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# **Ethical consumer in a globalized world: challenges for the individual's identity.**

A study on ethical consumers in Lund and Malmö.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses ethical consumption with a focus on individuals' identities, the notion of reflexivity and the importance of information in being an ethical consumer in a globalized world. Globalization brings changes to production of consumer goods, as well as consumption patterns of the individual. Ethical consumption is becoming a popular phenomenon that brings changes to the society and challenges individual's identities. Consumers become more aware of their impact on the environment and society through their consumption patterns. The concepts of reflexivity, habitus, self- and social identities are reviewed to provide deep understanding of the practices of ethical consumption. In order to achieve this goal hermeneutic approach was used to analyze in-depth semi-structured interviews of individuals who identify themselves as ethical consumers. By doing so, the author comes to some concluding remarks. In terms of ethical consumption, reflexivity should be perceived broader than concepts of Giddens and Bourdieu suggest, rather a merger of those concepts can be more beneficial. In a small sample of participants, reflexivity in terms of ethical consumption can be seen as an important element of the habitus. Information plays an important role in participants' ethical consumption experiences; particularly it becomes a way of influencing others. Being an ethical consumer challenges individuals' identities in their everyday personal lives, as well as in the social context.

Keywords: ethical consumption, reflexivity, habitus, Giddens, Bourdieu, globalization.

# 1. Introduction

In contemporary debates regarding the environment, human rights, climate change and sustainability, the individuals' consumption patterns become a major attention target. Over-consumption influenced by the media becomes more and more intense, along with its negative impact on the environment and society. At the same time, individuals become more aware of their footprint and the impact of their consumption patterns. Getting engaged in the practices is seen as both a response and solution to those challenges. Consumers are being exposed to more information regarding poor working conditions, human rights, and environmental issues, and therefore becoming more demanding towards producing companies. Demands that consumers are increasingly putting on companies underpin their ethical trade activities. An increasing number of people are starting to consider ethical aspects of their own consumption patterns, making ethical consumption a fast growing phenomenon. Generally speaking, an ethical consumer is the one who is concerned about environmental, animal and ethical issues, and consider them in their shopping practices (Mintel, 1994).

Globalization plays an important role in terms of ethical consumption and can be presented from several perspectives. Globalization processes contribute to the consumer society through global trade and changes in the supply chains. On the individual level, globalization affects individuals' consumption patterns by providing diverse and endless choices of available products and services (Giddens, 1991). The rise of social interconnectedness and advances in media and technology enforces the process of reflexivity, when individual becomes aware of his or her actions and begin to evaluate consequences and impacts of consumption practices. (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992).

Consumption is closely connected to the concept of identity. From one perspective, consumption becomes a tool for constructing an individual's identity (Giddens, 1991); from another, consumption becomes a reflection of an already formed identity (Bourdieu, 1984). The concept of reflexivity is present in both

approaches, however, in different forms. For Giddens (1991), reflexivity is an agent of constructing identity, particularly when applied to consumer activities. For Bourdieu (1984), on the other hand, patterns of consumption are reflections of one's identity, where choices are embedded in social structures, and reflexivity only appears in times of "crisis".

The main aim of this research is to explore the dynamics of self-identity, reflexivity, and ethical consumption. My interest lies in a deeper understanding of how ethical consumption affects individuals' lives and what changes it brings to the social and personal aspects of their lives. My goal is to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences of a small sample of people who identify themselves as ethical consumers. I will investigate the meanings that ethical consumers place on their consumption practices and its effect on self-identification as such. Furthermore, I will look closely into the concept of self-identification as ethical consumption and its affect on the social aspects of identity. As I have mentioned, this can be seen as a strong factor in shaping the individual's reflexivity. Therefore, I will also explore the role of information and knowledge in the process of becoming an ethical consumer. I will use theoretical concepts of reflexivity, habitus, and self- and social identities to understand the notion of reflexivity in the practices of ethical consumption. I have focused on individuals who identify themselves as ethical consumers. In the process of finding participants, it so happened that most of them were foreign nationals who have lived in Sweden for more than 2 years. This fact brings forth a possibility of a depth understanding of the notion of reflexivity.

#### Main aims:

-Gain an understanding of ethical consumption in relation to reflexivity as well as the self- and social aspects of identity.

-Discover the process and peculiarities of being an ethical consumer in a globalized world.

-Investigate challenges of self- and social identities of individuals who claim to be ethical consumers.

-Examine what role information plays in the process of becoming and being an ethical consumer.

My research questions will be: What challenges does ethical consumption bring to personal and social aspects of an individual's identity? How can the notion of reflexivity be explained in terms of Giddens and Bourdieu? What role does information play in practices of being an ethical consumer?

Most of the research regarding ethical consumption and individuals focuses on consumer behavior perspectives, values, and social obligations (Shaw et al, 2000; Shaw et al, 2005). In the previous research, quantitative methods are mostly used, simplifying and limiting understandings of the phenomenon of ethical consumption in terms of reflexivity. Therefore I aim to investigate what happens with individuals who already identify themselves as ethical consumers, what meanings they create, and what changes it brings into their everyday personal and social life. With this research, I do not intend to focus on any specific practice of ethical consumption, such as negative ethical purchase behavior, positive ethical purchase behavior, or consumer action (Tallontire et al, 2001). Instead, I will only focus on those individuals who already identify themselves as ethical consumers, regardless the type of practice, and later investigate what meanings they themselves put into their ethical consumption activities.

## 2. Theoretical discussion

In this section, I will attempt to discover how ethical consumption is related to an individual's identity. Specifically, I will pay closer attention to self- and social aspects of identity and reflexivity; discover how they relate to individual's practices of ethical consumption. It can be argued that consumption has become one of the major ways of affecting and shaping one's identity (Giddens, 1991). I will discuss the role of consumption on identity, highlighting related concepts of self- and social aspects of an individual's identity, habitus, and reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity supports the notion of individuals becoming more aware of the consequences of their actions and consumption practices. For Giddens (1991) reflexivity becomes essential in constructing one's identity, instead of reproducing one. Reflexivity gives individuals a chance to construct their self- and social identities through consumption. On the other hand, Bourdieu's (1994) view on habitus, which is defined by social position and class, explains that reflexivity is just a side effect when habitus is the stage of "crisis".

### 2.1 Consumption and identity

Research in the sociology of consumption has evolved from Veblen's "theory of the leisure class" where consumption is viewed as a pleasure-seeking activity rather than an activity to satisfy basic needs, and emphasizes its role in denoting membership to a certain class. This later shifts towards the assumption that the activities of consumption-as-leisure are directed primarily towards identity formation since their objective is, by definition, distinction and differentiation (Ransome, 2005). The question that is raised regards how the purchase and display of certain commodities impacts how we see ourselves and how others see us. There are several perspectives to this question, as Ransome (2005) describes. Baudrillard's "theory of consumption" gives evidence that when people reject conspicuous consumption (for example, "voluntary simplicity" movement) these acts can be seen as a "renewed quest" for differentiation,

emphasizing how one individual is not the same as another (Baudrillard, 1998[1970]:90; as cited in Ransome, 2005:115). As an example, Ransome (2005) turns to the concept of social activism, and suggests that although people involved in social activism feel passionately about their causes, membership or belonging to such group has itself become a form of consumption. Views on this kind of consumption may vary; nevertheless, what is obvious is that consumption and identity are interrelated in a number of ways. The concepts of self- and social identities are beneficial in explaining this link.

## **2.2 Self-identity and social identity in the consumer society**

Identity is commonly understood as a multi-faceted phenomenon where an individual's sense of themselves as a unique being has both social and personal dimensions, i.e. "people express identity both as objects in other people's perceptions and as the leading subjects of their own lives" (Ransome, 2005:89). From this perspective, a major way that both self-identity and social identity is established and maintained, as Paterson puts it, is through the consumption of particular goods and services. Paterson (2006:41) refers to a "lifestyle" that represents a set of positional markers and define a social group, and that mark differences from other groups through displaying consumer and cultural goods. As an example to support this argument, the case of drastic raise of the olive oil consumption in the UK shows that the choice of a more expensive and supposedly healthier product indicates not only orientation on healthier lifestyle, but also that these individuals instantly join a more select group of consumers with a sensible and healthy lifestyle. (Paterson 2006:45)

Later, the concept of identity in consumption-based societies suggested that "the formation of the self is a reflexive process as people constantly monitor their past actions and modify their future behavior in the light of ongoing experiences" (Ransome, 2005:101). Therefore, participation in consumer practices enables people to express the social aspects of their identities and can be explained in three ways (Ransome, 2005). First, consumption is a profoundly

social activity that involves some kind of cooperation with others, and further providing excellent opportunities for satisfying human needs for social interaction. Second, an explanation of why consumption provides important inputs to our identity is the opportunity to experiment and consume the very meaning of identity. Ransome emphasizes the availability of meanings and significances that are attached to particular products and activities. Third, consumption satisfies our need for social orientation: knowledge of how and what to consume provides an important guide to status- and consumer-group membership (Ransome, 2005).

In my research, I will rely on Barker's (2000) view on social and self-identity. According to him, self-identity refers to the conceptions that an individual holds for him- or herself, and social identity is formed by expectations and opinions of others. Further, I will describe the concept of reflexivity in relation to individual identity as well as individuals's actions regarding consumption.

### 2.3 Reflexivity and self-identity

Reflexivity is an essential concept in relation to identity, which provides explanations of individuals' actions. Reflexivity has a clear link to individuals' identities and generally implies that an individual becomes aware of consequences of his actions as a consumer. Turning closer to the question of identity and origin of reflexivity, I will present an overview of theoretical concepts here:

Three relevant social theories, by Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Zygmund Bauman, are essential in understanding the notion of changes in self-identity and reflexivity. They share one common feature, that “today people define themselves through the messages they transmit to others through the goods and practices that they possess and display” (Warde, 1994:878). Warde claims that in societies where commodities are becoming more and more available,

identity becomes a matter of personal selection of self-image more than ever; individuals are now obliged to choose their identities.

