

**European food quality schemes in everyday food consumption:  
An exploration of sayings and doings through pragmatic regimes of engagement**

**Abstract:**

While European consumers generally support the principles underpinning Food Quality Schemes (FQS), sales of certified products remain modest. This phenomenon is known as ‘attitude-behaviour gap’ and considerable scholarly and policy efforts have been geared towards ‘filling’ or ‘bridging’ the gap. This study aims at casting new light on this ‘discrepancy’ between consumers’ sayings and doings through a study of everyday food practices connected to FQS. We used a qualitative multi-method research design comprising extensive ethnographic fieldwork data gathered from 41 households across seven European countries, including interviews, walk-along tours, and food diaries, in order to understand consumers’ perceptions of FQS in relation to their everyday food consumption practices. Building on convention theory and Thévenot’s work, we showed that food practices can be understood through different ‘regimes of engagement’, namely different ways of thinking and behaving, following different logics corresponding to varying levels of knowledge and interest. We thus argue that the ‘attitude’behaviour gap’ should rather be reconceptualised as the co-existence of multiple regimes of engagement, namely a dynamic and always evolving process of adjustment through which consumers understand and engage with FQS in everyday food practices.

## 1. Introduction

The importance of labelling for ensuring high-quality food and protecting gastronomic heritage has been a consistent element in European agricultural policy over the past thirty years ((EU, 1992, 1999, 2012). This is reproduced also in the recent European Green Deal launched in 2020 to develop a fairer, healthier, and more environmentally friendly food system by 2030 (European Commission, 2020b). At its heart lies the Farm to Fork strategy ‘to empower consumers to make informed, healthy and sustainable food choices. For this purpose, the Commission proposed harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling and considered extending mandatory origin or provenance indications to certain products, while strengthening the legislative framework on Geographical Indications (GIs) to include specific sustainability criteria. A better understanding of consumer knowledge of European Food Quality Schemes is therefore needed. With the term Food Quality Schemes (FQS) we refer to approved designations of food quality, certified by public regulation. These include the EU Geographical Indications (GIs), such as the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), traditional products certified under the Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) scheme, and the EU-Organic certification.

Through the valorisation of cultural heritage, based on unique and distinguishable process and product quality, FQS offer producers the prospect of higher margins and profitability (XXX et al., 2021), contributing to rural development through better-paid jobs (Hilal et al., 2021) and higher local economic multiplier ratios (XXX et al., 2021). This can explain how FQS sales have increased in the global agri-food marketplace in the past twenty-five years (AND-International et al., 2020; FiBL Statistics, 2020). Additionally, a recent Eurobarometer shows that food bearing a label of quality is important for most consumers (81%), while consumer appreciation of culinary traditions, know-how and food coming from a given geographical area

has risen steadily in the past decade (European Commission, 2020a). Nonetheless, the market shares of FQS products typically remain low and marginal, and some major GIs and related labels are scarcely known by consumers (European Commission, 2020a; Grunert and Aachmann, 2016). This is also evidenced by recent empirical research that shows how the overall level of awareness and understanding of FQS among European consumers remains low (XXX et al., 2019). Against this backdrop, this paper aims to understand this apparent discrepancy between consumers' awareness of, interest in, and actual purchasing behaviour regarding FQS - in other words, investigating the difference between sayings and doings.

The discrepancy between consumers' increasingly positive attitude towards local concerns and products, including sustainable labels, and actual consumer behaviour is one of the most debated issues among scholars and policy communities on quality labels and sustainable consumption. In the academic literature, this phenomenon is often denoted as an 'attitude-behaviour gap' (Carrington et al., 2010) and studied through quantitative methods (ElHaffar et al., 2020), although the processes involved in consumption behaviour and food practices are plurivocal, involving the complex intertwining of different moral orders (Evans, 2011). Nevertheless, as consumer awareness of FQS is very limited, a new angle is needed to capture understandings and uses of FQS. We therefore focused the fieldwork on everyday food practices to delve deeper into the use (or non-use) of FQs.

Building on these insights, this paper investigates the everyday food consumption practices of 41 families – henceforth denoted as informants or participants – across seven European countries (France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Serbia and the UK) through a multi-method qualitative research design including ethnographic fieldwork (XXX et al., 2018). To unravel the complexities associated with everyday consumption (Evans, 2018), food

sustainability, and the world of FQS, we adopt a pragmatic sociological approach by drawing on the concept of ‘regimes of engagement’ to illustrate the complexity of different products, situations and discourses on consumption of FQSs products (Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2007; Evans, 2011; Ponte, 2016; Swaffield et al., 2018). The regimes of engagement developed by Thévenot comprise three forms of thinking and behaving (‘cognitive format’ in Thévenot’s terminology) in which people engage depending upon the situation, namely the *regime of familiarity*; the *regime of planned action*; and the *regime of justification* (see section 3 for a full explanation). We argue that these regimes offer a new perspective for understanding food practices and engagement with FQS, as the degree of reflexivity involved differs in each regime.

The paper is structured as follows. We start by discussing the state of the art on FQS in the context of food practices, their role in the EU Common Agricultural Policy (Aprile et al. 2016) and quality policy, where they are understood as drivers of sustainable consumption. We then outline the theoretical framework based on convention theory, focusing on the regimes of engagement developed by Thévenot. These sections are followed by the methodological approach and key findings. The latter is structured around the main phases of food consumption, i.e., planning, purchasing, cooking, eating, and disposing (Desjeux, 2006; Gronow and Strandbakken, 2015), and contextualised in light of the regimes of engagement and pragmatic sociology (Thévenot, 2007). The article concludes with final considerations, highlighting the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

This study contributes to the existing literature in at least two main ways. First, empirically, it presents extensive observations of everyday consumption practices of European households with a focus on FQS. We advance the state of the art through a detailed exploration of consumers’ perceptions, attitudes and use or non-use of FQS. In doing so, we contribute to an

emerging body of literature that explores the attitude-behaviour gap through qualitative approaches to illustrate the multiple moral engagements at play within everyday consumption (Carrington et al., 2014; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Freestone and McGoldrick, 2008; Grunert and Aachmann, 2016; Shaw et al., 2006). Second, we undertake theory building regarding everyday food practices, applying the ‘regimes of engagement’ approach of Thévenot (2007), to interpret and provide a better understanding of the complexities of households’ everyday choices related to FQS.

