interviews. The inter-reliability index (82%), checked for one sample interview, was considered acceptable. Any disagreements were discussed and solved to allow a consistent coding between the judges.

The main difficulty raised during the analysis of the interviews, particularly for non-regular consumers, was making the distinction between statements concerning organic products and statements related to general consumption, since recruitment criteria for not strongly committed organic consumers sometimes produced very small differences between regular and occasional organic consumers. In most of the cases it was very difficult to recruit "really occasional consumers"; those buying occasionally at least one product are very often also regular consumers for at least another different one.

2 Life Histories regarding Food Habits

This section deals with general statements, collected from the respondents, regarding food and the relevance of food and food quality issues in consumers' lives. In section 2.1 respondents' current food habits are presented, while the development of food habits is reported in Section 2.3 with particular regard to stories about childhood, youth and early adulthood. Section 2.2 deals specifically with the first encounter with organic food. Elements that have remained the same as well as, and more importantly, the direction of the changes that have occurred (e.g. towards healthier food habits, away from traditional recipes, more simple meals, more organic foods etc.) are the fundamental patterns described in all these sections.

Consumers, when thinking of good quality food, manly refer to the sensory characteristics of food: taste, texture, and smell are the most important quality dimensions of food products in general. Although different food quality cues are mentioned for different types of foods, all consumers spontaneously mentioned taste as the most important food quality characteristic, when they think of a good quality product.

In general there is no clear difference between the organic consumers groups (regular and occasional consumers) but there is a slight difference with the non-users. Most of non organic consumers seem less interested in the intrinsic food quality cues and assign more importance to the way products are prepared and cooked. To put into one respondent's words:

> *"Good cooking makes the real difference" (ITA-TO-NoUser-PS9, ITA-AN- NoUser-PS2, ITA-AN- NoUser-PS7).*

2.1 Current food habits

2.1.1 Meals, eating and cooking habits

The main findings with regard to the current eating and cooking habits in the three user groups (regular, occasional and non users) should take into account that the Italian traditional diet (sometimes referred to as Mediterranean) is generally perceived as healthy. There are few local/regional differences in the Italian diets – perceived as being higher in fat contents (e.g.: Emilia Romagna Region) – but usually the traditional Mediterranean diet is perceived as beneficial for the abundant consumption of fruit and vegetables, bread, wheat and other cereals, olive oil, fish and a moderate consumption of dairy products and wine. To Italian respondents, the Mediterranean diet – being as a diet rich in pasta, vegetables and olive oil and relatively poor in red meats – is considered as their standard and normal diet. Sometimes they have memories of heavier and less balanced (in terms of proteins, fat and carbohydrates) meals in the past, but they generally share the opinion that a diet with larger amounts of vegetables – better if raw – is a healthy diet.

One unusual case explains how the Mediterranean diet is perceived by a consumer of foreign origins.

> *"[when I was child] in my house but also when my mother was small there was always fruit and vegetables. They are not even typically Swedish…It is more a Mediterranean cuisine, isn't it! But we have always eaten well… fruit, and vegetables were always on the table.." (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3)*

The Italian (Mediterranean) food model – valuing the naturalness of food, the household timing of the meals together with the pride for the national traditions – has a strong symbolic value and a widespread traditional value. Even tough the Mediterranean diet has represented, in the general process of transformation of the food behaviours, the most important attempt of consolidating a nation-wide, shared and motivated food model (Albertini and Celenza, 2001), we cannot assume that this evolution is common to all Italian consumers. Our findings have to take into consideration that the sample interviewed was screened in order to select only those consumers exhibiting high involvement in food quality.

Nevertheless, some little changes characterize the "modern" way of cooking with respect to the old fashioned" traditional cuisine. The traditional pasta with meat sauce (known as "ragù"), a common dish of Italian families, is being increasingly abandoned.

> *"My cooking is different from my mother's or my grandmother's, neither my mother nor I have ever much used "soffritto"[6]. She just cooked the onion till it became tawny… Therefore my cooking is not a heavy one…[…], I just try to put the things together to prepare a quick and nice pasta, I prepare it with vegetables …to me it is the best we can have…better than the usual ragù[7] …, we lost the habits of the classic way of cooking, we do not use the gravy with meat anymore, the ragù and things like that, we have lost them. " (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1).*

> *"Our cooking is different. We cook in a simpler way… my mother probably cooks better but her meals are a bit complicated. We are getting used to eating ingredients as they are, we just like to add them to the pasta, rather than preparing a heavy sauce…" (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS9).*

In general, regular and occasional users have a negative attitude towards the old habit (very common in their family of origin) of eating lots of meat (especially red meat).

The meat consumption has to be seen in its symbolic meaning as a phenomenon associated to wealth and health perceptions by consumers. Meat has substantially been inaccessible to most of the Italian consumers until the end of the 1950s. In 1960, when Italy's industrial boom started, most people still lived in poverty and insufficient nutrition; meat consumption was still limited to 22 Kg per person, not far from the 14 Kg annual per person of 1861, the year of Italian reunification. It was just later, in the following fifteen years that meat consumption tripled reaching 62 Kg in 1975 an involving one third of the total annual household expenses. Until then, eating (more) meat was seen as a status symbol. The decrease of meat consumption began later, in the 90s, when consumptions fall down to approximately 53 Kg in 1998. At that time meat expenses were less than a quarter of the total food consumptions. Some medical research on cardiovascular diseases (and cancer) has also led to advice to reduce red meat consumption, which was very high during the Sixties and the Seventies (Albertini and Celenza, 2001).

Not surprisingly, the Mediterranean diet spread during the 1990s in the same period of the organic market development.

> *"[When I was child] there was a meat obsession, always on the table for every meal, therefore meat every day, twice a day " (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

Lunch (with the typical main course and a second course with vegetables), but also breakfast and dinner, vary a lot across respondents and their families.

> *"We can say that meals are normal. First course, second course with vegetables, fruits and sometimes cake.. " (ITA-AN-NonUser-PS2, ITA-AN-Occasional-PS5, ITA-AN-Regular-PS3)*

The majority are now eating in the 'new way', with a pasta dish and vegetables or salad for lunch, and meat or fish (or other protein foods) with vegetables for dinner, but no real rule exist within the different organic users groups. Breakfast is described in a more varied way, too. Italians do not consider it as an essential meal. Very often they just have an espresso coffee, with cookies or a slice

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[6] "Soffritto" is considered a quite heavy an unhealthy way to start preparing food. It consists of stir-frying a mixture of chopped onions or garlic, celery, carrots, seasonings, etc. The "soffritto" is ready when the garlic is golden and/or the onion becomes tawny. Bacon or other typical ingredients for the pasta can be also cooked together and are typically the base for a tomato sauce.

[7] Ragù is an Italian term for a meat-based sauce, which is traditionally served with pasta. The typical Italian ragù includes ragù bolognese (sometimes known as Bolognese sauce), Neapolitan ragù, and Ragù alla Barese (which contains horse meat). A ragù is usually made by adding meat to a "soffritto" and then simmering it for a long time with tomato sauce.

of cake. Only in some of the cases they eat a complete breakfast including some fruits, corn flakes and something cooked. This situation is mirrored in respondents' discourses, albeit nowadays breakfast is representing a meal of growing importance in Italy (Albertini and Celenza, 2001).

As concerns meal preparation, it is interesting to notice that in the case of couples, especially younger ones, this domestic activity is nearly always shared. During meal preparation there is collaboration between the two partners or at least the husband is involved in some special preparations during weekdays and/or the weekend.

> *"Even if he has some problems with his working hours, he tries to participate in the cooking activities … he doesn't have time to do shopping, but he's a very good cook and has a lot of fantasy when cooking… It's also a good thing that our children see their father, a man, fully involved in cooking activities" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS4)*[8]

> *"For practical reasons I usually cook during weekdays while my husband cooks on Saturdays and Sundays"(ITA-TO-Occasional-SS6)*

> *"During working days I do the cooking because my husband comes home later than me. On Saturdays and Sundays we cook together and sometimes he cooks" (ITA-TO-NonUser-PS8)*

Collaboration between the partners emerges in all the consumers categories (regular, occasional and non users). Nevertheless, this result need to be considered in conjunction with the type of sample selected in the present study. Partners sharing food preparation seem to be quite a recent habit in Italy. The fact that most of our respondents report this behaviour is probably connected with the respondents' attitude to prepare and eat foods of better quality than the standard consumer does. Collaboration on food preparation could be seen as a consequence of consumers' high involvement level of in food and food quality.

As regards meal consumption dinner and the weekend meals are important family occasions, while the lunch is seen a separate occasion especially in larger Turin where the partner often works far from home and schoolchildren often eat at the school canteen. Families sharing meals on a regular basis are still the majority in Italy: 60% of the population still eat all lunches at home (ISMEA, 2007), while the share of out-of-home food consumption in Italy is among the lowest in Europe.[9] The sample attitude of having meals together matches the Italian population behaviours.

All the informants show a clear attention towards quality of products purchases, which is confirmed by the high level of scores in the involvement scale obtained by most of the recruited consumers[10]. Nevertheless the high level of consumers involvement in food quality does not necessarily means a

[8] Her husband confirms: "She cooks more often than me because she has more favourable office hours, but I try to help her as much as possible...a man helping in the kitchen is a family tradition for me: my father cooked and my brothers also does" (ITA-TO-Regular-SS4)

[9] According to Nomisma (2007) out-of-home food expenditures represent 32% of total fod expenitures in Italy. This share is a bit lower then the European average (33%) and much lower if compared to 46.8% in Greece, 50.5% in Spain, 51.7 in Ireland, 48.1 in UK.

[10] According to the involvement scale submitted during the recruitment phase as a screening tool all the organic informants have a score ranging from a high level (that is a score higher than 30 and lower than 36) to a very high level, (that is a score higher than 36 on a maximum of 49). The minimum score acceptable not to be excluded was 24. Non users had the lowest food quality involvement scores, they reached the medium level that is had scores not lower than 25 but hot higher than 30. This means that all consumers interviewed are quite highly committed in purchasing food of good quality.

high involvement in organic food nor more organic purchases[11]. Indeed, regular users are those with the highest average score but the highest number of very highly involved consumers are found in the occasional group (Table 6). In any case, no significant difference is found among the three groups (Kruskall-Wallis test sig. 0.46) nor among users and non-users (Mann-Whitney U test Sig. 0.23).

Table 6 - Consumer involvement level in food quality

Consumers groups	Involvement score Average	Involvement score Std. Dev.	Involvement level Modal value	Total number of subject into consumer group
Regular users	35.5	3.9	HIGH	8
Occasional users	34.5	4.5	VERY HIGH	6
Non users	30.8	7.5	MEDIUM	4
Total number of subjects				**18**

Regular users

Respondents in this groups distinctly declare they look for both higher quality and healthier food products. Nevertheless, this group does not exhibit higher scores in the food involvement scale than occasional users (see above). Regular users, in their discourses, tend to consider healthiness and food quality an integrated concept, at least with respect to organic food. They pay a lot of attention in avoiding foods containing chemicals and harmful substances, which they consider to be less naturally produced.

> *"There are some things that I prefer not to buy … strawberries for example, because I know that farmers may use special chemicals to grow strawberries" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1).*

It is interesting to note that consumers who have had or still maintain connections with farming areas (through parents, relatives or friends), consider the food coming from known farmers both healthy and of good quality. When this is the case, production techniques and the possible use of chemicals is a minor problem: even those more strongly involved in organic food consumption seem to show a greater tolerance towards the potential usage of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

> *"We get a large amount of fruit and vegetables form Manuela's parents … they live in a mountain area, and just grow something for their needs, without any organic certification, but we perfectly know how they farm their land... so we pick salad and other things … there is a lot of differences between these products and those that we can find in other places" (ITA-TO-Regular-SS1).*

Regular consumers spend quite a lot of time both in food purchases (see following chapter) and in meal preparation. As a consequence they seem to dislike ready-made products as well as frozen food. The reason for the first attitude is the fear of eating chemicals and other additives. As an alternative frozen vegetables are rejected due to a bad taste experience.

[11] There is no correlation between the experience level (frequency of purchase of different product categories) as declared by the organic consumers and the involvement level measured during the recruitment phase. The correlation is also not present among the organic users.

“It is easier to buy a frozen product…we all have so many tasks…(ITA-AN-Regular-PS1) but you can be more organised, in preparing dishes/meals with less effort (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3, ITA-AN-Regular-PS8).

“Cooking can be not so demanding…a pumpkin soup does not require too much effort. You just put everything in the pot for 40 minutes…You must make nothing. Frozen foods have an awful taste” (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1)

They substantially assert that cooking is a matter of organization. Junk food, like chips, popcorn or hot dog, is generally not allowed in regular users meals. Exceptions are tolerated since even regular organic consumers are not fundamentalist in their relationship with (organic) food.

“I buy some junk food in order to please my children. Because I cannot be too much rigid. I know in some way they eat it…so I grant them on Saturday evening, they can have popcorn“ (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3)

Occasional users

Occasional users are a very mixed group, but in general they behaviours and choices are strongly oriented by the sensory experience.

Most of them do not really reject the habit of having a quick lunch with the so called “junk food”, like fish and chips or a hot dog from McDonald. They others (ITA-AN-Occasional-P4, ITA-AN-Occasional-P5). ITA-AN-Occasional-P8) to not disdain it if the food is tasty. Their opinion is that eating should be approached in a flexible way.

“We are not rigid nor have a fixation,…I like to eat some “junk” going to “Mc-Donald”, then I can feel sick for a week... but later if I want, if I like I want to repeat the experience…it is the atmosphere you are around and if you like an hot dog full of rubbish…as a rule a decide no but sometimes…you need it…” (ITA-AN-Occasional-P8)

Occasional consumers do not behave differently from regular consumers for what concerns ready made food, tinned and frozen products: occasional consumers too disdain ready made food, tinned and frozen products because they believe they are less healthy. Frozen products are sometimes judged of higher quality, compared to the ready made ones, by occasional organic consumers. Frozen food are often perceived as close substitutes of fresh ones, with similar degree of “freshness” but a longer shelf life. The use of frozen vegetables is convenient when there is little time for cooking.

“I never eat ready made food, sometimes I eat frozen products. I choose them because I believe they can be fresher than the fresh ones…” (ITA-AN-Occasional-SP5, ITA-AN-Occasional-SP9)

“I make use of frozen vegetables… also for convenience, because I work all the day and I have not much time, they are easy products…I always look for fresh products and in their simplicity they maintain their properties…”(ITA-AN-Occasional-SP4)

Non users

As compared to regular and occasional users, the non-users tend to pay less attention to the healthiness of food. They tend to give more importance to the taste experience but even taste does not seem to be so essential in their daily choices.

“…the best products/food is those from our home-garden. They are picked when it is time …they are not put in refrigerators to fully mature…” (ITA-AN-NonUser-PS2).

2.1.2 Shopping habits and shopping venues

Both in Ancona and Torino, almost all regular user and one occasional user (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6) make most part of their weekly food purchases in the organic specialised shops (small specialised shops and organic franchising supermarkets of different dimensions).

Although nearly all the informants (usually regular ones) usually attend more than one shop to complete their household purchases, some of them speak about a sort of uneasiness towards the supermarkets and hypermarkets.

> *"[When I arrived in Italy] I liked very much all those small specialized shops … one for milk, one for bread, one for cheese and so on … I preferred to avoid supermarkets .. It was strange, because at that time there was a supermarket boom in Italy... when I think about this spread of supermarkets and hypermarkets I feel really sad …When my friends tell me that they like to go to those supermarkets, I tell them «I prefer to take the bike and go to the bakery, then I go to the milk-shop and so on … I like it so much!» … I think that human relations that you can have in small specialized groceries are fundamental …" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS4)*

> *"If I think to our family's economy I must say that we decreased supermarkets purchases .. we always paid attention to what we bought, but this attention increased during last years ... My husband radicalized his position and now he tries to avoid supermarkets as much as he can … he's trying to completely avoid supermarkets" (ITA-TO-Occasional-SS7)*

Regular users

Most of regular users choose a variety of shops because of their quality orientation towards the product selection done by the different shop owners. They often go in three or more shops to complete their weekly food purchases. In one shop they buy meat, in another vegetables, in another pasta, tea, eggs, etc.

To some consumers (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4, ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6), the selection of the food stores is related to the closeness to home or to the office. In their discourses, a close shop is one they can go on foot or by bicycle, more times per week.

> *"Now it is more difficult to go to "la Macina" (the specialised shop)…we live far from the shop and I can go there less often" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3).*

Regular users often buy food from local market/farmers to have fresher products. In many cases they substitute shops with farmers for fresh fruit and vegetables. This choice is often related to achieving a higher degree of perceived freshness.