The main theme for Beck (1992) is the notion that reflexivity reveals itself in society as a circumstance of certain risks that modernization brings. Also, in a risk society, the notion of reflexivity can be applied to the circumstances of individuals through the tendency towards an intensification of the process of individualization, where “individuals become the agents of their own livelihood mediated by the market” (Beck, 1992:130). Following Beck’s arguments, Warde (1994) emphasizes that intensified individualization brings along several components, one of which is that individuals become responsible for the decision-making that impacts their biographies, which became self-reflexive. “One even has to choose one’s social identity and group membership, in this way managing one’s self” (Beck, 1992:136).

Zygmunt Bauman (1988) regards the demand for individuals to construct their own selves as a problem for self-identity, in the intensified notion of individuality, within modernity and post-modernity. For Bauman, it becomes an issue of freedom to link together consumption and liberty. He regards it as a double-edged condition. While being free from oppression is seen positively, there is another side to it where responsibility for one’s own choices might be quite stressful. Each individual must invent and consciously create a personal identity, which involves appropriate consumer behavior to a large extent. (Warde, 1994)

Self-identity for Giddens is “not something that is given, as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of individual.”(Giddens, 1991:52) and “the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography” (Giddens, 1991:53). He emphasizes the challenge of choices that emerges in modernity, faced by individuals, which aim is to help maintaining the self-identity through the construction of narratives about the self.

Consumption is an arena of choice, and although Giddens sees it as a generally positive phenomenon, he emphasizes that consumption may profoundly affect self-identity. Interestingly, as Warde (1994) notes that consumption might be interpreted in a way that if an individual makes a lot of inappropriate choices, he or she simply becomes a different person.

There are several aspects that all of the mentioned above authors share in their social theories. Firstly, they all agree that consumption matters because it seriously affects self-identity, from its creation to maintaining that identity. Secondly, consumer choice is an essential process in “creating a reflexive self, constructing a narrative of self, or electing oneself to a shared form of identification” (Warde, 1994:883).

Further I would like to pay closer attention to Giddens’s view on reflexivity, as his view fully relies on reflexivity and its relation to self-identity and consumption. Reflexivity is seen by Giddens (1991) as an act of an individual being aware of self’s actions, reflecting upon its own practices and preferences. According to him, identities have been closely tied with gender, class, and ethnicity previously, and therefore consumer practices tend to reflect existing social identities. Now, individuals have to actively construct a sense of self-identity from various means available to them, for example, through making choices of everyday consumption.

Giddens claims that reflexivity becomes heavily affected by the globalizing influences of increased mobility, media and technology among others. In the external environment that is full of changes under the influence of globalization, a person is “preoccupied with apprehension of possible risks to his or her existence,” (Giddens, 1991:53) and the consequential feeling of anxiety leads to an abnormal sense of self-identity. Whereas a person with a reasonably stable sense of self-identity “has a feeling of biographical continuity” (Giddens, 1991:54) that he or she is able to grasp reflexively and communicate to other people. An individual’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor in the

reactions of others, but in “capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (ibid). Furthermore, consumption affected by commodification influences the identity in a way that the project of self becomes translated into “one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life”, and as a consequence, appearance replaces essence (Giddens, 1991:198). The movement towards the “risk society” (Beck, 1992) adds difficulties in experiencing satisfaction regardless the growing number of available goods, environmental risks, and economic instability. The state of society contributes to uncertainty when it comes to the meanings of their lives.

Since, according to this approach, consumption is an essential part of our everyday life and an active element of constructing one’s identity, Cherrier (2005) points out that the process of questioning, “how shall I live?” and the self-monitoring of actions becomes part of the reflexive mobilizing of self-identity. In her words, “it is the freeing of social life from the fixities of customs and traditions in relation to manufactured risks that leads individuals to engage in a reflexivity of modern social life” (Cherrier, 2005:601). Whereas identity is no longer given, individuals shift from “being passive, non-reflexive marionettes to being active and reflexive agents,” and the idea of everyday life becomes a site of expression in which individuals become self-reflexive projects (ibid). This shift, according to Cherrier (2005), derives from a cognitive awareness of the self and an increasing diversity of lifestyle choices and involves engaging in monitoring of the self’s day-to-day practices.

## 2.4 Habitus and self-identity

Giddens’s position on identity can be questioned by Bourdieu and is problematized by his concept of *habitus*. His work suggests that individuals’ consumer choices are still heavily related to material circumstances or class, and therefore, one’s identity may still reflect such structural characteristics and not bring reflexivity processes into action, as Giddens claimed (Sweetman, 2003:529). “The habitus is not only a structuring structure which organizes practices and the

perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division in social classes" (Bourdieu, 1984: 170).

Bourdieu's notion of habitus implies the "positional" view on identity, meaning that social location (for example, class) determines subjective identity. In this view, social position is a decisive aspect of experience with structural factors seen to operate behind individual consciousness. According to Bottero (2004) the in the concept of the "habitus," identity is located within the pre-reflexive and embodied natural of an individual's practical activities. Social position through habitus constrains aspirations and tastes, and remains an important element in shaping social identity, whereas class is seen as implicit, encoded in people's sense of self, their attitudes and awareness of others. It is opposed to the view on identity influenced by the increasing reflexivity in social life where individuals themselves shape their destinies with their "identities disembedded from social constraints" (Bottero, 2010:4).

Bourdieu's position excludes the possibility of identity to be seen as a product of reflexive projects of the self as it appears to present "identity" as "unsituated, over-rationalized, and unduly reflexive terms" (Bottero, 2010:4) According to Bourdieu, a "sense" of how to behave derives from the early life stages, dictated and reinforced by belonging to a certain social group, where social practice is generated outside the channels of consciousness, not from the individual's conscious practices. Bourdieu's restrictive treatment of identity and his vision of reflexivity emerging from disruptions of the habitus make it nearly impossible to analyze reflexivity as one of the aspects of identity. And, although Bourdieu is aware that people reflect upon their practices, he questions the significance of these activities in shaping practice which makes his framework limited, analyzing identity in habituated practice only (Bottero, 2010). In contrast to Giddens's view on reflexivity, Bourdieu refers to reflexivity as a disruption to the habitus. He notes this happening when an individual, for example, travels abroad and becomes aware of their own nationality or class belonging when

coming into the context of the representatives of another class. So, what for Bourdieu is a result of inconvenient disruption, for Giddens is an outcome of the transformation of society and the individual shaped by globalization processes.

These two approaches can be summarized when applied to the consumption practices as the following. For Bourdieu, consumption is a reflection of an already existing identity, defined by social structures such as class and gender, where reflexivity is a flaw that appears when the social setting is disrupted. For Giddens, consumption is a tool of constructing self-identity through reflexivity as an agent. For example, wearing a particular brand of shoes no longer reflects your already existing status as a member of particular class, but declares who you, as an individual, have decided to be. Such distinction between the two approaches gives me a ground to investigate the dynamics reflexivity, identity and ethical consumption in this thesis. However both approaches need a deeper review, and therefore I will put them into the perspective of globalization and late-modernity.

## 2.5 Globalization and reflexivity

As it has been already mentioned, modernity implies that an individual is engaged in their own reflexive production and that consumption becomes a tool in creating one's identity (Giddens, 1991). This makes ethical consumption a very attractive phenomenon to research, as it involves debates about the nature globalization, reflexivity, and individualization (Adams & Raisborough, 2008). Globalization processes constitute the consolidation of "consumer society" and processes of consumption, including ethical consumption that become a form of identification. Some researchers refer to an *extended reflexivity thesis* (Adams, 2006; Adams & Raisborough, 2008), a concept that emphasizes reflexive capabilities in the context of social change. According to this concept, reflexivity is developed under processes of change in society, communication, and structures. Specifically, exposure of an individual to others becomes more transparent, cultural and individual practices become relativized to the point where nothing

can be taken for granted, and traditions and social structures lose their binding power (Adams 2006:512). The extended reflexivity thesis is explained through the rise of social interconnectedness in the context of globalization, what Giddens (1991) refers to as “the dialectic of the local and the global”. The consumer’s purchases start to reflect the connectedness between everyday decisions and their global outcomes here (Adams & Raisborough, 2008). The consumption of FairTrade is a good example in this case (Adams & Raisborough, 2008). In terms of the extended reflexivity thesis, it implies engaging with the complexities of the global supply chain, where prior information is provided mostly through access to relevant information (packaging, individual research). Therefore in these terms, the “reflexive consumer” is the one who seeks for and applies knowledge that shapes his/her consumption choices, producing a socially recognizable “social self” (Adams & Raisborough, 2008).

## 2.6 The concept of the hybridization of habitus and reflexivity

In my opinion, this approach, drawn upon Giddens’s perception of reflexivity, is quite deterministic since it portrays a modern consumer building their identity through buying and evaluating relevant information and acting upon it with no chance to relate to their social or cultural roots, which in fact might have a certain affect. This view on the individual makes them almost “faceless” in terms of his or her social and cultural background or experiences. Relevant critique also points out that the extended reflexivity thesis is a weak concept of social structure and fails to differentiate between experiences of people in diverse, structurally positioned settings. Generally speaking, an extended reflexivity thesis undermines the value of cultural, material, and affective parameters by universalizing and disembodying the self. However, these parameters in some way underpin “the way choices become reflexively known and acted upon” (Adams & Raisborough, 2008: 1169). Adams (2006) also emphasizes that the tendency to separate self-reflexivity processes demeans and limits an understanding of a complex relationship between social structures, subjectivity,

and agency, particularly expressed via consumption practices. It needs to be acknowledged that it calls for a more structurally sensitive approach that takes into consideration challenges of class. For example, the acknowledgement of the unfairness of a class system that motivates people to buy FairTrade products on different levels.