## **2. EU Food Quality Schemes in the context of food practices**

Since the emergence of quality policy within the European policy agenda, much has been written on FQS from both production and consumption perspectives (XXX et al., 2019; Ilbery et al., 2005; Kaczorowska et al., 2021; XXX et al., 2021; Meyerding and Merz, 2018; Tregear et al., 2007). EU FQS<sup>1</sup> aim to protect food names and cultural heritage while communicating superior quality attributes and trust to consumers (European Commission, 2020) but consumers’ interest and trust are often taken for granted within policy approaches (Goodman, 2004).

Although the market for organic food and GIs has increased in recent years, FQS generally remain a niche product and occupy a marginal position in the food sector (AND-International et al., 2020). **Even in the case of organic products, which are relatively well established compared to GIs and whose sales almost doubled in the last decade, EU consumers only spent**

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<sup>1</sup> PDO, PGI, TSG are the three quality labels launched in the 1990s to officially link food products to a traditional culture, reputation and / or their geographical origin. They certify different levels of product and process specifications, which are verified by certification body or designated authorities. The EU organic logo is an umbrella logo acknowledging national organic certification schemes by different national authorised control agencies or bodies.

on average approximately 4% of their total food expenditure per capita in 2019<sup>2</sup> (Bioeco Actual, 2019; EUROSTAT, 2019). Generally, FQSs products are not well known by consumers, who often do not understand or pay attention to the label (XXX et al., 2019).

A review of consumer studies identified a generally low awareness of European food quality labels (Grunert and Aachmann, 2016), confirmed by more recent consumer surveys that stress how consumers typically fail to recognise and understand the differences between FQS (XXX et al., 2019). The discrepancy between consumers' attitudes towards sustainability and actual consumer behaviour is one of the most debated topics in the literature on sustainable consumption. Known in academic literature as the 'intention-behaviour gap', 'attitude-behaviour gap' or 'green gap', most studies approach this phenomenon through quantitative and survey-based methods (ElHaffar et al., 2020; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006) attempting to explain consumers' 'incoherency' through demographic, psychological and social factors. However, conjoint analysis and survey-based methods have limited ability to explore the complexities of the moral choices involved in sustainable consumption and to fully understand the complexities associated with everyday food practices, whereas qualitative methods can contribute to building a rich and nuanced understanding of consumer motivations (Bernardes et al., 2018; Carrington et al., 2014; Grunert and Aachmann, 2016).

Research recognises this apparent discrepancy between 'sayings' and 'doings' (Park and Lin, 2020), and that "the way that people talk about food does not necessarily match the way that they consume it" (Eden et al., 2008, p.1054). Taking into account the potential of European FQS to contribute to rural development and drive consumers' sustainable food practices, and given consumers' increasing levels of interest in and awareness of sustainability issues, it is

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<sup>2</sup> Data report an average of 84 euros spent on organic product per capita per year for an average of 2140 per capita per year for consumption of food and non-alcoholic beverage (Bioeco Actual, 2019; EUROSTAT, 2019). Trends differ though based on different countries. For example, two of the countries studied here, Serbia and Norway, show quite different consumer behaviours, with an expense of respectively 1040 euros and 3080 euros per capita per year for consumption of food and non-alcoholic beverage (*ibid*).

timely and fruitful to understand why and how this discrepancy between sayings and doings is embedded in everyday food practices.

### **3. Conceptualising food consumption practices through the pragmatic regimes of engagement**

Our theoretical framework draws from the work of the French theorists Thévenot and Boltanski (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001; Thévenot, 2006) introducing convention theory, particularly the approach of the pragmatic regimes of engagement (Thévenot, 1994, 2007, 2019) in order to shed new light on everyday food practices and FQSs.

This theory has been effectively applied to study the ‘worlds of production’ (Parrott et al., 2002; Storper and Salais, 1997; Stræte, 2008; Morgan et al., 2006; Murdoch, 1999). More generally, several studies have used convention theory, including the regimes of engagement, to explore food practices, as evidenced by the agri-food literature - for an empirical example, see Andersen (2011); for a literature review, see Ponte (2016). Moreover, the concept of ‘regime’ is widely used in food sociology and rural studies (i.e. Geels, 2011), though from a perspective far from Thévenot’s regimes of engagement, where a micro approach aimed at understanding agency and describing civic engagement is central. Recent studies in social sciences draw on the regimes of engagement to shed light on the complexity of social practices, particularly on agency in actions oriented towards the future (Mandich, 2019; Welch et al., 2020). However, although food is a central part of everyday life, food practices are rarely mentioned in these studies with the exception of Thévenot’s article on Russian food supply (Thévenot, 2019).

Boltanski and Thévenot, in their widely known work *On Justification* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006), were interested in situations of debate and controversy and identified six worlds of worth

(market, industrial, domestic, civic, inspired, opinion) corresponding to six ways of appealing to higher legitimacy. The model proposed in *On justification* only took account of a certain type of action: engagement in justification. In this study, we draw on a lesser-known aspect of Thévenot's work, which represents a continuation of the study of the worlds of worth. The authors' idea was to expand this model with two other regimes of engagement: the engagement in familiarity and the engagement in a plan. These three regimes can be seen as subjects' ways of thinking and doing, depending on the situation. Situations and spaces can be more or less public, more or less fair, and can raise an issue for justification. The word 'engagement' was chosen to refer to two dimensions in the French language. The physical engagement (e.g., meaning 'going to', like entering a tunnel) echoes the pragmatic sociology sought by Thévenot. Moral engagement (commitment) is fundamental in a sociological theory expounding the moral dimensions of action (in Thévenot's words: 'to re-moralize sociology').

The regime of familiarity occurs through habits, linked to specific ways of doing, related to usual objects and devices, highlighting that an actor is accustomed to their surroundings (things and/or people). For example, an actor cooking a familiar recipe in the kitchen using familiar utensils engages in this regime. Feeling *at ease* is fundamental in this regime, involving personal ways of arranging things, using tools in ways that other people might consider inconvenient. This regime relies on 'perceptual clues', perceived elements of familiar things/devices allowing the smooth fulfilment of the action: "this type of engagement is linked to local, personal clues in the immediate surroundings. The *touchstones* by means of which reality is apprehended" (Thévenot, 2007, p.6). These can be, for example, the texture of pasta (to check if it is ready to eat), or a label or brand to select a product on a shelf. Actions performed in the regime of familiarity are barely communicable to others, as they are intimate, and are not

meant to be expressed (and rarely are) by words. The action here is fluid and smooth and involves a low degree of reflexivity.

