



**WP3-1 Deliverable**

# **Final report consumer and consumption issues**

**Halal and Kosher Focus Groups Results**

Dr. Florence Bergeaud-Blackler  
*IREMAM (CNRS) & Université de la Méditerranée, Aix-Marseille.*

Dr Adrian Evans, *University of Cardiff.*  
Dr Ari Zivotofsky, *Bar Ilan University.*

Contacts :

Dr Florence Bergeaud-Blackler

IREMAM  
Maison Méditerranéenne  
des Sciences de l'Homme  
5, rue du Château de  
l'Horloge  
P 647

F-13094 Aix-en-Provence  
Cedex 2

[florence@blackler.eu](mailto:florence@blackler.eu)

Website : [www.dialrel.eu](http://www.dialrel.eu)

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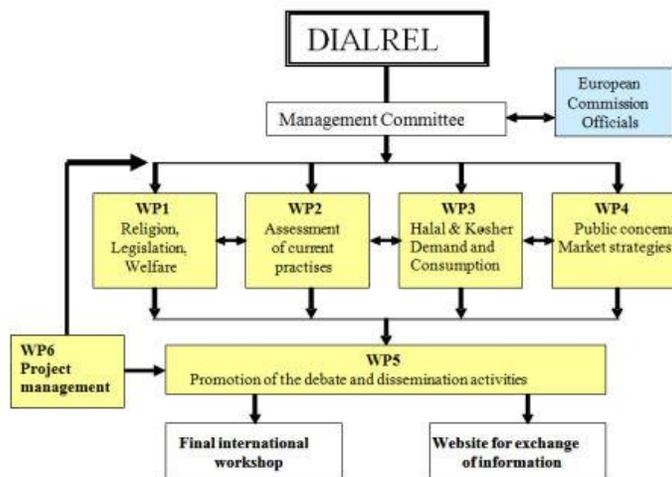
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Reports written with Dr.Adrian Evans (Cardiff University) and Dr.Ari Zivotofski (Bar Ilan University).

# dialrel

The main aims of the DIALREL project<sup>1</sup> are to explore the conditions for promoting the dialogue between interested parties and stakeholders and facilitating the adoption of good religious slaughter practices. The additional aim is to review and propose a mechanism for implementation and monitoring of good practices.

A work plan consisting of 6 work packages has been prepared (WP1 to WP6). The implementation is to be achieved by consultations, gathering, exchanging and reviewing of information and networking throughout. Dissemination activities are involving internet site(s) for networking and organised workshops that provides the platform for debate, exchange of information and consensus. [www.dialrel.eu](http://www.dialrel.eu)



Graphical presentation of the components showing their interdependencies

Disclaimer : *The views expressed in this report are those of the Project staff and do not represent any official view of the European Commission.*

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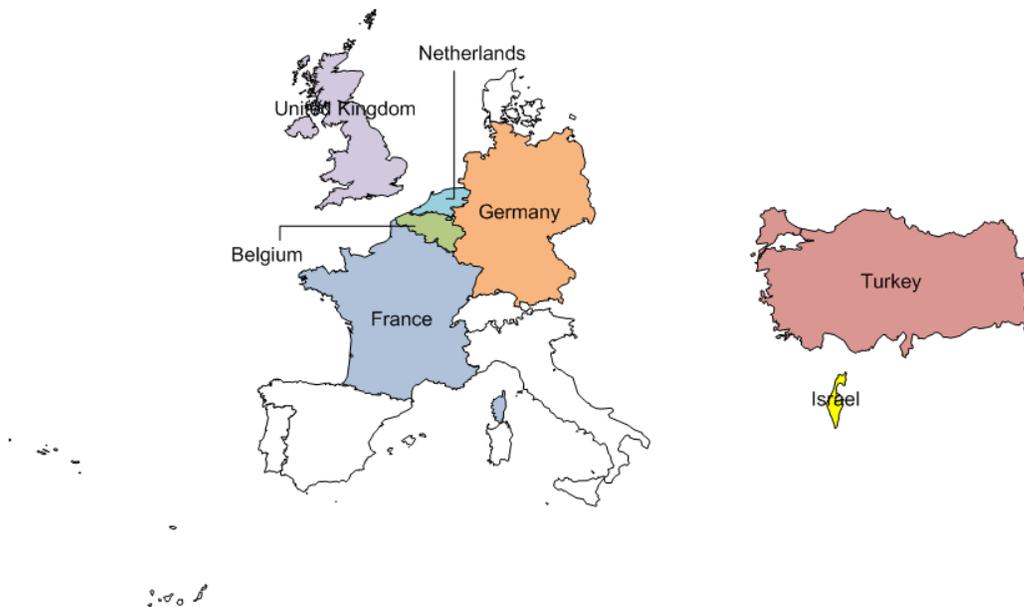
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## AIM OF WP3

This workpackage (WP3) is mainly devoted to building up a synthesis on halal and kosher consumption as well as kosher and halal consumer attitudes, beliefs, and concerns towards religious slaughter in selected European Union (EU) and associate countries. Although some legal, animal health, and welfare aspects have been investigated so far, very few studies have taken into account the consumption dimension. Therefore, WP3 aims to fill in the lacuna in knowledge in this area by organizing targeted comparative studies on halal and kosher consumption in Europe. The objective of this work package is to build on available data, set up new or modified methodologies, and stimulate the exchange of views that will lead to improved practices.

Activities of WP3 are intended to describe the current situation using available information, and elaborate on new methodologies in order to facilitate systematic collection and analysis of subsequent information in the future. This report explore consumer concerns, knowledge, and information relating to the religious slaughter process as well as halal and kosher products by gathering information and carrying out consumer studies in member and associate countries using Focus Groups (FG) in seven countries including five EU countries : Belgium, France, Germany, Israel, The Netherlands, Turkey and United Kingdom.



## 1. Why have we used the Focus Group method ?

WP3 is expected to collect kosher/halal consumer opinions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding religious slaughter practices in 7 countries, in a systematic way in order to generate working hypotheses and to allow, as far as possible, comparisons between countries and between the two religious communities (Muslim, Jews).

This first ever survey, covering consumer opinion on halal and kosher slaughter at this scale should be considered more as an exploratory study than an extensive in-depth analysis. It should be seen as a preliminary step for a future extensive and intensive survey throughout Europe (in a further programme) that permits a deep understanding of the issues and that can lead to generalizations.

Focus Group amongst available methods: To evaluate and ascertain consumer opinions and concerns, a wide set of investigative methods, both quantitative and qualitative, is available to the researcher. Quantitative surveys allow for generalizations, but it necessitates precise hypotheses to generate structured and standardized questions posed to a well thought composed sample of interviewee. It is not adapted to start an investigation. Qualitative methods are better suited to address consumer opinion at this very first stage of the research. One can distinguish two main situations : Individual interviews, and collective interviews. Individual interview allow the use of several semi-structured or structured face to face interview situation using several methods. Consumption and attitude towards products have been widely addressed in marketing using methods such as laddering (Means-End Theory ) to collect personal values. Repeated many times with a representative sample of interviewee, this situation of communication allow for rich collection of information and in-depth analysis.

Within collective interview we can distinguish between “group interview” and “focus group discussion”. The first consist in doing collectively what could as well be done during a face to face interview, the advantage being a gain of time, the disadvantage laying in the weakness of the trust relation between the interviewee and the researcher that can be in fine counterproductive. Unlike the group interview, the Focus Group discussion method creates the conditions for discursive interactions between the participants. It distinguishes itself from group interviews “by the explicit use of group interaction to generate data”<sup>2</sup>.

In social sciences, FG discussion are mainly used as qualitative method to explore people’s experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns. They can be used at different step of a research, either at the beginning of an investigation, or at the end to complete or interpret

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<sup>2</sup> Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory and Practice by Rosaline S. Barbour (Editor), Jenny Kitzinger (Editor) ", p5.

information gathered by other means. We are using the FG method to optimize the preparation to the drawing of a questionnaire by identifying : issues at stake regarding halal and kosher consumption and opinions and concerns on religious slaughter; their agenda and terminology. Indeed, during the FG discussion, the participants have generated their own questions, frames and concepts, using their own vocabulary and according to their own priorities.

The optimal use of FG also depends on the researcher's aim. We have chosen the FG method because it is appropriate to observe the "construction" of viewpoints. When the collective situation of communication is taken into account, (and not just as a way to minimise the cost/time of the research) it allows to analyse how "accounts are articulated, censured, opposed and changed through social interaction and how this relates to peer communication and group norms"<sup>3</sup>.

Different methods lead to different kind of results. Investigations often use a combination of several methods, FG and in-depth interview, FG and large quantitative survey depending on the topic and the sought demonstration. Here, the choice of Focus Group is mainly explained by the exploratory character of this study (in the frame of a Specific Support Action that does only fund synthesis and /or exploratory research). Kosher and Halal market and consumer studies have been investigated mainly by market players, a few have been done by sociologists and anthropologist in the US, France, Belgium, Israel and in Malaysia<sup>4</sup>. Amongst them, a few studies are devoted to consumer attitudes, practices and determinants and within these issues addressed, some have been related to consumer opinion regarding religious slaughter while this is a cornerstone of the production process of kosher and halal and a highly controversial social issue.

For Morgan<sup>5</sup>, the Focus Group method is the predilection method to building a survey. It offers "a rupture" in the tendency of replicating existing items from existing questionnaires because of their assumed reliability and validity. "To the extent that the borrowed items were generated in "armchair" fashion, rather than through contact with the potential survey participants they may yield a thoroughly reliable replication of: an essentially invalid measure." FG can indeed enrich the initial researcher plan by bringing up a new set of relevant dimensions in the domain, with the respondent words that better describe their worlds and references. This reduces misinterpreting the survey questions.

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan D.L. (1997, 2nd Edition) *Focus groups as qualitative research*. London: Sage., p25

## 2. Limitations of the Focus Group method

In all sciences a researcher can only observe and measure what his or her instrument is capable of observing and measuring. Any choice of method has always consequences on the results obtained.

We are aware that our results only focus on opinions on practices, and not on practices themselves, on opinions and concerns built by the participants before discussion but also during the interactions. Even if our aim was not to report weighted opinions in relation to a representative sample, we are aware that less than 50 people in Europe for each quality of food (halal and kosher), do not cover all possible opinions in relation to the multiple issues that were addressed. But if the limited numbers of individuals participating in qualitative research studies can be seen as a barrier to generalisation, they are balanced by the advantages that focus groups bring in terms of the depth of the analysis and through the interactive dimension.

Another possible limitation is that focus group can reduce the expression of individual points of view and be therefore an inhibiting and distortive factor. Social scientists have demonstrated first that it was not always the case, and second when it is, the inhibition or distortion are in themselves interesting information that "makes sense" and therefore needs to be interpreted. In our Focus Group it was clear that some opinions could not be expressed because they were felt to be controversial or personal and participants were not ready to argue about them. Some felt a strong collective pressure and could not express non conform opinions. For instance it was difficult for some participants to admit and express they could not entirely commit to eat halal as much as they would have thought they should. Our choice of giving priority to the diversity of educational, professional background, as well as gender, age, nationalities may have had an impact on the results. Last important critique addressed to focus group method is the interference with the object studied that is the possibility given to the "facilitator" to steer the discussion in one way rather than another to obtain the desired results. This can occur and in this case it is important that the analyses address this.

Qualitative research is often suspected for leaving too much leeway to the researcher in interpreting the data, but this is true for all method in all sciences, the important point is therefore the extent to which the researchers recognise this interpretative responsibility, make it explicit, and attempt to redress possible biases.

### 3. The discussion guide

WP3 is dealing with consumer "concerns, awareness, expectations", i.e with consumer opinions on what they think, what they think they do and what they think should be done when it comes to their kosher, or halal consumption. To investigate opinions generally requires a pre-knowledge of such opinions in order to ask the appropriate questions in the right order, and to be able later to analyze and compare the answers. When there is no formal pre-knowledge, qualitative methods such as group discussion or FG can be used to explore opinions, and for some of them, in the process of their social construction. Simplistically we can consider two type of opinions either stabilized or unstabilized : unstabilised or unstable is identifiable by the fact it becomes quickly controversial, while stabilized our stable opinions are not discussed at all (discussant may not agree or may agree, they do not feel the need to discuss it). Aiming to study consumer "concerns, awareness and expectations", we are particularly targeting unstabilised and largely controversial opinions. But no conversation can reflect only controversial issues. Trust is needed for the participant of a FG to engage in a conversation, therefore stabilized opinions occurs, and if they do not, they need to be introduced.

We have adopted a **discussion guide** including questions that we expected to discussions and sometime controversies, and others that we expect to be more descriptive or normative. The discussion guide has included challenging and relaunching questions for the themes expected to lead to unstable opinions to avoid early termination in case of pressure.