> *"…people often buy packed salad, it is a new trend…This product has nothing of the salad, apart from a lot of chlorine and it is not healthy. You need to wash it again, the vitamins are not there anymore, and it has a completely different taste from the one of the farmer. That salad has the dew still on the leaves, the farmer goes to take it early in the morning and when you eat it…it seems just picked, it is as it really is…"(ITA-AN-Regular- PS8)*

> *"My husband hates packed vegetables, probably because she has always lived closed to the countryside he dislikes processed things, he has the idea that concept or because it has grown here close to the campaign, than the produce does not have to be sold with the plastic…" (ITA-AN-Regular- PS3)*

Occasional users

This group seems the more heterogeneous both in terms of eating habits and shopping habits. Some of them select shops based on food quality criteria but mostly for the sake of convenience. This consumer group usually prefer supermarkets or convenience shops close to home or workplace. Farmers are sometimes mentioned.

The only two organic occasional users not mentioning known farmers among their shopping places are: the one who lives in the countryside (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS9), and another user just buying fair-trade products through purchasing groups (GAS[12]): ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7).

Non Users

Most consumers, especially the non-users and the regular ones, trust direct purchases from local farmers. This findings confirm what was reported in previous survey results (Zanoli, 2004). They believe they can trust local farmers better because they are closer to them (and often they are also in terms of relationships further than for their lower physical distance from them). In this way they can have their personal experience with the producer and can personally verify the way of production.

> *"I do not believe organic food is good nor better than the food bought from the peasant. What should organic food have more than the farmers produce? Surely I would buy from the farmer that I know. For example my uncle has his own garden…it is obvious I eat his vegetables…" (ITA-AN-Non-user-PS7).*

2.2 The encounter with organic foods

In most of the cases respondents do not describe their first encounter with organic food as a sudden revelation (like St Paul on the road to Damascus), but they tell about a slow change of mind. Most of the principal subjects cannot remember the specific event or situation that moved them towards organic food products. No significant turning point seems to come out even when the health issue has emerged as problem in one of the family members. In these cases the organic choice was just enlarged/spread to other organic products, whilst it had been explored before the event.

Only in few cases consumers are able to recall from memory the starting point of their organic consumption. They usually remember the life cycle stage but hardly are able to recall the location and the kind of products they bought.

> *"…they probably were the first years 1980s, half years 1980s, 1984,1985" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS3)*

> *"At that time, I speak about more than 10 years ago, perhaps also 15" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

> *"For sure less than 10 years ago, that is from since when I'm here... so about… ten years ago" (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6)*

Some of them just try to imagine which kind of product they purchased and the venue where they should have found it.

> *"… the first organic products were seitan and tofu […] maybe because I saw them in some shop … then I started to buy other products …" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS2)*

But when comparing principal and secondary subject's replies, these events do not appear really definite or confirmable inside the family.

According to the consumers replies there is no real rule in their first organic purchase (Table 7). Sometimes it is just a sort of curiosity, some other a reply to a health problem.

Table 7- First organic food purchased

LA R US	ID	First organic food purchased

[12] GAS (is an acronym for Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale) stands for Ethical Purchasing Groups. These are (often informal) associations of consumers that cooperate in order to buy food and other commonly used goods directly from the producers or from big retailers at a discounted rate. No retail margins are applied on the goods.

	ITA-TO-Regular-PS1	Seitan, whole grain rice
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS2	Seitan ,tofu
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS3	Whole wheat pasta
	ITA-TO-Regular-PS4	Flour, rice, pasta, fruit, vegetables, cous-cous
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS1	
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS3	Herb tea
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS6	Pasta, rice, almonds dried fruits
	ITA-AN-Regular-PS8	
OCCASIONAL USERS	ID	First organic food purchased
	ITA-TO-Occasional-PS5	
	ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6	Fruit, vegetables
	ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7	Pasta
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4	
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS5	Bread, cookies
	ITA-AN-Occasional-PS9	bread
NON-USERS	ID	First organic food purchased
	ITA-TO- noUser-PS8	
	ITA-TO- noUser-PS9	
	ITA-AN-noUser-PS2	meat
	ITA-AN- noUser-PS7	cookies

Most regular and occasional consumers usually recall a gradual evolution process, which paired with a strong cognitive process and a continuous exploration and experience, never ending up. Among the respondents, the organic choice is relatively recent. However, it seems a bit more recent for the occasional consumers than for the regular ones and it seem to be not related to their ages (average age is the same for the two groups). The regular consumers speak of the 1980s as the period they first encountered organic food. Occasional users refer to the mid of the 1990s which coincided with the organic market boom and the entrance of large retailers in the Italian organic market.

Regular consumers, usually more involved in organic consumption, seem to have ever looked for a “sort of” organic food, even when the organic produce was not sold into supermarkets. They were, and still are more or less organic explorers: searching for healthy and/or natural food (not necessarily organic) when and where it is feasible. When possible, regular consumers spend time and travel some distance to find the organic food they like or else they keep in touch with a friend of them producing the products the way they like. This search process is often also a way to save money avoiding specialised shops’ high prices.

Occasional consumers also told that their encounter with organic food was quite gradual, but they feel free to alternate organic and conventional, when the sensory experience is disappointing. Better taste is really the trigger event when moving to organic.

Some non-users (ITA-AN-Non User-PS2 and ITA-AN-NonUser-PS7) – and an occasional consumer (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6), recalled the bad taste experience of an organic product as the one that made them distrust the organic quality.

2.3 Changes in food habits

In order to have a complete view of the consumers habit the flow of consumer changes, as reported in their narratives, is described. Food biographies are analysed following three main phases:

childhood, youth and adulthood. Analysis of stories that concern earlier/former habits related to the food theme, will be developed to identify elements that have remained the same (e.g. a focus on saving money on food purchases, using considerable time on slow cooking, or eating meals together, etc.) as well as, and more importantly, identifies the direction of the changes that have occurred (e.g. towards healthier food habits, away from traditional recipes, simpler meals, more organic foods etc.).

Childhood is quite important because it seems that important models and experiences consumers have had in this phase have largely influenced their current habits and behaviours. These experiences are perceived as to be not consciously recognised, but in some way they have influenced current food choice. On one hand there are the taste and feelings experienced when consumers were children (*real and authentic tastes of fruits…we are trying to find again*) on the other hand the teachings and examples learned into the family of origin (see also Chap. 2.4)

> *"We did not care too much about it when we were children…but in my family, from my parents' side, there have always been much attention to home cooking."(ITA-AN-Occasional-PS2)*

> *"My mother took care of food purchases…therefore I have always eaten what she chose, what I found in house. In truth, but now in a posteriori view, I can say that she has conditioned a lot also my future choices. (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4)*

> *"My mother organised food purchases and meals, I was not so conscious about the choices but I remember special dishes and the taste of bread" (ITA-AN-Occasional-SS9).*

For what concerns meals organisation, not many differences are recorded among consumers groups. The practice of eating out of home at lunch (close to office or so) and probably having a unique family meal in the evening is quite a recent habit in Italy. Having a quick meal at the lunch pause during the working days is more frequent in big cities, like Torino, than in the smallest ones. When most of the consumers were young (excluding the youngest i.e.: aged around 30) all meals were a daily family event. In the experience of the respondents, lunch and dinner was a daily family reunion when the family head was back from work. This situation usually ended when one of the members left the home for study reasons, or because he/she built his/her own family or had a job (this occurred around the 1980s and 1990s). Nowadays lunch meals aren't any longer a convivial event except during the weekend. To have a family dinner every evening is more common and easier.

All interviewed people describe the way of cooking of their mothers and grandmothers as different to the one they do. The differences are connected to a changed availability of food, to different meals structure (see above Chap. 2.1.1) but also to less time available.

Most of the informants' mothers and grandmothers didn't work; they were housewives, so they had much more time, than the respondents, to cook. At the moment respondents, both men and women, say they have a full day schedule so they can not spend (or presumably do not want to) too much time in preparing food. Sometimes more time is allocated to food preparation during weekends. Nevertheless, **regular users** affirm the need to devote more time to food preparation. This is not related to the fact that they buy organic food but is presented as a general attitude towards careful food preparation and good meals. In practice, practically only few housewives, having more time to spend in the kitchen, can devote lot of time to cooking on a daily basis: one is a retired women (ITA-AN-Regular-P6), the other one (ITA-AN-Regular-P8) is a young housewife.

Regular and occasional consumers describe some changes in their way of eating due to the grown availability of food in general and of organic food in some cases. But the two groups are quite clearly moved by different levers. Actually, regular consumers give importance to the fact they can have a wider range of organic food than in the past and as a consequence they can eat more

Mediterranean dishes. Occasional consumers appreciate the openness of the market to other food cultures in general as a consequence they can choose among a great variety of different foods.

Regular users

In few food biographies of regular consumers (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1 e ITA-TO-Regular-PS2) there are some common regularities: a first phase characterised by low stability and (sometimes cyclical) changes in food habits, whereas the second phase (the actual one) is described as more "stable" and "coherent".

When telling about their food biographies, respondents tell about their experiences and anecdotes connected to their family traditions (this aspect emerges in a cross-sectional way respect to different age groups) and to the rural environment they experienced[13]. Many of them speak about their childhood in the countryside or just about when they had experienced a short period living with some relatives there, but also narrate about the family vegetable garden located in the urban periphery). In general child hood food and related sensory experiences are deeply impressed into consumers minds and mentioned in anecdotal format to specific products (oil, fruit, meat, etc.).

When thinking about food, respondents show a nostalgic feeling towards an idyllic (rural?) past compared to an agro-industrial, urbanised present:

> *"Having lived in the countryside I know exactly the consequences of interfering on the farming process, for example by using pesticides [...] I perfectly remember when my father had to get permissions in order to use pesticides14 .. those products had a "life danger" label and probably he knew of the risks connected to using them, but I think he was convinced that all the pests would be eliminated in a couple of weeks [...] so, they were happy because he could say "look at my crop, it's clean, only the corn grows up!" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS3)*

Similar feelings apply to the consequences of the industrial food processing:

> *"I was born in the States, specifically in Connecticut, in a family belonging to sixties-seventies generation, during the commodity food boom" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS4)*

> *"... it was during the '60s when I was a student … I remember the first industrial snacks appearing in our school bags" (ITA-TO-NonUser-PS8).*

Regular consumers (especially the secondary subjects i.e.: those with minor roles in family decision making) highlight the increasing availability of organic food as promoter of their increased consumption. A large assortment of organic food means you can eat organic without making compromises between health and taste:

> *"We first started with organic cookies, but… you know: until recently the taste was really poor you know what I mean?! […] She [the wife] bought strange products for soups… a sort of Nordic food, and you know we are Mediterranean, it is a taste issue… But now … now I see there are, eggs, flour … normal products! … normal carrots, strawberries, things like that and pasta and bread, …" (ITA-AN-Regular-SS3)*

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[13] It is to be noted that the huge phenomenon of the urbanism that has crowded the Italian big cities with a large and fast increase of population, beginning form the end of the '50s, together with the economic boom of the '60s has radically changed the social and economic framework in Italy. Starting from that period, one phase of fast transformation of the economic and social structures occurred. It was a process that in ten years transformed the peninsula from an agricultural-industrial country - substantially underdeveloped - in a modern industrial-agricultural country. These changes have largely influenced human lives forcing them to leave their farming activities and lands in favour of a more urban life, with all the advantages and disadvantages.

[14] In Italy you need a special licence to use the most dangerous pesticides.

> *"We have been eating conventional snacks, cookies and Coke for a long time. But we believed that vegetables, bread, milk and fruits should be organic [] now we have found a soft drink which is organic,… so now we take only that one." (ITA-AN-Regular-SS8)*

Occasional users
Occasional consumers do not appear so different compared to regular users in their past experiences and their current behaviours. In contrast with their regular counterparts, two main issues emerge as distinguishing. On one hand, their search for authentic and "real" tastes is more pronounced; on the other hand, given they perceive themselves as having much less time than their mothers for shopping and cooking food, they are keener in purchasing and using convenience food (such as frozen vegetables or, to a lesser extent, ready-made meals).

> *"My mother cooked home made meals every day…I have to use frozen vegetables… also for convenience, because I work all the day and I have not much time, they are easy products…I always look for fresh products and in their simplicity they maintain their properties…"(ITA-AN-Occasional-SP4)*

To a lesser extent, occasional consumers appreciate the increased availability of food in general, not only in the organic range. They value the wide range of different products available on the shelves due to globalisation. Once again the sensorial experience is the most important factor in guiding their choice. Variety matters too: they can experience different tastes, no matter if the experience is always satisfactory or if the product is organic or not.

> *"In my house we ate everything: meat, fish, etc.…but when I was a child we were not much used to eat exotic fruits like pineapple or kiwi, they were uncommon…" (ITA_AN Occasional-SP5)*

2.4 Influences on changing food habits

Regular and occasional users
Organic consumers seem to be very deeply influenced by their original family's food habits. In organic consumer biographies, there is always a family member that is assigned a special role in influencing the respondents' attitudes toward food quality. The greater influence is often assigned to grandparents and, secondarily, to the mothers of respondents. The grandparents seem to have played a major positive role in the discovery of quality in food and the recognition of what constitute a "good" food product. The role of mothers is ambiguous. Although the "mamma" is a special institution in Italian families, she is alternatively mentioned as providing a positive influence

> *"My mother has always given a good attention to the quality of the food or for an healthy way of cooking […] at that time there was not the culture of organic foods etc.[…] So she tried to find quality foods by looking for high priced products…milk, oil, baby food… I also remember she looked for specific quality signs" (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7)*

or a negative one

> *"When I was a child, my mother didn't pay attention to my eating habits; moreover, she had an obsession for meat: we had to eat meat everyday, sometimes twice a day ... when I left home, I decided not to eat meat anymore and I did it for 12 years" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

> *"My mother was quite traditional with respect to the American way of cooking .. she usually used time-saving, convenience products [..] she had a fixed menu and didn't like so much cooking ... there was always enough to eat, but it wasn't a really tasteful food" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS4)*

It is important to notice that, among the negative examples, one of them is referred to a "foreign mamma".

In general, the deep relation with whom was the food decision maker and purchaser when respondents were children seems to be an important vehicle for their involvement in food and their subsequent openness to change of mind (toward organic or healthier products).

> *"My mother said one hundred grams of good food is better than 600 of junk food" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS6)*

> *"My mother, but also my grandmother,…have always paid attention to good cooking, healthy food and Mediterranean meals were prepared, in order to eat a lot of fruit and vegetables…We have always eaten very well at home" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3)*

> *"Since I was young I remember my grandfather… he was a baker very concerned about bread quality. My grandmother paid a lot of attention in buying high quality food. Everyone in my family has an obsession for this" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS8)*

Few regular organic consumers barely mention other influencers, once grown up: friends and acquaintances the most reported, but with a minor role.

Although children are often mentioned as important influencers in family decision making (Peter et al, 1999), they do not appear to have played a crucial role in explaining current and past food habits in neither organic group. In some occasions, respondents report they were already organic users and when a baby was born they just decided to increase the amount of organic food purchased:

> *"…we were organic users but… you like your child to eat the same things the others family members eat, for a sense of protection towards him: he is so little, you end up in paying more attention towards the choice of food …" (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4)*

> *" …I have children so I try to buy organic…" (ITA-AN- Regular-SS3)*

Nevertheless, since the reported increase related to children's influence was contemporary to the organic market boom at the end of last century, it is not clear whether this organic increase was connected to a supplementary availability or to the increased awareness of new parents.

In one case (ITA-AN-Regular-SP3) the reduced amount of organic shopping could be related to the growing of (numerous) children: the volume of organic purchases should have increased but its cost could have been unbearable given the higher price of organic products.

At the same time, the same informant (ITA-AN-Regular-SP3) mentioned an external event (moving home) as a factor explaining the reduced amount of organic food purchased, since the new home is far from the organic specialised shop that she used to attend.

Among other internal events, household composition, pregnancy and health problems are not considered as events which have much influenced food habits. If this is the case, the change occurred just for a short period of time.

A similar short-term response pattern applies to food scandals and farming practices perceived as dangerous (e.g. GM food): organic consumers simply try to pay attention to the origin of food without taking into much consideration whether it is organic or not. Their behaviour in food choice is trust-driven. In some cases, they affirm to be confident in the shop owner choice (namely in the case of organic specialised shops) or in the retailer's mission (e.g. COOP is the largest supermarket chain in Italy and, a consumer cooperative, gives special importance to customer relations and product selection).

Non Users

Confirmatory evidence on the role of the family of origin in acquiring healthy and/or quality-oriented food habits can be derived by non organic users food biographies. This group of respondents generally declare that their original families were never very much interested in food quality, and so are they.