The second regime deals with engagement in a plan. This regime manifests when the actor performs a ‘normal’ action, i.e., one that is normal both for the actor and for anybody around them (for example, customers eating quietly in a café, a hotel or on public transport). Since this action is ‘normal’ and is operated in a similar way by most people, it is also accessible to everybody and communicable in essence. Consequently, “the person is treated as an autonomous individual clearly detached from his/her environment, carrying a plan of action defining the evaluation of what matters. The material environment is grasped in functionalities that sustain the accomplishment of the plan and so of the individual”<sup>3</sup> (Thévenot, 2006, p.14). In this model of rational planned action, the actor operates in a conscious way. The satisfaction of being able to project into the future is fundamental. In our kitchen example, we could think of a person inviting a friend and trying a new recipe, and therefore consciously gathering the ingredients and carefully following the recipe instructions. The action involves a certain degree of reflexivity, crystallised by will and by active engagement in the realisation of a project.

The regime of justification refers to situations of controversy when an actor seeks to settle a debate where participants try to justify their claims by appealing to a world of worth (a form of the common good). Situations of controversy occur when matters of responsibility arise, or when collective decisions must be taken: “persons and things engaged in the justifiable action are qualified according to orders of worth, allowing evaluations based upon common goods.”<sup>4</sup> (Thévenot, 2006, p.14). Returning to our kitchen example, when the researcher asks the reasons behind specific food habits, an informant may answer by appealing to worlds of worth (such as

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<sup>3</sup> Our own translation from the French text.

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prices in the market world or tradition in the domestic world). Consequently, this regime is relevant to understanding when an actor deliberates between different products, weighing the pros and cons of different food types and labels. Based on Thévenot’s work, Table 1 summarises the regimes of engagement, taking into consideration the type of regime, situation, and action. It should be emphasized that what Thévenot calls “the good at stake”<sup>5</sup> differs from one regime to another both in prevalence and relevance. While the regime of justification offers a possibility of mutual understanding and openness towards potential compromise, the familiarity and the planned action regimes are more concentrated on feeling “at ease” or finding a successful conventional way of doing things.

**Table 1. Regimes of engagement**

<b>Regime</b>	<b>Environment/situation</b>	<b>Characterisation of the action</b>
<b>Familiarity</b>	Personal (intimate) well-known, accustomed environment	Fluid, routine-based, embodied practices, importance of comfort
<b>Planned action</b>	Public, personal but open to all	‘Normal’, consciously planned, organised with a certain aim in the future
<b>Justification</b>	Public situation of debate	Exchange over what is at stake in the debate, importance of world of worth

Source: Own construction based on Thévenot (2007)

Most studies on the attitude-behaviour gap (especially in psychology and economics) assume the consumer to be a rational actor making deliberate choices for a specific purpose (ElHaffar et al., 2020). This way of conceiving action has been criticised by sociologists advocating for attention to practice, such as Shove (2010) among others, conceiving action above all as non-reflexive and routine-based. We follow Thévenot’s reasoning, which suggests that these two

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<sup>5</sup> To avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding, we choose here not to refer directly the worlds of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot 1991) which are pillars for the regime of justification, but not for the two others.

forms of action coexist and constitute two different regimes of engagement (the planned action and action in familiarity, respectively). By accounting for the possible co-existence of these mutually exclusive regimes and by highlighting the different forms of thinking involved, as well as the circumstances that allow a shift from one to the other, we aim to shed further light on the ‘attitude-behaviour gap’.

**4. A qualitative multi-method approach**

This study employs a multi-method qualitative approach to capture a wide range of discourses, practices and materials and their interactions. As mentioned above, we focus on everyday food practices to enable us to understand the use and knowledge of FQS (XXX et al., 2018). Previous research has underlined significant differences between Southern and Northern Europe regarding the use and knowledge about FQS (XXX 2019, XXX 2013), which were also brought forward during our fieldwork. However, despite recognising the differences among several food cultures and national food systems, we aimed in this paper and through the food practices approach to emphasize similarities more than differences.

The research involved a total of 41 European households comprising five to six families per country (France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Serbia and the UK). The fieldwork included three physical visits during each of the three seasons studied, lasting from a half-day to a full day, with three to six months between each visit. Table 2 summarises the key methodological phases.

**Table 2. Multi-method research design and key phases**

Methodology phase	Details
<b>Selection criteria</b> <i>Spring 2017</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family households (min. 2 people), with and without children</li> <li>• Mixed levels of awareness and interest in food quality and sustainability practices (low to high)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different socio-economic indicators (education, income, occupation)</li> <li>• Different geographical locations (urban, rural, coastal)</li> <li>• Willingness to record food practices (photo/video journal, food diary, etc.) with own devices</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment</b> Total of 41 Families in 7 Countries <i>Spring 2017</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• France, 6 Families (FR1-6)</li> <li>• Germany, 6 Families (GE1-6)</li> <li>• Hungary, 6 Families (HU1-6)</li> <li>• Italy, 5 Families (IT1-5)</li> <li>• United Kingdom, 6 Families (UK1-6)</li> <li>• Norway, 6 Families (NO1-6)</li> <li>• Serbia, 6 Families (SE1-6)</li> </ul>
<b>Interviews and dialogic conversations</b> <i>Summer 2017 to summer 2018</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 41 semi-structured interviews with households (1<sup>st</sup> visit)</li> <li>• 41 dialogic and self-reflexive conversations (3<sup>rd</sup> visit)</li> <li>• Card game with food quality schemes and eco-labels (3<sup>rd</sup> visit)</li> </ul>
<b>Ethnographic observations</b> 3 visits per household in 3 different seasons <i>Summer 2017 to summer 2018</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food baskets conversations based on visual and sensory experience (1<sup>st</sup> visit)</li> <li>• Participant observations of family food practices</li> <li>• Observations of main phases of food consumption: planning, purchasing, cooking, eating, and disposing (multiple visits) with photo/video recordings</li> <li>• Kitchen tours (multiple visits)</li> <li>• Walk-around tours in supermarkets, food shops and alternative food retail outlets e.g. farmers' markets, organic shops, etc. (multiple visits)</li> <li>• Cooking and eating together</li> </ul>
<b>Food biographies</b> <i>Winter 2018</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Households documented the “biography of family food” for a week</li> <li>• Households documented their favourite FQS food products</li> <li>• Households documented planning, purchasing, cooking, eating, disposing of an FQS product of their choice</li> </ul>

The first phase involved the development of the selection criteria of our family households (minimum of two people). In order to gain variation in the sampling strategy (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) we recruited families with and without children, with mixed levels of awareness and interest in food quality and sustainability practices (low to high), as well as different socio-

economic indicators (education, income, occupation) and different geographical locations (urban/rural). This allowed us to achieve a mixed sample representation, a strategy already adopted in previous research on the attitude-behaviour gap (Carrington et al., 2014). Families were recruited through a mix of approaches, i.e. ads in university and city councils spaces or professional networks, and were all preliminarily met in a shared space (i.e. a cafe or a university space) to assess their suitability and willingness to participate. All families received a food basket and monetary compensation for their participation.

