

Crowdfunding a Better World?

Ethical Consumption, Empowerment, and the Role
of Infrastructures in Marketplace Change

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Peter Thomas Hambrecht, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

30th April 2019

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Abstract

Ethical consumption is propagated as one of the main means of alleviating sustainability problems in contemporary society. The thesis challenges the dominant Choice Paradigm within marketing, which assumes that buying behaviour leads to meaningful societal change. It asks instead how consumer empowerment can be conceptualised when users self-organise value creation activities and looks at the factors that influence their ability to affect marketplace outcomes. Lastly, it explores whether new ethical consumption opportunities and behaviours emerge from self-organised value creation.

A phenomenon-driven case study research design is adopted to address these questions in the context of crowdfunding, which is seen as an instantiation of self-organised value creation. Multiple crowdfunding projects are investigated to understand the meanings attached to the phenomenon and the implications of ethical campaigns in the market. Interviews, documents and observations are combined for an in-depth, grounded analysis of the cases.

The thesis makes various important contributions to the literature. First, it offers a more extensive conceptualisation of co-creative empowerment than that found in existing research. It argues that the earlier consumers wield an influence in market development cycles, the larger the impact they have within the economy, which ideally starts with the financing of innovations. It identifies several factors that shape the ability of people to affect marketplace outcomes. In particular, participatory market infrastructures play a crucial enabling role by providing open, transparent and collectively-organised means for coordinating value creation activities. This allows users to engage in collective market entrepreneuring, where resources are mobilised by a group or network of individuals towards social change. New solutions emerge out of these efforts, as institutional constraints are circumvented and diverse discourses attain a market presence. Finally, a detailed exploration of zero waste stores shows that the material realities that emerge out of crowdfunding campaigns influence the behaviour of multiple stakeholders. The concept of consumption infrastructures is introduced to demonstrate how varying socio-material constellations provide different lifestyle affordances and reflexively mobilise people to adopt or abstain from sustainable practices. Here, especially the discussion of aesthetic reflexivity and ethical experiences offers an innovative angle on research into responsible consumer behaviour.

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I dedicate this thesis to all pioneers of change, who actively work towards the betterment of this world.

You can't start a fire without a spark.
Bruce Springsteen

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Chapter 1 – The Introduction: Marketplace Change and Where to Find It

The times they are a changin'.
Bob Dylan

1.1. Background

The times are changing on our planet and within contemporary society. The world's atmosphere is increasingly filled with carbon emissions and other forms of pollution. The oceans are full of microplastics, heating up and increasingly hostile to different life forms. The soil used for agriculture is degrading and saturated with toxins stemming from industrial activity in many places. In short, our planet is changing as mankind ushers in the age of the Anthropocene. These few statements highlight the impact that the human economy has had on the health of natural ecosystems, which presents just one of the most pressing societal issues of our time. Countless social problems, such as rising inequality, modern slavery, and other forms of abuse, could be added to this list. Of course, these concerns have not gone by unnoticed in public debates, so that there is a growing interest in finding ways to tackle and potentially reverse these developments, as evidenced by the recent rise of the Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion protests. At the political level, the Sustainable Development Goals have been advanced by the United Nations (2019), which prominently feature production and consumption as two main avenues for change. In recent years, however, consumers have increasingly been identified as the principle agents in charge of facilitating the emergence of a more sustainable economy (Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Humphreys 2014; Soron 2010). Accordingly, diverse market actors have pushed for sustainable consumption (Schrader and Thøgersen 2011) and research has tried to do its part by providing a better understanding of this phenomenon (Connelly, Ketchen, and Slater 2011; Prothero et al. 2011). In particular, the literature on ethical consumption has been prominent in this area, looking at the factors that influence the uptake of responsible market behaviours. Implicit to the growing responsabilisation of consumers is the assumption that they are actually capable of transforming the economy through their choices, which is not necessarily the case. Consumers might lack the options, resources, knowledge or other means to effectively signal their values in the market. If we challenge the notion that changing consumer choices is the best way to reach sustainable development goals, the question essentially turns to what sort of empowerment would better serve this

function? One answer may be found in the study of value co-creation. Recent research has argued that technological changes have opened up value creation activities to large parts of the population (Asmussen et al. 2013; Cova and Cova 2009; Jenkins 2006; Labrecque et al. 2013; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004b; von Hippel 2007), so that individuals and groups can now shape market outcomes more directly. This thesis takes co-creation as its departure point to understand how people influence the evolution of the economy through novel market infrastructures.

1.2. Objectives of the Thesis and Research Design

The thesis started out with the very simple question of how people can most effectively achieve marketplace change towards sustainability. Although consumption is ubiquitous in today's society and it seems natural that the best way to start such transformations would be to convince people to adjust their shopping behaviours, this logic is flawed because consumers might lack appropriate options to enact their needs or institutional forces keep things as they are. Co-creation, therefore, offers a promising opportunity for users to develop solutions to ethical problems, rather than waiting for established businesses to come their way. Based on the review of the literature, self-organised value creation, where users develop new offerings without a sponsoring company, was identified as the main research area. This led to the following three research questions:

Research Question 1: How can consumer empowerment be conceptualised in settings, where consumers self-organise value creation activities?

Research Question 2: What factors influence or enable consumers to partake in self-organised value creation?

Research Question 3: Does self-organised value creation lead to new ethical consumption opportunities and behaviours?

In order to answer the above research questions, crowdfunding was chosen as the empirical setting. It was seen as an instantiation of self-organised value creation because crowdfunding campaigns are typically run by people with a specific idea, which gets posted on a crowdfunding website independent of any existing commercial entities. The project initiators and their funders meet on a level playing field and both parties depend on each other, either to acquire resources or to implement a certain solution to a perceived market problem. Accordingly, several case studies of crowdfunding projects were conducted to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon.

1.3. The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into a total of nine chapters. Chapter 1 starts off with an introduction, where the scene is set for the overall outlook and objectives of the investigation. In particular, the growing sustainability concerns in contemporary society are highlighted and the fact that ethical consumption is seen as one avenue to remedy negative environmental and social developments. In addition, it highlights the goals of the thesis and provides an outline of the chapters.

The literature review (Chapters 2-4) provides a synopsis of existing research on ethical consumption and other academic streams, which are used to criticise this approach to marketplace change. Chapter 2 starts off with a look at how ethical consumption has been defined, before moving on to empirical research on the topic, which seeks to understand what factors influence the uptake of responsible consumer behaviour and the problems related to the attitude-behaviour gap. Chapter 3 then offers various critiques of the Choice Paradigm or, more simply, the assumption that consumer empowerment should be linked to voting with the shopping cart. These include: 1) the psychological perspective, which sees people frequently overwhelmed by choice complexity; 2) the macromarketing perspective, which looks at consumer vulnerability and the fact that people may lack power within the market for various reasons; 3) the ecological perspective, which questions the ability of ethical consumption to move society towards sustainability due to overall resource use levels and their dynamics; 4) the sociological perspective, which looks at macro-cultural influences in consumer societies that are likely to offset or discourage ethical consumption tendencies; and 5) the cultural perspective, which emphasises how micro-cultural contexts shape meanings and channel consumer identities in favour of commercial interests, rather than sustainability. Finally, the literature on co-creation and user innovation is reviewed in Chapter 4. A differentiation between company-led and self-organised value creation is made to argue that users have more abilities nowadays to actively shape the market and that there is a need to understand this phenomenon from an empowerment perspective. In this light, crowdfunding is identified as a form of self-organised value creation and various research questions are presented that provide the departure point of the investigation.

The methodology chapter outlines the data collection approaches used to answer the research questions. It begins with a description of the interpretivist research philosophy that was adopted in the thesis and then moves on to the research design. Several qualitative methods were applied to get a deep understanding of various cases. Qualitative interviews were the backbone of the examination, as both initiators and funders of crowdfunding projects were asked what meanings and significance they attached to crowdfunding. Observations and documents provided supplementary evidence, particularly in the form of visual data that was gathered during field trips. Each method is separately covered within the chapter, as well as the practical aspects of the data collection process. A grounded theory approach guided the data analysis process and is also outlined in the chapter. The final section looks at quality criteria and how the thesis performed on various dimensions.

The sixth chapter presents the first part of the findings in two major sections. The first section looks at the characteristics of participatory market infrastructures and why they are deemed important by initiators and funders. Compared to previous research on crowdfunding, it looks specifically at the intangible benefits of public value creation activities and the independence it provides compared to conventional ways of going to market. The second section looks at the implications this has on the realisation of business ideas, arguing that collective decision making and the mobilisation of resources foster discourse diversity, as alternative meanings and organisational forms materialise. It also highlights the positive side effects of widely accessible participatory market infrastructures, where innovation processes are demystified and inspire others to take action, as people learn from past crowdfunding projects.

The seventh chapter looks at the impact self-organised value creation has within the market after crowdfunding projects materialise. The concept of consumption infrastructures is advanced to show how zero waste stores establish new action possibilities and meanings through different material constellations, organisational philosophies, and socialities. These are contrasted to conventional supermarkets to show that different forms of conduct and subjectivities arise in these places and mobilise people through cognitive, aesthetic, and hermeneutic reflexivity. In particular, the creation of coherent ethical experiences facilitates the adoption of sustainable practices, as consumers are encouraged to extend their ethical deliberations into diverse life domains. The retail concepts are built on complicated sourcing arrangements, which

show that back-end processes are equally important for establishing consumer trust. Finally, supportive social environments help to develop consumption competences and provide emotional support to users, so that behaviours are sustained over time.

The last two chapters outline the contributions of the thesis. Chapter 8 takes another look at the findings to discuss how self-organised value creation establishes a new kind of empowerment, which allows users to directly wield an influence on markets. It then moves on to participatory market infrastructures and what factors influence the uptake of value creation activities, placing a particular emphasis on the aspects of democratisation and collective action. The second section examines the effects new consumption infrastructures have on consumer behaviour, through providing new action frontiers and different ethical experiences. It also covers the role of social interactions and the effect zero waste stores have on other businesses. The theoretical and empirical implications are summarised in Chapter 9 to demonstrate the broader significance of the thesis. The limitations of the investigation and future research possibilities are explored at the end of the chapter to continue the academic debate on this topic.

In covering all these aspects, the thesis aims to improve our knowledge of the complexities involved in creating a sustainable economy. It emphasises, in particular, the importance of involving more people in value creation activities, so that virtuous market alternatives can emerge. Furthermore, the need for more engaging ethical experiences and better consumption infrastructures is underscored. In an effort to make some of the main points of this thesis shine through, a few song titles and excerpts have been added along the way, so that the experiential aspects of consuming this text aid further understanding and make it enjoyable.

Chapter 2 – The Literature Review: Ethical Consumption

2.0. Introduction to Literature Review Chapters: Ethical Consumption, Empowerment, and Value Co-Creation

Consumption is a central aspect of life in many affluent societies around the world today. Wherever people turn they are surrounded by billboards, shops or mobile messages promoting one sort of product over another. Yet, critical voices are becoming louder that point toward the cracks in the shining façade of modern day consumption. It is the growing realisation that current ways of consuming have undesirable consequences that reach far beyond the individual and are causing damage in other valued areas of life (Borgmann 2000; Csikszentmihalyi 2000). A central theme of this criticism is that the study of consumption should entail more than the satisfaction of wants and an understanding of how offerings can optimally be sold. When looking at consumption, researchers need to recognise the full range of its consequences, not only the value consumers and companies extract for themselves during the exchange process. It is about taking seriously the environmental and social shadows that lurk behind marketplace offerings, which usually fall outside the boundaries of common marketing models (Princen 2001). A diverse body of knowledge has tackled this problem by investigating how ethical issues impact on consumer behaviour. This chapter critically reviews this literature, highlighting the different perspectives taken towards the study of ethical consumption and their key challenges. A particular focus will be set on how their underlying assumptions influence our understanding of consumer empowerment. The attention to power is important because it fundamentally affects what action possibilities and competences are attributed to consumers, shaping their ability to address ethical issues within the market.

The literature review is split into three different chapters. Chapter 2 looks at common conceptions of ethical consumption and various empirical research streams, providing a departure point from which to discuss the subject matter. Furthermore, it highlights key assumptions underlying this research, which are mainly built on a conception of power that is rooted in the choices consumers make. Chapter 3 presents various challenges to this view. It covers research on choice complexity (psychological perspective), consumer vulnerability (macromarketing), sustainability (ecological perspective), consumer societies and responsabilisation (sociological perspective), and how consumer imagination is channelled through cultural vehicles and in shopping environments

(cultural perspective). Lastly, Chapter 4 looks at how co-creation contests the dichotomy between production and consumption that is evident in much of the literature today. As a result, the dominant consumer sovereignty model of power is problematised (see Alvesson and Sandberg 2011), so that a new angle on empowerment and ethical consumption is required, as people become increasingly involved in the development of marketplace offerings. The thesis uses this challenge as its departure point and develops research questions based on this knowledge gap.

2.1. Ethics in Consumption

2.1.1. Definitions of Ethical Consumption: Buying with a Conscience

The last decade has not exactly been a joyride for people who believe in the positive transformative potential of the market. In 2008, the financial crises hit the global economy and revealed the unethical and, in some cases, downright fraudulent practices of the banking industry, which destroyed the life savings of many ordinary citizens and billions of dollars' worth of taxpayers' money. Sadly, the shortcomings in the financial sector were not an isolated incident. Other industries have equally encountered negative publicity due to their misconduct. The collapse of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh, the sinking of the oil platform Deep Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico, and various food scandals in Europe are just a few additional examples. Although ethical transgressions of corporations certainly predate the twenty-first century, the recent upsurge of malpractices has invigorated consumers' concerns about the impact businesses have on society, leading them to scrutinise their marketplace choices. In scholarly circles, this phenomenon has been referred to as ethical consumption and has been linked to a broad range of societal problems. Consumers can buy products that are locally produced, organically grown, second-hand, fair-trade certified, or in some other way labelled to signal their ethical credentials. Countless other issues could be added to this list, showing that many concerns are reflected in the practice of ethical consumption (Cooper-Martin and Holbrook 1993). Given the broad range of ethical considerations, it is essential to delineate the meaning of the concept before continuing with the discussion.

Ethical consumption has been defined in various ways, but usually a few key characteristics can be identified. Crane and Matten (2004) describe ethical consumption as a “conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values” (p.290). Two important inferences can be made from this definition. First, moral beliefs and values are a core reason why the consumer makes the choice in the first place. Moral issues gain the higher ground in these consumption decisions and profoundly influence the selection of product alternatives. In other words, consumers go beyond self-gain considerations and evaluate options based on their ethical implications. Second, ethical consumption is intentional. This means that a person who coincidentally buys an ethically-labelled product (e.g. fair-trade coffee) would not classify as an ethical agent (see also Littler 2009). The consumer, consequentially, is assumed to act rationally, selecting those offerings that most closely align with his or her personal belief system. This, as the next section will outline, has had a significant influence on how the topic is approached in marketing and the type of models used in research papers.

Similar prerequisites can be found in the works of other authors. Carrington, Shaw, and Chatzidakis (2016) ascribe ethical consumers “political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motives for choosing one product over another ... [who] are concerned with the impact of their consumption choices ... which goes beyond the individual to a collectivist societal orientation” (p.4). Likewise, Balderjahn (2013) sees ethical consumption as an umbrella concept, where other-oriented considerations (i.e. frugal, environmental, social, and animal-related issues) play a fundamental role. Here, the moral consequences of consumption are equally at the centre of attention. Indeed, this focus can be traced back to early works in the domain, as evidenced in the descriptions of the socially-conscious consumer. Webster (1975) portrays the socially-conscious consumer as “a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change” (p.188). Ethical consumption, therefore, reflects concerns about the general consequences of consumption decisions, which lead people to make choices that either minimise moral problems or maximise the benefits to society, in the hope of affecting social change. The next section will look at empirical research on the topic, highlighting common approaches and assumptions within the field.

2.1.2. Empirical Research on Ethical Consumption

2.1.2.1. Attitudinal Research on Ethical Consumption: Mind the Gap!

The previous section has provided a broad overview of what ethical consumption entails, emphasising that it is usually seen as an intentional process, whereby consumers carefully consider the broader consequences of marketplace choices. The following paragraphs explore how ethical consumption has been tackled in research practice, starting with attitudinal research, which predominates today. As ethical consumption is an abstract concept, it is not possible to investigate all kinds of ethical choices and their determinants simultaneously. Most research focuses on a narrow set of variables that is believed to affect the propensity of individuals to act on their moral inclinations within the market (Balderjahn 2013). The discussion will thus be broken down into subunits to understand the myriad elements that impact on ethical behaviour.

Cognitive models have frequently been used within the field, as consumers are assumed to engage in rational decision making. The *Theory of Planned Behaviour* (TPB) is one such case. The TPB, in its original form, outlines that behaviour is a function of intention, which, in turn, is influenced by three factors: attitude; subjective norm; and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen 1991). Attitude denotes whether or not the behaviour under investigation is seen favourably, while subjective norm reflects a person's belief about what others would like him or her to do. Perceived behavioural control considers how cumbersome an individual thinks it is to enact a certain behaviour, which reflects past experiences and anticipated obstacles (ibid). For example, a consumer may view local goods favourably because they are less likely to be produced under adverse conditions, which might cause the inference that friends would evaluate a purchase positively. Yet, the lack of adequate options may lead to a lower level of perceived control, making it more difficult to select these types of offerings. The combination of these factors determines the person's intention towards the purchase of a local product and the likelihood of it being performed.

A series of studies has applied the TPB in ethical contexts. In many cases they either offer an *extension or a critique of the theory*. Shaw, Shiu, and Clarke (2000) investigate the attitudes of ethical consumers towards the purchase of fair-trade goods through a questionnaire. In their study, they propose that two additional dimensions should be integrated into the theory: a) ethical obligation, representing personal beliefs about right and wrong; and b) self-identity, which assesses how central ethical concerns are to an

individual's self-concept (ibid). The authors find that the predictive ability of the TPB is improved through the inclusion of these measures. This finding is supported by a later publication based on the same dataset (see Shaw and Shiu 2002), as well as earlier research into environmentally-friendly behaviour (Minton and Rose 1997). Interestingly, Shaw and Shiu (2003) challenge their own conclusions in yet another paper, arguing that the TPB should be replaced with a layered model, as it more accurately matches their data in a structural equation modelling task. They propose that two meta-constructs, Behavioural Control and Internal Reflection, should precede behavioural intentions, challenging the unidimensional measures employed in the TPB. Nonetheless, even their model fails to explain 48% of the variation in behaviour (ibid). These three articles in many ways illustrate issues commonly encountered in the field, even though they refer to the same survey.

Ethical consumption research has been criticised for its inability to reliably predict when and how moral concerns translate into actual consumer behaviour. Scholars have sought a variety of explanations for this attitude-behaviour gap (see Caruana, Carrington, and Chatzidakis 2015). First, *methodological and sampling decisions* made in past investigations have been scrutinised. The heavy dependence on survey methodology and its susceptibility to social desirability bias is a common critique point. Auger and Devinney (2007), for instance, generally doubt the ability of questionnaires to reveal the true attitudes of respondents, as these are far too likely to misconstrue their answers to appear more socially responsible than they really are, and because generic questions are unlikely to capture the complex nature of ethical decisions. In a survey administered to students conducted by the authors, these assertions are supported and reinforced through the use of a variety of sophisticated analysis techniques. Randall and Fernandes (1991) come to a similar conclusion, showing that social desirability is a serious concern in ethics research.

Second, research within the field often uses *purposive sampling*, which may exaggerate the ethical tendencies of consumers by focusing on rather extreme subpopulations. The three papers published by Shaw and her colleagues, which were outlined earlier, were all based on a sample of ethical consumers because moral concerns were seen to be particularly relevant to them (see Shaw and Shiu 2003, p.1489). Yet, it has been demonstrated that perceived knowledge levels can be barriers to ethical consumption (Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Ellen 1994). Indeed, in a study on environmentally-related

behaviours, Polonsky et al. (2012) show that knowledge has a significant impact on attitudes, which in turn determine the actions of consumers. Hence, presuming that ethical decision-making processes mirror that of a small subpopulation is likely to lead to a skewed picture and might offer a partial explanation for the mismatch between recorded attitudes and actual behaviour.

Third, when it comes to *cognitive models*, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, their tendency to presume certain pre-existing states of mind may actually impose a structure on consumer thinking that would not normally arise. Ogden (2003) shows, through a systematic review of published articles, that it is difficult to reject these types of models, as they tend to *recruit evidence* in such a way that they become true by definition rather than empirical observation. Davies, Foxall, and Pallister (2002) also maintain that multi-attribute models oversimplify the decision-making processes of consumers, as explanatory variables may interact and overlap in various ways. They caution researchers not to directly link intentions to behaviour and recommend an integrated model to improve the predictive power of future studies. There are, consequentially, diverse weaknesses in the methodological designs, sampling procedures, and underlying theoretical models used in ethical consumption research, which, to some degree, explain the divergence between attitudes and behaviour.

Another approach to explaining this mismatch has been to look at what prevents consumers from acting on their beliefs. Several *barriers* have been identified in this respect. Bray, Johns, and Kilburn (2011) describe numerous factors that can impinge on ethical consumption. They find that financial and quality considerations may override moral concerns or that cynicism inhibits action. In other words, consumers may place their own gains above ethical considerations or doubt that their actions will lead to more benign outcomes, discouraging them to shift their spending patterns away from conventional marketplace offerings. Likewise, Young et al. (2010) find that “green consumers can use their buying power to make a difference, but at a high cost in terms of effort and time” (p.30). This, in turn, is unlikely to aid the adoption of environmentally-friendly practices, as consumers are unwilling to integrate them into their busy lifestyles. Existing consumption habits may further discourage any kind of change. Jackson (2005) describes how consumers are locked into consumption patterns due to critical decisions they made in the past, which can prevent more sustainable behaviour. Certain practices may simply be so entrenched in daily routines that it

becomes very hard to alter them over time. Heiskanen and Pantzar (1997) describe this effect as becoming “hostage to the past” (p.436), as internalised practices are no longer subject to critical assessment. Moreover, access and availability problems might present obstacles towards responsible consumption patterns (Press and Arnould 2009). Taken together, this partially explains why it is difficult to establish common behavioural patterns not only in different consumer groups, but also in the ways that individuals approach certain issues across product categories (McDonald et al. 2009). Consumers, in short, might be put off by the costs of making ethical choices, both in terms of higher expenditures and the mental energy required to alter certain behaviours.

Consumers may also challenge the need to engage in ethical consumption by *rationalising their behaviour*. A variety of strategies have been employed towards this end. Chatzidakis, Hibbert, and Smith (2007) identify five *neutralisation techniques* in a qualitative inquiry into fair trade consumption, which consumers may use to curtail the influence of moral concerns on their choices. Most notably, people may deny responsibility for a problem by claiming it is beyond their control or by playing down the consequences of their actions. Hence, a frequently observed opinion is that one person cannot possibly be held accountable for the wrongs created within the market system. People who follow this line of argumentation tend to ignore their own contribution to societal problems and deflect blame to other institutions, often presenting marketing as a chief offender in the process (Pereira Heath and Chatzidakis 2012). Strutton, Vitell, and Pelton (1994) lend further support to the applicability of these findings, albeit in a slightly different setting, as they demonstrate how consumers use these techniques to defend their own ethical transgressions in market settings. *Justifications* are also employed to escape moral deliberations. Eckhardt, Belk, and Devinney (2010) describe three such strategies: 1) economic rationalisation, where consumers contend that value-for-money trumps all other considerations; 2) institutional dependency, where other institutions are believed to be in a better position to solve consumption-related problems (e.g. through regulation); 3) developmental realism, which sees occasional unethical behaviours by providers as necessary to economic progress. Furthermore, consumers can apply *ad hoc strategies to compensate* the negative impact of their behaviour. Carbon-offsetting or other payback schemes are a case in point. These complementary services enable consumers to acquire a desired offering, while alleviating themselves of their guilt (see Lovell, Bulkeley, and Liverman 2009; Scott, Christie, and Tench 2003). All of these techniques may be invoked by

individuals to liberate themselves from responsibility, but they could also indicate more profound goal conflicts.

People can take on multiple roles when they consume, leading them to pursue a diversity of objectives when making marketplace choices. Ethical consumption in many ways complicates these matters even further, as it adds another dimension to the decision-making process. Szmigin, Carrigan, and McEachern (2009) in a study on voluntary simplifiers, for instance, find that consumers have to balance competing demands, as their ambitions clash with those of family members and friends. As a result, they often take a flexible approach to ethical consumption to accommodate the concerns of relevant others and to prevent threats to their self-identity. This implies that the inconsistencies observed in ethical consumption patterns are not a problem from the perspective of consumers, but a necessary method for dealing with goal conflicts. Indeed, in an investigation into the potential causes of the intention-behaviour gap, Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell (2014) discuss how ethical concerns are integrated into the lives of consumers. Based on a multi-method study of ethical consumers, they argue that *moral concerns get prioritised* based on how central they are to a person's self-identity. If issues are very important to an individual, he or she will be more willing to make sacrifices and to integrate them into lifestyle decisions, so positive behaviour becomes habitual over time. However, if a problem is perceived to be less significant, it might not be acted upon with such diligence, leading to incoherent shopping tendencies (ibid). This helps explain the discrepancy between intentions and behaviour, but at the same time questions the assumption that all ethical choices are created equal. The ethical status that is attributed to products and labels in many studies may not be as unambiguous as assumed. Aside from goal conflicts and value priorities, the *choice context* may offer contradictory information. Tanner and Wölfing Kast (2003) find that supermarkets lower environmentally-sound purchases because they tend to sell products that only perform well on one ethical dimension (e.g. biologically produced), but fail to address other criteria that are vital to their customers (e.g. little packaging). Other examples might include fair-trade bananas, which are shipped half way around the world, or compostable, single-use cups. These products all send mixed messages to the consumer, who may be faced with undesirable trade-offs when trying to buy ethical goods, as one concern might need to be balanced against another of equal importance. From this vantage point, the non-purchase of ethical products cannot serve as an indicator for inconsistent behaviour, as their virtue is contested.

Ethical consumption is a complicated field, where people have many incentives to make or avoid certain kinds of choices. Generally, ethical consumers think about the consequences of their consumption and try to buy products with positive moral qualities. Yet, research has identified a discrepancy between the stated intentions and actual behaviours of these consumers. The previous paragraphs highlighted several explanations for this, including: problems with the research designs of empirical studies; various barriers and costs linked to ethical decisions; rationalisations or justifications for intention-inconsistent behaviour; as well as goal conflicts and competing priorities. This showed that the process of engaging in ethical consumption is complex and that the nature of ethical goods can be contested. It was also emphasised that caution needs to be taken, when inferences about ethical behaviour are based on the views of people, who are very knowledgeable about the implications of marketplace offerings. While this discussion has looked at the factors that impact on ethical consumption more generally and what models have been used to explain decision-making processes, other studies have looked at the dimensions that influence the propensity of consumers to integrate ethical concerns into their choices. The following section explores this literature stream.

2.1.2.2. Antecedents to Ethical Consumption: Personal Values and Social Influences

The previous section looked at various limitations of attitudinal research and the barriers that inhibit people from acting on their moral principles. While this research has revealed many factors that impact on the decision processes of ethical consumers, other scholars have explored elements that drive people to reflect on societal issues during market exchanges.

Ethical consumption is facilitated by diverse personal as well as contextual conditions. As it implies a conscious inclusion of moral issues in consumption decisions, the consumer's beliefs become a crucial determinant of ethical consumption. *Personal values*, which regulate the content and importance of different moral concerns, have a pivotal role in the process (Allen and Ng 1999; Vinson, Scott, and Lamont 1977). Shaw et al. (2005), for instance, find that universalism positively impacts on ethical consumer decisions. Universalism logically aligns with ethical consumption because it stresses justice and the protection of welfare for all people and nature. A similar observation can be made when conservative values are important to the consumer. Steenhaut and van Kenhove (2006) show that the more security, conformity and tradition (i.e. conservative

values) are cherished by an individual, the more likely he or she is to condemn ethically-questionable practices. Self-directed values, such as hedonism, in contrast, lead to a higher tolerance of malpractices and a lower likelihood to engage in ethical consumption (ibid). Values can also direct the actions of consumers in specific domains. In terms of environmentally-friendly consumption, “generativity” has been found to have such an effect (Urien and Kilbourne 2011). It leads people to cultivate a long-term orientation that recognises the needs of future generations, encouraging them to care about the preservation of natural resources. Personal beliefs, in short, influence the adoption of other-oriented consumption motives in various ways, which are central to ethical consumer behaviour.

An indirect effect is attributed to *cultural and social influences*, which impact on ethical consumers through influencing their value priorities. Rawwas (2001), for instance, observes that ethical beliefs and moral philosophies vary between cultures. Although the study did not directly focus on ethical consumption, it shows, through the comparison of survey results from eight countries, that considerable differences exist between the beliefs of consumers. Hence, different values and issues might receive greater attention, depending on the national context in which ethical consumption is embedded. Collective identities may also form a part of this equation. Cherrier (2007) argues that the interpretation of moral issues and behaviours is heavily influenced by social relationships. Ethical standards, in her view, are not fixed, but rather provide a floating reference point, as people constantly change their opinions about the appropriateness of various types of actions through their interaction with other people. Social dimensions have also been linked to sustainable consumption. Granzin and Olsen (1991) outline the importance of referring to a sense of “we-ness” when trying to inspire environmentally-friendly practices. Soron (2010) makes a similar point by arguing that “efforts to encourage ‘sustainable behaviour change’ must address the legitimate psycho-social anxieties, desires and identity needs that, however counterproductively, have been channelled into consumer culture” (p.179). Put differently, it is not enough to encourage voluntary behaviour change, if this stands in opposition to social needs that are likely to supersede ethical concerns. Social influences and individual values, in short, jointly determine how central moral issues are to the decisions-making processes of consumers.

In general, ethical consumption research in marketing emphasises the internal motivations of individuals, while external factors receive less attention. This can be seen in the exploration of values as well as the use of cognitive models, where sequential decision processes start with the beliefs of a person. Yet, these only partially determine ethical consumption, as external conditions need to be taken into account. Phipps et al. (2013), for instance, use social cognitive theory to underline how personal, environmental, and behavioural considerations interact and affect each other. Through two examples, toy sharing and water conservation, the reciprocal effects of these dimensions are described, acknowledging that *social structures and choice contexts* play a crucial role in the formation of behaviour. It is, therefore, not enough to merely study the values and intentions of consumers, as other crucial variables are omitted from the equation. Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell (2010) advance a related argument by propagating several additions to the Theory of Planned Behaviour. They propose that actual behavioural control and situational contexts would more accurately reflect the external circumstances encountered by consumers and improve the predictive power of the model. Both papers, however, were conceptual in nature, so empirical evidence still has to examine the dynamics of structural and individual factors.

A combination of factors, then, affects the likelihood of persons to reflect and act on the moral consequences of their consumption. Some of these refer to the internal lifeworlds of consumers, while others pay tribute to consumption contexts and how they influence decisions. The literature covered so far, has mainly concentrated on the motivations of consumers and the obstacles they face to explain inconsistencies in behaviour. More managerially-focused research streams examine how firm conduct impacts on consumer behaviour, leading to either supportive or punitive responses. The next section is dedicated to this supplementary evidence.

2.1.2.3. Research on Company-Directed Actions: The Good, the Bad, and the Consumer

The arguments presented up to this point have covered many different elements in the ethical consumption puzzle. These reveal what inclines or prevents consumers to choose ethical products. A large body of research has also examined how consumers act towards providers by checking how positive social performance or misconduct affects their decisions. This is different from the previous literature stream because it moves the debate away from individual decisions and motivations to perceptions of market actors, often with the goal to inform managers on how to best handle moral concerns. A key

question in this respect has been whether or not consumers are willing to reward responsible providers? Numerous studies indicate that the relationship is positive, either by directly addressing the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR)¹ on consumers' perceptions or indirectly by exposing the intangible benefits of being a good corporate citizen.

Research looking at how *CSR impacts on consumer behaviour* has exposed several aspects. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) suggest that CSR impacts on purchase intentions by influencing product and company evaluations. It thus has a dual role in decision making processes, shaping both the image consumers have of the provider as well as the inferences they make about the product itself (see also Mohr and Webb 2005). Others have looked at subareas of CSR. Grimmer and Bingham (2013), for instance, discovered that high levels of perceived environmental performance increase the purchase intentions of consumers for a product, especially when they are very concerned about ecological issues. Research taking an aggregate perspective has also established a positive link in terms of higher brand equity (Hoeffler and Keller 2002), customer satisfaction (Luo and Bhattacharya 2006), and advocacy behaviours (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2007). Hence, there is ample evidence of the advantages of investing into CSR.

Several limiting factors, however, determine the success of such endeavours. Even though, on average, more responsible behaviour can be equated with additional consumer goodwill, several *boundary conditions* affect the ability of companies to profit from responsible behaviour. A frequently encountered problem in the marketplace is the low level of awareness of social performance. Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009), in a study on CSR in the banking sector, show that the consideration of social initiatives is generally low. An important prerequisite for being able to take advantage of CSR is, therefore, that virtuous behaviour is communicated to the consumer. Several pitfalls can be encountered in this process. Swaen and Vanhamme (2005), for instance, demonstrate that the source over which consumers receive information impacts on their reactions. External sources are generally deemed more trustworthy than those controlled by the organisation, speaking for the use of independent channels for these kinds of

¹ Corporate Social Responsibility delineates the moral management of enterprises, which most commonly involves not only the achievement of economic goals, but also meeting the legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations placed upon business (see Carroll (1991)).

campaigns. Similarly, Osterhus (1997) finds that the likely success of pro-social positioning depends on the trust placed in the marketing source. It is consequently not only important that people are made aware of a firm's CSR engagement, but also *how* they hear about it.

Another problem occurs when companies do not live up to their self-proclaimed ideals. In a market where many providers occupy almost every product category, it is tempting for enterprises to overstate their social engagements to improve their competitive positioning. This approach bears considerable risks, as the discovery of a mismatch between the conveyed image and actual behaviour can lead to considerable backlashes. Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz (2009) label this phenomenon *corporate hypocrisy* and show that positive CSR assertions have the opposite of the intended effect, when they are accompanied by inconsistent firm behaviour. A good example is the positioning strategy chosen by British Petroleum, which was supposed to convey a "green" image to consumers. After the oil platform Deep Horizon sunk, the company lost its credibility for trying to appear environmentally responsible. This resulted in a lot of negative publicity, reduced the equity of the brand and led to the payment of astronomical fines. Accordingly, it is important for companies to sincerely engage in CSR activity, rather than half-heartedly reacting to external pressure (Ellen, Webb, and Mohr 2006; Groza, Pronschinske, and Walker 2011; Lee et al. 2009; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schartz 2006). If a company is perceived as a good corporate citizen, this can generate positive associations and lead consumers to identify with the organisation (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Brown and Dacin 1997; Marin and Ruiz 2007; Marin, Ruiz, and Rubio 2009; Pérez, del García los Salmones, and del Bosque 2013).

Besides these pro-choice approaches towards market players, consumers avoid irresponsible providers by withholding purchases or other types of support. In essence, they decide between a buycotting and boycotting strategy, where money is either given to or withdrawn from providers, depending on how ethical their business practices are perceived to be (Neilson 2010). *Boycotts* are generally a response to an egregious act or behaviour on part of a company, which is evaluated negatively by consumers (John and Klein 2003).² Whether or not a consumer decides to support a *boycott depends on several factors*. Boycotts are facilitated by a person's need to evade guilt or dissonance

² See Friedman (1999) for a more detailed description.

related to buying from an irresponsible provider or to enhance one's self-esteem (ibid). Personal involvement is also affected by the participation level of other people because a higher impact is likely to be achieved when a critical mass is reached and the loss of sales becomes a problem for the targeted enterprise (Klein, Smith, and John 2004). A number of *counterarguments*, nevertheless, can undermine boycott participation. These include: 1) the perceived costs of excluding certain brands from one's choice set; 2) the view that it is not necessary to back the boycott; 3) a belief that the boycott creates negative side effects, such as layoffs at the targeted company; 4) the CSR efforts of a firm that provide a counterweight to negative publicity; 5) scepticism towards the boycott cause; and 6) distance to the problem that lies at the centre of the boycott (Hoffmann 2011; Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Koos 2012; Vanhamme and Grobben 2009; Yuksel 2013). Despite the uncertainty surrounding the uptake of boycotts, companies should take these forms of consumer resistance very seriously, as irresponsible behaviour can have substantial negative consequences, such as lower purchase intentions and increased threats of being targeted by anti-consumption campaigns (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2009; Sweetin et al. 2013; Trudel and Cotte 2008). Hence, managers should treat boycotts as a clear warning sign and try to resolve consumer concerns before they permanently damage their company's brand equity.

In summary, companies face many problems when trying to implement CSR strategies or when they misbehave. Although research suggests that there is an overall positive link between responsible behaviour and consumer intentions towards the firm, several factors constrain this relationship, such as the communication and sincerity of CSR activities. If the efforts are seen as genuine attempts to improve social performance, consumers are most likely to identify with a provider and engage in supportive behaviours (see Friedman 1996). Boycotts are the other side of that coin. Unlike pro-choice approaches, boycotts seek to punish a business for its misconduct and to encourage it to improve its social performance. They are a way to voice discontent and to signal to companies how they should not run their operations. While there are individual reasons for supporting boycotts, in general they need a larger number of people to be effective. The diversity of factors that influence the success of such boycotts means that the outcomes are hard to predict and not always successful in affecting change. All in all, the actions available to consumers may take different forms and depend on several contingencies. Unlike pure ethical consumption research, managerially-focused studies tend to focus on corporate behaviours and their

implications. It further suggests that ethical decisions are complex and not only dependent on the personal beliefs of consumers, but also how they judge the behaviour of other actors in the market. It, thereby, adds weight to the growing evidence that ethical considerations are having an influence on mainstream consumption.

2.1.3. The Choice Paradigm: The Underlying Assumptions of Ethical Consumption Research and Consumer Empowerment

The previous sections reviewed empirical evidence on how moral considerations are integrated in consumption decisions. Although the research in this area is incredibly diverse and could be supplemented with evidence from other disciplines, it demonstrates that research has mainly sought to extend theory in this domain, while the fundamental assumptions have remained untouched. The following paragraphs critically scrutinise these to show that much of ethical consumption is based on a conception of power, where rational choices are the main route to consumer empowerment.

The first observation that can be made in relation to ethical consumption research is that it construes consumers as rational decision makers. The definitions presented at the outset of this chapter clearly show a conscious effort on part of individuals to include ethical considerations in their purchases (see Carrington, Shaw, and Chatzidakis 2016; Crane and Matten 2004; Webster 1975). Based on the premise that consumers intentionally seek out ethical products, studies have taken for granted that people possess the prerequisite knowledge and have clear preferences regarding marketplace offerings. Several arguments were raised against this view, including the high level of expertise possessed by ethical versus mainstream consumers, as well as the prioritisation of issues and contradictory nature of products. Nonetheless, this indicates that fundamental perspectives of morality are at work in consumer research. The first is focused on the individual and views morality as a *process of cognitive maturation*, where consumers become increasingly engaged in ethical consumption, depending on how knowledgeable they are (Caruana 2007b). This seems to fit the general gist in ethical consumption research, where ethical consumers are deliberately surveyed based on their expertise and dedication (e.g. Shaw, Shiu, and Clarke 2000). It is typical of cognitive models, where values provide a top-down route for screening products and selecting the most ethical options (e.g. Brunsø, Scholderer, and Grunert 2004). The goal of research then is to identify the underlying motivations of consumers by looking at *individual determinants and attitudes*, which favours the exploration of one-off

practices and primarily grants consumers power through making personal choices (Wallenborn 2007). This can be seen in the emphasis placed on purchase intentions or similar measures in the literature (e.g. Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Nicholls and Lee 2006; Pelsmacker, Driesen, and Rayp 2005; Trudel and Cotte 2008) and directly links to economic understandings of morality (Caruana 2007b), where consumer sovereignty is the guiding principle.

Consumer sovereignty plays a crucial role in marketing theory. In a review article published by Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder (2006), the assumptions behind this approach are delineated. The authors argue that under the *consumer sovereignty model* consumer empowerment is implicitly linked to the ability of self-interested and free individuals to choose. Change, according to this view, is introduced through market mechanisms, where the spending patterns of consumers signal to producers what they desire and what ethical transgressions will not be tolerated (Shaw, Newholm, and Dickinson 2006). A voting metaphor is often invoked in research on ethical consumption and may relate to both positive and negative actions towards marketplace entities, such as buying ethically-labelled products or boycotting irresponsible companies (Moraes, Shaw, and Carrigan 2011; Zhang 2015). This implies *empowering consumers entails giving them better options or information* (e.g. Harrison, Waite, and Hunter 2006; Pires, Stanton, and Paulo 2006) to enable them to make good decisions. As this represents the dominant approach within marketing and consumer research (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006), it is here referred to as the *Choice Paradigm*. This overemphasis on rational choices, as a means to empower consumers and route to a sustainable economy, is challenged on multiple grounds. The next chapter will cover various theoretical streams towards this end.