1-The discussion guide: themes and questions introduced to the participants, what content and what we are expecting from the discussions. The discussion guide is an outline of key issues and areas of questioning used to guide a qualitative interview or a group discussion. In the discussion guide, we have used suggestive open ended questions, avoiding closed yes/no question. For the most expected controversial issues, we have used open probe, question asked in such a way that one do not expect the way in which it will be answered, as well as leading and provocative comment.(example : Closed probe: Is the halal/kosher meat too expensive ? Open probe: What do you think should be done to reduce the price of halal/kosher meat ? Instead of a question such as "Do you prefer this.. ?", we have used non-directive prompts like "What is your reaction to ..?")

*Question that have led to 'stable' opinions.*

**Frequency and place of purchase and consumption** are typically leading to uncontroversial opinion in a group of participants (if they are coming from different households!). This type of data is better collected by other type of method than FG, but is useful to understand the coherence of the locutor discourse, it is for instance a part of the strategy of "presenting oneself to the other". **Culinary skills and preference** does not lead

to critics, they have a defrosting power if use at the beginning of the session, they help participant to engage the conversation, they inform participants and moderator on their origin, which can be a trigger of controversies Questions related to the **level of knowledge on ritual slaughter** are really not debatable neither, they are more factual data even if they are, again , part of a strategy of self presentation. These questions are indications but cannot be treated and analysed as such.

*Questions that have led to controversies and 'unstable' opinions (from the less to the most controversial issues ):*

**Qualities attributed to H/K food with special focus on meat.** What are the qualities attributed to H/K foods and in particular to meat ? What are the motivations to eat H/K ? Quality is a multidimensional concept combining several dimensions and characteristics of the product. We expected participants to identify the specificities of foods by experienced or inexperienced comparison to similar conventional foods. We were aware that some participants never consumed conventional foods, but we still did not consider them unable to compare other similar foods. As we said earlier food quality includes material and immaterial components. Furthermore, opinion is not always linked to experience. Indeed it is a major contribution from the sociology to have demonstrate in many circumstances how much independent and unrelated are opinion and practice.

**Religious references :** Who is legitimate to tell about halal/kosher ? Whom do they refer to when it comes to religious and H/K knowledge in particular ? The participant have been invited to tell about the religious institutions, figure or trend they follow. We expected this issue to be matter of discussion since religious interpretations are generally plural. In an industrial context, with evolving technologies, Halal and kosher norms have to be defined and therefore are matter of discussion between religious and non religious experts. Questions were supposed to identified the different religious trends the participants belong to as well as to measure the level of awareness of religious debates on issues of slaughter.

**Consumption commitment .** How much participant feel committed to eat halal / kosher? How do they respond in a situation where they cannot totally control their food intake : invitation (restaurant, friends), canteens ? This issue is not controversial as long as it is a self appreciation which does not imply any judgment towards others. But the answer were highly dependent on the collective context, and partially built in the FG scene. In particular for Halal commitment was highly valued. The honesty of the speaker was scrutinized by others, or at least the speaker felt like it, therefore their answer were sometime driven by this feeling.

**Attitude towards animal and animal welfare :** The project aims to explore the conditions for promoting the dialogue between interested parties and stakeholders and facilitating the adoption of good religious slaughter practices. The quality of the dialogue is highly

dependent of a good diagnosis on the opinions and belief of meat coming from animals ritually slaughtered. Moderator have been asked to give emphasis to the exploration of attitude towards animal and animal welfare in the group discussion. Participants have been invited to tell which meaning they attribute to animal welfare, to what they refer their opinions to. It is not always easy to talk about animal death and suffering. To invite participants to talk concretely about the process of killing, they were asked to compare slaughter at the time of festival and slaughter for ordinary consumption. Considering the importance of animal welfare opinions within the Dialrel project, 'stunning' issues was introduced by the moderator in case this was not already raised up by participants. The issue was controversial where the mediatisation of animal welfare organisation public campaign against ritual slaughter was the highest.

**Control, trust and responsibilities** : Do participant think there is a need for H/K control ? Do they trust the H/K guarantees ? If they do, to what extent do they feel responsible in the control process ? What are their responses to insufficient guarantees ? These issues led to unstable opinion because of mediatisation of food scandal, the daily experience of having to trust foods.

**Participant's feeling of social acceptability towards religious slaughter methods and H/K consumption.** Antisemitism and racism are amongst the most critical political and social issues in modern and multicultural western societies. We expected this issues to be the most controversial ones, that could lead to open conflicts. We asked the participants how much participants feel comfortable to consume H/K in a secularised society, do they feel discriminate or not and why ? To avoid this question to lead to open conflicts and reduce the impact on the discussion, it was placed towards the end of the discussion guide.

#### 4. Criteria at the time of recruitments.

Ten participants have been recruited according to the following criteria, aiming to have 8 persons being present the day of the group discussion. They ought to be :

- ✓ Resident in the country (imperative)
- ✓ Born in the country or arrived before the age of 7 (imperative).
- ✓ Regular halal eaters (at least once a week.) (imperative).
- ✓ Represent diversity of religious trends in the country (in term of religious practice intensity and in terms of religious identity).
- ✓ Good balance of gender (ideally 4 and 4)
- ✓ Aged between 18-60 included, if possible half of the sample were asked to be less than 35 years old

- ✓ They should not be from the same family

As much as possible, they should not know each other (not a group of friends, not a group of colleague) because it increase the (self)social control over the conversation.

Although we have not selected participants on the basis of their social class, income, or level of formal education, we did not seek social homogeneity. Conversely, we thought it would be important to select them within different social class, income, level of education, as much as possible. For example avoid recruiting a group of academics, or a group of cleaners, or workers in the same enterprise etc.

Following details about the participants have been recorded before or after the FG : (a) Level of formal education (using a three level classification low-medium-high), (b) Some indicator of income or social class (using a four level classification)

## 5. Method of recruitment of participants

The participants were recruited with the help of dialrel partners. The recruitment of 10 participants per halal focus group per country was made on the basis of the criteria written down in a “guide for FG organisation” that was distributed to the consortium.

Before the discussion, in each country, a screening questionnaire was sent to each participant to make sure they all met the relevant criteria, that the participants were not belonging to the same family and were not closed friends. Confidentiality of data being required in all countries we have not reported the names of the participants in the attributes tables.

All the focus groups were audio-taped, video-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then entered into *NVivo* designed for the analysis of qualitative research. As Qualitative research software, *Nvivo* helped to manage, shape and make sense of unstructured information by providing a logical, structured means to order, sort, and categorise the transcribed text from the focus groups. The transcripts were organised into topics by coding appropriate sections of the text.

Data were coded through nodes in a systematic way and then reorganised in topics following procedures used in Grounded Theory: a research method in which the theory is developed “from the data”, rather than the other way around .



## KOSHER FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Dr. Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, IREMAM, Université de la Méditerranée (France)

Dr. Ari Zivotofsky, Bar Ilan University (Israel)



## 1. Description of the group participants / country

Participants to the 6 kosher consumer focus groups were aged from 18 to 68. In Brussels, 8 participants including 5 females and 3 males were aged from 19 to 64. There was a well balanced repartition of (self defined) religious trends including 3 orthodox, 2 traditional, 2 liberal, 1 convert. There was a high correspondance between level of education and the income (middle) . Participants defined themselves as being from Belgium origin. One indicated that her family was coming from Turkey.

In Berlin, 8 participants including 5 males and 3 females were aged from 19 to 53.

The group was dominated by the presence of orthodox: 2 orthodox; 2 orthodox/conservative; 1 orthodox/traditional. The 2 other participants (self) defined themselves as liberal, conservative/traditional. The level of education was rather high, and the level of income from low to medium. Four of the participants defined themselves as Germans, 3 declared to be from Russian origin.

Regarding the recruitments, one of the problems was that for historical reasons there seemed to be few Jews born in Germany. Most had come later in life, many of them from Russia. Therefore, conditions of nationality and place of birth were lifted for Germany. That helped considerably to make people find the search criteria more realistic and therefore raise their willingness to help me. Another difficulty was that many did not want to give me their address or phone number but only their email address.

In Bordeaux, 8 participants including 5 males and 3 females were aged from 23 to 64.

They declare to be French and for one person French Moroccan origin.

In regard to religious affiliation, participants could not self define easily : 3 declared to feel close to traditionals, 2 orthodox, 1 liberal, and one could not define himself. 1 person was non jew.

The level of education was from moderate to high, and the income from low to middle income. The recruitment of participant was difficult. The different institutions have been contacted: consistoire de Bordeaux, -centre communautaire culturel, association des étudiants juifs, association des femmes (n'a rien donné), boucheries kasher (n'ont rien donné). The jewish community in Bordeaux is rather small with a low visibility but high connections between its members. It was not easy to find non jewish kosher eaters.

In Cardiff, 8 participants including only one female were aged from 19 to 68. All Jewish participants declared to be British with origins from the British islands, and one from (?). Participants were regular kosher eaters but mostly non-practicing. Just two of them declared to be regular practicing of religion, but they did not identify any trend they belong to. One participant was Noahite, one participant was Muslim (and occasional kosher eater).

Recruitment was difficult. Most of participants were recruited in the University, with insufficient balance of gender, age, social situations compared to the criteria given in the guide for organizers.

In Tel Aviv, 10 participants were recruited and present during the FG, including 6 males and 4 females aged from 23 to 59. They were born in Israel for five, born in the USA for three of them, one was born in Russia, and one in the UK. All but one participant were having difficulties to affiliate themselves to a particular religious group. Three self-defined themselves as secular (non-religious), 2 religious, 2 orthodox, 1 ultra-orthodox, 1 traditional/orthodox, 1 refused to “play this game”. Rather high education, middle to high income.

## 2. Shopping practices

The kosher consumers in general felt that there is both low demand and low availability of kosher meat products. These two phenomena are obviously inter-related and it is difficult to ascribe a cause-and-effect. In the FG various reasons were suggested.

The low demand is explained by several factors. The Jewish population of western Europe has a large secular component that is little connected to their religion, and thus does not eat strictly kosher and does not demand kosher meat. In addition, although it is concentrated in several population centers it is highly mobile and in some places it is low density.

The low availability of kosher meat was explained by FG participants as having several causes. They pointed to the existence of monopolies or other situations that limit competition and keep prices artificially inflated. Price was mentioned in several contexts. Alexandra, from Berlin, stated: “Yes, what a pity, but it is also very expensive. For a student it is... . I think Jehoschua understands me here. And other than that I eat at the synagogue, if I eat meat. In the past I have eaten more often, but then I was at the Jewish secondary school, so not too long a time ago. But there they had meat every day really.” Large supermarket vs. local kosher butcher is not an issue for the kosher consumer in Europe because in general kosher meat products are simply not available in large supermarkets.

There was also concern about the lack of uniformity in the certification (“hechsher”) process and the large numbers of competing certifying agencies. While this sounds like the opposite of monopolies and a free market that should generate competition, consumers found it unnecessary, confusing, and, in their opinion, in the long run detrimental to increasing supply. For example, in Brussels it was pointed out that the available hechsher and the consumer demanded hechsher differ, leading to lower availability. There was also a feeling of certain standards being imposed, such as the lack of availability of “non-glatt” meat. The availability in places in which it is low has difficulty increasing because of the consumer habit of buying in large quantity in areas of high availability and storing. Thus, Phillip lives in Rotterdam, not far from Antwerp. He imagines that Jews go shopping in Antwerp once a month, purchase in bulk, and put in their freezer. Another effect of low availability is that the less committed consumer will simply give up. Harry, from the Cardiff FG explained: “I buy my meat [non-kosher] from Cardiff market because I really have given up any attempts to buy kosher meat since I was about 20.” Some consumers try to influence the situation through their buying power. Gregor, from the Berlin FG, said “I spend my money evenly at the few kosher shops we have. And it is a little sad that Gabriel’s [Jan’s restaurant] does not buy at ..., because I find the supply situation very sad in Berlin.”

**Further study points:**

1) Price issues. Is kosher meat really more expensive in the EU than non-kosher? Study the perception of the kosher consumer – does consumer think he/she is paying more for his/her purchase and by how much; does the non-kosher consumer have any opinion on the price of kosher vs. non-kosher meat, and what are relationships between the prices of kosher and non-kosher meat. What are the reasons for this difference ?

2) Future trends as they relate to affiliation to religion. As noted many secular Jews are not particular about kosher. In the Halal study it was found that the younger generation is more interested in Halal than their parents. It would be interesting to look at such trends in the Jewish market. While the children of parents who eat strictly kosher are likely to continue the trend, the question is how many children of non-kosher eating parents start eating kosher. Emilie, from Bordeaux, said “I wouldn’t say so if it wasn’t the case... 12 years ago, on the other hand, I would just buy anything ! but now ”, .... so we reached the point where we ate strictly kosher.”