The following phases consisted of semi-structured interviews with households during our 1<sup>st</sup> visit and dialogic and self-reflexive interviews during our 3<sup>rd</sup> visit (41 of each type). The semi-structured interviews, conducted on the first visit to serve as an ice-breaker, focused on FQS and a self-description of everyday food practices. The aim was to produce discursive and normative data about food practices, including the role of FQS in everyday consumption. The recorded interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes each and were transcribed *verbatim*, coded and analysed using NVivo software. Eventually, prior to the last encounter, we sent participants the transcription of the first semi-structured interview to explore any behavioral changes in the level of awareness/interest in food quality and sustainability since the start of the fieldwork. Inspired by the dialogism of Bakhtine (1978) and notions of dialogic democracy (Callon et al., 2009), the aim of this experimental methodology was to stimulate discussion with the interviewees, inviting reflexivity and the co-construction of knowledge. During the last visit, some households were also invited to play a ‘card game’, in which pictures of some of the studied FQSs and national labels were used to stimulate discussion and further empirical data.

Interviews were coupled with ethnographic observations based on three visits per household in three different seasons. Ethnographic participant observation, which entails the study of socio-

cultural interactions, practices and understandings that occur within groups, was chosen because of its emphasis on exploring ‘the native point of view’ to understand how members of a society see their own culture, values and norms (Grasseni, 2007; Pink, 2020). In order to minimise social desirability bias regarding the attitude-behaviour gap (Johnstone and Tan, 2015), we did not directly question our participants’ attitudes towards FQS, but rather focused on their everyday household practices, adopting a curious and ‘indirect’ approach to the study of FQS in the context of everyday consumption. The main part of the ethnographic fieldwork involved participant observation in the homes of each household as well as in supermarkets, grocery stores, and various alternative food retail outlets (e.g., farmers’ markets, organic shops and farm shops). The empirical approach was based on intervention, combining observation and communication techniques (i.e., words or absence of words, facial expressions) and interactivity (between informants and products, as well as informants and researchers). Inspired by Morin (2008), we adopted a constructivist perspective, acknowledging that food practices are embedded in a complex network of interpersonal relations where systems, families, objects, individuals, situations and time all play an important part. We were also mindful of the role of the researcher, whose presence, gaze and questions change the studied landscape, and the fact that what researchers do not see or hear is also a part of the study (Watzlawick, 1976), and of the fact that informants and researchers constantly adapt and adjust to the given situation they construct together. In other words, we aimed not to do research *on* the households but *with* the households. The rich exchanges between participants and researchers helped define and normalise different kinds of knowledge which were captured via audio or visual recordings, a recognised practice in qualitative studies (XXX et al., 2003; Pink, 2020).

The last phase of our methodological approach entailed food biographies. Focusing on FQS and stimulating a reflection on labels, the households documented their experiences and

engagement with FQS products by taking notes, photos and videos with a tablet or other device (camera, smartphone, laptop, etc.) through food biographies. We asked informants to provide the researcher with a tour of their kitchen and to show us their fridge, freezer, cupboards and utensils, and we discussed their use and associated practices. Going shopping at various local supermarkets, specialty shops and food festivals garnered further observations and conversations, which would later become important for better understanding, and contextualising, the respective households' food practices.

## **5. Everyday FQS food practices in European households**

We present below our key findings according to the different phases of consumption (Desjeux, 2006; Gronow and Strandbakken, 2015): planning, purchasing, cooking, eating, and disposing.

### *5.1 Planning*

Planning is a transversal way of organizing food practices, including reflected, and reflective, behaviors or routines interconnecting the different phases. We found that FQS did not play a central role in our participants' plans for everyday purchases, although planning 'sustainable' or 'local' food practices manifested in different forms in most of our participants' routines. **Our participants held favourable views, or 'sayings', of concepts of rural development, higher quality of food, traditional methods of production, and schemes supporting local producers when planning for buying food. Interestingly, they expressed convinced support for all these dimensions underpinning FQS schemes but were in most cases not aware of the role FQS play in facilitating these dimensions. Several examples can be presented of practices aligned with the support of local production. For example, in the case of David and Dagny (NO3), consumption practices revolved around local and high-quality food; they were so committed to this practice that they were willing to include substantial planning and high-tech utensils such**

as a freezer of sous-vide machine. Since they preferred to buy meat and fish from local producers rather than the grocery store, they needed to coordinate buying, storing, defrosting and cooking. Dagny had a phrase for this: “working with the freezer”:

*When we do the packaging ourselves, we vacuum-pack the food and freeze it flat, and it only takes a couple of minutes to defrost in water, it's very quick. Like when we buy a whole pig, we just think what's easy to have in the freezer, because we don't need Sunday dinners, we need everyday dinners. Wok meat is the easiest to defrost ... and minced meat.*  
(NO3)

David and Dagny's way of buying meat from alternative suppliers may seem more complicated than buying from a regular grocery store, but they developed this system because they were opposed to buying meat and fish that cannot be traced when purchased from the store. Similarly, Léa (FR6), who grew vegetables and stored them as frozen goods or prepared soups, had a yearly planning strategy (Figure 1). This storing practice had the advantages of being economical and practical and avoiding food waste.

**Figure 1. The courgette fridge**



Source: own picture from fieldwork

We observed this sophisticated planning in many families, especially in **situations** where ‘grow your own produce’ played an important role in their life, either from their home garden or in the form of gifts from close relatives living in the countryside. A substantial part of this produce was stored in freezers and consumed out of season. In the words of our participant: ‘We have a freezer full of my mother's frozen meat’ (IT4). Interestingly, **and as already underlined by other researchers (Eden et al. 2008) our participants always considered locally-produced items as more valuable and of higher quality than those purchased in supermarkets**: ‘If we got something from my parents that was produced by them, we consider it as a very high-quality product and try to prepare something special’ (HU4). This, in turn, highlighted interesting contraposition between ‘labelled’ and ‘non-labelled’ food, whereby participants considered local, non-labelled products of much higher quality and more trustworthy, and revealed a higher level of material and affective engagement with them. In the words of one participant:

*I trust local products more. If I have to go and buy ham or salami, I go to someone I know nearby. I'd rather do in this way than to go to the supermarket and buy the DOP [PDO] products. [...] I trust the local product without a known label but from a producer I know.*  
(IT1)

It is important to note that in some cases participants showed higher engagement in reflexivity around everyday planning practices, driven by the presence of the researchers. For example, one of the Norwegian participants, Elisabeth (NO4), bought chicken fillets and carrots especially for the evening meal planned with the researcher. She had thought about ‘what to cook for the researchers who will come tonight’ and had decided that chicken was convenient. This deviated from her usual purchasing behaviour and needed prior reflection. Several other

participants also felt a need to explain themselves and their decisions, because being accompanied by researchers and a video camera while food shopping is unusual. Nonetheless, through our multi-method approach, we observed that FQs were generally absent, or remained in the background at best, in our participants' everyday planning.