To non organic users there are not many differences in their current food habits compared to that they had in the past. Changes or improvements can be connected to family budget:

> *"I have not modified my way of eating. My mother was not particularly attentive about food and cooking, so I am the same. I can eat a hot dog at lunch and dinner for days…But nowadays I probably have more money than she had (she was a single mother with two children) so I' have modified eating because I can go more often to a restaurant to eat well. " (ITA-AN-Non User-PS7)*

> *"We bought a steak more often in the past…now, also because we are just two in the family [wife and husband] we prefer cheaper meat…pig meat which costs less. We buy the best cuts of meat for my daughter [when she comes to visit], because I see they cost more" (ITA-AN- Non User-PS2)*

2.5 Conclusion: The place of organic consumption in changing food habits

On one hand, organic users seem rather different in their food habits as compared to the non-users.

Being an organic consumer appear to be somewhat positively related to food involvement (as measured during recruitment) and therefore to a search for quality in food.

On the other hand, the boundaries between regular and occasional organic consumers are much less crisp than that between organic users and non-users. The fuzzy nature of the categorisation is partially attributable to the a-priori recruitment rules.

In any case, food habits appear as a dynamic development more than an abrupt change, especially when organic "conversion" is involved. This idea of a slow pattern of change is well described by Gardner (2004), who considers the sudden changes of mind (like that of St. Paul) an exception more than a rule.

The direction towards which food habits tend to change is most of all connected to a different way of living and thinking which puts its roots and slowly grew in the mind of organic consumers.

Organic consumption is a matter of inner development. It is an idea which slowly grows in the mind of the consumer (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1, ITA-AN-Regular-PS3, ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4).

> *"Organic consumption is a sort of personal pathway, obviously the family imprinting is important, but then it is your own choice, they are connected to your environmental values" (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4)*

> *"… ethical and social values [are involved]…organic choice is also how much you go in depth with your personal inner search, your life goals, etc." (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1)*

> *"Organic consumption it is a philosophy, a way of living I also follow the Steiner doctrine…there is something of scientific in following its principles and organic is included." ITA-AN-Regular-PS3)*

To some extent, regular users consider organic consumption as coherent with other food choices (e.g. vegetarianism, macrobiotics, etc.), ethical conduct and health related behaviours (e.g. homeopathy). Non-users (and some of the occasional users) tend to exclude organic food from their prevailing patterns of change in food habits (they seem to prefer switching to local or typical food, regarded as less expensive but at least similar to organic food in terms of quality).

Consumers don't seem to adopt any particular **re-descriptions** lever (in Gardner's terms) regarding organic food: the only example that we can find is connected to the way they try to encourage organic consumption. Their approach it to substitute a conceptual description of organic food characteristics and production processes with an experiential device: respondents believe that - in order to produce a change of mind in their relatives and friends - cooking and serving organic food has a higher impact than simply speaking or reasoning about them. It is not a behavioural stance: simply they realise that the "language" of food and cooking can better be expressed on the stove!

3 Mind-sets with regard to Organic Consumption

This chapter focuses on the 'mind set' involved in becoming a consumer of organics and attempts to answer some relevant questions about consumers' mind-sets concerning organic food. At a first stage, we explore if such a mindset really exists. At a second stage, the analysis focuses on some more specific questions: "do regular users have a mindset with respect to organic foods that distinguishes itself in particular ways from those who occasionally or never consume these foods?" "what are the distinguishing features of such a mindset?"

Following Gardner's suggestions, the analysis in Section 3.1 mainly focuses on **reasons** and **rewards** (ways of thinking about organic foods and their perceived benefits) that can act as levers for change of minds, and on **resistances** that **eventually** may limit the extent of those levers (particularly among non-users). **Research**, that is how the collection of relevant data usually influences change of minds are also included in this section

The analysis in Section 3.2 concerns mainly the emotional component – included in Gardner's **resonance –** which add a positive reinforcement to the decision making process.

3.1 Thinking about organic foods

This section reports the analysis of concepts of and theories about organic foods with particular regard to the extent to which subjects focus upon product characteristics and upon characteristics of production/producers, in order to weigh the relevant options and make an assessment.

3.1.1 Reasons and rewards

Organic food: "technical" vs. "cultural" dimensions

When asked to define "organic food", almost all subjects focused their reasoning on production techniques (absence of pesticides and chemicals, preservation of natural seasonal cycles, etc.). However, this "technical dimension" of organic product knowledge is not so deep and wide. Sometimes, especially in regular users' discourses, it leaves room to what we can refer to as a "cultural dimension" of organic product knowledge. In marketing research, we treat culture as *the meaning that is shared by (most) people in a social group* (Peter et al., 1999). Culture influences cognitive aspects such as product knowledge by providing (shared) meanings to market stimuli like product attributes. Besides, the cultural dimension can be related to the cognitive and affective responses that culturally-homogenous groups of consumers have to consumption-related stimuli in their environment.

'Abstract' (in means-end terms) food attributes such as taste, "naturalness", "healthiness", etc. are culturally-mediated concepts, and respondents appear to attach cultural meanings and personal feelings to such concepts. In terms of Gardner's levers, the above mentioned 'technical dimension' could be seen as an indicator of the '**reason'** lever, while the 'cultural dimension' seems more appropriately pertaining to the '**resource and rewards'** category. Respondents feel rewarded because they feel the organic food perceived better taste, healthiness and naturalness is a resource that is enough to reward them of the costs[15] and sacrifices they undergo to purchase organic products.

[15] Not only in monetary terms, but in terms of time, cognitive difficulties, emotional distress, etc.

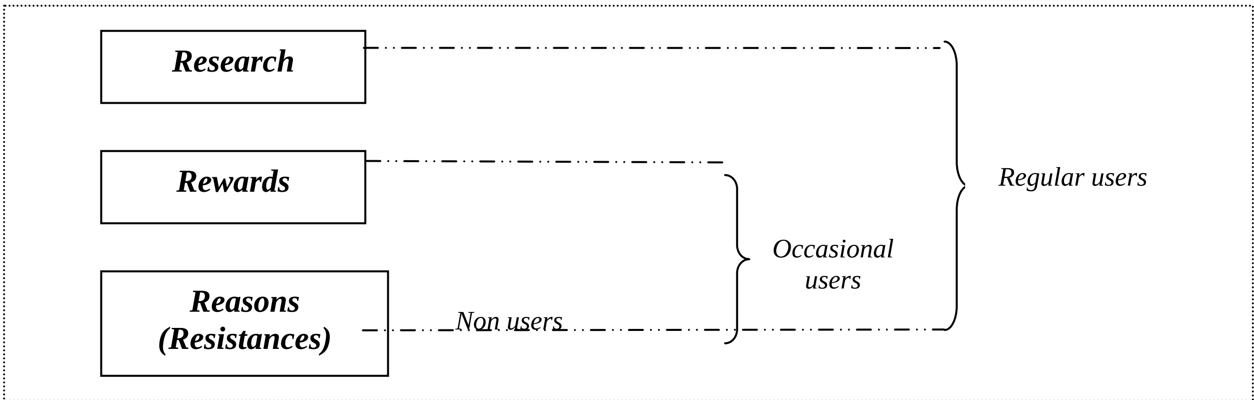
Both occasional and regular consumers are attracted by the "real and natural taste" of organic food. Sometimes, the latter give the impression to be less interested to the "taste experience" just because they seems more involved in reading labels and getting information before choosing an organic product. The attention to the label's content and information seems to better pertain to the '**research**' lever.

From this point of view, *reasons* seem to grant a common background of "what organic food is". This background acquires a more definite shape in the mind of occasional and regular consumers that feel more precisely the benefits (*rewards*) rising from organic food consumption. Regular consumers, probably highly involved in organic consumption, try to ensure and enforce their (technical and cultural) idea of organic food by systematically searching for confirmations about the quality properties of their food (*research*).

> *"I had the possibility to read a large amount of information regarding food .. how different food products are processed ... the use of pesticides and other chemicals on non-organic food and so on ...this increased my distrust towards a certain kind of products and reinforced my choice for organic consumption... (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1).*

Only regular consumers seem to benefit about all the three levers mentioned (Figure 1). Occasional users mix the cognitive aspects of *reasons* with the culturally-mediated and feeling-activating *rewards*. Non-users, due to their lower knowledge and involvement, appear to think of organic products only in terms of technical and factual based rationalistic terms (*reasons*), coupled with negative beliefs (*resistances*) . They don't really *know* but believe they *know*!

Figure 1 - Different levers influence on consumers' mindsets about organic food



Regular users

Organic food as "normal food"

Some regular users explicitly tell that organic food is nothing else than "normal food" and they say they can't understand why other consumers consider organic as a particular category of food.

> *"Another aspect that makes me reflect is that people approaching organic food consider non-organic food as 'normal food'. They believe that organic food – that should be the most normal thing – like a sort of 'special' food […] So many times I was questioned «is this organic bread similar to normal bread?» I think we should rebel against this kind of distorted view … I think that eating healthy food should be a well-deserved right for everyone…" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1).*

Regular users often mention known brands they buy and trust. Demeter, Ecor and "La terra e il cielo" are the most mentioned, while other small brands are mentioned for special high quality products. When selecting these special products (i.e.: rice or butter of special brands) regular consumers highlight that even if these products are really expensive they can accept it because they know they are "unquestionably better"

Occasional users

Some occasional consumers, especially those having links with rural relatives, often say they are not interested in buying organic products since they produce home grown vegetables and fruit and can be much more certain about their safety. This sub-group of occasional users seems to be more sceptical towards organic produce, and is also less interested in food certification and to the presence of known brands, perhaps due to the lack of information.

> *"My family live in the mountains. Better of my family home-grown food is nothing. It is not certified but I know products are not treated" (ITA-AN-Occasional-SS9).*

Non Users

On the other hand, non-users (and some occasional consumers), don't consider "being organic" as a particularly distinctive characteristic of food. Their search for good food tend to be based on other characteristics such as place of origin (*ITA-AN-NonUsersPs2, ITA-AN-NonUsersPs7, ITA-TO-NonUser-PS8, ITA-TO-NonUser-PS9, ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7,*), brand (*ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6, ITA-TO-NonUser-PS8)*, or social responsibility (*ITA-AN-Occasiona-PS9*, *ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7, ITA-TO-NonUser-PS9*).

These consumers are also afraid of potential (organic) frauds. Italians do not have trust in quality inspection systems in general, not only those connected with organic certification. Most non-users simply ignore all about how organic food are inspected and certified, and therefore attach a very high 'perceived risk[16]' to their organic purchase. Their (negative) beliefs about organic farming and products tend to form the basis of their supposed product knowledge.

> *"I prefer to buy from the farmer than in an organic supermarket, because I do not know if it is true that the products are really organic …like many other things, inspections and controls in Italy are not really as they should be…, because many things…are not as they should be…" (ITA-AN-NonUser-PS7)*

> *"…is any truth in it?... because who tell us, for sure, that these things are not treated? At the end we see them all packed, bright and beautiful…, if you can look them on the trees you can check if they give them pesticides or not, ours apples are ruined. Where do they [organic farmers] keep them? I am quite sure they give something to these products for being all so beautiful because if not…" (ITA-AN-NonUser-PS2).*

Non users are quite often sceptical about the freshness and healthiness of organic produce compared to that of local conventional farmers.

> *"I have no confidence that it is good. I do not believe that it [organic food] is better of the food bought from the farmer" (ITA-AN-NonUser-PS7).*

3.2 Assessing organic foods (mindset in practice)

In this section we investigate the issues specifically related to the "change of mind", by exploring satisfaction and dissatisfaction towards organic food. Different perceptions within the household/family – giving rise to consensus or conflicts regarding the organic food choice – are also explored in the following pages. In our analysis, we draw attention to consumer's theories as value-based beliefs on organic products; values have been shown to provide a fundamental factor in

[16] Perceived risks concern the undesirable consequences that consumers want to avoid when they buy and use products (Peter et al., 1999)

explaining different levels of organic food consumption (Zanoli, 2004). Beliefs and other value-based antecedents of attitudes, will be included in the **resonance** lever. They represent an associative network of linked meaning stored in consumer memory which play a specific role in forming attitudes or overall evaluations of organic products (Peter et al., 1999). These attitudes towards organic products either assist in consolidating a mindset or provide support to changing minds. According to consumer theory, Gardner's *resonance* is a result of cognitive (*reasons*) and affective (*resources and rewards*) aspects and includes **resistances** (negative beliefs, in some cases based on cognitive dissonance[17] and purchase dissatisfaction). Past behaviour and **real world events** – contributing to the respondent's experience – provide further information that contributes to reaffirming or changing the consumer attitudes or mindset.

3.2.1 Resonance

In Gardner's view, *resonance* integrates the cognitive component with the emotional one. Values are people's broad life goals and involve the affect associated with such goals and needs (Peter et al., 1999). In consumer discoursers, the *resonance* lever can be found in the values supporting (or not) a change of mind. Among these values, health – and its relationship with food – is of major personal relevance to most of the respondents. Health is referred to in two ways.

On one hand, most of respondents directly point out that health can be maintained or improved by eating organic food. Health is not always mentioned directly, but sometimes referred to in negative terms, e.g. when respondents mention dietary requirements or changes in food habits due to illness or specific diseases. People perceive organic food as a mean to maintain their own and their families' health and/or to prevent illness. When thinking to their family and loved ones, health has a higher emotional content, and is reflected in sentences where is associated with other values such as responsibility, care and wellbeing: "*I am responsible for my children*" (ITA-AN-Regular-SS3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4), "*I want to give something good to my son/daughter*" (ITA-AN-Occasional-SS3, ITA-AN-Occasional-PS9, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4, ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6). Respondent's own health is often referred to in more practical terms, by using real-life examples. Just in few cases – and with uncertainty – health was mentioned as a driver to organic food:

> *"She had a breast cancer, she undertook surgery. I think she started to eat healthy food after that...but I am not sure" (ITA-AN-Regular-SS6).*

> *"When my husband was young he suffered of gums problems, he undertook dental surgery three times…at that time he ate unhealthy food, now since we have been eating organic food his problems are solved" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS9).*

> *"My daughter had some allergy problems, so the doctor told us to avoid some specific foods ... but we were already consumers of natural food..." (ITA-TO-Occasional-SS6).*

On the other hand, consumers tell about diseases and health problems closely connected to the food area. As an example, four respondents (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS2, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4), speak about anorexia as a problem that they – or their close relatives – have personally experienced. By these people, organic food symbolises a mean to support their own and their families' health or a food that they come to know and use in order to fight these diseases.

> *"When my son was 3 or 4 years old, he had some intestinal problems, no children doctor was able to find a solution, I do not know how many came to examine him…I*

[17] Cognitive dissonance is a condition of conflict or anxiety resulting from inconsistency between one's beliefs and one's actions.

> *probably looked for some organic food in that occasion…I remember something…but I am not sure" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1)*

In food biographies *environmentalism* and concern for *sustainability* seems to emerge like a theoretical orientation shared by all the consumers' types, but usually the main value driving organic food consumption among the respondents is health and not care for the environment.

The environmental motivation, linked to the consumption of organic products, is not mentioned by all consumers groups. Only some of the regular and occasional consumers seem really interested to "*contribute to reduce the environmental impact*", because they "*wish to make the environment more fit for human living*" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4, ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6). Organic production methods are seldom associated with environmental sustainability, and more in the North (Turin) than in the Centre of Italy (Ancona). However, the one and only organic consumer who speaks at length about the "health state of the world" is a regular consumer from Ancona, with a deep knowledge of organic farming and processing. The defence of the sea species and the food-mileage issue are specifically mentioned.

> *"Environmental friendly? It depends from where the food comes from…transportation creates a lot of pollution. So tap water is the most environmental friendly water. It does not contain the exhaust gases that the truck produce to bring to your door the water of "Pejo" [an Italian brand located in the north of Italy], from Pejo to Ancona [...]…Or take the tuna fish, the tuna angled in the Mediterranean sea by dolphin-friendly methods …now Coop [conventional supermarket chain]stocks a dolphin-friendly canned tuna-fish , which before was only available in the organic varieties… Nobody knows that the tuna fish from Japan, besides killing dolphins, is full of heavy metals... we should not buy it…" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS8)*

To the majority of respondents (occasional consumers and non users) environmental behaviours are independent to the organic option, even though they are interested in environmental protection.

> *"I try to buy environmentally friendly products [washing powder and other washing stuff] for an inner and external protection …if we live in a better environment we are better inside too, the two things go together…" (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4).*

The *ethical* dimension of organic food (ethical values and social responsibility) appears in both organic and non organic users' discourses, but it depends on the social environment of the respondents. In Turin, fair trade is particularly developed and many fair trade specialised shops exist, while in Ancona there is only one of such shops. In Turin almost all respondents pay attention to social issues: e.g. producers' working conditions, and profit distribution along the value chain. To some occasional consumers and non-users (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7, ITA-TO-NonUser-PS9) this aspect appears to be paramount, as compared to the distinction between organic or not. The occasional user matches the organic attribute with fair trade; the non user is somewhat uninterested in the organic production and processing of the food, and values the ethical aspects more.

In Ancona, fair trade is never mentioned, but one occasional consumer mentions organic farming as a production method related to rural development.