In addition, some Jews, particularly those of Sephardic ancestry demand kosher even when not strictly observant in other areas and it would be interesting to study how this is transmitted to the next generation.

### 3. Opinions and concerns on animal welfare issues

Introduction: Participants were invited to talk about their own conception of how Judaism views issues of animal welfare. Does religion have an opinion on the subject and what does it say? They were also asked about shechita and animal welfare. Does it conform with what they said religion says about animal welfare, why is shechita important, and why they specifically eat or do not eat kosher meat as it relates to animal welfare. Because within the context of the Dialrel project, 'stunning' is an important topic, this issue was introduced by the moderator when it was not already raised by participants. We expected this issue to be controversial because of public campaigns of animal welfare organizations against ritual slaughter without stunning. The participants of the FG are not religious authorities, but some did have a religious education and were thus not ignorant of the issues. In the particular area of religious slaughter most had more theoretical rather than practical knowledge.

#### Religion and animal welfare

It was frequently stated by the participants that Jews should take care of animals and that religious texts are explicit on this, and further that Jews should not behave like “heathens.” Alan from Cardiff stated “Right, there is a Jewish point of view right which says you look after your animal before you look after yourself.” There was a minority voice that thought that religion had no comment on animal welfare, such as Jean-Pierre from Bordeaux who in a debate on foie gras stated: “no we don’t talk about animal welfare, this doesn’t exist with us, no no”. He was roundly challenged by Laurent and Emilie. Laurent said: “I don’t agree with what Jean-Pierre is saying, although I respect it...(..)Whether religion takes animal welfare into account, I’ll say yes it does ! still, in the Torah and in all texts.... one has to respect animals!” Emilie continued: “I think that Laurent is right, that it is very important in Judaism, one cannot hit animals. And talking about stress, are ducks stressed, I think they are ! I really think that we have to be careful, and concerning foie gras, I disagree with Jean-Pierre, because it is a real issue today, is foie gras really kosher, everywhere.”

#### Shechita and animal welfare

It was nearly unanimous in the kosher focus groups that shechita was the “best” method of slaughter, preferable to any other method, including conventional and Halal. What is meant by “best”, however, was not always uniform. There were three broad explanations.

1) Shechita is intended to reduce the pain of the animal. This was a firmly held belief by many of the participants who felt that it can be scientifically explained. Michael from

Berlin explained: “Well, as is known it is in the teaching itself, in Torah itself it is said that it is forbidden to torment animals. So naturally kosher slaughtering, which is commanded by the Torah itself, does not need to be in the framework of cruelty to animals. So otherwise this would be a contradiction.” Jehoschua from Berlin who states that he has studied much physiology said “To make it short: Because of several physiological articles I have read regarding this [that shechita is less painful than other methods]. Listing them here now would simply be beyond the limits because you would have to step into the basics of physiology. I think this would be ridiculous. And it is simply my medical conviction as a medical student who is also a physiology freak.” Michael from Berlin said “and kosher slaughtering is a method that tries as little as possible to cause pain for the animal.” A variety of explanations were suggested by participants to explain why shechita better. These included: The incision technique; the high skill of shochet who have been trained for years; the animal must be bled with only one cut (as opposed to two cuts in halal according to some participants) which implies the use of a very sharp knife; the animal losing consciousness very quickly.

2) The essential meaning behind shechita is that a human is taking an animal life and the permission to kill, even an animal, can only be granted by God and therefore the killing should be done in a manner prescribed by God. The animal should not suffer, but this is not the primary motivation in shechita. Jehoschua from Berlin declared “Well the primary reason also for me is simply because it is requested by the law.”

3) That the motivation behind shechita is not for the sake of the animal (although it was stated that the animal did indeed suffer less) but for the sake of the human, that he should not inflict pain to any living creature. Baruch, from Tel Aviv, explained: “I think what Avy is saying when he says its for our sake – of course we are concerned for the animal’s welfare and we don’t want to cause the animal any unnecessary suffering, but when we don’t want the animal to suffer it is not only because of the animal but because we shouldn’t be one who inflicts suffering, and that shouldn’t become a part of us. We should be sensitive; it’s similar to what you are saying. Our being should be permeated with the sensitivity to care for people, for animals, and to any other living thing, and again the shechita is much more than that but this is a very important part of it”. But he also stated: “We have a tradition that shechita is exceptionally sensitive to the animal welfare where the actual death of the animal and prior to that the animal’s being able to feel anything is directly related to a proper shechita and that is part of what is involved in the shechita process and the entire process also takes into account the welfare of the animal.”

Some participants were therefore in favor of eating only kosher meat because they preferred that the animal die in the least painful manner. Others saw no advantage to that. Peter from Cardiff said “I think the big question about animal welfare comes down to how the animal is treated prior to the actual process of slaughter itself. The process of slaughter I can’t say either way without having seen the paperwork that has been produced or visited a slaughterhouse what’s the most humane and painless way of carrying it out but if there

are certain legal procedures that do need to be observed then by all means I do think we should go ahead with that.” And Miri from Tel Aviv said: “Honestly if you think about the whole issue of humane slaughtering they are contradictory – you are killing an animal to eat it, you are still killing the animal so either you decide you are going to eat an animal then it doesn't make a difference how it's killed or you decide I'm not going to kill any animals and then you just eat vegetables and whatever...no matter how you describe how the animals are killed they are dead so I don't see the difference; it's dead at the end. I don't care how it got there.”

In most FG the stunning issue was raised by the moderators, and we do not know if it would have been raised spontaneously by participants. It should be noted that stunning as a consumer concern is a rather recent trend. There was a significant difference between the Israeli and the European FG regarding the entire issue, as in Europe there is a strong subtext that permeates the entire discussion.

In Tel Aviv two basic objective topics were discussed. One related directly to stunning itself: does it accomplish its objective of reducing the animal's pain and is it itself painful. The other issue was how to relate stunning to shechita: does religious law change to incorporate novel methods in general and in particular can and should the practice of shechita be modified to incorporate stunning. Regarding the former, there was no uniformity regarding the efficacy of stunning and there was a variety of opinions regarding whether it is a useful technique, regardless of the religious issue, with some people suggesting that it actually increases the animal's suffering. Meron stated: “An electric probe? To get it to suffer a lot and be in pain before you actually kill it. That's basically what happens. When a person is being shot by a stun gun they are in a lot of pain; he is stunned but in a lot of pain for a while, even after the shot is gone. The same thing with an animal. Basically you put him in a lot of pain so he doesn't feel the other pain you are inflicting on him.” On the other hand, Ram pointed out: “I feel like I don't have enough information about stunning to have an opinion. We are all making the assumption that stunning is more painful but I do not hear somebody protecting stunning. If it does inflict more pain on the animals I'd be happy that it won't be done in Israel, and it's not a matter of kosher or not kosher; it's just a matter of animal welfare but that needs to be proven.”

There was a strong feeling that the shechita process should not be tampered with, as expressed by Baruch (I'm very happy that there is no stunning done in Israel. ... It's not acceptable in halacha) and Avy (stunning is not permitted according to halacha [Jewish law] and therefore it is good that it's not done for kosher meat, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it shouldn't be done for non kosher meat. If stunning is done within the context of a non Jewish person expressing his reverence for life and his respect for life, then I think it's a perfectly reasonable thing to do).

In Europe the issue of motivation behind those wishing to introduce stunning was questioned. Harry from Cardiff said “Yes well you're touching on that sort of very deep issue. I mean I remember even as a child the inveighing against the cruelty of kosher

slaughtered animals has been associated with anti-semitism for a long, long, long time”. And even scientific evidence is challenged as expressed by Alan of Cardiff: “Can I ask what you mean by scientific evidence? Political or ideological pressure?” and Harry(?) who asserted that “This is again this is a difficult thing these days because you can honestly scientifically prove anything almost that you want depending on how you carry it out.” Harry (from Cardiff) said: “but what I think you would find among a group of people who have been brought up with the idea of kosher slaughter is that they will always be suspicious of the argument that there is something wrong with this method of slaughter.”

In Europe the same issues discussed in Israel were also discussed with similar results. There was mixed opinions regarding the utility of stunning and whether it itself introduces a painful element. Many participants viewed stunning as intrinsically painful and not accomplishing the goal of reducing the animal’s pain. Here too it was pointed out (by Harry of Cardiff) that maybe all the facts are not known by the group when he stated “Surely the point is this, is that it is essentially none of us have the real facts before us, we can go around and around in circles.” There was also a general agreement that religious practices should be resistant to change. The notion was raised by some that shechita is a more “natural” method of slaughtering and that more natural means of stunning, such as an adrenalin shot, can be used.

In general, participants declared that animal welfare was not a factor in their choice to eat or not eat kosher or in their other food consumption choices. Veal and foie gras were noticeable exceptions with some people avoiding them for animal welfare reasons. One reason animal welfare may not be an issue is because the most common behaviour is to not think about slaughter at all at the time of purchasing meat. Meron (Tel Aviv) explained: “I am concerned with animal welfare but it does not interfere with my choice of meat. The only effect on my choice is whether it tastes good.” And Ram (Tel Aviv) said: “When I eat meat I try not to think about it. I do mind about how the animals are grown up and treated while they are alive and I'm less concerned about how they get slaughtered, ... I cannot think of an example of a meat that I would not eat it because of the way it is slaughtered.”

#### **Points for further study**

- 1) Anecdotally in one-on-one conversations it appears that the aversion to stunning in Europe may carry two undercurrents - the above stated suspicions of the motivations, and that the methods of stunning carry negative associations with methods used by Nazis. We think that this second issue should be further explored.
- 2) Post-cut stunning was not raised or discussed. Knowledge and attitudes towards this practice should be researched.

#### 4. Commitment to eating kosher

As part of the FG, the topic of level of commitment to eating kosher food was raised and discussed, sometimes in a heated manner. The topics included: How much participants felt committed to eat kosher? Was their commitment universal or differed depending on location of type of food? How do they respond in a situation where they cannot totally control their food intake such as business or social invitations at either commercial establishments or a friend' home? How do they perceive others as viewing their eating habits?

In the kosher FG, the vast majority of self declared Jewish participants declared that eating kosher had some level of importance for them. In comparison to halal, most participants agreed that eating kosher was an obligation for Jews, yet the level of commitment to eat kosher was lower than that found in the Muslim focus group regarding Halal. Most participants agreed to leave the definitions of what is and is not kosher to the experts, be that rabbis of their denomination, shochet, or certification agency. Others found the multiple agencies and the varying standards to be troublesome. This results in one of two reactions: either to rely only on specific organizations that meet your standards (but then again to leave the specifics to the agency) or to rely on anyone claiming to certify it. For example, Robert (from Tel Aviv) stated: "I only eat keep kosher meat. As long as it is certified it does not matter what certification. I don't know the difference between the rabbi in Nahariyaha and the rabbi in Holon. As long as it has a certification from an establishment."

Low levels of observance of kosher were not justified by an alternative interpretation of the requirement nor by the absence of clear status of the food. There were various levels of commitment to avoid non-kosher food that were expressed. Some participants expressed a looser interpretation of kashrut that includes not consuming explicitly forbidden food, but not carefully avoiding items that may contain mixtures of these products. Thus, there are absolute prohibitions against pork and certain seafood, and these people would avoid directly eating these products. Two participants in the Brussels FG explicitly declared this level of commitment to kosher eating. Harry from Cardiff stated that: "I used to be a kosher, very kosher eater until the age of about 20 and then perhaps slowly lapsed further and further and further so that now there are only a few things I won't eat, like pork." Martine from Brussels said she "does not buy into specialty stores, but I will respect the rules of kashrut. ... I do not eat shellfish; I do not eat pork, I do not eat horse ... all these food is automatically excluded, already by the taste and secondly, by conviction, actually to be closer to the tradition."

Other participants stated a commitment to eat Commitment to eat only kosher meat, a standard that was attached by others. Alan from Cardiff said: "you see the question is not

whether you buy kosher because if you bring kosher meat to a house which doesn't eat kosher immediately the stuff becomes non kosher.” He thus was of a stricter interpretation shared by others who declared complete fidelity to all of the laws of kashrut. The commitment to avoid only non-kosher meat is becoming increasingly difficult in an age of more and more processed foods that contain meat products.

Another type of gradation in level of commitment related to where the person is eating. There were four basic categories expressed by the FG participants:

1-Occasional observance; 2-Observance outside the home but not at home (non Jew); 3-Observance at home but not outside the home; 4-Observance at home and outside the home

Those who declared that they only occasionally observe the laws of kashrut, stated that they do so on special occasions, such as holidays, or family visits or to transmit the feelings and heritage. Liliane from Brussels is an example of the latter when she said “And so I do not eat strictly kosher, no. But I try to, at certain given times, for me, for my family, and precisely for that education of feelings.”

