

The Problem of Meat Consumption

A Ph. D. Project Outline for the Study of the Role of Attitudes, Identity and Values

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People are seldom aware about cause-effect relationship between their actions and the relevant consequences. For example, at first glance, meat consumption and climate change may not seem directly related although they actually are. The livestock sector requires large supplies of energy and water, consumes about 40% to 50% of the global grain production and pollutes by disposing of very large amounts of substances and materials. Then, damage caused by agriculture must be taken into account too. Both intensive and organic agriculture reduces biodiversity and subtracts to the planet important sources to contrast global warming.

Positive thinking about eating meat still resists in collective imagination (especially in those who live in Western Countries). Meat is considered a key part of a balanced diet. This is not wrong because meat is rich in proteins and easily assimilated nutrients, has a great number of essential amino acids and provides both a good number of minerals and vitamins. However, a robust body of evidence reveals the potential health risks associated with an excessive consumption (i. e. obesity, some types of cancer, cardiovascular diseases and increasing frequency of “metabolic syndrome” cases). The claim of meat has risen considerably over the years (all over the world) and risks to become unsustainable at present rates unless changes in food habits take place (for example, switching to a Mediterranean or Macrobiotic Diet).

This PhD project focuses on two main studies, in a sample of young subjects, autonomous in their purchasing decisions and consumer behaviors, in order to reduce meat consumption, improving health and decreasing pollution. As far as the first study

is concerned, a quali-quantitative questionnaire will be used to investigate perception about meat (“are people aware of how much meat they eat?”), to understand how, where and when meat is used and to analyse how meat consumption is affected by attitudes, personal/social identities and values (in particular, NEP values: altruistic, selfish/materialistic and biospheric). In fact, previous studies revealed that more positive attitudes towards meat are associated with stronger levels of identification with being a meat eater (meat identity) and that attitudes towards eating meat are inclined to be negatively associated with people’s environmental identity. Moreover, attitudes towards eating meat seem to be positively related to egoistic values and negatively related to altruistic and biospheric values (Abrahamse, 2009). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB - Ajzen, 1991) and the Value Belief Norm Theory (VNB, Stern *et al.*, 1999) will be the main theoretical models.

Finally, the second study will test the efficacy of new communication strategies, based on the results of the previous study, aimed at reducing meat consumption.

References

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