> *"Organic product can grow in underdeveloped zones, it can give job to those communities and people etc" (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS9)*

As reported in previous studies (Gambelli et al., 2003; Miele and Parisi, 2001; Zanoli, 2004) animal welfare is not a relevant issue in Italy. Only one regular consumer mentions it as a value *per se*.

> *"I select meat producers that put animal well-being among their concern, because I believe it is important, they live better, chickens live on the ground, cows can move…" (ITA-AN-Regular-SP8).*

Other theoretical value orientations connected to organic consumption are more sporadic: one respondent relates her consumption to Steiner's anthroposophy (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3), another to a spiritual/religious values (Buddha's teachings: ITA-TO-Regular-PS2). Few consumers mention "macrobiotics" in relation to organic food, both in positive and negative terms.

Resonance is also called for indirectly. As Gardner's puts it, resonance operates also by imitation or by empathy with another person's values (especially the promoter of the change of mind). Some respondents reported that their beliefs and attitudes towards organic food were strengthened by the fact that the partner shared the same beliefs and attitudes. Such emotional and cognitive sharing reassures the consumer and strengthens her decisions.

> *"It's a matter of day-by-day life ... this allowed me a quiet living without having to argue about food everyday – like it happened with my earlier partners… this is important for me… it gives stillness …"(ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

As already mentioned, *resonance* provides the integration between the cognitive and affective aspects. This integration often takes place at the unconscious, intuitive level, as a consequence of *reasons* (or *research*) or simply because *resources* become available to *reward* the consumer and to help her to change her mind or habits.

On one hand, the way of thinking about organic products contributes – more or less directly – to the salient beliefs about them. On the other hand, it does not appear that the change of mind (about organic food) is really influenced by (external) resources made available to consumers that were not previously in their possession. No consumer has told us that he has moved into organic consumption as a result of a salary increase or other income-increasing life events; and – given monetary resources – it does not appear from respondent's stories that extra time available (e.g. after children have gone from home) has influenced their consumption patterns. The only *resource* that appear to influence respondents' beliefs and, therefore, having a deep *resonance* upon them is the (perceived) higher healthiness (often coupled with better taste) of organic food.

To this respect, there is a difference between regular and occasional consumers in terms of how they perceive the time allocated for food preparation and shopping.

On one hand, regular (and some occasional) consumers do not complain about the need to spend more time and money on organic food search and preparation. They feel that the time used for shopping and preparing good organic food is well employed and rewarded by what they get.

> *"People are stressed, it is easier for them to go to the supermarket… you take frozen food, you put it in the microwave, after 5 minutes it is ready …here is it! It is much easier but… …Instead, on Saturday I go around in three different stores in order to complete the household purchases…I could go and buy everything in the same shop but I don't" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1)*

Occasional users, on the other hand, do not want to spend too much time on food provision and preparation. They affirm they buy organic food whenever it is possible, according to the perceived available *resources* (money and time). But their involvement is lower, and as a result the *resonance* is also lower.

> *"We are not ideologically converted to the organic food choice, so we try keep up with this choice whenever it is possible; if it is not feasible for time reasons or because we cannot afford it in that very moment or because we do not find it, it is not a problem" (ITA-AN-Occasional-SS4)*

3.2.2 Resistances

In Gardner's terms the resistance lever is related to barriers to change. In marketing terms, barriers are related to negative beliefs, perceived risks higher than perceived benefits and previous purchase dissatisfaction. They embed both cognitive and affective aspects and are mediated by culture. For example, as we have already see, the trust in inspection systems is very low in Italy and this represent a general barrier for the development of organic consumption among the mass of consumers.

Among cognitive barriers, poor information and low product knowledge appear to have a relevant impact on consumer evaluations of organic food. Organic food is still confused with close ‘substitutes’, such as ‘natural’, ‘macrobiotic’ and similar products. These wrong perceptions result in misunderstanding and increase confusion and resistance. Among respondents, we have ascertained such cognitive mistakes mainly among occasional consumers, although even a regular one still has no clear ideas about what is buying (ITA-TO-Regular-PS2).

Lack of knowledge and trust in organic brands is another of the resistances mentioned.

> *“I prefer to trust in big and famous [conventional] brands than in little, often unknown organic brands… I think that big brands can guarantee me more” (ITA-TO-NonUser-PS8).*

Organic products are generally perceived as expensive products, when compared to conventional alternatives. High prices appear as an important barrier especially for the non users.

> *“The main issue is price … when I go to the supermarkets and take a look at organic food I notice that prices are so high ... that’s the main reason people don’t buy organic ... If I would earn the double of what I actually do, maybe I could buy a lot of organic stuff, but this is not the case …” (ITA-TO-NonUsers-PS9)*

Occasional consumers generally state that the higher price of organic products is not a real barrier, since food is just a small part of the family budget nowadays.

> *“I recognize that organic food can be a little more expensive, but not so much to really influence household budget ... people generally waste so much that ... this is a worthwhile investment” (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6).*

This idea that higher prices of organic products cannot be the real justification for not-buying them is shared by regular consumers too (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1, ITA-AN-Regular-PS3, ITA-AN-Regular-PS6, ITA-AN-Regular-PS8). They believe that people not eating/buying organic food apparently do so in order to save money. But in most of the cases – they say – this is just an excuse since prices are not always so much higher.

> *“A lot of people, concerned about saving money, renounce to organic food…but they do not know there are many different ways to save money buying organic food directly from the producer…” (ITA-AN-Regular-PS8).*

To organic consumer the rewards they perceive to gain from organic food is well beyond the resources (in terms of time and money) they employ to search for the higher quality of organic products.

Nevertheless, even some regular consumers perceive there is a maximum price that they won’t exceed when buying organic food. As a result, the most expensive products are avoided.

> *“I’m a teacher in a primary school and my income is around 1200 euros per month … so I have to pay attention to my expenses .. I mean, I can renounce to organic salmon .. Price is the main obstacle, but if I want, I can afford some bigger expenses sometimes .. I purchased organic salmon a couple of times, when I wanted it” (ITA-TO-Regular-SS1)*

> *“I often buy seitan but I don’t have a preferred brand for this product… I simply avoid extra luxury seitan ….” (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

Besides higher prices, previous literature mention lack of availability as a barrier to organic consumption. Among our respondents, this is mentioned only in a special case by one occasional consumer. An occasional consumer (*ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7*), buying nearly exclusively products from a fair-trade purchasing group, laments that actually no organic producer is involved in this group.

On the contrary, regular organic users are used to look for food in more than one venue. They would probably eat more organic meat if they could find it easily in the shops, but apparently they do not seem to care too much.

Sometimes organic food is perceived as ‘strange’ food by non-users (ITA-AN-NonUser-PS2, ITA-AN-NonUser-Ps7). Most of them associate organic products with special items such as seitan (gluten curd) or tofu (soybean curd) or with wholemeal products.

In Gardner’s view, resistance to change could increase with age. In our (small) sample, age doesn’t seem to play any role in making respondents more or less resistant to changing food habits.

The social image organic consumers have in the eyes of peers and reference groups appears a more relevant resistance to changing food habits. Many occasional consumers believe that regular consumers are somewhat obsessed with organic food and that they look and behave strangely. Occasional users do not want to be associated with this ‘alternative’ group of consumer: the regular consumers represent therefore, to this respect, the *dissociative* reference group for occasional consumers (Peter et al., 1999).

> *“Nobody laughs when I say I like this organic bread, and not since it is healthy but because of the better taste. They do not believe I have got a bee in my bonnet...” (ITA-AN-Occasional-SP5)*

Since these consumers want to avoid to be categorised as ‘deviant’ or odd (*“I feel normal” - ITA-AN-Occasional-SP9*), they say they behave and choose in a more flexible way. They do not eat everything organic but they select good and healthy food with openness of mind.

Some non users resist to organic food since they believe that eating organic does not really make the difference. This group of respondents does not associate organic food with better health, since many other risk factors exist in every day life, and are somewhat acquiescent that achieving a healthy and long life is quite difficult in a polluted world.

> *“To my opinion a good food, that is a food with no chemicals at all, does not exist anymore. Food always gets worse, day by day, year by year, due to water and air pollution. Even if there are foods with less chemicals…how many years do they want to live, because to the end sincerely I do not know how much the game is worth the candle… sincerely they make me to laugh, however to see those fixed …,and they stop in a polluted area (in a gallery), even they also enter on foot. It is an absurdity…” (ITA-AN-NonUser-Ps7).*

> *“I associate…classify organic food with alternative medicine, like homeopathy…maybe I am wrong but to me it is an unusual food, …for those having problems” (ITA-AN-NonUser-SP2)*

3.2.3 Real word events

Real world events, in Gardner’s terms, are part of the (marketing) environment. Environment can influence consumers’ affective and cognitive responses and their behaviour (Peter et al., 1999).

As we have already discussed, occasional and regular users state that organic food is of better quality than conventional one: organic consumers feel personally rewarded by (organic) products that taste better and are healthier than their conventional counterparts.

Unfortunately, in some organic consumers’ experience, the organic market development has not carried only good progresses. Some regular users (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS2) report an increasing dissatisfaction regarding the quality of some organic products (e.g.: strawberries). According to these consumers, organic produce quality has changed during the last years: fruits and vegetables are becoming aesthetically more attractive but are losing their flavour and taste (conventionalisation of organic food).

> *"I must admit that that during the last years the quality of some organic fruit and vegetables has decreased while the price remained high [..] Apples, for example, are beautiful, but the taste isn't as good as some years ago.. you cannot distinguish from non-organic ones ...and the same for strawberries..." (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

Another 'event' that drives regular users towards widening the range of organic food purchased is the increased availability. Many different kind of products are sold and put on the shelves of both specialized and non-specialized shopping venues.

> *"Nowadays, different kind of organic products can be found in may shops, so I can buy organic spices, for example … the price is a little bit expensive, but I like them and I use them really often for my recipes" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1).*

Other real world event that have, or could have, contributed to changing the consumers' mindset (like food scandals, media increasing coverage, etc.) will be reported in chapter 5.

3.3 Influencing others with respect to organic consumption

Few attempts are made, by organic consumers to influence others to use organic food products. Consumers give only some arguments (**reasons**) to be used in these endeavours. For most of them they think there is no need to convince others. Consumers ranges their replies from "*I do not try to convince others, I just try to offer an example*" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4, ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6) to "*I am rather pushing*" ITA-TO-Regular-PS2, ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7).

Most consumers believe that other people can be hardly convinced to buy and use organic food if they do not have a special, personal involvement towards food in general. According to respondents, food culture depends on personal pathways people undertake.

> *"I always try…but people are not able to get the message unless they are ready to understand …most of people just wants easy solutions…packed salad for example… they are completely immersed into the consumerism… words are not enough… a personal sensibility is necessary…to eat well, to choose well. But this sensibility can only grow with experiences…" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1)*

> *"I believe that trying to convince people is not a good strategy … if I wanted to try and convince someone to purchase or eat organic food I would invite them- for a dinner and cook something really good … trying to make food attractive … It has already happened that some friends started to buy organic food after having dinner here with me…" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

> *"When they tasted [organic foods] at our home they liked it.. I think this is the best way to convince people .." (ITA-TO-Regular-SS4)*

Also due to this mistrust about the arguments that can be used to encourage organic consumption, organic users say "*What works is the example inside the family and outside. Life experiences are also important*" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1, ITA-AN-Regular-SS3).

Offering organic food to others is recognised to be a mean to reach the aim[18], but it is seldom used as tool to influence others. Some regular consumers believe that the organic choice it is a question

[18] To this respect, see what we already mentioned about the re-description strategies of consumers.

of taste and suggest to offer other consumers organic dishes/products to convince them (ITA-AN-Regular-PS6, ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4).

> *"When they taste my cookies and appreciate them I explain they are made of organic ingredients" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS6).*

An occasional user also highlights this opportunity. He believes organic bread is superior in terms of taste and this is shared by those who have tried it with him:

> *"Nobody laughs when I say I like this organic bread, and not since it is healthier but because of the better taste..." (ITA-AN-Occasional-SP5)*

Only two regular and one occasional consumer highlight the connection between organic farming and environmental protection. For one of them organic consumption is a way to conjugate her food choice with her environmental concerns

> *"… in order to convince someone, I would try to speak about the protection of the nature…about the future generations…health is a more abstract concept than the environment…I am not sure I will stay healthier [by eating organic food]…environment is more macroscopic. It is a big issue." (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3)*

Organic consumers do not share a common vision about the reasons to be used to encourage organic consumptions nor about the instruments to be used. They all mention health and environmental issues as motivations to support their choice, but they also say they are not used to speak with friends about their organic consumption choice

> *"My friends do not know the dinner I'm serving is organic" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3).*

In general, organic regular consumers, although are quite set in their organic consumption habits, seems rather tolerant towards different choices and beliefs. They think that organic choice is often a question of knowledge of good farming and production practices. But everybody has freedom of choice.

A non user (ITA-AN-NonUser-PS7) tells about some friends of her trying to encourage her first encounter with organic food. The experience was unsuccessful not only because of the bad taste and texture of the cookies but also because of the non-user prejudices (*resistances*).

> *"…organic food is a new fashion, the last one, after the yoga of some years ago, now we have organics." (ITA-AN-NonUser-PS7)*

Within the family, convincing other members does not appear a real problem. Other members do not seem to have negative attitudes towards the (organic) choices made by the decision maker (usually the wife). Husbands/partners usually show a gentle attitude towards who has made the decision ("*she chooses, she is informed…I agree…*" or "*for me it is ok, it is the right food, nothing new…*"), and in most of the cases the organic choice is a shared preference and they collaborate in finding products and solutions.

Sometimes children and adolescents are suspicious. They try to ask for a second choice but usually mothers are authoritative enough to counter persuade them or to limit their conventional choices to some special occasions (e.g. birthday parties). In any case, freedom of choice is considered important because consumers have lost the familiarity with the natural taste experience of the past. Nowadays children are used to new tastes, often based on artificial flavouring or with very light, uniform taste (like many industrial dairy products).

> *"Many people and children are not used to eat ricotta cheese as soon as it is made, they think the taste [of warm ricotta] is awful…or the traditional pecorino cheese…the taste of real farmer's made pecorino is stronger than that of the one bought in a supermarket. The taste of the sheep. Nothing is more natural than that. But people are so much getting used with such uniform tastes…" (ITA-AN-Occasional-SS9)*

3.4 Conclusion: The mind-sets of regular consumers of organic food as compared with occasional and non-users

3.4.1 Regular users

Organic food to this consumers group appears healthy and tasty. Regular consumers, usually very informed about organic product, never forget to learn new things about organic food and to exchange information whenever is possible. They trust organic products because they believe that they have a deep knowledge of the organic production methods (also when this is not really true). Their knowledge has been built day after day with some effort but most of all by their experiences. Friends, shopkeepers and other informants give their contribute to increase this product knowledge.

Organic food is not openly but quite often connected to a way of living and to broad life goals and values. Regular users try to behave as ethical consumers and oppose mass consumption as a societal trend. Both altruistic (environmental protection, sustainable development and family) and egotistic values (health and quality of life) are quite important in their lives. All these aspects are strongly connected to the organic choice, which is not only a food choice but a way of living. Organic food is sometimes directly associated to philosophy or spirituality.

Meals are seen as a mean to intake all the necessary substances for a healthy life. The right mix of proteins, carbohydrates, and vitamins is pursued by always giving a lot of attention to the food choice and preparation. Fruits and vegetables are very important in these consumers' diets. Taste is given for granted (after all we are speaking of Italian food lovers) but only secondary to health.

Although they seems to be quite satisfied about the (organic) food they eat and their meals, they think there is no need to convince others verbally but much prefer direct demonstration by personal testimony (**re-description**, in Gardner's terms). The most common form of demonstration is within the family: by teaching the children to eat 'well', consumer reduce conflicts and establish a family agreement on the organic choice. Within their reference groups, consumers may prefer to offer organic food to their friends to let them appreciate it and understand the difference, instead of verbally transmitting the information about organic food.

3.4.2 Occasional users

According to this group, their organic choice is more a question of taste. Occasional consumers have strong beliefs about the better taste and the higher quality of organic food in general. Quality is perceived as multidimensional: they also appreciate the good texture and smell of organic products. The health aspect, though mentioned, is a secondary one.

Occasional consumers do not build their behaviours and choices on an ideological belief. Even if they exhibit related environmental behaviours (recycling, use of 'green' washing-up liquids and similar) they substantially do not link these behaviours to the organic choice.

Their overall level of information about organic food and farming seems lower than the regular users. Nevertheless they do not seem to search for more information. They improve their knowledge just when it is unavoidable, that is when they make new experiences with organic food or when they happen to read or listen about organic issues. Perhaps this cognitive weakness may explain why they tend to trust the point of purchase more than the products themselves. In other words, they delegate the responsibility of the organic food choice to someone else that they think is more knowledgeable: the shopkeeper (specialised shops) or the buyer of the large retailer chain, especially COOP[19]. Their trust in organic food is mainly an indirect one.

