

## **RESPONSIBLE AND ACTIVE: SENIOR CITIZENS AND THEIR ANTIDOTES TO FEAR**

*Fear and Senior citizens* is often thought of as an inseparable twosome. Given that citizens over the age of 65 form nearly 20% of the population and are forecast to increase to 23% in 2020, it is clear that if the two go hand in hand our country's destiny would be to become necessarily old and scared.

But like so many other recent stereotypes, senior citizens have disproved this one too. Their relationship with fear should not be made too much of, because they have shown that in their daily lives they are able to use a potent antidote, that of individual responsibility, even in the smallest details of their lives.

For example, when the quality of life and environmental protection are involved, Senior citizens do not merely pass on the responsibility to politicians or the government and what they can or should do. They emphasise that an effective solution also, and sometimes especially, depends on how much individual citizens get involved, changing their own way of life.

The fact is that over 53% of senior citizens bring the responsibility of politicians in every country to the fore, stating that environmental protection is a priority. Over 48% of them feel that citizens have a responsibility and need to change their habits and consumption patterns in order to respond to new environmental protection needs; they (25.5%) consider international agreements or the role of companies and the environmental impact of their actions (17.9%) much less important (tab. 1).

The data confirms that these generations feel much more strongly and directly involved and that they will not pass the responsibility for the solution to those that rule them (although they are aware of the contribution that can and should come from politics), but prefer to be actively responsible in practice.

*"Changing ourselves in order to change society"* is the true motto of Senior Citizens, and from this point of view an original rediscovery of behaviour and practices is taking place, which in previous times was absolutely normal and therefore an inheritance of the generations which are now our seniors; a certain amount of austerity and simplicity, do-it-yourself, home production on a very small scale, for themselves and their families.

In this regard, 87.5% of senior citizens economize on electricity, switching off lights when they go out of rooms, using low energy bulbs etc., 86.6% do not waste tap water, 66.1% grow pot plants such as parsley, basil, oregano etc., almost 65% carry out small repairs at home themselves (electrical plug points, small plumbing and sewing jobs, etc.), almost 53% try to use their cars as little as possible, about 48% use public transportation, 36.3% do not use plastic carrier bags to do their shopping, and 21% cultivate a kitchen garden (tab. 2).

Far from being scared by the new environmental emergencies and the changes in behaviour that this calls for, Senior citizens show that they are culturally and practically prepared to adopt *eco-oriented* behaviour en masse, with well-known positive effects.

Other eco sensitive socially oriented behaviour practices include the purchase of organic products by over 35% of those interviewed (10% of them regularly and the others at least once a month), about 30% purchase fair trade products, and 12% buy ethnic foods from countries other than their own (tab. 3).

With regard to the important problems to be faced on a world level in the future, 49.5% of senior citizens feel that world hunger and poverty are the most urgent, 37.1% feel that war and peace are important, 27.9% - environmental pollution, 17.5% speak of the depletion of non-renewable resources (especially oil, 14.9% identify the need for social justice and fair resource distribution between developed and developing countries (tab. 4).

**Table. 1 - Important factors for protecting the environment and the quality of life, according to educational level (. % values)**

<i>In order to protect the environment and the quality of life the most important thing according to you is:</i>	None or elementary school	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	University	Total
Politicians in every country should give priority to environmental protection	64.5	48.2	51.2	52.0	53.5
Citizens habits and consumption should change	38.4	61.9	45.1	46.6	48.2
There should be international agreements between all countries which prioritise the environment on a global level	19.0	21.6	27.9	38.5	25.5
Companies should be more careful about the environmental impact of their activities	9.3	18.3	21.4	22.3	17.9
We should listen more to ecologists and environmental protection experts	4.3	4.6	18.9	13.5	11.1

The total is over 100 as multiple responses were allowed

**Table.2 - Eco-oriented behaviour of Senior citizens, according to geographical area (% values)**

	North West	North East	Centre	South and islands	Total
Economizing on electricity (turning out lights when leaving a room, using low energy bulbs, etc)	89.6	86.1	86.4	87.2	87.5
Not wasting tap water	83.8	85.3	87.9	89.1	86.6
Growing herbs in pots (parsley, basil, oregano, etc.)	57.8	57.1	78.2	71.1	66.1
Doing small repairs at home (electrical repairs, small plumbing jobs, mending etc.)	65.0	63.7	63.4	66.4	64.9
Using the car as little as possible	60.4	57.1	43.6	49.5	52.8
Using public transport	55.2	58.8	53.7	30.2	47.8
Not using plastic bags for shopping	48.6	37.1	30.7	28.4	36.3
Cultivating a kitchen garden	19.7	15.1	33.1	18.0	21.0

The total is over 100 as multiple responses were allowed

Source: Censis-Salute La Repubblica survey, 2008

**Table. 3 – Buying certain products for selves and families, according to educational level (val. %)**

	None or elementary school	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	University	Total
<b>Organic fruit and vegetables (grown without pesticides and processed without preservatives)</b>					
<i>Yes</i>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>42.4</b>	<b>35.9</b>	<b>45.9</b>	<b>35.6</b>
- regularly (at least once a month)	5.4	14.9	9.9	8.1	10.0
- occasionally (less than once a month)	16.1	27.5	26.0	37.8	25.6
<i>Never</i>	<b>78.5</b>	<b>57.6</b>	<b>64.1</b>	<b>54.1</b>	<b>64.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Fair trade products (e.g. chocolate, coffee and other food products from developing countries)</b>					
<i>Yes</i>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>34.7</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>58.1</b>	<b>29.6</b>
-regularly (at least once a month)	2.5	13.4	1.9	11.5	6.2
- occasionally (less than once a month)	7.5	21.3	26.8	46.6	23.4
<i>Never</i>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>71.3</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>70.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Ethnic foods, different from those of my country (for example oriental, Mexican or Indian food, etc.)</b>					
<i>Yes</i>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>23.7</b>	<b>12.0</b>
- regularly (at least once a month)	4.3	1.2	1.0	1.4	1.9
- occasionally (less than once a month)	5.4	7.9	10.7	22.3	10.1
<i>Never</i>	<b>90.3</b>	<b>90.9</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>76.3</b>	<b>88.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Censis-Salute La Repubblica survey, 2008

**Table. 4 - Opinion about the main problems that we will have to face at a world level, according to educational level (% value)**

Which are the main problems that the world will have to face in the future	None or elementary school	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	University	Total
Hunger and poverty in the world, especially in some parts	44.4	44.5	56.2	48.6	49.5
War and peace	49.8	32.3	35.8	27.7	37.1
Environmental contamination	19.7	31.1	32.9	20.3	27.9
Depletion of non renewable resources (especially petrol)	10.8	26.2	15.7	16.9	17.5
Social justice and fair resource distribution between developed and developing countries	12.5	11.6	14.5	28.4	14.9
Global warming	11.1	11.3	13.4	18.2	12.9
Migration	14.7	14.0	11.7	10.8	12.9
Relationships between the great religions	7.2	5.8	1.9	8.8	5.0



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The total is over 100 as multiple responses were allowed

*Source:* Censis-Salute La Repubblica survey, 2008