Eating kosher only outside is rare and was expressed by one non-Jewish Berlin participant who declared that he eats kosher only in restaurants.

Eating kosher only at home but not outside was much more common. Manja from Amsterdam was such a participant and she explained that “At home we kept a real kosher housekeeping but outside we did not keep that. ...but it is easier to eat outside non kosher food.”

This last point is one of the two main reasons expressed for this phenomenon of eating kosher at home and yet eating non-kosher out – it is easier. This relates to the topic addressed elsewhere of the lack of availability. Availability of kosher foods can affect the level of commitment to kosher foods. For a person not fully committed to eating only kosher, the difficulty of obtaining kosher food can dissuade a person to making such a commitment. The absence or low number of kosher eating places (fast food, take away, restaurant) is inconvenient for workers and young who have no time to cook.

A second reason for a weaker commitment to the laws of kashrut, relates to social pressure, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Unlike among Muslims where the FG found that strong social pressure “forces” conformity to Halal rules, no such mechanism was found to play a significant role in the Kosher FG. Among kosher consumers there appears to be acceptance of various levels of commitment, with the less committed feeling no peer pressure to eat only kosher products. On the other hand, many kosher consumers have difficulty with the social acceptability of eating kosher, often from other Jews. Jean-Pierre from Bordeaux stated: “I think that in fact it is more difficult when you’re with Jews who don’t eat kosher, because they won’t make any effort regarding kashrut, while non-Jews... I have worked with non-Jews, and knowing I ate kosher, whenever we had an aperitif or a party or so, they would come to me saying ‘we checked about the whisky, you can drink it ; the

peanuts are on the list, we checked that... ‘ so they were careful out of respect for my religious practice.” Emilie has found a similar phenomenon: “I completely agree; when I started practicing [kosher laws], my best friend is a non-Jew, and whenever I go to her place, I kosherize her kitchen, we go shopping together with the list, and there’s no problem. ... I see, non-Jews are much more willing to take my practice into account and make some efforts, using plastic and all that, than within my own family, ... Jews who don’t eat kosher, at least that’s what it seems, because I don’t want to generalize, it’s not my type, are a lot more fussy than non-Jews.”

In all EU countries, voluntary or involuntary adaptation or conformation with non-Jewish food styles is an important obstacle for keeping kosher and many felt that there is a lack of social acceptability to keeping a strictly kosher diet projected by their friends and colleagues. This issue was, for obvious reasons, not raised in the Israel FG. In Europe, on the other hand, this was an important topic with participants expressing their feeling about the social acceptability of eating only kosher products and meat slaughtered by shechita. Anti-Semitism is amongst the most critical political and social issues in modern and multicultural western societies. We expected this issue to be a controversial one when participants were asked how comfortable they feel consuming kosher products. The level of real or perceived resentment can truly be very high. Kazik, from Cardiff, claims that “It is actually one of the reasons why my wife left me.” Within a professional context the commitment to eat only kosher can sometimes lead to difficulties and uncomfortable situations, although some of the FG explained how they deal with such issues. Asher, from Bordeaux happily reported that “my sales manager does it [tries to arrange acceptable food]; but I know people who live in firms where they just don’t care! They get there, and there’s only ham or stuff...so they just cannot eat. That’s not cool.”

Explicit anti-semitism was not raised except in the Brussels FG where not only was it discussed, but its supposed cause elaborated upon, (strong anti-Israel feelings) and illustrated by numerous personal examples. Participants said that they are careful not to display their religion either by what they wear or what they eat. For example, Liliane: my husband doesn't wear the kippa, nor anything else, ... me, I have been assaulted several times too” and Martine added: “the rabbi who has just been mugged. ...and his house has been under police surveillance for months.”

In other FG this was not raised and it is not clear if anti-semitism truly has an effect on the social acceptability of eating. Interestingly, in the Cardiff FG it was noted that the greater prominence of Halal food in recent years has eased the pariah nature of religious dietary restrictions and made kosher consumers feel more comfortable. David, a student at Cardiff University explained that “I think the increasing prominence of Islam in the UK has made it more socially acceptable because people, more people understand that it is not just Jewish people that don't eat pork and like their food slaughtered in a particular way ... so personally I don't find that there is an issue with eating kosher because I know like I mean at Cardiff University I don't know any other people who even eat kosher food but I know

quite a lot of Muslim people and they don't eat pork and no one cares because it is their choice what they want to do and it's kind of a similar thing” and fellow student Peter concurred, stating “I think David is quite right though, I think the increase of halal food in restaurants has done something of the publics awareness towards importance of religious obligation in terms of foods”.

The commitment to eat exclusively kosher thus seems to be multi-factorial. Some of the participants were fully committed and nothing would affect that. But many others had less of a commitment and were thus influenced by external forces. Peer pressure to conform and eat only kosher is negligible and is thus not one of these external factors. Lack of availability is a strong factor, as is the desire to blend in with the general society. Smaller factors seem to be the lack of social acceptance, from both Jews and no-Jews, to eating only kosher, and the fear of anti-semitism.

#### **Points for further study :**

We suggest to further study the correlations when they exist between level and type of commitment to kosher laws

- 1- and the observance of other religious practices, e.g. Sabbath observance, synagogue attendance, etc.
- 2- the synagogue denominational affiliation
- 3- level of social acceptance of religious food in the country studied
- 4- level of kosher food consumption by non-Jews

## **5. Justification for eating kosher**

During the course of the FG it became clear that among the Jewish participants there was a wide range of level of observance of the kosher laws and that the level of commitment to the laws varied greatly. Irrespective of the level of commitment, most explained their choice to eat kosher food as being based on religious factors, although this explanation can be further subdivided. The primary reason offered was simply that the religion requires it. Thus, Nathan (Amsterdam) says that when one chooses to live by the law of the Torah, eating kosher becomes automatic. If you live according to these laws, you don't have a choice anymore. Jan (Berlin) said “I would agree to this. Purely religious reasons for those who do it.” And Gregor from Berlin had very similar sentiments: “I eat kosher for pure religious reasons. This is a Mitzwa and I fulfill it and health reasons play less of a role now. So that is how it is. Full stop.” Yehoshua (Tel Aviv) expressed it as such: “Most of

the time the food is cleaner but only because of religious reasons [I eat kosher], there is nothing else.” In Bordeaux a discussion about the reason for eating kosher took place and Daniel and Asher explained as follows: Daniel: “no there is none [reason]; what’s written is: just do it and you’ll understand! It’s not ‘do this because of that... don’t eat pork because it doesn’t have cleaved hooves, because here is the scientific reason...’ You’re not given any reason; you shall not eat it and that’s an end to it.” And Asher followed with: And to answer Dan, one must realize that no Kosherout law is given any explanation; it’s just written. One is not told ‘thou shall not kill because it is not good, thou shall not steal because...’ no; we are told: ‘you must eat kosher’, that’s it!” even though there is no “reason”, some people still what some logic to it as Asher explained: “You cannot eat kosher today if you didn’t get an initiation, or at least some instruction, or read books. And even if you decide to follow all the rules, you won’t keep it up. Because you need to understand, between brackets: there’s no explanation but there is a logic which is explained to you.”

It is thus clear that in most of the FG from all the different geographic areas this was a constant theme. The primary motivation, justification, reason for eating kosher is that it is an essential part of the Jewish religion. There is no need for additional rationales and they offered none; rather these participants observe the law as part of their religious practice.

It seems however that it is not only a conscience, intellectual decision to keep this set of regulations. Rather a big part of it upbringing and training. Jehoschua (Berlin) explained: “Well, on the one hand I have simply grown up like that and ...I mean, I have moved out now and could do whatever I want but by my own conviction. ... Yes, that is why. Simply raised that way. And one lives as Jew and kashrut belongs to it as everything else.” On the other hand some people raised that way maintain it for the older generation and then stop, such as Ram (Tel Aviv): We used to eat only kosher because my parents came from religious home, our house was kosher, as long as my grandparents were alive we kept a kosher kitchen, but when they passed away over the years we stopped keeping kosher and it is not an issue anymore.”

A variety of other reasons were also heard for why people eat kosher. Health was one of the reasons. Yanni (Brussels) explained: “there is a lot of people my parents know, and who are not Jewish, who eat kosher meat because they know precisely there are fewer health risks, diseases ... When there were problems of mad cow, kosher shops were invaded by non-Jewish consumers, precisely for these reasons. And I absolutely agree with that, and I respect, and indeed that is why I eat kosher too.” Esther from Bordeaux explained that her daughter is a medical doctor and nutritionist and that she has told her that some of the kosher laws, such as not eating meat and dairy together, are healthy. Rachel (Berlin) was emphatic about the health benefits, she explained: “Well, first of all for religious reasons and then also for health reasons. I am 100% convinced that if I eat kosher I live healthier. Yes, I mean for health reasons.” Sarah (Tel Aviv) said: “The food is cleaner, the meat is slaughtered properly. You know they have the veterinary certification.” Other

people eat only kosher meat because they believe it is better from an animal welfare perspective. Alexandra from Berlin said she had been a vegetarian for a while and then learned that in kosher meat the animal does not suffer and she resumed eating meat, but only kosher. Finally, others gave the reason that it is a means of identification with the Jewish community and a separation from the general society while eating non-kosher would be a subconscious assimilation in the surrounding non-Jewish culture.

**Points for further study :**

- 1) To investigate the attitude of Jews who do not observe the kosher laws and of non-Jews towards whether kosher food is healthier, tastier, or better for animal welfare, or the opposites.
- 2) To examine the reasons for keeping kosher among Jews who were raised keeping kosher as compared to those who adapted the lifestyle later in life.
- 3) if possible to have Jews who abandoned observing kosher laws as adults try to relate what the reasons for observing it that they had before quitting, and how they felt and feel about taste, healthiness, and animal welfare of kosher food.

## 6. Control, Trust and responsibility issue of kosher food

The over-whelming majority of kosher consumers are not involved in the food production chain at all and thus are personally not involved in making the food kosher or ascertaining its status. For example, making the food kosher when it comes to meat includes: guaranteeing that it is a kosher species (e.g. cow not pig), slaughtering it properly, inspecting it, and removing certain forbidden section. There are also special rules governing kosher milk, cheese, bread, and wine. In the not-too-distant past much of this was done locally or even in the house and the consumer was intimately involved in determining and enforcing the kosher status of the food she ate. Today all of these steps are centralized and commercial removing the consumer from the process. Furthermore, most food consumed today is factory produced with the consumer having no way of knowing the total list of ingredients or the complete process. How is a consumer to know what products or what food establishments are kosher. The FG participants explained and discussed this topic and how they each make that determination.

Because the kosher laws are complex and involved, food science is difficult, and the factories are not easily accessible, the consumer relies and centralized rabbinic determination of the kosher status of the products. In the US and less so in Europe the main method of communicating rabbinic approval is by labeling on the package itself such that the package of a kosher supervised product will contain a symbol of the rabbinic

supervising agency. In Europe the principal method is via kosher lists published by local or national authorities in the different countries (such as The London Beth Din Kashrut division, the Consistoire Israélite de Paris, the NIK in the Netherlands, the Orthodoxen Rabbinerkonferenz Deutschland [German conference of rabbis] in Germany). They are regularly updated, with particular attention paid to products that have lost their kosher acceptability. These same organizations also certify eating establishments as kosher and designate this by providing a kosher certificate to the restaurant or hotel. The various inspecting and certifying agencies sometimes have differing standards and requirements but in general the FG participants strongly rely on these organizations.

Yaniv from Brussels relies on such lists: “Me, I’m rather careful not to eat non-kosher, it means that there are lists of products prepared by the consistory. They are products without cachet but nevertheless permitted for consumption, because they contain no banned ingredient in their composition” as does Jehoschua fom Berlin: also this ‘kosher list’, which is newly edited as regularly as possible in Germany. Also on the internet there is always a current version of it.”

Jean-Pierre (Bordeaux) explained both the need for the supervision and then tension regarding differing standards: why do we use the Paris Beth Din? Because most people, we don’t all know all the rules, so it’s more simple to have a stamp indicating it is kosher, so one can be sure; it is a referent, it’s good. But some people will say: “Paris [Beth Din], it’s not good enough.” In response Emilie elaborated on the multiple organizations, the overlap, and differing standards: when you go to any kosher restaurant in Paris, you find 3 théodeut, that is 3 different kosherout certificates. I have friends who only eat the top, glatt kosher thing, while I eat Paris Beth Din, what is considered as the norm.“ the idea of being very trusting was also expressed by Yehoshua from Tel Aviv, obviously a region with many competing kashrut organizations: “I chose to eat everything that has a kosher certificate. ... I accept all the certificates. I trust the one who gives the certificate, but others might not trust if they do not know the rabbi.” At another point he said: “I am eating, buying only kosher, it doesn’t matter which rabbi gives the certification. I buy in regular supermarkets and eat at any restaurant that has a certificate.” Robert (Tel Aviv) said similarly: “I only eat keep kosher meat. As long as it is certified it does not matter what certification. I don’t know the difference between the rabbi in Nahariyaha and the rabbi in Holon. As long as it has a certification from an establishment.”