Chapter 3 – The Literature Review: Challenges to the Choice Paradigm: Too Much, Too Little, Too Constrained?

3.1. The Psychological Perspective: Empowered to Be Unhappy

Over the past decades, the amount of choices offered to consumers has reached a staggering level. In the grocery sector, this is evidenced by an average of more than 40,000 items carried by supermarkets in the United States in 2014 (Food Marketing Institute 2016). The underlying premise behind this progression is that as the amount of options increases, people are more likely to fulfil their specific needs. In other words, choice makes people happy because they can find exactly what they want. The logical conclusion is to maximise the number of options available to consumers, so everyone is able to choose whatever the heart desires. Likewise, as the previous section outlined, it is also assumed that the market moves towards sustainability if the number of ethical options increases, as consumers are given the means to reward responsible brands and providers. However, these presumptions are contradicted by evidence regarding the effect of choice complexity on consumers. As this section will argue, the freedom to choose does not necessarily empower consumers.

Choice is a double-edged sword in many respects. It can be motivating for people who love variety and for those who have clear prior preferences (Chernev, Mick, and Johnson 2003; Givon 1984; Kahn 1995; McAlister and Pessemier 1982). Yet, large assortments do not always lead to better results or clearer preferences (Broniarczyk, Hoyer, and McAlister 1998; Chernev and Hamilton 2009; Lehmann 1998). This paradox of choice has attracted much attention in recent research, especially with respect to the possible negative effects of too much choice on consumers (Schwartz 2007). An *excessive amount of choice* has been found to: a) lower motivations to choose or to defer decisions altogether; b) decrease preference strength or satisfaction; and c) increases in negative affect (Burger 1989; Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Iyengar, Wells, and Schwartz 2006; Scheibehenne, Greifeneder, and Todd 2010). In addition, several factors contribute to consumer anxiety about abundant choices, such as regret about foregone choices, higher expectations, and uncertainty about having made the right decision (Dhar 1997; Diehl and Poynor 2010; Greifeneder, Scheibehenne, and Kleber 2010; Schwartz 2000; Schwartz et al. 2002). The considerations outlined above render the general claim, that a wider variety of products is always better, obsolete, implying that

providers have to discover an ideal amount of options to provide to their customers (White and Hoffrage 2009).

The importance of real *market contexts* cannot be overstated in this respect. People do not simply choose what product to buy. They also decide where, how and when to make a purchase. A consumer can choose to acquire the same product over the internet, in local retail chains, or over the mobile phone. Each channel has its own unique set of advantages. The internet provides consumers with interactive decision aids and user-generated ratings (Ansari, Essegaiier, and Kohli 2000; Häubl and Trifts 2000; Hu, Liu, and Zhang 2008), besides unrestricted shopping hours and access to masses of information. Retail outlets allow people to get a better sense and feel of the desired product, as well as the opportunity to turn to store personnel for advice. Mobile technology enables people to shop from anywhere, but also impacts on other channel experiences, such as by allowing price comparisons or through augmented reality applications (e.g. Quick Response (QR) codes). In addition, the sheer size of supermarket assortments is often overwhelming, as they usually present several thousand products to customers. When these products also have a large number of features or are included in bundles that increase the difficulty of reaching a decision, it can confuse and impact on the satisfaction of consumers (Agarwal and Chatterjee 2003; Fasolo, McClelland, and Todd 2007; Matzler, Stieger, and Füller 2011; Rust, Thompson, and Hamilton 2006, Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005). All of these considerations are destined to impact on the experiences of consumers and, more often than not, to enhance the complexity of finding a suitable product (see also Swait and Adamowicz 2001).

Ethical attributes or labels are a form of product augmentation (Crane 2001) and likely to increase the information load placed on consumers. In the United Kingdom there were more than 4500 fair-trade products available in 2019 (The Fairtrade Foundation 2019), representing only a part of the ethical options available to consumers. This can make it difficult for consumers to enact their concerns in the marketplace. Indeed, a recent review article by Broniarczyk and Griffin (2014) highlights the many challenges that individuals face when trying to find suitable offerings. The authors show that the growing freedom of choice and the increasing availability of information overwhelm consumers. More specifically, they link a large number of choices to greater *task complexity*, preference uncertainty and trade-off difficulty. Hence, the often taken-for-

granted assumption that more welfare and sustainability can be attained by giving people more choices is misguided. The opposite might actually be the case, as consumers may be dissatisfied, when they have to take on responsibility for ever more areas of their life (Botti and Iyengar 2006). This suggests that consumer empowerment based on choice may not always lead to the desired outcomes. Choice, like so many other things in life, should be met with moderation. The freedom to choose, however, does not equally apply to all consumer groups, as the next section will outline.

3.2. The Macromarketing Perspective: Consumer Vulnerability and Powerlessness Within the Market

Modern society offers an unsurpassed range of options to people around the world. The previous discussion has already outlined the difficulties that may be encountered in a marketplace, where many routes to satisfaction present themselves. However, not all consumers benefit equally from a large variety of choices. This section discusses various forms of consumer vulnerability, which here is seen as the inability of individuals to act on their preferences within the market due to various personal constraints or characteristics (Ringold 2005). Three research streams will be covered to explore these issues: compulsive consumption; consumer vulnerability; and impoverished consumers.

People have many different motivations to consume any particular product. While most consumption decisions are assumed to be deliberate and the result of considerable contemplation, reality paints another, more colourful picture. Consumers often do not place too much emphasis on the functional value of goods, but rather purchase them for emotional, hedonic, and social purposes (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holt 1995; Sheth, Newman, and Gross 1991). Not all of the behaviour manifested to achieve these goals is actually planned, as consumer actions are at least partially driven by impulses (Tauber 1972). A growing body of research on compulsive consumption highlights the issues related to unbounded and sometimes thoughtless buying behaviour. *Addictive consumers* tend to engage in shopping not for the sake of the product and its merits. They are more interested in the psychological benefits they extract from the acquisition process, as they seek to escape their own misery and lighten the burden of negative feelings in their lives (Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych 1987; Hassay and Smith 1996). These addictive tendencies are usually the consequence of several, interdependent

developments. The starting point for most compulsive behaviour is a pressing problem, such as emotional discomfort. Research has, for instance, found that people who have addictive purchasing tendencies are more likely to come from unstable social backgrounds (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Denton 1997), to have low self-esteem and to be prone to compulsive behaviour (O'Guinn and Faber 1989). The perceived issues then trigger a search for resolution strategies, which might be found in consumption activities. It has been shown that people seek out products to reduce stress (Arnold and Reynolds 2012), to compensate powerlessness with items that signal status (Rucker and Galinsky 2008), and to make up for perceived deficits in their lives (Woodruffe 1997). If the chosen plan succeeds in lifting the subjective feeling of the individual, consumption may become a self-reinforcing habit, as new acquisitions are necessary to act as continuous mood enhancers. After a while, consumption turns into an obsession. People start concentrating on the short-term benefits and pleasures of the shopping experience, where objects turn into interchangeable fixes that enable a person to cope with his world (Elliott 1994; Hirschman 1992). This lack of control over one's own consumption habits seriously questions the ability of this consumer group to attain power through the provision of more choices. In fact, the opposite might be true, as encouraging these people to solve problems through acquisitions can reinforce compulsive behaviours.

Impoverished consumers equally face challenges within the market. They are at the opposite end of the spectrum, as they lack the means to access the products they desire. Hill, Martin, and Chaplin (2012) find that people with deficient monetary resources to buy products are likely to be less satisfied with their lives, especially when they engage in upward social comparisons. In addition, impoverished and other vulnerable consumers are targeted by exploitative market practices (Hill 2008). It has, for example, been shown that the elderly, the poor and minorities have been victims of predatory lending or overpriced insurance schemes (Hill and Kozup 2007; Karpatkin 1999). These subpopulations thus not only struggle with marketplace exclusion, but also need to resort to low-value options, as mainstream offerings are not available to them. More recently, there has been growing interest in how poverty concerns could be solved through market mechanisms (Prahalad 2005). The targeting of poor consumers at the base-of-the-pyramid, however, has been criticised. Bonsu and Polsa (2011) argue that this practice merely seeks “to reconfigure poorer consumers in a manner that facilitates the expropriation of their desires and well-being for corporate profitability” (p.241) and

that it has a limited impact on actual poverty alleviation. Here again, choice is presented as the main way to empower consumers, even though it is questionable that it actually helps them tackle their problems, let alone fosters the ambition to combat societal problems. Indeed, people often feel disempowered to break out of the market situations they face in relation to their economic status (Henry 2005). The consumer sovereignty model also plays down relative power imbalances, when the ability to make choices is placed against buying power. Firat (1977), for instance, observes that wealthy individuals have more opportunities to shape the market because they have extensive economic resources (i.e. votes) at their disposal and are able to set trends as early adopters of new offerings, which most other people cannot afford. More choices, therefore, favour rich consumers, as they have a disproportionately high capability to wield power within the market.

Consumer vulnerability can also be linked to the *lack of skills*. This concern is particularly relevant to the debate about companies targeting children and adolescents. Since young people do not have the necessary experience to judge the trustworthiness of marketing claims, they may be easily convinced by persuasion attempts. Pechmann et al. (2005) found that adolescents are more impulsive than adults and thus susceptible to image advertising. Marketers have abused these weaknesses by deliberately linking their brand appeals to the insecurities of adolescents. Tobacco manufacturers, for example, have tried to attract new customers by associating cigarettes with the aspirations and fantasies of young adults (Hastings and Saren 2003). Comparable efforts may also be observed in the food industry, where meals have been coupled with toy premiums to appeal to children (McAlister and Cornwell 2012). These consumer groups might simply be unable to understand the implications of marketplace choices. Nonetheless, adults might equally be affected, if they lack the necessary skills to make informed decisions. Adkins and Jae (2010) identify language barriers as one source of consumer vulnerability. Clearly, not being able to comprehend information due to insufficient language skills can put consumers in disadvantageous positions. Similar challenges are encountered by low literate consumers, who are not able to read or write at a sufficient level (Adkins and Ozanne 2005). Consequently, certain levels of knowledge are required for consumers to act with confidence in the marketplace.

The freedom to choose, in summary, is never really universal. While some consumers initiate their own unhappiness by engaging in unfavourable levels of consumption, others suffer from exclusion, when they lack access to valued goods or can only attain them under unfair conditions. *Consumer powerlessness* stands in direct opposition to the assumption that consumers are generally able to act on their needs. Empowerment based on choice is context dependent and may only apply to consumers with significant purchasing power and the necessary marketplace skills. Vulnerability, however, is not limited to a few consumers, even if it occurs more frequently within certain population groups and with graver implications. Everyone may experience it once in a while, whether it is due to negative emotions, unfamiliarity with a situation, or a host of other factors (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005). Increasing the amount of choices available to consumers without recognising the conditions under which powerlessness may be experienced, is, therefore, unlikely to resolve all consumption-related problems and societal issues.

3.3. The Ecological Perspective: Consumption Patterns, Population Bombs, and Sustainability

In recent years, sustainability has made it onto the agendas of many actors in society. Governments have tried to encourage sustainable consumption practices, companies have invested into “greener” product portfolios, and consumers have endorsed environmentally-friendly products (Krantz 2010). Likewise, sustainability has received wide-reaching attention in many academic disciplines, a movement that has recently intensified in the area of marketing (see, for instance, Connelly, Ketchen, and Slater 2011; McDonagh and Prothero 2013; Prothero et al. 2011; Varey 2012). Yet, contemporary consumption still contributes to global problems by fuelling unsustainable ways of living. The previous discussion already looked at how choice might not be the ultimate source of empowerment because of its tendency to overwhelm consumers or due to restraints caused by different forms of vulnerability. This section looks at how the focus on choices, especially at the exchange stage, neglects other influences on consumption. Before moving to these issues, it is necessary to understand what “unsustainable” means in the context of consumption.

Sustainability can have multiple meanings. There are, however, two main ideas which are relevant to sustainability from a consumption angle. One of the most regularly cited definitions originates from the report *Our Common Future*, published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). It states that sustainable development involves meeting ‘the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) 1987, p. 43). While this conception by itself offers little practical guidance, it highlights the need to consider the long-term, inter-generational consequences of consumption practices. This aspect is especially important when common resources are under threat because individual countries or organisations profit from exploiting a resource in the short-term, whereas everyone loses over an extended time period (Dietz, Ostrom, and Stern 2003; Hardin 1968; Jacquet et al. 2013; Kennedy 2003). One key dimension, consequently, is the timeframe one refers to when judging the sustainability of consumption patterns. The second important aspect deals with the existence of natural limits to the human economy. Publications in this research area stress that planet Earth has a finite amount of natural capital and a maximum level of sink capacity for absorbing waste or other kinds of pollution (Common and Perrings 1992; Ekins 1993; Meadows, Randers, and Meadows 2004; Nordhaus 1974). Even if it is not discernible at what level these capacities are exhausted, as an exact assessment of the resilience and evolution of ecological systems and the influence of technological innovations is impossible, consumption may irreversibly reduce an ecosystems biological productivity and its ability to support human life (Arrow et al. 1995). Therefore, unsustainable consumption patterns imply that resources and sinks are used up to such an extent that their regenerative capabilities are exceeded and their long-term viability is critically diminished.

Current consumption patterns with their high level of material throughput and disregard for ecological systems have been condemned for failing to consider these limits and for undermining the welfare of future generations. In order to understand the magnitude of the impact of consumption three factors need to be considered. First, the *quality of the consumption options* matters. The logic behind this approach sees offerings as more or less sustainable in terms of resource use and pollution. A person, for instance, might buy an energy-saving fridge for his home or locally-produced food to manage his environmental footprint. The arguments in these lines of research usually highlight the significant efficiency gains that can decrease the effect of consumption on the

environment (Gaston 2013; Munasinghe 2010; Weizsäcker, Lovins, and Lovins 1998). A key problem in this respect is the complexity of determining the relative virtue of goods. Locally-produced food might require more energy if it is grown in greenhouses compared to conventional harvests from farther away. Car sharing concepts may only have an advantage over individual car ownership, if they are powered by regenerative energy and used by existing drivers, rather than people who travel by public transportation. Actual consumption practices often fall short of these ideals in Western societies. People consume in ways that are resource-intensive and wasteful due to high packaging-to-content ratios, frequent replacements of perfectly functional goods, individual versus collective product use, and a focus on meeting personal needs through material-rich options in the marketplace (Firat and Dholakia 1982). Alternative ways of consuming that are not directly linked to product ownership, such as sharing and non-commercial ways of achieving life goals, are rarely considered (Princen 1999). In other words, consumers mainly distinguish between choices among more or less close substitutes, but not whole consumption patterns, which lie outside a given category or the mainstream market (Firat 1977). Further, when the focus lies on the improvement of current offerings, current lifestyles are taken for granted, even if they are unsustainable (Shove 2004). Ethical consumption research and empowerment based on choice usually follow this line of reasoning. By focusing on how consumers can improve their purchase decisions, they indirectly propagate making comparisons within particular product categories, such as choosing the most environmentally-friendly option. This, however, does not reflect *how* people consume, which is very important from an ecological perspective.

The second factor that needs to be considered is *per capita resource consumption*. Individual resource use is not only affected by how efficiently goods provide a particular service, but also at what rate they are consumed. Several factors are relevant here. Tukker et al. (2010) argues that better production methods and offerings are not enough. More sustainable household consumption also requires lower levels of overall consumption as well as the effective use of existing resources. The extension of product lifetimes might be one solution. Cooper (2005) describes how longer life spans help tackle some of the problems created by throwaway society. Similarly, Box (1983) describes how reconditioning products would create positive effects in terms of waste management, by enhancing the longevity of possessions and stimulating second-hand markets. Both these measures, to a certain degree, decelerate the throughput of goods in

the economy, thereby reducing overall resource consumption. On the consumer side, sharing can decrease the overall use of goods (Belk 2010) and provide an alternative to conventional marketplaces (Ozanne and Ballantine 2010). Consumer lifestyles are another area that has been identified by research. Voluntary simplicity (VS), for example, calls for an overall reduction in consumption. It stands for lifestyles that are “outwardly simple, inwardly rich” (Elgin 1981). The scope and comprehensiveness of these practices often depends on the commitment of individuals. Etzioni (1998), for instance, distinguishes between downshiffters, who restrain from using certain products, and holistic simplifiers, who make significant sacrifices to completely align their lives with the VS philosophy (see also Huneke 2005; Shama 1985). All these research streams critically engage with per capita consumption and avoid the mistake of equating product efficiency with lower resource use. In fact, efficiency gains can make people feel comfortable with higher levels of consumption (Wilk 2004). This paradox is known as the rebound effect and has been observed in research on the dynamics of energy use (Binswanger 2001; Schipper and Grubb 2000; Sorrell and Dimitropoulos 2008). In essence, the rebound effect describes the tendency of people to increase the consumption of a good when the costs or consequences of using it go down.³ Offering efficient or environmentally-friendly options to consumers can, therefore, only be a partial solution to resource overexploitation, which needs to be complemented by an understanding of lifestyles and consumption cycles (see also Mohr, Webb, and Harris 2001).

Finally, even if products are highly efficient in their utilisation of resources and people consume at moderate levels, the *scale of worldwide consumption* still raises sustainability issues due to the size of the human population. As every person has to meet a certain level of basic needs to survive and as resource-intensive consumption patterns are advocated in ever more countries, ecological concerns arise solely due to the growing number of people on the planet (Butler 1994; Daily and Ehrlich 1992; Ehrlich 1968). These concerns persist even as sustainable consumption practices are boosted in affluent societies, as they are offset by developments in emerging markets (Engelman 2009; Holtz-Eakin and Selden 1995). There are also no signs that this process will slow down. Quite to the contrary, the world population is expected to grow

³ A driver, for instance, might use an electric car more often and for shorter distances than a regular car because he or she does not fear an adverse effect on the environment. If the intensive use of the electric car, however, leads to a net increase in energy use compared to self-restricted driving behaviour with a combustion engine, the overall environmental impact is worse.

to unmatched heights in the coming decades. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013) predicts an increase in the world population from an estimated 7.2 billion in 2013 to a staggering 9.6 billion by mid-century. This progression is going to cause rising tensions in the distribution of resources, as the each person's share of Earth's finite natural resources declines with the inflating world population. The desire of developing countries, such as China, to catch up with Western living standards is likely to accentuate this problem even further, as their citizens seek to build up material wealth (see Croll 2006; Davis 2000). These prospects should be troublesome for every sustainability enthusiast, especially if overall consumption levels continue to grow and intensify the pressure on scarce resources.

Conclusively, linking consumer empowerment to the provision of choices obscures other important factors that impact on the sustainability of consumption from an ecological perspective. The IPAT model elegantly summarises the three factors described in the previous paragraphs. Ehrlich and Holdren (1971) outline that the environmental impact of a population (I) is determined by the interplay of the size of the population (P), the affluence of its citizens in terms of per capita consumption (A), and the state of technological development (T) or, more simply, the harm done per consumption unit (see also Kajikawa 2008; Kates 2000). Unfortunately, most public debates around sustainability are limited to the efficiency of marketplace offerings and production techniques, which neglects the overall scale of resource depletion and pollution. Their focus is on the relative sustainability of consumption (i.e. certain ways of consuming are more sustainable than others) rather than its absolute impact (i.e. whether or not current ways of consuming are generally viable over a long time horizon, given scarce resources). It seems likely that current consumption practices are already surpassing critical thresholds to such an extent that one planet will not suffice to meet the escalating demands of humanity (WWF 2012). When assessing the sustainability of consumption, it is necessary to include all of the discussed factors to avoid an incomplete understanding of the problem (Cohen 2012; Schaefer and Crane 2005). This includes a consideration of the sociological influences on consumption, which impact on the behaviour of individuals. This will be covered in the next section.

3.4. The Sociological Perspective: Ethical Imagination in an Age of Consumption

An often downplayed aspect in ethical consumer research is the societal context in which consumption occurs. This context is not limited to the market environment, which creates various conflicts in terms of the types and quantities of choices provided to consumers. It is also guided by societal influences that shape the beliefs and life priorities of individuals (Nicosia and Mayer 1976). An often discussed subject in this respect is consumer society, which arguably has become the dominant ideology in developed countries and focuses people's attention on consumption activities (Baudrillard 2003). There are many proponents arguing for its positive impact by empowering people to freely choose their own lifestyles, while others have argued that it channels them into predetermined routes that serve the interests of companies and the market economy (e.g. Sanne 2002; Twitchell 2000). In short, the main question seems to be whether consumer society provides freedom or enslaves people in the service of ever greater consumption? In order to delineate the sociological influences on consumption, this section discusses how consumer society indirectly shapes the values and behaviours of individuals and why this is problematic for ethical consumption. More specifically, it looks at how consumer societies preoccupy people with materialistic values and consumerist lifestyles, responsabilise individuals for societal problems, and distract them from enacting other forms of change.

3.4.1. Consumer Society and Its Implications: Dominant Social Paradigms, the Cultivation of Consumerist Lifestyles, and the Responsibilisation of Individuals

Preoccupation with consumerist lifestyles. One of the central features of a consumer society is its tendency to make people turn to the consumption of objects to solve any kind of problem (Bauman 2007). A useful concept to clarify this point is the dominant social paradigm (DSP). A DSP represents "a society's belief structure that organises the way people perceive and interpret the functioning of the world around them" (Milbraith 1989, p. 116). The DSP, more simply, illustrates how society influences peoples' perceptions and judgments. In most developed Western economies, the DSP encourages people to think about progress and quality of life in material terms (Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997). Consumption is seen as a highway to happiness and the market as a one-stop shop for satisfying all types of needs. It follows that the only viable path to the good life can be reached through the market and that all opposition to

consumption should be removed (see Baudrillard 2003). Indeed, it does seem like consumer society has successfully indoctrinated all major cultural and social institutions towards promoting its dominant purpose, that is, the belief in materialism (Kilbourne et al. 2009). Governments talk of new growth stimuli and encourage people to spend money to support the economy, companies measure their success in sales figures and monetary indicators, and charities sell their services (or even merchandising) to promote the good of society. In other words, consumer societies, and the businesses that operate within them, preach to consumers that the market is the only medium through which salvation from an unfulfilled life can be attained, leading to the commercialisation of happiness. Moreover, as people strive to satisfy all kinds of needs through the market, consumption thinking spreads to and commodifies ever more areas of life. Bauman (2007) provides a vivid example in his discussion of the “society of consumers”. He argues that these types of societies are characterised by consumerist lifestyles that encourage people to think of all types of actions in terms of consumption. The lines between what is chosen and the person making the choice become increasingly blurred, as people themselves become more like commodities (ibid). Hence, individuals are not students enrolled at a university, but consumers of sellable skill sets that open up career opportunities. The consumer attains a monopoly position, as individuals no longer engage in different kinds of behaviour, but rather different forms of consumption (Miller 2005). Everything is framed as consuming, as people become the sole agents of consumption.

Responsibilisation of consumers. The previously discussed characteristics of consumer society have important implications for consumer responsibility. As more and more areas of life are viewed in terms of consumption, it is the consumer who is increasingly held accountable for solving societal problems. Soron (2010), for instance, argues that it is often suggested that consumers should pave the way for sustainable consumption through voluntary behaviour change. Boulanger and Zaccai (2007) describe how social institutions, such as schools, families and businesses, seek to cultivate the ideal of a sensible, moderate consumer to encourage responsible shopping behaviour. This focus on consumer sovereignty is tightly linked to neoliberal political traditions, which emphasise the responsibility of individuals in market economies. Giesler and Veresiu (2014) argue that “neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility valorises the solution of social problems through morally responsible market actors”, where “responsibility is shifted away from the state and corporations and reassigned onto the individual agent”

(p.843). Responsible consumption, consequently, is not a consumer-initiated movement, as ethical consumer research would have us believe, but rather involves “the active creation and management of consumers as moral subjects” (Giesler and Veresiu 2014, p. 840). A similar argument is made by Humphreys (2014), who traces the development of sustainability discourses in the media. She reveals that attention over time shifted from holding government actors responsible for protecting the environment to companies and consumers. Here again, individual consumer choices emerge as a key determinant for solving societal problems, largely absolving other marketplace actors from responsibility (see also Henry 2010). Indeed, it seems that many institutions and agents seek to push consumers to take on more responsibility through a multitude of logics (Caruana and Chatzidakis 2013). However, assigning the all-powerful consumer the lead role in saving the world is problematic in consumer societies.

Cultivation of insatiable desires. The effectiveness of market solutions is called into question for several reasons. First, consumer society has the tendency to generate boundless desires. Bauman (2007) sees consumerism as a guiding force within modern societies, where aspirations become detached from the actual needs of individuals. A consumption-oriented society does not want people to experience gratification, at least not for longer periods of time, as this would endanger the constant flow of commodities. It is, consequently, not interested in prompting rational behaviour and reasonable choices. Far from it, it builds on the irrationality and emotions of people to keep them coming back to the market for fresh fixes that help them resolve their concerns (see Bauman 2007, pp. 47–48). Nowadays, marketers rarely plan for long time horizons, but cultivate fashions and inspire novelty seeking to keep selling products (Glennie 2005). Companies do not want consumers to be completely satisfied; they want to foster relative value judgments with clear expiration dates that animate people to discard their current possessions in favour of newer models (see Slade 2007). The detachment of needs from objective ends counteracts meaningful behaviour change. This can be seen in the turn to emotional appeals and seductive consumption atmospheres, which encourage people to keep buying things (e.g. Biehl-Missal and Saren 2012) and foreground concepts and ideas, as opposed to the functional value of goods (Ariely and Norton 2009). Even social relations are increasingly mediated by the market and lead to rising aspirations, as upward comparisons to reference groups are cultivated (Baudrillard 2003; Cherrier and Murray 2004; Frank 2012; Lunt 2005). Consumer society, therefore, offsets sustainable consumption by constantly escalating desires

through upward-spiralling social comparisons and encouraging people to adopt a materialistic outlook on life.

Individual solutions versus collective action. Second, consumer society leads people to search for individual solutions to societal problems on the market. Conca, Princen, and Maniates (2001), for example, critically discuss conventional views “that assume atomistic rationality and that privilege power as consumer sovereignty” to show that this leads to individualisation, which is the “tendency to ascribe responsibility for all consumption-related problems to freestanding individuals” (p.7). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009) refer to this as “institutionalised individualism”, where collective solutions to societal issues receive less and less attention (see also Middlemiss 2014). Maniates (2001) challenges the privatisation of ethical problems and individualised solution strategies. He maintains that only collective action can lead to genuine change, as mainstream market approaches “constrain our imagination about what is possible and what is worth working towards” (p.50). Evidence for this can be found in research on collective action. In a study on responsible consumption cooperatives, Papaoikonomou and Alarcón (2017) argue that new forms of social organising lead to higher levels of perceived control, rather than trying to tackle problems through conventional market structures. As a result, they call for the consideration of collective approaches to consumer empowerment, which oppose the underlying assumptions in the ethical consumption literature, which predominantly focuses on individual solutions to ethical issues.

Ethical imagination limited to market offerings. Finally, consumer society channels people’s attention towards solutions that can be bought on the market. Non-material means of attaining satisfaction are rarely, if at all, communicated within consumer society (Adams and Raisborough 2010; Firat 2013). This is problematic, as it conceals power imbalances within and systemic problems of market economies (see Fleming and Jones 2013; Perelman 2005). Clearly, it would not be in the interest of companies to promote voluntary simplicity or frugal consumption because this would lead to lower returns. Economic egoism trumps all other moral maxims in organisations (Desmond and Crane 2004), challenging the notion that companies will push for sustainable change. It is, then, hardly surprising that consumers mainly get to choose within predetermined, rather than radically different, consumption patterns (Firat 1977). The freedom of choice represents nothing but an illusion, as consumers constantly find

themselves in a “position of constrained choice” (Dobré 2007, p. 168). Therefore, the individualisation of responsibility keeps ethical consumers on pre-set tracks, which confine the possibilities for action they perceive to the marketplace.

The above discussed aspects of consumer society essentially undermine truly responsible consumption tendencies. A preoccupation with consumerist lifestyles, which tend to generate boundless desires through the creation of fashions and emotional appeals, lures consumers into consuming more and replacing existing goods in ever shorter consumption cycles. Social comparisons reinforce the focus on possessions by creating competition amongst individuals to outshine the material wealth of relevant reference groups (Baudrillard 2003). Consumer society leads individuals to turn to material objects for satisfaction in their lives, turning consumption into a central avenue for reaching personal happiness. As a result, even if people are urged to buy ethical products or to consume less, such appeals are unlikely to be successful, if the dominant social paradigm, which filters their attitudes and beliefs, encourages them to behave in another way (Kilbourne and Carlson 2008). Sustainability is endangered by propagating materialistic and rising consumption, which enhances the likelihood that each consuming unit uses up more resources. This problem is aggravated by the fact that almost no attention is paid to more benign, let alone radically different, consumption patterns that are not bound to the market. Can choice be a solution to the woes of society under such conditions? This seems highly unlikely, as consumer society is intertwined with many of the problems associated with excessive consumption. The next section takes a look at how consumer responsibility is influenced, shaped and constructed by market actors, rather than the result of the deliberations of free moral agents.

3.4.2. Governmentality: Placing Consumer Agency Within Boundaries Through Ethical Subjectification

The previous section looked at how consumer society as a cultural context, in which most Western consumers find themselves, encourages people to focus on individual solutions to societal problems. It also highlighted the problems this creates, as dominant beliefs discourage responsible consumption and limit the ethical imagination of consumers to individual choices within the market. In this sense, the way consumers approach responsibility is placed within boundaries, as their freedom to choose is never absolute. This section further develops this argument by looking at recent work on governmentality, which reveals how the ethical possibilities available to individuals are shaped by market actors.

In modern societies, where individuals have substantial personal freedoms, power is exercised in less obvious forms. Research in this domain has largely been built on the works of Michel Foucault and his ideas on governmentality. In liberal economies, according to Foucault (1991), power is applied through aligning personal freedoms with dominant interests in society. The goal of governmentality, then, is to create environments or ways of thinking that compel people to manage themselves. Other authors have elaborated on and extended the concept of governmentality. Dean (1999) describes 'government' as:

“any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends.”
(p.11)

This implies that behaviour may be manipulated by shaping the capacities for action that people perceive, especially by channelling their ambitions and thoughts in certain directions. Therefore, the understanding of power evoked in studies on governmentality necessarily deviates from the consumer sovereignty model, which was previously referred to as the Choice Paradigm. Choices are not simply equated with empowerment, but rather preconditioned by the way powerful agents construct and guide consumer freedom and agency (Moisander, Markkula, and Eräranta 2010). Discourses and the way they define what is considered normal and what can be known in certain consumption domains, are thus essential to consumer empowerment (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006). As the market is a central site of governmentality in Western societies, consumer culture and consumption mechanisms are important for the management of self-conduct (Rose 2000).

Governmentality within consumption can operate through various means. Moisander, Markkula, and Eräranta (2010) outline four main ways in which consumers might be governed: 1) visibilities and visual representations, which include direct attempts to channel consumer attention in retail contexts as well as the meanings, norms or ideals conferred through visual and textual information; 2) techniques and practices of government, covering the technologies that might be employed to govern consumers; 3) knowledge and expertise, describing how different forms of thinking about consumers influence how they become objects of government and what action possibilities are granted to them; and 4) identity, referring to the way subjectivities are constructed by market actors and how they shape the field of possibilities for consumers. Each of these points will be briefly discussed in turn, with the exception of visual representations, which will be briefly covered later on (Section 3.5.).

Consumers can be swayed to govern themselves through the *deployment of technologies*. Beckett (2012) labels these “technologies of consumption” and shows how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) can be linked to governmentality. In a case study on a loyalty scheme offered by a major British supermarket chain, he depicts how CRM extends consumer agency. However, instead of “liberating the individual from power relations, [consumer agency] is used to tie the identities and aspirations of consumers to the strategic imperatives of producers” (ibid, p.16.). Fitchett and McDonagh (2000) offer a similar interpretation, viewing relationship marketing as an oppressive regime, where companies dictate the terms under which relationships are formed or discontinued due to inherent power imbalances. Hence, the consumer sovereignty model, which equates additional choices with greater consumer power, might be misguided, as it underestimates the ability of marketplace actors to preconceive the potential avenues of action of individuals through less conspicuous forms of governance.

Database marketing is another modern technology that provides opportunities to govern consumers. It not only provides a *way of knowing consumers*, by classifying them into categories, but also the capacity to artificially construct identities based on the behaviour exhibited by diverse individuals (Zwick and Dholakia 2004). It yields both linguistic power “through which the consumer subject is first discursively constituted as a cultural object and then acted upon as a target for marketing practice” (ibid, p.40). In other words, it is both a form of knowledge that makes consumers intelligible in certain

ways (i.e. through revealed preferences and segmentation) as well as a technique of governance. Furthermore, it actively manufactures customers “as modular configurations of propensities, as calculations of possible future values and as purified groupings of selective homogeneity” (Zwick and Denegri-Knott 2009, p. 240). As such, it is also linked to identity formation, as novel segments might be revealed, which constitute consumers and their desired behaviours in different ways. It is a technology of customer construction (Zwick and Dholakia 2004), rather than a vehicle to discover existing needs.

Identities have long been central to the study of marketing and are often invoked to explain how consumers relate to particular brands (Reed II et al. 2012). Although it is assumed that self-images are internal to consumers, the concept of governmentality challenges the notion that identities are independent of marketplace discourses. Miller and Rose (1997) argue that marketing mobilises consumers through the *construction of subjectivities*. This is achieved not only by aligning products with the needs of consumers, but also by assembling everyday practices so they naturally integrate marketplace offerings. Caruana, Crane, and Fitchett (2008) offer a vivid example of how consumer subjectivities are guided by the interests of marketers in their analysis of the “independent traveller”. They describe how the “independent traveller” discourse creates specific ways of knowing and being that are set within identity boundaries, which limit “the interpretation to a narrow set of pre-defined relationships and corresponding modes of consumption” (ibid, p.261). Rather than leading to truly self-directed travel, consumers are encouraged to enact their identities as “independent travellers” through market offerings, which are, somewhat ironically, placed in a context of security and dependency (ibid). Marketplace discourses are, therefore, integral to the understanding of consumer identities, as they shape how individuals think and act within certain consumption domains.

Ethical subjectivities, and the types of responsibility they confer to consumers, are central to marketplace governmentality. Rose (1999) refers to this as “ethopolitics”, where autonomous individuals are governed through their ethical principles by shaping their perceived fields of possibility. Certain ways of knowing, being, and acting are normalised, limiting the behaviour of people to those actions that align with the invoked ethical standards. In market economies the ethical values paradigm suggests that consumers need to change their buying behaviour to create a demand-pull for

sustainability (Holt 2012). This indicates that the responsible consumer subject (i.e. the ethical consumer) is generally accepted, while other ways of being are problematised. Schwarzkopf (2011), for instance, argues that the sovereign consumer myth delegitimises other routes to empowerment, as market ideology is suffused with beliefs that only marketplace choices allow individuals to create meaningful change. It discredits other sources of power, such as political engagement, as viable alternatives to tackling societal problems, aside from consumption (ibid). Even when contradictory evidence emerges the efficacy of market solutions remains uncontested. Carrington, Zwick, and Neville (2016), in their discussion of the attitude-behaviour gap, highlight that inconsistencies in ethical consumption are usually explained by personal failures, rather than linked to systemic problems within the market. This promotes ethical subjectivities, while challenges to the capitalist system are countered through the provision of sustainable offerings. In these contexts, people mainly think of themselves as responsible consumers, while their ideas, of what such an identity entails, are guided by discourses that have been fabricated by marketplace actors.

Reflexivity plays a central role in mobilising ethical subjectivities in certain directions. Beckett (2012), for instance, discusses the importance of governing the reflexive capacities of individuals to encourage consumption. By channelling the interests of consumers towards purchasable options, ethical subjectivities normalise marketable solutions to societal problems (see also Firat 2013). The creation of labels, education campaigns, and related infrastructures, for instance, are all geared towards enhancing ethical buying, in contrast to promoting lower usage intensities (they are, quite literally, out of sight and out of mind). Dobscha and Ozanne (2001) critique the emphasis placed on consumer subjectivities in their study on ecofeminists. Ecofeminists see the consumer role as constraining, linking it to wasteful ways of life, and call for a critical stance towards consumption. For them, the dominant discourses that revolve around responsible subjectivities constrain people's choices and actions. Likewise, Valor, Díaz, and Merino (2017) find resistant consumers should *reject the identity positions* offered to them within the marketplace. They argue that subjectification precedes identity formation and that the normalising and homogenising effects of power can only be circumvented, when individuals emancipate themselves and embrace a multitude of subject positions. Beckett and Nayak (2008) captures this pre-configuration of thinking and acting, by stating that “reflexive engagement, far from freeing the consumer, redefines the relation of power which bind them to producers” (p.313). Consequently,

conventional understandings of responsible consumption only offer a narrow field of possibility to people, which should be complemented by ethical behaviour in other life domains.

Conclusively, this section has outlined the problems of linking higher levels of consumer sovereignty and agency to greater empowerment. It started out by discussing how the responsabilisation of consumers is promoted by institutions, where states and businesses place the blame for societal problems on the buying behaviour of individuals. However, this development underemphasises the ability of market actors to exert indirect control over consumers. Several forms of governmentality within the domain of consumption were subsequently discussed. First, it was delineated how customer relationship management may operate as a “technology of consumption” (Beckett 2012). It was demonstrated that consumer agency can be deployed in ways that align with the interests of corporations. Second, database marketing was linked to certain types of expertise, which make consumers intelligible through segmentation practices and the categorisation of observed buying patterns. Here too, the capacities of individuals were defined through the manufacturing of customers (Zwick and Denegri-Knott 2009). Finally, the fabrication of identities, as a form of governmentality, was sketched out. Through the construction of subject positions, businesses were able to create identity boundaries that confine the ways of knowing and being of individuals to the market. In particular, ethical subjectivities were deemed effective in mobilising moral logics to limit the reflexivity of people to their role as consumers. This was deemed problematic, as it confines the field of possibility to the domain of consumption, lowering the probability that solutions to societal issues will be sought in other life domains. Taken together, then, even autonomous individuals may be governed in a multitude of ways, challenging the assumptions of the consumer sovereignty model, which equates more marketplace options with greater individual power. The freedom to choose, in other words, does not necessarily lead to the freedom of mind. The next section considers marketplace mythologies and discourses to explore how cultural influences that impact on their consumption.

3.5. The Cultural Perspective: Interpreting Marketplace Discourses, Myths, and Ideologies

Consumers experience the world around them in various cultural spheres, many of which have a significant bearing on their consumption decisions and behaviours. It was already discussed how macro-social influences frame and individualise the responsibility for societal problems and how contradictory value priorities jeopardise meaningful change within consumer societies. In particular, it was highlighted how political ideologies portray consumers as autonomous and responsible actors, whose action possibilities are nonetheless confined to the marketplace. The examination of different governance techniques revealed that consumer sovereignty is rarely left unchecked, as market players develop meanings and subject positions that align the behaviour of consumers with commercial interests. This section explores the micro-cultural vehicles used by marketers to channel consumer thinking and actions into desired directions by looking at marketplace discourses and their ideological implications. Similar to the previous discussion of the sociological influences on consumption, this approach challenges choice as the main source of consumer power, as it places meanings and discourses, and the control people wield over these, at the forefront of empowerment. It argues that the meanings available to consumers and their field of possibilities are limited by available marketplace discourses and the identity boundaries they provide.

Market actors are very much aware that cultural representations and meanings have diverse effects on consumers. Goods and other consumption symbols play a crucial role in this respect. They act as carriers of meaning, which consumers can extract through various practices or rituals (McCracken 1986). Marketplace offerings, in other words, are suffused with symbolic values, which enable consumers to assemble particular identities. Myths are a potent tool for imbuing products or messages with meanings. Thompson (2004) offers a comprehensive overview of how marketplace mythologies work. Essentially, mythologies can be viewed as discourses of power, which seek to move consumer thinking and behaviour in desired directions by constructing identities that link to particular ideologies. Marketplace mythologies are primarily directed towards commercial goals and serve two overarching functions. First, they are used to *advance the interests of specific market entities*. Belk and Tumbat (2005), for instance, describe how myths are used to give brands a transcendental character and to sustain

their brand images. If they are successful, brands can achieve a cult-like following, where consumers develop almost religious affections for a brand. Myths also help create enticing consumption experiences. One such example is American Girl Place, a themed brandstore, which manages to fabricate an environment suffused with brand ideology (Borghini et al. 2009). In this outlet, the physical consumption context surrounds consumers with brand content, wielding a powerful ideological influence on them, as their behaviour is directed towards the interests of the provider. Kozinets et al. (2004) offer similar insights in their study on ESPN Zone Chicago. They show that, even though consumer agency is not constrained in relation to the production of experiences and fantasies, the retail environment naturalises corporate interests to such a degree that the self-images of customers are tightly intertwined with commercial goals. Marketplace mythologies and ideologies are thus leveraged by organisations towards particular ends.