Bourdieu's perception of reflexivity and the role of habitus can be also questioned under the influence of globalization processes. It has been already acknowledged that processes of globalization result in increased mobility, institutional reflexivity, and blurring the boundaries between the self and others. Since habitus is defined as the relation of the field, this is the moment when established dispositions of the field might lead to a possibility of lack of fit. These notions are characterized by Bourdieu as a crisis. For example, changes in the field or unexpected movement between fields, such as, when one loses a job or has to move to another city (Adams, 2006).

Critiques of the Bourdieu's and Giddens's positions on reflexivity led to several attempts in sociological literature to bring reflexivity and habitus together (McNay, 1999; Sweetman, 2003; Adams, 2006). Adams, with a reference to McNay, argues that the establishment of habitus is now problematized, and allows the reflexivity "in". McNay, turning her attention to gender identity, claims that the notions of habitus and the field do not explain how, "movements across fields may attenuate the power of habitus in the formation of gender identity" (McNay, 1999:107, as cited in Adams, 2006:517). Therefore, reflexivity "is a creative possibility, but it is founded upon pre-reflexive commitments originating in the social world, which shape this possibility" (*ibid.*). Similarly, it might be possible to suggest that neither reflexivity in Giddens's understanding nor habitus can fully explain the formation of identity in the moments of transformation on their own, but rather that their hybridization is required.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is perceived as non-reflexive as it depends upon relatively stable social conditions and secure relationship between habitus

and the field, which is characteristic for simple modernity. Sweetman (2003) suggest that in conditions of reflexive modernity, the disruption of the social position and constant disjunction between the habitus and field become more or less permanent, and reflexivity itself becomes habitual, thus “incorporated into the habitus in the form of the flexible or *reflexive habitus*” (2003:541). Effects of globalization provide people with a feeling and knowledge of diverse and endless choices in consumption and “pre-existing traditions cannot avoid contact not only with others but also with many alternative ways of life” (Giddens, 1994: 97). These factors lead to the *crisis* in terms of Bourdieu’s understanding of it, which, as Sweetman (2003) argues, becomes permanent. He suggests that “not only does the concept of habitus not, in and of itself, preclude reflexive engagement with the self, but also that certain forms of habitus may be *inherently* reflexive and that the /.../ reflexive habitus may be both increasingly common and increasingly significant due to various social and cultural shifts” (Sweetman, 2003:529). For him, the reflexivity emerging towards the contemporary environment may itself be regarded as a form of habitus, the outcome of adaptation to, rather than a “distanciation” from the changing society (Sweetman, 2003).

These emerging views of the possibility of merging habitus and reflexivity gives, in my opinion, some potential to a deeper understanding of the notion of reflexivity in the context of a globalized world. It gives the opportunity to not exclude reflexivity from the picture of an individual’s identity as unimportant, as well as to consider individuals’ social and cultural backgrounds in analyzing the notion of reflexivity in their consumption practices.

## 2.7 Ethical consumption and identity

Each year the issue of ethical consumption attracts stronger attention as people become more aware of human, ecological and environmental costs of consumption. Although the existence of what is considered to be ethical consumption has a long history in different forms (for example, the Co-operative movement), the rising popularity and accessibility of “ethical” products is

impressive (Adams and Raisborough, 2008). Media gives a lot of attention to the issues of ethical consumption while supermarkets ensure the availability of ethical brands and opportunities to donate money to charity as people make purchases. Adams and Raisborough (2008) argue that processes of globalization constitute the consolidation of a “consumer society” in which practices of consumption become almost inescapable forms of identification, including ethical consumption practices. More and more of what people consume come from distant countries through complexities of supply chains hidden from the individual’s view. Therefore ethical consumption is generally seen as a way for consumers to responsibly participate in the process.

This view can be supported by the concept of a risk society. According to Beck (1992), the concept of risk is directly bound to the concept of reflexive modernization, which has been outlined before. He views risk as a “systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself”. Where “risks, as opposed to older dangers, are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernization and to its globalization of doubt” (Beck, 1992:21). Such risks may include climate change and ecological destructions. The concept of “reflexive modernization” (Beck, et al, 1994) also implies that people increasingly tend to follow a more “individualized” path in composing their own identity, and where identity becomes more flexible and is reflexively constructed. The reflexive self, when an individual starts questioning the impact of their own actions, becomes a way of dealing with and managing those risks. Ethical consumption from this perspective can be seen as an act upon those risks, a complex interrelation between personal life and global concerns.

Ethical consumption is often defined in the relation to the issues of ethical concern, such as environmental issues, fair-trade, labor conditions, human rights, and health and safety risks. From another perspective, consumption can be seen as means of acting in ethical ways, including such practices as shopping, investment, and personal banking. Barnett, et all (2011) emphasize that those practices are

underscored by a variety of organizational forms: ethical trading organizations, consumer boycott campaigns, lobby groups, local food markets and charity shops. Ethical consumption is often discussed from the perspective of being a form of political participation. Influenced by sociological theories of modernity and globalization, and informed by the theories of the risk society and reflexive modernization, the growth of ethical consumption is seen as a result of a shift from “traditional” forms of political participation (Barnett, et al, 2011).

To give a brief overview of what ethical consumption practices may include, I will refer to the Ethical Consumer Research Association (ECRA) and its categorization here (Barnett, et al, 2011:14). Ethical consumption may include different forms of action: boycotting, positive boycotting, anti-consumer activity, buying the most ethical product in a particular sector, or relationship purchasing. Mintel (1994) used the term ethical consumption to describe those consumers who are concerned about environmental, animal, and ethical issues, and consider them in their shopping practices.

Despite the growth of ethical consumption as a phenomenon, there is only very limited research connected to ethical consumption and ethical consumers. Most of the research is connected to decision-making processes and the motivations of the ethical consumer to purchase ethical products. Researching the intentions behind fair-trade purchasing, Shaw, et al (2000), discovered that it has less to do with self-motivated concerns, but rather is driven by a sense of ethical obligation and their identity with the issue. Consumers felt a sense of obligation to purchase ethically, while identifying themselves as ethical consumers. They claim that "ethical" issues may not, for example, only be of ethical concern to a tight group of principled consumers - self-identification with this issue gives an individual the chance to be perceived as a member of the group. Shaw & Shiu (2002) also developed a theory of planned behavior in the context of ethical consumption behavior where they emphasized that ethical obligation and self-identity affect ethical decision-making. Self-identity, according to them, represents the “pertinent part of an individual self that relates to a particular

behavior” and ethical obligation refers to the reflection of “an individual’s internalized ethical rules” (Shaw & Shiu 2002, p. 287).

As already mentioned before, existing research refers to ethical consumer as a “fixed identity,” (Cherrier, 2007:332) who makes decisions based on the information available regarding ethical products/opportunities. This reduces questions of ethics in relation to consumption, to those information flows, and limits the importance of the real world in this process. Cherrier (2007) questions the concept of ethical consumer as “rational choosers”, emphasizing that they perceive ethical consumers as people “who coalesce their multiple identities into the united and desired ethical identity by choosing when and how to participate in ethical practices” (2007:323). She claims that ethical consumption experience goes far beyond the marketplace and this experience is more social than individual. Therefore, she argues that the consumer’s degree of ethical involvement depends not only on self-identity, but also on their relations with others and overall social context. In this research, I partly agree with Cherrier’s perspective and will consider her point on ethical consumption as being more of a social practice, than individual practice and its impact on one’s identity.

In my research, I will rely on the previously analyzed viewpoints that present reflexivity as an agent of ethical consumption. However, I will also leave space for Bourdieu’s view on reflexivity. Generally speaking, I am taking the standpoint of the research (McNay, 1999; Sweetman, 2003; Adams, 2006) that see potential in merging habitus and reflexivity together to gain a deeper understanding about the dynamics of identity regarding those who claim to be ethical consumers. Therefore, I will focus closely on the notion of reflexivity in participants’ ethical consumption experiences and also pay close attention to the role of information and knowledge in ethical consumers’ experiences.

## 2.8 The role of knowledge in ethical consumption

It is often claimed that ethical consumption is understood in relation to access to information, assuming that decisions are made by well-informed consumers and organizations that rely on this knowledge. Barnett et al (2011) criticizes the approaches that rest mainly on assumptions that knowledge is the key to putting pressure on institutions and information provided to the consumers about conditions of production and distribution of the commodities is central to changing consumer behaviors, arguing that it is not necessarily true. He claims that in order to understand both the range of roles and the motivations people bring to their engagements with ethical consumption, the “consumer” concept might not be enough. Cherrier (2007) also criticizes the view of ethical consumers as the ones who make decisions based on the information available about ethical products/opportunities. She claims that it reduces questions of ethics in relation to consumption to those information flows and limits the importance of the real world in this process. Cherrier (2007) questions the concept of ethical consumers as “rational choosers”, emphasizing that they perceive ethical consumers as people “who coalesce their multiple identities into the united and desired ethical identity by choosing when and how to participate in ethical practices” (Cherrier, 2007:323).

Another perspective about the role of knowledge is presented by Beck, and states that education and attentiveness to information opens up new possibilities of dealing with and avoiding risks (Beck 1992:35). Risks, as well as possibilities of managing them, also are distributed unequally. Those who are *wealthy* in income, power, or education can *purchase* safety and freedom from risk. Knowledge guides an individual through the risks by evaluating the products and choosing the most efficient option. Beck (1992) claim that the group of those who get affected by getting information and knowledge about the risks can be described as following:

*“They are mostly well educated and informed but they are afraid, feel threatened and organize themselves in order not to let the only possible*

*test of their realistic-pessimistic visions of the future even happen, or to actually prevent it" (Beck, 1992:53)*

However, dependence on external knowledge raises the degree of people's endangerment such that Beck claims create dependencies in risk positions, which are unknown in class situations (Beck, 1992:53).