They believe that good living means good, nutritious food coupled with some physical activity. Open-air activities and contact with nature are also relevant to them. These beliefs make them appreciate local farmers' products, not necessarily organic.

Their meals are considered to be healthy because Mediterranean: not too heavy (full of oil and fats) and quite varied. This is why they also appreciate the local food that they judge to be as healthy as the organic one. They do not want to spend too much time on shopping and food preparation. The wide range of organic food available in supermarkets is also important and valued as an opportunity to enlarge their organic consumption. They are quite flexible with organic food purchases, they buy and eat organic product just when it is possible, even if in many cases they have a strong preference for the organic variety of a special food (i.e.: bread). (See next chapter).

3.4.3 Non users

Non organic users sometimes perceive organic food as a new fashion, the last fad ("…*after the yoga of some years ago, now we have organics*." ITA-AN-NonUser-PS7). In some cases they recall a disappointment with their first occasional organic encounter. The bad taste experience has influenced their current position towards organic food, which is – anyway – largely based on lack of (correct) information and prejudices (*reasons and resistances*)

Their distrust of organic food depends mainly from a lack of trust in institutions and, specifically, in inspection systems. This distrust is backed up by little knowledge of the organic production process. Non users meals are sometimes less quality oriented. They do not pay too much attention to the balance of different meals and to their nutritional content. A 'natural way of living is not included in their choices and behaviours.'

4 Shopping habits with respect to Organic Consumption

This section focuses on shopping habits of different users group. The range of products purchased is explored in section 4.1. The selection of shopping venues is explored in section 4.2 and loyalty towards organic products paired with the substitution strategies adopted is in section 4.3. Barriers that reduce or limit the organic purchase are in section 4.4.

4.1 Buying organic foods

Buying behaviour is a result of the overall evaluation of the product (attitude) which is a result of cognitive (beliefs, i.e. *reasons* and *resistances*) and affective (*resources and rewards,* which coupled with reasons produce a *resonance*) factors.

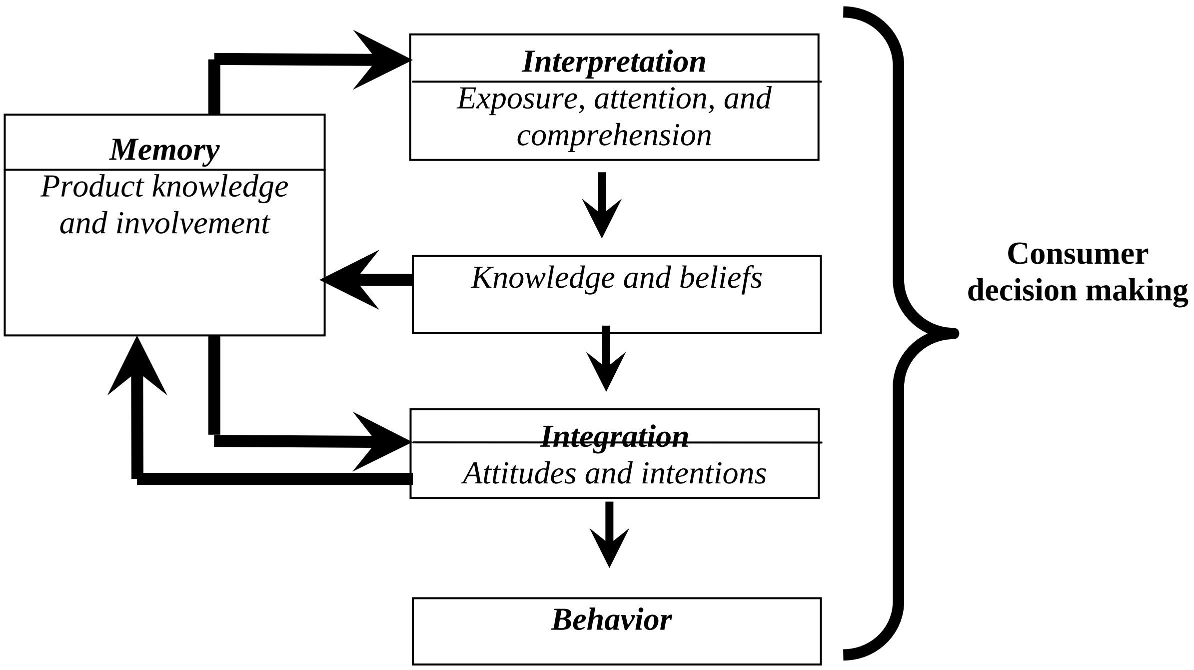
Behaviour depend on consumer decision making (see Figure 2), which is substantially based on Gardner's lever *research*: the consumer search for information, both from external (media, friends, etc.) or internal (memory, including past experiences and behaviours) sources, in order to form a knowledge of the product sufficient to motivate him to a certain behaviour (conative aspect).

In our analysis, buying behaviour has been partially observed by a privileged position: we have followed the respondents in an actual shopping trip and therefore we have collected participant observations of consumers' shopping decisions. We have to remember that observations made during these shopping trips represented a 'single shot' of the actual purchasing patterns and

[19] We already mentioned that COOP, as consumer cooperative, has a specific consumer focused marketing strategy and a strong brand image related to customer care and high quality products. The payoff of their advertising campaign is: "COOP is you".

behaviours of the respondents. Nevertheless shopping with the consumers allowed us to partially verify some of the statements previously made by the respondents during the interviews. We could e.g. realize that an occasional consumer was not only buying a single product category (i.e.: bread) but that he occasionally purchases also different organic products. At the same time a self declared regular consumer was better classified as an occasional consumer after the shopping trip.

Figure 2 - A model of consumer decision making (Peter et al., 1999)



In any case, due to the limited exposure we had to consumers' actual decisions and behaviour, we can only give an overview of the main observable characteristics of respondents' shopping habits in relation with the cognitive, affective and conative antecedents discussed above.

Obviously enough, emphasis here is given to the **research** lever.

4.1.1 Research

By direct observation, we can conclude that actual product choice and stated preferences, albeit individually consistent, are somewhat different both within and between respondents' groups.

Each organic consumer exhibits her own specific behaviour, often guided by personal heuristics, when observing, examining and actually selecting products.

Some of them are particularly careful with ingredients when they wish to avoid some specific component due to various beliefs (i.e.: palm oil is perceived as an unhealthy ingredient). Some other just select organic products according to brand name e.g. choose only private labelled products. Some others just buy methodically (i.e. from a mental or written list) always the same (organic) products in order to minimise the time spent in shopping activities.

The fact that organic products are more expensive than conventional products also produces different behavioural heuristics in the different groups of consumers, according to their different level of involvement in organic consumption and related different perception of the value-for-money of organic food. Furthermore, these behavioural differences cannot be ascribed to different income levels but to the share of organic food purchased over total food purchases. To occasional consumers, who purchase both organic products and their conventional alternatives, the price comparison is inevitable and influences their choices.

Regular users

Regular users show a generalized preference for purchasing organic products. Participant observation allowed us to ascertain that their shopping baskets contained wide-ranging organic food products categories: rice, pasta, flour, cereals, legumes, eggs and oil above all.[20] Due to the qualitative nature of this study, these results are by no means representative, but show that the regular organic consumers like to choose quite varied types of products.

Regular consumers declared they always buy, of the organic kind, the following products: rice, pasta, bread and flour (for their home made cakes) or spices. Surprisingly enough, even if a large amount of their food purchases is made of organic products, some tend to regularly substitute organic produce with (conventional) fruit and vegetables from local farmers' markets or known/trusted farmers (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS2, ITA-AN-Regular-PS3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4).

> *"…as the time passed, I am sorry to notice that organic fruit and vegetables, besides having reached very exclusive prices,… they aren't tasteful anymore, I can't buy them organic… I became aware of a decrease in the quality, they can be healthy but the taste is missing, I prefer to go to the farmer that I know how he grows them…" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

Sometimes consumers even do not know whether farmers' fruits and vegetables are organic or not. They have doubts, but they do not seem to care.

> *"I do not believe the farmer do not use pesticides…he tell us…but I am not sure, I have reservations" (ITA-AN-Regular-SS3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS2)*

Some special organic products are selected due to special circumstances/situations. It is the case of vegetable juices or soy and rice milks. Respondents buy them for health reasons and they often can find them only of the organic kind.

Vegetarians – in our sample only regular users – buy tofu and seitan of the organic kind only. These products have been the first organic products bought from these consumers (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS2).

> *"At that time ... it was ten or fifteen years ago … there were few organic shops and I could find seitan only in highly specialized organic and macrobiotic shops … that's why I approached organic food (for example whole rice) starting from seitan … I went to specialized shop in order to buy seitan and tried other organic products that I found there." (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

Regarding price, in general regular users believe that organic products have a high value for money. Some of them are not willing to pay high prices for non organic food, since they think conventional products aren't of great quality. The only exception to this – as we have already mentioned – refers to fruit and vegetables.

At the same time, regular consumers enact special strategies in order to reduce the cost of their shopping basket. For example, they plan their purchase in order to take advantage, as much as possible, of periodic price reductions and promotions done in both specialised shops and

[20] During shopping trips all the following products were mentioned or bought: Bread, Flour, Cereals, Legumes, Eggs, Oil, Meat, Sliced ham, cold cuts), Fish, Seitan, Tofu, Fruit & Vegetables, Dried fruit, nuts, Milk & Butter, Cheese, Cookies, Breakfast products, Jam, Sugar, Honey, Salt, spices etc, Sauces, Coffee, Wine, Ready made food, Pets food.

supermarkets. This purchase strategy or heuristic is specifically pursued for easily-storable, long shelf-life 'commodities' for which bulk purchases can be made. Organic extra-virgin oil is one of these products. Nearly all the regular users have it into their shopping baskets but its (not always higher) price is specifically mentioned as an issue.

> *"I buy only organic oil, but I always try to purchase it when it's discounted, because I cannot afford to pay 15 euros for a 75ml oil bottle …" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS2)*

> *"Nowadays you can find organic oil at similar prices than non organic oil; the same applies for milk and butter... I consider it very important because even people with lower income can purchase and consume good quality products if he wants" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

To purchase olive oil at the lower price further research effort can be placed, often appealing to some personally known producer or to word-of-mouth.

> *"We look for producers close to us, there are some friends of my mother producing organic oil. Or there is an old person that we have known in Sarnano at the butcher's shop. She produces olive oil and we often buy there in great amounts. We have also bought some special jars for the purpose to store it for a long time…" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS8).*

Occasional users

Occasional users buy only few products of the organic kind. Some of them are actually interested only in one specific product e.g. bread. To these consumers, the organic experience is motivated by the fact that, in their research process, the specific organic product is unique and superior compared to all other (conventional) that they have experienced before.

For example, organic bread is particularly appreciated because of the genuine taste and the good texture. The long lasting of this bread is also appreciated ("*It is not as tasteless as conventional bread, I can eat it for a whole week and it is always good: ITA-AN-Occasional-PS5*). Some of the consumers also know it is made by careful processing and traditional recipe: "*dough has time to rest*", "*no standardised dough*". The whole wheat variety is an opportunity not always appreciated because of the stronger taste.

For occasional consumers, taste is the most important factor in their search and selection strategy. The flavour but also the texture and cooking results is the driving factor in persuading them to confirm the organic choice or continue searching for another kind.

> *"After the first purchases, the[organic] cakes were not so good…we do not buy them any more... there are some [organic] croissants that my daughter likes but we do not find them of good quality .., I do not like them..." (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6)*

> *"I bought an [organic] pasta I do not remember the name of the brand the cooking results were so bad. I buy this now[shows another organic pasta brand] …it has a good texture, the sauce mixes very well the taste and consistency is good" (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS4)*

Some occasional consumers (but also some non users), namely those with lower organic product knowledge, confuse local farmers' products with organic products, given they associate local farming with natural i.e. not industrial production.

Non users

Non consumers do not pay too much attention to the organic label. It can happen they buy organic food without knowing it, and, above all, they do not purchase them with the motivation that "it is organic". Sometimes is just the only product they can have or it is just curiosity for a new product.

4.2 Selecting point of purchase

Another kind of *research* refers to the selection of the point of purchase. Many respondents' statements mention the purchases modes: specific shops are often chosen to assure the widest and deepest organic product assortment and the best quality.

Regular users are those having tested the greatest variety of organic point of purchase. Their purchase heuristic often consist in visiting many of them to look for discounted prices and promotions.

> *"When I see discounted products that I already tasted and liked … some kind of cookies, for example … I buy them even If I don't need them […] If I'm buying a product but I see that a similar one that I like is discounted, then I replace the former and take the latter…" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS2).*

> *"When there are some special offers [for this Emmer pasta] I always purchase it". (ITA-AN-Regular-ST8)*

As already mentioned, (conventional) local farmers' markets or direct-sales purchases are often preferred even by organic consumers in order to buy cheese and fruit and vegetables. The criteria of freshness is therefore considered superseding the organic quality. In general, the local origin of the product is often more important than the method of production (organic vs. conventional) for most of respondents.

Direct-sales purchases are seen as a specific purchase modes for specific, difficult-to-find products, but some handling systems (like box-scheme home-deliveries) are seen as complex and unusual.

> *"I tried to look for meat, but I have not found it! In the shop they said there is a producer in Macerata, he brings this meat in huge amounts of different cuts once a week, but you have to be sure you use all the types of meat you have in the box…it is a bit complicated…"(ITA-AN-Regular-PS1)*

4.3 Loyalty towards organic products and substitution strategies

Regular consumers are somewhat idiosyncratic for given food categories. During the shopping trip we observed different substitution strategies when a planned purchase was not possible because the product was sold out. Regular consumers assign a special weight to some food categories (e.g. pasta, fruit and vegetables), but there is no regularity observed. No food category was more important than others, but each family has his own peculiar habit and preferences regarding some organic food.

> *"Regarding lasagne, I'm very loyal to this specific brand because I must say that they're really really good …… the price is expensive, but I tried different ones and I didn't like them" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

Regular users mostly adopt some specific substitution strategies that are, respectively: "close substitution", "retry" and "surrender". These strategies are usually repeated.

Occasional consumers, *ça va sans dire*, are much less loyal regarding organic food choice. This consumers group does not disdain to buy substitutes of organic products like local and regional products, including the farmer-next-door ones. In this way they reduce the need to search for organic alternatives, since these other non organic products are often perceived as better and fresher substitutes of some 'long-distance travelling' organic products (Naspetti and Zanoli, 2005). As a consequence, their most frequent substitution strategy is "treason" or, in some cases, "retry".

Both regular and occasional consumers do not buy a pig in a poke: when they experience some dissatisfactions (for taste or price reasons) with an organic food category (e.g. fruits) or for a specific item (e.g.: cookies of a specific brand) do not hesitate to move to other products or better to other points of purchase (e.g.: like farmers markets or direct on the farm).

In general, we observed that organic consumers, both regular and occasional, usually do not change the product (organic or not) they use to buy. When they are satisfied about a food product they not want to substitute it. They know the taste, texture, consistency (and often the good cooking results) of that product and they want to stick to it.

4.3.1 Close substitution

Organic brands appear to have a very low brand equity. Low brand awareness, coupled with low brand image, results into a lack of brand loyalty. According to our interviews and participant observation, this is the main reason why consumers accept to substitute a missing organic product with another organic one (*close substitution*). Organic brands do not seem to have a great *brand image*: some specific brands (e.g. AlceNero, Ecor), regarded either of premium quality or of greater value-for-money, are generally preferred for some specific products. Among these products consumers mention: rice (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1, ITA-AN-Regular PS8, ITA-TO-Regular-PS3), butter, lasagne, vegetable stock cubes (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1) and flour (ITA-TO-Regular-PS4). Consumers' loyalty for specific brands is, in some specific cases, strong enough to avoid *close substitution*, when the product is missing. Brand loyal consumers prefer to go into another shop (*relocate*) or to wait for restocking (*retry*).

> *"I am looking for this pasta, it is made by Emmer flour (farro), […] I always purchase the "ECOR" brand. I sometimes buy "AlceNero" too but now I do not see it here. Then I will buy it in an other shop…that one is the one I prefer respect to all those that are on the market…" (ITA-AN-Regular-ST8)*

On the other hand, when the brand image is not so strong, regular buyers do not disdain the possibility of buying brands different to those they usually buy.