Second, marketplace ideologies also have a broader influence on consumers. Individually and collectively, the marketing efforts of organisations produce a cultural context that promotes consumption and highlights the merits of market economies. Peñaloza (2000) demonstrates that cultural events are filled with commercial meanings. Through an investigation of trade shows, she delineates how particular meanings and values are espoused by marketers to legitimise their actions and *foster general beliefs in capitalism*. Vehicles of popular culture operate in a similar way. Hirschman (1988), for instance, describes how television series encourage viewers to pursue different lifestyles and consumption symbols by imitating the projected ideals that feature in cultural narratives. Advertisements are another medium through which cultural meanings are conveyed. Belk and Pollay (1985) argue that the display of luxurious and comfortable lifestyles in advertising preoccupies people with material concerns. Often these communication vehicles employ graphic and textual rhetorical elements to create resonance in consumers, so that they can be seen as visual forms of governmentality (McQuarrie and Mick 1992, 1996, 1999; Phillips and McQuarrie 2004). Through images of the good life, then, consumption is presented as an end in itself. In this way, micro-cultural practices sustain dominant social paradigms. Andersen and Challagalla (1994) emphasise that marketing processes have traditionally affirmed the “preoccupation with measuring quality of life exclusively in terms of an ever escalating material standard of living” (p.174). Specific cultural environments as well as media

vehicles, consequently, channel the desires of consumers through the construction of idealised lifestyles and behaviours.

Individuals, however, are not viewed as passive recipients of meanings within consumer culture theory. Even though ideologies have a powerful influence on consumers, they can take up a *variety of interpretive positions*. Hirschman and Thompson (1997) show that people are very discerning, when it comes to the appropriation of consumption symbols and meanings. Instead of uncritically accepting the ideals presented in marketplace discourses, they interpret them in different ways. A consumption symbol can be seen as a desirable identity project and used to affirm virtuous traits by one person, whereas another might resist the same communicated meanings, as they are seen as a threat to his or her self-image (ibid). Brands compete for identity value and operate in *ideological fields* (Kozinets 2008; Thompson and Tian 2008), where consumers engage in a “complex interpretive dance in which they continuously take up different interpretive positions from which to ascribe meanings to their ... behaviors” (Thompson and Haytko 1997, p.36-37). The intertextual nature of discourses, therefore, produces a dialogue between the personal narratives of the consumer and the discursive possibilities granted to him or her in certain consumption domains (Murray 2002), so that consumers can adopt a range of worldviews at any given point in time. Accordingly, far from being passive dupes, consumers are constructed as active agents in cultural research, which resist dominant ideological influences through their meaning-making activities. This cultural view predominantly grants power to consumers in the form of resistance, as ideological structures and discourses are believed to be beyond individual control (see Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006). It is thus not surprising to find references to the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), who believed that people employ various ruses and tactics to circumvent the efforts of powerful agents to influence them, in consumer culture theory. One such example might be seen in the reflexive strategies that persons use to demythologise consumption practices to protect their identity value in particular domains (Arsel and Thompson 2011). Accordingly, in research on cultural contexts, such as events, spectacles or themed retail environments, symbols and meanings take precedence over functional value, granting choice only a subordinate role in consumption processes.

Nevertheless, the individual interpretations of consumption meanings are constrained by the cultural environment. Kozinets (2001) show that personal meanings are extracted and constructed from a broad nexus of meanings that represents the interests of various stakeholders and institutions. In their study on the Star Trek cosmology, various power relations are identified that structure the cultural field that people experience. The meanings individuals can embrace are placed in a *context of bounded diversity*, as the commercial interests of the producer dictate what does and does not belong to the official Star Trek universe (ibid). Similar observations can be made in relation to ethical debates, where various moral positions are available to consumers. Kozinets and Handelman (2004), for example, explain how consumer movements construct dualistic subject positions to wield ideological influences on consumers. They legitimise individuals, who engage in responsible forms of consumption, while condemning mainstream consumers, who are seen to be complicit in creating immoral situations due to their lack of reflexivity. This approach seems to echo the spirit of ethical consumption research, but is problematic for several reasons. First, consumers do not like the elitist talk activists use to demonise certain practices (ibid). Instead, they should provide experientially-engaging narratives that resonate with consumers and are able to compete with conventional consumption meanings and spaces (see Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007b). Furthermore, it neglects the possibility of individuals to adopt various ideological positions and moral identities. Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler (2010) argue that moral protagonism may be employed towards multiple ends, depending on the values that are embraced by individuals. Their findings reveal that even owners of large, fuel-inefficient cars may think of themselves as moral agents, when that identity is linked to meanings that favour personal liberty and technological progress as a solution to societal problems. Lastly, consumer movements naturalise consumption as the main site of and solution to moral dilemmas (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). As such, they only represent a form of *style-based resistance*, which is rooted within the same underlying ideological system, rather than challenging consumer culture itself (ibid; see also Thompson 2003). Consumer emancipation (i.e. the goal to engage more consumers in reflexive and responsible forms of consumption) here is based on consumerist ideology, reinforcing marketplace meanings and logics in many life domains (Thompson 2004). It is increasingly difficult for individuals to escape the grasp of consumer thinking, as “emancipated spaces” and countervailing

interpretive positions are commercialised and integrated into marketplace ideologies (Murray 2002).⁴ As a result, people are mostly responsabilised in their role as consumers, leading to the ethical subjectification that was outlined in the previous section.

There are, however, efforts that problematise consumerist ideology and conventional market structures. The voluntary simplicity movement, which was outlined earlier, is one such example (see Section 3.3.). By considering ways to reduce the overall scale of personal consumption, it defies consumerist reasoning, which merely seeks to improve the spending patterns of people. Alternative market systems are another source of *ideological resistance*. They are built on countervailing cultural meanings that seek to instil different ideological understandings in individuals. Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007a), for example, investigated community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives to reveal the ideas that underpin these systems. They show that CSA is infused with countervailing meanings, such as decommodification, a greater sense of community, and a higher appreciation of the value of food and eating. CSA also imposes structural constraints on consumers, who, to a certain degree, have to change their lifestyles, as the farmers dictate which produce is grown and distributed to members of the network (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007b). It starkly contrasts with conventional marketplace ideologies, which place a premium on consumer sovereignty, because individuals voluntarily give up some control over their consumption by delegating decisions to the farmers. They challenge standard commercial rhetoric and act as a market resource to circumvent globalised food supply chains (ibid). Local currency movements are another example. Local currencies offer alternative exchange schemes that are only tradable inside a regionally-bound network, which forces people to barter with other members to attain wanted services. Ideologically, they oppose unlimited economic growth and try to fight individualisation by reviving a sense of community (Helleiner 2002). Similar observations were also made in research on responsible consumption cooperatives (Papaoikonomou and Alarcón 2017; Papaoikonomou, Valverde, and Ryan 2012). These kinds of resistance and alternative forms of organising contain a far-reaching critique of the status quo, as they question the

⁴ The fair trade movement, for instance, started out as genuine attempt to reform trading practices before it was integrated into the mainstream market to become just another way of shopping for a better world (Low and Davenport 2005).

fundamental workings of the marketplace and the enactment of responsibility through mainstream consumption.

This section reviewed the literature on marketplace discourses and the influence ideologies have on consumer behaviour. It started out with an outline of the key ideas behind marketplace mythologies and how commercial offerings are encoded with cultural meanings. It then moved on to discuss the ways in which organisations have employed ideologies to achieve their goals and to boost the confidence placed into the market economy. This channels consumer attention to commercial meanings and, to a certain extent, limits their ethical imagination. It was, however, pointed out that consumers can adopt a range of interpretive positions at any time, allowing them to play with different meanings by drawing from a broad nexus of discourses. Consequently, people do not uncritically accept hegemonic discourses, but are constrained by the ideological structures and discursive possibilities available to them. From a cultural perspective, consumer empowerment was thus seen mainly in the creative adaptation of meanings, where choice, in terms of the availability of different goods, was of marginal importance. Ethical debates were also covered, where a line was drawn between resistance based on consumerist ideology, on the one hand, and resistance based on countervailing ideologies, on the other. It was argued that responsible consumption is often placed within the bounds of consumer culture, rather than confronting the ideological foundations on which it is built. In relation to this, consumer sovereignty was problematised, as alternative market structures require people to give up some of their choices and the convenience connected to these. Consumerist ideologies, therefore, entrap people in marketplace discourses, leading them to only perceive identity positions and action possibilities within the field of consumption. For that reason, marketplace discourses are essential to the responsabilisation and governance of consumers, as they frame choices as the ultimate cure against societal ills.

Chapter 4 – The Literature Review: Value Co-Creation

The discussion so far has looked at ethical consumption and various challenges linked to its underlying model of empowerment. Choice, or the avoidance of it, was identified as the fundamental building block of consumer power, enabling people to mainly enact their values in the marketplace through the types of offerings they consume. This was captured by the Choice Paradigm. Various other perspectives were then presented to challenge this viewpoint. The arguments included that choice may be overwhelming (psychological perspective), non-existent or problematic for certain subpopulations (macromarketing perspective), ineffective from a systems standpoint (ecological perspective), constructed and channelled through technologies of government (sociological perspective), and that action possibilities may be limited by inherent ideological structures and discursive possibilities available to consumers (cultural perspective). These perspectives, however, are often built on an outdated, passive understanding of the consumer, which does not adequately reflect recent changes in the cultural fabric of society.

The 21st Century has seen significant shifts in the technological landscape, many of which have enabled consumers to get their voice heard by a broad spectrum of other people, companies, and institutions. The emergence of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp, to name just some of the most popular social media platforms, has led to a more participative culture (Jenkins 2006), where consumers have become active agents in value creation processes. These changes are reflected in marketing theory, which has attributed more power to consumers over time. Cova and Cova (2009) track the evolution of consumer competencies through various theoretical lenses. They describe how consumers moved from being constructed as individualistic agents, who merely engage in dialogue with providers (relationship marketing), to creative and capable market participants, who fulfil different roles and employ resources to reach their goals (collaborative marketing). Labrecque et al. (2013) identify four types of consumer power in the digital age. Going beyond the consumer sovereignty model, which is usually limited to demand and information power, individuals are now able to network and pool their resources with others to achieve their own or group-related goals. This development is facilitated by easy access to technology, which has opened up new opportunities through the democratisation of information and related social capabilities (Asmussen et al. 2013). As a result, individuals are increasingly

placed at the centre of value creation activities, giving rise to the concept of co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004b). The growing body of knowledge surrounding this idea, questions the rigid distinctions between consumer and producer roles, which distinguish the co-creation perspective from the previously outlined theoretical traditions (see Table 1 for an overview). This section reviews this literature stream and the important questions that arise in relation to consumer empowerment and ethical consumption.

Table 1 – Theoretical Perspectives, Consumer Roles, and Empowerment Concerns

Theoretical Perspective	Role Granted to Consumer	Type of Power	Empowerment Concerns
<i>Consumer Sovereignty</i>	Rational utility seeker	Choose or avoid	Choice availability, transparency, awareness
<i>Psychological</i>	Information processor	Cognitive decision making	Bounded rationality and information overload
<i>Vulnerability</i>	Victim	Lack of power	Inadequate skills, social capital, or resources
<i>Ecological</i>	System participant	Consumption patterns and lifestyles	Overall consumption intensity and scale
<i>Sociological</i>	Identity seeker	Choice of subject positions	Subjectivity construction and latent control
<i>Cultural</i>	Interpreter	Interpret, juggle, and resist meanings	Ideological structures and available meanings
<i>Co-Creation</i>	Co-creator	Value co-creation	Value creation activities, resources, and knowledge

4.1. Theoretical Foundations: Service-Dominant Logic, Co-Creation, and User Innovation

The new millennium saw several societal developments that had a lasting impact on the theoretical developments in the field of marketing and related disciplines. The widespread use of the internet and the growing interconnectedness of people were linked to the rise of a network economy, where organisations would take on consulting functions, rather than the classic role of sellers (Achrol and Kotler 1999). These claims were substantiated by the rise of companies like eBay, Airbnb, or Uber, which primarily facilitated exchanges between individuals, rather than distributing products by themselves. Indeed, these ideas were early manifestations of what is now being referred to as platform business models (see Evans and Schmalensee 2016). Simultaneously, as organisations stepped away from delivering desired offerings themselves, hybrid economic forms emerged, requiring consumers to take on different roles and responsibilities (Scaraboto 2015). This has convinced academics since the turn of the century that a fundamental paradigm shift is occurring, which puts productive individuals in charge of value creation activities (Ramírez 1999). This understanding has cumulated in what is now referred to as co-creation.

Various research streams have contributed to the advancement of the idea of co-creation. In the early 2000s, several concurrent developments paved the way for collaborative forms of value creation in the marketing discipline. Most notably, the call for a *service-dominant logic* (SDL) accelerated a shift in mainstream marketing thought. In a seminal article, Vargo and Lusch (2004) argued that the focus of marketing should be on “value in use” and everything should be viewed as service provision, even physical products, which were viewed as service vehicles. They stressed that value-in-exchange is essentially misconceived, as “value is defined by and co-created with the consumer” (p. 6). Marketing shifted, in other words, from a “marketing to” understanding of the relationship between providers and consumers to a “marketing with” view (Lusch 2007), placing value creation at the centre of the discipline’s self-understanding (Sheth and Uslay 2007). This laid the philosophical groundwork for co-creation, reflected in the foundational premises of the SDL, and cemented the consumer’s authority over the determination of value (Vargo and Lusch 2008; Vargo, Maglio, and Akaka 2008).

Around the same time, a few key authors advanced the concept of *co-creation*. In particular, the work of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) helped shape theory in this domain. The authors argued that consumers could no longer be viewed as passive bystanders in the market, but were taking charge as collaborators in the co-creation of value. The traditional roles of producers and consumers converged, as both parties were viewed as equally capable resource integrators (see Lusch and Vargo 2006). Co-creation, consequently, was defined as the “*joint creation of value by the company and the customer*” (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004a, p. 8; emphasis in original).⁵ Several important implications arose out of this understanding. First, as value could no longer be programmed into offerings, managers would have to pay more attention to customer experiences (ibid). Value would need to arise iteratively through interactions, rather than within and as an output of value chains (Helkkula, Kelleher, and Pihlstrom 2012; Ramani and Kumar 2008). Second, due to the *blurring of the lines between producer and consumer responsibilities*, some authors have argued that *prosumption* would be a more accurate term. George Ritzer’s work is notable in this respect. He argued that a productivist bias had artificially separated production and consumption in economic and social theory for most of modern history, while individuals had always taken on roles in both domains (Ritzer 2013; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). Only recent technological changes have revived interest in the dual capabilities of individuals, especially because new business models depend on the prosumer to generate content and therewith connected revenue streams (Ritzer, Dean, and Jurgenson 2012). Lastly, scholars have looked at consumer roles in the innovation process as a crucial aspect in value creation. This seems logical because at earlier stages individuals should, at least in principle, be able to significantly influence value outcomes, whereas this is difficult once resources have undergone transformative processes. Accordingly, the innovation and technology management literature has significantly contributed to the understanding of co-creation (Galvagno and Dalli 2014) and is worth further exploration.

Similar to the developments in the marketing discipline, innovation management has seen substantial changes over the past 20 years. Here too, academics have called for a *paradigm shift away from producer-centric conceptions of innovation* to open, collaborative models (Baldwin and von Hippel 2011). These mirror the changing conceptions in marketing to a certain extent, as the two knowledge areas connect and

⁵ A recent literature review defined co-creation in similar terms, speaking for the general applicability of this conception (Galvagno and Dalli 2014).

cross-fertilise each other (see, for example, Mele, Colurcio, and Russo-Spena 2014). Open innovation (OI) captures the general trend in contemporary business towards institutional openness (Gassmann, Enkel, and Chesbrough 2010), where companies increasingly draw in knowledge and resources from a multitude of external sources (Chesbrough 2003; Enkel and Gassmann 2010). OI itself represents an umbrella concept, which unifies a variety of research streams (Huizingh 2011; Lichtenthaler 2011). One significant stream of this theoretical current is user innovation (UI). Unlike OI more generally, UI also considers the utility gains users can extract from innovations (Bogers and West 2012). It, in other words, does not merely adopt a managerial perspective by trying to identify the ways in which firms capture value from outside corporate boundaries, but also seeks to uncover the motivations of users for participating in co-creation activities. As such, it is well placed to yield additional insights into the phenomenon.

User innovation has a far-reaching empirical history. Even though publications on lead users can be traced back to the 1980s (Urban and von Hippel 1988), a recent influx of research can largely be accredited to the opportunities created by the internet and easier access to productive resources. This becomes particularly evident in the works of von Hippel, whose lifework is collected in the book *Democratizing Innovation* (von Hippel 2005a). Von Hippel explains that the wide availability of simple tools has considerably lowered the difficulty of users to co-create value in the market, leading to the democratisation of innovation, where “users of products and services ... are increasingly able to innovate for themselves” (von Hippel 2005b, p. 64). Here, users generally stand for individuals or firms that benefit directly from the use of an innovation, compared to manufacturers, which benefit indirectly through the sale of that innovation or related services (ibid). Research has, for example, shown that users have substantially contributed to the development of expert equipment (Herstatt and von Hippel 1992; Morrison, Roberts, and von Hippel 2000) or sporting gear (Franke and Shah 2003). As the user takes control of innovation, it aligns with the notion of co-creation, because both approaches place individuals at the forefront of value creation.

In summary, our knowledge of co-creation is built on three related theoretical fields. First, service research outlines the core principles of a new approach to marketing, where companies no longer dictate what constitutes value. Second, the consumer and value co-creation represent the new gravitational centre of the discipline with important

implications regarding role distinctions. As consumers become competent, active collaborators, they no longer only choose between existing offerings, but are actively involved in the creation of value with other market players. They become, following Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010), prosumers. This is the core premise of co-creation and distinguishes it from the focus on choices championed by the consumer sovereignty model. Third, because value creation begins when ideas turn into market opportunities, user innovation represents the most promising context in which co-creation can be studied. The next sections take a closer look at user innovation, exploring empirical instantiations of the phenomenon as well as explanations of why consumers voluntarily engage in these activities.

4.2. Co-Creation in Practice: Innovation Tools, Communities, and Implications

The previous section explained the theoretical foundations of value co-creation and the extended responsibilities that are attributed to consumers in the marketing discipline. Yet, while the core premises have been outlined, co-creation is still a concept which lacks theoretical substance (Grönroos 2011). The general models that have been proposed to variously explain co-creation (Payne, Storbacka, and Frow 2008), co-production (Etgar 2008), collaborative innovation (Hoyer et al. 2010), or combinations of these (Greer and Lei 2012), take a managerial approach to the phenomenon and usually depict different antecedent, implementation, measurement, and outcome dimensions. However, they remain at a very abstract level and do not distinguish between different forms of co-creation. This section reviews several practices that have been employed by businesses to collaborate with consumers as well as the factors that impact on their potential success.

User innovation can be approached in multiple ways. One established method is to build innovations on the input of lead users. *Lead users* are generally described as individuals or firms that are ahead of the majority of users regarding an important market trend and thus likely to offer insights that can facilitate the development of new solutions within a particular domain (von Hippel 2005b). This technique has been extensively researched and shown to be relevant in a large variety of sectors, covering both industrial and consumer products (ibid). More recently, online technologies have advanced the potential of lead user integration even further, by allowing dispersed experts to contribute to the solution of problems in virtual communities (Mahr and Lievens 2012).

This moves the discussion to another important source of innovation: consumer communities.

Consumer communities can be activated for value co-creation through various means. Füller et al. (2006), for instance, explored the influence consumer communities had on the development of Audi's Infotainment system. They found that the community generated a range of novel ideas, some of which were previously unknown to in-house designers. *Idea competitions* have been used towards similar ends. They are employed to "access innovative ideas and solutions from users" by motivating them "to participate at an open innovation process, to inspire their creativity, and to increase the quality of the submissions" (Piller and Walcher 2006, p. 307). Gebauer, Füller, and Pezzeri (2013) looked at a bag design contest launched by a supermarket to examine the usefulness of this tool. The authors show that the willingness to pay for the end product and to positively talk about the experience may differ, depending on the perceived desirability of the outcome, perceived fairness of the process, and a sense of community among participants.

Participatory design is another area of user innovation (Buur and Matthews 2008), where consumers take charge, at least partially, of product design decisions. Fuchs and Schreier (2011) identify four levels of empowerment in relation to designs. Based on their ability to create designs and/or choose the designs that ultimately get produced, users can have: zero empowerment, where they neither create designs nor decide which designs make it onto the market; create or select empowerment, where only one of the dimensions is under their control; or full empowerment, where they both create designs and have authority over final production decisions (e.g. Threadless). Interestingly, empowerment here is viewed as the degree of control consumers have over the later stages of the value creation process, which significantly differs from the focus on choices under the consumer sovereignty model. It is also seen as an outcome variable, where higher perceived levels of empowerment create better results for companies (ibid). Interaction tools and interfaces can significantly influence the feeling of empowerment. Füller et al. (2009) find that co-creation tools that help consumers master their tasks or generally lower the skill levels required of individuals, are perceived as more empowering and enjoyable. It, therefore, is essential that organisations create conditions that facilitate user participation.

Several factors determine effective user innovation. First, it is important to pay attention to *process characteristics*. Innovation processes are not only influenced by easy-to-use tools, as indicated above, but also by the possibilities granted to users. Jeppesen and Molin (2003) argue that environments that allow playful interaction and sharing amongst peers are critical for learning processes. People familiarise themselves with the norms that guide value co-creation activities and learn how to use the innovation tools through participation in communities (ibid). This requires companies to give away a certain amount of control to allow users to iteratively co-create value (Harwood and Garry 2010; Quinton 2013). If this is done successfully, community members contribute to value creation in a variety of ways. Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder (2011), for instance, argue that users can co-manage a brand by taking on important moderator functions. Likewise, other research has shown that several forms of value can accrue from communities (see Healy and McDonagh 2013; Seraj 2012). Given the importance of communities for user innovation, considerable effort should go into establishing a network of people, who work together effectively. *Social relations* are a crucial puzzle piece in this respect. Bugshan (2015) finds that sufficient interconnectivity between members raises the commitment people feel towards the community and increase the likelihood that they will make positive contributions towards its goals. Trust among members is another important determinant. Ind, Iglesias, and Schultz (2013) track the evolution of a consumer community to show that trust only slowly moves from members of the community to the brand. They depict brand building as an organic process in which fair reciprocity is fundamental to benefit from consumer creativity. Gyrd-Jones and Kornum (2013) also emphasise the need for mutual respect and complementary values. Shared interests and common understandings thus guide the co-creation of value and ensure the integration of stakeholders into innovation processes.

On top of the previously outlined issues, research has shown that both *extrinsic and intrinsic rewards* play a role in co-creation.⁶ In terms of material gains, payments, discounts, the promise of future services, and selling benefits have been found to influence user innovation (Bogers, Afuah, and Bastian 2010; Brockhoff 2003; Shah and Tripsas 2007). Other extrinsic motives may include peer or firm recognition (Jeppesen and Frederiksen 2006; Jeppesen and Molin 2003) or social goals, such as meeting like-minded people and sharing one's view with others (Ind, Iglesias, and Schultz 2013).

⁶ Theoretical explanations for user innovation were not covered in this review. See the work of von Hippel (2005) for more details.

Intrinsic incentives include excitement and fun (Füller et al. 2006; Füller, Jawecki, and Mühlbacher 2007; Lakhani and Wolf 2005) as well as learning and a sense of accomplishment (Hertel, Niedner, and Herrmann 2003; Nambisan and Baron 2009). Consequently, co-creation can also be encouraged by environments that permit users to achieve their personal goals.

This section covered various practical aspects of user innovation and, by extension, value co-creation. It started out with a general observation that existing models of the phenomenon are usually too abstract to provide actionable insights, which led to the discussion of various methods and tools that have been used to integrate users in innovation processes. Lead users, consumer communities, idea competitions, participatory designs, and their implications were subsequently covered.⁷ It was also pointed out that empowerment frequently describes the degree of control consumers have over some aspects of value creation (e.g. design processes) in this domain and that this profoundly differed from the conception of power found under the consumer sovereignty model. Lastly, several factors were identified that facilitate user innovation. These included creating stimulating environments and processes, giving away authority by allowing users to adopt various roles in their communities, and establishing trust and fruitful social relations. In addition, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for engaging in innovation activities were also outlined. All in all, this provided a good overview of co-creation from a managerial perspective. The next section looks at critiques of this standpoint.

4.3. Critiques of Company-Centric Forms of Co-Creation: Governmentality and Exploitation

Value co-creation and user innovation, at least how they were presented so far, are both managerially-oriented concepts. Accordingly, the discussion primarily outlined research that explores the practices and factors that are necessary to set up successful co-creation activities. However, a few academics have questioned the sincerity of the transition towards collaborative marketing. Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody (2008), for instance, view *co-creation as a form of governmentality* that seeks to bring about certain forms of life. They contend that the discourses and practices surrounding co-creation primarily

⁷ The review does not provide a complete overview of co-creation activities. See Sawhney, Verona, and Prandelli (2005) for further approaches.

aim to direct the freedom of consumers, so that their newly acquired productive capabilities can be harnessed for corporate purposes. A similar observation is made by Bertilsson and Cassinger (2011). They link the co-creation brand paradigm with the construction of consumer subjects as entrepreneurial agents and prosumers, which equally leads to the exploitation of their free labour. Bonsu and Darmody (2008) explore consumer cooperation in the context of Second Life, a once popular virtual reality game. They too link co-creation to the colonisation of people's minds, which enables the provider to capitalise on the participation of users. The authors liken the virtual environment to a prison, where consumers are free to create and do whatever they want within the confines of the game, but all value is collected by the software developer, as the gatekeeper of that world. This form of "latent supra-structural control" naturalises corporate interests (ibid) and leads to the exploitation of consumers.

Several *forms of exploitation* have been linked to co-creation. Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody (2008) describe two types of exploitation. First, consumers are not paid for the work they contribute to marketable commodities. Second, they have to pay a price premium for co-created commodities, as their value exceeds that of offerings stemming from standardised production procedures (e.g. customised sneakers). This leads to the double exploitation of users, as the surplus value of their efforts is exclusively captured by the manufacturer (ibid). Dujarier (2016) expands on this point by explaining how organisations benefit from three types of consumer work. The first form of work is described as self-directed production, where consumers increasingly take over certain parts of the value creation process. Whether it is the self-assembly of furniture, self-service at a food outlet, or self-guidance through an online buying process, companies have found many ways to outsource work to prosumers. Second, businesses have found ways to capture the fruits of the immaterial labour of consumers. User-generated content is a prime example of this approach. The postings, pictures, and videos consumers share over Facebook do not only allow the firm to tailor their commercial messages to individual users (i.e. free market intelligence), but also generate traffic on the website and, thereby, increase related monetisation opportunities (i.e. free promotional work and advertising revenues). Lastly, consumers sift through large amounts of information in organisational work. The ratings and evaluations found on many online stores are largely the result of the sorting jobs assigned to users. This trend towards the exploitation of consumer work challenges the proclaimed empowerment of consumers in collaborative marketing (Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008), especially

when individuals have little choice but to accept the terms of powerful market actors, if they do not want to be excluded from (mediated) social interactions (see Fuchs 2011). This raises important questions regarding the implications of co-creation.

Two related concerns are embedded in this debate. The first is linked to the question of whether co-creation simply presents the logical next step in marketing's attempt to extract value from consumers, a new means of producing consumers (Fontenelle 2015), or a revolutionary form of collaborative capitalism (Cova, Dalli, and Zwick 2011; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010)? Proponents of the governmentality perspective would probably support the former standpoint, where consumer empowerment and self-actualisation remain a fantasy (Comor 2010). The vision of a harmonious market is problematised by the fact that companies capture most of the economic value linked to co-created offerings (Cova and Dalli 2009). Hence, a second important question is who benefits from the work of consumers? Humphreys and Grayson (2008) distinguish between "collective production" and "company-consumer production" to emphasise this point. They argue that it is the latter approach that creates ethical issues because productive consumers are excluded from the surplus value generated through their labour. Collective production avoids this dilemma, as consumers capture the value of their efforts within communities or networks. The next section is dedicated to this growing phenomenon.

4.4. Collective Production and Co-Creation: The Rise of the Crowd

Value co-creation can occur in many contexts. The review outlined firm-centric forms of co-creation so far, where one organisation coordinates the innovation process. Sponsored co-creation (Zwass 2010), however, does not represent the whole spectrum of the phenomenon. Indeed, it was already mentioned that innovation is shifting away from the sole control of producers (Baldwin and von Hippel 2011), as organisations lose their privileged position in developing innovations (Raab and Kenis 2009). Observers have variably proclaimed the rise of mass collaboration (Tapscott and Williams 2010), the collaborative commons (Rifkin 2015), and social production (Benkler 2007) to acknowledge the growing importance of user-led value creation. Social production, in particular, has been used as a label for this phenomenon. Arvidsson (2008), for instance, describes social production as "self-organized systems of (mostly immaterial) production" (p.326) and links its increasing relevance to modern communication

technologies. Asmussen et al. (2013) also argue that the democratisation of technology has led to more stakeholder-initiated brand management activities. The ensuing discussion takes a look at how co-creation has manifested itself in the collective production of brands.

Brands are a hallmark of modern capitalism that are found in all sectors of the economy. While firms were traditionally in charge of brand management, this no longer holds true in contemporary society. Fisher and Smith (2011) maintain that the authority over brands and their meanings is increasingly diluted, as consumers employ them as flexible semiotic devices to fulfil different identity needs. As a result, managers should allow for enough interpretational flexibility to appeal to a large number of potential users, as *consumers attain cultural authority* within the market (Pongsakornrungruangsilp and Schroeder 2011). However, consumers are not only interpretive agents in this process, but also co-creators of brands. Black and Veloutsou (2017), for example, show that individual, community, and brand identity reinforce and shape each other. In an ethnographic study of the “Yes Scotland” referendum campaign, individuals were found to co-create the symbols and meanings of the movement. However, the role of consumers can go beyond meaning and identity co-creation.

Consumer communities can develop their own brands without the interference of corporate sponsors. Cova and Cova (2012) describe how collaboratively-organised consumers capture the value of their own work within communities. More specifically, they look at *counter and alter brands* as examples of collective production. Counter brands are created by communities because they are dissatisfied with existing offerings. A case in point is the work of Cova and White (2010), who showed that frustrated Warhammer fans successfully launched a competing product to meet their needs. Microsoft has equally inspired anti-consumption sentiments, leading people to turn to and develop open source software solutions (Cromie and Ewing 2009). Alter brands, on the other hand, are formed to advance community goals. Füller, Schroll, and von Hippel (2013) demonstrate this in the area of software development. Their examination of Apache is a prime example of a user-generated brand. Here, like-minded individuals started to gather around a common passion, which led to the emergence of a co-created brand over time. Consumer communities can also establish commercial offerings. This was observed in the case of outdoorseiten.net, where a community of outdoor aficionados launched its own camping equipment (Füller and von Hippel 2008). These

examples are instances of *self-organised value creation*. von Hippel (2007) offers the term “horizontal innovation networks” to capture forms of collective production, where users circumvent manufactures to produce innovations themselves. He contends that these constellations are most likely to emerge when information products are being sold (e.g. software or apps), as production costs are close to zero. For physical products, users are likely to depend on manufacturers to produce their innovations, unless only small volumes are demanded or the productive resources are widely available. The emergence of new technologies, such as 3-D printers, suggests that this will be possible in more and more consumption domains (see Rifkin 2015). The empirical evidence, however, is still limited and a lot more work needs to be done to understand self-organised value creation, which is the generic term adopted in this thesis to describe user-led market activity.

Conclusively, collective production is becoming increasingly popular, as more users join in collaborative networks to develop solutions to their problems. Various studies were discussed in this section to show how consumers self-organise to create their own brands and market offerings. The power of autonomous consumer communities, thereby, became apparent. While this does not signal the decline of capitalism, the various instances of self-organised value creation give reason to believe that the power balances in the market are shifting in favour of users. So much so, that this has inclined some authors to call for a “community paradigm” in brand management (Quinton 2013). Likewise, innovation processes increasingly emerge from horizontal networks (von Hippel 2007). That is to say, individuals collaborate to bring their ideas to life. Crowdfunding is linked to this aspect and will be examined in the following section.

4.4.1. Crowdfunding: Definition, Crowdfunding Types, and Empirical Evidence

The previous section has shown that co-creation goes beyond corporate-sponsored innovation processes and includes genuine forms of self-organised value creation, a term that will be used from here on, where the locus of control shifts to autonomous users. The absence of an overall coordinating entity, however, raises important questions regarding the empowerment of consumers. This becomes evident when individuals form crowds, which allow them to collectively mobilise, channel, and bundle resources towards achieving particular goals (see Labrecque et al. 2013). Crowdfunding has recently received more attention in this respect, as people no longer just collaborate to create meanings and content, but also launch their own ideas onto the market with the support of others.

Crowdfunding is a relatively new phenomenon. Kickstarter, a pioneer in this sector, was established in 2009. Accordingly, crowdfunding is still an underexplored research area, where most existing work is found in the field of entrepreneurship (see Moritz and Block 2016). Crowdfunding has been defined as “the provision of financial resources online through many small contributions by large numbers of individuals” (Mollick and Kuppaswamy 2016, p. 537). Belleflamme, Lambert, and Schwienbacher (2014) describe it as “an open call ... for the provision of financial resources either in the form of donation or in exchange for the future product or some form of reward to support initiatives for specific purposes” (p. 588). These definitions accommodate a variety of *crowdfunding types* that are found on the market, namely:

- i) donation-based crowdfunding, where the funder gives money to a project without expecting any type of return;
- ii) reward-based crowdfunding, where funders receive a product or some other benefit for their support;
- iii) loan-based crowdfunding, where funders receive financial returns for the money they lend to project initiators; and
- iv) equity-based crowdfunding, where funders receive shares and/or a part of the returns generated by the venture that is created as a result of the project.

Given this variety, it is not surprising that academics have explored the benefits of the various funding styles for capital seekers. Tomczak and Brem (2013) outline the general importance of crowdfunding in filling financing gaps within the market. It diminishes the problem of scarce venture capital, as the pool of potential investors is expanded and new sources of seed capital become accessible (see also Bruton et al. 2015). Furthermore, crowdfunding may help counteract some of the problems of traditional forms of venture financing, such as regional clustering, the concentration of control over funds in closed expert networks, and the general male dominance amongst venture capitalists (Mollick and Kuppaswamy 2016). Other authors have looked at how capital seekers can select the best funding option for their needs. Meyskens and Bird (2015) show that different forms of crowdfunding may be appropriate, depending on the level of social or economic value likely to accrue from a project. Belleflamme, Lambert, and Schwienbacher (2014) find that plans with large capital requirements are best accompanied by profit-sharing models.

Several potential downsides of crowdfunding have also been identified, such as delayed product deliveries and underperformance (Hossain and Oparaocha 2017), information asymmetries (Belleflamme, Omrani, and Peitz 2015), fears of public failure by entrepreneurs (Gleasure 2015), and it being a last resort for firms that struggle to attain financing through other means (Walthoff-Borm, Schwienbacher, and Vanacker 2018). Regarding the latter point, crowdfunding is especially attractive for social ventures.

Social businesses usually face additional challenges in attaining funds because they have to meet multiple goals and their initiators are likely to have different mindsets from investors (Lehner 2013). By turning directly to those people who believe in the idea behind a project, funding may be attained more easily through this finance vehicle. Indeed, it has been shown that non-profit campaigns are able to reach their minimum funding goals more frequently and to draw in higher average contributions from their funders (Pitschner and Pitschner-Finn 2014). Yet, little has been written about the potential of crowdfunding to solve ethical issues for consumers, even though ethical value has been identified as a major factor in social production (Arvidsson 2008). Investigating self-organised value creation amongst consumers in the form of crowdfunding can thus lead to interesting insights.

4.4.2. The Interplay of Self-Organised Value Creation, Consumer Empowerment, and Ethical Consumption in the Context of Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is a growing phenomenon. In 2015, the worldwide capital collected over crowdfunding reached more than 34 billion US Dollars, a significant increase from the mere 1.5 billion US Dollars of funding volume recorded in 2011 (statista 2017). Likewise, the general awareness of crowdfunding is rising. A recent survey of 1000 people in Germany, for example, revealed that almost two thirds of the participants were aware of this form of financing (crowdfunding.de 2017). It, consequently, offers a rich context for studying the interplay of self-organised value creation, consumer empowerment, and ethical consumption.

Crowdfunding is a promising empirical setting for this study for several reasons. First of all, the boundaries between production and consumption in crowdfunding are blurred. While existing research on ethical consumption mainly looks at the reasons why consumers choose ethical products, crowdfunding grants people a more active role in influencing what kind of options (i.e. potential choices) become available to them in the future. The strict binary distinction and hierarchical view of the relationship between consumers and producers is replaced with a co-creative view, which raises important questions about how empowerment can be understood under these conditions. This research project seeks to explore consumer empowerment in this domain by looking at crowdfunding as the empirical context. Therefore, the first research question is:

How can consumer empowerment be conceptualised in settings, where consumers self-organise value creation activities?

Building on the previous point, an understanding of the factors that influence consumers' abilities to successfully create value must be attained. What conditions affect self-organised value creation? What goals do people have in self-organised value creation? What meanings do different people attach to crowdfunding? The second research question is:

What factors influence or enable consumers to partake in self-organised value creation?

Crowdfunding has the potential to raise awareness for and find solutions to ethical niches that might not otherwise be served. This might be connected to the inability of social ventures to get access to funds through traditional finance mechanisms, as well as the disinterest of established players to launch ethical offerings, as businesses are generally bound by corporate objectives when developing innovations (Lüthje and Stockstrom 2016). Vulnerable groups might benefit from this development, as crowdfunding can tackle their problems and promote the visibility of their concerns. It might, more simply, help push new forms of ethical consumption into the market. Crowdfunding could also promote new opportunities because consumers are no longer dependent on the action possibilities granted to them by large corporations. As these offerings might be linked to new meanings, crowdfunding could expose consumers to new ideas and discourses. The last research question thus is:

Does self-organised value creation lead to new ethical consumption opportunities and behaviours?

All in all, the context and the research questions should shed light on a little investigated research domain. This can promote a new view of consumer empowerment, which takes into account the increasing ability of individuals to shape value creation activities within the market. It may also move understandings of ethical behaviour in the contemporary marketplace beyond the Choice Paradigm. The rise of new discourses that are created through crowdfunding, might lay the foundation for entirely new action possibilities, shaping the future of the market along the way. The next section briefly summarises the arguments advanced in the literature review before the research design of the thesis is explained.

4.5. Not Just a Matter of Choice: Consumer Ethics Beyond the Choice Paradigm

The preceding chapters covered a lot of ground in the process of looking at how ethical behaviour manifests itself in an age of consumption. At the outset, the literature on ethical consumption, with its focus on ethical products, consumer attitudes, and the often inconsistent behaviour of consumers, was discussed in Chapter 2. Various important factors were identified that help explain why consumers choose to consume ethically or why they fail to do so despite their best intentions. The assumptions underlying this research stream were linked to the consumer sovereignty model, which sees consumers as utility-maximising choosers. This conception was challenged on multiple grounds in Chapter 3. It was questioned from a psychological perspective. In an option-rich environment, consumers might simply be too overwhelmed by choices to include ethical considerations into their decisions, as they represent an additional cognitive burden. The inability to make choices was linked to consumer vulnerability, one of the concerns of macromarketing theory. Here the lack of skills or resources constrained effective consumer agency. From an ecological standpoint, with its focus on long-term system sustainability, choosing resource-efficient options was not enough. Even if ethical consumption became the *modus operandi* for people in developed countries, global demand and rising consumption intensities would still threaten ecological systems in the long run. The sociological perspective challenged empowerment through choice by viewing the corresponding responsabilisation of consumers as a form of governmentality. In other words, agency was seen to be preconceived and the freedom of individuals only a tool to entrap them in the domain of consumption. The cultural model linked agency to the resistance against dominant meanings. Consumer empowerment here was linked to navigating ideological fields and discourses, rather than choices. Finally, the dichotomy between production and consumption, that characterises most of the above perspectives, was problematised in Chapter 4. Various research streams relating to co-creation were then examined. Here, the concerns linked to company-centric forms of co-creation were outlined. Self-organised value creation circumvented this problem and was identified as a promising research area, both in terms of the implications it could have for understanding consumer empowerment and enabling new forms of ethical consumption. Several research questions were presented in relation to crowdfunding, which served as the empirical context of the investigation. The next chapter provides more information on how the research questions were addressed in practice.