## *5.2 Purchasing*

The purchasing practices observed during the fieldwork involved different types of food sourcing, including non-market ones such as gardening or food gifts. We explored purchasing habits via interviews and walkaround tours with participants. We observed both non-reflexive practices (i.e., how the hand automatically reaches out and takes a specific product) as well as intentional and reflexive actions such as taking time for pauses, deep consideration, and decision-making. Specific choices were linked to the reasons that participants either told us about, or which we, as researchers, identified. Typical reasons included perceptual cues such as price, expiry date, quantity, package shape, the desire 'to try something new', and time, weight or volume constraints. Most of our participants had a few local grocery stores they visited several times during the week. In the shops they chose for our walkaround tour, participants took a regular route. Both we and the participants noticed the highly routinised and unreflexive nature of shopping practices. In David's and Ruth's words:

*You're just kind of grabbing things and you're not really thinking and concentrating on what you're doing. You've just got a list of what you need and you just want to be in and out as quick as you can. (David, UK6)*

*When it comes to fish I don't even think, I just buy. (Ruth, UK6)*

Routinised shopping practices seemed to emerge from the stability of using the same grocery store over time. For example, Elisabeth (NO4) and Linda (NO6) were both very consistent in their shopping routines, following the same route through their respective stores; their purchase choices were guided by routinised movements, albeit during the walkaround tour they might have shown a higher degree of reflexivity, probably driven by the researcher’s presence – which is an implicit bias. As illustrated in Figure 2, in the habitual act of purchasing tomatoes, they switched from their usual choice to locally produced tomatoes.

**Figure 2: An example of purchasing practices**



Source: own pictures from fieldwork.

In some cases, the food preferences of family members were deeply engrained in their purchasing habits, establishing a network of routine purchase behaviours which did not involve a high degree of reflexivity. In the words of one of our Serbian participants:

*We've been married for two years. We each have our preferences, and we don't hold each other back. For example, he buys salami, I buy bratwurst, he drinks Balance Plus yogurt, I drink lemonade. Sometimes he does the shopping and sometimes I do. [...] We don't make a shopping list. We pretty much know what we're going to buy. [...] We know each other's habits. (SE4)*

Conversely, we observed that major changes in the lives of our participants, such as changing jobs, having children, and moving to a different neighbourhood/city, sparked reflexivity and generated changes in food consumption habits. For example, between our first and second visits, a Norwegian mother (NO4) changed jobs and transferred most of her family's weekly grocery shopping from their local supermarket to an online store that provided her with a tool to save her grocery list. This created a quite stable and continuous system of food provisioning, as she rarely added new products to the list. The online tool heavily mediated her purchasing practices, making online food shopping not only a habit but also an automated practice. A similar type of routinised behaviour characterised Claire, a British mother (UK4) who recently moved to the countryside with her family and started to buy groceries online, as she found it more convenient than reaching distant grocery stores. Our participants became more reflexive of food practices following these major life changes and identified online shopping as a constraint to paying any attention to quality labels, compared to a physical store situation where consumers can pick a product and check carefully its packaging. The major changes in their

lives (change of job and change of living area) generated changes in their ordinary food consumption, which they reflexively identified as lacking the opportunity to engage with labels.

Interestingly, in this complex landscape of food purchasing practices, we found that FQSs rarely played a role in the everyday routinised practices of our participants. During the walkaround tours in grocery stores, we noticed participants hardly used these labels as visible cues that guided their purchases. Private labels provided by retailers and food companies were often better known than FQS and seemed to be both sufficient and reliable as emphasized by this German participant: *“Yes, I only see the [Supermarket] organic label [...] I trust it. [...] I know [name of the supermarket] this logo [he points at the retailer’s identification for locally produced products], but I have never seen this one [he points at the official label for GI]”*. (GE3)

Even when consumers seemed to pay particular attention to a product and chose one with a quality label, the label itself was not the reason for such product choice. To some extent, however, FQS were associated with special care for family members or guests. In some families, for example, purchasing organic food was associated with caring, since organic products were often considered healthier than conventional ones. **Having children was thus sometimes linked to higher consumption of organic products, as stated in the words of this Serbian father: “for our daughter, we only buy organic products” (SE2)**. Similarly, GI products were considered a special ‘treat’ and, as such, were the perfect choice to offer to guests, as expressed by Pietro and Elena (IT4):

*[GIs] make the products more attractive if you plan to have dinner with friends and you want to prepare something following a specific recipe. [...] If there are other people and*

*we have to cook, we try to get the best, freshest things. Also, because if you have guests for dinner, you have to please them. (IT4)*

As this case shows, the use of FQSs labels in our fieldwork was restricted to certain social and special occasions. However, this ‘quality dimension’ was only salient for a strict minority, as most participants showed neither practical engagement with FQS labels nor particular interest in them in their shopping practices.

### *5.3 Cooking and eating*

Observing how our participants consumed food through cooking and eating, we found that most practices were imbued with emotional and affective meanings connected to intimacy, memories and family traditions. Participants reconnected their current cooking and eating practices with past family experiences, as in the case of Christine:

*I used to spend all my time with my father, and my father was cooking all the time. So of course it's my father who passed on everything I know to me. [...] and my father was really ... when it comes to transmission, he really had the urge to pass on. [...] So it is true that, you're right, in every recipe I make, there's always a bit of my father in it. (FR5)*

Webs of sociability, especially within families, generate invitations to eat together on a regular basis (Figure 3). In many cases, our participants indicated the key role played by older family members in providing support for cooking and balancing work and private lives.

**Figure 3: Preparing homemade ravioli with the neighbour**



Source: own picture from fieldwork

The culinary activity was not limited to discourses on health, conviviality or taste, but encompassed also aesthetic discourses of beauty and attractiveness. When food was presented in or on beautifully decorated dishes and tables, participants displayed a sense of attachment and pleasure. From this perspective, the aesthetic of the set table also played an important role in shaping participants' attachment to the atmosphere linked to quality food.