> *" I have no brand loyalty, I just take those less expensive, unless … once I have bought a Basmati rice, I do not remember the brand name, it cost a little more but it was very very good, much better than all the others that I had bought … therefore when I found it I buy it, if not I buy another one… "(ITA-TO-Regular-PS1).*

Very often *close substitution* is preferred to *relocation* not only because is more time-efficient, but because the low brand equity of organic brands makes consumers perceive organic food as a product category of its own, the "organic" one precisely. This means that to organic consumers the word "organic" has its own intrinsic relevance and activates positive means-end knowledge in their mind (Zanoli, 2004). In other words the organic label is itself a brand-like signal, and activate their inner cognition and trust into the healthiness and quality of the food purchased. In marketing terms, regular organic consumers are mainly *information seekers*, in the sense that they have positive means-end knowledge about the (organic) product category, but no particular brand stands out as superior; in few cases are *brand loyalists*. Occasional consumers are typically *brand switchers* since they have low intrinsic self-relevance for both the brand and the (organic) product category (Peter et al., 1999).

In general, regular consumers, before introducing in their basket any 'new' brand or product, need to carefully study and test it.

> *"I usually study organic new products… I have to carefully read ingredients, then I choose because I have a reason to do so…and I do not change easily my mind, especially when taste corresponds to my expectations" (ITA-AN-Regular-ST8)*

On the contrary, the selection of the right organic pasta product can take time. Since pasta is a fundamental food in Italian consumers' diets, consumers are particularly concerned in having good pasta. In some of the cases they have to try many different brands (or types) of organic pasta to be satisfied. They claim about the fact that sometimes organic pasta cannot (or couldn't) be cooked "al dente" (i.e. keeping the right hardness) and that bad cooking results has a negative influence on the pleasure of eating food. In any case, no consumer refers to having stopped to buy organic pasta for similar reasons; they continued with trial-and-error close substitutions until they found the brand or type they liked most.

4.3.2 Surrender

Given its peculiarity, this strategy is only implemented (albeit infrequently) by regular consumers. A consumer who cannot find an acceptable product in the organic variety, could decide to avoid any purchase of that food product, at least for some time (ITA-AN-Regular-ST3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS1 and ITA-TO-Regular-PS3).

> *"…it is difficult to find good potatoes; recently…I do not succeed in finding them good. […] I do not like taste… too much sweet, watery, too soft…I am looking for potatoes to be roasted… this potatoes I leave them behind …" (ITA-AN-Regular-ST3)*

They apply this strategy only in some circumstances in the case the organic product is not found, independently of the brand. These circumstances are usually related to household-stock refilling of basic commodities, such as: eggs, legumes and potatoes.

Other surrender situations may occur because the products on the shelves appear not fresh enough (fruits and vegetables) or a specially searched variety is missing (e.g. gluten free).

Indeed this strategy is easily confused (in our interview material) with the next one (*retry*), which was more often acknowledged even by occasional consumers.

4.3.3 Retry

When a product is not find in a shopping trip, the consumer may decide to come back *in the same shop* in the near future to look for it.

This strategy occurs just when the product it is not so necessary at the moment of the purchase otherwise the consumer will actually chose another (more efficient) substitution strategy: look in another shop (*relocate*) or (e.g. if time is short) maybe substitute it with a conventional food (*treason*, see below).

4.3.4 Relocation

Sometimes regular consumers need or want to buy some special organic products. If they can not find these products, usually selected for special health purposes, into the shop they usually go, or prefer, they look for the same product in a different shop.

> *"I need these organic vegetables juices, at La Macina [specialised shop] they do not have them so I have to look for them in another shop. I do not care about the brand…" (ITA-AN-Regular-ST1).*

In general, shop loyalty is eased by the friendly relationships that regular consumers entertain with some shopkeepers or sales personnel. Shop loyalty is increased when the sales personnel appears competent and knowledgeable to the consumers, and constantly keep them informed about product characteristics, usage or origin. This activities make consumers feel more confident about their choice. These relationships, acting as trust-builders, play a pre-eminent role in avoiding *relocation* strategies. Shop loyalty often appear to substitute the generalised low level of brand loyalty (Zanoli, 2004; Naspetti and Zanoli, 2004).

On the other hand, regular consumers do not always exhibit a high store loyalty. While preferring the organic shop, they do not disdain the supermarket whenever it solves their need for a practical, comfortable, some time cheaper and time-saving way of shopping. They trust the shopkeeper of the specialised shop but they also shop in many other different places any kind of food, organic and conventional. Even if they have a more detailed knowledge of food characteristics they are always tempted to buy other products.

4.3.5 Treason

Treason is the more relevant substitution strategy, because it relates to the substitution of organic products with non-organic ones. It is the dominant substitution strategy of les loyal organic users (the occasional consumers) but, in specific occasions, is observed among regular consumers too.

As an example, organic consumers easily substitute organic fruit and vegetables with conventional ones when these products are missing in the preferred shop. Given the organic supply of fruit and vegetables is often discontinue and given the relevance of these products in the Italian diet, this strategy is the most efficient if the consumers have not enough time to tray a *relocation* strategy.

A regular consumer complains about the small amounts of organic fruit in the (supermarket) packages. She justify her "treason" by these words:

> *"We are six in our family, we cannot buy these small packages […] we need big quantities. The truck coming with green stuffs from the farmer is better for us and apples are tastier…" (ITA-AN-Regular-PS3)*

Indeed, for this regular consumer, more than the packaging issue, lower prices and perceived higher freshness appear to be the real motives behind the *treason* strategy.

Perceived freshness and quality appear to play against organic fruit and vegetables. 9 out of 14 organic consumers do not buy certified organic fruit and vegetables, and systematically buy them from local farmers' markets or known 'trusted' local farmers, irrespective to the fact they actually follow organic farming practices or not. This is a recent trend, and seems to be ascribed to the perception of the lower quality of organic fruit and vegetables found in specialised shops or supermarkets. The prices are judged excessive in relation to the quality of the products.

In some cases, environmental, social and ethic values move consumers towards local and fair trade products.

> *"…I do not buy milk from the Trentino region, I prefer to buy local milk produced in Piemonte…. It's a question of focusing on transports and distances more than on quality per se …" (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6).*

This tendency is transversal to different consumer categories (emerges in regular, occasional and non-users). In some of the non-users (ITA-TO-NonUser-PS9), social and ethic values exercise a concrete influence in orienting consumption towards local products and, to a minor extent, towards fair trade products (organic seems to be an irrelevant characteristic). In a different way, occasional and regular users tend to integrate social and ethical considerations into the organic option. All of them are young people (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Occasional-PS7, ITA-TO-NonUser-PS9).

4.4 Barriers to loyalty

Concerning the barriers to loyalty, organic users do not really mention important obstacles to organic purchases. Sometimes they point out some difficulties related to the fact that it is not always easy to find all the products they need into the same shop.

> *"When I cannot find what I need because the producer changes the day of supply or when it is too late…if I am inside the supermarket I buy what I need no matter if it is organic or not …" (ITA-AN-Regular-ST1)*

Looking at the barriers to buying organic food, we have to bear in mind that in Gardner's terms we speak about **resistances**. We already have described consumers' resistances in section 3.2, nevertheless, when referred to consumers loyalty to organic food purchases these aspects need to be seen much more in depth. Consumers barriers are here described and resumed from the organic consumer perspective (more than from the non user point of view).

The negative aspects which generally influence consumer loyalty to organic purchases seem to be mainly related to *lack of trust* in organic certification, the perceived *higher price* of organic products, the product *availability*, and to some *quality aspects*.

4.4.1 Lack of trust

The large number of certification bodies and different labels that appear on the market contribute to confusion and lack of trust in the organic certification and related label for a quite high number of Italian consumers (Naspetti and Zanoli, 2005):

> *"…I buy organic if its of better taste …not just because it's organic…after all, can we really trust the organic label? …" (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS5)*

4.4.2 High prices

Both regular and occasional consumers appear to be price-sensitive.

Some regular buyers, explaining they do not perceive so much differences among the different brands of a certain product, refer they try to select the less expensive food. This behaviour does not necessarily means that all brands are really the same in terms of quality, but that:

a) the level of brand equity of organic brands is often very low (see above); and
b) consumers, spending a lot of their income in organic food purchases, have to make some compromises in order to survive and keep on with their principles and personal needs (ITA-AN-Regular-PS6, ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO- Regular-PS2).

Regular consumers perceive high price levels as a barrier and they spend a lot time and effort on finding solutions to save money. We have already mentioned that, in order to save money and buy perceived better quality products, organic consumers count on local (even if not always organic) products.

4.4.3 Availability

Perceived or actual low availability of some organic products is among the reasons organic buyers use to explain the need of buying some non organic food.

In some cases regular consumers complain that the range of organic products available is limited. Some (the one who have been organic consumers from a longer period) recognise that availability has increased in the recent past, but is still perceived as not enough. The case of meat is a good example. For various reasons, the supply of organic meat is still not very developed in Italy. Furthermore, in the case of beef, most of the supply come from other countries. Consumers affirm that they would buy more organic meat if they could find it easily in the shops (ITA-AN-Regular-PS1).

Shopkeepers (and some consumers confirmed) say that organic meat is not so much appreciated by organic buyers because, due to Italian hygienic regulations, specialised shops can only sell pre-packed meat. Very few organic butchers exists in Italy (and not in Ancona or Turin) and even supermarkets sell pre-packed meat. Besides, meat is served only in a limited number of cuts, and consumers like to have a wider range of choices and ask for they special (fresh) meat cut.

Availability is the most cited "loyalty" barrier by occasional consumers, and is surprisingly mentioned more often than price.

4.4.4 Good quality

Good value-for-money is also another crucial factor. It is influencing price perception because organic products should neither be too cheap nor too expensive. Consumers (especially the regular ones) complain about the high prices of organic products but they also know that should be not too cheap. To the regular consumers the products they have to buy weekly should remain affordable but at the same time not risking to reduce their trust in the organic quality of the food.

We already mentioned in many places the case of organic fruit and vegetables. Due to a reduced perception of their quality and freshness (and related value-for-money) organic consumers are often substituting them with local, non-organic farmer's produce.

4.5 Conclusion: The shopping habits of regular consumers of organic food as compared with occasional and non-users

Regular organic users usually pay a lot of attention to the food the buy and use. Regular consumers, frequently buying a large amount of different organic foods, are accustomed to perform a continue search for information regarding the food they buy. In Gardner's term they are very active in the cognitive activity known as *research*. They look for information as much as they can (they get it form the shop keeper or they read them on magazines, newspapers and books on this issues) in order to make the best choice. They are, in marketing terms, *information seekers*. Their shopping behaviour and habits are strongly influenced by the information they gather from trusted sources. On one hand, they tend to be quite informed about the food components and the organic production process, and they are very careful to avoid some perceived unhealthy ingredients and to select the best organic products on the market. The typical regular consumer is often quite fussy in reading the product label, nutritional information, ingredient list, information about the product origin and also in looking for just some known and trusted brands.

On the other hand, regular consumers feel unsure about the intrinsic quality of organic food and are unable to asses if it has increased during the last 3-5 years. What do they appear to have quite clear in mind is that, in response to the rising demand of organic food, a larger range of organic products has become available. And this is seen as an important improvement in the market.

> *"It is difficult to ascertain the better quality of organic food in practice…, but during the last years food processing and production have gone on, there are new technologies, demand is even greater, therefore the companies are more...there is more choice, sure. I do not know if this has also involved an improvement from the qualitative point of view, I am not in a position to assess it" (ITA-AN-Regular-ST1)*

> *"Some brands have better products, the range and the quality of some products have improved...(organic) pasta is a noteworthy example, it is really a better product now than it was in the past, cooking results are enhanced…before it was a tragedy to cook it" (ITA-AN-Regular-ST8)*

Opinions concerning (increased) quality are not shared by all respondents. To some of the regular consumers the quality of the organic vegetables has decreased in the recent past and this has produced the search of substitutes often found in local farmers' products. (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1).

Some other regular consumers seem less suspicious. They buy the product the shopkeeper suggests to them although they do not forget if possible to buy local foods.

Among regular consumers group there is a great difference in the amount of organic product purchased, but it is quite common to find non organic fruit and vegetables in their shopping basket. Organic meat is also considered a product with low or insufficient availability.

Concerning substitution strategies regular users show quite similar patterns. In most of the cases there are some products they cannot renounce to (pasta of a special brand or special food bought for health reasons). When these products are sold out they could spend a lot of time in going into other shops to find them: this active *search* behaviour matches the cognitive *research* for information which represents one of its antecedents. This *relocation* strategy is more efficient (and common) than other strategies such as: waiting for the product to be re-stocked in the shop they usually buy it (*retry*) or momentarily renouncing to buying it (*surrender*). This latter behaviour is mostly observed when the searched organic product is not urgently needed but is customarily stocked in their household food pantry. The decision to substitute an organic food with a substitute conventional product is mainly due to emergency situations (they have friends at dinner), but it is often a rule when fruit and vegetables are involved. Local farmers' produce appear to them fresher and of better quality, resulting in a good reason for abandoning their regular organic purchase pattern (*treason*). In all the other cases they try to move to a different organic product (*close substitution*) but usually they want to be reassured by the shopkeeper or by word-of-mouth before changing brand.

Occasional consumers usually buy only few organic products. Within this group, the shopping behaviour exhibits gender differences. Women behave in a more routinely and methodical way (and usually they also say to do so); men are more curious in their shopping, and are more prone than women, in trying new products.

Within the occasional consumer group the product purchased are different both in terms of the amount and the type of food. Some of these consumers are quite loyal to some specific product or – less frequently – brand (e.g. organic bread or milk); some other buy just the food their children need. For occasional consumers, taste is the most important factor in their search and selection strategy.

Concerning substitution strategies, occasional users do not really appear to exhibit a special pattern. They are obviously unloyal to organic food, and easily substitute it with conventional ones. Being guided by taste, occasional consumers are typically *brand switchers* since they have low intrinsic self-relevance for both the brand and the (organic) product category.

Two thirds of the occasional consumers interviewed buy organic food in supermarkets; the remaining buy it in specialised shops. Regular consumers usually have a favourite specialist shopping place, but tend to visit many different points of purchase in their weekly search for the best and cheaper organic food.

Occasional consumers and non users complain about the increasing homogenisation of taste of conventional products. They have nostalgic remembrances of taste and flavours of their childhood, especially concerning fruit and vegetables. In the past, tastes are recalled as more marked but more 'authentic' (ITA-AN-Occasional-ST5, ITA-AN-Occasional-SS9, ITA-AN-NonUser-ST7).

Prices are less an issue for occasional consumer than for regular ones, who exhibit a higher share of organic food in their overall food expenditure. Higher prices of organic products are mentioned by many of the respondents classified as non organic users, but the most important barrier to organic food purchases within this group is the lack of trust. Non users perceive the organic boom as a fad, and don't believe that "so many products" can be organic. They substantially do not trust organic food at all.

These results are consistent with previous studies which showed that in Italy the lack of trust in organic food is related with a lower degree of both quality perception (Zanoli and Naspetti, 2002) and product knowledge (Zanoli, 2004).

5 The Role of Particular Events and Persons in the development of Organic Consumption Patterns

The analysis presented in this section aim to identify the character of specific events and/or persons that have influenced the development of 'regular' consumption of organic foods over time as compared to 'occasional' consumption and non-use.

As already mentioned, the respondents do not seem to have experienced a sudden change of mind with respect to organic food; on the contrary, becoming (regular) organic consumers is a lengthy, dynamic and gradual process.

In our interviews, respondents do not recall any special stories regarding events and agents within the household circle that may have changed their mind.

On one hand, no special character has a leading role in producing the change towards organic products, though many persons have a supporting role in maintaining this change if it has occurred, especially within the family circle.

On the other hand, special events and life occurrences may provide the stimulus for a cognitive and emotional reaction that may finally produce a change in the consumer behaviour (Peter et al., 1999). But, in the biographies of our respondents, these event have never produced an abrupt change, but have summed up to an increased knowledge and emotional 'stock' in their memory.

Events and person have an impact on cognition and emotions, and therefore on *resonance*. Some personal influences of special people and events have already been discussed in relation to this Gardner's lever in chapter 3.2.1.

5.1 The influences of lifecycle events, family members and friends

In the respondents memory, neither close relatives and friends, nor lifecycle events seem to have deeply influenced organic consumption patterns or mind sets regarding organic food.

In general no respondent connect his initiation to organic food to any special event. Only one – nowadays regular – consumer recall her first encounter with organic food as a consequence of having moved into a big and polluted city, like Milan. The idea was to intake something natural when the outside environmental was so dirty and polluted as compared to their origin, a small town in central Italy. A sense of inner purity in contrast to outer impurity.

> *"Paolo has been working in Milan for 7 years and there we have had more the necessity to eat natural, because the city is truly …polluted, because you suffer it too much, if you come from a small town like Ancona". (ITA-AN-Regular-PS8)*

Again, in the respondent biography, this important event is like the last straw. We cannot conclude that this event itself is the main driver to change of mind, but only that this is the final event of a series of life experiences, emotions and understandings that ended up into organic awareness and consumption.

In other two cases (one occasional and one regular consumer), respondents declared that the change of residence caused a slight (temporary?) decrease in organic consumption, because the new shopping pathways did not include anymore the usual shop where they bought organic food. In both cases they try to cope with this situation finding new points of purchase.