Chapter 5 – The Methodology

5.1. Research Philosophy: The Worlds We Think In

The first step in an empirical investigation involves delineating the philosophical foundations that guide the research process. Although this is seldom reflected in published research, the choice of research paradigms has a significant influence on what types of data are accepted as appropriate evidence. What is considered good practice differs between disciplines. The management and marketing disciplines have a long history of *positivist thinking*, which surfaces, for example, in the rigour-relevance debate (Gulati 2007). Positivists take a realist position, which assumes that reality exists independent of social actors and that objective truths about a phenomenon can be discovered (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Furthermore, positivist research is based on deductive logic, where theory guides the selection of appropriate methodological approaches and empirical settings (Lutz 1989). It is, thus, likely that quantitative research methods are adopted to prove hypothesised causal relationships, where standardised procedures aim to minimise any confounding influences on the data collection process. Experiments and surveys, which allow a high degree of control over the research procedure, are often employed towards this end. The measures used to judge the quality of the findings correspond to these beliefs and seek to assimilate the ideals of the natural sciences (see Bryman and Bell 2007). The positivist view, however, has been criticised for being naively realist by believing empirical observations are true representations of the object under study (Fleetwood 2005). Other approaches emphasise the variety of experiences people have of a phenomenon.

Interpretivism represents another major school of thought in management and marketing research. Unlike positivism, this approach holds that there can be multiple interpretations of a reality at any time, which are context-dependent and value-bound (Lincoln and Guba 1985). An interpretive research orientation seeks to “understand the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings” (Gephart, JR. 2004, p. 457). In terms of this paper, this denoted looking at what meanings various stakeholders (the social actors) ascribed to crowdfunding projects (the settings), particularly from the vantage point of empowerment and ethical consumption. These meanings were, of course, not an end in themselves, but rather the starting point for theory development, where the “concepts of social actors [served] as the foundations for analytic induction” (ibid, p, 457). Interpretivism, consequently, takes the opposite

approach to positivist studies by letting themes emerge from the data, rather than looking to support hypothesised relationships. Empirical investigations are characterised by open, emergent designs, as the perceived realities of informants cannot be known beforehand (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Qualitative methods usually form the core of the data collection process because they allow the exploration of meanings and do not superimpose a structure on the views of participants. The interpretivist philosophy, accordingly, represents a flexible research approach that seeks to gather rich, contextualised data.

In summary, two main research paradigms were covered in this section. Positivist research was linked to an objective understanding of reality, deductive logic, standardised procedures, and quality measures akin to those found in the natural sciences. Interpretivist research was linked to the existence of multiple realities, inductive logic, open data collection processes, and a focus on gaining rich, contextualised insights into a phenomenon from the perspective of study participants. An interpretivist research orientation was used in this inquiry, as a deep understanding of the respondents' views was sought, which aligned with the research approach.

5.2. Research Objectives and Research Approach

The previous chapter outlined the relevance of taking a critical look at current understandings of ethical consumption by questioning some of its foundational premises. It was emphasised that, while a lot of research has examined the topic based on an implicit acceptance of the consumer sovereignty model, little consideration has been given to the new roles consumers have adopted in value creation activities. In short, research in this area does not adequately represent changes in the cultural environment, where consumers have attained more than just demand power (i.e. the ability to purchase or boycott certain products or providers; see Labrecque et al. 2013). This thesis not only problematises the underlying assumptions of existing research, but also offers a different perspective on empowerment by looking at self-organised value creation within the context of crowdfunding. Given the shortage of theory in this domain, an *explorative research approach* was chosen, as indicated by the broad scope of the research questions:

Research Question 1: How can consumer empowerment be conceptualised in settings, where consumers self-organise value creation activities?

Research Question 2: What factors influence or enable consumers to partake in self-organised value creation?

Research Question 3: Does self-organised value creation lead to new ethical consumption opportunities and behaviours?

Exploratory research seeks to identify preliminary patterns and structures within empirical data and to develop initial conceptions based on the data (Stebbins 2001). To explain how alignment between the research questions and the chosen methodology was achieved and to demonstrate the adequacy of the selected approach, it is worth referring to the concept of methodological fit (Edmondson and McManus 2007). Methodological fit describes three general states of theory development, ranging from extensively studied (mature theory) to underdeveloped research areas, where little is known (nascent theory). Depending on where the topic falls on this continuum, different methodological approaches are best suited for studying and answering particular research questions.

This study can most accurately be described in terms of nascent theory. Much still needs to be learned about how consumers engage in value creation, particularly when they collaborate to develop offerings themselves, rather than when they participate in open innovation processes that are championed by established market players. Crowdfunding is an emergent area of inquiry and it is uncertain what potential it holds towards truly empowering consumers, especially when it comes to enacting their ethical concerns. Due to the low level of knowledge in this domain, the investigation took an *inductive approach to theory development*, which required openness towards the discovery of new themes, allowing concepts to emerge from the data, rather than specifying expected relationships between variables in advance (Edmondson and McManus 2007). Since quantitative methods are less suited for this type of research and because the emphasis was on understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of various stakeholders, a qualitative approach to data collection was chosen. More specifically, a case study design was adopted to build emerging conceptions from a rich empirical base.

5.3. Research Strategy: Crowdfunding Projects as Case Studies

5.3.1. Case Study Research: Definition, Research Traditions, and Advantages

The preceding sections laid the groundwork by outlining the philosophical assumptions and the inductive approach of this investigation. This part takes a closer look at the case study research design that was adopted. A case study is defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 1994, p. 13). In this thesis, the phenomenon was self-organised value creation, with a particular focus on how it affects extant conceptions of consumer empowerment and the ability to engage in new forms of ethical consumption, by looking at the context of crowdfunding.

Several advantages spoke for the adoption of a case study research approach. First of all, it is frequently used to *develop theory*. Particularly in the area of user innovation, case studies have been applied extensively to explore the motivations of various actors to participate in value creation activities (see Bogers, Afuah, and Bastian 2010; Galvagno and Dalli 2014). Usually this is done to develop concepts inductively, by looking at patterns within the dataset, which can involve single or multiple cases (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). As an inductive approach was central to the examination of the research questions, this aspect was essential for the selection of the research strategy. However, it is important to distinguish between positivist and interpretivist streams in case study research. Positivist approaches generally assume that reality exists independently from the social constructions people can have of it (Walsham 1995). Yin (1994) represents this line of thinking, which can be seen in the quality measures he applies to case study research. These mirror those of the natural sciences (e.g. external validity and reliability tests) and imply that the discovered facts represent empirical truths. The case survey method is an example of this school of thought (see Larsson 1993). Interpretivists, conversely, believe that different constructions of reality exist and that values and facts are intertwined. This means that research does not reveal facts, but rather offers interpretations of reality (Walsham 1995). Given the research philosophy outlined earlier, the latter approach was embraced. Case study research was in line with this viewpoint for multiple reasons.

One key benefit of cases is that they emphasise *contextual and in-depth understandings* of phenomena. Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg (1991) highlight that cases offer a way of “studying humans and actions in their natural surroundings” and that such “analyses permit the observer to render social action in a manner that comes closest to the action as it is understood by the actors themselves” (p. 7-8). Selecting crowdfunding projects, to explore self-organised value creation, produced rich data, which helped to illuminate the motivations and types of thoughts that inspired individuals to jointly develop marketplace solutions. Hence, the case study method matched the interpretivist research philosophy of this paper.

Case study research also offers a more complete view on a phenomenon than other research strategies. Sjoberg et al. (1991) identify the ability of cases to provide a *holistic perspective* on a theoretical issue as one of their major advantages. While surveys or experiments might establish causal relationships between variables, these methods necessarily lose much of the deep understanding that can be gained through paying attention to the context in which a phenomenon occurs. It was discussed earlier, how ethical consumption is often confronted with methodological challenges to account for the frequently observed attitude-behaviour gap (see Section 2.1.2.1.). In particular, social desirability biases and the neglect of contextual circumstances were seen as key weaknesses of survey-based studies (Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell 2010; Steenkamp, Jong, and Baumgartner 2010). Case study research pays attention to the complex interrelationships and contexts in which a theoretical issue is addressed and circumvents these concerns. Due to its holistic approach, the research strategy is sensitive to complex webs of social interactions (Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg 1991), which are at work in self-organised value creation. It is, consequently, well placed to answer the research questions posed in this study.

Moreover, case study research avoids common methodological criticisms through the application of multiple data collection tools. The application of a single method within a study may produce a narrow set of findings, which, to a large extent, are influenced by the specific tool that is applied (Stewart 2009). To counter the problem, *multiple research methods* are mobilised to achieve triangulation, which allows for “the simultaneous display of multiple, refracted realities” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 6). This generates richer findings, as more breadth and complexity is added to the inquiry (Flick 2002), and the weaknesses of a single technique are offset by other

complementary ones (Davis, Golicic, and Boerstler 2010). Additionally, a good method mix helps to reach convergence in the findings, as only sufficiently grounded concepts survive the scrutiny of the investigation (Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg 1991). The risk of falling into methodological traps is diminished, ensuring that the findings are relevant and transferable.

Case study research, in summary, matched the goals of this inquiry. It aligned with the intentions of advancing nascent theory, answering relatively open research questions, and building theory from emerging themes. Towards this end an interpretive approach to case study research was adopted, which helped to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. Furthermore, the application of multiple methods tackled common critiques of ethical consumption research. As a result, the rich data gathered through case studies captured the complexity of self-organised value creation in the context of crowdfunding projects and offered novel contributions to the field.

5.3.2. Unit of Analysis and Multi-Case Research

A crucial aspect of every case study research design is the identification of a unit of analysis. The question is what the “case” actually stands for in the context of the study? The answer largely depends on the researcher’s assumption of what constitutes an appropriate case (Sjoberg et al. 1991). Ragin (1987) differentiates between two approaches, viewing the case as either a data category (e.g. a company or a community) or a theoretical category (e.g. class as a theoretical unit). The case, here, was viewed as a theoretical category, where a crowdfunding project was seen as an instantiation of self-organised value creation. Each project, therefore, provided a rich context in which this phenomenon could be observed. Essentially, this corresponds to what Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) refer to as *phenomenon-driven research*. The phenomenon moves to the forefront of the examination, rather than the empirical instances representing it. Another important point to consider is the number of cases included in the inquiry.

The thesis employed a *multi-case research design*. This was done for several reasons. First, different cases can be used to contrast findings across and beyond an individual case (Eisenhardt 1991). Elger and Smith (2005), for example, argue that differences or similarities can be discovered through such an approach and that this leads to further theoretical insights. Other advantages of multi-case research include better grounded

theory and more accurate concepts because patterns can more clearly be identified by looking at different contextual circumstances (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). This seems particularly relevant for the described phenomenon-based approach, as outlined above. Typically single-case research designs are used, if the underlying case provides a critical challenge to an extant theory or in some other way is an extreme or revelatory example of a phenomenon (Yin 1994). Multiple cases, on the other hand, are used for replication. They either seek to replicate findings in a hypothesised direction or to contradict them in a way congruent with the employed theoretical framework (ibid). This, however, represents a positivist viewpoint on case study research, which is not equally shared amongst academics (see Dyer and Wilkins 1991). Rather, the multi-case research design was employed in this study to develop a richer and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon by placing it on a broader empirical foundation. It, more simply, was used to add variance and detail to the examination to yield thicker descriptions (see Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Cases were selected on the basis of how much additional insights they could yield for the study, as outlined below.

5.3.3. Selection Criteria for Cases: Purposeful Sampling of Crowdfunding Projects

Crowdfunding is a growing market, drawing in an increasing amount of funds from private households and even professional investors. To ensure cases were relevant to the research questions a purposeful sampling strategy was used. This meant crowdfunding projects were selected based on their ability to yield insights into the phenomenon (Patton 1990). A few *parameters* were set to ensure relevant projects were included. First, each case needed to have an *ethical mission*. Crowdfunding projects usually provide an overview of the goals that the initiators want to achieve and the types of benefits potential funders can expect. In these descriptions, initiators that aim to fulfil an ethical mission clearly state their intentions and explain how the identified issues are to be addressed. The first precondition was, therefore, that a clear ethical objective could be identified in the project description. Second, only crowdfunding projects that operated a *reward-based funding* scheme were considered (see Section 4.4.1.). This was because the focus was on consumption-related motives, which might be less relevant to funders who are interested in financial returns. Here, consumption motives get mixed with investment logic, which could have led to conflicting ambitions on part of the funders and, as a result, contradictory findings. Third, only *successful projects* were considered. The project had to at least reach its minimum funding goal. This was

necessary to answer the third research question, which looks at the ethical consumption opportunities and behaviours that result from self-organised value creation processes, in this case crowdfunding projects. This would not have been possible for projects that never actually establish a market presence. Additionally, the project had to meet several *popularity* measures. It had to have a minimum funding goal of at least 10,000€ and needed to be backed by more than 50 different people. This was to ensure the project did not represent a small, discontinuous private endeavour of an initiator. The other reason was that it would be possible to recruit enough participants for the interviews, as more people had lent their support to the project. For the same reason, projects that had been completed relatively recently were preferred (i.e. no earlier than two years prior to the commencement of the empirical investigation in the summer of 2017). Any project that did not meet these conditions was excluded from the investigation. Together these criteria produced a mix of cases that offered a rich background for exploring self-organised value creation and ethical consumption (see Table A.1. in Appendix A for an overview of the cases). The following section takes a closer look at the specific methods that were employed and how they contributed to answering the research questions.

5.4. The Method Mix: Interviews, Document Analysis, and Observations

Case study research seeks to offer rich and contextualised understandings of phenomena. As such, it often inherently adopts a multi-method research approach. Orum et al (1991), for example, define a case study “as an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon” (p.2). Likewise, Yin (1994) sees the unique strength of this research strategy in “its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence” (p.8), spanning from documents and artefacts to interviews and observations. This study used interviews, documents, and observations to collect a rich dataset. Each of the three methods is discussed in turn, paying attention to their strengths and how these were mobilised to attain a comprehensive understanding of co-creation within the context of crowdfunding.

5.4.1. Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews were employed for several reasons. First, interviews are good for gaining a *deep understanding* of a subject matter from the perspective of the respondents (Walsham 1995). This is especially true for qualitative interviews, which are characterised by open-ended questions and the absence of preconceived answers. This allows respondents to express their thoughts freely and in a way that most accurately represents their views. It is, thereby, clearly distinguishable from positivist approaches to interviews, which deliberately limit the scope of an inquiry through the imposition of theoretical constructs on the interview process (Fontana and Frey 1998). Positivists often use structured interviews to ensure consistency and to control for researcher influences in the data collection process, as deviations threaten the objectivity of the findings (Bryman and Bell 2007). The position adopted in this paper most closely aligns with romanticism. It, therefore, seeks to come close to the participants’ views of the phenomenon by cultivating good relationships with them (Alvesson and Ashcraft 2012). The qualitative interview achieves this objective.

The interactive nature of the qualitative interview and the flexibility in asking questions, further allow the researcher to probe deeper into interesting themes. It can, thereby, promote a *nuanced understanding of a phenomenon* (Kepper 2008). As an inductive research approach was chosen, this ability to explore emerging concepts was essential. Moreover, qualitative interviews enable the researcher to investigate complex issues,

such as motivations for particular actions, which might not lend themselves to other forms of inquiry (Bryne 2004). Standardised measurements, such as the rating scales found in surveys, cannot match the profound insights attained through interviews. Qualitative interviews, in short, adequately matched the goal of this investigation to capture the wealth of meanings linked to crowdfunding and were able to accommodate the emerging nature and complexity of the subject matter.

Qualitative interviews, however, also present several challenges. First, the quality of the data produced through interviews heavily depends on the nature of the interview process. It is essential for the researcher to create rapport with the respondents to gain deep insights into a phenomenon (Fontana and Frey 1998). If the interviewer does not establish a good working relationship with the informant or does not show enough interest, this can seriously limit the amount of useful data generated during the encounter. Questions have a large impact on the interview process. If leading questions superimpose the opinion of the researcher onto the respondent or judgemental follow-up questions devalue their perspectives, this can undermine honest and unbiased answers during the interview (King and Horrocks 2010). This runs the risk of “forcing” the data in a certain direction (Glaser 1992), when participants are not given enough *flexibility* or feedback to encourage them to provide rich insights on a subject matter. As a positivist position, which seeks to structure the interview to minimise bias (Alvesson and Ashcraft 2012), was not adopted in this study, open questions were used to prevent these problems (see Section 5.5.1.1.). This also impacts on the quality criteria applied to judge the merit of a study. Positivists follow classic validity measures, while constructivists would find this of little value (Roulston 2010). Since this paper adopted an interpretive orientation, the hard measures advocated by positivists were replaced with a trail of evidence throughout the paper (Bansal and Corley 2011) to help other scholars assess the appropriateness of the research design.

In summary, qualitative interviews presented the most adequate method for meeting the objectives of this research. An interpretive position was taken towards the interviews, so informants could express themselves freely, without being limited by a strict, standardised process, in which theoretical constructs are imposed on the discussion. The openness of the interview process allowed concepts to emerge from the data, matching the inductive research approach taken in the study. The next section looks at document analysis, which complemented the insights gained from the interviews.

5.4.2. Document Analysis

The previous section outlined why interviews provided a comprehensive understanding of the crowdfunding process. These insights were complemented and enhanced by document analysis in the thesis. There were several reasons for the inclusion of documents in the method mix. First, as documents represent “any written materials that people leave behind” (Esterberg 2004, p. 121), they offer a potentially *large pool of resources*. They come in various forms, ranging from physical documents, such as letters or public records, to electronic texts and images found on websites, blogs, and social media (Hewson 2014). In the current study, this included online resources, such as: the original project descriptions and blog entries posted over the crowdfunding platform; the website of the new venture; and links to external websites, blogs, or related postings. Second, in some cases, documents may be the only way to *access particular kinds of information* (Gidley 2004). This was true in the context of crowdfunding, where documents played a crucial role in two ways. One aspect was that the project descriptions were necessary to select relevant cases for the investigation. Without the information provided on the crowdfunding website, it would not have been possible to find projects, which had an ethical mission and were successful in reaching their funding goals. Additionally, the project descriptions presented data in their own right. They were used, for instance, to examine the claims made during the campaigns and the types of information they offered. They could also be explored in terms of the language used in the descriptions and the meanings attached to these (see Coffey 2014). On top of their accessibility, documents provide a *richer context* and lead to questions that might not be considered otherwise (Bowen 2009). Another benefit of documents is that they are non-reactive. This means that they have not been created specifically with the interests of the researcher in mind and are thus *less susceptible to demand effects* (Bryman and Bell 2007). Accordingly, social desirability biases, which usually plague marketing research, are avoided. These advantages matched the chosen research strategy and the other data collection methods that we employed.

Nonetheless, documents present their own set of challenges. One critical question is for what purpose documents were created in the first place? Atkinson and Coffey (2006) argue that documents are not transparent representations, but rather a construction of social facts that seek to transform events into textual realities. It is, therefore, necessary to understand what expectations and shared understandings motivated their formation,

as this impacts on the *authenticity* of the reported accounts. Certain texts are written with a public audience in mind and may contain idealised stories, rather than objective facts, such as when autobiographies are published (McNeill 1990). As this study did not view documents from a realist perspective, where they are taken as factual representations of events (Gidley 2004), this was less of a problem. In fact, the way in which projects were framed could be used as data in itself. Nonetheless, it is important to consider *how* the documents came into existence. The project descriptions and posts that were produced during crowdfunding campaigns, for instance, emerged organically as a result of the funding process. They were, consequently, seen to be authentic accounts because they were not fabricated with the research objectives in mind. Scott (1990) identifies four criteria to assess the trustworthiness of documents. These are described on the basis of the project descriptions below (see Table 2.).

Table 2 – Criteria for Assessing the Trustworthiness of Documents

Criteria	Is the document ...	Example
<i>Authenticity</i>	... genuine?	Project descriptions arise naturally as part of the crowdfunding process
<i>Credibility</i>	... undistorted?	Project descriptions aim to provide transparency
<i>Representativeness</i>	... typical for its kind?	Project descriptions are part of every crowdfunding campaign
<i>Meaning</i>	... clear and comprehensive?	Project descriptions cover goals, benefits, strategies, and the team of each campaign

Adapted from: Scott (1990).

5.4.3. Observations

The preceding discussion outlined the importance of documents in attaining knowledge about crowdfunding projects. Observations were used, on top of the two methods that were already mentioned, to enrich the understanding of the outcomes of crowdfunding campaigns. These focused on the offerings created as a result of the campaigns and how they extended the action possibilities of consumers within the marketplace. The next paragraphs describe the contribution this method made to the inquiry.

Observations offer several benefits. In general, an observation “consists of gathering impressions of the surrounding world through all relevant human faculties” (Adler and Adler 1998, p. 80). This means that all senses provide relevant information for the researcher during fieldwork, leading to a *diverse and rich dataset*. Observations can also grant access to a phenomenon, if it is located in the public domain. In fact, they are often conducted in everyday settings, which has the advantage that *observer effects and intrusion are minimised* (ibid). This, however, depends on the role the researcher plays during the observation. These roles are often distinguished based on how involved the observer is within the setting of the investigation. This can range from extreme detachment (objective observer) to extensive membership (participant observer), when the researcher is actively involved in the research context (Adler and Adler 1998). Here again, positivist and naturalist perspectives can be identified. Positivist approaches to observation seek to exercise control over data collection to reveal universal laws about a phenomenon (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). They make realist assumptions about the accounts created by researchers, which are seen as “factual representations of empirical reality” (Clough 1992, p. 21). The research designs, accordingly, lead to highly structured observations to test theoretical constructs (e.g. Martinko and Gardner 1990). Naturalists, on the other hand, believe that stimuli can be interpreted differently by individuals, depending on what cultural meanings are attached to them (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In order to understand the behaviour of individuals, these meanings need to be accessed by the researcher through involvement in the empirical context of the phenomenon.

In this thesis the observations fulfilled two important functions. First, *participant observations* were conducted at the zero waste outlets, which opened as a result of the sampled crowdfunding projects. This included looking at the spatial layout of the stores, interactions between people, as well as the arrangement and types of objects on display, amongst other things. These observations were important to understand whether the projects created novel material realities and consumption opportunities. The comparison of zero waste stores and conventional brandscapes, for instance, led to important insights regarding the affordances and aesthetic appeal of shopping contexts. The visual data collected during field visits was crucial in this respect, as it conveyed the unique character of these stores and, thereby, complemented the descriptions of the interview participants. Second, an auto-observation period was performed, in which the author tried to adopt a zero waste lifestyle for a limited period of time. *Auto-observations* allow researchers to “place themselves in the same situations as their subjects ... [to] gain a deeper existential understanding of the world as the members see and feel it” (Adler and Adler 1998, p. 97). This immersion in the setting helped the researcher to develop *greater sensitivity* to the challenges faced by people living by zero waste principles, which provided theoretical insights and helped built rapport with the respondents (see Berger 2001). Common problems linked to zero waste routines in everyday life, for example, provided a good entry point into conversations.

However, observations are also seen critically by some scholars. The possibility of researcher biases and the lack of generalisability are common arguments raised against observations, especially in respect to ethnography (Hammersley 1998). Although these downsides largely represent positivist challenges, the application of multiple methods and the focus on theoretical generalisation countered these problems. In particular, the triangulation of different data sources ensured that theoretical interpretations were sufficiently grounded. Another issue is that observations require the phenomenon under investigation to be at least partially visible to the researcher. This was, of course, only possible for ventures with a physical outlet, in which customers and their surroundings could be observed in their natural settings. Hence, the zero waste stores were used to answer the third research question in Chapter 7. All in all, observations offered the advantage of looking at people within their everyday settings to witness the results of crowdfunding campaigns in the market and helped to build richer, contextualised case studies to explore the phenomenon. The next section looks at the practical side of the research process.

5.5. The Data Collection Process: Methods in Practice

The preceding discussion explained what the various methods contributed to the investigation of crowdfunding cases. It highlighted the advantages and challenges associated with each data collection tool, without describing how these are put into practice. The ensuing sections delineate issues related to the application of the research methods, focusing especially on interviews, as these were central to this thesis.

5.5.1. Qualitative Interviews in Practice

5.5.1.1. The Interview Process, the Nature of the Questions, and Briefings

The interview process itself has a profound influence on the quality of the data collected during an investigation. Based on the recommendations given by Kvale and Flick (2010), several steps were taken to maximise the likelihood that rich data was attained from the interviews. First of all, the researcher aimed to develop good working relationships with the study participants (see Alvesson and Ashcraft 2012). In order to achieve this, the interviewer cultivated an open atmosphere, where respondents were encouraged to answer questions in their own terms. The beginning of each interview involved a certain amount of small talk to build up *rappport* during the interactions. Second, the interviews were conducted over the phone, as the respondents were geographically dispersed across Germany. Hence, they were able to talk at times that were convenient for them and not placed in any artificial environments, which might have been discomfoting. Third, the conversations were gently guided towards significant and emergent themes as they appeared in the statements of the informants. The interview process was thus set out to be as pleasant as possible for the respondents.

The questions used in the interviews equally sought to enable the participants to express their views freely. The interviews predominantly featured *open-response questions*, allowing participants to answer in their own terms (Bryman and Bell 2007). This openness supported the goal of attaining rich descriptions by not restricting the replies of the participants in advance. Towards this end, grand tour questions were employed (see Spradley 2016), which asked respondents to describe their viewpoints on crowdfunding, before moving on to the typical processes encountered during a campaign. Once relevant responses had been elicited, probing questions were used to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. This was essential for attaining

information on *emergent themes and adaptations* were made in the course of data collection to accommodate and delve into relevant theoretical categories. Additional questions were thus added to iteratively examine particular aspects and to advance the development of concepts (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Moreover, follow-up questions were used as a form of “member checking” (Lincoln and Guba 1985), where respondents were asked to judge the accuracy of the interpretations the interviewer had drawn from their statements. Great care, however, was taken to circumvent demand effects. The use of leading or suggestive expressions was avoided to prevent “forcing” the participants in certain directions (Glaser 1992). Slight adjustments needed to be made between the various stakeholders that were interviewed. The initiators needed to answer slightly different questions than the funders, due to their roles in the crowdfunding process. Similarly, the consumers were asked about their perceptions of the finished projects, as they had not supported the crowdfunding campaigns (see Table A.2. in Appendix A). Finally, the respondents were given the opportunity to raise important issues themselves by asking them if they wanted to add anything towards the end of each interview.

The *briefing and debriefing* of participants also fulfilled an important function in the research process. First, the respondents received a general briefing, which outlined the basic goals of the project. This description was not very detailed, stating that the purpose of the study was to understand why people engage in crowdfunding. The introductory statement further included information concerning data protection issues. Respondents were told that the information they provided would not be shared with third parties for commercial purposes and that they had the possibility to withdraw from the interview at any time. It was also made clear that it would not be possible to identify them after the interview, as all personal information would be removed to ensure anonymity. In case of the initiators, it would have been difficult to conceal their identities due to the public accessibility of the projects over the crowdfunding website. Further steps were taken to ensure informed consent and they agreed to be quoted under their names. Furthermore, the data was stored on a password-protected computer to guarantee data protection. Second, the debriefing played an important part in terms of *informed consent and research ethics*. The objectives were revealed after the interview was completed to eliminate any concerns about misleading the respondent. Further, participants were encouraged to ask questions, if any part of the interview had been unclear or to speak about anything they thought was relevant. Whenever possible,

informed consent was attained in written form, which proved difficult, however, as most respondents had busy lifestyles and were only able to talk over the phone. Verbal consent was sought in such cases. After all formalities were taken care off, the respondents were thanked for their support and usually a couple of minutes of small talk rounded off the conversation.

5.5.1.2. Recruitment of Informants for Interviews

This paper employed a two-stage sampling strategy to get access to relevant informants, who had been active in one of the selected crowdfunding projects. First, the project initiators were contacted. The reason for this was that their names could be identified over the crowdfunding website, as successful campaigns remained online even after their completion. Furthermore, direct access to funders over the crowdfunding website was not possible due to data protection, eliminating this alternative route to recruit respondents. After the identification of the initiators, contact was made either through a personal visit or a phone call. The founders were asked, if they were willing to participate in the project. Once access was granted and the interviews had been conducted with the initiators, a *snowball sampling* procedure took over. The initiators, who had received a list of their funders from the crowdfunding website, asked further respondents to participate in the study. They acted as *gatekeepers* (Esterberg 2004), who established contact to the funders of the projects. Several of the people that funded the campaigns had become loyal customers, which made it easier to get in touch with them. This procedure led to a total of 33 participants. The details of the informants are summarised in Table 3. Even though the funders and consumers are listed separately, the former were usually also customers at the stores they had sponsored over the crowdfunding website.

Table 3 – Cases and Interview Participants

	Name of Project	Initiators	Funders	Consumers
<i>Zero Waste Supermarkets</i>	Tante Olga	Dinah (f)	Alice (f) Ella (f) Helen (f) Janina (f) Mareike (f) Paula (f)	David (m) Eveline (f) Jens (m) Jessica (f)
	Stückgut	Sonja (f)	Elena (f) Silke (f)	-
	Veedelskrämer	Bettina (f)	Henrik (m) Valerie (f)	-
	Unverpackt Lübeck	Wiebke (f)	Lara (f)	-
	Ohne	Hannah (f)	-	-
<i>Foodsaving Store</i>	SirPlus	Raphael (m)	Anita (f) Anne (f) Carolin (f) Julia (f) Melanie (f) Peer (m)	Simone (f) Ulla (f)
<i>Fair-trade Sneakers</i>	Karma Classics	Shai (m)	Patrick (m)	-
<i>Political Vegan Café</i>	Radikalecker	Christin (f)	-	-
<i>Platform</i>	Startnext	Tom (m)	-	-

(m) = male; (f) = female

5.5.1.3. Preparing the Data for Further Analysis: Transcription of Audio Recordings

The research design, the drafting of the questions, and the practical application of the data collection procedures are not the only phases of a research project that have a significant impact on the quality of the findings. Another important component is the preparation of the data for further processing and analysis. In qualitative studies this often entails the transcription of audio records into written text, which leads to various concerns towards the *accuracy of the resulting data*. There are several critical factors that need to be considered with respect to the transcription of interviews. First, as a transcript inevitably is a translation of one narrative mode into another with different language rules (Kvale and Flick 2010), the purpose of the research is of fundamental importance. The standards used for transcription are determined by the goals of the data analysis process. Ryan and Bernard (2000) distinguish between two approaches to text analysis: 1) viewing text as a proxy for experience; and 2) viewing text as the object of analysis itself. Each of these approaches requires a different level of detail in the transcription of texts. Since the goal of this study was to analyse the content of the interviews (i.e. viewing text as a proxy of experience), verbatim transcription was sufficient. This reflected the purpose of capturing what was said during the interviews, rather than how it was said. The transcription, therefore, did not feature the pronunciation of words or the dialect used by the respondents, which are essential for research, where text is the object of analysis. For the same reason, it was deemed acceptable to improve the readability of the transcripts (Gibbs and Flick 2011). Second, transcription requires *consistency*. Given that the *transcription standard* plays a crucial role in determining the trustworthiness of the transcripts and the resulting data (McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig 2003; Poland 1995), it was carefully selected before the audio files were processed. More specifically, the transcription was based on the instructions provided by Dresing and Pehl (2013, p. 20-22), which aligned with the purpose of analysing the content of the texts. The guidelines ensured that high-quality data was attained. Third, the transcripts should represent the respondents' views as accurately as possible. For this purpose, the detailed standards were followed to minimise variation in the way the audio files were transformed into text and the entire process was controlled by one person, which avoided variation in the application of the transcription standards. In addition, all audio files and the corresponding transcripts were double-checked for errors. The final transcripts thus accurately represented the voice of the respondent and paved the way for the qualitative analysis of the texts.

5.5.2. Document Analysis in Practice

Document analysis differs from interviews and observations in several ways. First, as the documents already existed before the study commenced (e.g. project descriptions), the researcher had no influence on the content or presentation style of these data sources. Hence, *no interactive effects or demand biases* influenced their shape or form (Hodder 1998). Instead, the focus shifted on selecting the right kinds of documents for further analysis. This was largely predetermined by the choice of crowdfunding projects. The search for documents concentrated around the final set of cases, which were then explored in greater depth during data analysis. Other documents, such as flyers, linked blogs, and information materials were also considered. They were used as complementary evidence, especially regarding the discourses and meanings surrounding ethical projects. Everything that was connected to the crowdfunding cases and found within the stores was treated as potential data.

Second, the reasons for which documents were created formed an important consideration during data collection. This was already discussed in respect to the project descriptions in the methods section and will not be reiterated here (see Section 5.4.2.). It is worth noting, however, that *project descriptions* posted on the crowdfunding website covered several general categories. Each project mentioned: 1) the basic funding requirements of the project, including the minimum and desired financing thresholds as well as the funding period; 2) the rewards one could receive in return for financial support; 3) the idea behind the project and related keywords; 4) the goals of the project; 5) arguments explaining why the project should be supported; 6) what the funds would be used for after successful completion of the project; and 7) the team behind the project. Furthermore, blog and pin board postings were available. These information sources provided a rich foundation for document analysis, especially regarding the initial aims of crowdfunding projects.

Lastly, *ethical issues* relating to documents were addressed. Similar to the other methods, informed consent was of relevance in document analysis. However, as the texts were created without the involvement of the researcher, the question arose whether or not permission for their use would need to be granted? The answer depended on where the documents were published. If the text appeared on a public website to which anyone could gain access, consent was deemed to be implicit and no explicit request

was sent to participants (see Hookway 2008). This was the case for the project descriptions posted on the crowdfunding website, as these were deliberately created to draw in a large audience to maximise the probability of being funded. Nonetheless, permission was requested from the project initiators, if critical content beyond this was used to inform the study. Furthermore, the use of online content was assessed in terms of the confidentiality offered to participants and the harm that could possibly accrue to individuals (Hewson 2014). This was tackled through anonymising any personal information attached to the content and reducing the traceability of quotes by translating texts into English. As the data was gathered in Germany, the need to translate quotes was useful, as it made it difficult to identify the original source. This also circumvented copyright concerns, which were generally deemed unproblematic for the investigation. All in all, these measures accounted for ethical issues during data collection.

5.5.3. Observations and Field Notes in Practice

An essential part of observations is the creation of *field notes*. Without these a researcher would not be able to capture the myriad actions and details of an empirical setting. Generally, two forms of field notes can be distinguished. One involves the direct written observations of a researcher. Here, the fieldworker writes down his or her impressions of the setting that is being studied, taking notice of all occurrences pertaining to the phenomenon. These might include recordings of behaviours, interactions between people, emotions, smells, physical arrangements, and so on (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). It is a way of looking at and directing attention within a field, which builds on the experiences of the researcher as the primary research instrument (Wolcott 2008). In this study, observations were particularly directed towards the physical outlets that had arisen as a result of crowdfunding efforts. The goal was to gain insights into how they might represent new forms of ethical consumption and countervailing marketplace discourses. As these projects related to zero waste concepts, it was of particular interest how these ideas played out in practice. In order to experience the challenges of such a lifestyle and the solutions provided by the stores, auto-observations were used to assimilate an insider perspective through *immersion in the field* (Adler and Adler 1998). This entailed preparing and acquiring equipment for visits to the stores, as well as noting down personal experiences before, during, and after shopping errands. In particular, the preparation phase was of interest here, so a diary was kept to capture relevant observations in one central document. These were written

down as soon as possible after field visits to capture the detail and richness of these contexts.

Another form of field notes recorded theoretical reflections and analytical ideas when they arose. These “theoretical memoranda” were essential for the further investigation of the topic, as they led to the identification of promising themes, which could be pursued in subsequent empirical encounters (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The tracing of theoretical ideas was informed by the practice of memo writing in grounded theory research. Memo writing was indispensable to attain *theoretical sensitivity* towards the data. While memos are generally viewed as “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships” (Glaser 1978, p. 83), they can have different functions during the successive analysis of data. Initially memos were used to provide preliminary definitions of codes to ensure consistency in their application and to discern their key characteristics. These memos also led to the investigation of further interesting themes and the development of new codes. As the analysis moved on, memos became more discriminating and were used to compare codes and to integrate them into more abstract categories. In this respect, memos were essential to identify variation within and between categories and to delineate their properties and dimensions (Charmaz 2006). In the later stages of the project and as analysis matured, memos were particularly important for comparisons and theory development (O'Reilly, Paper, and Marx 2012). Memos were created not only for observations, but also in relation to the other data collection tools. They were kept separate from the primary field notes to avoid confusion. Both forms of field notes were essential for later data analysis.

Finally, *ethical issues* were also considered. Observations are criticised for several reasons (see Adler and Adler 1998). One is the intrusion of other people’s privacy. The current study largely circumvented this problem, as supermarkets can be considered semi-public places, which anyone may enter. Nevertheless, wherever possible, permission was sought for observations, especially when visual data was collected (i.e. when photos of the stores were taken). The researcher also did not in any way misrepresent himself to others, which might have led to ethical concerns. Moreover, the research was not on a sensitive topic or could have put other people at risk. These characteristics, and the fact that no personal information was recorded, diffused common ethical arguments advanced against observational research.

5.6. Data Analysis

5.6.1. Identification of Suitable Data Analysis Approach

An integral part of any research project is to interpret the data acquired through fieldwork. The data analysis approach effectively determines what conclusions can be drawn from the empirical investigation and, thereby, profoundly influences the quality of the findings. Given the critical function of data analysis in the research process, it is essential that the applied method meets the objectives of the study. Since the goal of this study was to understand crowdfunding from the perspective of the participants, the data analysis approach needed to mirror the interpretative orientation and inductive approach taken within the thesis. A suitable analysis technique thus had to meet two basic conditions: a) it should focus on understanding crowdfunding from the perspective of the participants; and b) it should be open to the development of new concepts by letting themes emerge from the data. Several methods were excluded based on these criteria.

Quantitative analysis methods were unfit for this study for a couple of reasons. First, the positivist orientation of these types of analysis could not appreciate the rich and diverse viewpoints of the interview participants and the complexity of the research setting. Quantitative approaches to data analysis usually seek to find evidence for predefined hypothesis, which requires *rigid structures and standardisation*, leaving less room to understand how people themselves make sense of a phenomenon (see Bernard 2012). Similar to the arguments advanced in relation to the data collection methods, the positivist assumptions underpinning quantitative data analyses were counterproductive. Second, based on these principles, quantitative analyses take a deductive approach towards theory development (Bryman and Bell 2007). This was problematic for the current research project because deduction usually requires and builds on prior theory to specify hypothesis and to explain relationships between variables. This approach is not suitable for nascent theory (Edmondson and McManus 2007), which characterised the state of theory development in respect to crowdfunding and self-organised value creation. Further, as deduction usually follows a linear process of theory development, it does not permit the identification of new themes. It, thereby, opposed the goal of letting concepts emerge from the data.

It is worth taking a closer look at data analysis approaches directed towards the evaluation of texts. Ryan and Bernard (2000) differentiate between two types of analyses directed towards free-floating text: 1) based on the analysis of words; and 2) based on the analysis of codes, which can be further split into “exploratory codes” and “confirmatory codes”. Given the state of theory development (underdeveloped) and the goals of this paper (exploration and inductive theory development), it should not come as a surprise that *exploratory codes* were the main focus of data analysis. Nonetheless, a few arguments help explain why the analysis of words or confirmatory codes were rejected. First, the analysis of words and confirmative approaches to coding seek to quantify content and, consequently, make positivist assumptions about the relationship between the prevalence of certain words (or combinations of these) and meaning (Krippendorff 2003). Similar to the quantitative analysis methods discussed above, this devalues the perspective of the participants by inferring meaning that may not adequately reflect their understanding of a phenomenon. Another problem is the degree of structure imposed by these methods. The goal of content analysis, for instance, is to “quantify content in terms of predetermined categories in a systematic and replicable manner” (Bryman and Bell 2007, p. 304). This standardisation and pre-structuring of categories was deemed undesirable for the purpose of this research. Third, as counting is usually a central element of these methods, issues linked to word frequency analysis would arise. In particular, it has been argued that counting should be avoided when the subject’s perspective and unexpected discoveries are relevant for a research endeavour (Hannah and Lautsch 2011). As both aspects were crucial for the analysis of the crowdfunding cases, approaches built on these assumptions were excluded. This included procedures with more inbuilt flexibility, but equally high levels of standardisation, such as codebook analysis (see Neuendorf 2002).