Interestingly, we found that this sense of attachment, pleasure, and sometimes emotional connection, was the main reason behind the presence of FQS products in our participant's kitchens. Most of the families had a strong familiarity with a few staple ingredients, such as spices and oils, and used these products regularly and unreflexively. Through our ethnographic observations of cupboards and fridge tours, we noticed that these basic food products accounted for the majority of FQS purchased by participants. Importantly, when asked about the reasons behind the purchase of these specific FQS products, participants revealed that the labels were

not the reason why the products were bought. Participants were almost never aware of the presence (or the meaning) of the PDO/PGI logos on their staple foods; **in other words, participants bought products they knew and liked for their characteristics, or for their attachment to that ingredient, and not because of the logo, similarly to what noted by Eden et al. (2008).** A German participant explained that he did not pay attention to the quality label, or ‘subconsciously maybe, but not in a way that I would have reacted to it [PDO label]’ (GE1).

With a few exceptions pertaining to organic and some local/national quality labels, FQS products were bought, used or found in the households’ homes because of their taste, quality, or familiar attachment to the product, not because of the scheme level attributes associated with the labels. The case of internationally known PDOs such as Parmigiano Reggiano (which most participants across the seven countries had at home) is enlightening: our participants bought the cheese because they liked it, but in most cases without noticing or knowing that it was a PDO product. Additionally, as part of the dialogical conversation on our third visit to the households, we provoked reflection by studying a food package with a clear GI logo – in some cases appearing on the front and in the middle of the package. Participants took this exercise seriously, looked carefully at the package and read aloud different packaging information, but did not pay much attention to the logo. In our ethnographic observations, we noted that FQS labels remained mostly ‘unseen’.

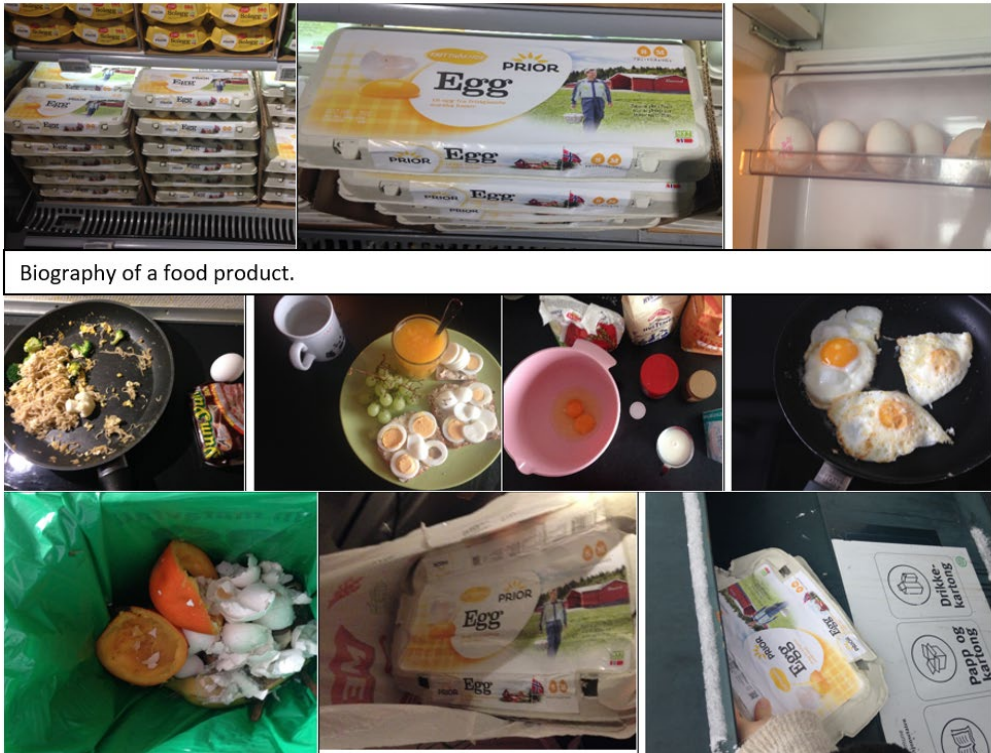
#### *5.4 Disposing*

In our multiple field visits, we cooked, ate, and disposed of food together with our participants. After cooking and eating, leftovers were cleared up and the kitchen cleaned. We found several strategies employed to minimise food waste, including avoiding overpackaged food, storing leftovers or creatively reusing leftovers for new recipes, and composting food waste or using

them as feed for pets and farm animals - however, nothing striking emerged in relation to FQS. Several families indicated they were trying to avoid plastic waste as much as possible, and the challenges associated with this issue generated feelings of frustration and guilt. For this reason, non-packaged local farm products, which may include organic foods, were chosen.

To explore whether superior quality food was in any way associated with reduction, or special treatment, of leftovers or food waste – for example, if the food was local and/or organic – we relied on participants’ food product biography assignments (Figure 4). When we asked the households to follow a FQS food product and take pictures of the phases of purchasing, cooking, eating and disposal, we could not discern whether the label had any impact. None of the households mentioned that possessing an FQS or other production/process quality attributes could be a valid reason for not wasting food.

**Figure 4: The biography of eggs – from planning to waste**



Source: own pictures from fieldwork

## **6. Dialogic reflection: a pragmatic regimes approach to the attitude-behaviour gap**

### *6.1 Regimes of engagement and FQs in everyday food consumption*

Our multi-method fieldwork placed a strong emphasis on the role of embedded knowledge and non-reflexivity, which aligns with literature stressing the importance of routines in food consumption (Miller, 1998; Warde, 2005). Observing food consumption at a practical level highlighted the importance of routines as well as constraints such as time, convenience and budget, and the embeddedness of practices in infrastructures, cultural values, material culture, technological devices, social norms and policies. This approach shed light on the role of FQS in everyday food practices, including their presence, their absence, the importance of a given situation in the use of quality food products, and the overall household dilemmas and complexity around food consumption choices. We observed how our participants navigated different regimes of engagement in their everyday food practices. They often moved between routinised and unreflexive habits to rational, intentional, and communicable plans. While different regimes of engagement are mutually exclusive (Thévenot, 2007), engagement in regimes is a dynamic process and is driven by different situations and rationalities.