For the purposes of this research, the role of information will be seen mainly from the view of importance to becoming and sustaining oneself as an ethical consumer and as the content of communication with others. It is not my intention to see it as the only factor of consumer's choice.

### 3. Methodology

I have chosen a qualitative approach to answer the research questions. The purpose of this research is to understand individual's practices of ethical consumption and their effect on his/her personal and social aspects of identity. Therefore, only qualitative approach will give a chance to understand the meanings that individuals put into their experiences. I will explain the choice and principles of hermeneutic approach to interpretation and analysis. Further I will explain the choice of in-depth semi-structured interviews, sampling procedures and ethical considerations and validity.

The purpose of this research is to study individuals who identify themselves as ethical consumers, explore the dynamics between practices of being ethical consumers, reflexivity and identity. Specifically, investigate what meanings they put into ethical consumption and what changes being an ethical consumer bring to individual's identities. My research focuses on the exploration of social meanings of actions or objects; therefore I find hermeneutics as the most suitable approach that looks for highly aggregated meaning units and concepts that bind together the parts (Flick, 2009:355).

The material for analysis is the text in form of transcribed interviews. My theoretical standpoint relies heavily on hermeneutics, where the interpretation of meanings is the central theme with a specification of what kinds of meanings sought and attention to the questions posed in a text. Hermeneutics stands for grasping the meaning of an action or statement by relating it to the whole discourse or world-view from which it originates. Giddens claims that hermeneutics "does not find its central range of problems in the written texts as such, but in the mediation of frames of meaning in general" (Giddens, 1993:71). Gadamer points out that text forms a unity, an internally consistent whole and that this idea of unity can help to assess the adequacy of one's interpretations of its various parts (Warnke, 1987). Therefore, hermeneutics attempts to find

interpretations that can both make sense out of the individual parts of a text and integrate them into a consistent whole. (*ibid*)

### **3.1 Hermeneutics and consumption research**

Thompson (1997) recognizes the benefits of using a hermeneutical framework in researching consumer experiences. It allows, he argues, to discuss the meanings that consumers ascribe to their consumer experiences in the form of texts and narratives. Consumer research relies on hermeneutics as a way to derive marketing insights from texts of consumer stories, specifically because they need models to analyze and interpret how consumers perceive products in relation to themselves (Thompson, 1997:439). The relevance of hermeneutics to consumer research can be explained through the fact that hermeneutics serves to “understand understanding itself” where the concept of understanding accounts not only for existing theory and research findings, but also for the knowledge that emerges during the interaction between researchers and human objects of their inquiry (Arnold & Fischer, 1994).

### **3.2 Method and sampling**

For my research purposes of exploring the ethical consumption hermeneutic approach appears to be the most appropriate (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997). To be able to get to the meanings that consumer put into their own consumption practices semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to guide the interviewees to talk about their ethical consumption practices, as well as to assess them. Semi-structured interviews allow people to answer questions more on their terms, but still provide some level of structure (May, 2001:123). They also intend to “discover the “how’s” of people’s lives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:62).

The sampling procedure was a *purposive sampling* where “researchers select individuals who are considered representative because they meet certain

criteria of a study” (Bui, 2009:143). For the purpose of this study respondents were not provided with the definition of what ethical consumption or being an ethical consumer is. The criterion for choosing respondents was a question: Do you consider yourself being an ethical consumer? If the answer was positive, the respondent would qualify for an interview. The message with a question was sent through a social network to people in Lund/Malmö area asking to answer this question. To find additional respondents I used a snowball sampling (May, 2011:145) by asking participants who already qualified for the interview to forward the message to someone they know. In total, seven people positively responded within two weeks, and were eager to participate in the interviews and therefore seven interviews were scheduled and conducted. The total amount of around twelve hours were recorded and then transcribed, each interview took around six to eight hours to transcribe. I would argue here that 7 in-depth interviews is an appropriate amount for this study, since my goal is to reach a deeper understanding of each case and reveal the meanings that people put into their ethical consumption practices. Kvale (1996) emphasizes that it might be better “to have fewer interviews in the study” and take more time to prepare and analyze them (Kvale, 1996:103). In order to obtain richness of the methodology the interviews were supplemented with information on the narrators’ backgrounds that I had access to since I knew some of them personally. The questions during the interviews covered such themes as stories on how they became ethical consumers, what ethical consumption means to them, their everyday shopping preferences, and the importance of information. Using hermeneutic approach I analyzed my data through going back and forth from parts to the whole to obtain a coherent understanding.

### **3.3 Hermeneutic interpretation**

I would like to outline here the main principles of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics emphasizes the foreknowledge by interpretations; it attempts to obtain interpretations free of contradictions and aims at consensus of

interpretation. Basic hermeneutic approach is driven by interpretive inquiry seeking to understand the meanings of parts within a whole. According to Gribch (2007) it could give a researcher almost total freedom to decide how to undertake the study, what design aspects to incorporate, which techniques of data collection and analytical tools to employ and what perspectives to call on to provide an interpretation.

The interpretation of meaning is characterized by a hermeneutical circle. The understanding of a text takes place through a process in which “the meaning and its separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text” (Kvale, 1996:47). Furthermore, the closer determination of the meaning of the separate parts may at some point change the originally anticipated meaning of the totality, which again influences the meaning of the separate parts and so on. Ideally such a hermeneutical explication of the text, Kvale (1996) claims is an infinite process and while in practice it ends when one has reached a sensible meaning, a valid unitary meaning, free of inner contradictions.

Kvale (1996) presents analysis of the hermeneutical circle as following set of cannons which I will rely on in my analysis:

1. Continuous back and forth process of analysis between the parts and the whole that follows from the hermeneutical circle. The researcher starts with a vague and intuitive understanding of the text as a whole, then interprets different parts of it and out of this interpretations the parts are again related to the totality and so on. This circularity is viewed in the hermeneutic tradition as spiral that implies the possibility of a continuously deepened understanding of meaning.
2. Interpretation of meaning ends when one has reached a “good Gestalt”, an inner unity of the text free of logical contradictions. The interpretations of an interview stop when meanings in different themes make sensible patterns and enter into coherent unity.
3. Testing of parts of interpretations against the global meaning of the text. In interview analysis this implies a comparison between interpretations of the single

statements and the global meaning of the interview and possibly with other information about interviewee.

4. A forth canon refers to the autonomy of the text, implying that the text should be understood on the basis of its own frame of reference, by explicating what the text itself states about a theme. Applied to the interviews this means that the interpretation should stick to the content of the statements and try to understand what they express about the life world of the subject.
5. Knowledge about the theme should be extensive and allow the researcher to spot the nuances of meanings expressed and the different contexts into which the meanings may enter.
6. The researcher needs to be conscious and aware of own presuppositions and attempt to make them explicit, consider modes of influence and try to take them into account in the interpretation.
7. Creativity in interpretation by bringing forth new differentiations and interrelations in the text.

### **3.4 Participants**

All seven participants in this research are young adults. Six out of seven are international graduate students from USA, Germany, Canada, Turkey and one participant is from Sweden. All the names were changed due to the ethical considerations. The common language of the interviews was English that might be seen as limitation, since it is not a mother tongue to most of the participants, as well as for me, as a researcher.

#### *1.1 Table of participants*

Name of the participant	Age	Occupation	Country of origin
Sally	25	Recent graduate student, now unemployed	United States

Natalie	27	Graduate student	Canada
Kenneth	27	Graduate student	United States
Lola	26	Volunteer	Turkey
Robert	28	Research assistant	Germany
Ana	27	Graduate student	Germany
Carlos	29	Human ecology student	Sweden

### 3.5 Ethical considerations

Since the topic might reveal personal meanings, participants were assured about the confidentiality of the information they provided, therefore I am not going to use their real names. I also used the principles of *beneficence* that means that the risk of harm to a subject should be the least possible. (Kvale, 1996:116). Also, having chosen hermeneutic approach of interpretations I will use the form of “hermeneutics of suspicion” to “what a person directly says and a text manifestly expresses, interpreting the meaning to be something else than is directly said” meaning being in some way suspicious of hidden intention or plot (Kvale, 1996:203).

### 3.6 Validity

Validity is seen as strength of qualitative research and is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher or the participant (Creswell, 2003:195). To increase validity of my research, I used the “member checking” technique (Creswell, 2003:196), which can be especially beneficial in hermeneutics since it allows to clarify questions and uncertainties in the data and gain understanding of the participants understanding. Two out of the seven participants were contacted, others were hard to reach due to their travel arrangements and limited time. In this process, participants reviewed the summary of the data analysis; they answered several questions regarding unclear statements and gave some clarifying comments. Those participants agreed with the analysis

flow and found it very interesting and precise in capturing and interpreting their thoughts.

## 4. Analysis

Using the hermeneutic approach to analysis of the interview data, the themes were identified. First, open coding was applied, and then highly aggregated meaning units and concepts that bind together the parts were identified and formed into themes (Flick, 2009:355). I will present them in this section in a form of cases that will capture the main themes in the participants' interviews.