Conclusively, quantitative and confirmatory text analysis methods were deemed inappropriate for this project. Neither the positivist assumptions behind these analysis techniques, nor the high degree of predetermined structure supported the achievement of the research objectives. Instead, a data analysis method was chosen, which helped to build theory, while offering flexibility to the research process that enabled the inclusion of unexpected findings.

5.6.2. Grounded Theory: Core Principles and Their Application

Grounded theory is one of the most widely used tools for the analysis of qualitative data. It involves three successive, yet recurrent, steps. *Initial coding* is directly anchored in the data and encourages a close scrutiny of the words and ideas used by the participants themselves. While different terms have been used to describe this initial phase of coding (see Table 4 for an overview), it usually involves assigning short names to words, lines, or segments of the data to indicate their connection to a theme or concept (Charmaz 2006). The procedure is normally put into practice by asking a series of questions, which help to allocate a code to a data fragment, such as: “What is this data a study of?” or “What does the data suggest?” (Glaser 1978). At the beginning of data analysis, the transcripts were examined for the meanings attached to crowdfunding. Later on, further text segments were included to cover other relevant aspects (e.g. different forms of reflexivity).

Table 4 – Coding Terminology Used by Different Authors

Glaser (1978)	Strauss (1994)	Charmaz (2006)	Gibbs (2011)
Substantive Coding	Open Coding	Initial Coding	Descriptive Codes
- Open Coding - Focused Coding	Axial Coding	Focused Coding	Categorisation
Theoretical Coding	Theoretical Coding	Theoretical Coding	Analytic Codes

Focused coding represents the second phase. At this stage, the data set is reviewed for additional occurrences of the identified themes and the most significant codes are determined. These are then checked against the data to see if they match and explain the accounts of the research participants. The goal is to synthesise the main themes and to develop tentative conceptual categories (Thornberg and Charmaz 2014). In this paper, focused codes were created by unifying various similar themes under one category by moving to an abstract understanding of the phenomenon. If respondents, for instance, associated “free marketing support” or “material contributions” with crowdfunding, these themes could be subsumed under the category of “intangible benefits” at a more etic level. Focused codes were created by asking questions, such as: “What is the least common denominator of these codes?” or “How can these codes be usefully combined to gain a more concise understanding of the data?”. This process was inspired by the coding paradigm suggested by Strauss and Hildenbrand (1994), yet neither axial coding

nor the coding families endorsed by Glaser (1978) were stringently applied during data analysis.

The last step in the sequence is *theoretical coding*, which seeks to uncover and specify the relationships between codes and categories (Glaser 1978; Holton 2007). Theoretical coding, for example, was applied by looking for connections between the material forms crowdfunding campaigns attained and different forms of reflexivity, which are encountered when consumers are exposed to new ethical discourses. Even though coding was described here as a three-step process for the sake of simplicity, in practice it had a cyclical character, where new codes and themes were added to the analysis if existing conceptualisations were unable to account for the full range of experiences described by the respondents.

Another important element of this process was the intensive use of *comparisons* to make sense of the data. These comparisons can take multiple forms, but usually pervade all levels of analysis, contrasting “data and data, codes of data and other codes, codes and category, and category and concepts” (Charmaz 2006, pp. 72–73). Besides checking the consistency of codes and integrating them into categories, comparisons had a very important analytic purpose. First, they were used to examine if the same codes applied across different crowdfunding cases. In other words, cross-case comparisons were conducted to gain a better understanding of the identified themes (Ayres, Kavanaugh, and Knafl 2003). This can be seen, for example, in the comparison of the different material constellations of zero waste shops (see Appendix E). Second, inter-person comparisons were made across interview transcripts. This was done to check the relevance of theoretical ideas by examining if themes were only mentioned by specific persons or multiple respondents within the dataset. This also featured comparisons between different stakeholder roles, such as the congruence between initiator and funder views. Codes that appeared across the crowdfunding cases and within many transcripts represented important theoretical categories.

Computer assisted qualitative *data analysis software* (CAQDAS) facilitated these comparisons. MAXQDA 11 was used for this project and provided several benefits to the research process (see also Kuckartz and Rädiker 2010). During the initial phase of analysis, the software was used to develop codes and memos. Central tasks included contrasting different coded text segments with each other to merge similar codes and,

using the lexical search function, to find additional occurrences of themes. After the greater part of the data had been analysed, code matrices, which depict the frequency of codes by respondent, were used to assess if codes applied to only a small number or the majority of the respondents. Summaries complemented these comparisons, distinguishing between some of the finer-grained variations in the transcripts. This process was iterative in nature and led to a more complete treatment of the data and the identification of differences and similarities between crowdfunding cases. During the last phase of data analysis, where the focus was on establishing relationships between codes, the code relation browser was helpful. It allowed searching for the co-occurrences of codes and showed potential relationships between codes. It is important to mention here that the co-occurrence of codes does not automatically establish a significant relationship between categories (Gibbs and Flick 2011). Each segment was, therefore, interpreted separately to ensure the assumed connection between two codes did in fact materialise. In brief, using CAQDAS supported the development of codes, helped to establish their relevance, and was useful for lifting codes with explanatory power to a conceptual level. All these steps facilitated the understanding of the phenomenon.

5.7. Quality Criteria

The chapter described the use of different methods with respect to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. While this detailed discussion has come some way towards demonstrating methodological rigor by making the research process transparent (Bansal and Corley 2011), further steps were taken to establish the trustworthiness of the study. Seven criteria were compiled to judge the quality of the findings and the measures taken to address them. These criteria included four general measures for interpretive research taken from Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, as well as three complementary measures from Charmaz (2006), which included originality, resonance, and usefulness. These measures are generally relevant for judging qualitative research and can be linked back to the interpretive philosophy adopted in this paper. Inspired by Flint, Woodruff, and Gardial (2002), each of these criteria and the steps taken to address them, are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5 – Trustworthiness of the Study and Findings

Trustworthiness Criteria	Approach Taken to Address Criteria
<p>Credibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree to which findings provide accurate accounts and represent the perspectives of the study participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use of interviews to get a deep understanding of the topic from various perspectives (initiator, funder, consumer) ▪ Use of open-ended and grand-tour questions to ensure respondents could answer questions in their own terms ▪ Careful selection of a transcription standard to obtain accurate accounts of the respondents' views ▪ Extensive use of quotes to reflect the respondents' views ▪ Translation did not alter the meaning of respondents' statements (original language was German) ▪ Constant comparison of data, codes and categories to ensure their completeness and accurateness ▪ Member checking during the interviews through follow-up questions to ensure correct interpretations ▪ Data triangulation through the use of multiple methods ▪ Result: Codes and concepts reflected the perspectives of the respondents
<p>Transferability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree to which findings can be applied in other contexts or settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inclusion of several cases to check applicability across various contexts ▪ Inclusion of different stakeholder groups to gain a rich understanding across various participants' roles ▪ A sufficient level of abstraction was attained, which enabled findings to travel beyond the context of this study ▪ Result: Abstract analytical themes spanned several cases and stakeholder groups
<p>Dependability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree to which the study could be repeated and similar results would be obtained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Detailed description of all aspects of the research process ▪ Detailed explanation of the structure and content of the interviews as well as the sampling procedure ▪ Result: An exact description of the methodology promoted the repeatability of the study
<p>Confirmability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree to which interpretations and findings can be confirmed by others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thick descriptions of the findings through the extensive use of contextualised quotes ▪ Transparency in reporting the used methodology and the findings ▪ Result: Enough information was provided to allow readers to scrutinise the conclusions drawn in this paper
<p>Originality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree to which findings provide novel insights or lead to the refinement of theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The literature review provided a new perspective on various related, yet often compartmentalised, research streams ▪ The application of grounded theory and the exploratory nature of the study led to several contributions ▪ Result: The study provided insights into a new research area and usefully synthesised extant theory

<p>Resonance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree to which findings represent the entire data set 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial coding went through the text line by line, taking into consideration all relevant pieces of information ▪ Theoretical sampling exposed unexplored text segments and reassessed coded segments to account for all relevant issues ▪ Constant comparisons were further used to account for the full range of experiences and to identify potential gaps ▪ Result: The findings made use of the entirety of the data and only excluded obviously irrelevant statements
<p>Usefulness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree to which findings are useful to actors and contribute to and encourage further research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The conclusion outlined the implications of the current research for multiple audiences ▪ Several fruitful research directions were pointed out to spark an academic debate in the field ▪ Result: The potential applications of the findings and future research possibilities showed the value of this thesis

Further source used for this compilation: Wagner, Lukassen, and Mahlendorf (2010).

Chapter 6 – The Findings: Self-Organised Value Creation, Participatory Market Infrastructures, and Collective Market Entrepreneurship

6.0. Introduction: Creating, Not Waiting for Marketplace Change

The review of the extant literature demonstrated that marketplace choices are often construed as the main way of tackling societal problems and achieving change within consumer societies. It was then outlined in what ways this viewpoint might be misconceived by providing several critiques of this consumer sovereignty model of empowerment (see Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006). Most importantly, in order to act on their beliefs consumers need the right options to effectively signal what they want. This is not necessarily the case, as certain meanings might be accepted and generally applicable in various cultural domains (i.e. they exist in certain discursive fields), while there might not be any real life pendants on the market that allow consumers to walk their talk (i.e. products that offer solutions to particular societal problems). Ethical consumption research simply ignores this possibility by focusing on what influences the uptake of *any* ethical option. In this sense, consumers may be waiting in vain for their shopping behaviour to create the social change that they desire. The thesis set out to explore the ways in which self-organised value creation, here in the form of crowdfunding, can help solve these problems and how empowerment might be conceived under these circumstances.

The answers to the research questions are presented in two findings chapters. Chapter 6 first looks at the factors that influence the ability of people to engage in self-organised value creation (i.e. Research Question 2). Here, it emerged from the data that crowdfunding can be seen as a participatory market infrastructure, which opens up value creation activities for users and allows them to address particular problems or societal issues. Participatory market infrastructures are characterised by democratisation, which is linked to: i) openness, where as many people as possible can access and contribute to value creation activities; ii) transparency, where information availability and procedural clarity provide legitimacy and a sense of agentic involvement; and iii) collective decision making, where a large number of people determine what offerings make it to market. Participatory market infrastructures depend on and enable the mobilisation of resources from different stakeholders. These take on

multiple forms, including financial, material, knowledge, marketing, and other intangible resources. This, in turn, leads to greater independence, as innovation activities are freed from the constraints placed on them by traditional institutions.⁸ Due to this democratisation, resource mobilisation, and independence, participatory market infrastructures allow value creation to go down different routes. The second section on market shaping looks at the opportunities that arise from self-organised value creation in the context of crowdfunding. It is argued that participatory market infrastructures enable people to directly influence what solutions make it to market, which are often linked to raising awareness of societal issues or sustainability problems. Here, the concept of collective market entrepreneuring is introduced to describe how networks of users seek to generate social change through the creation of new marketplace options. It is then outline how this leads to discourse diversity, as many different, even niche, issues are approached by crowdfunding projects. In particular, problems that cannot be addressed through mainstream market infrastructures may be tackled. Finally, Chapter 6 closes with a discussion of the side effects of the radical openness of participatory market infrastructures. Here, the observability of past crowdfunding projects is found to confer the necessary knowledge and capabilities to people that allow them to bring their ideas to life and inspire a larger part of the population to engage in value creation activities. The chapter closes with a summary and answers Research Question 1, where co-creative empowerment is delineated as the ability to influence value creation processes throughout entire market development cycles.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to the third research question. It explores how self-organised value creation, in the form of crowdfunding projects, leads to the materialisation of novel ethical discourses, which impact on the behaviour of a variety of actors through their market presence. Multiple zero waste stores are used as case studies to argue that new consumption infrastructures emerge out of crowdfunding campaigns. The elements of these infrastructures are subsequently outlined, including different material constellations, namely the built environments, user interfaces, and objects found within the outlets, organisational processes, and social interactions. It is argued that zero waste infrastructures do not only provide new action possibilities, but also promote sustainable thinking in various ways, compared to the brandscapes encountered at

⁸ Banks and venture capitalists, for instance, are mainly driven by capital accumulation and, therefore, prefer investments with relatively secure profits, quick revenue potential, and overall high returns. Projects that tackle sustainability issues often do not meet these criteria, as their main focus lies on creating an impact beyond making money.

conventional supermarkets. They offer coherent ethical experiences and mobilise various forms of reflexivity (cognitive, aesthetic, and hermeneutic) to engrain the zero waste concept in the minds of their users. This prompts consumers to develop a critical awareness of their own consumption habits and encourages them to apply zero waste principles in all sorts of life domains. As a result, people change their practices and adopt more sustainable routines. Last but not least, this may promote market evolution as other actors notice these developments. They may reflect on their own business practices (institutional reflexivity) and whether or not changes are warranted to take advantage of trends or counter competitive threats. In this process, the discourse spreads to various stakeholders, such as suppliers, which try to accommodate unpackaged deliveries, and competitors, which adapt their offerings. In other words, practice innovation takes place amongst many entities and can lead to the institutionalisation of particular standards. Each of the elements outlined above is discussed in dedicated sections that usually follow the sequence of presenting the data and preliminary analysis first, before elaborating on the theoretical significance of the findings. Chapter 7 closes with a summary and answers the third research question, which addresses the impact that crowdfunding projects have on consumer behaviour and other stakeholders.

All in all, the two findings chapters follow the empirical progression of the investigation. First, the conditions under which self-organised value creation flourishes are outlined. Crowdfunding is used as an example of this phenomenon to argue that participatory market infrastructures enable the collective mobilisation of resources to solve problems that are not addressed by other institutions (Section 6.1.). The thesis then delineates the consequences this has for value creation activities. The efforts to realise ideas through crowdfunding campaigns are viewed, in more abstract terms, as collective market entrepreneuring and linked to a variety of ethical consumption opportunities (Section 6.2.). Finally, the outcomes of self-organised value creation are explored in relation to zero waste stores. The impact of these outlets within the market are described in terms of different elements of consumption infrastructures to demonstrate how their physical forms (Section 7.2.), organisational processes (Section 7.3.), and socialities (Section 7.4.) generate new consumption possibilities and ways of thinking. In short, Chapter 6 is dedicated to answering the first two research questions, but also provides evidence on the opportunities that arise from self-organised value creation, whereas Chapter 7 looks at the third research question, as depicted in Table 5.

Table 5 – Overview of Findings Chapters

Market Infrastructures	Democratisation (Section 6.1.1.)	Resource Mobilisation (Section 6.1.2.)	Independence (Section 6.1.3.)	RQ 1 RQ 2 RQ 3
Market Shaping	Value Focus (Section 6.2.1.)	Discourse Diversity (Section 6.2.2.)	Inspiration (Section 6.2.3.)	
Market Materialisation	Material Assemblages (Section 7.2.)	Organisational Processes (Section 7.3.)	Sociality (Section 7.4.)	RQ 3
Market Presence	Lifestyle Affordances (Sections 7.2.2.3., 7.2.3., 7.4.2.1.)	User Reflexivity (Sections 7.2.1.2., 7.2.2.2., 7.2.3.2., 7.3.3., 7.4.2.2)	Changing Behaviour (Sections 7.2.1.2., 7.2.2.2., 7.2.3.2., 7.4.1.2, 7.4.2.2.)	
Market Evolution	Practice Innovation (Section 7.3.4.)	Institutional Reflexivity (Section 7.3.4.)	Discourse Dispersion (Section 7.3.4.)	

RQ = Research question.

6.1. Factors that Enable Self-Organised Value Creation: Democratisation, Mobilisation of Resources, and Independence from Institutional Constraints

6.1.1. Democratisation of Value Creation Activities Through Participatory Market Infrastructures: Openness, Transparency, and Collective Decision Making

Openness. Crowdfunding embodies a departure from traditional ways of attaining financial resources for value creation activities. It draws in small amounts of money from a large number of people (Mollick and Kuppuswamy 2016), which sets it apart from bank credits or venture capital funding, where resources and risks are concentrated in the hands of a few. This allows many people to participate in the funding of projects, as everyone can potentially contribute small amounts of money. Every project offers different reward levels, allowing people to pick those that best suit their budget. In the case of the zero waste stores, for instance, the lowest contribution was 5€ and could span all the way up to 1000€. The goodies offered in return for support included small items, like organic carrier bags, zero waste sets, or vouchers for the stores. These were priced incrementally, so that various options existed for funders.⁹ This openness was seen as a key advantage of crowdfunding:

“Well, this gets closest to my understanding of democracy ... Democracy for me stands for more *self-determination* ... I think *everyone can take part* in crowdfunding ... [and] say, “Hey, I’ll give a few Euros for that!” ... This is how I imagine it to be, if *everyone participates*, it has a *positive impact on all*.” (Carolin, funder, SirPlus: 14)

“I was surprised what impact so many people can have. Even *if everyone* just *gives* one Euro, it can make a *big difference* ... It pays off incredibly, if you have the courage to work towards something and *find enough like-minded people*.” (Wiebke, initiator, Unverpackt Lübeck: 90)

It is interesting to see how the funders and initiators concur that it works out best for everyone if a lot of people can participate in the financing process. The two quotes highlight the benefits of this. Carolin’s description shows that the low threshold levels for making a contribution allow almost everyone to take part, which is something that is not usually possible through traditional financial institutions. Here, shares or loans are given out at levels that many people cannot afford, effectively excluding a large part of the population from financing new ideas. Crowdfunding is, consequently, an inclusive market mechanism.¹⁰ The analogy to democracy captures this pretty well, as crowdfunding gives masses of people (i.e. crowds) more self-determination over value creation activities. Wiebke’s quote underscores the collective nature of this endeavour, as she shows that the ability to reach many like-minded people enables initiators to

⁹ See Appendix B for an overview of the rewards offered by the zero waste stores in this thesis.

¹⁰ See Quote 1 in Appendix D for another statement stressing the openness of crowdfunding to everyone.

realise their ideas. Even if only small contributions are made by each supporter, cumulatively these can have a big impact. Instead of having to convince people in charge of institutional funds or with deep pockets, the jury consists of a network of hundreds or, in some cases, even thousands of individuals, who have different views of what is worth pursuing. This ensures that a broad range of interests are considered, which might not directly be linked to vast profit potential. As a result, it enables users to wield greater influence on future offerings and, by extension, the sustainability of consumer society.

Transparency. The ability to attract funders is not an easy undertaking and requires initiators to clearly delineate their visions and plans. This transparency is achieved through two means. First, each crowdfunding campaign needs to provide basic project descriptions. On Startnext (2018a) five major questions have to be answered by initiators. These are:

1. What is this project all about?
2. What is the project goal and who is the project for?
3. Why would you support this project?
4. How will we use the money if the project is successfully funded?
5. Who are the people behind the project?

Each of these questions serves a different function. The first three questions outline the underlying goals and value of the project for prospective supporters. Simply put, they provide clarity of purpose for everyone looking to finance a particular idea. In other words, clear declarations of intent are made and rhetoric elements are applied to attract funders and to extend the collective imaginaries of people of what is deemed possible (see Dey and Mason 2018; Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen 2009). The fourth question describes how the funds will be used. Two funding goals are generally stated for each campaign, one stating the minimum threshold level that needs to be reached for the project to be able to launch, while the second goal enables the initiators to realise more ambitious plans. This offers clarity over the use of funds. Finally, the people that stand behind the project are introduced, so there is also clarity of responsibility, as the main actors are identified. Taken together, these questions offer *transparency of information*, as ‘the what’, ‘the how’, and ‘the who’ of crowdfunding campaigns are identified, allowing potential funders to judge the merit of projects. The funders valued these detailed descriptions:

“Elena: I think *transparency* is generally important, not matter if you’re looking at projects in business, politics or wherever. In the end, people want to *see what happens* and have an overview of things ... As a supporter I can see which people are behind [a project]. It’s not just the name of an organisation or somebody with a donation box. You see *the people who actually implement it*. I can *trace* how a project is progressing, depending on how well they *document everything* [...]

Interviewer: How does this transparency emerge? Could you give an example?

Elena: On the one hand, they don’t just say ... ‘I have an idea and want to implement it’ ... The *goals and milestones* are outlined, so I can see *how thoroughly* someone has identified what he wants. ... On the other hand, it is important for me to see what the money is used for ... This practically makes it transparent for me, if it is *clearly identifiable* where the money flows and what is done with it.” (Elena, funder, Stückgut: 66 + 73-74)

The given account highlights the importance of building up a certain level of credibility through detailed project descriptions. Elena’s elaboration of the transparency is a good example of how the clear documentation of milestones, the dedication of funds towards particular ends, and the identification of the initiators are all critical in attaining the trust of supporters. These descriptions act as an indicator of “how thoroughly” someone has worked towards implementing their ideas and help funders to feel more at ease with their decisions to give money. The ability to see the people responsible for the execution of the project is equally important, as funders are mostly dealing with strangers over the platform. The pitch video is another crucial component of every crowdfunding campaign in this respect, as it establishes a certain level of rapport between the two parties.¹¹ Indeed, other research has shown that the content of crowdfunding campaigns is essential for building “entrepreneurial legitimacy” (Frydrych et al. 2014). Elena’s quote also points towards a second element of transparency. The ability to trace the progress of projects over the crowdfunding platform was crucial for many participants:

“I can’t really look behind the scenes of big corporations. Even if they are willing to divulge information, it somehow feels staged. With small crowdfunding campaigns, I still get the feeling that *something is emerging*. If they *take you behind the scenes*, you can *really participate* ... ‘What are the challenges?’, ‘Where do they stand?’ ... ‘What actually happens in the end?’. This *sense of being involved* and being taken along is a *beautiful feeling*, which you rarely get as a consumer.” (Julia, funder, SirPlus: 40)

The *transparency of processes* is another key aspect of crowdfunding. If the initiators create an enticing video and online presentation, but do not follow through on their claims and keep the funders uninformed, it would hurt their reputation and that of the platform. However, giving them the opportunity to look “behind the scenes” of a project through frequent blog posts and updates, as Julia describes, leads to a different form of participation. This is something that is not usually encountered in the market (i.e. something “you rarely get as a consumer”), as people are presented with ready-made

¹¹ See Quote 2 in Appendix D for a statement on the importance that funders attach to the video to get an impression of the initiators.

options that only need to be bought. In contrast to large, established organisations, crowdfunding enables people to accompany the journey from inception to final launch, which creates positive feelings on part of the funders.¹² Indeed, regular updates have been linked to increased hit rates and legitimacy in previous research (Gegenhuber and Naderer 2018; Lagazio and Querci 2018). Crowdfunding campaigns, thereby, create “credible alternatives”¹³ by frequently communicating the progress of projects and cultivating a sense of agentic involvement that does not arise in conventional product development cycles.

Collective Decision Making. Aside from being an open and transparent mode of financing, crowdfunding, by definition, is a collective endeavour. No single person can push through a project alone, as success is premised on the ability to attract a lot of people to support a specific idea. The following quotes illustrate this:

“It’s the possibility to take part in a project ... as an individual, but also in the form of a collective. It’s a *collective of citizens* that *allows ideas or concepts to be realised*, through the contribution of financial means. [...] Yes, many individuals who become a collective because they are all drawn to a certain idea.” (David, consumer, Tante Olga: 119-121)

“I associate it with the *participation of the crowd*, which can *actively codetermine* if a product is needed in the world ... That is, to a certain degree, democratisation, this right of the crowd to codetermine [outcomes]. [It also implies] the *emancipation from the individual*, which, with numbers, turns into a crowd that has a lot of power. A good example for this are ... political consequences, which I think can be discussed in relation to the Arab Spring and its implications. It was also a *grassroots movement*, which moved from the *bottom to the top*, originated from a few individuals, and pulled very many people along. You could describe crowdfunding in similar terms.” (Shai, initiator, Karma Classics: 11)

These statements highlight that the formation of collectives is essential for crowdfunding. David, for instance, argues that it is the “collective of citizens” that enables ideas to come to life. These crowds are united in their outlook and ambitions and, through the accumulation of funds during a campaign, permit initiators to implement their projects. Shai describes this aspect as codetermination and links it back to bottom-up or grassroots processes, which represent a democratic mode of deciding what innovations are ultimately introduced on the market. He sees enormous power in the ability of crowds to mobilise in this way, which he likens to the Arab Spring uprisings that had far-reaching political consequences, leading to the upheaval against existing governments in several countries. Interestingly, he also sees a move away from individual agency to collective action, diverging from usual ways of enacting change in the market. Through bundling their powers, then, crowds can work towards their goals

¹² Quote 3 in Appendix D offers another example that captures the emotional aspects of observing the progress of projects, which is compared to seeing a child grow up.

¹³ Julia, funder, SirPlus: 55-57.

much more effectively than if everyone reverted to change at a personal level. In fact, several respondents mentioned that this “we-feeling”¹⁴ or “community feeling”¹⁵ made up a significant part of the appeal of crowdfunding (see also Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn 2011). The joint enactment of goals allows people to get involved earlier on in value creation activities and to have a greater bearing on market developments. They no longer just adopt (i.e. vote for) certain offerings or innovations, but rather take part in upstream processes that are usually restricted to providers, which in modern capitalism, more often than not, are large corporations. Crowdfunding can thus be considered an “inverse infrastructure” through which bottom-up, user-driven, widely accessible, self-organised networks impact on the economy (Egyedi and Mehos 2012). The active mobilisation of crowds, in short, grants people access to value creation mechanisms and enables them to collectively shape the future of particular market segments.

In summary, market infrastructures can be considered participatory, the more democratic – that is open, transparent, and collectively organised – they become. Crowdfunding democratises the financing of innovations in several ways. First, it opens up opportunities for everyone to participate, as funding levels vary with the rewards that are offered during a campaign. Attracting seed capital is difficult for many small ventures and projects and can restrain economic activity (Beck and Demircuc-Kunt 2006). Allowing the wider public to sponsor ideas through crowdfunding offsets some of these limitations (Bruton et al. 2015), as like-minded people can gather around projects and make them a reality. Crowdfunding can be accessed by individuals, who come from a variety of backgrounds, hold different beliefs, and may be geographically dispersed. This contrasts with and can counter the downsides of traditional financing mechanisms, such as the regional clustering of venture capital or the male dominance in the entrepreneurial sector (Brush et al. 2017; Mollick and Robb 2016). As a result, a broad range of stakeholders may benefit from these developments. Second, the transparency provided through crowdfunding nourishes the legitimacy of initiators and projects. The presentation of various forms of information on the crowdfunding page provides clarity of purpose, clarity over the use of financial resources, and clarity of responsibility. In addition, the transparency of processes, which is achieved through regular updates and blog posts, promotes the trust placed in projects and generates a sense of agentic involvement in value creation activities (see also Gegenhuber and

¹⁴ Julia, funder, SirPlus: 32.

¹⁵ Melanie, funder, SirPlus: 65.

Naderer 2018). Finally, collective decision making enables people to jointly work towards solutions. It is not a single market actor that pushes through its will, but rather collectives (i.e. crowds) that decide what is in the best interest of particular groups and, in the end, for society. These factors are all important for self-organised value creation activities, so that participatory market infrastructures provide the necessary means for people to realise their ideas.

6.1.2. The Mobilisation of Resources and Participatory Market Infrastructures

6.1.2.0. Introduction: The Many Forms of Support Attained Through Crowdfunding

The previous section looked at the characteristics of crowdfunding and why it represents a participatory market infrastructure. The successful launch of projects, however, is not only premised on the ability to attract financial resources through democratic processes. Many forms of support above and beyond monetary contributions can be attained through crowdfunding. These are presented in three subsections. First, initiators benefit from the knowledge and information provided by funders. Various feedback mechanisms promote collaboration between the two groups, which help the initiators to align their offerings with market demands and to reduce the uncertainty of their innovation activities. Second, the enthusiasm of funders often translates into voluntary work and non-financial contributions. This gives projects additional leverage compared to a market entry through closed innovation systems, where only a few people evaluate and help to launch an idea. Third, the indirect benefits of crowdfunding are discussed. The public accessibility of a project, including information on the number of supporters and the amount of funding raised, can signal credibility that facilitates interactions with other stakeholders. Crowdfunding, in short, should be viewed as more than a financing tool, as it allows initiators to draw on different collective resources.

6.1.2.1. Market Knowledge and Alignment: Uncertainty Reduction Through Collaboration

Crowdfunding is inherently a collaborative process that allows initiators to profit from the knowledge contained within funder networks. Campaign pages usually offer various interaction possibilities, like comment functions, blog posts and messaging systems. In addition, social media channels can complement these platform-based tools. These mechanisms enable project starters to communicate with all their followers

simultaneously as well as individually. The amount of funding and feedback attained through backers assist initiators in developing a higher sensitivity for the market before implementing their ideas:

“Crowdfunding means that you try to bring an idea to life, to get people excited about it ... You extend the number of interested parties in the project, idea, or concept through the crowd ... At the bottom of the line, it is a *‘proof of concept’*, before you take cash into your hands, to *see if it is really as cool as you think.*” (Raphael, initiator, SirPlus: 4-6)

“Well, most of it happened over the comment-function on Facebook. *Many questions* were product-related, such as ‘What dimensions does it have?’ Then you had *various hints*: ‘Hey, why don’t you launch a Baby Karma Classics range?’ In other words, *product suggestions* were made. The Karma Bag, for example, got considerable headwind because we wanted to make the badge out of leather. People, who strongly believe in veganism, naturally opted out in the beginning.” (Shai, initiator, Karma Classics: 85-87)

It is very difficult to predict the commercial success of innovations. While large research and development departments may simply tick off unsuccessful projects and go back to the drawing board, this is difficult for user innovators, who cannot fall back on the safety nets that corporations provide. As such, establishing demand before bringing their idea to market can offset this uncertainty to a certain extent. The “proof of concept” described above is not limited to the number of supporters and the funding sum that is achieved. Rather, qualitative insights can be attained through interacting with the funders, so that the initiators recognise wrong preconceptions and work towards improving their offerings. This becomes evident in Shai’s description, whose team created a series of products based on what they learned from their crowd. One of their products, the Karma Bag, was the result of wishes communicated to them during a previous campaign. Furthermore, the feedback of the crowd convinced them that a vegan alternative to the original leather badge should be made available to accommodate the concerns of various vegan funders. Crowdfunding counteracts some of the uncertainty linked to going to market, as initiators can test their ideas and react to the criticism of funders.¹⁶ Closed innovation does not foster this type of engagement with end users, as development processes remain hidden from the public. Indeed, recent studies have underscored the informational function of crowdfunding and the immense value that arises from the feedback of target audiences (Hervé and Schvienbacher 2018; Viotto da Cruz 2018). It is also evident in user innovation research that focuses on sticky information and the role of tacit knowledge in development of new offerings (Mascitelli 2003; von Hippel 2005a). Crowdfunding, in short, improves market alignment, which lowers the risk of market entry and enhances the likelihood of success.

¹⁶ See Quote 4 in Appendix D on how feedback allows initiators to modify their offerings prior to launch.

6.1.2.2. Direct Support: Voluntary Work and Contributions

Crowdfunding offers more than just the general advantages that were outlined above. It generates various forms of support that users provide to project initiators to help them get their ideas off the ground. First, let us turn to the ways in which users extend the reach of self-organised innovations:

“It was really nice to get this kind of *emotional support* and to have people that say, ‘Hey, we think it’s a great idea, can we help you in some way? Can we support your crowdfunding campaign by *doing marketing for you*, handing out flyers, or going to events with you? Can we help with any manual work?’ Of course, there were many people who *voluntarily supported us*.” (Dinah, initiator, Tante Olga: 73)

“I helped ... wherever I could. I posted, I sent e-mails, I *shared every story* that I could find and used my *personal reach to bring the project forward* and make it known. At least all of my friends heard about it.” (Alice, funder, Tante Olga: 59)

This type of user marketing was evident in all interviews. The quotes illustrate that projects can engage supporters in such a way that they will go out of their way to make it a success. Dinah describes how help was offered to her during the launch of Tante Olga. Alice, who was one of the funders of Tante Olga, really wanted to see the project come alive and spread the word on every occasion. More specifically, users generate additional awareness for a project by mobilising their personal social networks, which can lead to a larger and larger crowd. This is especially valuable because funders usually auto-target people who have similar interests and might be susceptible to an idea, making it more likely that a loyal supporter base is acquired and the project reaches its funding goal. Crowdfunding, quite simply, is a great way to generate word-of-mouth marketing (Stanko and Henard 2016). In this way, funders become what Shai calls “multipliers”, who extend the reach of campaigns.¹⁷ In addition, people tend to contribute more than just money, when they are passionate about a project:

“It simply had an extremely *positive outward appeal*. ... We had *many people who offered their help*. It starts with ... a business consultant, who went through the whole thing with me for free, simply because he was thrilled by the project. Then there was a light designer, who supported us in planning the light effects ... There were many instances, where people said to us, ‘I think that’s great and as far as it’s in my abilities, I will help out!’ [...] You would probably not receive this kind of *support* if you opened up a fish shop. It was this project.” (Sonja, initiator, Stückgut: 136)

“You get a lot of *networking* going on through crowdfunding, you get *a lot of support and contacts* to potential suppliers can be established ... For example, we had funders who sent mails [to make us aware of particular producers] ... We received mails from many different boroughs with the contact details of estate agents and descriptions of commercial properties ... You had *various instants of support*, which went *above and beyond financial support*.” (Hannah, initiator, Ohne: 10-12)

¹⁷ See Quote 5 in Appendix D for the full statement.

Initiators benefit from many types of support. Sonja received advice on how to build a convincing business model from a consultant and the lighting concept of the store was supplied for free. Likewise, funders scouted the property market for an appropriate shop for Hannah's project and connected her to potential business partners. These forms of support can be more valuable than individual financial contributions, as they help initiators to set up their operations and establish links to other market actors that do not normally arise through usual entrepreneurial activity. The sense of agentic involvement and goodwill created through a project unlocks a multitude of intangible benefits and allows initiators to draw from the knowledge distributed in a crowd (e.g. sharing of business contacts and market insights through feedback). Sonja's comment towards the end of her statement, however, also indicates that it is likely that voluntary work is only provided to certain projects. A boundary condition for these forms of voluntary support can thus be seen in the project's goal to foster the common good. It is unlikely that solely profit-driven endeavours would generate as much positive sentiment to sway people to help in any way possible. Crowdfunding, accordingly, is a great tool for sustainable ideas to tap into crowd resources to maximise their impact.

6.1.2.3. Indirect Support: Peer Credibility and Stakeholder Relationships

The findings presented so far stressed various forms of support that initiators receive during the crowdfunding process. While these help to bring ideas to market, there are indirect benefits that accrue from the public accessibility of projects. Stakeholders take notice of the amount of supporters a project has and the types of interactions that occur over the crowdfunding website. This can improve the position of initiators when they deal with their stakeholders:

“Well, in first instance it didn't help us to scale. It helped us to *gain credibility and reputation* because there were so many supporters. [...] It helped us in the sense that we were *backed by our crowd*. You know? We didn't have anything, but we were able to say: ‘Wow, look at this! It's going through the roof!’[...] It means something if you have a crowd of 1700 people ... [or] a video that has been viewed 100,000 times ... It makes a *good impression on our partners*.” (Raphael, initiator, SirPlus: 47-53)

“Through the crowdfunding campaign, we were also able to get a *better standing in the negotiations* with our future landlord, as well as during our talks with the bank. Indeed, you *could practically prove*, you had *facts in your hands* that allowed you to say: ‘Hey, this is a great project! This is a good idea because there are already many, many people who are interested in it, want it, and support it.’” (Sonja, initiator, Stückgut: 10)

Resource constraints can make it difficult for self-organised innovations to enter the marketplace. Crowdfunding offsets some of the financial restraints of starting a project and helps to build up credibility before an offering is launched. Raphael describes how

the number of supporters and video viewings offered convincing arguments when they dealt with their partners. This peer credibility enabled them to get logistic companies and food wholesalers on board and moved them one step closer to fulfilling their dream of creating a secondary food market. If they would have approached these market players through a conventional entrepreneurial route, without any evidence of a large following, nor the media coverage that usually comes with this attention, it is likely they would have encountered more problems in gaining the support of these organisations. A similar observation was made by Sonja in respect to the negotiations with their landlord. Stückgut opened its doors in Hamburg, which has a very competitive property market, making it hard for a zero waste store, which still represents a relatively risky business model, to gain favour from landlords. Compared to renting the retail space to a major supermarket chain, for instance, a start-up cannot provide the same level of security, which, to a certain degree, can be compensated through the endorsement provided by the crowd. A successful campaign can also facilitate the acquisition of further funds from professional investors (Roma, Messeni Petruzzelli, and Perrone 2017). This is unique to crowdfunding, as a project is not only publicly accessible, but also backed up by the monetary contributions of funders, which signals a certain commitment to the project. Likes, comments or the number of followers found on social media platforms, in contrast, may only show a relatively loose association due to the lack of investment in an idea. In other words, successful campaigns deliver “social proof” for an innovation that is priceless for resource-constrained initiators.¹⁸ That is to say, the number of backers, the amount of financing received, and the qualitative feedback accessible over the crowdfunding platform produce evidence of market demand that can be leveraged in stakeholder relationships. Hence, radically open innovation processes offer multiple advantages for initiators that do not arise in closed entrepreneurial systems. Crowdfunding establishes an evidence-based market test that can favourably impact on negotiations, yield free publicity, and secure better conditions or free services. Table 6 shows the breadth of support that can be received through crowdfunding both directly, through the funders, and indirectly, through the credibility attained through a successful campaign. Conclusively, participatory market infrastructures, here represented in the form of crowdfunding, are linked to a long list of benefits that show the significance of collective resources in bringing diverse innovations to life.

¹⁸ See Quote 6 in Appendix D for the full statement on “social proof”.