In general there seemed to be trust in the kosher certifying system, as expressed in this exchange: “Stephane: exactly. There’s a whole series of persons who are there to validate. Laurent: Generally speaking, when there are doubts, one doesn’t eat! Jean-Pierre: If you have doubts, you mustn’t eat. But when there are supervisors, and a mistake is made, for instance a non-kosher animal is found among a kosher lot... there are strict and well defined rules to know whether such a lot is kosher or not, so...” In addition to trusting the rabbi involved in producing kosher meat and certifying products, participants were comfortable with the transference of responsibility. This was expressed in a dialogue in

Bordeaux where several participants agreed that if one relies on the rabbi and he defrauded them, it is ultimately his problem.

**Points for further study :**

In the FGs, the majority of participants expressed a willingness to rely on many of certifying agencies to determine what food is kosher. It would be interesting to explore

- How wide spread this trust is among this population, and among others regarding food labeling. In other words, if these people are willing to stake their religious convictions and the word of those organizations, are they willing to trust government claims regarding the health and safety of food items?
- Would consumers trust non-rabbinic, third party groups about either kosher status or health and safety issues of food?
- How does the non-Kosher consuming Jew or non-Jewish consumer relate to labeling on food products?
- What about kosher consumer's opinions and concerns towards novel foods? When they are told that certain products are genetically modified, raised in organic conditions, or that meat was ritually slaughtered, do they trust the labeling authority? And more important than trusting the facts, is do they trust the implicit message that the authority is trying to convey regarding the appropriateness of consuming that product?

All of these questions can be addressed in surveys that compare and contrast it with the seemingly almost complete, almost naïve, confidence that the kosher consumers expressed in the rabbinic certifying agencies.



## HALAL FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Dr. Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, IREMAM, Université de la Méditerranée (France)

Dr. Adrian Evans, Cardiff University (UK)



## 1. Description of the group participants / country

The 47 participants to the 6 halal consumer focus groups were aged from 18 to 69.

In Amsterdam, 8 participants including 3 females and 5 males were aged from 26 to 55.

6 participants had a moroccon origin, one convert had a dutch origin and one had a Egyptian origin. 5 participants declared having a regular practice, the others had occasional practice.

In Berlin, 8 participants including 6 males and 2 females were aged from 19 to 46.

Half participants had a Turkish origin, two were originated from Bosnia, one from Lebanon, and one was a convert from Germany. The group was dominated by the presence of 7 participants declaring a regular practice, the other declared an occasional practice.

In Bordeaux, 8 participants including 4 males and 4 females were aged from 18 to 69.

They declared to be originated from Morocco, Algeria, Syria, Portugal and Salvador.

In regard to religious level of practice, 5 participants declared regular practices, 2 had occasional practices and one was not muslim.

In Cardiff, 7 participants including only one female were aged from 19 to 37.

Participants declared to have origins from the UK for the only non muslim participant, origins from Pakistan for two participants, two from Bengladesh and one from Somalia. All muslim participants declared a regular level of practice

In Istanbul, 8 participants were recruited and present during the FG, including 6 males and 2 females aged from 26 to 65. They were born in Turkey and were all muslim. Three declared observing regular practice, 4 occasional practice, and one no practice at all.

In Renaix (Belgium), 8 participants including 5 females and 3 males were aged from 25 to 43. Amongst the 8 participants 1 was a belgian non muslim halal consumer, and 1 was a Belgian convert to Islam. Others participants were from Moroccon, Turkigh and Tunisian origins. There was a well balanced repartition of (self defined) religious trends including 2 persons declaring no religious practices, 3 regular practice, 2 occasional practice.

## 2. Halal shopping practices

### The perceived availability of halal food

Focus group participants in nearly all study countries believed that there was a sufficient supply of halal food. This contrasts strongly with the perceived lack of availability of kosher food, highlighted by participants within the kosher focus groups. Despite participants' overall satisfaction with the availability of halal food, there were some interesting national differences in supply (see table 1). Focus group participants from Amsterdam, Bordeaux, Cardiff and Istanbul believed that halal foods were widely available in butcher shops, whereas participants from Berlin and Renaix indicated that the supply of halal food was only 'average' or 'low' in these outlets. In contrast, the perceived availability of halal foods in supermarkets was low to average in all places, except for Istanbul. Concerns were also raised by focus group participants in Bordeaux and Renaix regarding the perceived lack of the public provision of halal foods in state institutions, such as schools and hospitals.

**Table 1: The perceived availability of halal meat in Islamic butchers compared with supermarkets.**

Location	The perceived availability of halal meat in Butchers	The perceived availability of halal meat in supermarkets
Amsterdam	High	Average
Berlin	Low (East), average (West)	Average
Bordeaux	High	Low
Cardiff	High	Average
Renaix	Low	Low
Istanbul	High	High

Place of purchase: a preference for halal butchers over supermarkets

In all countries, focus group participants expressed a preference for purchasing halal meat in Islamic butchers rather than in supermarkets. This was because butchers were believed to provide a good balance of hygiene, quality, price, variety and proximity, furthermore many participants had developed a personal relationship of trust with their butchers and they felt that this was the best way to guarantee that the meat they purchased was genuinely halal. Only one focus group participant (from Amsterdam) stated that they preferred to

shop for halal food at the supermarket and this was due to the lack of ready-meals available in halal butchers.

Several factors influenced the choice of butcher. In particular, many participants mentioned the moral reputation of the butcher as something that would influence where they chose to shop. This was especially important within smaller communities where individuals were easily identifiable. Moral reputation tended to function more as a push factor than as a pull factor. For example, one participant from the Cardiff focus group stated that:

*So if somebody was to maybe sell alcohol or even drink alcohol or not be what we would say sort of like an upright person then that would distance away from as a... for a commercial... sorry for a relationship ( ) then because the halal thing is very important to us so very quickly that would spread amongst the community and a lot of people would move away...*

The *institutional standing* of the butcher was also deemed to be important, particularly in those countries where there was a close relationship between halal commerce and religious institutions. For example, in Germany where many mosques sell halal meat, this is considered to be preferable to purchasing meat from another butcher.

Finally, the *country of origin of the butcher* could influence where participants chose to shop. For example, in Germany the term ‘Islamic butcher’ is less frequently mentioned than the term ‘Turkish butcher’ and most Turkish butchers have relationships with a mosque, which in turn makes them more highly regarded than other ethnic groups selling halal foods. The issue of the country of origin of the butcher appeared to be less significant in other study countries. However, it is highly likely that factors such as the cultural presentation and cut of the meat, the presence of culinary products of the same culture of origin and the language and cultural identity of the butcher would influence where halal consumers chose to shop.

In contrast to the popularity of Islamic butchers, the vast majority of participants were less positive about purchasing halal meat from supermarkets. This was due to several factors, including:

- **A perceived lack of assurance about both the quality and halal status of the meat.** According to many of the participants, supermarkets do not offer a trustworthy guarantee that the meat provided is genuinely halal. Participants were even skeptical about halal labeled products (the presence of which has been increasing in these outlets) and many felt unable to trust or even understand the guarantees that they were offering.
- **A perceived lack of choice of halal foods.** Many participants believed that there was a lack of choice of halal meat and processed meat products in supermarkets. For those who bought non-meat products in supermarkets, e.g. in Cardiff and Berlin, the reason to shop for halal meat in supermarkets was mainly due to convenience.

- **The proximity of non-halal (haram) foods.** This issue was considered to be important in Cardiff and Amsterdam. One participant from the Cardiff focus group stated that they would not purchase products (whether or not they were labeled as halal) in shops that were also selling alcohol. In Renaix and Bordeaux, the presence of haram foods was not raised as an issue. This is because there are no available supermarkets selling halal products near Renaix and there is a high concentration of halal butcher shops in the center of Bordeaux (which sell meat at equivalent, or cheaper prices than at the supermarket), as such haram foods were not likely to be encountered in close proximity to halal foods.
- **A lack of personal guarantees.** The direct and personal guarantee offered by the seller (e.g. a grocer or butcher) is an important determinant of the choice of shop. For example, the very fact that a seller is Islamic in itself provides a guarantee that the meat will probably be genuinely halal.
- **Price.** Results from the focus group discussions indicate that price was not an important consideration for influencing participants' shopping habits, or for encouraging them to seek potentially cheaper halal food within supermarkets. However, it is possible that due to social pressure to appear to conform to religious requirements, focus groups are not the type of arena in which participants are willing to express their preference for price over guarantees concerning halal status. As such we feel that further research is required concerning the role of price as a market driver for halal food consumption.
- **Supporting the Muslim community.** Participants' preference for halal butchers, over supermarkets, can also be viewed as a consumerist strategy to support local Muslim businesses and communities

### Differences between minority and majority Muslim countries

In European countries, where Muslim consumers are a minority group, the place of purchase of halal meat was mainly determined by the level of trust that consumers had regarding the genuine halal status of the products that they were purchasing. Where consumers shopped was also heavily dependent on the retail infrastructure and the availability of different types of outlets selling halal food within their area of residence. Convenience, direct relationship with the seller and price also helped to determine choice of shops. In contrast in Turkey, where Muslim consumers are in the majority, the issue of trust in the authenticity of claims of halal status was not considered to be an important issue. In Turkey factors such as hygiene, freshness and convenience seemed to be more important drivers influencing where consumers chose to shop. Furthermore, there seemed to be large differences in shopping, food preparation and consumption practices between urban and rural areas. For example, one focus group participant from Istanbul was not particularly concerned about whether the meat she was purchasing in Istanbul was

genuinely halal, however she stated that this was a concern for other members of her family, who were living in more rural areas, primarily because they tended to buy live animals rather than meat products and carried out the slaughter process themselves in accordance with halal rules.

*Istanbul FG participant: I married in September. I have been shopping since September. I do it from a market near my home. I have never paid attention about the meat whether it is halal or not. Before my marriage, I had been eating outside, from restaurants. My family and their neighborhood pay attention about it strongly. They always slaughter their animal by themselves ... Maybe, it is because they are living in a village ... Yes, but I have never paid attention about that in Istanbul.*

*Moderator: Your consumption attitude is different from your family.*

*Istanbul FG participant: Because of their living place.*

*Moderator: It is a situation about the environment, isn't it?*

*Istanbul FG participant: We can say in my family's village no one buys meat from market, instead they buy animals.*

#### **Points for further studies :**

- 1) Price/Quality issues. Does halal consumer have any opinion on the price/quality of halal vs. non-halal meat. What are relationships between the prices of halal and non-halal meat. Preference for butcher rather than supermarket need to be assessed by market studies.
- 2) Future trends as they relate to affiliation to religion. It was found that the younger generation is more interested in Halal than their parents. Market studies are needed to confirm / inform this.
- 3) What is halal can be defined differently. The halal / haram foods proximity seems more an issue in the UK than in France for instance. Can this idea of purity/impurity be related to a religious trend and juridic shool ? What is role of the marketing in the definition of halal, in the perception of halal as pure that should not be contaminated?
- 4) Some consumers prefer to buy the animal alive and kill it themselves? Does this practice -common in rural area- still exist in urban area, how it is justified ?

### **3. Halal consumers' opinions and concerns about animal welfare**

Participants were invited to talk about their own understanding of animal welfare (and how this related to their interpretation of halal) and to talk about their perception of religious slaughter practices. Participants were also asked to discuss and compare animal slaughter at the time of festivals and slaughter for ordinary consumption, we hoped that this would encourage them to draw on their own experiences and to talk in more concrete terms.

Considering the importance of scientific understandings of animal welfare within the Dialrel project, 'stunning' issues were introduced by the moderator if they had not already been raised by participants. We expected that this issue would be controversial due to the high media profile of animal welfare NGO's public campaigns in relation to religious slaughter.

### **Media debates concerning Halal slaughter**

In all of the study countries religious slaughter is an issue of concern for animal welfare organisations. In the UK, in Germany, in the Flemish part of Belgium and to a lesser extent in France, Belgium (Wallonia) and the Netherlands, this issue is publicly debated. The level of public interest and debate around this issue is connected to the credibility of the animal welfare organisations, their own resources and their capacity to mobilise the media. For example, in the UK, the discourse on religious slaughter formulated by the CIWF has far more credibility than the discourse on religious slaughter mobilised in France by the Brigitte Bardot Foundation, whose president is suspected to have racist and xenophobic motivations. The Muslim press and web blogs usually exhibit an apologetic discourse that aims to convince readers how compassionate Islam is towards animals, especially in comparison to the secular treatment of animals. This apologetic discourse is grounded on Koranic verse as well as hadith of the Sunna, and usually opposes what it sees as being the largely atheistic and amoral economic rules that govern secular forms of slaughter. The Muslim press also responds to accusations that religious slaughter practices have not been updated and therefore are still promoting ancient and cruel methods of killing.