In some cases an illness – or another health problem – of one of the family members represented the reported reason to start buying some organic food, but even this event alone is not enough, in the respondents' minds, to explain their change of mind or habits. The event often is backed up by a trustworthy personal advice of an external agent (e.g. doctor: see below chapter 5.2). Since not all people that have experienced serious illnesses, dietary or other health disorders become organic consumers, other co-factors need to be contemporarily present in order to produce a change of mind.

On one hand, some of the (current) non-users (2 out of 4) reported that a health problem was indeed their first encounter with organic food, but they have subsequently stopped organic consumption when the health problem was solved. On the other hand, those respondents more interested in quality as a mean to live healthy and have a better quality of life, continued to buy and slowly increased the amount of organic food into their baskets (5 out of 14 organic users).

Changes in household composition (e.g.: marriage, new child) is reported to have produced some changes in household shopping, eating and cooking habits (e.g.: a new child requires more attention towards food quality). Since these changes are reported as occurred after organic consumption was started, they are not felt as very significant by regular users as they just confirm the attitudes of household members towards healthier and organic food.

> *"Now we have two children, so the way I plan and do shopping has changed somehow… I don't have time to go out for shopping four, five or six times a week... so I have to carefully plan what to purchase trying to satisfy all family members…" (ITA-AN-Regular-SS3, ITA-TO-Regular-PS4)*

In both towns (Torino and Ancona) the increase of the family budget does not appear to be able to significantly influence organic food consumption. On the contrary, a future income growth is seen like a factor that it could allow to increase their own organic purchases (ITA-TO-NonUser-PS9, ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS2).

In some cases, organic consumers report that the first employment or a change in the current employment appear to have influenced the approach to food. This is reported as different shopping habits and less time for food preparation (ITA-AN-Occasional-SP4).

In any case, among organic respondents, the entrance into adulthood (i.e. going to live outside the original household and/or starting to work) never produced a substantial change in lifestyles and food habits. Even if the organic choice was not present in the family of origin, it is perceived as the logical consequence of the food habits and behaviours of the family of origin. The influence of parents' food habits is important even when (just in one case) this has caused a reaction and an opposite behaviour. In some cases, the organic choice appears in the same period in which the consumer improves his/her cooking abilities (e.g.: experimenting new recipes). But in this case it is difficult to establish which of the two events influences the other.

Some regular users report that the behaviour of friends and the knowledge acquired by them (word-of-mouth) influenced them to try new organic food items, brands, points of sale and (direct) producers.

Some respondents reported that their beliefs and attitudes towards organic food were strengthened by the fact that the partner shared the same beliefs and attitudes. Such emotional and cognitive sharing reassures the consumer and strengthens her decisions.

> *"It's a matter of day-by-day life ... this allowed me a quiet living without having to argue about food everyday – like it happened with my earlier partners… this is important for me… it gives stillness …"(ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

Partners are, obviously, an important source of emotions and personally-relevant knowledge. Common food habits and common involvement in organic choice are a very important factor in partnership and family life. The sharing (or lack of) common attitudes and behaviours toward (organic) food is reported as personally relevant by most respondents. On one hand, sharing similar beliefs and attitudes, in some cases (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1) or respecting and surrendering to partner's choice (ITA-AN-Regular-SS3, ITA-AN-Regular-SS6) simplifies family life and produces harmony, and this is emphasized in respondent's interview. On the other hand, some respondents recalled the dissimilar approaches to food and subsequent lack of sharing they had with former partners (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1, ITA-TO-Regular-PS2).

We have already mentioned in chapter 2.4 that children's opinions do not appear to have influenced in any significant way current and past food habits in neither organic group.

5.2 The influences of external events and agents

In this section stories regarding events and agents external to the household (including the influence of 'food scandals', food producers, shopkeepers, health professionals, etc.) are summarised. All these events do not seem very influential on change of mind however they can sometimes suggest or support a new temporary habit. Nevertheless none of these effects are long-lasting unless they rely on a deeper personal concern of the subject.

All these external events are part of the consumer's physical and social environment, that can influence consumers' affective and cognitive responses and their behaviour (Peter et al., 1999).

Words of mouth and media (newspapers, magazines and the web above all) are seen as means for getting information and suggestions, whilst external events as food scandals (as stated in previous studies: Zanoli, 2004) don't appear to have a strong influence on food habits and attitudes towards organic food.

More influence is exercised by sought information (e.g. books and web browsing), than by mass media. The search for personally relevant information from the external environment is a standard step in consumer decision making process. But the extent of this search varies according to the level of involvement in the decision making. Therefore we can distinguish between routinized choice behaviour (where limited information is collected and most of it is recalled from memory), limited decision making and extensive decision making (where a higher amount of new information is sought) (Peter et al., 1999). The fact that organic consumers actively seek information is a proof of their higher involvement and of the relatively more extensive decision making process they put into place than non-organic users. Somehow, this implies that organic consumers prefer to personally "drive" their choices than to be driven by others or by external events.

Regular users are those more involved in looking for more information. A deep knowledge of the nutritional validity of the traditional "Mediterranean" diet is usually combined with a continuous learning process about the healthiest and nutritionally balanced way of eating and cooking food. These consumer group aims to constantly improving its food knowledge day by day, not only by the aid of media and newspapers but also by the advice of the shopkeepers and fellow consumers. They often discuss with the former about the ingredients and health properties of food; they have a certain consideration about shopkeepers' opinion in the choice of (the right and healthiest) food.

Doctors' advices have sometimes been the first drive towards the organic choice in cases of health problems (cancer in two of the cases: ITA-AN-Regular-PS6, ITA-AN-NonUser-PS2, but also when some minor dietary issues occurred: ITA-AN-Regular-PS1, ITA-AN-Occasional-PS5, ITA-TO-Regular-PS2).

> *"A dietician told me I had an allergy to yeast. He suggested to buy bread without chemical yeast in organic shops" (ITA-AN-Occasional-PS5)*

The first encounter with organic food, if driven by an external factor or agent, was followed up and continued only by those consumers more attracted by the food quality and coming from a family particularly caring about food choices. In general, external events or external agents' opinions act as *interrupts*, that is environmental factors that can affect consumer decision making by interrupting or disrupting the flow of the ordinary decision-making process (Peter et al., 1999). A disease and the related information (coming e.g. from a doctor or a magazine) that organic food can help, represent a new information which is inconsistent with established knowledge structures in the mind of the consumer. Therefore, the ordinary decision plans are disrupted, and a new decision (regarding the buying of organic food) may temporarily occur. But these disrupting events are not sufficient to permanently cause a change of mind. Consumer behaviour does not permanently change unless other factor intervene: e.g. a family-inherited attention to the healthiness and authenticity of food, the better taste and sensory experience, etc. For all other consumers, after the *interrupt* stop its effects, the organic choice is abandoned when e.g. the health problem had been solved.

In any case, integration processes in consumer decision-making make the exploration of this salient past external events quite difficult: consumer tend to integrate and mingle these events in a multi-factorial explanation of their gradual change of mind. Eventually, consumers' stories tend to forget or minimise the relevance of these past events which become latent factors of change unobservable to the researcher.

Among external events we can also mention the increasing amount of marketing stimuli produced by the organic market development. Increased range and availability and larger exposure to organic products in various, non-specialised points of sale is mentioned by all respondents as a potential influence on their behaviour: many declare that they have more incentives to try (new) organic products.

Special mention here has to be given to **counter persuaders**, that is to those individuals that negatively influence the consumer organic choice. Counter persuaders do not consider organic food of better quality and believe that there is not much difference between organic and conventional production.

Counter persuaders are generally not member of the family household but close-relatives (parents, grandchildren, in-laws) or friends, doctors, and neighbours. They are rarely the informants' partners, children or other members of the household. Husband or wife usually shares the organic choice. Only one secondary subject openly shows his doubts on organic food in his interview: "*I am interested but at the same time I have many doubts on the on the authenticity of organic food. According to me organic is purely a marketing outcome*" (ITA-AN-Occasional-SS4). Other partners, albeit openly not refuting the family organic choice in their personal interviews as secondary subjects of investigation, have been reported by principal subjects as merely following the householder in her/his choice.

Counter-persuaders, being non-users, exhibit reasons similar to the latter for product dissatisfaction: higher prices, lack of confidence on organic farming practices and the risk of external "contamination" of organic crops.

Counter-persuaders also openly show distrust towards the possibility to avoid the "contamination" between organic cultivations and not organic cultivations

> *"My parents believe that the organic question is a big lie… that organic farming is a fraud…they believe that is impossible to farm large organic fields. My parents completely avoid the use of pesticides and other chemicals in their fields, but they're deeply convinced that is impossible to apply the same agricultural production system to a mass scale production… So they say that organic food is a big lie…" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS1)*

> *"My brother-in-law is an eye doctor … he tells the story of polluted fields that can contaminate neighbouring organic fields ... and then says that all food contains the same vitamins …" (ITA-TO-Regular-PS2)*

Another counter persuader, in the respondent's narration, justifies his refusal of organic food by extreme confidence in the safety of conventional farming practices:

> *"He was born in the countryside in the south of Italy and he always says: «all this chemical additives disappear in less than two months … they disappear in the air … you can eat those fruits, you can chose, they're as healthy as organic fruits»" (ITA-TO-Occasional-PS6).*

Other counter persuaders do not perceive any difference among conventional and organic products:

> *"…my in-laws are stubborn, how can I describe them…they are a out of date and naive …to them everything is fine, everything is the same… they do not find all this difference…they do not want to accept it" (ITA-AN-Occasional-SS9)*

5.3 Conclusion: Major influences on regular consumption of organic food as compared with occasional and non-consumption

Family members and events have much more influence on organic food choices than agents and events external to the household.

During the childhood consumers move their first steps into food choice. Of course, children do no make decisions for the whole family, but they gradually develop their own tastes by confronting themselves with their family tastes. Organic consumers have generally been exposed in their families of origin to approaches to food emphasizing the quality and healthiness of ingredients. The imprinting of parents and sometimes grandparents appear to be crucial in producing the respondents' higher involvement in careful food choice and meal preparation. Respondents' mothers and grandmothers, in particular, have been the living example that influenced (positively or negatively, in the case of non-users) respondents' openness to change.

Reported food biographies show that food attitudes rooted in childhood reappear in later stages of life even if during teenage the food consumption patterns were revolutioned. Teenagers and young adults often do not pay too much attention to the quality of meals and food. The gate to full adulthood is quite fuzzy in contemporary Italy. It may coincide with going to live outside the original household, either as single or as a couple. Or it may coincide with the birth of the first children. In any case, in later stages of the family lifecycle, consumers end up in following again their parent's tracks. All respondents tell about similar food behavioural patterns.

Regular consumers are influenced by information personally sought. A growing stock of information supports their food choice and confidence in organic food. They collect information whenever they can and everywhere. Nevertheless, they still exhibit a lack of knowledge about product characteristics, certification bodies, labels, etc. The large number of certification bodies and the growing number of brands and organic labels – often of foreign origin – that appear on the market contribute to the confusion. But in most of the cases, they are able to discriminate among the organic food products.

The influence of family members is higher than that of family events. Family members usually have to agree on the organic food choice the decision maker does. If not this causes a lot of discussions and problems inside the family and it is difficult to keep on with organic food. Family events are somewhat less relevant, and they have no impact on changing mind unless they are related to family health. Diseases, eating disorders, and the subsequent doctor's advice are never a fundamental factor of change but sometimes is by these events or agents that the first encounter with organic food is made.

External events as food scandals don't seem to be very influencing on food habits and attitudes towards organic food.

Close relatives and friends have no influence on change of minds, albeit sometimes they act as counterpersuaders.

Among external agents that particularly influence regular consumers, a special mention should be made to the specialised shopkeepers: the relationship they establish with the most committed organic consumers reinforce the respondents' trust and confidence in organic products (*resonance*).

Non-users' stories do not show the slow process of change that organic consumers report. Interviewed non users are all aware of organic products but somehow their first encounter (either mediated by an agent or by a family or external event) has "failed". The *reasons* for this failure is usually reported to be linked to a negative taste experience or a lack of confidence in organic certification. But, investigation of their food biography and participant observation of their actual buying behaviour shows that, even for non-users, the missed change of mind is not a result of a single event or a single person's influence. The 'distance' and 'estrangement' they experience towards organic food has a dynamic, multifaceted explanation in their personal life history.

6 Conclusions: The character of demand for organic foods

In this paper, following the Gardner's suggestions, we have tried to understand how people change and start buying and eating organic food. In theory, by "knowing our audience", we could learn how to persuade the public of consumers to buy and eat (more) organic food in the future.

We analysed the processes and dynamics that have occurred and have influenced the respondents in becoming organic consumers (both regular and occasional ones); we analysed non-users resistances to this change as well.

Taking into consideration individuals' cognitive reasoning, and assuming that consumption of organic food has involved a change of mind about food experiences and food habits, we have identified the concepts, stories and theories mentioned by respondents in their discourses about organic food. Consumer reasoning has been studied with reference to these elements with a view to obtaining a deeper knowledge and understanding of consumer discourses.

6.1 Organic consumption as a change of mind and habits

Organic food consumption has steadily grown in Italy during the last ten years, if we exclude the short crisis in 2001 (Willer & Yussefi, 2005; Biobank, 2007); according to our qualitative research findings, this growth cannot be ascribed to a sudden and abrupt change of consumers' mind. Collected consumer narratives & food biographies show that consumers have been changing their minds gradually, and that this process, especially for the regular users, is still continuing.

Our data collection and analysis has been inspired by Gardner's (2004) theories on changing mind; this work represent the first attempt to apply Gardner's theories to consumer behaviour.

Starting from the *concepts* intended as the basic units, we have learned that the idea of 'organic food' stored into the minds of the consumers is usually shared buy all those interviewed, even though consumers' knowledge of organic production and processing is not deep.

Besides, we have found that *regular* organic consumers exhibit a strong cognitive association between organic food and **healthiness**, while for *occasional* users the main association is with **taste**.

Non-users that have tried organic food at least once, appear to have missed – in their encounter with organic food – that spark that ignites the trial-and-error approach of occasional users to organic food; this 'spark' is represented by the superior taste experienced for at least one product, that represents a significant perceived differential that can be comprehended and remembered (Peter et., 1999).

Health, as leading life goal, is shared by all consumers (including non-users) but the way organic food is seen as a mean to reach this end is different in the various respondents' groups. Organic users perceive their special attention to food as a mean to maintain their health; on the contrary, non users have a much lower awareness of the links between food habits, healthiness of food and own health.

This results on Italian organic consumers confirm what was found, by a different methodology, by Zanoli and Naspetti (2002).

Food *stories* or narratives are somehow similar for all categories of consumers. The main character or protagonist is always represented by the respondents' family of origin. Parents or grandparents influence on the development of the respondents' attention (or lack of) to food is found in all stories. Most organic users perceive that their special attention to food and their food habits are inherited from their families of origin; in one case, a regular organic user tells that the negative example provided by his family has moved her to search for a different approach to food. Non-users mostly recall that food was not given a special attention by their parents.

Organic respondents stories share similar goals: these stories consist of food related activities aimed towards the achievement of family health as well as broader altruistic values (protection of environment, fair-trade, etc.). In Gardner's view, a story is not merely a message or slogan, but it has all essential elements of a good narrative. Our collected organic stories all have a protagonist (the family of origin), a goal (superior taste, better health, environmental and other ethical aims), obstacles (poor information on organic products, the lower availability and higher price of organic food), and a resolution (regular or occasional consumption).

Theories are formal explanations of phenomena. They are capable of predicting future occurrences or observations of the same kind, and capable of being tested by experiment or otherwise falsified through empirical observation, but they can also change over time due to new knowledge (Grander, 2004). In our investigation, we have collected from our respondents theories both about food in general and about organic food.

Consumers, when thinking of good quality food, manly refer to the sensory characteristics of food: taste, texture, and smell are the most important quality dimensions of food products in general.

In general there is no clear difference between the organic consumers groups (regular and occasional consumers) but there is a slight difference with the non-users. Most of non organic consumers seem less interested in the intrinsic food quality cues and assign more importance to the way products are prepared and cooked.

Regular users think about organic consumption as coherent with other food choices they make (e.g. vegetarianism, macrobiotics, etc.), ethical conduct and health related behaviours. Occasional consumers do not build their behaviours and choices on an ideological belief. Even if they exhibit related environmental behaviours (recycling, use of 'green' washing-up liquids and similar) they substantially do not link these behaviours to the organic choice. Non-users (and some of the occasional users) tend to exclude organic food from their prevailing patterns of change in food habits (they seem to prefer switching to local or typical food, regarded as less expensive but at least similar to organic food in terms of quality).