### Case 1: Sally

#### *Theme 1: Reflexivity emerges when Sally moves to another country*

For Sally, moving from the United States to Sweden became a trigger that made her to start being conscious about her consumption choices. Back at home, in a small town, no one seemed to care about their consumption patterns, neither did she. After coming to Sweden she started noticing that people were more attentive to what they consume and she also noticed the variety of organic and fair-trade products available in the stores. She was also influenced by here growing circle of friends in the university environment where she got introduced to organic products:

*“When I came to Sweden it’s a point in my life when I made a lot of bigger changes, organic food for example. My friends were really into organic things and they introduced me to things like that. And I started thinking more and more about consumer choices that I am making, every day I do smaller changes and moving more and more towards more ethical way of consuming stuff... at least I hope so.”*

I questioned her uncertainty that was clearly expressed through “I hope so” and she explained that sometimes it feels that probably she could do much better, but she can’t afford to buy organic or fair-trade products that often. Often she chooses products that have lower price because there is a significant difference

between the ethical products and other products, but it is because she doesn't have a budget to afford everything she wants right now, and therefore she often questions if she is an ethical consumer or not. Sally is a graduate student, currently unemployed and looking for jobs. Consumption practices for her became an ongoing process of constant compromising. Her main concern is the price, but at the same time, she emphasizes that she makes choices and balances her choices. In this case, organic label or fair-trade label is not necessarily important. For Sally, ethical consumption is first of all consuming less, buying only what is needed. And when she reflects on her economic situation it seems that ethical consumption, although being "expensive and hard to afford fair-trade and organic products" makes her feel proud of herself in consuming less. So her economic situation both enforces her ethical consumption in terms of "consuming less" and limits it in terms of "having consciousness about things you choose to buy" if they are not organic or fair-trade. Sometimes she feels like an ethical consumer and sometimes, when she is not able to afford ethical products, she feels the opposite.

Compromising also becomes an issue in social aspects, for example, in the situations where people consume publically. For her, seeing that people are being wasteful makes her confused in how she wants to act how she needs to act. It becomes a conflict between her self-identity and social identity where she does not know how to behave and decision doesn't come easy for her:

*"Like when I go to these conferences I just stop eating because if I eat I need to use all those unsustainable products and make unethical choice to throw stuff away all the time. I am thinking about it a lot... that I need to find ways to react, that are also not totally socially unacceptable, because that's a hard thing too I think, cause there are a lot of things that can cause you problems with other people. Yeah... it's hard"*

She says she does not boycott companies or products, yet she refuses to buy certain products or visit certain stores, which is a passive way of boycotting.

This behavior also puts her into position when she is forced to explain to her friends why she doesn't want to go to a certain store, which also makes her uncomfortable but nevertheless she tries to explain her position to her friends. Sometimes it is quite hard because her friends do not understand her motivations and she is not a big fan of explaining it, because she sees it as something very personal, her personal choice to be an ethical consumer. Although majority of her friends share similar views on consumption, but handle things differently and she doesn't find it necessary to question or criticize their choices. Ethical consumption for Sally, she confesses is just a buzz word, so although she thinks of herself as one, it is more an individual choice for her of consuming less, being vegetarian and buying organic and fair-trade products when she can afford it.

### **Case 2: Natalie**

Natalie is 27 years old, she grew up in Canada. She is a graduate student at Lund University and a strict vegetarian.

#### *Theme 1: Consumption patterns are challenged by the social environment*

Natalie sees herself as an ethical consumer that is aware of the processes of production and consumption and waste, not just consumption. She also believes that consuming ethically is consuming less. She is aware of human's enormous impact on the environment, social relations and politics as well and that everything she buys becomes a part of the deal, so she always thinks about impacts. The way she was growing up had a certain effect on her consumption practices. When her family moved from to another city she got exposed to the world and her values, as well as consumption patterns:

*"I grew up in the country side, in that rural town in Quebec and my life was never bombarded with commercial and consumption, I didn't go to shopping malls until I was 14 years old. Because we just didn't live in that setting and my parents were sort of hippies, we were always recycling and composting, my mom never wore*

*make up and or was very stylish, neither my dad. And also being a girl scout and those values about the environment and sharing, things have been right from the start. In high school when we moved I was sort of hit by this consumer culture and girls wearing makeup and bikinis and not caring in the same ways I've grown up with.”*

The process of adjusting to the new school and finding new friends was partly driven by the desire to fit in, as well as questioning herself and her values which affected her consumption patterns as she started to shop more. Soon she got to know people with similar to hers views, so she could be herself again. Natalie is highly aware of the processes and consequences of production, this knowledge she developed through her studies in the university; learning more about the environmental degradation and role of food systems, capitalist systems of production and consumption. Moving to Sweden had yet another surprise for her. Being suddenly exposed to more fashion than in Canada she again found herself consuming more which made her feel like losing her values again. There is a constant presence of struggle within her and her views on society and changing world. To her, life is always full of contradictions, choices and compromises. Natalie always feels the pressure from the society to consume more. Whether it is advertising, fashion, sales or other people. One part of her embraced it in a limited way, while other keeps demanding to be against it. She is highly reflexive of the choices she makes and if she makes a “wrong” one she has a bad conscience. This constant awareness of consequences of her actions and ongoing reflection on choices sometimes make her feel apathetic.

*“Sometimes I have days when I feel that the individual can really make an impact on consuming ethically, being vegetarian and consuming less and some days I think well that the world is doomed (laughs) and here we have China opening a coal factory once a week and hundreds thousands new cars on the road and so my sort of environmental altruism some days high and some days low.”*

This pressure makes her feel obliged to those who are being hurt or treated unfairly. The rules and values that Natalie had from her childhood and enriched throughout her life not only shape her consumer behavior but also become obligatory for herself to follow. She feels that through her ethical behavior she is able to positively contribute to the greater good and make it up for the “world’s indifference”. Furthermore, because she identifies herself as a person from the West, she feels pressure to personally make up for consequences of negative impact of the West on the rest. Being under this pressure she feels a need to justify some of her actions to be able to “sleep at night”:

*“I fly a lot because I travel and work in different countries and visit my family. And for me to be able to sleep at night somehow in my mind it equals out if I reuse plastic bags and turn off the lights and recycle and being vegetarian and I ride my bike, don’t take bus or taxi and I feel like in my own mind it equals out that I am not destroying the planet more than I could.”*

The other aspect of the pressure that Natalie often feels comes from the necessity to comply with the label of ethical consumer, which the consumer society puts on her. She feels pressured that if for economical reasons, for example, she can’t afford to buy only organic products, she is doing something wrong and what she is doing is not enough.

*“You know society teaches you to buy things and be beautiful and happy, young and slim and whatever and then there is also this other side that tells you need to buy this all organic, fair-trade and vegetarian and you can be a true environmentalist and activist if you have all this.”*

This pressure makes her critically think about the industry of ethical products, she questions whether the industry of ethical products will be sustainable if it follows the same tactics as regular consumer products, trying to make you consume more. Yet, she recognizes the importance of putting things

into perspective and often calms herself down saying “*ok I am just one person, and if I don’t buy organic tomatoes today... its ok...*”

#### *Theme 2: Knowledge is a way of creating awareness*

In regards to her social position, she doesn’t consider herself being an activist. Nevertheless she believes that she is making an impact by organizing the “free store” (giving things away for free), taking up discussions with friends and staying informed. Information plays an important role to her, she is constantly searching for new sources and new information about companies and food chains, watch documentaries and uses social networks to stay updated and communicate with like-minded people. The knowledge that she gets from research and through her education makes her feel confident about her own position and protect her standpoint in the discussions with others.

#### **Case 3: Kenneth**

##### *Theme 1: Instability of an ethical consumer identity*

Kenneth, 27 years, from Oregon, United States. Graduate student at Lund University, lives in Malmö. He has been working as a chef for almost a year and he loved it until he moved to Sweden. Since he works with food his main ethical concern are groceries. At the same time, he emphasizes that he is a student which makes his budget very limited. Not having a chance to buy ethical products often makes him question himself as ethical consumer. Nevertheless, he always tries to find a balance and compromise. For example, when choosing between different energy contracts he didn’t have money to choose the most ethical one, so he had to choose the one in-between. Kenneth’s path of becoming an ethical consumer was quite radical, and can be explained through two major events.

*“I probably am the greatest contrast because I used to be the most unethical person in the world. I used to drive around and throw the trash from the window; I was a terrible, terrible human being...”*

First, he went to college and “*started learning about, sounds silly, but my role in the world, about environment and sustainability and change that one person can make*”. For him it was more about the change that he could make to himself, contributing a small amount to a bigger picture. Raising awareness about his own impact on the environment made him start revising his consumption habits. For him it was an eye-opening experience, a discovery not only of his role in the world and an impact on the environment, but also looking for the ways to reduce his impact. The way he feels now is highly affected by this notion of awareness about impacts raises a feeling of obligation in Kenneth:

*“I can’t get out of my head this though I’ve read: the topic of global warming and climate change is leading to the world that is no more inhabitable, the worst case scenario the earth is no longer able to sustain life, and no matter what your view point is, if you believe in it or if you think it all is a bunch of bullshit, the fact that it is a possibility is enough. If there is even a 1 percent of possibility, even a fraction of possibility then that’s enough... because of the result of being the end of life that it’s yours and everybody else’s obligation to make this possibility no longer a possibility. So until that point comes and it is no longer question how long it will take instead the question what will we do to stop it, to move it and so... that’s how I feel now.”*

When he met his Swedish girlfriend, they realized that they have similar view on things and commitment to being sustainable and ethical in their own consumption. Together they found a passion for hand-made products, which for Kenneth has become a way to be an ethical consumer on a tight budget. He holds workshops in Malmö teaching others ho to make different things using only recycled materials, instead of buying new ones. Kenneth feels frustrated with ethical consumers to whom ethical consumption is all about buying fair-trade. He often gets criticized by them that he is not ethical enough, regardless his economic situation:

*"I remember in class, someone was talking about fair-trade and I've mentioned something that I am a poor student and if I had the money I would be happy to buy fair-trade bananas. but I don't - so I don't. And she was very frustrated with that. I don't know what you want, I have like a 1000 kr per month food budget...I would love to if I could, but I just can't."*

For Kenneth, being able to find alternatives and to compromise based on “price, desire and ethics” became his way of being an ethical consumer, perhaps more affective and creative than just buying fair-trade products, according to him. There is certain contradiction here, it seems that his consumption patterns that are strictly limited by his budget stop him from seeing himself as an ethical consumer and at the same time he finds a niche where he believes he can be ethical by doing things with his hands. Nevertheless there is a clear presence of pressure that he is experiencing from other ethical consumers. So sometimes he doesn't consider himself as an ethical consumer because he just can't afford it, but at the same time finding an alternative that still gives him a possibility to reduce his negative impact, brings a positive change and generally makes him feel good about his life. There is a lot to think about in ethical consumption and there are different ways how people choose to commit to this:

*"There are people that are trying to keep their footprint low and then there are people that are very specific (like buying fair-trade and being a vegetarian) in their actions of being ethical, but they don't take time in thinking about other things"*

Sometimes he feels encouraged by his friends and by what they do and sometimes vice versa, what they do wrong makes him reflect on his own consumption, learn more and change his behavior.