Participants from the UK focus group debated the issue of whether they should support the actions of animal welfare organisations. In the UK animal activists have gained a higher visibility since the 1970s by using new methods of mobilisation. Certain organisations also promote vegetarianism and veganism. The UK also has a large Indian Muslim population for whom animal welfare concerns have traditionally been important. The UK participants agreed with the animal welfare organisations in relation to their aim of ensuring better conditions for the lives and slaughter of animals, but they did not agree on the means to reach this aim and they largely disapproved of the ultimate aim of some activists to convert people to vegetarianism. Focus group participants from the UK, but also from France and Belgium, showed disapproval concerning the hostility of some animal welfare organisations towards the Islamic method of slaughter.

*French FG participant: I've read books about that, and (in Islam) the animal must be well treated, without any violence, without ... even though, I know ... for Brigitte Bardot, to her slitting an animal is something very barbaric; I don't think so ; I think that everything is done to ensure that the animal is well treated all along to its death.*

### **Does halal always mean better animal welfare?**

Certain FG participants believed that there were strong links between halal and animal welfare. In Germany, two participants were keen to stress that halal requirements did not only relate to slaughter but also extended to a general principle of care for animals and another participant believed that this duty of care could also imply that we should try to reduce our meat consumption.

*German FG participant: "For example the prophet says he has not eaten meat so often. He recommends to not eat meat so often. The problem we now have with mass husbandry is that we are used to eating meat nearly every day or nearly every other day. And we get to the point and also the scholars that we perhaps say: 'Okay, with the conditions we have today we cannot say other than we cannot do it as at the festival of sacrifice.' My question then would be: Isn't it sad to loose these standards?"*

A participant from the UK also argued that treating an animal with respect constitutes a good deed that will be rewarded by God.

In contrast, certain participants believed that halal could not be fully equivalent to animal welfare, as animals must always be killed, and to a certain extent suffer, to produce food. Indeed, many participants acknowledged that Islam allowed and to a certain extent prescribed (during the aid el adha) the consumption of animal flesh, and therefore accepted a minimum of suffering for animals. However, the Islamic way was qualified as being more humane, or more compassionate in comparison to secular-industrial killing techniques.

In the French focus group there was also a discussion regarding the appropriateness of certifying certain food items, such as foie gras, as halal.

*French FG participant 1: I have a concrete example regarding this ; I'm not really a foie gras consumer, because I don't like it at all. However, it seems that some foie gras is being now sold with the halal logo. So I was sent a short documentary on the subject, about how the geese are treated, geese and ducks. And in fact I saw how abominable it is, how bad they are treated, tortured ...*

*French FG participant 2: I do think that, well at least that's what I learnt, in order to be really halal, the animal has to be treated well, I don't know ...*

This discussion illustrates that the equivalence between animal welfare and halal status is not straightforward for all focus group participants. Whilst some participants extend the notion of halal to incorporate the living conditions experienced by animals, others focus predominantly on the method of slaughter.

## Halal slaughter versus industrial slaughter

All the Muslim FG participants expressed a strong preference for the Islamic way of killing, however they did not posit a simple dichotomous opposition between a good religious way of slaughter and a bad secular way of slaughter. Instead, their main concerns about secular or conventional slaughter tended to focus on highly intensive or industrialised slaughter methods, which they perceived to be driven by profit motives, even at the expense of animal welfare. Indeed, according to many participants, the main obstacle to animal welfare at slaughter was economic constraints in the context of mass production. Religious slaughter was seen as an alternative to an economic model deprived of any morality because they believed that outside of a religious perspective the balance between profit and animal welfare would always end up favouring the first.

*Cardiff FG participant: It's a trade-off because ultimately they are running a business ..."*

Most male participants believed that they had a good knowledge of the Islamic duty of care for animals at the time of slaughter, including; good feeding, stroking, not showing the knife, not seeing the slaughter of other animals etc.

*German FG participant: "Yes. The Muslims ... For example they are recommended to feed the animal before, give it water, stroke it so they are less stressed, to then turn it toward Mecca and then to slaughter. The animal must not see the knife. The animal must not hear that another animal is being slaughtered next door. And in front of the animal a Muslim should also not sharpen the knife ..."*

But these views were often based on their personal or family experience of sacrifice during Aid el Kebir/ Kurban bayrami, which involves very traditional methods of slaughter, rather than on any experience of the types of modern intensive slaughter techniques that can be used to produce halal meat for daily consumption. This led to a highly idealised view, in which halal slaughter was perceived to be more humane, compassionate and caring than secular-industrialised killing techniques.

## The issue of stunning

Instructions were given to the focus group moderators to introduce the issue of stunning if participants did not spontaneously mention this topic.

Many focus group participants were uncertain as to the definition of 'stunning' within the context of animal slaughter. This is hardly surprising, as it is a technical term, which is rarely used in everyday language. Some participants thought that it was equivalent to 'killing with a gun', whereas others, who had experience of slaughterhouses, believed that it was a method for making the animal 'asleep', 'insensitive' or 'unconscious'.

All participants supported the *aim* of ensuring that animals suffered as little as possible during slaughter, however there were mixed views concerning the use of stunning as a *means* to achieve this aim. Those who rejected stunning cited incompatibility with religious requirements. Other concerns included the fear that stunning by gas or chemical methods was unnatural and might cause harm to the animals and damage the meat. For those who

thought that stunning was carried out with chemical products, or by gas, as in is the case of poultry, stunning was rejected in principle, as it was seen as an un-natural method capable of changing the nature of the animal and therefore the meat.

Many participants were unaware that stunning might also involve methods such as electrical shocks. When these alternative methods were brought to their attention, concerns were expressed that they might inflict unnecessary additional suffering for animals. Indeed, when certain participants learnt that stunning could be carried out with electrical devices they thought that this was appalling. Many even associated electronarcosis with the use of the electrical chair to carry out human executions. According to these participants, there was a contradiction between the aim (improving animal welfare) and the means (the use of electric shocks to render unconscious) and stunning by this means was strongly rejected.

In contrast, certain participants believed that stunning methods were not forbidden by Islam and drew comparisons with the use of anaesthetics to eliminate or minimise pain in humans during surgical procedures such as circumcision.

*Amsterdam FG participant: "... I would like to say something, to see whether it is better or not, if it is less halal or not, if we should do halal like in the past. When circumcising a little boy now, we do it with stunning with a surgeon in the hospital... should we still do it with a scissor without stunning? I say no, we can't. I prefer stunning with a surgeon ..."*

These participants focused on the effectiveness of stunning methods, especially on their capacity to induce insensibility, rather than on the permissibility of stunning.

### **The debate in Turkey: animal health and integrity**

In Turkey the debate tends to focus on issues of animal health and integrity rather than animal welfare. In some parts of the country, especially in rural areas, animals are not monitored by veterinarians and this causes consumer concerns regarding the safety and quality of certain Turkish foods. However, recent increases in veterinary controls are seen as a sign of the increasing problems associated with modern agricultural production techniques (especially new types of diseases) rather than as a solution to problems brought about by traditional animal farming practices.

#### **Points for further studies :**

- 1) Knowledge of religious slaughter is limited or relates to sacrifice practices. Religious slaughter is often understood as a non industrial practice. Knowledge and understanding on stunning are very limited.
- 2) In order to give more information to consumer, investigations are needed to understand consumers's resistance to scientific / religious knowledge. (Science and society issues).

#### 4. Commitment to eating halal

In this section we examine the extent to which focus group participants were committed to purchasing and consuming halal food in different contexts. In particular, we examine how commitment varies between different countries and between different socio-cultural groups and we explore how focus group participants responded in situations where they could not completely control their food intake, such as when eating out (either in restaurants, or canteens, or at friends houses).

##### **No barriers for purchasing halal foods, except in public spaces**

The majority of focus group participants in Berlin believed that there were no longer any major physical or mental (e.g. lack of trust) barriers for purchasing halal foods. This view was echoed in the UK, where supply was perceived to be sufficient even for smaller Muslim communities. Even in Renaix, where it was more difficult to purchase halal products in local shops, participants did not see this as an insurmountable barrier. Indeed, many were willing to expend considerable effort in travelling to purchase halal meat and they were prepared to bulk buy and freeze their purchases. Price was not raised as an obstacle for purchasing halal foods, this was primarily because potentially cheaper non-halal meat options were simply not considered to be a viable alternative, as they were forbidden by their religion. Whilst a lack of trust could function as a strong barrier for purchasing halal goods in specific stores, this did not prevent participants from sourcing halal foods. Instead, many focus group participants had developed more or less elaborate strategies to purchase trustworthy halal products. Thus, whilst the unreliability of the halal status of certain goods/shops was a concern, it did not affect the overall commitment of participants to eat halal foods. Certain focus group participants felt that whilst they experienced few problems accessing halal foods the situation was different for dependent people, such as children or hospital patients. Furthermore, in Bordeaux and Renaix, participants raised the issue of the provision of halal foods in public spaces like schools and hospitals.

##### **High, non-negotiable, commitment to halal amongst religious consumers**

With the exception of Turkey, the majority of FG participants were highly committed to consuming halal food and they considered halal status to be a non-negotiable characteristic of the meat they bought. Even though participants explained that there can be some uncertainty about what is halal and what is haram (with some foods having no clear status), only one person argued in favour of the consumption of non-halal food (and this was because they believed that non-halal organic foods were more in line with religious requirements to ensure good animal welfare than certain supposedly halal foods).

Self-defined 'religiously practicing' participants tended to view this issue in a strongly moralistic and polarized fashion. For these participants, eating halal was perceived as a 'good thing', and not eating halal, especially in a context of high availability, was viewed as a failure and, as such, would not be readily admitted. Moreover, admitting that one was

only an occasional halal eater would imply that one also eats haram (or forbidden) foods. However, it is crucial to note that this seemingly high commitment to halal food might not always be translated into purchasing or consumption practices. This is because, firstly, it is notoriously difficult to make reliable links between stated consumer preferences and actual behaviours.

Secondly, focus group discussions can privilege a ‘harmonization of opinions’ at the expense of alternative views, especially if those views are deemed to be non-conforming. This is clearly a risk in the case of halal food consumption, where there is very strong social pressure to give the appearance of conforming to religious requirements, even if one is not that committed in practice. This is clearly illustrated in an extract from the Bordeaux focus group, in which several participants attempt to negotiate what is meant by the religious obligation to consume halal foods.

*Bordeaux FG participant 1 Exactly! It depends on each individual's priorities. For this person, eating halal or not ... Personally, I think that maybe we give too much importance to ...*

*Bordeaux FG participant 2 Religion is meant to facilitate life, as we said earlier on. In this case, instead of throwing away non-halal meat, it is better to eat it saying « bismillah », as long as it is not pork, it can be eaten. Then, if really the person feels guilty about it, then one can perform ablutions for repentance.*

*Bordeaux FG participant 3: Exactly! What I mean is that I wouldn't buy non-halal meat with the excuse that I don't have enough money or other, eat that and feel guilty afterwards! No ! I just wouldn't eat meat!*

*Bordeaux FG participant 1: It depends on why she feels guilty really. Is it on the cultural level that it's been hammered in "you must eat halal"... or ...*

*Bordeaux FG participant 3: uh...hammered in, well, excuse-me, it is part of the religion! There's no hammering in, it is the religion!*

At the beginning of the extract the first participant starts to question the importance given to halal consumption, but she is unable to finish her sentence. Fortunately, she was rescued by another participant who developed a religious argument for the occasional non-consumption of halal food, which revolved around the flexibility of religious belief and the fact that religious belief should facilitate rather than hinder life. This position is immediately challenged by a third participants who states that she would rather not eat meat at all than consume haram products as she would feel too guilty. At this point the first participant questions whether this guilt actually arises from social and cultural pressure rather than from a failure to comply to religious rules. Finally, the discussion is closed down with the strong assertion that eating halal is a religious obligation – a statement that is difficult to contradict in the context of a group discussion with other Muslims. This example shows the advantages, as well as the limitations, of the focus group method. The method is particularly apt for identifying controversies, the positions of (religious) authorities, spontaneous alliances, taboos and influences. However, we would be mistaken

to think that the arguments of (religious) authority that often close discussions, by leading to an apparent consensus, are expressing the opinions of all, or even the majority of participants. Where social control is strong, contradictions cannot be expressed easily, frustrations are hidden and apparent consensus can be overemphasized.