As a result, the choice to (regularly) buy organic is a matter of largely unnoticed inner development. It is an idea which slowly grows in the mind of the consumer, and gradually involve her emotions, producing an overall positive evaluation of organic products based on both utilitarian and emotional ground. These evaluations are the basis for attitudes, purchase intentions and behaviours.

Over time, such positive attitudes and behaviours eventually reinforce previous beliefs; in Gardner's words, the longer people believe something, the better they get at deflecting counterarguments. Finally, regular consumption and loyalty is established.

This is exactly what Gardner suggests for "ordinary" changes of everyday's life: "It is important to state that these differences occurred gradually, often almost unnoticed, from one month or year to the next. […] What characterizes mind changing under ordinary circumstances is that it occurs largely beneath the surface; unless one has a keen memory or a well-documented journal, one may be surprised to discover that one ever held a contrary point of view". (Gardner, 2004, p. 195)

6.2 Influences on the development of organic food habits

Consumer purchase behaviours is based on attitudes and intentions integrated with past experience, knowledge and beliefs stored in memory (Peter and Olson, 1994). Behaviour is also influenced by consumer affect and cognition regarding stimuli and events taking place in the environment. Although the relationship between affect and cognition is not yet fully understood and remains an issue in psychology, it is quite clear that consumer cognitive interpretation influence and are influenced by affective reactions. For example, many people eat chocolate or sweets to get rid of a bad mood that is they cognitively retrieve from memory a past heuristic that has shown to work well in changing their feelings.

Following Gardner's suggestions, our analysis on influences on the development of organic food habits focused on both cognitive (**reasons**, **resources and rewards**) and affective (**resonance**) levers of change of minds. Furthermore, **resistances** (both cognitive and affective) that may limit the extent of those levers were also explored.

Regular consumers trust organic products because they believe that they are healthier and tastier than any other product. This belief has been built day after day their experiences and by word-of-mouth: friends, shopkeepers and other informants. A relevant amount of product knowledge is stored in their memory and constantly increased by **researching** relevant information. Indeed, regular consumers are influenced by information personally sought. A growing stock of information supports their food choice and confidence in organic food. They collect information whenever they can and everywhere.

Occasional consumers have strong beliefs about the better taste and the higher quality of organic food in general. Quality is perceived as multidimensional: they also appreciate the good texture and smell of organic products. The health aspect, though mentioned, is a secondary one. They are quite flexible with organic food purchases, they buy and eat organic product just when it is possible, even if in many cases they have a strong preference for the organic variety of a special food. Their overall level of information about organic food and farming seems lower than the regular users.

Non organic users sometimes perceive organic food as a new fashion, the last fad. In some cases they recall a disappointment with their first occasional organic encounter. The bad taste experience has emotionally influenced their current position towards organic food, which is largely based on lack of information and negative beliefs (prejudices).

In general, the **resistances** that are experienced by consumers embed cognitive, affective and conative (experiential) aspects and are mediated by culture.

Among cognitive barriers, in previous chapters we have mentioned: poor information, low product knowledge, lack of knowledge and trust in organic brands. Organic food is still confused with close ‘substitutes’, such as ‘natural’, ‘macrobiotic’ and similar products.

Affective resistances aren’t easily spotted, given the nature of our research. But the social image organic consumers have in the eyes of peers and reference groups embeds an emotional relevance and appears a relevant resistance to changing food habits. Many occasional consumers believe that regular consumers are somewhat obsessed with organic food and that they look and behave strangely. In the eyes of occasional consumers, the regular consumers represent therefore, in some instances, their *dissociative* reference group (Peter et al., 1999).

Organic products are generally perceived and experienced as expensive products, when compared to conventional alternatives. High prices appear as an important cognitive and conative barrier especially for the non users. To organic consumer the rewards they perceive to gain from organic food is well beyond the resources (in terms of time and money) they employ to search for the higher quality of organic products.

In any case, the existence of premium prices in the organic sector produces different behavioural heuristics in the different groups of consumers, according to their different level of involvement in organic consumption and related different perception of the value-for-money of organic food. Occasional consumers usually buy only few organic products. Therefore, even if they are more exposed to price differences since they buy both organic and conventional products, they seem to attribute less importance to price.

Regular consumers perceive there is a maximum price that they won’t exceed when buying organic food. Furthermore, regular consumers enact special strategies in order to reduce the cost of their shopping basket. For example, they plan their purchase in order to take advantage, as much as possible, of periodic price reductions and promotions done in both specialised shops and supermarkets. This purchase strategy or heuristic is specifically pursued for easily-storable, long shelf-life ‘commodities’ for which bulk purchases can be made.

In previous research (Zanoli & Naspetti, 2002) we have found that regular consumers, given the higher share of organic food over the total food expenditure, are more price sensitive than occasional users. Our current findings appear to validate these results.

According to Gardner (2004), “for most of us the principal – as well as the primordial – form of mind changing consists of exchanges that take place within the family”. Family, indeed, represent a very strong influence in people’s biographies. The child, by identifying herself with her parents or other salient adults in the family, models her behaviour accordingly.

In our analysis, we have found that indeed family members and events have much more influence on organic food choices than agents and events external to the household.

During the childhood consumers move their first steps into food choice. Of course, children do no make decisions for the whole family, but they gradually develop their own tastes by confronting themselves with their family tastes. Organic consumers have generally been exposed in their families of origin to approaches to food emphasizing the quality and healthiness of ingredients. The imprinting of parents and sometimes grandparents appear to be crucial in producing the respondents' higher involvement in careful food choice and meal preparation. By developing their own *theories* of food, organic consumers redefine their mental images of food (*representational redescription* in Gardner's terms) but still they perceive resonance with their parental models.

The influence of family members is higher than that of family events. Family events are somewhat less relevant, and they have no impact on changing mind unless they are related to family health.

Partners are other quite relevant influencers. Resonance is again the main lever here. Some respondents reported that their beliefs and attitudes towards organic food were strengthened by the fact that the partner shared the same beliefs and attitudes. Such emotional and cognitive sharing reassures the consumer and strengthens her decisions.

All events and people outside the family of origin or the current family have a much lower influence, if any, on organic consumer attitudes and habits.

Shopkeepers of specialised organic shop are the remarkable exception: albeit relationship they establish with the most committed organic consumers is not intimate, often is enough for resonance. Shopkeepers opinions reinforce the respondents' trust and confidence in organic products.

6.3 The basis of loyalty towards organic food products

Two aspects of loyalty, behavioural and attitudinal, have been well established in the marketing literature (Dick & Basu, 1994; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). The behavioural side of loyalty is represented as *repatronage intentions* and, as a consequence, *repeated purchases.* The attitudinal side of loyalty is represented as *commitment* (Chaudhuri, 2006).

The cognitive perspective can therefore distinguish between the observed behavioural side of loyalty and commitment or involvement towards organic food (Table 8).

The literature on consumer behaviour as identified commitment as one's "motivation" to sustain a relationship with a product or a retailer (Chaudhuri, 2006). Affect and emotions are the main driver to any kind of relationships, and, in Gardner's term, are associated with the *resonance* lever of change. All respondents are involved food lover, but only regular organic users exhibit a certain degree of attitudinal loyalty. Among our respondents, organic product commitment appears strictly connected with frequency of purchase: most of regular users may therefore be classified as *loyals and committed*.

Nevertheless, most of interviewed regular users exhibit a low degree of behavioural loyalty for the specific category of fruit & vegetables: local albeit conventional produce is often preferred to long-distance travelling organic produce. To this respect, given the value-based motives behind this behaviour, we can classify most of interviewed regular users as *information* & *variety seekers*, too. Regular consumers, frequently buying a large amount of different organic foods, are accustomed to perform a continue search for information regarding the food they buy. In Gardner's term they are very active in the cognitive activity known as *research*. Their shopping behaviour and habits are strongly influenced by the information they gather from trusted sources (*resonance*).

Besides, regular organic users are often not brand loyal. They exhibit a certain amount of store loyalty, but relocation strategies are often the easiest way out when a specific organic product is not found in the usual store.

Occasional consumers usually buy only few organic products. They exhibit both a lower degree of behavioural loyalty as well as commitment. They switch easily between organic, local and conventional products. At the same time, some occasional consumers among our respondents are very loyal toward a specific organic product or brand, which they purchase habitually. This manifest loyalty is a way of simplifying purchases: they keep on buying the same product as long as it satisfies them. Albeit they normally are *switchers*, they can be *habituals* towards a specific organic brand.

Table 8 – Organic Loyalty and Commitment

		Organic Commitment	
		Low	**High**
Organic Loyalty	**Low**	**Switchers**	**Variety & Information Seekers**
	High	**Habituals**	**Loyals & Committed**

Source: Adapted from Peter et al. (1999)

6.4 Influencing future organic demand – some reflexions

Most consumer research is concerned with understanding consumer behaviour and employing the understanding gained to influence and eventually change future consumer behaviour.

The change attempts may originate in the producer/seller realm as well as from government intervention and/or from non-profit organizations.

Marketing strategy usually is put into operation by the traditional levers of product, price, distribution and communication strategies.

Institutional attempts to change consumer behaviour are commonly categorized into consumer information, consumer education and consumer advice (Peter et al., 1999).

In order to increase both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty, the level of consumer information and product knowledge should be increased. Besides, consumers will become more committed if their beliefs regarding the intrinsic self-relevance of organic food will increase in the future.

Consumer education is not related to specific product choices and has to do with consumer socialisation (Peter et al., 1999). Consumer socialisation refers to how children acquire knowledge about products and various consumption-related skills, such as how to compare products and how to infer quality cues. We have seen how consumer knowledge acquired in childhood has influenced both organic users and non-users in later years. The role of the family of origin is of outmost importance in developing an interest for high quality and healthy food. Stories collected from consumers show that parents (and sometimes grandparents) serve as model for their children; they also provide reinforcement when their children, in later years, imitate their behaviours. In the future, consumer education in school can provide further reinforcement in acquiring knowledge and skills related to organic consumption. The role of consumer education and socialisation can be analysed both in terms of cognitive learning and in terms of behavioural analysis. On one hand, cognitive learning is mostly related to direct teaching of parents and school teachers, like when these adults try to teach children about the role of food on health and environment or, more specifically, about organic farming. On the other hand, behaviour can be directly influenced by taking children on shopping trips, on farm visits and by letting them directly experience organic food at home or ins school canteens. The latter is of greater importance especially when children grow up and relate their home-acquired food habits with those of peers: eating together organic food let them socialise their organic food experience.

Gardner's cognitive approach can be of further help in analysing influences on future consumer behaviour. Generically, mind change entails the alteration of mental representations, often acquired in childhood. These representations have a *content* that can be expressed as ideas, concepts, theories, stories. We have seen how serviceable are these concepts, theories and stories in forging consumer attitudes and behaviour towards organic food.

We have also seen that mind changes occurs gradually and steadily. Gardner's warns us that sudden changes like that of Paul on his way to Damascus occur rarely; and even if occur, they are often not recalled in (consumers') memory. At the same time, mind changing can be eased by a number of crucial factors that, in Gardner's view, are:

1) Content
2) Size of audience
3) Type of audience
4) Forms of communicating change: direct and indirect
5) Levers of mind change
6) The ethical dimension

We will now explore how this dimension can be applied to a strategy of influencing consumer behaviour towards organic food in Italy.

The present *content* of organic food consumption concept, in the mind of respondents, is: healthy, nourishing and tasty food obtained mostly by small-scale production and processing. Only few consumer actually relate organic food and farming to a lower impact on environment and to ethical values. The *desired* content therefore could entail a stronger environmental focus, as well as social and ethical contents such as fair-trade, care farming, local production and limited food mileage, and, maybe, animal welfare. The competing *countercontents* are not only conventional food and farming (with its modern face given by GMO and biotechnology era), but also low-input and Zero Residue farming, local and typical food and non-organic 'ethical' food (fair trade, farm-house products, etc.).

The *audience* is the large public, quite diversified and segmented, which generally have quite simple stories and theories in mind about food. To this respect, Gardner (2004) makes a very important observation:

> *Let's be clear — it's never easy to change minds. And it's even more difficult to replace a simple way of thinking about a matter with a more complex way. But complex stories and theories have a better chance of success when the entity in which one is working is of limited size and composed of individuals of similar background and common expertise.*

Therefore, to target a larger audience, a simplification of the organic *story* is needed, albeit the *concept* needs to remain the same. If the latter change, the most committed and informed consumers will be disappointed; but if the story is presented in a simpler and more vivid way, which is cognitively and affectively appealing for larger segments of the consumer population, organic food will become more popular. Increasing organic consumption has to do with communicating stories that are intrinsically self-relevant to a larger group of people. This stories need to contain values shared and understood by a larger number of segments, not only the most privileged and educated. Communicating the right stories is an important driver of change, though it modifies consumers' attitudes and behaviour mainly in the long run. Communication itself is not fully predictable in its outcome: for instance, the direct experience of using organic food can have a strong impact on product knowledge and intrinsic self-relevance.

In terms of *forms of change*, sometimes the indirect effects are more durable of the direct content of the communicated stories, theories and concepts. Among our respondents, most organic consumers believe that other people can be hardly convinced to buy and use organic food if they do not have a special, personal involvement towards food in general. Offering organic food to others is recognised to be a mean to reach the aim, but it is seldom used as tool to influence others. According to Gardner (2004), personal example is a strong, indirect driver of change, since it may be reinforced by at least two levers of change: *resonance* and *representational redescriptions*. Personal example entails resonance since it appeals to consumers' feelings and emotions: it is therefore intrinsically self-relevant to them. At the same time, in Gardner's view, individuals learn most effectively when they receive the same message in a number of different ways and from different sources. Personal example may end up as a number of different mental representation in the audience, that challenges current representation and may induce change of mind.

Among the levers of mind change, we have found that – at least in the recent past – each had a different degree of importance in establishing the mindset of organic consumers.

In chapter 3 we have shown that regular consumers differ from occasional and non-users since they are *information seekers*; this *research* for information blends cognitive (*reasons*) and affective (*resonance*) elements, according to the intrinsic self-relevance of sources to each respondent.

In the future, regular consumer need to be reassured that the organic concept and story isn't changing for the worst, and that will continue to embed the values (egoistic and altruistic) they consider self-relevant.

Occasional consumers are *switchers*, and the research lever is not so relevant in influencing them. Rationality (*reasons*) is beneath the surface, but *rewards* and their emotional *resonance* appear to be dominating occasional consumers' mindset. *Resources*, too, appear relevant: perceived healthiness and taste, coupled with a fair value-for-money, may influence their attitudes and behaviour.

In the future, it is not clear whether or not occasional consumer will 'naturally' and gradually become regular users. If the organic concept content will remain the same probably they will not.

In marketing terms, time is not passing by without producing changes in the market environment. Followers will never show the same behaviour than innovators or early adopters, even if attitudes will evolve in the same way. The organic market environment is changing very quickly. As a consequence of a wider availability of products, of the competition of an increasing number of organic substitutes (local farmer's products, 'zero residue' products, 'integrated farming' products, etc.), and of new 'environmental' threats (*real world events* such as climate change, end of the cheap energy oil-based economy, etc.), the relevant levers could be other than those effective in the past.

Resonance and *representational redescriptions* are, in our opinion, powerful drivers of mind change: occasional consumers, showing low attitudinal loyalty, need to be reinforced in their gradual change by symbols (more effective logos and widely recognised brands) and opinion leaders (not only doctors).

Non–users, and the wide public in general, need to be reached by even simpler concepts and stories. The *theories* beneath current organic consumption, as we have collected from our respondents, are far too elaborate to be appealing to people at large.

We have found that most of non-organic consumers appear little interested in the intrinsic food quality cues and assign higher importance to the way products are prepared and cooked. Their values concerning food choice are mainly guided by taste and convenience. For those who have tried organic products, their first encounter was recalled as negative mainly since the found a noticeable difference in taste if compared with conventional food products.

In the future, 'conventionalised' organic products may be more appealing to this category of consumers; but the 'conventionalisation' of organic food and farming is also one of the main concerns that regular consumers has exposed to us. This trade-off shows that a finer segmentation is needed, in order to expand the market beyond its current boundaries.

A final consideration should be given to the *ethical dimension* of mind change. Most of the changes in the marketplace can be carried out "for amoral ends, for immoral ends, or for impressively moral ends" (Gardner, 2004).

The intrinsic morality of the organic market has been challenged in the recent past by its own impressive and exponential development. If in the past, organic food and farming was assumed and perceived as a more ethical choice than their conventional counterparts, this assumption could not necessarily hold in the future.

Today's organic market is widely globalised, and an increasing number of products come from channels very similar to the conventional ones. The food mileage issue, as well as concerns regarding labour welfare in many exporting countries, are questioned by an increasing number of (organic) consumers, and practitioners.

A crucial step in the development of the organic market in the future, will be reconciling the trade-offs between an increasing demand of widely available organic products and the possibility of supplying them in an ethical way.

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