

# Practicing being green

## *Ordinary consumption and inequalities in France since the 1980s*

### ***Abstract:***

Injunction to greening lifestyles, which has spread in the public arena since the early 1990s, raises sociological questions about the heterogeneity of French households' consumption styles and the evolution of social inequalities. Do the differences in the ways of consuming, polluting, and conforming to the injunctions to have greener lifestyles reproduce or renew former mechanisms of stratification and social differentiation? How do inequalities related to social class and income, but also to age, gender and residential conditions affect ordinary consumption styles and *de facto* the observance of an emerging norm of eco-citizenship? Do the material conditions experienced by individuals as a resource or a constraint (whether residential, budgetary, linked to household composition or to the nature of the professional activity) supplant the dispositions acquired in childhood (tastes, values and habits) in understanding such divides? This thesis provides answers to these three questions.

Based on the statistical exploitation of data from the Family Budget Surveys from 1985 to 2017 (INSEE), the Survey on Household Environmental Practices 2016 (CGDD/SDeS), interviews and web data, this PhD thesis participates in renewing the analysis of the social stratification of lifestyles and the methodological tools to study it. By focusing on ordinary consumption practices—related to food, energy, transport, equipment, and clothing—it explores the dynamics of social change across generations and over the life course. It thus sheds light on the way in which such practices have been renewed or perpetuated over the past 30 years in relation to the development of concerns for the preservation of the environment.

This thesis shows that the new ethical and environmental meanings of ordinary consumption practices do not weaken the divides that have structured household consumption styles since the 1980s in France. These remain surprisingly stable and reflect, in the sphere of consumption, the unequal positions occupied in the social and residential spaces: they distinguish between integrated and excluded consumers, and between locally rooted and connected consumers. Inequalities in such ordinary lifestyles first depend on unequal material conditions of existence (related to budget, residence, family, professional activity). Thus, from 1985 to 2017, exclusion from ordinary consumption shows forms of frugality associated with low income, unemployment or inactivity, and housing insecurity. Lifestyles depend secondarily on dispositions acquired and transmitted during socialization, and only marginally on variations in environmental concern and willingness to conform to a norm of eco-citizenship.

The normative injunctions and the new registers of social distinction that arise from the valorization of forms of anti-consumerism overlap with rigid forms of lifestyle inequalities, in which socially excluded households—poor, rather young, and urban—are the champions of frugality, and farmers and their children are the main proponents of locally rooted consumption.