#### *Theme 2: Knowledge about a product affects the purchasing decision.*

All the choices he makes in his consumption are evaluated based on his knowledge and considering possible alternatives, compromising with his budget. He feels that there is always a room for improvement and emphasizes the

importance of being aware of own actions, keeping his footprint low. Moving to Sweden for Kenneth, was an event that made him reflect on his consumption more. Here, after the US he feels that people care about the environment less and as a researcher I was surprised because one of the participants, also from the US, stated the opposite. The explanation came from additional information about the State Kenneth is coming from. Apparently, this state is considered to be the most sustainable state in the United States which makes it radically different from other states. Living there and working in the restaurant that used only local and organic products went without saying. It was cheap and practical and Kenneth was used to that. The shock came when he came to Sweden and had experienced his first shopping trip. There he realized that products he was used to (local and organic) buy he could no longer afford. That became a turning point, when he realized that he needs to find alternative ways to be ethical. He describes his experience:

*“You could easily go to the grocery store and buy everything that you need that was produced locally and there were many people who care about this stuff and it made it easier. Here – not so much.”*

For him the fact that people don't care about impacts of their consumption patterns in Sweden, and the Swedish government's high taxes that stop restaurants from being able to experiment with local food, create a vicious circle that keeps things from changing. Restaurants don't see any point in investing money in sustainable and organic products because they don't have a demand from the customers. And therefore he is hoping that “the day comes soon that people start doing more things that matter to them with the food, instead as opposed to making the food they think people want”.

#### **Case 4: Lola**

Lola is from Turkey; she just graduated from Lund University and now works as a paid volunteer in a local NGO.

*Theme 1: Sharing with others reduces waste*

For Lola being ethical in her consumption practices means not to waste food and pay attention to what products she buys. She reflects on her choices and finds the best option that fits her ideas about food and fits into her budget. She also tries to buy local, but is not obsessed with it, and she doesn't regularly pay attention to whether the product is fair-trade or not. Of essential importance to her is not being wasteful. She is critical to herself: in the situations when she cooks, she tries not to cook more than needed for the meal so she won't have to throw it away. Her knowledge about the hunger situation in other countries makes her pay great attention to her food consumption and find ways to reduce her impact. She is highly aware of how wasteful our modern society. Recently Lola became a so-called "dumpster-diver". In this case, dumpster diving is a practice when a person looks through commercial trash (garbage cans next to the supermarkets) to find products that are not expired and can be used. Therefore he/she prevents perfectly normal groceries that can be used and might just have a deformed package from being wasted. Her friends introduced her to this practice here, in Sweden and she started practicing dumpster-diving regularly. Although she mentions that it is also helpful to her budget since now she can spend less money on buying food. But her motivation is not economical in its essence. She describes her first experience:

*"I was wearing this raincoat, really long black raincoat and when I was there I felt like I was not me anymore, I was someone else... and there was this iron fence and we had to crawl under it. I had my raincoat and it was all dirty. And we opened the dumpster and I didn't feel I was doing something wrong, I just felt good".*

And although her first experience was quite stressful for her, she is committed to keep doing it because it feels like she is doing something "right". She also finds a feeling of safety when she sees other young Swedes doing that, she doesn't feel like she is doing something wrong. Lola doesn't care when other people tell her that food from the bins is "dirty", but she explains their concept of "dirtiness" by criticizing capitalistic society that tells us to consume more and more. And she chooses not to be a part of it.

*Theme 2: Ethical consumption gives a feeling of social belonging*

Lola's friends share her vision and since they live together in the dormitory it also creates a platform for sharing food and thus reduces waste. With other dumpster divers that she gets to meet "in the field" it is also common to share between each other; no one takes food that he or she doesn't need. Sharing becomes an essential part of her experience as an ethical consumer. Committed to reducing the level of wastefulness of herself and people she lives with, she promotes practices of cooking together, buying food together. In her case, being an ethical consumer makes her feel closer to other people, in some way she sees it as a way of socializing. Being closely connected to people with the same vision and values as hers, makes her feel good about what she is doing, gives her a sense of comfort and security.

*Theme 3: Knowledge sharing brings people closer*

The information that Lola gets from the internet and the social network communities is always shared and discussed with her friends. She gets a feeling of joy when she discovers something that her friends haven't heard about before. Information and knowledge for her exist along with sharing, she feels good sharing not just things, but knowledge and new information that might be helpful to other people and improve their lives.

**Case 5: Robert**

Robert, 28 years. He graduated from Lund University with a masters in the environmental field, has experience of working with an environmental NGO abroad.

*Theme 1: Influencing opinions of others through knowledge.*

Robert's understanding of ethical consumption derives from his extensive knowledge about production, materials, working conditions that he received during his education. For him, being ethical is all about being aware and informed, therefore looking for information and learning new aspects is a big part

of his life. For him becoming an ethical consumer was a continuous process of becoming more educated, and being aware of connections between products, whether it is food or computers and the more he knew what was behind it the more careful he became in choosing the products. Being aware of the affect that individual has on the environment, makes choosing products a long logical chain that needs to be reflected upon before final purchase is made:

*“Tracing back the supply chain and the process of making of this product you can look into the indicators that this product somehow shows that when you consume it you don’t harm or you try to put as less harm on the environment, and the people who produced it compare to perhaps another product or companies that ignore fair working conditions or palm oil plantations or deforestations; you kind of look at these indicators or labels that indicate or give some sort of assurance that the product and consequently you have not harmed that much.”*

He constantly reflects upon his practices and evaluates the products he uses. Few years ago he found out that his bank was investing in the nuclear industry. Immediately after this discovery he made a decision to change his banking provider without any hesitation. For Robert, the part of communicating his knowledge and his standpoint to others becomes a challenge. He tries to convince his friends that they need to be more ethical, but often it comes difficult, sometimes he feels like he is “selling a product to a friend” and he doesn’t feel good about that. He tries to find a compromise and raise awareness of his friends by forwarding them the articles that support his point, or inviting them for dinner and cooking vegetarian meals to show that it can be tasty; and if the discussion or debate emerges he tries to explain his standpoint and the importance of it. The reason why some of his friends do not consume ethically, he thinks, is that they just don’t know as much as he does. In the end, Robert is convinced, everything is about information, the more you have, the better choice you can make. However, in the end, having too much information puts him in situations where he doesn’t know what is the best “trade-off”, which puts him in conflict with himself.

He criticizes the way ethical products are marginalized, as they are mostly available to people who are already conscious about their consumption patterns and therefore looking for fair-trade or organic products. People who are not aware or don't have enough knowledge about these issues have less chances to be exposed to such products and therefore learn how to consume ethically.

*"The thing is that you need to make it convenient for everyday consumers and if you don't you will only reach this marginalized group of people."*

He finds it easier to shop in Sweden and buy fair-trade and organic products, he doesn't feel a need to boycott big chains since they try to introduce fair-trade shelves in their stores and they somehow try to put demand on the supply chains to be more ethical. Robert calls himself a "whistle blower", bringing people's attention to the issues of ethical consumption. Not doing that and just closing his eyes on certain things gives him a bad conscience, so he turns those situations around and chooses an active position which in a way is an expression of civil courage. This comes with certain difficulty in the context of individualistic Western society:

*"You pretty much need to ask for help to give help (laughs). Like if a person drops something and you picked it up and gave to him you get a comment "you obviously are not Swedish" (laughs). It doesn't mean they are not helpful, but the cultural setting that you can't engage unless you are asked".*

Being an ethical consumer to Robert is "super tricky". It is complex and sometimes there is just not enough information available which makes it harder to make a decision. He does not see any solution, unless the majority will start questioning their consumption patterns and learn about ethical choices nothing is going to change.