Our fieldwork demonstrated that several everyday food practices and phases of consumption were often conducted with the agent being in the ‘regime of familiarity’. This means that food practices were non-reflexive, embodied, and routinised, conducted in a form of thinking and behaving based on ‘certainty’. We observed that FQS were not an integral part of everyday food practices and that choices regarding FQS were almost never performed from a regime of familiarity. It is important to note that the features linked to FQS are not tangible and cannot be

perceived, what we refer to as credence attributes, but are expressed through the label, which can act as a perceptual clue if known, recognised, customary and thus familiar. **However, and obviously because labels are second-hand information, lacking the direct face-to-face contact, as underlined by Sally Eden (Eden et al., 2008), the label did not work as a perceptual clue for most of our informants.**

Engagement in a plan emerged during shopping trips, especially in cases where we observed that the choice of a particular product could be affected by the researchers' presence, for example when sharing a meal or video filming. In some cases, we witnessed our participants shifting to the regime of planned actions, and considering buying an FQS product that was usually not part of their food practices. The regime of planned action can be both observed and discussed, where participants take a product, look at it, read information and explain the reason for their choice. FQS have their place in this regime when they facilitate planning and choosing. Information and knowledge are at the core of the regime of planned action. Concerning FQS, knowledge refers to ethical concerns based on fair values and sustainable principles, which we can define as invisible qualities. In this regime, FQS represent an excellent tool for emphasising product-invisible qualities to a consumer who is not necessarily familiar with them, for instance, as a guarantee of preserved cultural heritage. However, some participants decided to buy an FQS product for a special occasion when they thought a change in food quality is required, such as for the dinner with the researchers. In such situations, FQS became part of the engagement in a plan.

Although FQS were peripheral to our participants' everyday food consumption, FQS played an interesting role in the regime of justification. Almost all our informants showed good knowledge of food quality when we discussed food systems and the globalisation of food

production. In the dialogic conversations, they argued for better education in, and better knowledge about, FQS to improve sustainable consumption and the issues associated with globalised food production. From this perspective, FQS seemed to represent a ‘specification of the common good’ (Thévenot, 2007, p.7). In other words, FQS played an important role in our participants’ – indirect – sayings but not in our participants’ doings.

While this is conceptualised in the literature as an ‘attitude-behaviour gap’ and could thus be understood as a lack of coherency in our participants’ behaviours, we argue that we need to shift from this perceived ‘inconsistency’ to recognising the presence of multiple regimes of engagement that determine different actions in different situations. Some actions are performed within the regime of engagement in familiarity, based on routines, personal uses and preferences, where the consumers’ choices are based on feeling ‘at ease’, while others are performed through rational and intentional choices. In other words, a consumer acts in response to different ‘goods at stake’ (Thévenot, 2007) in each regime, depending on the situation. **One informant could refer to several regimes, without any incoherence, as each regime is a specific way of engaging the world, more or less public, more or less routinized.** The question then becomes not how to ‘bridge’ or ‘fill’ the gap, which has attracted considerable scholarly efforts (ElHaffar et al., 2020), but rather how everyday food practices navigate different regimes of engagement and, from a policy and managerial perspective, how FQS can be integrated into everyday food practices. **Agency and pragmatic adjustments are of paramount importance and informants are able to shift between regimes when facing different triggers (as unexpected or spontaneous variations) but considering causes for long-term changes, we now focus on life events shaping or “bifurcations”.**

## *6.2 Bifurcations as paths to change*

The literature on how major life changes – referred to here as ‘bifurcations’ (Barrey et al., 2016) impact on food habits provides useful insights for answering the question of how FQS can be integrated into everyday food practices. Several anthropological or sociological studies (Cardon, 2009; Lamine, 2008; Marshall and Anderson, 2002), emphasized that key life events such as getting married, having a child, becoming ill or moving to a different area might generate a legitimacy crisis, which in turn generates a questioning of familiar food habits. In other cases, influenced by media discourses on sustainability or health, consumers might feel a tension between their habits (familiar engagement) and their values (order of worth). Alternatively, consumers may remain in a state of tension between the sometimes-conflicting moralities around food (Andersen, 2011). These bifurcations in life trajectories create room for a shift from familiarised habits to new rational plans and new justifications. Our empirical data showed that informants could either remain in this tension or try to solve it by changing practices. In our fieldwork, the engagement in a plan was either linked to a specific occasion or a turn, the latter often a bifurcation as a phase of life or a moment of crisis in the general sense of the term. The fieldwork itself and the participants’ engagement with the researchers over a long period of time, might represent a bifurcation which drove our participants to question their food choices and engage in new plans.

In connection with this, we propose here a processual model of a shift from different regimes of engagement that emerged from our participants’ experiences of ‘ignoring’/‘not seeing’ the FQS labels at the beginning of our fieldwork to ‘acknowledging’/‘seeing’ them and potentially integrating them into their everyday food practices. We combine emic notions arising from the field, namely the concepts of ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’, and etic notions based on Thévenot’s work on regimes of engagement (Figure 5).

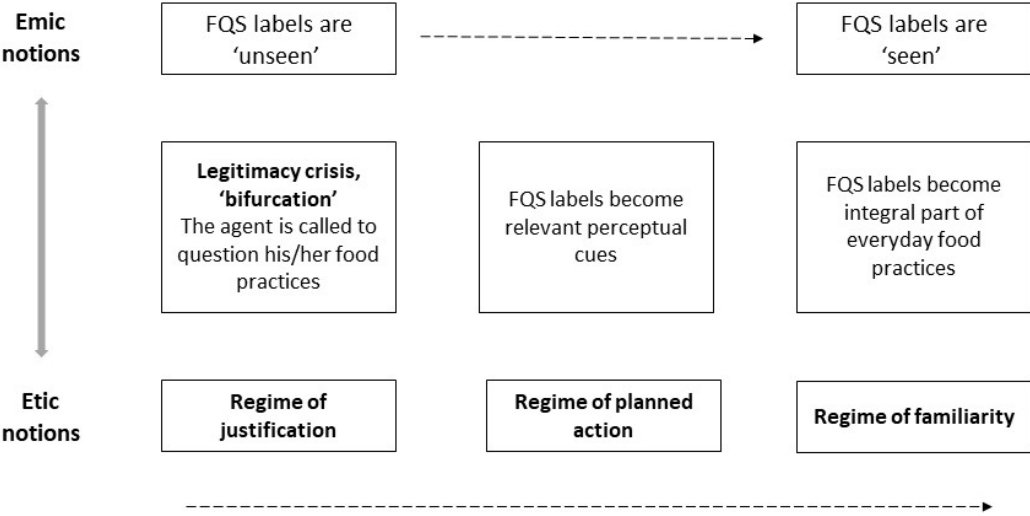
We have shown how FQS can be both ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’, part of both routines and discourses, and present in the three regimes of engagement related to different situations. The question is then to try to understand *why* some FQS are ‘seen’ and others ‘unseen’, an issue which the notion of the pragmatic regime of engagement allows us to better understand. **There is no real hierarchy between the three different engagement regimes, but in each situation, acting according to a specific regime will result as more suitable than acting according to the other regimes. Our data** tend to underline that the justification regime may precede the regime of planned action. In this process, labels **or the values underpinning them, such as supporting local producers**, might be part of discourses and justifications around food consumption but not be part of everyday habits. Following a period of crisis or bifurcation, the abstract knowledge consumers might have around FQS starts to ‘make **sense**’, **as in the case of families having children and shifting to the consumption of organic products** <sup>6</sup>. Consumers may begin to question their food choices and develop an interest in FQS (regime of justification) and engage in planned action to change their food habits. **For example, we observed the case of Claire, who moved to a new area with few shops and started to buy her groceries online: this change in her living area prompted her to reflect on the limitations of online shopping and how this constrained her engagement with FQS labels online.** In other words, moments of bifurcation represent key events where food reflexivity can be stimulated **(although they do not represent the only possible pathway to reflexivity, of course)**. FQS logos can then become relevant perceptual clues (referring to Thévenot) in the regime of planned action, which means that the ‘invisible’ device of logos becomes potentially ‘visible’. It is within the regime of engagement of planned action that the label begins to ‘make sense’ and is transformed from words, ideas