Table 6 – The Various Forms of Support Received by Crowdfunding Projects

	Short Description	Example	Source
Voluntary Work	<i>Marketing</i>	Online or offline sharing of the project, commenting of posts, pictures, stories or other communications. Distribution of promotion material or participation at information events.	All participants Alice Paula
	<i>Organisation</i>	Building up the shop environment, sorting or registering stock, and cleaning.	Dinah Alice Janina Mareike
	<i>Consulting</i>	Free consulting services or expert advice provided.	Sonja Wiebke Mareike
Networking	<i>Business Partners</i>	Sending of contact details, setting up connections and/or giving hints about suppliers.	Dinah Sonja Valerie Hannah Wiebke Lara Christin Tom
	<i>Media Contacts</i>	Connecting initiators with press contacts, specialised magazines or blogs.	Elena Julia Shai Tom
Material Contributions	<i>Equipment</i>	Free supply of various forms of equipment or furniture, such as coffee machines, jars, or shelves.	Alice Wiebke
	<i>Rewards</i>	Free provision of rewards for the campaign, such as products or self-made things.	Christin
Immaterial Contributions	<i>Service Provision</i>	Lower rent or offering services at a discounted rate or for free.	Dinah Raphael Julia Christin

6.1.3. Independence from Institutions and Participatory Market Infrastructures

The previous sections highlighted the democratic nature of crowdfunding and the importance of crowd resources for establishing innovations on the market. These characteristics of participatory market infrastructures have the effect that initiators gain more flexibility in implementing their ideas, absolving them of some of the constraints that traditional financial institutions place on entrepreneurs. As such, initiators value the independence they gain through crowdfunding:

“Crowdfunding for me represents *independence* ... The *freedom to try out ideas* and not be afraid. [...] If I compare it to how I would *otherwise attain money* ... I would have to take on *great risks*, as I would have to go to a bank, write a business plan, and present a forecast, which would be based on totally speculative numbers that I cannot really predict. Then two to three people at the bank, which ... don't know the market, would decide whether or not I get a credit or not. [...] Hence, crowdfunding, above all, stands for the *democratization of finance*, as *MANY people get to decide* what they want.” (Shai, initiator, Karma Classics: 2-6)

“It's a good possibility ... to *obtain funding beyond* the normal means of the *capitalistic market system*. [...] Of course, you could apply for a loan at a bank, but we didn't want this because it immediately *creates a certain dependency* and makes it more difficult to implement projects, which *don't follow a classic business model*. [...] If you don't have any capital, you have to obtain it somehow, for instance from banks, which creates debts that need to be paid off ... We *don't want this pressure ... to be financially successful*.” (Christin, initiator, Radikalecker: 6-10)

Independence. The above quotes demonstrate that the financial independence gained through crowdfunding allows initiators to experiment with ideas, increasing the likelihood that innovations are brought to market. In particular, avoiding usual financial instruments helps to circumvent the obligations that are attached to them, such as having to develop a detailed business plan or paying interest rates. As Shai points out, this is intrinsically linked to democratisation, a core characteristic of crowdfunding, as many people decide what ideas should be put into practise. In this way, it helps to overcome common barriers that limit self-organised innovation (see von Hippel 2007). Moreover, Christin describes how crowdfunding provides an alternative to capitalistic funding opportunities that demand a substantial level of returns for investors. Her team sought to escape the pressure of capital accumulation that is common to “classic business models” to attain autonomy in realising their own ideas. In this way, crowdfunding allows new forms of organising economic activity to emerge. Indeed, initiators specifically sought out this form of financing because it allowed them to circumvent business conventions and gave them more freedom to try out new concepts. Christine mentioned this several times in her interview:

“The idea behind [Radikalecker] was to *create a workplace for oneself* ... one that you can shape, where there is no boss, no superior, no hierarchies ... Nobody makes decisions and has responsibility alone, rather these are made collectively and if something goes wrong, *everyone shoulders the problems* together. [...] *Solidarity economy* ... is one of our keywords ... We feel obligated to *create another form of economic activity*, through our café, as well as through *cooperation* with other collectives.” (Christin, initiator, Radikalecker: 16+43)

Alternative organisational forms. This and the previous statement by Christin show that crowdfunding may be a springboard for alternative organisational forms that would not normally be backed by traditional financial institutions. Crowdfunding gives people more self-determination, as like-minded individuals are drawn to an idea to make it happen (i.e. openness and collective decision making). As in the example above, this can give rise to business models that focus on solidarity, an idea that is alien to most corporate logic. A solidarity economy, which is built on cooperation rather than competition, would require a radical shift in mindsets and is likely to remain a utopia. Christin mentions later on in the interview how one of their main goals was to establish a “place of anticapitalistic counter culture” to facilitate discussions about “alternative politics and economic ideas”.¹⁹ Institutional decision makers would probably not be too enthusiastic about these prospects. Interestingly, the ability to organise differently was also seen as a key strength of crowdfunding by other initiators. Shai initially wanted to hand down the Karma Classics project to a successor, so that each new harvest, a term he used to describe a new generation of shoes, would be launched by someone else. In a similar manner to Radikalecker, this was supposed to break the cycle of capital accumulation, where profit targets become a self-reinforcing goal.²⁰ The zero waste stores also cooperated and shared insights about good suppliers, regulatory issues, and established a cooperative to develop more visibility and market power. At this early stage of development, then, the desire to spread the concept outweighed competitive pressures between zero waste providers, as they all worked towards the same goal (see also Bruin, Shaw, and Lewis 2017).²¹ In this sense, crowdfunding not only offers new product ideas a breeding ground, but may facilitate a different business culture that promotes social cohesion and sustainability.

¹⁹ Christin, initiator, Radikalecker: 83-84.

²⁰ Shai, initiator, Karma Classics: 34-36. In addition, all members of Shai’s team had equal rights and they worked without hierarchies, so that responsibility was shared within the group (59-61).

²¹ Many of the initiators explicitly described how the zero waste stores in Germany formed a network with the goal to help each other, raise awareness, and to increase their influence on the market: Dinah (40, 61, 69); Sonja (108-114, 118, 175-182); Bettina (45-49); Wiebke (24-28, 32-36). Wiebke was even allowed to use the logo of another store, which shows the level of cooperation between these outlets.

In summary and more abstract terms, independence from traditional financial institutions allows initiators to try out new business models and ideas. The collective nature and open accessibility of participatory market infrastructures, in this case crowdfunding, broadens the horizon of opportunities, as people with similar interests are mobilised, rather than organisational decision-makers, who might be biased towards particular areas of expertise or need to adhere to institutional standards. In the financial sector, for instance, venture capitalists and mainstream banks, through the application of naturalised investment criteria and matrices (e.g. return on investment or cash flows), favour enterprises that generate a lot of profits, while they turn a blind eye to solutions that have a positive impact on society, but offer little monetary returns. Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen (2009) observe that venture capitalists “may serve to reproduce structures of power, reduce variety in organisational forms and strategies, and ultimately blunt the social change potential of entrepreneurial projects” (p.483). As a result, the standards and classifications that delineate acceptable practices within an industry lead to assumptions about the kinds of innovation that should be pursued, which is usually to the disadvantage of unconventional ideas. Standards create an implicit moral background that often sets the stage for innovations and, ultimately, what offerings come on the market. This can be seen in respect to financial market infrastructures that shape the future of capitalistic economies through their investment decisions (see also Larkin 2013). Standards are a form of “soft regulation” (Jacobsson and Brunsson 2000) through which institutional actors and organisations govern the conduct in particular market sectors (Timmermans and Epstein 2010).²² While norms and values are important in crowdfunding, the plurality of interests of funders and the ability to tap into crowd resources allows many ideas to unfold. Participatory market infrastructures, therefore, are a good departure point for various innovations. The next sections take a closer look at the value focus fostered by crowdfunding and how this breeds discourse diversity.

²² The role of standards and classifications has also been studied in relation to states, especially in terms of how they valorise certain views and influence how institutions see – or, in fact, do not see – events, developments, or population groups and how this affects who has access to specific public services and under what conditions (see Bowker and Star 2000; Scott 1998).

6.2. Market Shaping and Participatory Market Infrastructures: Value Focus, Discourse Diversity, and Inspiration

6.2.1. Value Focus: Market Shaping Through Collective Market Entrepreneurship

The previous sections looked at the various elements of crowdfunding and the freedom it grants initiators. The following part covers the ability of users to build new opportunities for themselves by supporting projects that offer several forms of value. In doing so, it shows that funders have the inclination to fund sustainability projects and that they seek to broaden the awareness for particular issues in the wider public. However, in the first instance, crowdfunding enables people to bring things to market that would not normally be available:

“The motivation for me is above all to try to *make the world a little better* ... [Through crowdfunding] you have a far bigger influence on things compared to other ways of giving or donating money [...] in the sense that you *shape what products or merchants enter the market*. Bamboo toothbrushes are a case in point. They might appear on the market on their own, but this way I can practically influence if it happens or not ... instead of hoping that someone in the market economy at some point does what I want. You don't really have an influence on this.”
(Elena, funder, Stückgut: 30-32)

Market shaping. The quote above contains interesting insights. Elena describes how crowdfunding offers a direct participatory mechanism for shaping the market, in contrast to voting with the shopping cart. Supporting a particular project enables funders to create options for themselves that would not normally emerge through the severed feedback processes of market economies, where purchases only imperfectly signal consumer wants to organisations. In this way, crowdfunding allows people to have a say in what options and providers should make it to market, rather than institutional decision makers that need to consider corporate objectives (see Lüthje and Stockstrom 2016). The bamboo toothbrush is a good example, as it is more sustainable than its plastic alternative, but likely to yield lower profits, which disincentivises established brands to offer such an option. A crowdfunding project is not bound by organisational constraints or vested interests and for many funders was a vehicle to make the world better.²³ That is to say, funders are not only driven by self-gain, but rather seek to nurture the common good by supporting campaigns with a sustainability character. Indeed, this sentiment was shared by many respondents:

²³ See Quote 7 in Appendix D for another statement that refers to the societal dimension of projects.

“It is built on the fact that you don’t just have an idea, which aims to fill your own pockets, but that *fosters the general good* ... Of course, if the idea would have been to open a shop to quickly generate a lot of money for yourself, probably no one would have responded ... However, if the idea is to *help other people*, if it has a social dimension or a sustainability character, then people might be more willing to say, ‘I can’t give you any money, but I have a few materials in my basement’, or whatever. This builds a *community feeling*.” (Alice, funder, Tante Olga: 79)

Societal value and crowd resources. The statement underscores the importance of sustainability for many crowdfunding projects. Indeed, Alice emphasises that providing something that “fosters the general good” mobilises funders in the first place. Having a positive impact on society may thus be a prerequisite for unlocking crowd resources, as costless support would probably not be offered to projects that aim to make a lot of money. Mareike summarises this quite well by saying “you get the attention of the crowd by providing something that adds societal or emotional value and not by saying that you want to get rich or want to fulfil yourself.”²⁴ Crowdfunding is, therefore, particularly interesting for projects with an ethical mission. The moral agency associated with developing solutions to sustainability problems, at whichever scale, gives projects a competitive edge by setting free enthusiasm about jointly working towards the common good, which optimally leads to a “community feeling”. Put differently, under circumstances where the beneficiary is society at large, people are willing to go the extra mile to make the project a success by providing all the support they can muster. Often projects are explicitly linked to the desire to raise the visibility of an issue in the wider public:

“I would like to see and *support pioneers of change* [...] You don’t know if one of the crowdfunding projects could be the *next big thing* in five to ten years from now. It might be an *idea that catches on* and becomes mainstream, even beyond the small group of people that are particularly interested in sustainable ideas. It might begin to *convince the average* Joes to change their behaviour ... You always need initiators and ... they don’t necessarily convince others in a matter of weeks and months, but rather need to be able to go the distance. They need *supporters of the first hour*. I believe that the crowdfunding platform enables me to get a piece of the action ... I can, perhaps, have a *small part in saving our world*, our planet.” (Peer, funder, SirPlus: 114 + 121)

“It is important to us to *raise awareness of the whole issue*, but equally for solutions, and to tackle it through education, through the media, and at some point through lobbying. [...] We can be *part of the solution* ... through *cultivating an appreciation for food*. We want to *carry this topic out into the world*, through our business as well as the topic of ‘food waste’. It is one of our central concerns.” (Raphael, initiator, SirPlus: 21- 23)

Raising awareness of alternative discourses. Societal change is a crucial element of ethical crowdfunding campaigns. This crystallises in the statements of both funders and initiators. Let us consider the funders first. Peer wants to help “pioneers of change” by becoming a zero-hour supporter and playing a role, however marginal, in “saving the world”. Crowdfunding platforms for him are a medium to back ideas that could set in

²⁴ Mareike, funder, Tante Olga: 9. See also Quote 8 in Appendix D.

motion larger social transformations that impact on the consumption patterns of whole populations, rather than being confined to ethical consumers, who have a high concern for the environment anyway. In fact, most respondents sought to enable visions to break into the mass market. Melanie, for instance, saw crowdfunding as “a great opportunity to bring out a vision” and the SirPlus store, in particular, as one way to familiarise a broader audience with the topic of food saving, by allowing “people to see and engage with things they knew nothing about.”²⁵ In other words, SirPlus not only represented a novel action possibility (i.e. an outlet where saved food could be bought), but also a new cultural resource, as it gave people the chance to learn more about an unfamiliar discourse (i.e. food waste and food saving). Crowdfunding projects thus extend the repertoire of meanings available to consumers, alleviating them from constraining ideologies and the dominance of individualistic moral subject positions (see Autio, Heiskanen, and Heinonen 2009). As such, crowdfunding facilitates the emergence of “new cultural resources” that “might open up scope for subject positions that are more empowering and more capable of reconciling personal interests, collective concerns, and the health of the planet” (ibid, p.50). A project may, therefore, have a much wider influence than just establishing another product or service on the market, when it challenges conventional ways of thinking and raises the appeal of alternative solutions.

Ideological recruitment to discourse communities. The initiators of crowdfunding campaigns are equally keen on achieving their mission. The previous sections have already outlined how important independence is for projects that do not follow a classic profit logic, but aim to fulfil a societal function. This becomes evident in Raphael’s ambition to promote awareness of the problems surrounding food waste by using various channels “to carry the topic out into the world”. The project here is seen as a vehicle for implementing change. On the one hand, SirPlus coordinates the collection of overdue food from retail partners and then makes it available to its customers at discounted prices. This prevents people from having to linger around supermarkets when they close or to climb into containers to rescue discarded goods, which many funders felt uncomfortable with due to legal concerns.²⁶ It, thereby, creates more convenient ways of saving food. On the other hand, it seeks to spread the idea to population groups that were not previously exposed to it. SirPlus actively encourages

²⁵ Melanie, funder, SirPlus: 4-6.

²⁶ Several funders talked about “containering”, their discomfort with this practice, and how SirPlus resolved this problem: Anita (50); Julia (84); Melanie (40-44); Carolin (34-36).

people to become part of the community of food savers. When viewed in this light, crowdfunding campaigns engage in “ideological recruitment”, where “consumers are proactively integrated into a social network linked by a common outlook and goal system and, conversely, that its members develop an enduring sense of commitment towards that community and its core values” (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007a, pp. 147–148). This manifests itself in the language used by SirPlus, where the word “rescue” is added to regular expressions, such as “rescue market” or “rescue package”.²⁷ The societal mission, therefore, is so tightly intermeshed with the business model that all processes are built around it, so that promoting awareness of the issue breeds market success. All initiators in this study sought to rally support for particular issues. Shai states “Our campaigns are not designed to make us millionaires or continuously earn us money, rather we try to *sensitise people for sustainable fashion* through the stories that we tell [...] We try to get the ball rolling by *cultivating an appreciation* for the people who produce our clothes” (18-20). Here too, the Karma Classics range sought to encourage people to value the clothes they wear and to build a community that enabled various generations of products to be launched. A similar story could be spun around the zero waste stores, which made unpackaged shopping a reality and inspired people to become zero waste users by exposing them to the discourse and associated practices. Hence, crowdfunding projects not only open up new action possibilities, but are also ideological interfaces that cultivate a broader set of discourses.

The above discussion highlights that both funders and initiators have the desire to wield a positive influence on society through crowdfunding projects. This ambition to promote the common good through market mechanisms and to recruit people to discourse communities can be seen as a form of collective market entrepreneuring. Entrepreneuring refers to “efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group of individuals” (Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen 2009, p. 477). In contrast to this broader phenomenon, *collective market entrepreneuring* is here defined as the mobilisation of resources by a group or network of individuals towards the common purpose of creating social change by coordinating value creation activities to develop marketplace solutions to particular problems. It follows that greater control over value creation and the availability of

²⁷ In German words can easily be combined, so the above examples in the original were “Rettermarkt” and “Retterbox”. Even people were referred to as “Retterherzen”, which roughly translates to ‘people with a heart for rescued food’ (SirPlus 2018a).

resources positively impacts on the ability to achieve this change. Participatory market infrastructures, in this case crowdfunding, are conducive towards this end, as they allow users to finance ideas from the outset and grant independence from institutional requirements, which normally restrict the output of innovation systems by privileging those offerings that are commercially attractive. The collective action that is made possible through them can thus lead to new solutions, as the next section will discuss.

6.2.2. Collective Market Entrepreneurship and Discourse Diversity: Funding a Thousand Opportunities

In the previous section, we saw that crowdfunding enables people to change the market landscape by supporting projects that benefit society and that this represents a form of collective market entrepreneurship. One important goal of many funders and initiators, meanwhile, was to move underrepresented discourses into the limelight by establishing new cultural resources. Given the collective nature of crowdfunding and the value focus of the parties involved, greater diversity can emerge as crowds mobilise resources to support novel ideas. This allows innovations to come to market that would not arise through conventional financing instruments:

“Due to the fact that funding is split amongst many, it means people, who give money, don’t face any substantial risks. This allows *small, grassroots projects* to be financed, which *otherwise don’t stand a chance*, because no one can imagine they have a sustainable business model. If you do crowdfunding, this becomes possible, as you can *reach many people, everywhere.*” (Helen, funder, Tante Olga: 6-12)

Collective market entrepreneurship and diversity. Crowdfunding not only gives initiators the independence to experiment with new forms of organising, as previously described (Section 6.1.3.), but equally enables funders to foster marketplace diversity. Due to the fact that many people back a project, individual contributors are less worried about taking good investment risks, so the goals of the project move to the fore. The decentralisation and de-clustering of risks, as Helen mentions, gives smaller projects a chance. Collective market entrepreneurship, more simply, allows issues to be tackled that would not be supported by financial organisations that bring profit expectations to the table, as they usually have higher stakes in businesses. Silke, for instance, mentions a campaign that wanted to save a unique tomato species from extinction.²⁸ This would likely not appeal to a large enough target group to warrant an investment by a for-profit entity. Collectives of like-minded people, however, can make grassroots and niche

²⁸ See Quote 9 in Appendix D, where Silke argues that crowdfunding makes the market more colourful.

projects possible, when they collaborate and come together through crowdfunding campaigns. This is to say that self-organised innovation, where users take charge of value creation activities, facilitates the emergence of a variety of discourses that would not arise through other market mechanisms. Ethical projects, in particular, stand to gain from crowdfunding:

“It is relatively *difficult to get financing* for projects that don’t fit the norms or criteria whereby banks give out credits or that don’t have any property that could be used as a guaranty. If we look at the *ethical domain in particular*, where the overarching goal is not profit maximisation, but social impact, it is relatively difficult to attain funds. In this respect, perhaps it lies in the nature of these things that projects turn to crowdfunding platforms for *financing* because they can *directly reach their end users*.” (Tom, project adviser, Startnext: 32-33)

Collective market entrepreneuring versus institutional constraints. This statement shows how sustainable innovation can benefit from crowdfunding by letting users determine the outcomes. In many situations, it might simply not be in the interest of corporations to back ideas, when they do not conform to the ways they normally do business. Husted (2016) describes various conditions under which it is difficult for an organisation to do well financially and to be a good corporate citizen at the same time. First, “moral conditions” might not align with a company’s objectives, when the business model of a firm clashes with sustainability goals or stakeholder expectations. A tobacco manufacturer cannot, for instance, promote the health of cigarette users without compromising sales targets. In other situations the “technical conditions” may not exist. Car manufacturers cannot simply replace the combustion engine with electric or hydrogen-powered alternatives in a short period of time without incurring major financial liabilities. Finally, “institutional conditions” create deadlock situations. Competition conundrums may prevent a single actor from implementing change, such as when one major fashion retailer radically overhauls the working conditions at its manufacturing sites, while its rivals keep their prices down and skim customers from the ethical first mover. Similar problems arise in relation to common-pool resources (e.g. catch limits in the fishing industry) and other societal dilemmas, which prevents individual market players from developing solutions. Under these circumstances, collective market entrepreneuring enables users to create action possibilities for themselves, which can tackle sustainability problems that were not previously addressed by company-led innovation. This can also be to the advantage of underrepresented consumer groups, as Anita outlines:

“I think *banks prefer not to finance these things* as much because they present a greater risk. People, who have similar interests and want to support [a project], are more likely to stand behind it and give money. [...] For example, there are many books on topics, which deal with transgender people and everything around the LGBT scene. I would say, these are *niches*, where a publisher ... would first ask, if it does not represent a greater risk. Through crowdfunding, you *already have an audience.*” (Anita, funder, SirPlus: 10+18)

Collective market entrepreneuring and niche interests. Financial and reputational risks often lead mainstream providers to avoid offering particular solutions. Here, self-organised user innovation can fill the void by uniting like-minded people, who jointly realise projects. Crowdfunding, thereby, fulfils an important societal function by facilitating the development of new options, which can be especially relevant to minority groups. As the above example illustrates, the ability to reach a particular audience enables niche interest groups to essentially service themselves. As a result, solutions can span a variety of consumption areas and give new discourses a presence on the market. Startnext alone has hosted hundreds of ethical projects, including in such fields as sustainable food, fashion, and shopping, which cover environmental concerns, as well as tackling social issues, as seen in the integration of refugees or the inclusion of minority consumer groups (see Appendix C for examples). These problems often reflect the zeitgeist of a population, as many refugee-related projects were launched at the peak of the “immigration crisis” in Germany in 2015 and the years that followed. Crowdfunding, in simple terms, gives “a voice to people who would otherwise never even have a chance to seek funding, let alone provide it”, creating “opportunities for new businesses and innovations” (Mollick and Robb 2016, p. 86) in the process. As such, it empowers users to shift mainstream market currents in sustainable directions.

6.2.3. The Societal Value of Crowdfunding: Demystification of Value Creation Activities, Inspiration, and Role Reflexivity

The previous sections have looked at how crowdfunding opens up new opportunities for novel discourses on the market. In particular, it was highlighted that a broad range of ethical solutions, which usually fall through the cracks of profit-focused institutions, cultivate diversity on the market and offer new cultural resources to people. This section explores how crowdfunding encourages people to take action and how it enables them to learn from previous campaigns by being able to access various types of information over the platform. More specifically, it looks at how crowdfunding: i) demystifies value creation activities and shows that it is possible to implement ideas; ii) promotes role reflexivity by inspiring people to start something themselves; and iii) enables potential

initiators to learn from existing projects. It draws attention to the role crowdfunding can play beyond establishing distinct, novel options on the market, as the openness of the medium broadens the engagement with innovation activities.

Crowdfunding is an inherently open process compared to private, closed innovation systems. This public accessibility is not only important to draw in large numbers of people that then form crowds, but it can also demonstrate that it is possible to implement ideas, even when no substantial capital exists at the beginning. Crowdfunding platforms help people to visualise how ideas may be put into practice:

“It produces societal value, as you can see, through these platforms, how thousands of people think about and produce great ideas on how to make this world better. [...] I believe it also *animates you to just give it a try* ... Crowdfunding is a good *example of direct practicability*. In other words, you *see how people do it* and that it actually works ... and you ask yourself, why you’re not doing it. I do think that this is *inspiring*.” (Mareike, funder, Tante Olga: 83 + 91)

Feasibility and inspiration. There are two ways in which crowdfunding inspires innovation. First, Mareike draws attention to the volume of projects that are realised through crowdfunding. This shows a “direct practicability” of ideas to a wider population, as countless success stories can be observed, giving other potential initiators the confidence to work towards their own dreams (i.e. it “animates you to just give it a try”). The ability to witness the emergence of market innovations in this way is unique to crowdfunding and connected to the transparency and information provided by the campaigns. Closed innovation systems do not provide these insights, so that this openness can tackle the myths linked to entrepreneurship. Second, high-impact projects act as evidence that small movements can create meaningful change. Carolin mentioned her fascination with SirPlus and how a single project was able to offer a solution to a societal problem, in this case food waste, which then caught on and affected more and more people. This, in her eyes, was a good example of the impact that individuals can have within the market and that this may entice others to attempt something similar themselves.²⁹ Put differently, both the scale and the availability of good exemplars inspire people to engage in value creation activities, as they perceive new ways to implement their ideas. In fact, funders felt motivated by their experiences:

“I think these things also *promote creativity* ... It gives you the *courage* to say, “Well, you can just try it.” [...] I think, for one, it’s about seeing this shop itself and realising that it created something that, not too long ago, you could not imagine existed ... You get an insight into, “What kind of people are these?”, and, “Somehow they are just like you and me!”. Suddenly a *new horizon of opportunities* opens up, where you say: “Actually, why not? If they can do it, why shouldn’t I be *able to do the same*?” (Silke, funder, Stückgut: 67-69)

²⁹ See Quote 10 in Appendix D on how Carolin drew courage from the success of SirPlus.

Demystification and role reflexivity. The above quote demonstrates that taking part in crowdfunding can make people think about launching their own campaigns. Silke describes how crowdfunding promotes creativity and nurtures courage. In particular, seeing projects succeed that were deemed inconceivable before can make one's ideas seem more attainable. In comparison to the idealised discourses that normally surround entrepreneurship (see Mitchell 1996), crowdfunding reduces the distance between initiators and funders, as the former introduce themselves in pitch videos and project descriptions. This helps funders to discover a “new horizon of opportunities”, as they recognise that initiators are regular people (i.e. “just like you and me”), rather than exceptional geniuses of the likes of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk, who built multibillion-dollar empires. The fact that common people are involved in these activities lowers the psychological barriers of establishing enterprises, as innovation processes are demystified and seem approachable. The transparency cultivated by crowdfunding, thereby, promotes role reflexivity, where people increasingly question their ability to affect change through their prevailing subject positions as consumers, encouraging them to become co-creators of value. Paula, for instance, notices a certain helplessness in counting on public or private institutions to enact change. Crowdfunding, for her, opens up a critical engagement with particular issues that may give rise to new solutions, as users no longer just accept suboptimal outcomes as a given, but channel their concerns towards improving these situations.³⁰ This explains why several funders could picture themselves as project starters, such as Melanie, who wanted to employ crowdfunding “to make the world a little bit better”,³¹ or Janina, who kept it “at the back of [her] mind as a possibility”.³² These considerations were reinforced by the fact that crowdfunding enables users to learn from existing projects:

“I do think that it is a smaller step to establish something yourself, if you have *knowledge about how these things work*, as everyone can see what happens there. [...] I think if you *see examples* that it actually works, you are more inclined to try something similar yourself. [...] If I have ... the dream to open a café, for example ... then I can *check one-to-one, how others have done this* in the past ... It becomes easier to make your own plans, when *you know what needs to be done* to reach that goal.” (Anita, funder, SirPlus: 126-130)

³⁰ See Quote 11 in Appendix D, in which Paula contends that crowdfunding raises the critical awareness of funders and promotes a more active approach to solving problems within the market.

³¹ Melanie, funder, SirPlus: 123-125.

³² Janina, funder, Tante Olga: 164.

Crowdfunding as knowledge development. Anita's statement indicates that crowdfunding produces both generalised and project-related knowledge. First, seeing "how these things work" reduces the uncertainty associated with market innovations, as generalised procedural knowledge makes it easier to implement ideas. More specifically, the public accessibility of information makes it transparent for everyone which projects have been successful, what problems might occur during the process, and the outcomes of particular campaigns. Crowdfunding, quite simply, enables people to identify best practices and learn from the mistakes of others, increasing the likelihood of successfully launching a project. Indeed, previous research has shown that project failures are an excellent source of information (Greenberg and Gerber 2014). In this sense, a platform is an agglomeration of data on collective market entrepreneuring, where each previous attempt is archived and available to review for everyone.³³ In addition, campaigns can be modelled on the basis of past projects. They act as ideographic blueprints that can be consulted to identify key steps in the process (i.e. "check one-on-one ...what needs to be done"). If one looks at the various zero waste projects, for instance, it is remarkable how similar the reward categories are (see Appendix B) and how key elements, such as the bulk bins, reappear across the various outlets. Indeed, Wiebke, a co-founder of Unverpackt Lübeck, mentioned that she only slowly started to feel comfortable about running a campaign after observing "zero waste shops in other cities, which financed themselves through crowdfunding" and even "supported a few of them to get to know it".³⁴ Similarly, Tom pointed out that "successful projects definitely have a signalling effect for other projects"³⁵, when he talked about Original Unverpackt, the first zero waste shop that was financed over Startnext in Germany. Therefore, once a pioneer project is successful, imitators can draw on the experience of these forerunners through the crowdfunding platform.

Lastly, due to the fact that crowdfunding is inherently a collective endeavour that requires the support of a large number of people, it also challenges dominant understandings in the entrepreneurship literature. Research in this area has typically looked at how individualistic factors impact on venture success, such as competences (Mitchelmore and Rowley 2010), personality traits (Chell 2008), and the ability to recognise opportunities (Mary George et al. 2016), while contextual issues are identified

³³ See Quote 12 in Appendix D, where Elena outlines how other people's mistakes can be a useful source of information.

³⁴ Wiebke, initiator, Unverpackt Lübeck: 10.

³⁵ Tom, project adviser, Startnext: 48.

as boundaries for entrepreneurial activity (Welter 2011). Network perspectives also exist, but mainly look at inter-organisational dynamics and the social capital of founders (Cummins et al. 2001). Collective market entrepreneuring opens up a different view on the creation of new offerings that runs against the common construction of heroic individuals as the main agents of marketplace change (Ogbor 2000). This contrasts with common myths found in media stories on entrepreneurial activity (see Nicholson and Anderson 2005) and the responsabilisation of individuals in contemporary society.³⁶ As a result, studying this type of collective action can provide insights on how co-creation might evolve, when technological developments make it easier for many people to engage in market activities and participatory economic forms emerge (see, for example, Rifkin 2015).

Conclusively, crowdfunding in many ways engages people in value creation and inspires an active approach towards solving societal problems. In the first instance, people may perceive the masses of projects that are realised through these platforms and recognise the possibility to gather money for their own ideas. Very successful projects, such as SirPlus or Original Unverpackt, further strengthen this view by showing that individuals can kick start larger movements. Crowdfunding, therefore, makes projects appear feasible, which can encourage potential founders to give it a try. The ability to review past projects is very important in this respect, as it makes innovation processes transparent and comprehensible. It demystifies entrepreneurial practices and shows that normal people succeed with their projects. This fosters a critical engagement with existing market offerings and can lead funders to overthink their role as consumers, as becoming an initiator seems like a viable option. Finally, transparency yields insights on how to run campaigns and similar projects may be used as ideographic blueprints for future endeavours. In summary and more abstract terms, participatory market infrastructures do not only fulfil an important societal function by fostering marketplace diversity, but also by involving larger population groups in innovation activities by giving them the knowledge and capabilities to realise their ideas, which contrasts with extant entrepreneurship research that focuses on individual, heroic agents.

³⁶ Please refer to Section 3.4. for a discussion of dominant social paradigms and responsabilisation.

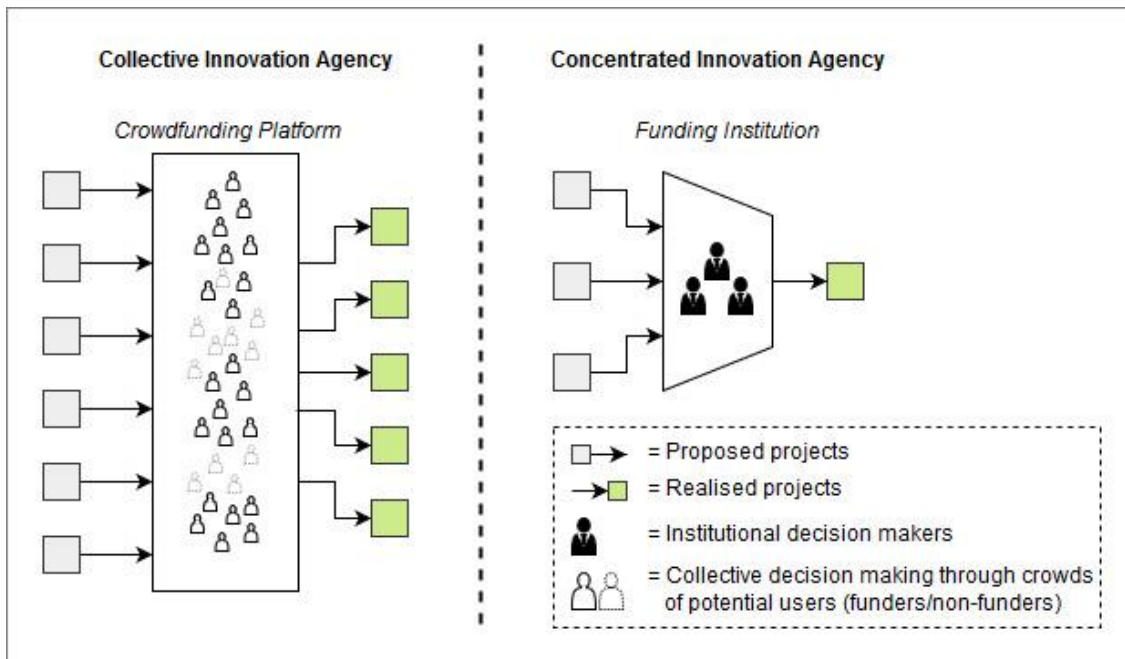
6.3. Summary and Answers to Research Questions: Self-Organised Value Creation, Empowerment, and Marketplace Change

The chapter looked at crowdfunding as a participatory market infrastructure that people use to realise ideas. It started out with a discussion of the unique characteristics of this funding mechanism, with a particular focus on why it represents a democratic form of value creation. It was highlighted that the various reward levels make it accessible to the larger population and enable collective decision making, where crowds of like-minded individuals come together to launch projects. In addition, the various forms of information and procedural transparency allowed projects to build up credibility. Crowdfunding was then contrasted to closed financing mechanisms, which are bound by various institutional demands that limit the spectrum of innovation opportunities. Many of the co-creation tools commonly found in the marketing literature are geared towards organisational entities (see, for instance, Sawhney, Verona, and Prandelli 2005), which oversee the benefits that collective market entrepreneuring has to offer. In particular, the mobilisation of resources and independence from institutional standards can give new business models and offerings a chance to develop. Consequently, it is of fundamental importance to look at market infrastructures, as these supply “aspects of the diffusion process ... control the availability of innovation to potential adopters” (Brown 1975, p. 185) or, more simply, what finally becomes available to mainstream consumers. Research on ethical consumer behaviour ignores this form of market preconditioning by mainly focusing on consumption power (e.g. Moraes, Shaw, and Carrigan 2011; Shaw, Newholm, and Dickinson 2006; Wilk 2001), rather than the potential that individuals can unfold through value creation activities. Participatory market infrastructures are an excellent tool for supporting innovations early on in their development, enabling users to influence what types of offerings make it to market.

This has various implications. First, the fact that funds are drawn in from many people in crowdfunding not only means that risks are spread more widely amongst individual backers, but also that a range of decision frames are brought to the process. It, therefore, becomes more likely that different interests are satisfied, as crowds are comprised of members with a multiplicity of beliefs. In this sense, crowdfunding takes on a “polynuclear propagation structure”, where “the gross pattern of diffusion come[s] about through the aggregation of individual actions and decentralised decision making” (Brown 1975, p. 186). Put differently, not a single, resource-rich institution determines

the prospects of innovations, as is typical in late capitalism, but rather collectives of people that unite behind a common cause. Figure 1 shows the differences between these two forms of innovation agency, which shape what kinds of ideas get funded and trickle down into the market in the form of new products or services.

Figure 1 – Collective versus Concentrated Innovation Agency



Under crowdfunding, the various reward levels enable many people to participate in value creation, both financially and through other forms of support (e.g. free marketing or voluntary work for projects), leading to greater discourse diversity, which is represented by the higher number of realised projects in the graphic. In other words, because many people judge the merit of innovations, novel solutions and alternative business ideas may flourish. The democratisation and decentralisation of resources that are characteristic for participatory market infrastructures, allow concepts to emerge (e.g. solidary economic forms or niche products, such as rare tomato species), which would not make it through the boards or committees that decide how institutional funds are allocated. Awareness for alternative meanings can be raised in this way, as more users engage with discourses they did not previously encounter. This was particularly evident in the cases of SirPlus and the zero waste stores, which wanted to recruit more people to food saving and zero waste practices. Finally, due to the constant availability of information on all past and present projects over the platform, innovation processes are demystified. Both the overall volume of projects and the success of high-profile cases encourage people to develop solutions to societal problems, as they show that even

ordinary citizens and unconventional ideas can be successful. This is depicted on the left side of the graphic to symbolise that a broader engagement of people in innovation breeds more projects. That is to say, platforms are approached by more people than institutions, leading to an overall higher number of ideas that are realised. Crowdfunding creates a virtuous cycle, whereby new generations of users are inspired to take action and to carry a broader variety of offerings to market. It, thereby, becomes an invaluable cultural resource for innovation, which not only enables the creation of value through hosting projects, but ultimately is of value in and of itself.

How then does all this relate back to the literature review and the research questions? Let us start with the criticism brought towards purchases as a means for creating marketplace change (see Chapter 3). Self-organised value creation, in the form of crowdfunding, can solve many of the outlined issues. First, consider the overload of choices encountered by consumers on a daily basis. The launch of tailored projects for particular needs helps to develop relevant and fitting solutions for specific target groups, limiting the cognitive burden associated with trawling through thousands of comparable options. Even though this is not applicable to all consumption domains (e.g. medicine), the possibility to bring exactly what they want to market, was valued by funders. Second, consumer vulnerability was problematised. Here too, collective market entrepreneuring enables underrepresented or niche interest groups to meet their needs. The large number of projects launched to facilitate the integration of migrants, which represent a vulnerable group in various ways (i.e. lack of language skills, little financial and social resources, and problematic legal status), into German society, are a good example of this. No conventional provider or brand would have responded to this due to consumption power. Third, crowdfunding promoted the launch of a multitude of sustainability projects that did not emerge organically from existing organisations. Zero waste infrastructures were established by a few ethical lead users, as conventional supermarkets would have had to completely overhaul their trading practices, which are based on a constant stream of goods from global commodity chains and corporate brand owners. The independence gained through collective market entrepreneuring, enabled the zero waste movement to spread to all major cities in Germany. Fourth, crowdfunding addresses the responsabilisation of people in their role as consumers. The discussion of how the success of others inspires role reflexivity illustrates that crowdfunding can extend the ethical imagination of individuals to new domains and practices. The fact that several initiators were active observers of campaigns before they

implemented their own ideas, indicates that this is indeed a career route that people take. It might, therefore, deemphasise changes in consumerist lifestyles as the only route to achieve social change, so that more sustainable subject positions become plausible. After all, even the most critical consumers can do very little, if no market resources exist to effectively signal their ethical preferences. Collective market entrepreneuring thus provides a counter-design to complacent consumer behaviour, where market developments are delegated to other, mostly institutional, actors. This leads to the final point on market ideologies and discourses. It was outlined before that individuals always move in a nexus of discourses, where the creative adaptation of meanings is important to occupy preferred subject positions (see Section 3.5.). Since crowdfunding gives many ideas the chance to reach larger audiences, it also extends the discourses available to consumers, such as new ways of thinking and speaking about food saving or zero waste. Countervailing meanings gain traction through collective market entrepreneuring, as seen in the ambitions of initiators to establish less profit-driven forms of organisation. Self-organised value creation, consequently, leads to new ethical opportunities and subject positions, as the previous paragraphs have shown. The democratic and collective nature of crowdfunding gives rise to marketplace offerings that do not arise under other conditions, which answers research question three with a reassuring “yes”. The impact self-organised value creation has on the conduct of consumers and other market actors will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 7 on the basis of zero waste stores.

In terms of the first research question, this chapter also provided answers. Research Question 1 asked how empowerment in co-creation settings can be conceptualised. Based on the above discussion, a *co-creative model of power* defines empowerment as the ability to participate in and jointly shape value creation activities throughout market development cycles, so that desired outcomes, both in terms of concrete action possibilities and new cultural resources, can be achieved for designated user groups or society at large. This focus on the influence on whole value processes is crucial and moves beyond previous work in the field, which has mainly focused on the ability of consumers to customise offerings or to determine the composition of choice sets (see Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006; Fuchs and Schreier 2011; Wathieu et al. 2002). It was argued in this chapter that it is important for people to have a say in funding mechanisms, as these precondition what options actually make it to market. Only looking at co-creation at the later stages of the development process may change

the appearance or performance dimensions of products or services, but it does not affect the availability of suitable solutions to consumer needs or societal problems. Put differently, it is not possible to customise or change something that does not exist. An unpackaged shopping trip, for instance, would remain out of reach for most people, if a small group of dedicated zero waste aficionados had not established this retail concept. Hence, the ability to shape market outcomes essentially becomes a question of how people can help generate novel forms of value through innovation activities.

Moving to the second research question, several factors were covered in this chapter that determine the ability of users to shape market developments. First, *open access* to market infrastructures is important. Here, crowdfunding was identified as a democratic funding instrument, as threshold levels were low enough to allow most people to contribute to campaigns. Similarly, almost anyone can become active on these platforms, given that their projects offer value to certain user groups or foster the common good. It, thereby, is a medium that can be utilised by a large part of the population. Second, *transparency* needs to be ensured, so funders can ascertain the credibility of projects and track if initiators actually follow through on their claims. The possibility to monitor the progress and execution of projects is crucial to establishing a system of checks and balances, so fraudulent and exploitive practices are minimised. Third, the *mobilisation of collectives* is elemental to self-organised value creation. One reason for this is that *collective decision making* ensures that restraining business conventions are avoided, which would otherwise frame value creation activities in various ways. Through collective action, more diversity emerges, as users gather around and enable a multitude of ideas, broadening the spectrum of opportunities. Another reason is that resources are not clustered and signed off by one market entity. Rather, stakeholder networks need to be activated to attract *crowd resources* to bring ideas to life. The success of projects on crowdfunding platforms stands and falls with the collection of funds and other forms of support, which are activated through the agentic involvement of funders and the provision of societal value. Lastly, the ability to learn from past projects may not only inspire entrepreneurial activity, but also provide the basic *knowledge and capabilities* required to engage in innovation. The informational function of crowdfunding can bridge this gap, allowing more people to become active co-creators of value. In short, the more participatory market infrastructures are and the more they allow people to collectively mobilise resources and knowledge behind specific ideas, the greater the ability of users to influence market outcomes.