*"I mean do we have time to wait that long or are we willing to exploit other nations and workforces?... it's not enough if you just have those tree huggers or this minority acting ethically it needs to become mainstream."*

## **Case 6: Ana**

*Theme 1: Hard to maintain positive social relations with non-ethical consumers.*

Ana is 27 years old and lived in Germany before she moved to Sweden to study in the Graduate school. She has a degree in humanities and at the moment works on her Master thesis about waste and environmental behavior. Ana strongly rejects the label of “ethical consumer” as unnecessary branding, saying that she would never call herself that. Ethical consumption for her is a “big game”, where people who claim to be ethical gain a label that they feel pressured to maintain. Instead she characterizes her behavior as:

*“I would say that I am concerned of certain things more than other people and I see that in my behavior and my thinking, in contrast to the behavior of others.”*

Her consumption patterns have been ethically oriented since she was a child, her parents always voted for the green party in Germany and always recycled, the house they built only had recycled materials in it in order to make it sustainable. Also, she partly developed her views through her education and socialization with others. She gets regularly updated about the issues on working conditions, production and supply chain that are absolutely necessary to know about, according to her. The process of choosing a product usually involves an extensive research on various options, analyzing different aspects of production, quality and sustainability. Ana follows several forums on ethical consumption, where consumers with similar values share their feedback on different products. Ana is very critical not only of her own consumption and but also of the consumption patterns of others:

*“People don’t understand and I don’t understand how they can tell me to buy an expensive computer. And then they argue that they can’t afford to buy fair-trade product and I am like: What the fuck?? Are you serious? Couple of kronor, you know?”*

As a result, this approach to others often makes her feel criticized by them. Many times they point out that she herself is “not ethical enough”. Since she is always arguing with people, she gets “branded” and therefore people often try to see mistakes in her behavior. Ana sees it as a sign of being narrow-minded and often she feels misunderstood. Some people seem to put her into a “naïve box” and others, on the contrary, honor her for her beliefs. For Ana this behavior is a sign that people themselves feel threatened and criticized by her. Since she always defends herself, argues and makes critical jokes, she understands that probably that’s a logical reaction from those who feel criticized by her. Nonetheless, Ana sees her own position as the only right one, and she doesn’t compromise it. Yet, she is aware that her persistence in proving herself right and others wrong closes people, because no one wants to feel regularly criticized or blamed.

*“Of course I can ask myself: how do I know that I am more right than they are (laughs)... but of course I think I am right (laughs).”*

Ethical consumption for Ana becomes a challenge not only in her consumption actions where she needs to compromise with her budget, but mostly in a social context when she always feels pressured to defend herself as an ethical consumer. People that don’t consume in the same way she does make her angry, but at the same time it frustrates her when people demand a certain behavior from her. It makes it hard for her to socialize and sustain a positive atmosphere with others if the conversation touches upon issues of ethical consumption.

### **Case 7: Carlos**

Carlos was born in a small town in the northern part of Sweden. For him, ethical consumption “is an acknowledgement of your behavior, so to speak to be aware of what you buy and also to know what you buy and know the history behind things”. His family didn’t pay much attention to their consumption practices and when he moved to Malmö he started reflecting upon his consumption patterns much more. There are several reasons that can help explaining this shift. Firstly, when he moved to Malmö, he found it much easier to

be ethical in his consumption practices, the variety of environmental friendly products was much bigger then in his hometown. Secondly, he met his ex-girlfriend and new friends who were vegetarian that made him re-evaluate his meat consumption. Also, he started his education in Malmö University that gave him a more extensive knowledge on environmental issues and made him question certain issues. Finally, on a more abstract level, Malmö itself played an important role, as an urban environment. Carlos refers to it as a city, that “has this magical vibe” and that helped him to become more conscious about his consumption patterns.

*Theme 1: The more knowledge you have, the more cynical you get.*

Carlos has an ambivalent view on his own consumption patterns and on the role of an individual in general:

*“I am very ambivalent when it comes to my consumption, because on days when I feel shitty, I can feel like I can throw a paper in the forest but then the other week I go and I pick up trash on the streets. I can sometimes act very proactive, but sometimes I feel like I can’t change anything.”*

This is one of the reasons he started being even more critical to his own consumption lately. Getting more information by doing own research he started to believe that the whole industry of ethical consumption goods is not as innocent and “friendly” as it might appear. According to him, organic and eco-friendly labels often belong to and distributed by the multinational companies. In this case, he doesn’t see any point in buying those products, if the same company that produces unfriendly products, gets credit just for starting an eco-line. Also, fair-trade products from far abroad can’t be considered as completely ethical choices also, since they have to make it all the way to Sweden, and transporting, obviously, has the worst impact on the environment, according to Carlos. This process of “looking for the truth” made him, as Carlos sadly accepts, a very cynical person when it comes to his consumption choices. In the past several years he shifted towards far less consumption, buying only second hand and local

products. Carlos has uncertain feelings towards other ethical consumers. When someone is buying fair-trade and organic and being quite critical to other's consumption patterns, this behavior will not necessarily make this person an ethical consumer. Instead, it becomes more an issue of a liberation, "they seem to be buying their freedom, freedom of travelling and doing other not ecofriendly things". And he thinks, unless this attitude changes, ethical consumption will lead to the same state as our present consumer society, with its competitive rules, so it becomes a vicious circle.

*"I think we, as consumers, need to put demands on stores to limit their intake on products and I think it needs to be more radical, then buying organic milk. If we continue that and everything becomes ecofriendly and fair-trade it will still be a problem because it's an over consumption, it's not sustainable."*

Carlos lost his faith in the ethical products per se, as well as in people that blindly consume those products, sincerely believing that they are doing good by buying more of it. He sees the only solution in looking beyond the consumption itself; looking into the self and re-evaluating own actions and consumer patters, which cannot be done without an access to information.

## 5. Discussion

Sweetman (2003) emphasizes that self-identity has become a reflexively organized individual attempt to create their own selves; and consumption becomes one of the major ways to achieve that. The shift from the mode of consumption as reproducing one's identity to consumption as constructing identity also affects the social identity, as it makes more resources and tools available to an individual to consume in the ways which articulate to themselves and others a sense of identity. In the light of the theoretical outlines above, for my research purposes, I will look at the consumption as an essential element in constructing individuals' identities. However, in researching ethical consumption through participants' experiences, and specifically exploring the notion of reflexivity there, I will leave a room for Bourdieu's view on reflexivity.

To answer my research questions I will now outline my main findings and discuss them in the light of my theoretical discussions. For the purpose of this research, all potential participants were asked in advance if they identify themselves as ethical consumers. Based on their positive responses only, the participants were chosen to be interviewed. This was done because for the sake of exploration of what happens after the individuals already identify themselves as ethical consumers and what changes does it bring to their personal and social lives. Also I wanted to explore the notion of reflexivity in experiences of being ethical consumers.

### 5.1 Social aspects of ethical consumer identity

It is clear from the data that there is some dynamics between social identity, self-identity and being an ethical consumer. A notion of conflict between the self and social aspects of identity can be recognized in many interviews, where the commitment to ethical consumption itself becomes a problem. For Sally, for example, this conflict appears in the social situations where the majority of people

do not care about their impact and are being wasteful, often in the official public setting. In those moments she struggles to find a “socially acceptable” way to act. Her self-identity, i.e. being an ethical consumer faces the group of others (in her case academic setting where she wants to fit in), where she needs to find a way to be part of, without being judgmental or rude. It’s a challenge for her to be in these situations and she did not find a solution yet.

Another aspect of what might appear to be a conflict between the self-identity and the social aspect of identity is presented in several interviews in a form of what can be best expressed as a “feeling of an anxiety”. Kenneth, for example, becomes affected by the attributes that other people ascribe to ethical consumption and facing such criticism he feels that he cannot “qualify” as an ethical consumer, which makes him anxious and even leads to questioning of his self-identity. In other interviews, Natalie and Ana, both to a different extent feel pressure from their friends and colleagues, who often try to find mistakes in their “ethical” consumption, claiming they are “not ethical enough”, which gives them a feeling of “failing” in the eyes of the others.

This finding can be well explained through Giddens’s perspective on the transformation of individual’s identity where globalization brings an element of uncertainty and often anxiety of not adjusting to the certain behavior, “an uprush of anxiety occurs when the person is unable to carry out, or is prevented from carrying out, the behavior in question” (Giddens, 1991:44) Such anxiety can be seen in most of the interviews that were analyzed, whether it is connected with the economic issues, when an individual cannot afford to buy an ethical option due to the tight budget, or when being criticized by other ethical consumers for “not being ethical enough”.

For some participants, it might be suggested, the pressure from the society raises a feeling of obligation. The rules and values that some participants had from their childhood and enriched throughout their life not only shape their consumer behavior, but also become obligatory to follow. As Shaw and Shiu (2002)

explained in their research, ethical obligation refers to the reflection of “an individual’s internalized ethical rules” (Shaw and Shiu 2002:287). Furthermore some of the participants strongly identify themselves as people from the West, which makes them feel a constant pressure to make up for consequences of the negative impact of the West on the rest.

## 5.2 The notion of reflexivity

One of the aims of this research was to explore the dynamics between self-identity and reflexivity. I am interested to trace the notion of reflexivity in terms that both Giddens and Bourdieu understood it. For Bourdieu, reflexivity does not play any significant role in constructing person’s identity; it is rather seen as a disruption of habitus. Consumption patterns of an individual here derive from his/her belonging to a certain class where habitus is responsible for shaping the identity. For him, identity is located within the pre-reflexive and embodied natural of individual’s practical activities. Giddens sees reflexivity as an act of an individual being aware of self’s actions, reflecting upon its own practices and preferences. In contrast to Bourdieu, who implied that identities are closely tied with gender, class and ethnicity, and therefore consumer practices tend to reflect existing social identities, Giddens claims that now individuals have to actively construct a sense of self-identity through reflecting on their choices and making decisions of everyday consumption.

During the analysis it has been discovered that the notion of reflexivity as an act of awareness of self’s actions, reflection upon practices and preferences are clearly present in some interviews. One of the indicators of reflexivity is a *life-planning* according to Giddens, presence of which can be traced in those some of the interviews. Participants refer to the future in terms of getting a job or moving to another place. For example, “when I get a job I will be able to afford buying fair-trade products”, “when I get to have more free time in the future, I will get active in environmental projects”. These and other examples show that reflexivity in that form is present. Also, the fact that bad consumption choices make

participants “having bad conscience” and “not being able to sleep at night” proves that their consumption decisions are being re-thought and evaluated so that in the future bad choices can be avoided. Therefore reflexivity here plays a clear role in shaping individual’s self-identity.