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<sup>6</sup> In a parallel prospective, organisational theory developed the concept of “sense-making” in a way close to Thevenot’s pragmatism: actors respond and adapt to the environment, look for specific clues as landmarks for action to organise the world, action is not seen as a mainly rational, conscious behavior. See for instance Weick et al. (2005)

and knowledge (in the regime of justification) into meaning in everyday food practices (in the regime of familiarity).

**Figure 5. Processual model illustrating a potential shift between regimes of engagement**



Source: Own model

Based on a convention theory approach, our model recognises that food practices tend to become habits: embodied behaviours belonging to the regime of familiarity based on perceptual clues. As Thévenot puts it, in the regime of familiarity ‘the good is more than a fixed habit because it involves a dynamic relation with an immediate milieu that is experienced. This type of engagement is linked to local, personal clues in the immediate surroundings’ (Thévenot, 2007, p.6). The characteristics of FQS are not immediately perceptual and linked to local surroundings, but can easily be assimilated into habits through the device of the logo.

It is however important to stress two caveats. First, while we present this processual model as linear, in practice the process might stop at any stage, and FQS might not become an integral part of everyday food habits. The purpose of the model is to illustrate a potential shift between different regimes of engagement, not a necessary and consequential chain of changes. Second, and more importantly, while this simplified and linear model of change may prove useful for policy initiatives, we emphasise that regimes of engagement are not static forms of thinking and behaving, and that agents shift across and navigate via different regimes in a dynamic and relational way.

## 7. As a matter of conclusion or as a premise for continuation

The empirical data presented in this paper aims at offering deeper insights into the role and use of FQS in European households' everyday food practices. The pragmatic perspective of regimes of engagement provided an enriching analytical framework for understanding the differences between 'sayings' and 'doings' and represents a novel way of understanding consumer engagement with FQS. The *regime of familiarity* is at the forefront when a person acts in a well-known and customary situation, for instance, cooking a favorite recipe at home. When performing an action in a standard way (as the general public would), a person engages in the *regime of planned action*, for example when following a new recipe; while a person debating over the common good engages in the *regime of justification*, as when a family meal turns into an argument about veganism. Scrutinising our empirical data through the three pragmatic regimes of engagement enabled us to shed new light on the attitude-behaviour gap and the apparent inconsistencies of action in consumption behaviour. Labels supporting FQS are supposed to help consumers make decisions by emphasizing the tangible quality characteristics of products. The fieldwork revealed very little knowledge among the informants about the logos

and limited interest in GI labels, despite their interest in the quality of food products **and the values underpinning FQS**. This discrepancy has been ascribed to the so-called attitude-behaviour gap. By taking a closer look at consumers' sayings and doings related to everyday food consumption and by building on convention theory's regimes of engagement, we argue that the gap might not be the main issue. The perceived gap between sayings and doings seems largely to be a matter of pragmatic regimes and consumer reflexivity about food consumption.

**The ethnographic work underlined that, in those cases when labels were used, they were part of food practices based on a certain level of practical knowledge, attachment, and habit towards the product. From this perspective, FQS were an integral part of the familiarity regime. The main question then becomes: how can labels that are 'unknown' and 'unseen' shift to the regime of familiarity, where they become routinized and embodied knowledge and practices? Our fieldwork showed the importance of stimulating reflexivity in order to integrate FQS into the regime of engagement in a plan. The planned action thus opens the door to a better knowledge of the label and to the potential to integrate the label into everyday consumption practices. Engaging in a plan underlines a will for change, a way for consumers to show agency towards food with special qualities. Although regulations and infrastructures can play a fundamental role in guiding food consumption practices, we argue that stimulating the action in a plan could be a potential path to promoting the consumption of FQSs and, ultimately, the values underpinning these schemes.**

Obtaining new knowledge, gaining inspiration, and changing one's mind or type of argument for action has nothing to do with incoherence within one given regime, but rather represents a constant adjustment, an evolution and an adaptation that reflects the cultural dynamic and transformation of food practices. What is most interesting is that this process of dynamic transformation inherently builds on interactivity between the regimes, underlining the constant

tension and reflection of the agent. By attempting to characterise and define the usual frames of comprehension used by actors to be themselves within their environment, this theory also sheds light on the dynamism and interactivity between the three regimes, which is a precious analytical angle for understanding sustainable consumption practices and ‘sayings’ and ‘doings’ related to FQS.

We conclude outlining limitations and possible avenues for future research stemming from our empirical results. First, we observed an interplay in our families’ behaviours between everyday consumption and special occasion consumption related to FQS that future research could explore to expand our knowledge of FQS and consumption behaviour at the family level. Second, while we did not emphasise geographical and national differences, as we aimed at studying participants’ engagement with FQS from an everyday perspective, national contexts play an important role in shaping families' food practices; future research could thus build on our model to explore in detail how national cultures and food habits influence the engagement with FQS. Similarly, as our aim was to explore the dynamics of shifts and interactions between regimes of engagements, rather than the specificities of the different labels and schemes, we did not investigate how consumers interact with the specificities of the different FQS; future research could thus explore how agents engage with different types of European Food quality schemes. Finally, while we outlined a potential shift among regimes of engagement related to everyday practices and FQS, there is scope for future research to investigate specifically how to trigger shifts from one regime to another as a way to foster FQS consumption. We believe this is a fruitful avenue for research aimed at understanding how to operationalise our model, and ultimately how to promote the consumption of FQS products.

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