### **Lower commitment amongst non-religious consumers**

In contrast to the seemingly strong commitment to halal consumption expressed by religious consumers, certain non-religious participants were more open about their weaker commitment to halal foods. In Bordeaux, certain participants argued that eating halal was not a pillar of Islam, and therefore should not be a high priority, but they did not question the religious status of such consumption. One participant even thought that consuming halal had unduly become as important as prayer (the second pillar of Islam) and that consuming halal foods had been given too much importance because of cultural pressures to conform. One Muslim and one non-Muslim participant declared that they would prefer to buy organic meat rather than halal. For the Muslim participant, organic meat was believed to be more in line with religious requirements than poor-quality halal-certified meat, for the non-Muslim participant, the organic label guaranteed a better quality product than halal. Furthermore, many Turkish participants viewed halal consumption as a cultural inclination rather than a religious obligation. Thus, we can see slightly different discursive alignments and differences occurring in countries that have Muslim majorities and those in which Muslims are in the minority. In countries such as Turkey, halal is often viewed in cultural terms and specifically as something traditional, which stands in opposition to Western notions and practices of modernity. However, in many European countries, where Muslims are in the minority, the importance of halal consumption is viewed mainly as a religious issue.

#### **Points for further studies :**

Participants believed that there were no longer any major physical or mental barriers for purchasing halal foods. Concerns were raised in France and Belgium where such foods are not available in public spaces.

1) market studies to assess the situation regarding the availability of religious foods in public spaces (schools, prisons, hospitals) in each countries.

Further study the correlations when they exist between level and type of commitment to halal foods

1) and the observance of other religious practices,

2) the mosque denominational affiliation if any

3) level of social acceptance of religious food in the country studied, level of halal food consumption by non-Muslims.

## 5. Participants' perceptions of the positive and negative attributes of halal meat

As part of the focus group discussions we addressed the issue of what qualities, other than religious, focus group participants associated with halal products. It is important to note that in certain countries, such as the UK and Germany, the designation 'halal' can cover a wide variety of food (and even non-food) items, whereas in other countries the designation 'halal' only tends to be used in association with meat products. This in turn had an important impact on consumer attitudes towards halal. For example, in Cardiff and Berlin, focus group participants thought that religious control was the main difference between halal and non-halal products. In contrast, in countries where halal only tended to be applied to meat products, focus group participants cited method of slaughter as the main difference between halal and non-halal products.

Many participants were not able to (or did not feel able to in this context) compare halal and non-halal meat. Indeed, some participants claimed that they could not make a comparison, as they had never tasted non-halal meat. Furthermore, in some cases discussing the quality of the halal meat was perceived as a way to challenge and criticise the obligation to consume halal foods and as such was avoided. For example, in the Renaix focus group, one participant strongly believed that this topic was not relevant and should have been dismissed.

*Renaix FG participant: "No, right madam, I think but the rest everyone is Muslim and then it's a question of religion that we should eat halal, do you understand? It is not the quality."*

However, discussing issues regarding the quality of halal meat were easier when at least one of the focus group participants was a halal eater who was either a non-Muslim or a recent convert to Islam.

In Istanbul, where religious obligation is not the primary motivation for eating halal, discussions over food quality were very developed. In relation to meat, Turkish focus group participants looked for signs of food safety, such as colour, taint and other indications of freshness. Clues such as colour were also believed to indicate the age of the animal and provide information about tenderness. Attributes such as hygiene and the cleanliness of the butcher's premise (as well as the cleanliness of the butcher himself) were also considered to be important. Finally, naturalness was deemed to be an important criteria and the use of artificial hormones, drugs and GMO was strongly rejected.

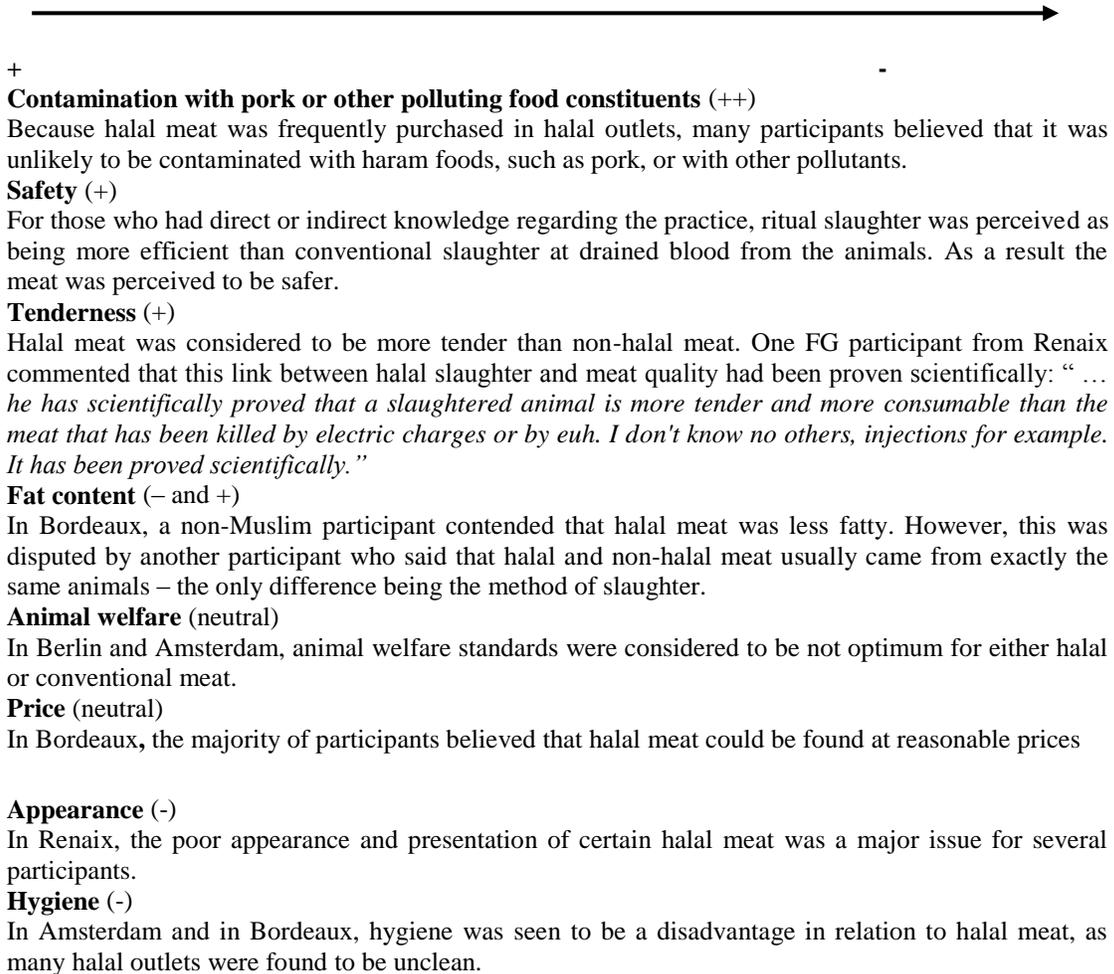
Despite some of the difficulties in encouraging European focus group participants to discuss their perceptions of the positive and negative attributes of halal meat, certain opinions were expressed about this issue. Figure 1 provides a summary of some of these

views. This data should be viewed as strictly exploratory and far more research would be needed before one could make reliable conjectures concerning consumers' perceptions of the attributes of halal products. However, the figure does highlight some of the interesting connections that consumers make between the physical properties of foods and their halal status. For example, certain participants believed that halal meat was more tender than non-halal meat, whereas others felt that the presentation and appearance of halal meat sometimes compared unfavourably with non-halal products.

**Figure 1: Participants' perceptions of the positive and negative attributes of halal meat**

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Contamination - Safety – Tenderness - Fat content – Welfare – Price - Appearance - Hygiene



## 6. Social acceptance of halal consumption and religious slaughter methods

In this section we explore focus group participants' perceptions of the broader social acceptance of religious slaughter methods and halal consumption. We asked participants how comfortable they felt consuming halal products in secularised societies and whether they experienced any discrimination and if so what was the nature of this discrimination. We hoped that this would enable us to explore the issue of Islamophobia, which is one of the most critical political and social issues in modern, multicultural Western societies.

### **Economic benefits**

Certain focus group participants pointed to the economic benefits of the halal market for local economic actors, something that they believed others viewed as a positive aspect of Muslim immigration. Certain participants also had personal experience of the shared economic interests between Muslims and local farmers at the time of Aïd el Kebir, when certain farms open their doors to the public, particularly in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. In the UK and Germany, no focus group participants commented on the fact that indigenous non-Muslims might view halal consumption in positive economic terms but rather they tended to think that religious slaughter and halal consumption was viewed more critically by members of the local population.

### **The “right” to consume halal foods**

As halal consumption is defined as a religious practice, participants thought that Muslims should be entitled to access to halal foods, even within public institutions such as schools, hospitals and prisons, however this has not always been the case and there continues to be certain problems regarding access to halal foods in certain countries.

In both the Bordeaux and Renaix focus groups, the low availability of halal food in public institutions was raised as an important issue of concern. Furthermore, this issue was heavily politicised and participants often interpreted it in terms of discrimination and the deprivation of minority rights by majority rule. In Berlin, Cardiff and Amsterdam there was no discussion regarding problems of the availability of halal food. Although these countries have experienced public conflicts concerning the issue of access to halal foods in public institutions such as schools and hospitals, none of the focus group participants considered that this reflected a low social acceptance of Muslim practices, but rather they believed that it reflected temporary shortcomings in the ongoing process of adaptation of the majority to the needs of minority groups.

In France, one of the main arguments in favour of the right to access to halal foods in public institutions, relates to the change of status of the Muslim minority from ‘guests’ to ‘citizens’. Since there is a significant Muslim population with French national citizenship, focus group participants argued that it was the responsibility of the French state to ensure the availability of Islamic compatible foods for Muslims in public institutions.

Even when there is a wide consensus regarding the necessity to practice one's religion and therefore to make halal food available in public institutions, certain focus group participants understood that the public provision of halal foods was not always an easy issue to solve, due to practical and economic reasons. One interesting solution to this problem was raised by a focus group participant from Bordeaux, who proposed to slaughter all animals according to Muslim religious slaughter rules, as this would satisfy both Muslims and non-Muslims. However, this notion was strongly rejected by another non-Muslim participant in the same focus group who felt that it was a way of imposing one's religion on to other people. He drew an analogy with a personal relationship that he was recently involved in where similar pressures were exerted to conform to beliefs that were not his own.

*Bordeaux FG participant: " yet at the same time, I'm not sure I would have had this attitude just a year ago ... ; it might be linked to a relationship which was argumentative at times; not that she is very religious, you probably wouldn't consider her as such as a matter of fact, but uh, just as an example ... it so happened that she told me « well, you've eaten pork meat and drunk wine so we're not sleeping together ! » ... what I mean is that sometimes I feel invaded by somebody who's trying to force me into a religious practice which isn't mine ...*

### **The miss-perception of religious slaughter as “uncivilized”**

In Cardiff, focus group participants believed that there was a low social acceptance of religious slaughter and halal meat consumption. They believed that this was not due to any issues of social discrimination or minority rights but rather due to public misconceptions about the uncivilized nature of religious slaughter and especially religious slaughter without prior stunning. In particular, focus group participants felt that:

- There was a lack of public knowledge about religious slaughter in the UK
- There were hostile press campaigns against Muslims, using religious slaughter as a pretext for criticism
- It was hypocritical to target Islamic slaughter methods for special attention, whilst outdoor slaughter without stunning still existed in many rural areas in the UK
- Whilst non-stunning and religious methods of slaughter are perceived to be barbaric, British methods are sometimes even more uncivilized.
- Stunning is primarily used for economic reasons in a context of mass production rather than for animal welfare reasons.

### **Concerns about future EU legislation regarding slaughter**

In the majority of study countries, focus group participants did not raise the issue of the ongoing discussions about religious slaughter at the EU level. However, in Amsterdam, concern was expressed that European regulation might be changed to remove the current derogation for religious slaughter practices, and thus effectively force the use of stunning prior to slaughter. This was felt to be an infringement of religious rights.

## 7. Control, trust and responsibility

In this section we address issues surrounding control, trust and responsibility in relation to the consumption of halal foods. In particular, we seek to understand whether, and to what extent, participants trusted claims made about the halal status of different products. We also explore the factors that helped to foster trust, as well as those that eroded trust in halal products. Furthermore, we examine whether participants thought that there was a need for stricter controls on halal products and we discuss who participants felt was, and should be, taking responsibility for ensuring the credibility of halal products.