Chapter 7 – The Findings: The Materialisation of Ethical Discourses and Its Implications

7.0. Introduction: The Materialisation of Ethical Discourses Based on the Case of Zero Waste Stores

The previous chapter looked at crowdfunding as a participatory market infrastructure and how the unique character of self-organised value creation allows new discourses to emerge on the market. In particular, the openness of the funding system, the dispersion of decision making and resources, the independence from institutional constraints, and the value focus of innovation activities enabled networks of users to collectively realise ideas. Chapter 7 looks at the next step in the value creation process, exploring how projects, once they have been implemented, impact on the behaviour of consumers and other market actors. The zero waste stores acted as case studies for this part of the inquiry, as their physical presence made it possible to complement the interviews with visual data obtained through observations. The goal here was to understand how the material realities that spring from self-organised value creation affect various stakeholders and to provide an answer to Research Question 3.

The review of the literature has shown that consumption contexts play a crucial role in guiding consumer behaviour. This can be seen in the previous discussion of marketplace mythologies, discourses, and ideologies, which unveiled that the meanings attached to retail spaces and objects are of fundamental importance (see Section 3.5.). Therefore, detaching choices from the meaning systems that operate around them only paints half the picture. Unfortunately, previous ethical consumption research has done exactly this by focusing on particular ethical labels and factors that influence the uptake or boycott of goods on an individual level, such as attitudes and value dispositions (see Section 2.1.2.). This neglects the meanings attached to goods and how they may be interpreted differently (see Thompson 2004; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Only a few authors have looked at ethical movements from a discourse or ideological perspective. These studies emphasise that consumer movements rely on dualistic constructions of the complicit and the responsible consumer (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010) and explore the countervailing meanings that are available to people (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007a, 2007b). Nevertheless, the material realities that consumers encounter in relation to ethical consumption are still rarely acknowledged.

This is surprising, given the overall prominence of the topic within marketing. In particular, studies on atmospherics, which refers to the “conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers” (Kotler 1973, p. 50), have looked at how sensual cues channel people in desired directions. Supermarkets are well known for guiding the attention of consumers towards expensive products to maximise profits through such means as advertising displays, store layouts, product positioning, and shopping aisles (e.g. Chandon et al. 2009; Kerfoot, Davies, and Ward 2003; Smith and Burns 1996). In a similar fashion, research on servicescapes has shown the importance of physical environments for service encounters, including the types of social interactions that occur within these places (Bitner 1992). Here too, different sensory cues from the surroundings aim to produce an overall perception of the retail context that advances organisational goals (Lin 2004; see also Spence et al. 2014). Nevertheless, multi-sensory retail contexts have predominantly been studied in relation to brand themes (Foster and McLelland 2015), especially in terms of how they help to build strong brand ideologies (Borghini et al. 2009). This becomes apparent in academic work directed towards contexts that capture the imagination of consumers through fantasy and play, channelling their attention towards brand meanings and encouraging them to act in the interests of organisations (Kozinets et al. 2004). It is rare that shopping environments are deliberately designed towards mobilising sustainable consumer behaviour, which is partially due to the common belief that ethical products will sell themselves, as general concerns about sustainability grow. Yet, ethical consumption raises important questions in relation to shopping environments. What ethical meanings are conferred by the surrounding environment? What action possibilities do they provide? What modes of conduct and thinking are privileged in retail spaces? Therefore, there is the need to better understand how ethical meanings get translated into material reality, which is something that is evident after crowdfunding projects are funded and turned into marketplace offerings.

In order to answer the third research question, infrastructural thinking was used to build an understanding of the different elements that make up consumption contexts. Infrastructures are defined here in a broad sense as “extended material assemblages that generate effects and structure social relations” (Harvey, Jensen, and Morita 2017, p. 5). This incorporates organisational processes and standards, which shape the materiality of infrastructures and the things that travel through them (see Larkin 2013), and the socialities that arise within them (see Amin 2014). These elements jointly make up,

what is here referred to as, consumption infrastructures. Consumption infrastructures, in short, consist of three interrelated components: i) materiality, which includes the built environment, user interfaces, and the objects found within them; ii) organisational processes, such as particular modes of conduct and standards; and iii) sociality, the types of social interactions occurring within these constellations. In this chapter, zero waste stores are viewed as a distinct, new form of consumption infrastructures that promote a profound engagement with sustainable consumption. Each of the infrastructural elements will be explored separately to show that self-organised value creation gives rise to material realities that afford new action possibilities and reflexively mobilise people in different ways.

7.1. What Does Zero Waste Mean? The Multidimensionality of the Discourse

Zero waste stores, as the name implies, are dedicated to minimising, if not abolishing, the amount of waste accumulated on a daily basis by offering alternative solutions to usual retail outlets that boast packaging in many forms and sizes. This creates a radically different shopping environment, as consumers have to bring their own containers to the store, weight them, and pay for the amount of product at the till. Needless to say, that this requires novel store concepts and provides an excellent example of how ethical discourses materialise.

The zero waste discourse is inherently multidimensional and taps into various problems and debates. In order to understand how it has been applied in practice, it is worth looking at one of the most popular books on the topic. *Zero Waste Home* by Bea Johnson has been very influential amongst zero waste stores. Johnson (2013) proposes a simple *5R model* for achieving a zero waste lifestyle, which has stimulated store owners to apply these principles to their businesses (see, for instance, the picture on the right, taken at Stückgut). First, items that reinforce wasteful practices and are dispensable should be refused whenever possible. The *Refuse* dimension seeks to curb indirect or unnecessary consumption, such as by declining free merchandising, flyers, or single-use cups and straws. Second, existing habits should be scrutinised to reduce the volume of goods consumed. More emphasis should be placed on quality and non-



material ways of accessing services, rather than keeping a large stockpile of things that are rarely used. The *Reduce* dimension, consequently, encourages scaling down and relates to ideas from the voluntary simplicity movement (see Elgin 1981). The third dimension, *Reuse*, looks at how consumption cycles can be extended to save resources. Collaborative and second-hand consumption as well as repairing items can work towards this goal. Fourth, whenever goods reach the end of their lifecycle or packaging cannot be avoided, recycling kicks in. The *Recycle* dimension stresses that goods that can be fed back into production processes should be selected. Correspondingly, items that can easily be recycled and for which collection systems are in place should be prioritised. Lastly, organic materials should be returned to the ecosystem. The *Rot* dimension explains how organic waste can be composted. This means that if people vigilantly follow these rules, especially in terms of refusing and reducing certain forms of consumption, little waste should accumulate in everyday life. These principles provide a mental frame of reference that was used by several zero waste stores.

Needless to say, this only represents one view on the topic, as the concept is rooted in a broader nexus of discourses dealing with less materialistic ways of life and responsible consumption. The *Refuse* and *Reduce* dimensions, for instance, link to the literature on de-growth (Latouche 2013; Meadows, Randers, and Meadows 2004), dematerialisation (Steinberger, Krausmann, and Eisenmenger 2010; Weizsäcker, Lovins, and Lovins 1998), and voluntary simplicity (Belk 2012; Shama 1985). These concepts all seek to decouple human well-being from ecologically-harmful activities. The *Reuse* dimension focuses on less resource-intensive ways of meeting needs, which are evident in research on the sharing economy, where access is privileged over ownership to reduce environmental footprints (Belk 2010, 2014; Botsman and Rogers 2011; Lamberton and Rose 2012), and slower consumption, where usage intensities and extended consumption cycles are explored as means to maximise resource efficiency (Bakker et al. 2014; Cooper 2005, 2016; Thomas 2008). Finally, the *Recycle* and *Rot* dimensions consider the afterlife of things, which, ideally, should feed back into production cycles or natural ecosystems, reflecting cradle-to-cradle or circular economy thinking (Braungart and McDonough 2008; Geissdoerfer et al. 2017; Ghisellini, Cialani, and Ulgiati 2016). Accordingly, the outlined principles (i.e. the 5Rs) should not be seen as an exhaustive philosophy and are only used as a shorthand for zero waste thinking. Therefore, various ideas are invoked throughout this thesis to aid argumentation.

7.2. The Materiality of Zero Waste Stores

7.2.1. The Shopping Context: Ethical Meanings that Symbolise the Zero Waste Discourse

7.2.1.1. The Built Environment: Upcycled Materials and Second-Hand Components

Zero waste stores are suffused with ethical meanings, which emanate from both the types of products that are on display and the architecture of the place. Let us turn to the interior designs of zero waste stores, which reflect the zero waste principles in multiple ways. When a person walks into one of these stores, the difference to conventional supermarkets is immediately apparent, as long aisles filled with branded goods and flashy promotional displays are nowhere to be found. Instead, upcycled materials and the use of second-hand furniture and equipment underscore the primacy of ethical meanings. The coffee corner in one store, for instance, was made up of a constellation of second-hand chairs, self-made stools and an old cable reel. Similarly, several counters and outdoor seating benches were constructed from old crates (see Figure 2; please note that all visual data within the main body of the text was taken from Stückgut; further evidence on the other stores can be found in Appendix E). In addition, these objects were often made of wood, which lent a further sustainability dimension to the shop floor, as it is a renewable natural resource.

Figure 2 – Upcycled Materials and Second-Hand Furniture in a Zero Waste Store



Ethical meanings in the material environment. The above observations show that the zero waste philosophy materialised in the physical environment. The fact that many design elements were second-hand or upcycled can be linked to the *Reuse* and *Recycle* dimensions and tap into wider debates around dematerialisation and extending product lifecycles. The initiators deliberately built their stores with the zero waste concept in mind, as Sonja indicates:

“One of our co-founders, had already *cultivated* a very *sustainable style* in her hostel and did a lot, a lot of *upcycling*. Yes, perhaps it is also about *not acting so consumption-oriented* and consciously dealing with products, all along the line.” (Sonja, initiator, Stückgut: 41)

Even though the quote does not explicitly mention the design process, it is illustrative of the amount of thought the owners put into the initial planning stages of their shops. It shows that zero waste thinking dominated the physical crafting of the retail space. Put differently, the discourse dictated the design of the stores in contrast to sales maximisation goals, which traditionally guide the creation of shopping environments. In addition, the fact that the furnishing was self-made, lent the store a certain degree of authenticity, as it represented the style and labour of the founders, who had built it with the help of volunteers.³⁷ Given that the outlet was made possible through crowdfunding, the do-it-yourself approach signalled the commitment and frugality of the initiators, as they were not spending any of their funds on fancy materials or expensive interior designs. The crowdfunding campaign itself, meanwhile, made it possible to track these developments through the frequent blog posts of the founders. The sustainability cues and design elements were noticed, by consumers:

“I thought it was great that they paid attention to it on top of everything else. [The founders] said ... we will rather pay attention to having *second-hand containers* ... [and a counter] that is sustainable, either because it was produced sustainably or because it was bought from somebody else and, hence, *isn't an additional burden on the environment*. In the end this saves money, which can be invested into the store and into the vision ... No doubt, it was supposed to look chic, but it was also supposed to have a *sustainability character* ... If you would have an, I don't know, IKEA shelve in the store, it would perhaps not convey the *message*. You would perhaps think it is a little ambivalent.” (Alice, funder, Tante Olga: 71)

Sustainability cues and the material environment. Having a mutually reinforcing ethical environment lays the ground work for the credibility of zero waste stores. This becomes evident in Alice's discussion of the potentially ambivalent impressions that would arise from inconsistencies between a responsible sourcing strategy and using the shelves of a large Swedish furniture manufacturer. The observation that the interior was self-made signalled that the founders directed the limited financial resources at their disposal towards developing a convincing offering and retail space, rather than a hypocritical

³⁷ See Quote 13 in Appendix D for another statement on this.

focus on selling unpackaged goods. In other words, the founders concentrated on the zero waste discourse, resulting in a high level of trust placed on them by their funders and customers. Other interview participants also picked up on this. Jens raised an interesting point, when he mentioned that the store was visually differentiated from supermarket chains. He talked about being able to see that “there were people behind it” and that it was not the standard imprint found in other outlets, indicating a disidentification with the business practices of mainstream players. The authenticity arising from the owners’ creative involvement in the construction of the place, consequently, was deemed more rewarding than the “mass-produced” shopping contexts encountered in conventional supermarkets.³⁸ The fact that these objects and materials had a history, in the sense that they had moved through several consumption cycles or reached the end of their useful life in relation to a particular purpose, symbolically reinforced the zero waste discourse, as waste was avoided at an aggregate level.³⁹ In short, the retail environment mirrored a multitude of considerations, including the reuse of materials, second-hand components, and anti-corporate sentiments, which provided sustainability cues and led to positive affective responses from the consumers.

7.2.1.2. Coherent Ethical Perceptions Arising from the Material Environment

One aspect that has been highlighted throughout the previous passages is the distinct physical environment in zero waste stores. The interior design elements create a unique experience, which emphasises the material aspects of infrastructures in shaping consumer understanding and behaviour. Larkin (2013) points out that the “materials of infrastructures ... bring about a sensory apprehension of existence” that possesses “the critical potential to reconfigure the territory of the common and allow for the insertion of new voices into political space” (p. 338). This critical potential is present in zero waste stores in various ways. Alice, for example, expands on her elaboration of what kind of message the shop floor conveyed to her:

“Interviewer: What did you mean exactly when you talked about ‘the message’?”

Alice: *Respect* the environment, respect the materials that it provides, and don’t squander them. Pay what it is worth and not dumping prices that come at the cost of the environment or unknown people. Another part of the message is, use it until it falls apart or as long as possible.

³⁸ See Quote 14 in Appendix D for the full statement.

³⁹ The use of second-hand components and the upcycling of materials stood for the extension of product lifespans and prevented the removal of virgin materials from the natural environment. This form of repurposing materials has become an increasingly popular branding element for sustainable businesses, such as mimycri (2018) and hej-hej-mats (2018).

Don't throw away things just because they're not "in" anymore, don't look stylish anymore, or because you crave something new. It's about *containing consumer behaviour* a little. Used things can also be great, sometimes even more beautiful than new things." (Alice, funder, Tante Olga: 74-75)

Ethical inferences drawn from the interplay of elements. This quote shows that the retail context plays an important role in signalling ethical meanings to consumers. The use of second-hand equipment and upcycled materials nurtures the care and "respect" that individuals hold towards the resources that nature provides. Indeed, the emphasis placed on the actual worth of things fosters a holistic understanding of sustainable consumption that runs counter to common consumer thinking. This can be seen in the intensive engagement with alternative market offerings, such as an enhanced focus on the positive traits of used goods (e.g. their beauty), which prevents the premature disposal of items due to fashion trends. In other words, a holistic appreciation of material resources arises from the context. It promotes reflexivity by opening up new thought patterns in the mind of consumers (see Thompson et al. 2018). Coherence between the different elements of the material environment is important in this process, as Jens describes:

“Interviewer: So the impression that it was self-made, that there were people behind it, and that it was minimalistic, reinforced this view that you are dealing with something that is sustainable?”

Jens: Yes, exactly. This impression ... that there's *something behind it*. You could see it. No matter if it was the interior or that ... everything was unpackaged – it *all had its reasons* ... Whenever I walked through stores before, I paid attention to this. Here I went in and *nothing messed with my mind* because everything was organic, completely unpackaged, and it was a family business. In other words, you know what you are supporting. It gave me an *incredibly good feeling* to be there and to go shopping.” (Jens, consumer, Tante Olga: 78-79)

Coherence and positive reinforcement. Jens' statement implies that other outlets do not offer the type of commensurate ethical environments that consumers seek. The fact that he felt good about shopping at Tante Olga because “it all had its reasons” and “nothing messed with [his] mind” suggests that regular supermarkets create conflicting demands towards sustainability (see also Tanner and Wölfing Kast 2003). It is easy to imagine that a single fair-trade product will be perceived as an alien object between scores of conventional goods, as it is drowned out by the flood of commercial messages stemming from the surrounding environment. These micro-cultural contexts are bound to create contradictory demands on people's attention and present a fragmented ethical space to consumers. The moral fabric of a product becomes just another buying criterion amongst many, essentially signalling that ethics is discretionary in consumer society. Zero waste stores help to avoid the cognitive dissonance that arises from fractured meanings and goal conflicts by aligning various ethical principles in a unified overall picture. Indeed, these findings extend previous research that has looked at the influence of congruent stimuli on purchase behaviour, by focusing on how various ethical

meanings work in concert to foster sustainable consumption (see Helmeffalk and Hultén 2017; Spence et al. 2014). In this respect, zero waste stores become ideational spaces, where various ethical meanings operate in harmony to reinforce virtuous behaviour. One way in which crowdfunding projects foster responsible conduct, consequently, can be seen in the creation of novel spaces that influence consumer thinking.

7.2.2. Alternative Forms of Provisioning: Dispensing Systems and Their Implications

7.2.2.1. Unpackaged Buying: Bulk Dispensing Systems

The materials used in the construction of the built environment and the creation history behind the stores are not the only features of the interior design that provide cues of the underlying zero waste discourse. Bulk bins are essential in deploying user interfaces that allow people to access unpacked goods and dominate the visual appearance of the shop floor. Bulk bins are large containers filled with particular products that enable consumers to extract the amount of produce they want to acquire. These dispensing systems operate on the basis of a leverage mechanism, through which consumers regulate the flow of the product from the container. Furthermore, since the bulk bins are transparent, goods are directly visible in their natural form and not enhanced through branding (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Bulk Bins in a Zero Waste Store



The same holds true for other dispensing mechanisms and containers that are used for goods that cannot be distributed through bulk bins. Herbs, spices, and chocolates are stored in large glass jars, where finer measurement is possible. Liquids, such as vinegar or olive oil, are extracted from glass or stainless steel containers. These work in a similar way to the bulk bins, only that they are operated with a tap (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Glass and Stainless Steel Containers in a Zero Waste Store



7.2.2.2. Dispensing Systems and Aesthetic Reflexivity: Sensing Is Believing

The dispensing systems are significant because they create different consumption experiences. They represent a radical departure from the brandscapes⁴⁰ encountered in mainstream supermarkets, where brands take centre stage. Artificial colours and trademarks are replaced by commodities in their natural form, which visually differentiates zero waste outlets. The bulk bins and other containers symbolise the zero waste discourse and send out a clear message: “No packaging, it is the product itself that counts!”. Jessica outlines the problems she faces in conventional supermarkets:

⁴⁰ The term “brandscape” is used here to describe the omnipresence of brands in the shopping environments and product categories of supermarkets, rather than the dominance of one brand theme in the retail context (cf. Sherry, JR. 1986; Thompson and Arsel 2004).

“I have realised that you can decide between spelt flour and rye flour, but not amongst various manufacturers at Tante Olga. I think that is very *pleasant*. This can probably be linked back to the excessive demand I experience in normal supermarkets. There is simply an overload of products that appear to be similar, but only carry a different logo and a lot of colours. They simply seek to trigger the consumer to buy products. I somehow find it more pleasant to have these natural products, as I can decide for myself and *do not have to react to any colours and captions*. [...] After a long day, it’s nicer to go shopping at Tante Olga because you basically *don’t have to make a decision*. I mean, only *for* a product and *not between* two products.” (Jessica, consumer, Tante Olga: 22-24)

Aesthetics of zero waste stores. This statement is interesting because it shows that the environment in zero waste outlets is experienced as pleasant *because* there are relatively few artificial colours, which are usually an integral part of shopping contexts. The focus shifts towards the natural appearance of goods, rather than artificial enhancements created by branded packaging that may be ideologically leveraged by organisations (see Sassoon 2010). This experiential aspect is neglected in most of the ethical consumption literature and may be one way to enchant ethical consumerism (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007b), rather than solely focusing on the superior moral status of a product, in the hopes that this will lead to the automatic adoption of responsible consumption patterns. Raising the emotional appeal of ethical consumption, in other words, may be more effective than rational appeals to the good character of individuals. Helen describes her reaction to a zero waste store in this way:

“I think the system they have there, the dispensing system, is pretty cool. It is simply a *beautiful place*. I mean, it is *fun* to go shopping there. [...] I think it has a *nice atmosphere*. It is not hectic, compared to what it is like in large shops ... It is also pleasant that you don’t have to choose between 25 different brands of rice. You simply pick the one that is available and that’s it. Yes, you don’t have to face such a gigantic selection. Everything is somehow more *relaxed*. It is also *optically engaging*, with these different containers in various sizes.” (Helen, funder, Tante Olga: 146-150)

Again, experiential aspects come to the fore. Helen’s description is filled with expressions that evoke a sensually appealing environment within zero waste stores. The interplay of the unique visual appearance created by the dispensing systems, especially regarding the unencumbered optical access to the commodity in its natural form, and the limited number of options available for purchase, produces an enjoyable ethical shopping experience. This observation is also in line with the literature on the paradox of choice outlined earlier (Section 3.1.), as reducing the total assortment size is perceived as liberating because the cognitive burden of making consumption decisions is reduced. It shows that simplified shopping contexts can yield positive affective responses, as opposed to the vast range of offerings available in supermarkets.

Zero waste infrastructures and aesthetic reflexivity. The insights that people attain within zero waste stores are not solely based on cognitive contemplations, but also reflect an aesthetic dimension that is rarely considered in studies on ethical consumer behaviour. Larkin (2013) writes that aesthetics provide an “embodied experience governed by the ways infrastructures produce the ambient conditions of everyday life ... a process by which the body, as much as the mind, apprehends what it is to be modern, mutable, and progressive” (p. 336-337). This facet of zero waste stores was evident in the inferences customers drew from the provisioning systems (e.g. bulk bins) and physical environments. The positive perception of the predominantly natural colours, the limited number of choices, the relaxed atmosphere, and the beauty of the stores were all instances in which bodily reactions supported the engagement with zero waste practices. Jessica’s and Helen’s statements are good examples of how zero waste stores aesthetically reinforce sustainable consumption through engaging visual environments and simple product ranges. The encounter with shopping contexts and the objects they harbour thus creates “aesthetic reflexivity” (Lash 2007). That is to say, the corporeal experiences that consumers have within these stores (e.g. feelings of fun, pleasantness, and calm) generate positive feedback loops that engrain responsible behaviour in everyday shopping procedures, not the least because the dispensing systems allow a different haptic involvement in the buying process.

Zero waste infrastructures versus brandscapes. This is a stark contrast to the shopping environments encountered in conventional supermarkets, where “responsible” options sit alongside mainstream alternatives that tend to disseminate consumerist meanings and intensify desires (see Biehl-Missal and Saren 2012). Indeed, brandscapes, which usually shape the experiences of people within these contexts, seek to generate “surplus value from affect” by channelling desires toward corporate ends (Wood and Ball 2013, p. 61). This does not mean that brandscapes propose a single, coherent marching route, but rather that various agents vie for control within them (ibid). In simpler terms, each brand seeks to attract the favour of consumers, leading to a messy ideational field, where each product is suffused with multiple meanings. The overall landscape of branding, nevertheless, cultivates a capitalistic metanarrative that operates through the “unity of contradiction” and “animates the discourses of commodities” (Goldman and Papson 2006, p. 251). Ethical considerations are usually just an afterthought in these commercial spaces. Zero waste infrastructures speak a different language, as they boost responsible consumption on many levels. They encourage people to refuse material-

intensive ways of satisfying their needs, to reduce unnecessary purchases and the premature disposal of goods, and to recycle or repurpose items that might not be fit for their original use anymore. In short, zero waste stores send out a clear message, as all aspects merge into a physically-anchored metanarrative that conveys ethical meanings to the consumer and prompts the uptake of sustainable behaviours. This indicates that self-organised value creation, here in the form of crowdfunding projects, promotes ethical consumption through raising the aesthetic appeal of responsible conduct.

7.2.2.3. Consumption Infrastructures and Their Affordances: Look What You Made Me Do

7.2.2.3.1. Zero Waste Infrastructures and Their Action Possibilities

The zero waste philosophy is not only evident in the absence of packaging, but also linked to the interaction possibilities granted by the dispensing systems. Waste reduction is possible because consumers control the amount of product they purchase. For example, instead of having to buy a standardised package of an ingredient, with a given volume of content, for a particular recipe, the customer can select the right amount. David picks up on this element:

“I like the principle of being able to buy food in amounts that I personally deem sensible. One aspect is the idea of *freedom and self-determination* regarding the actual amount, which, at the same time, is connected to sustainability thinking to me. First, the absence of packaging in itself, which I think is great. It is, however, also mirrored in this self-determination, the *ability to only acquire things in certain amounts*. Spices are a case in point. I don’t need to buy a large package that remains unused for centuries ... and at some point you just throw it out because it rots away in the cupboard.” (David, consumer, Tante Olga: 14)

Physical affordances granted by zero waste infrastructures. This excerpt clearly shows that control over purchasing quantities is both perceived as empowering on an individual level, as the words “freedom” and “self-determination” emphasise, but also representative of the zero waste discourse. More specifically, by being able to extract the amount needed for one’s own purposes, individuals avoid accumulating excessive volumes of a product that might end up not being used and are ultimately discarded. It, thereby, helps to prevent food waste, which is a major issue in Germany, as 18 million tonnes of food are thrown away every year (Deutsche Umwelthilfe 2018). David shows that this problem often arises unintentionally in his elaboration of the unwanted stockpiling of spices, as they are not available in any other format in regular supermarkets. The concept of affordances can be usefully deployed to understand this aspect of consumption infrastructures. Originating in the domain of psychology, Gibson (1979) explains that “affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what

it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (p.127). That is to say, the physical environment enables certain action possibilities, while others are constrained.⁴¹ In terms of shopping contexts, zero waste stores make it possible to buy things unpackaged and in desired volumes. Supermarkets, in contrast, stock many products in different sizes, but essentially precondition the amount of a good that a person can attain. Consumption levels are thus to a certain degree inscribed into retail environments.

Zero waste infrastructures, routines, and skills. Infrastructural arrangements have implications beyond facilitating shopping processes. They demand more or less effort from consumers, which can differ considerably across contexts. The following statement illustrates this point:

“It doesn’t have that *automaticity* to it, in the way that you can just fill your shopping cart at Aldi. [...] Yes, it’s *work* in the sense that you *have to prepare* your shopping trip ... you have to *get used to new habits*, new things, and new processes.” (Henrik, funder, Veedelskrämer: 61-63)

Dealing with zero waste infrastructures, as Henrik outlines, requires users to overthrow some of their established habits, as they can no longer revert to usual pick-and-drop shopping strategies that work well in standard supermarkets. Consumers have to plan what they take to zero waste stores, which removes the “automaticity” from the buying process and enables them to break out of entrenched behavioural routines (see Heiskanen and Pantzar 1997). In order to transport goods, appropriate containers have to be selected, which may vary depending on the amount and type of product that will be purchased. This is what Henrik refers to as the “work” that is required to prepare for a shopping trip. The additional effort linked to acquiring goods without packaging was mentioned by many respondents. Helen, for instance, discussed how her buying behaviour became more structured due to her visits to Tante Olga and how this kept “unnecessary things” off her shopping list.⁴² Mainstream supermarkets tend to promote spontaneous consumption, as products attract attention and another purchase is just an arm-length away, whereas this is problematic in zero waste stores because most goods cannot just be taken off the shelves. In this sense, they encourage users to consider what they need before they go out to buy something, which helps prevent excessive consumption. Other participants described the need for appropriate skills. Lara saw the move away from convenience goods to basic ingredients (e.g. falafel mixtures versus

⁴¹ It should be noted here that the term affordance, as described by Gibson (1979), is relational in its outlook, so it depends on each person whether or not action possibilities are perceived and acted upon.

⁴² See Quote 15 in Appendix D for the full statement.

chickpeas), as one requiring “creativity” and “learning by doing”.⁴³ Having to cook from scratch, then, presumes that people have a range of capabilities, including an imagination of what goods might be used for when they are not presented in a ready-to-use format. David finds that the knowledge of basic functional substances (e.g. natron) and the ability to produce household items at home made him more critical of what is “conveyed as necessary” and that “it doesn’t necessarily need an industry to make these products available”.⁴⁴ Zero waste stores, thereby, allow people to gain more independence from existing marketplace offerings by breeding do-it-yourself skills (see Ratto and Boler 2014). A change in the way provisioning systems are organised can have far-reaching consequences, where the disengagement with existing industrial supply structures requires a certain level of “reskilling” (see Giddens 1991, pp. 142–143). Leonardi and Barley (2008) argue that “technologies ... not only offer affordances that change work practices; they often change the nature of the work itself. When technologies are used in ways that allow people to do new things that would have been impossible before, tasks and roles frequently change” (p. 165). Although this study stems from the field of organisation studies, its key argument can be transferred to the consumption domain. On a broader level, the dispensing systems not only afford people the ability to buy things unpackaged, but also shape consumer behaviour by cultivating a structured and, ultimately, less wasteful approach to shopping. In addition, they may breed broader skill sets, as people have to take over certain productive tasks, which are otherwise embedded in business processes. In short, when self-organised value creation gives rise to novel material assemblages, it can change the nature of consumption itself.

7.2.2.3.2. Zero Waste Infrastructures and the Formation of Subjectivities

In addition and based on the above discussion, zero waste infrastructures produce a different subjectivities to those propagated in other retail outlets. The ability to interact with the dispensing systems offers real action possibilities, in the sense that a zero waste lifestyle is enabled through unpackaged shopping opportunities, and subtly signals that consumers should only use as much as they need to avoid resource overexploitation. This is mirrored in the following quote:

⁴³ Lara, funder, Unverpackt Lübeck: 34-36.

⁴⁴ David, consumer, Tante Olga: 85.

“Overall, you think more *consciously* about everything that you take. You don’t just randomly pick five packs of almonds ... and then gobble them down. Instead, you do everything more *deliberately* and *aware* ... You *intentionally* take more time to shop well and buy good products, which you then eat and perceive more *mindfully* when you’re at home. You don’t buy more and devour it because it’s on offer and cheap ... Yes, it certainly generates a better outlook on life.” (Ella, funder, Tante Olga: 103)

Dispensing systems and mindfulness. Dispensing systems are not only significant because they offer consumers control over purchasing quantities, but also because they lead to greater appreciation of what is acquired. Ella’s description is filled with references to mindfulness and the positive feelings created by deliberately using high-quality products. Even the slower shopping experience is viewed as a contrast and counterbalance to everyday life, distinguishing the zero waste shop as a place where one can calm down and temporarily retreat from hectic daily routines. The shopping context affords consumption processes that allow customers to decelerate and reflect on their behaviour and, thereby, provides a critical counter-node to those found in conventional outlets. This deceleration by itself can be of considerable value to consumers (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019) and may be linked to the problematisation of particular forms of consumption (Sassatelli and Davolio 2010). Ella also indicates how cheap products or offers encourage faster consumption, as consumers show less appreciation for what they acquire (i.e. products are devoured and gobbled down), compared to when each unit is paid separately, of high quality, and placed in a retail context suffused with ethical meanings. At first sight this may appear to conflict with consumers’ tendencies to try out new things (Kahn 1995). Valerie, however, mentioned that her local zero waste store offered her the opportunity to experiment and combine a variety of products, without having to engage in wasteful overconsumption, as leftovers do not arise due to unmet expectations. Valerie further described how her children paid more attention to what they consumed when a small bag of mixed sweets was bought compared to larger, standardised packages, which again highlights that appreciation facilitates slower, conscious consumption.⁴⁵ The encounter with zero waste infrastructures, then, can nurture “mindful mindsets” that lead to “temperance in acquisitive, repetitive and aspirational consumption” (Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas 2011, p. 30) and promote sustainable behaviours by implicitly reinforcing the image of the critically-aware, responsible consumer.

⁴⁵ See Quote 16 in Appendix D for the statement made by Valerie.

Infrastructures and subjectivities. The fact that infrastructures are implicated in the production of subjectivities is often ignored in the literature on ethical consumption and offers an interesting view on how material constellations affect the uptake of certain lifestyles. Simone (2004) writes that particular “spaces are linked to specific identities, functions, lifestyles, and properties so that the spaces ... become legible for specific people at given places and times” (p. 409). This means that material assemblages are by no means neutral backgrounds that simply present themselves to individuals, but rather carry within them particular idealisations. Von Schnitzler (2013), for example, investigated how particular technical systems, in her case water meters in South Africa, influenced the way people behave. She shows that “ethical regimes” are imbued in infrastructural interfaces, which seek to cultivate self-monitoring citizens that control the amount of water they consume autonomously. Similarly, Anand’s (2011) analysis of water supplies in Mumbai demonstrates how a particular form of “hydraulic citizenship” arises from infrastructural constellations. In other words, it is important to look at the types of behaviours that are, to a certain extent, inscribed into infrastructures.

Zero waste infrastructures versus brandscapes. While zero waste stores promote more mindful consumption through the deployment of repurposed resources and bulk bins, mainstream retail contexts, by design, privilege other modes of conduct. Brandscapes represent not only an ideological interface (Borghini et al. 2009), which carries brand meanings to the consumer, but can also be seen as a form of governmentality, capturing individuals’ attention in particular consumption domains (see also Soneryd and Uggla 2015). They do not adhere to holistic ethical principles in the way that zero waste stores generally advocate less material-intensive ways of satisfying needs. Their focus lies on generating profits through stimulating more consumption and facilitating swift exchanges, where prices and convenience are the main decision criteria. Pick-and-drop shopping styles, ready-made food, and recurrent rebates, for instance, are characteristic for modern supermarkets. This promotes individuals to think primarily about personal gains and how to become efficient choosers, especially in relation to maximising the amount of goods that can be obtained under given budget constraints. If they encourage responsible consumption at all, they do so within particular categories, such as by providing fair-trade fruits and vegetables so that they may be selected over non-certified produce. The different emphases can even be deduced from the brand names of companies. Conventional supermarkets, for example, feature monetary references in their logos, such as the word “discount” (e.g. Netto Marken-Discount, Penny, and Aldi

(Albrecht Discount)), whereas zero waste stores frequently use terms that symbolically invoke the underlying philosophy (e.g. Original Unverpackt, Stückgut, Ohne, Lose Laden, Das Gramm). Given the dominance of retail chains in the grocery market, it is hardly surprising that sustainable consumer behaviour has not spread more widely. Mainstream consumption infrastructures favour the image of the self-interested consumer, who can be lured in by offerings and is not put off by moral reservations about the potential impact these might have on the environment. The “preferred readings” (Hutchby 2001) engrained in them, quite simply, are predominantly consumerist in nature. They represent three of the four forms of governmentality outlined earlier (see Section 3.4.2.), as visualisations, technologies, and constructed identities are all channelled in favour of corporate interests. Infrastructures, as a result, do not only shape people’s capacities for action (Appel, Anand, and Gupta 2015), but also naturalise certain ways of life. As long as the majority of shopping decisions are made within contexts that are geared towards ever escalating levels of consumption, sustainable practices will continue to struggle to make their way into the everyday lives of people.

In summary, bulk dispensing systems afford consumers the ability to acquire everyday items without packaging and in the desired amounts. They implicitly send the message that one should consume mindfully, value the things that are consumed, and avoid the unnecessary disposal of goods by buying too much. This corresponds to two key principles of the zero waste discourse, namely: *Refuse* and *Reduce*. People should refuse wastefulness and reduce their overall consumption not only by circumventing packaged items, but also by only taking what they need. Conventional supermarkets generally do not offer these opportunities, as they are geared towards efficiency, by allowing people to quickly fill their shopping carts with standardised products and little prior preparation. There are only a few products that come without packaging in these contexts, making it impossible to practice a zero waste lifestyle. Zero waste stores, in contrast, are specifically designed for this purpose and provide a physical space in which people can enact these principles. As such, consumption infrastructures simultaneously provide action possibilities and influence the conduct of consumers through privileging certain subjectivities. Since zero waste infrastructures emerged as a result of crowdfunding campaigns, a form of self-organised value creation, the first few sections already suggest a positive response to the third research question, as ethical behaviours manifested themselves in these novel outlets.

7.2.3. The Objects in Zero Waste Infrastructures: Enlighten Me

7.2.3.1. Viva La Zero Waste: The Zero Waste Lifestyle in Various Consumption Domains

Another major component that materialises the zero waste discourse can be found in the goods that are available within the stores. One obvious and instantly apparent aspect is that food in all forms is unpackaged and accessible through the dispensing systems that were previously discussed. However, the zero waste discourse is applied to a large variety of consumption domains, facilitating zero waste practices in many areas of everyday life. Household items are a case in point. Cleaning equipment, washing liquids, basic chemicals, and detergents can be extracted through pump systems, enabling a waste-free cleaning routine. Another application area is cooking, where scrubs and other utensils are displayed without layers of packaging (see Figure 5). As these things wear down over time and need to be replaced relatively frequently, they are made of natural materials, which biodegrade. The scrubs, for example, are made of wood and natural fibres. Hence, whenever waste is unavoidable, it is ensured that the resources are reintegrated into ecological cycles when products reach the end of their lifespans. This adheres to the last principle of the zero waste discourse, *Rot*, which foresees that organic material should be returned to the ecosystem.

Figure 5 – Household Items Available in a Zero Waste Store



Personal care products are another major category covered by zero waste stores. Representing consumables that people use on a daily basis, various options enable consumers to move away from single-use plastic containers. Shampoo and soaps are sold as solid bars, while toothpaste is available in tablet form and needs to be chewed to clean the teeth. Deodorants are offered as creams and plastic toothbrushes are replaced by sustainable bamboo versions, a fast growing natural resource that biodegrades and can be fed back into the ecosystem (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Personal Care Items Available in a Zero Waste Store



Finally, zero waste stores provide various lifestyle tools, which enable consumers to transfer zero waste principles into diverse consumption domains. All stores offer a variety of containers that can be used to transport goods in other settings (see Figure 7). These are usually made from long-lasting materials, such as glass or stainless steel. It is, consequently, very common to find metal lunch boxes or water bottles stocked in the shelves. In addition, alternatives for everyday single-use items are available. Metal straws, pocket cutlery sets, and cotton carrier bags are just a few examples. An interesting substitute for cling foil can be found in bee wraps, which are made out of wax and can be used over and over again. They allow zero waste practices to take hold in many different contexts, such as eating out or home storage, and reflect the first three dimensions of the zero waste discourse (i.e. *Refuse, Reduce, Reuse*). Lifestyle tools, then, support individuals in their everyday struggle against waste and permit them to consume responsibly.

Figure 7 – Lifestyle Tools: Products that Enable Consumers to Avoid Waste



The types of products sold within zero waste stores complement the ethical meanings conveyed by the physical environment. Regional produce, fair-trade and organic certification, as well as the support of small manufacturers unite many different sustainability issues. Even usually stigmatized goods, such as tampons or other menstruation-related products, are substituted by reusable inlays or menstruation cups. The appeal of these products is sometimes even enhanced by social causes. The Ruby Cup, for instance, is sold by a social business operating a “Buy One, Give One” model, where one menstruation cup is donated to a young woman in a developing region with every purchase (see www.rubycup.com). In other words, the objects that flow through zero waste infrastructures are crucial for creating a coherent ethical image. If the goods were simply offered without packaging, but would otherwise be produced under exploitive conditions, such as through the use of child labour or soil-degrading harvesting methods, it would not be in the service of sustainability. In mainstream supermarkets ethical products often tackle just one problem (e.g. pre-packaged, organic tomatoes from abroad) and send conflictual messages to consumers. Consumption infrastructures thus offer more or less appropriate lifestyle resources to consumers.

7.2.3.2. *Object-Induced Reflexivity: New Thought Patterns and Critical Imagination*

The objects found within zero waste stores are important for another reason. The diversity of life domains covered by the product range enhances consumer reflexivity, as people get inspiration for new practices and increasingly question taken-for-granted processes that usually escape critical scrutiny. The development of new thought patterns crystallises in a statement made by Ella:

“It is a completely *different outlook on life*. This doesn’t just apply to the shop, but it may also make you *want to change* your electricity provider. Then you start thinking about the bank, where you hold your account. [...] [The opening of the store] was the starting point to *intensify these efforts* and to change things. This is because when you go inside and have a look at all the stuff, it suddenly starts to dawn on you what sorts of *alternatives exist*. It starts to become a kind of addiction, where you check what else you can improve at home. [...] Yes, subtleties, like toothpaste and toothbrushes, which *might not cross your mind* initially ... or cleaning agents. That was a major change, as you usually have a separate bottle for everything. They simply have the utensils for mixing something together ... You get *great inspiration* there.” (Ella, funder, Tante Olga: 35-41)

Objects and cognitive reflexivity. The above quote is typical for the reactions that consumers have when they enter zero waste stores. Ella’s description is filled with references of how Tante Olga encouraged her to apply zero waste principles in more and more areas of life. Starting off with everyday items for personal care and household cleaning, the shop inspired her to scrutinise practices in unrelated consumption domains, such as power provisioning and banking. The encounter with physical objects played a crucial part in this process. She mentions that looking “at all the stuff” made her realise that “alternatives exist”, which led her to further improve her lifestyle and pay attention to things that she previously did not consider. The plurality of the offerings suffused with zero waste meanings presented in a tightly-bound locality, as in her case, creates a “different outlook on life”. In other words, the material objects carry latent reflexivity potential within them that can induce behavioural changes through opening up new ways of seeing the world. Even though the influence of things in shaping social worlds has been well established, such as in the works on Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2008), this aspect is often downplayed in ethical consumption. The strong focus on individual agency found within these studies often sees the main barriers to responsible behaviour in the lack of knowledge or other personal constraining factors (see, for example, Bray, Johns, and Kilburn 2011). The discussion above suggests that a context that signals ethical meanings to the consumer may actually recruit people for certain lifestyle practices. More specifically, behavioural spillovers (Dolan and Galizzi 2015) may occur through the exposure to ethical objects. Previous research has already demonstrated that “other products” have an impact on the demand for conventional goods (Shocker, Bayus, and Kim 2004). The findings here

suggest that ethical decisions are equally affected by lifestyle resources that help consumers transfer zero waste thinking into different categories. Hence, instead of generalised values dictating the uptake of sustainable consumption (Thøgersen and Ölander 2003), zero waste infrastructures may inspire people to apply sustainable practices in various domains.