However, the notion of reflexivity, although present in the data, cannot provide a clear picture of its origins and occurrence in participants lives. Giddens’s view on reflexivity lacks an explanation on this, more extensive than the effect of the modernity and globalization processes. In this case, I think that Bourdieu’s view on reflexivity gives us more freedom in explaining the originating processes of reflexivity. Bourdieu refers to reflexivity as a disruption of habitus, that emerges in spite of the habitus, during what he calls “disjunction” between habitus and the field (always existing, obligatory boundaries of experiential context) (Adams, 2006:514). Nevertheless, being an individualized and unconscious formation, habitus in fact reflects a shared cultural context, where cultural commonalities of a class become inscribed upon the individual and reproduced in personal development of the field, which is a response to already existing social conditions.(ibid) To some extent, Bourdieu allows the possibility of reflexivity which is understood as “the systematic exploration of the unthought categories of thought” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:40, as cited in Adams, 2006:515) This understanding of reflexivity, although might be criticized as being too deterministic can be seen as a possible explanations in one of the interviews. This discussion can be presented on the example of the first case. For Sally, the realization of her footprint and a necessity to change her consumption patterns came when she moved from the US to Sweden. The transition from living with her family in “the middle of the nowhere” with people who “don’t really care about anything” to Sweden she realized that people around are concerned about their consumption patterns and their impact on the environment. After some time, when she got used to and started feeling comfortable in her new environment, she started reflecting on her own practices and evaluating her actions, step by step improving her consumption and moving towards “being ethical”. Eventually, she

has reached the point where she identifies herself as an ethical consumer. Here we can see a clear link to emergence of reflexivity, as Bourdieu understood it whereas Giddens's view on reflexivity, referring to this example might be lacking a possibility to explain the aspect of transition. For Giddens, an individual creates his/her own identity partly through the consumption choices he/she makes and reflexivity is an agent in this process, all occurring under the influence of globalization processes and regardless the social structures that in general lost their power. However, it is clear that the social and cultural setting and their impact on individual's self-identity need to be carefully considered. Therefore, it might be suggested that hybridizing approach to reflexivity and habitus will be beneficial for explanation of such situations.

It needs to be emphasized here that the notion of reflexivity in fact can be seen as part of habitus, meaning that certain social positions and experiences interact with a "high" level of reflexivity. Interviews demonstrate the significance of experiencing going abroad to Sweden where they temporarily become a part of a new social field, and its effect on their consumption practices and values. However, those changes are to be found of a controversial nature. For some of the participants moving to Sweden was a negative impression of too much consumption, fashion and advertising, lack of possibilities to consume ethically and sustainably, due to the high prices. These participants had an impression that people are obsessed with fashion and consumption and don't really care about their impact on environment. In both cases participants came from Canada and the US (Oregon state), where they claim things are positively different. For others, Sweden became an awakening for starting consuming more ethically and availability of ethical products, and people's commitment to being environmental friendly and reducing the footprint. Those participants are coming from the US (Maine), Germany and Turkey. Interestingly, both participants from the US have opposite experiences of moving to Sweden, that can be explained by their state of origin, whereas Oregon is commonly considered to be the most "sustainable state" and Maine is not recognized as one.

In late modernity, although the notion of reflexivity is highly present in the participants' interviews, nevertheless it is not enough in explaining the transformation of participants' consumption patterns into more ethical ones. Transformation in the case of the present sample of interviews was directly connected with changing a social setting to the one that is itself more reflexive and Giddens's understanding of reflexivity may not provide an efficient explanation for this process. In this case, Bourdieu's concept of habitus and understanding reflexivity can seem more beneficial. He sees reflexivity as a result of crisis that occurs when social settings start to change, therefore this process of transformation can be explained through this perspective, when people move to other countries, they change their social settings that they born into to others, unknown ones, and therefore, the notion of reflexivity occurs, being exposed to otherness and other patterns of consumption, they start evaluating theirs. The difference in cultural and social origins here played an important role in the analysis that hermeneutic approach made it possible to recognize, whereas Bourdieu's view on reflexivity and nature of habitus helped to explain this transition. I here will agree with Sweetman (2003), who suggests that reflexivity becomes an important aspect of habitus. Social situations and positions that participants of this research experience can be also seen as reflexive, as they make them aware of the consequences of their consumption practices and further evaluate their actions.

### 5.3 Knowledge

It needs to be acknowledged, that in this group of participants, interviews show the notion of choosing products and services based not only on their personal values, but also on the information and knowledge they possess. From this perspective, this finding can in some way relate to the view of Devinney, et al (2010) who describes several archetypes of consumer behavior, where one of the approaches indicates consumers as "rational informed processors". This approach implies that consumer having knowledge of own values, beliefs, needs and wants

search for those products and services that best meet them. Although these findings might contradict with Cherrier's (2007) who claims that ethical consumers should not be understood as "rational choosers" that make their ethical purchases solely based on information and knowledge. However, they can relate to her view of an ethical consumption as a more social activity, where consumers use knowledge to influence others and make them improve their consumer patterns.

From another perspective the analysis shows, that for most of the participants, information is an essential part of their practices of being ethical consumers. "It is all about the information in the end" states one of the participants. The transition to being an ethical consumer is often triggered by participant's search for information on the specific topics. The information about ethical consumption from a wide range of sources gives them a ground for evaluating different products, looking closely at the ways they were produced, working conditions, ecological impact, etc. Due to the limited budget in all of the cases, the question of price naturally occurs before making the decision. However, information comes first, economic conditions and further compromises follow. In some cases, commitment to researching different options and extensive knowledge puts participant in the position of the conflict where he doesn't know where a "best tradeoff" is. Furthermore, information also becomes a tool of influencing others. Having information about related issues give some participants a chance to engage in the discussion with their friends, raise awareness and provide arguments about the necessity of ethical choices. In the light of the findings that the reflexivity becomes an important part habitus it can be mentioned that knowledge plays a role of driving the notion of reflexivity forward. The more knowledge individuals have the more aware they are of their actions and consequences and therefore more critical they become in evaluating and improving their consumption choices.

## 6. Concluding remarks

The aim of this research was to explore the dynamics between reflexivity, self-identity and social aspects of identity of ethical consumers, as well as to see the notion of reflexivity in their practices. To answer these questions I used several theoretical perspectives on reflexivity, self-identity to explain and analyze the interviews with people who identify themselves as ethical consumers.

Main findings show that the concept of reflexivity as Giddens presented it cannot fully explain the ethical consumer behavior as it neglects the importance of considering the social structure and cultural context, especially when participants relocated to another country. Neither can Bourdieu's concept of habitus and his understanding of reflexivity, as its disruption. The situation of long-term travelling abroad and its affect on an individual's identity, for example, might be seen as one of the outcomes of a globalized world in Giddens's perspective. However this perspective it is not sufficient in explaining the notion of reflexivity in becoming and sustaining being an ethical consumer. There is much more to it in exploring this process of transformation into an ethical consumer than just notion of reflexivity. Specifically, changing the social and cultural contexts need to be taken into consideration as a factor of becoming an ethical consumer. Although Bourdieu's vision of reflexivity as originating from such situations of crisis when social settings are being changed can be give some impact in explaining such situations it might still be not fully sufficient.

The concept of hybridization of habitus and reflexivity, suggested by Sweetman (2003) can be considered as a fruitful approach in explaining the results of a sample of this research only. It can be suggested that participants that share similar social experiences in the similar social fields become reflexive in their experiences, which can relate to Sweetman's (2003) concept of "reflexive habitus". Therefore it might be suggested that although participants are coming from different countries, they share similar social experiences in a new social setting that are in fact, reflexive. It might be also suggested that on the basis of the

sample of the informants it can be concluded that reflexivity becomes an important aspect of habitus.

Information does play an important role in the process of becoming an ethical consumer. There is also a clear link between knowledge and reflexivity, where knowledge drives the notion of reflexivity further. It can be seen as the situation when the more knowledge participant have in the situations of changing social settings the more active in evaluation own consumption practices, as well as those of others, they become. Knowledge also becomes a tool to influence others, an attempt to raise awareness about the state of the society and possibility of ethical ways of living.

Being an ethical consumption brings challenges to participants' social experiences, as well as challenges their self-identification as being ones. It might be suggested that ethical consumption puts a certain pressure on the self and social aspects of an individual's identity. One side of it is that they feel conflict between their self - identification as ethical consumers and being around people who do not share their views on consumption. For some it makes it harder to socialize without being too critical to others. On the other hand, for some participants being ethical consumers makes it easier to socialize with other ethical consumers. Conversely, some participants feel pressure from other ethical consumers, for "not being ethical enough" which makes them question themselves if they are ethical enough.

It can be recommended that further research needs to explore the understanding of reflexivity as an important part of the habitus in relation to ethical consumption. It might be interesting to see, ethical consumers' patterns and understanding changes when they regularly travel abroad.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview guide**

#### I. Demographical block

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What is your occupation?

#### II. Introduction

- 1) What does ethical consumption means to you?
- 2) Why do you find it important to consume ethically?
- 3) Can you describe when and how did you start to consume ethically?

#### III. Shopping choices

- 1) How often do you shop in specialized stores?
- 2) What criteria do you use choosing products?
- 3) How does it make you feel when you buy an ethical product?
- 4) What is unethical product/purchase to you and how does it make you feel if you are for some reason buying it?

#### IV. Information and knowledge

- 1) Where do you get information about ethical consumption issues?
- 2) Is it easy to be an ethical consumer where you live?

#### V. Activities

- 1) Have you ever been engaged in related activities? (Boycotts, demonstrations, other)

- 2) Do you belong to any kind of community or organization of ethical consumers or related issues? How does it make you feel?

VI. Social context (friends, family, etc)

- 1) Do you live alone? (If no, ask if people he/she lives with share their attitudes?)
- 2) Are many of your friends sharing your position of an ethical consumer?
- 3) What do they think about you being one?
- 4) What do you get out of making ethical choices?

VII. Do you have anything you want to add?