### **Halal claims: a label alone is not sufficient**

Halal food labels and certification schemes were present in all study countries, however participants questioned their reliability. Certain participants highlighted the complexity of food chains in industrialized societies and hence the difficulty of guaranteeing that ‘halal’ requirements were followed at all stages of production. Participants were also suspicious about the proliferation of different halal labels on both food and non-food products and many were unwilling to trust a halal label without additional assurances. In particular, they believed that halal labels should be authenticated by trustworthy religious institutions that guaranteed control of the entire process along the food chain. Furthermore, many focus group participants preferred to place their trust in what they perceived to be more traditional and personal networks of supply, such as butcher shops. They believed that trust was not something that should be automatically taken-for-granted but rather it was something that had to develop over time through the building of relationships. This in turn implies an alternative regime of trust, where trust is based on indicators such as the integrity of the seller and the integrity of the premises, rather than on impersonal assurances from distant bodies. Indeed, Halal consumers used several different more traditional indicators of trustworthiness these included; the integrity of the shop selling halal food (the shop should not show any signs of disrespect towards religion, e.g. by also selling haram goods such as alcohol or pork), the cleanliness of the shop (good hygiene was viewed as a sign of religious conformity), and finally the reputation and morality of the seller (the seller should behave and act according to religions values, such as honesty, loyalty, and care).

### **Different regimes of responsibility in halal food chains**

Drawing on the focus group discussions it is possible to identify two different regimes of responsibility within halal food supply chains. The first regime, which we have termed the chain model, places responsibility firmly in the hands of the seller, or the person making a claim regarding the halal status of a given product. Responsibility is then passed along in a chain; the butcher is responsible in front of the customer, the wholesaler is responsible in front of the butcher, and the slaughterer is responsible in front of the wholesaler. In this

model, moral responsibility lies with individuals and not with institutions and the final consumer/eater is left free from any burden of responsibility. This chain model of responsibility was apparent in Bordeaux, Renaix and Amsterdam (in all these places the majority of participants were from Maghreb). In these three countries, many participants believed that those who claimed to be selling halal products had a moral responsibility to ensure that this was true and that this in itself should act as sufficient guarantee, which in turn meant that there was no need for further questioning or control.

The second regime, which we have termed the shared responsibility model, emphasises the importance of both sellers and buyers taking responsibility to ensure that the products on offer are genuinely halal. This model of responsibility was apparent in Cardiff and Berlin. In this model consumers check and monitor sellers, who must give proof of their credibility by stocking halal products displaying externally accredited labels and assurance schemes. This model can result when there is a separation between consumers and actors in the production and distribution chain.

### **A lack of consumer power**

Many participants were aware of the potential unreliability of information concerning the halal status of food products, however they were often faced with little choice other than to trust the information that they received. Different regimes of trust coincided with the chain and shared models of responsibility outlined above, however the power of the consumer was severely limited within both regimes. Within the chain model, there is little scope for the consumer to challenge or question the claims of the seller as this would be viewed as an offence slur on their integrity. As such the only sanction available to the consumer is to vote with their feet and take their trade elsewhere. Similarly, whilst the shared responsibility model seems to offer more power to the consumer, this power is limited by the consumer's knowledge and ability to verify the information given to him by producers and sellers. Protest is not an option in the first model and it is only a limited option in the second model.

### **Variations in trust and responsibility between study countries**

As we have already discussed, results from the focus groups indicated that there was low trust in the authenticity of halal foods in all study countries. Kjaernes et al (2007) differentiate between two types of trust in food, namely familiarity and confidence. "Familiarities ... rely on long-term personalized, experience-based and particular relations that involve knowledge of the shop, often also particular persons, and specific knowledge of the origins and qualities of food"

"Confidence relies on impersonal inter-relations with formal institutions ... Expectations and evaluations are based on generalized public opinion and codified, often formalized, types of information, such as labels".

There was strong evidence of the presence of both these forms of trust in consumers' relationships to halal food, however trust based on familiarity seemed to be more significant across all study countries, even given the increasing presence of halal labels in countries such as France and the UK.

There were other interesting differences in trust and responsibility across different study countries. The strongest expression of general distrust about food was found in Turkey, however the halal status of food was less questioned here. Many Turkish focus group participants showed a general distrust of society as a whole, which in part reflects tensions caused by Turkey's transition from tradition to modernity. In contrast, focus group participants from the Netherlands believed that their food supply-chain was trustworthy. However, many also believed that the system was so complex that it prevented access to information, especially for less-educated consumers. In Belgium, focus group participants complained of a lack of guarantees and were placed in a position in which they had little alternatives other than to trust producers and retailers. In the UK, despite the fact that halal labelling is well-developed, consumers felt the need to look for additional indicators (often related to familiarity rather than confidence) of the authenticity of halal products. There was a similar situation in France, however this was supplemented by another form of trust based on instinct. This can be summed up by the expression: 'if you cannot trust, listen to your heart'. Finally, in Germany, the model of shared responsibility was most prevalent and focus group participants believed that consumers had to take a certain amount of responsibility for ensuring the halal status of the products that they purchased.

**Points for further studies :**

In the FGs, the majority of participants expressed a willingness to rely on certifying agencies. Meantime most of participants think that the best guarantee is the one given by practicing slaughter oneself. For other foods products, consumer are concerns by the lack of reliability of certifying agencies or mosque.

- 1) How wide spread this trust is among this population, and among others regarding food labeling. In other words, if these people are willing to stake their religious convictions and the word of those organizations, are they willing to trust government claims regarding the health and safety of food items?
- 2) Would consumers trust non-religious third party groups about either halal status or health and safety issues of food?
- 3) What about halal consumer's opinions and concerns towards novel foods? When they are told that certain products are genetically modified, raised in organic conditions, or that meat was ritually slaughtered, do they trust the labeling authority? And more important than trusting the facts, is do they trust the implicit message that the authority is trying to convey regarding the appropriateness of consuming that product?

## CONCLUSION : POINTS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

	Kosher	Halal
<b>Shopping practices</b>	<p>1) Price/Quality issues. Is kosher meat really more expensive in the EU than non-kosher? Study the perception of the kosher consumer – does consumer think he/she is paying more for his/her purchase and by how much; does the non-kosher consumer have any opinion on the price of kosher vs. non-kosher meat, and what are relationships between the prices of kosher and non-kosher meat. What are the reasons for this difference ?</p> <p>2) Future trends as they relate to affiliation to religion. As noted many secular Jews are not particular about kosher. In the Halal study it was found that the younger generation is more interested in Halal than their parents. It would be interesting to look at such trends in the Jewish market. In addition, some Jews, particularly those of Sephardic ancestry demand kosher even when not strictly observant in other areas and it would be interesting to study how this is transmitted to the next generation.</p>	<p>1) Price/Quality issues. Does halal consumer have any opinion on the price/quality of halal vs. non-halal meat. What are relationships between the prices of halal and non-halal meat. What are the reasons for this difference ? Preference for butcher rather than supermarket need to be assessed by market studies.</p> <p>2) Future trends as they relate to affiliation to religion. It was found that the younger generation is more interested in Halal than their parents. Market studies are needed to confirm / inform this.</p> <p>3) What is halal can be defined differently. The halal / haram foods proximity seems more an issue in the UK than in France for instance. Can this idea of purity/impurity be related to a religious trend and juridic shool ? What is role of the marketing in the definition of halal, in the perception of halal as pure that should not be contaminated?</p> <p>4) Some consumers prefer to buy the animal alive and kill it themselves? Does this practice - common in rural area- still exist in urban area, how it is justified ?</p>
<b>Animal Welfare</b>	<p>1) It appears that the aversion to stunning in Europe may carry two undercurrents - the stated suspicions of the motivations, and that the methods of stunning carry negative associations with methods used by Nazis. We think that this second issue should be further explored.</p> <p>2) Post-cut stunning was not raised or discussed. Knowledge and attitudes towards this practice should be researched.</p>	<p>1) Knowledge of religious slaughter is limited or relates to sacrifice practices. Religious slaughter is often understood as a non industrial practice. Knowledge and understanding on stunning are very limited.</p> <p>2)In order to give more information to consumer, investigations are needed to understand consumers's resistance to scientific / religious knowledge. (Science and society issues).</p>
<b>Commitment</b>	We suggest to further study the correlations	Participants believed that there were no longer

	<p>when they exist between level and type of commitment to kosher laws</p> <p>1) and the observance of other religious practices, e.g. Sabbath observance, synagogue attendance, etc.</p> <p>2) the synagogue denominational affiliation</p> <p>3) level of social acceptance of religious food in the country studied level of kosher food consumption by non-Jews.</p> <p>- Further studies on the correlations between commitment and life course.</p> <p>1) To investigate the attitude of Jews who do not observe the kosher laws and of non-Jews towards whether kosher food is healthier, tastier, or better for animal welfare, or the opposites.</p> <p>2) To examine the reasons for keeping kosher among Jews who were raised keeping kosher as compared to those who adapted the lifestyle later in life.</p> <p>3) if possible to have Jews who abandoned observing kosher laws as adults try to relate what the reasons for observing it that they had before quitting, and how they felt and feel about taste, healthiness, and animal welfare of kosher food.</p>	<p>any major physical or mental barriers for purchasing halal foods. Concerns were raised in France and Belgium where such foods are not available in public spaces.</p> <p>1) market studies to assess the situation regarding the availability of religious foods in public spaces (schools, prisons, hospitals) in each countries.</p> <p>-Further study the correlations when they exist between level and type of commitment to halal foods</p> <p>1) and the observance of other religious practices,</p> <p>2) the mosque denominational affiliation if any</p> <p>3) level of social acceptance of religious food in the country studied, level of halal food consumption by non-Muslims.</p> <p>-Further studies on the correlations between commitment and life course</p> <p>1) To investigate the attitude, opinions, concerns of Muslims who do not commit to halal foods</p> <p>2) To examine the reasons for keeping halal as compared to those who adapted the lifestyle later in life.</p> <p>3) to investigate opinions of muslims who abandoned eating halal.</p>
<p><b>Social acceptance</b></p>	<p>1) Survey on the acceptance of religious foods amongst non muslim, non jews</p>	<p>1) Survey on the acceptance of religious foods amongst non muslim, non jews</p>
<p><b>Certification and Trust issues</b></p>	<p>In the FGs, the majority of participants expressed a willingness to rely on many of certifying agencies to determine what food is kosher. It would be interesting to explore</p> <p>- How wide spread this trust is among this population, and among others regarding food labeling. In other words, if these people are willing to stake their religious convictions and the word of those organizations, are they willing to trust government claims regarding the health and safety of food items?</p> <p>- Would consumers trust non-rabbinic, third party groups about either kosher status or health and safety issues of food?</p> <p>- How does the non-Kosher consuming Jew or non-Jewish consumer relate to labeling on food products?</p> <p>- What about kosher consumer's opinions and concerns towards novel foods? When they are told that certain products are</p>	<p>In the FGs, the majority of participants expressed a willingness to rely on certifying agencies. Meantime most of participants think that the best guarantee is the one given by practicing slaughter oneself. For other foods products, consumer are concerns by the lack of reliability of certifying agencies or mosque.</p> <p>1) How wide spread this trust is among this population, and among others regarding food labeling. In other words, if these people are willing to stake their religious convictions and the word of those organizations, are they willing to trust government claims regarding the health and safety of food items?</p> <p>2) Would consumers trust non-rreligious third party groups about either halal status or health and safety issues of food?</p> <p>3) What about halal consumer's opinions and concerns towards novel foods? When they are told that certain products are genetically modified, raised in organic conditions, or that</p>

	<p>genetically modified, raised in organic conditions, or that meat was ritually slaughtered, do they trust the labeling authority? And more important than trusting the facts, is do they trust the implicit message that the authority is trying to convey regarding the appropriateness of consuming that product?</p> <p>All of these questions can be addressed in surveys that compare and contrast it with the seemingly almost complete, almost naïve, confidence that the kosher consumers expressed in the rabbinic certifying agencies.</p>	<p>meat was ritually slaughtered, do they trust the labeling authority? And more important than trusting the facts, is do they trust the implicit message that the authority is trying to convey regarding the appropriateness of consuming that product?</p>
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# dialrel

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The DIALREL project is funded by the European Commission and involves partners from 11 countries. It addresses issues relating to religious slaughter in order to encourage dialogue between stakeholders and interested parties. Religious slaughter has always been a controversial and emotive subject, caught between animal welfare considerations and cultural and human rights issues. There is considerable variation in current practices and the rules regarding religious requirements are confusing. Consumer demands and concerns also need to be addressed and the project is collecting and collating information relating to slaughter techniques, product ranges, consumer expectations, market share and socio-economic issues. The project is multidisciplinary and based on close cooperation between veterinarians, food scientists, sociologists, and jurists and other interested parties.

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**The text represents the views of the author(s) and does not necessarily represent a position of the Commission, who will not be liable for the use made of such information.**

DIALREL Project  
Coordinator

Dr Mara Miele

School of City and  
Regional Planning

Cardiff University  
Glamorgan Building  
King Edward VII  
Avenue  
Cardiff, CF10 3WA  
United Kingdom