Information resources and critical imagination. These forms of reflexivity are desired by zero waste stores. Not only do they provide the necessary goods and tools for lifestyle changes, but they also create a space for other discourses that are linked to zero waste thinking. For example, the stores feature: boxes for recycling old gadgets, free depositories for books and other sharing items, water refill stations, flyers for green energy providers and local farming initiatives, or information leaflets for planned demonstrations (see Figure 8). Several outlets also acted as collection sites for community-supported agriculture schemes or hosted regional suppliers from time to time. The zero waste discourse is, therefore, embedded in a broader nexus of ideas surrounding sustainability and alternative market constellations. Conventional supermarkets usually do not provide a stage for these concerns, as they blend out all debates that could negatively affect their commercial interests.

Figure 8 – Information Sources: Objects Tapping into Ethical Debates or Issues



The fact that zero waste stores harbour many different ethical objects also enhances the critical imagination of consumers. The confrontation with concrete alternatives does not only highlight different action possibilities, but also foregrounds the hidden conventions of existing consumption infrastructures that usually remain unchallenged. Several respondents picked up on this:

“If you see that you can have all these things unpackaged ... this encourages you to reflect, ‘It doesn’t have to be this way.’ If I go to a normal supermarket, I *notice* that I think, “Okay, does it really have to be packaged?”” (Valerie, funder, Veedelskrämer: 44)

“Well, because of [Tante Olga] ... I thought more about certain issues, like packaging. When I went shopping, I paid more attention to it and realised, “Oh wow, crazy, this much is actually packaged!” You *don’t normally realise* this. If you do it every day, then *it is normal*, you know?” (Jens, consumer, Tante Olga: 93)

The statements emphasise that the encounter with zero waste stores affects how mainstream supermarkets are perceived. Valerie points out that being exposed to various unpackaged goods helped her overcome preconceptions of how things can or even should be sold. That is to say, unquestioned dimensions of shopping contexts come under critical scrutiny, as their usual composition is disputed. It is interesting to see that Valerie and Jens both experienced a kind of epiphany when they entered conventional supermarkets after their visits to zero waste stores. They suddenly realised how much packaging was present, which is an observation that previously escaped their consciousness. Jens, in particular, highlights that one would not “normally realise” this, as packaging is taken as a natural fact, it is, quite simply, seen as a part of mainstream consumption infrastructures. In this sense, zero waste stores hold considerable emancipatory potential that can lead people to question existing structures (i.e. “It doesn’t have to be this way.”). The engagement with these ethical retail contexts represents what Thompson et al. (2018) call a “destabilizing event” or “moments of reflexive awareness ... whereby conventional ... norms and distinctions are revealed to be disempowering sociocultural constructions” (p.589-590). In this case, people start to view self-interested shopping styles in the light of zero waste ideals, which unveil the environmental implications of their consumption (i.e. “Oh wow, crazy, this much is actually packaged!”). Unthought thought patterns become apparent because ethical considerations move to the centre of attention. The focus shifts from conveniently acquiring everyday goods on-the-go to minimising the amount of waste produced, rendering mainstream supermarkets problematic, as there is almost no way to buy things without packaging. Zero waste infrastructures, therefore, produce “critically reflexive consumers” (ibid) that constantly think about how to enact sustainable behaviours in new ways.

Objects and aesthetic reflexivity. The previous paragraphs outlined how zero waste stores heighten the critical awareness of consumers. However, this is not the only way in which they encourage behavioural change. The sensory appeal of the goods may further strengthen the predominantly cognitive contemplations just described. Jessica, for instance, explains how aesthetic considerations come into play:

“I think this can be traced back to my *senses*. First, the sense of smell. The smells there are very, very pleasant. I believe this comes from the foodstuffs within the store and the soap products, which are all not synthetic. Second, the sense of sight. I think it is incredibly pleasant to have everything in its natural form and that you don’t have so many different colours. This can essentially be traced back to *aesthetic aspects*, since one does not get so overwhelmed by the external influences usually linked to packaging.” (Jessica, consumer, Tante Olga: 18)

The fact that the products are unpackaged shapes the bodily experiences of people in zero waste stores. Smells emanate from goods because they are not trapped in airtight containers and their natural appearance contrasts with the artificially-coloured brandscapes encountered in mainstream supermarkets. Jessica highlights how these aspects create an aesthetically pleasing environment. The objects within the store thus do not only encourage people to change their behaviour through the development of new cognitions, but also nudge them through bodily sensations. In simpler terms, a soap bar may not just be bought because it is unpackaged, and thus deemed morally superior, but also because it smells nice and animates people to give it a try. Hence, the objects found within consumption infrastructures promote aesthetic reflexivity (Lash 2007). It also shows that the sensual appreciation of consumption contexts leads to embodied experiences (see Thompson and Hirschman 1998; Yakhlef 2015), which can influence the uptake of responsible behaviours as new thought patterns emerge (see Gärtner 2013). The symbiosis of ethical aesthetics and the awareness of market alternatives, which tap into and address various ethical discourses, creates a reinforcing interpretational cycle that extends the moral deliberations and behaviours of consumers into different domains. Zero waste stores, as a consequence, reflexively mobilise people to alter their consumption routines, lending further support to the third research question.

7.3. Organisational Processes that Shape the Character of Consumption Infrastructures: The Plane Behind the Field

7.3.1. Holistic Sourcing Strategies: The Re-Localisation of Distribution Chains, Simple Product Ranges, and the Zero Waste Philosophy

The previous section outlined the material qualities of zero waste stores and how they communicate particular ethical meanings and mindsets to individuals. The physical forms that consumption infrastructures take, however, do not enable sustainable lifestyles by themselves. The organisational processes that determine what products are available within these stores, and from where and whom they are sourced, are another crucial puzzle piece. Regional sourcing arrangements help avoid the indirect use of resources that result from long transport routes and related problems, such as the perishability of goods. Hannah captures several aspects linked to this issue in her elaboration of Ohne's sourcing strategy:

“It is one of our most important principles to have short value chains. [...] Ideally ... our supply chains ... are based on a *deposit scheme* [Mehrweg]. For this to happen, the producers and manufacturers need to be from the region, as a deposit system would not make any sense otherwise. [...] The containers and everything that comes with it in terms of food safety, are incredibly *costly over long distances* ... If the producer, however, directly delivers the goods, which is often the case for us, a deposit scheme, for one, makes more sense in terms of *CO2 emissions*, as the distance is shorter, even if the weight is higher. This is because we do not work with plastic as a material, but rather with glass and metal. [...] Another reason is that we think it is important to *support the local economy* and farmers ... In other words, there are not only economic and logistic reasons, but it is to a large extent also based on our desire to do our part in *trailblazing the way* [for regional products]. We *want to show* our customers ... that there are great farmers in Upper Bavaria ... and that it is *possible* to consume things without horrendous footprints, if one is willing to accept that these are not available year-round and perhaps not in the amounts one might be accustomed to.” (Hannah, initiator, Ohne: 44-52)

Regional supply arrangements and the zero waste philosophy. This passage is representative of the amount of thinking that goes into the back-end processes that make zero waste concepts truly unique and sustainable. Hannah touches on several points in her discussion, starting, perhaps most importantly, with the environmental footprint linked to deposit schemes. Reusable containers are usually made of glass or stainless steel, which weigh more than the single-use packages at regular supermarkets. Given this physical difference, a glass container that travels long distances produces more transport-related emissions compared to a plastic one, as more energy needs to be expended to move the goods from one place to another. However, it outscores plastic packaging in terms of longevity and recyclability, reflecting both the *Reuse* and *Recycle* dimensions of the zero waste discourse, especially because no materials are put into landfills, burnt, or downcycled, which is a fate that many single-use items share (see Montero 2017). This explains why local solutions are preferred, as they avoid these

problems by rooting deposit schemes in regional distribution networks. Moreover, it reveals the holistic sourcing strategies behind zero waste stores, which consider resource expenditures along entire commodity chains. They, thereby, tap into various sustainability discourses related to total material requirements and dematerialisation, which aim to lower the overall throughput of economies (Bringezu et al. 2004; Steinberger, Krausmann, and Eisenmenger 2010). Interestingly, Hannah also outlines the importance of supporting local providers and raising consumer awareness of how needs can be met on a regional level. This might not be possible around the year, as seasonal limitations constrain the availability of goods (e.g. German strawberries). Yet again, this reflects the *Refuse* dimension of the zero waste discourse, as mass-produced, constantly-available products are rejected. Considerable effort has to go into explaining when certain goods are in season or what suitable local alternatives exist, as certain everyday items are tightly integrated in the daily routines of people and have become naturalised over time (e.g. chia versus linseeds). The focus on offering only one variant of every product also reflects the purchasing philosophies of the stores. Sonja, one of the co-founders of Stückgut, highlights the benefits of a smaller assortment:

“We don’t actually have such a vast product range. There are many *distinct options*, but every item is *only available once*. I don’t have to decide between 10 sorts of cornflakes or 23 types of mustard, rather we make a preselection. I am under the impression, the customers that come here really trust us that we have thought about which products to stock and from whom we source them. [...] It is somehow a relief [for customers]. One could also say, it offers a higher quality of life, as you are not constantly forced into ... decisions.” (Sonja, initiator, Stückgut: 58 + 67)

Simple product ranges and coherent ethical philosophies. The simplicity propagated by zero waste stores has several implications. First, as Sonja outlines, less decisions are “forced” onto consumers, which makes the shopping process less demanding and generates “a higher quality of life”. This links back to the experiential aspects described in relation to the dispensing systems and how they reduce the cognitive burden placed on consumers, when less colours and brands compete for attention (see Section 7.2.2.2.). In other words, the assortment decisions made by the store owners set the ground for reflexivity, as they deliberately narrow the range of options available within the store. Second, the diligence that Sonja describes in selecting appropriate suppliers clearly conveys that only those products that align with the high ethical standards of the stores are made available. This allows consumers to place their trust in the purchasing policies of the stores and prevents the ethical conundrums that arise in conventional supermarkets, where trade-offs need to be made between alternative products and ethical criteria (e.g. heavily-packaged organic versus unpackaged conventional food). The multiplicity of issues that are considered in the sourcing arrangements, in short,

reinforce the general image that zero waste stores do everything in their power to enable sustainable consumption.

7.3.2. Networked Infrastructures and the Need for Intermediate Infrastructural Arrangements

Zero waste stores do not operate in isolation. In order to bring their philosophies to life, they need the support of other market actors that accommodate their sourcing requirements. The demand for zero waste deliveries leads to a focus on predominantly regional providers, which is reflected in special supply arrangements:

“We have a regional beekeeper, which produces Bioland-Honey here in Cologne, and has made a stainless steel hobcock available to us, from which our customers can extract the honey. He always brings the honey in reusable buckets and *refills* the hobcock. [...] Then there is Memo, an amazing eco-friendly office supplier, which keeps sending boxes back and forth. Although these are plastic boxes, at least they are not creating any packaging waste because they are *always returned* to them. I think our supplier for toothpaste tablets has a similar arrangement, only that they use silver envelopes, which can be *used over and over again*. Yes, reusable envelopes.”⁴⁶ (Dinah, initiator, Tante Olga: 53)

Networked infrastructures and zero waste deliveries. The quote demonstrates that deposit schemes are a popular solution to prevent waste. Dinah gives various examples of how reusable containers are employed to avoid packaging waste, when products are in transit or restocked. The words she uses, such as “refills”, “always returned”, and “used over and over again”, are characteristic for the type of cradle-to-cradle thinking (see Braungart and McDonough 2008) that goes into the back-end processes of these stores. They stand for a circular economy, where products are part of a closed loop system and, once discarded, constantly reintegrated into production cycles to minimise the impact of business activities on the environment (Govindan, Soleimani, and Kannan 2015; Lieder and Rashid 2016; Souza 2012). Without the containers and the assistance of external partners, these supply agreements would not be possible, as the ability to return empty vessels and to reuse them for future deliveries depends on supportive distribution networks. Graham and Marvin (2001) refer to “networked infrastructures” to show how technological systems cluster together. A public transport system, for instance, is not only dependent on functioning rails or roads, but also electricity infrastructures that power the vehicles travelling on them. Similarly, consumption infrastructures rely on interlocking supply systems, which cannot easily be untangled.

⁴⁶ The German words used for reusable bucket and reusable envelope were “Pendeleimer” and “Pendelumschlag”, respectively. “Pendel” means pendulum in German, which captures the idea behind reusable containers very well: they are like a pendulum swinging back and forth between the supplier and the store.

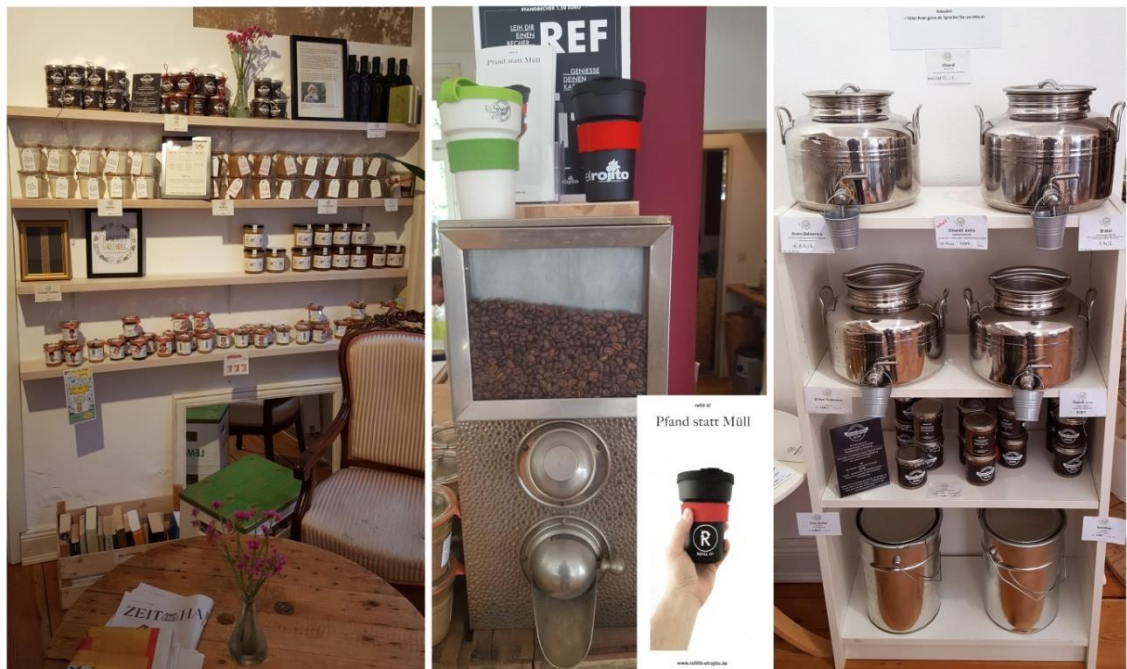
This is particularly true for the operation of sustainable supply chains, as these require extensive collaboration between different stakeholders (Seuring and Müller 2008; Vachon and Klassen 2006, 2008). In the case of zero waste stores, different arrangements are required compared to standard supermarkets, as they seek to cut out all forms of unnecessary waste in the delivery process, which was especially evident in the exchange of reusable containers during deliveries (i.e. hobbocks, buckets, and envelopes). These business practices are not found at, indeed probably not even possible in, conventional supermarkets, where the sales potential and efficient handling of offerings outweigh ethical considerations. The study of consumption infrastructures, consequently, goes beyond organisational boundaries to consider how interdependencies between market players affect the lifestyles of consumers.

Responsible providers and supply artefacts. The previously described supply arrangements also offer other benefits to zero waste stores. Sonja described the advantages of having a close relationship with a local coffee roaster, El Rojito, which replenished the coffee supply in their store with reusable buckets.⁴⁷ First, the supplier was not an unknown, distant entity, but rather an identifiable person that may be approached by customers during seminars. The supply arrangement becomes a lot more graspable, as people associate the origin of a product with a regional player, who could potentially be put under more scrutiny than anonymous commodity chains (see Princen 2002). This lends further credibility to the store, as the primacy of ethical considerations in the supply process becomes evident. Second, El Rojito runs by the slogan “Kaffee solidarisch” (that is “Coffee in solidarity”) and is organised as a registered association that seeks to cultivate fair trade practices with Latin America (see www.el-rojito.de). This mission is reflected in the names of their products, as “Hamburger Fairmeister” or “Biologo” pay tribute to both fair trade and organic supply arrangements. Third, the organisation also runs a reusable cup scheme in Hamburg that addresses the problems created by on-the-go coffee consumption. Stückgut is one of the growing number of shops joining the scheme as collection and distribution sites that help people avoid single-use coffee containers. In this sense, the providers are not just local partners, but their responsible sourcing strategies supplement the ethical image of the zero waste stores. Finally, these supply aspects are communicated through flyers within the store and, thereby, become part of the surrounding retail context. The stainless steel hobbocks

⁴⁷ See Quote 17 in Appendix D.

and other reusable containers have the additional advantage that they act as visual proof that zero waste principles guided the sourcing arrangements behind the products. Consumers are made aware of these constellations not only through the physical presence of the containers, but also through other cues, such as labels and talks with staff members (see Figure 9). Put differently, the zero waste philosophy can be experienced by consumers, as they interact with artefacts of the supply process through the dispensing mechanisms. They are the tangible manifestations and hallmarks of the zero waste discourse,⁴⁸ which differentiate these outlets from conventional supermarkets. In this way, aesthetic reflexivity even arises from sourcing arrangements.

Figure 9 – Regional Produce and a Coffee Deposit Scheme in a Zero Waste Store



⁴⁸ The aspects include: *Refuse* offerings that cannot be sourced regionally and avoid single-use items; *Reduce* the overall consumption of resources through lean supply chains and by enabling on-demand purchases; *Reuse* containers and employ deposit schemes to extend the lifetimes of provisioning systems.

7.3.3. Coherent Ethical Perceptions Arising from Holistic Sourcing Arrangements

Customers are well aware of the significant amount of work that goes into the development of a well-rounded, sustainable product range. The following interview excerpt from a user of Tante Olga illustrates this point:

“I know Olga is very strict about these things. She ... is generally an advocate of ‘Let’s only buy regional products’. If you make a demand for an exotic product, such as chia seeds, she is *reluctant* and says, ‘It has such a *long supply chain*.’ The same goes for quinoa, which isn’t produced under fair conditions. It took them a long *time to find a supplier* from the Münsterland, who also offers it ... This shows me that they pay a lot of attention to these things ... I can put my *trust* in them and assume that they are equally *rigorous* when it comes to other products. [...] A company, which focuses on consumption, would add quinoa to their assortment straight away because ... you could make money out of it. They didn’t do that. Instead, they waited until they could offer an *optimal solution* to their customers. One they could back in terms of sustainability.” (Alice, funder, Tante Olga: 17-23)

Ethical inferences drawn from sourcing arrangements. Consumers make inferences based on the sourcing constellations they encounter at the stores. First, consider Alice’s recollection of a discussion she had with Olga, a co-founder of Tante Olga. She saw the reluctance towards including products that were demanded (i.e. chia seeds), but did not meet the high standards set by the managers, as an indicator that zero waste goals overruled profit considerations. It signalled that waste avoidance was the guiding principle behind assortment decisions, as an “optimal solution” was sought and no compromises were made in relation to sustainability concerns. The “rigorous” sourcing strategy allowed customers to place their trust in the shop. Conventional outlets, which are funded through mainstream finance and subject to return expectations, would probably not place themselves under such strict ethical regimes because they “could make money” out of offering “exotic” goods. A similar observation was made by Jessica, who discussed how a “diligent” zero waste concept led to positive feelings for her. More specifically, she thought the in-depth investigation of suppliers and the attentiveness to multiple issues (i.e. unpackaged, organic, regional origin) created a “coherent overall picture” that provided a holistic ethical action space.⁴⁹ Similarly, the limited product ranges in zero waste stores challenge the consumption habits of users:

“I think it is good that they constantly have discussions about the number of products that really need to be available and if they can allow themselves to *educate their customers* whether it is *absolutely necessary* to be able to attain ... red rice from China, even if it is unpackaged and organic. [...] The founders ... reflect over and over again if a product they want to offer is delivered in the most sustainable way possible, from the manufacturer up to their store ... [A product] should not have to travel ... thousands of kilometres just to enable a varied diet with no packaging. I know other concepts, where it’s just about sourcing something that is organic that doesn’t come in a plastic bag, but otherwise it is flown in from all over the world.” (Eveline, consumer, Tante Olga: 35-37)

⁴⁹ See Quote 18 in Appendix D for the full statement made by Jessica.

The statement shows that zero waste stores are not just about being able to avoid packaging at the point of purchase. Generally, the stores encourage their customers to question the number of products they really need by making a careful preselection of goods. Eveline touches on this point in her discussion of red rice from China. As this example illustrates, consumers are to a certain degree “educated” by the stores through the organisational logics that lie behind the offerings. The sourcing arrangements symbolically represent the *Refuse* dimension of the zero waste discourse and signal to consumers that they should reject unsustainable products, rather than betray their ideals. Eveline stresses this by describing how products should not be “flown in from all over the world”, as this would negatively affect their environmental footprint. Zero waste stores, therefore, prompt people to consider the bigger picture behind their consumption through setting good examples. They do not fulfil every customer demand, as supermarkets tend to do by having everything ready to buy at any time of the year. The totality of sustainability thinking encountered in these stores is rarely, if at all found, in other outlets, suggesting that infrastructures arising from collective market entrepreneuring do not only establish new action possibilities for consumers, but also shape business practices, as the spirit of the projects lives on within the organisations.

Standards embedded in infrastructures and their implications. Consumption infrastructures are, therefore, best thought of as rooted in wider organisational logics that shape their material form and structure. The one-option policy, the regional supply arrangements, the rigour and effort going into the constant improvement of the assortment in zero waste stores are all aspects that flow into the overall perception of these places. The business philosophies determine what objects ultimately are available to consumers and what action possibilities exist for them. The provision of all kinds of goods in unpackaged form, including personal care, cleaning, and household products, that is central to zero waste stores, would not be possible at conventional supermarkets. This points towards the broader issue of how infrastructures frame and influence consumption patterns through the standards and policies engrained in them. Akenji et al. (2016) stress that “shifting to sustainable lifestyles requires ... reviewing the choice architecture and infrastructure enabling and constraining lifestyles” (p. 6). If we think about usual high-street supermarkets from the perspective of zero waste users, several constraints become apparent. Leaving the obvious amount of packaging waste that branded goods create aside, the constant stock of all sorts of products can only be ensured if they are flown in from all over the world (e.g. strawberries during winter

season), which uses up resources in transport. This type of indirect consumption is rarely problematised and often out of the purview of people's attention. Other items might simply not be sold, such as deodorant creams, toothpaste tablets, and menstruation cups. In other words, the field of possibilities is delimited by decisions that are made further upstream, as dictated by the business conventions and standards embedded in supply systems (see also Star 1999). These taken-for-granted processes affect the use of infrastructures and, in the end, their sustainability. Aside from consumption infrastructures, this has also been demonstrated in research on electricity provisioning systems, which entrench unsustainable levels of energy use, as efficiency gains do not align with prevailing industry practices (Knoeri, Steinberger, and Roelich 2016). Tonkiss (2015) rightly outlines that “the supply of infrastructural goods implies certain kinds of moral economy” (p. 384) that are mostly beyond the control of individual actors and restrict the action possibilities within them. The impact that back-end processes have on consumption patterns should, therefore, not be underestimated. The fact that the zero waste stores, which were launched as a result of crowdfunding campaigns, pioneered new business practices, provides further evidence for Research Question 3, as the next section will elaborate.

7.3.4. Zero Waste Infrastructures and Market Evolution: Practice Innovation, Institutional Reflexivity, and Discourse Dispersion

The previous sections looked at the holistic sourcing strategies behind zero waste stores, how these place specific demands on supply chains, and how consumers are influenced by these constellations. Implementing zero waste philosophies creates unique challenges for the store managers, as they cannot draw on standard market offerings in the way that supermarkets just add or drop stock keeping units from their portfolio.

Wiebke outlines several of these:

“We only buy in bulk. You cannot take that for granted with all suppliers, which means that you have to do a lot of research on what you can source, from where, and at what quality. [...] We are trying to gradually fine tune our approach for every product: ‘Can we move it closer?, What can we improve?’ [...] We realised, however, that there are a *ton of problems*, which we all have to tackle individually ... There is a lot of work related to the suppliers and our own calculations ... Then you have to deal with logistics: ‘How do you get it to the store?, Does it make sense if to have a dedicated supply run?, Are there any supply chains that could be combined?’ It entails a whole slew of changes to develop a *holistic approach*. Nonetheless, I think if you take it step by step and *work together with other people* to set an example... it certainly moves in the right direction.” (Wiebke, initiator, Unverpackt Lübeck: 78-84)

Pioneering new business practices. There are many problems linked to implementing a holistic zero waste philosophy. Wiebke describes the amount of work she needs to put into finding regional providers that meet her requirements. A multitude of criteria dictates the sourcing decisions, which constantly develop as better alternatives are found and processes are fine-tuned. Wiebke talks about this evolution in her store, as they tried to move their provisioning chains closer to their base of operations, to make use of synergies on delivery routes, and to take advantage of collaboration opportunities. These efforts require a large amount of pioneering work because zero waste stores cannot rely on established supply networks, which are blind to the special requirements of non-packaged, bulk distribution systems. Interlocking structures, organisational processes and partnerships need to be developed to tackle the complexities linked to zero waste provisioning (as seen in Section 7.3.2.). In this process, zero waste stores often have an impact on other stakeholders. Their ambition to eliminate all kinds of unnecessary resource use can motivate their suppliers to rethink their own practices by questioning existing conventions. Paula gives an example of how Tante Olga wielded their influence on a local provider:

“We have this vegetable box, for instance, which gets delivered to our door. They had always put a plastic bag into the delivery box. Dinah then *called the supplier* and asked, ‘Can’t you just leave that out?’ The following week they were gone. I thought to myself: ‘Crazy, she made one phone call and they’re just gone.’ This supplier delivers the whole of Cologne with these crates [...] and they were gone everywhere ... I didn’t *question* these *practices* and thought, ‘Well, probably they have to do it that way.’ She, however, questioned this and before long the *problem was solved*” (Paula, funder, Tante Olga: 138-140)

Critical scrutiny of naturalised business practices. This statement shows that zero waste stores prompt other market players to examine their own behaviour. The change that Paula describes seems trivial, yet it represents the inertia that often keeps certain practices in place, even though more sustainable approaches are not that difficult to implement (i.e. the simple removal of a bag). The fact that she assumed that there was no other way for the provider to deliver the vegetable box, shows that many indirect forms of consumption are naturalised to such an extent that they escape the attention of consumers and, for that matter, established organisations. Questioning entrenched provisioning standards thus releases untapped critical imagination, in the same way zero waste objects unveil taken for granted assumptions of how grocery shopping should work. The stores act as role models in this process, where their diligence inspires others to take action. This, as Paula’s example illustrates, can have wide-reaching consequences, if a large number of households is affected. The zero waste stores actively work together to make this happen. This becomes evident in the creation of a zero waste cooperative, as outlined by Dinah:

“First and foremost we want to strengthen and support each other. We don’t see ourselves as lone warriors, but rather as a *big unpackaged family*. We ... *write each other* and ask questions: ‘What experiences did you have with these products?’ We also *order goods together* with the *Veedelskrämer* here in Cologne. The overarching goal of the cooperative is that ... we can *develop more market power* ... to better direct our suppliers in terms of prices, but, more importantly, in respect to packaging. If a small shop, like us, orders a few noodles, the *pressure on a supplier* is not high enough to warrant a switch from plastic to paper. If we are a lot of stores ... chances are higher that it will change. [...] [The cooperative] is primarily about establishing a *greater market presence through a united appearance*, to generate more awareness for the whole topic. It shows that it’s not just about one small corner shop, but that a *movement* is developing that should be taken seriously.” (Dinah, initiator, Tante Olga: 61+65)

Market power and stakeholder impact. The quote reveals several interesting aspects of the way zero waste stores collaborate with each other. First, the stores support each other through various means, such as sharing insights on particular products or providers as well as jointly sourcing goods to benefit from better buying conditions. This contrasts with the cut-throat competition usually encountered in the retail sector and is made possible through the collective goal of working towards the greater good. Second, zero waste stores understand themselves as one “big unpackaged family” and “movement”, which should pull on the same strings to get other market actors to respond to their demands. Large wholesalers, in particular, would probably not react to the requests of individual stores, which is why they joined forces to gain influence and attain better bargaining positions. The goal here is not, in the first instance, to lower the prices, but a waste-free supply chain. The cooperative allowed the dispersed stores to build a “united appearance” and generate awareness of zero waste topics.⁵⁰ This represents a form of “collaborative social entrepreneurship”, as the zero waste community frames waste avoidance as a problem and pools resources to facilitate “the emergence and reshaping of institutional arrangements to support scalable efforts for change” (Montgomery, Dacin, and Dacin 2012, p. 376). Jointly, then, through the establishment of the cooperative, the stores seek to enhance the cultural receptivity for these ideas to have an impact beyond their confined, local spheres of influence. In doing so, they shape the practices of other businesses and institutional actors. Consequently, their market presence can push competitors to change:

“I think a lot of people heard that this shop would open. I know that Landwege, an organic cooperative, recently caught up with them by offering unpackaged, loose goods, such as noodles and rice. This shows me that they were probably afraid that the shop could become too strong competition for them or they just realised, ‘Hold on a second, perhaps we should also do something for our sustainability’ ... I personally have the feeling that this turned into a *chain reaction* because Wiebke opened her store.” (Lara, funder, Unverpackt Lübeck: 55)

⁵⁰ Several dedicated websites also seek to do so by listing all zero waste outlets and related topics, such as www.bepakt.com and www.zerowasteurope.eu.

Institutional reflexivity and market evolution. Lara touches on an important aspect in her observation of how the retail sector reacted to the first zero waste store in the city. Seeing how well Unverpackt Lübeck was received after it opened its doors, competitors started to take in zero waste ideas to improve their own environmental performance. The fact that Landwege introduced their own unpackaged range demonstrates that zero waste stores are diffusing practices beyond their first line of stakeholders. This can lead to a “chain reaction”, where more and more organisations get inspiration from zero waste stores and check how the concept could be applied to their own distribution systems. Put differently, zero waste infrastructures enhance “institutional reflexivity” (Giddens 1991) by provoking other market actors to rethink their own conduct through the exposure to practice innovations. Normative influences and competitive mimicry have been found to play a central role in the diffusion of organisational practices and standards (Guler, Guillén, and Macpherson 2002). Indeed, recent news coverage has documented that zero waste thinking is moving out of its niche existence and increasingly taken in by large supermarket chains (Guardian 2019; NDR 2019; Welt 2019). Consequently, the work of forerunners can affect the evolution of whole market sectors, as they not only offer new consumption opportunities, but also shape the institutional field around them.

Discourse havens and inspiration. Finally, the initial efforts of these shops have knock-on effects, as people draw inspiration from them and establish outlets in other locations. Since Original Unverpackt, one of the first zero waste stores in Germany, launched in 2014 through a crowdfunding campaign, many others have followed suit. Only four years later, more than 35 zero waste projects were realised across the country over Startnext alone (Startnext 2018b), speaking for the tremendous popularity of the topic. Raising more than 100,000€ and receiving extensive national and international press coverage (see Original Unverpackt 2018), Original Unverpackt put zero waste on the radar for many people, who previously did not know it existed. In part, this trend was reinforced by the activities of the founders themselves, who launched a magazine and workshop series to raise awareness for the underlying problems and support other potential entrepreneurs. Several initiators in this study reported that they had visitors, who wanted to learn more about their approach to zero waste and get information for their own stores. The field note below documents this:

“[Hannah], however, mentioned that a new zero waste store would open in London and that the founder came to visit them to get inspiration and perhaps acquire a few of these dispensing systems. It was interesting to see, how the initial entrepreneurs in this market niche were educating the next generation of founders and spreading the idea beyond city and national boundaries ... These outlets could thus be seen as more than just places, where one could lower the environmental impact of one’s personal consumption. They were discourse havens, carrying the ideas, lifestyle tools, and necessary knowledge out into the world. The carriers - the consumers, future entrepreneurs, and other interested parties - all acted as vessels helping the discourse spread from previously narrowly confined localities to various regions.” (Field notes, Ohne, 01.12.2017: 55)⁵¹

The above excerpt, and the theoretical insights linked to it, suggests that zero waste stores act as “discourse havens” that allow other market actors to draw insights and inspiration from their experience. The fact that a founder travelled all the way from London to Munich, symbolises the reach that this zero waste network has. In the example above, the encounter resulted in the opening of a zero waste store, called Hetu, in the South of London. The founder bought a self-engineered dispensing system from Ohne, as they had developed a glass alternative to the standard plastic bulk bins. Indeed, during a later visit to Hetu, the founder told me “If it wasn’t for them, we wouldn’t be open” (Field notes, Hetu, 15.02.2018: 1). Here too, the zero waste principles were applied to the whole shopping environment. They used environmentally-friendly paint for the walls, naturally sealed off the floor, employed second-hand furniture and materials, and even placed vintage scoops next to the containers on the shelves. The visual impression and diligence found at Ohne was thus transferred to Hetu because the founders had a mental blueprint of how zero waste ideas were implemented there. In summary, and in response to the third research question, self-organised value creation facilitated ethical behaviours not only directly, through providing new consumption opportunities in the form of zero waste infrastructures, but also indirectly, as the market presence of the stores influenced a broad range of stakeholders and inspired them to take action. In doing so, crowdfunding projects enhance the cultural receptivity for certain ideas, as seen in the growing popularity of the zero waste discourse, and help the market to evolve in sustainable directions.

⁵¹ Hannah also mentioned this encounter in her interview, corroborating this observation (Hannah, initiator, Ohne: 101-109).

7.4. Sociality Within Zero Waste Stores

Several characteristics of zero waste infrastructures have been discussed in the preceding sections. More specifically, it was shown that material constellations and back-end processes give rise to ethical meanings and action possibilities that result in different subjectivities and behaviours. However, consumers need to learn how to manoeuvre within these places and how to make sense of particular lifestyles. The following paragraphs will look at the role of social interactions within infrastructures from two main angles: i) how they help to acquire necessary competences; and ii) how they influence behaviour through providing emotional and social support for practices. The objective is to expose the crucial function of people within consumption infrastructures.

7.4.1. Being in the Know: Knowledge Embedded in Zero Waste Infrastructures

7.4.1.1. Zero Waste Stores as Knowledge Repositories and Places for Mutual Learning

The previous sections have almost exclusively looked at the material constellations and processes that give rise to the zero waste discourse and associated practices. The discussion has, accordingly, been largely silent about the social interactions that take place within the stores, which allow consumers to familiarise themselves and learn more about the zero waste lifestyle. There are two groups of people, staff members and customers, who help individuals attain required skills and resources. The employees and owners of the store are typically the first line of contact for people. They seek to create a space where questions are welcome and an active exchange between customers and personnel is encouraged. Sonja describes the ambitions of Stückgut in this way:

“One central idea was not necessarily to just open a shop, but to *create a platform* for the whole topic of waste avoidance and sustainable consumption ... We are under the impression that ... *people come here specifically with their concerns, questions, and suggestions* ... I believe there wasn't an actual place to go to in Hamburg before, where you would know, 'I can go there if I don't want these masses of packaging waste. I can go there to inform myself, meet liked-minded people, and *get good information.*' [...] We create a *place of exchange*. There are many people who feel uncomfortable and dislike the idea about going to a shop and saying, "I would like to have that in my own container". They know they won't get strange looks here [...] If they want to know whether or not a toothbrush is vegan, then this isn't a problematic question at all. It is *fine to ask* about it, if this is important to you. [...] These are things that you would not be able enquire at a normal supermarket because you simply don't have qualified personnel... Day in day out many of our customers want to know more about particular things ... We offer a *space for these things.*" (Sonja, initiator, Stückgut: 41-47 + 58)

Knowledge repositories. This quote reveals that zero waste stores are much more than the physical infrastructures and organisational processes that were outlined before. Rather, social interactions and the expert knowledge shared by employees are elemental in helping consumers acquire the necessary information and skills to apply zero waste principles. The expressions Sonja uses, such as “create a platform”, “place of exchange”, and “space for these things”, signals a high willingness to interact with customers and to divulge information that helps them evaluate the virtue of certain offerings and practices. Here, consumers are not reduced to revenue streams and targets of promotional claims, but rather treated as capable agents that need to learn how to apply zero waste ideas. The sociality of zero waste stores helps consumers alleviate problems that impede waste avoidance during everyday shopping trips. For one, they offer a location, where people have the opportunity to use their own containers and, at the same time, they promote an active engagement with the topic. People come to the store, as Sonja explains, with their “concerns, questions, and suggestions” and attain “good information” that empowers them to take action. In the case of Stückgut, this even included a series of events and workshops on various topics, such as self-made cosmetics, cotton diapers, and talks on environmental issues (Stückgut 2018). Moreover, books can be consulted within the stores to gain a deeper understanding of zero waste ideas and practices (see Figure 10). These feature manufacturing instructions for everyday goods and various guidelines that facilitate the implementation of zero waste principles. Zero waste stores, therefore, act as knowledge repositories that enable consumers to learn more about the concept.

Figure 10 – Knowledge Resources at a Zero Waste Store



Expert ethical advice. The staff members play a crucial role in the acquisition of competences that individuals need to become proficient zero waste users. Much of the information outlined above would not normally be available at conventional supermarkets due to the lack of expert staff, who do not know much about sustainable consumption or the production conditions of goods. This expertise is engrained in the service experience at zero waste stores, as a respondent shows in relation to Tante Olga:

“Service is spelt with a capital S ... Normally there is always someone around whom you can ask something. You can also ... *get information* about the topic zero waste more generally [...] It is not about speed. In REWE or Aldi the sales staff just wants you out of the way, to pack your things, and leave the store as quickly as possible, so no queues can form ... At Tante Olga, you can sit down for an hour or simply stick around and *ask about things*. You can ask, ‘Why?’. For instance, ‘How can I save waste in this area?’, or, ‘How can you do that?’ I can *get advice* for myself.” (Alice, funder, Tante Olga: 97-99)

In essence, zero waste stores fulfil an important consulting and networking function for customers, who might not be acquainted with the idea or want to improve their conduct in particular consumption areas. Alice’s emphasis on the service offered at Tante Olga and the ability to “ask about things” and “get advice” shows that these interactions are indispensable for building an understanding of the philosophy and associated practices. These encounters take time, so zero waste stores, to a certain degree, offer slow shopping experiences, where emphasis is put on internalising specific skills sets. This involves asking questions about “why” certain consumption patterns are counterproductive and learning “how” to reduce waste. Jessica equally saw a major advantage in the experience the staff members had with the zero waste lifestyle, as this enabled them to give hints on how to best approach certain problems, such as making detergent from the basic ingredients sold at the store.⁵² The ability to engage in conversations and attain deep insights from the people encountered in these stores set them apart from usual grocery shopping. In essence, zero waste stores help their customers to adopt sustainable behaviours and to continuously expand their skill sets to new consumption domains, by offering a unique ethical consulting service that cannot be found anywhere else. The exchange of ideas, however, is not a unidirectional, top-down process, as everyone can contribute knowledge:

“It has certainly intensified (sustainable practices) because I exchange ideas with Dinah, for example, on a regular basis. She gave me *extensive advice* and could tell me more about a vegan diet. There are many customers as well ... [who] strictly follow the rules and try to live by them. They usually have many *tips and new ideas*, which motivates somehow. [...] I recently spoke with a customer ... and she gave me a great recipe for a butter substitute. I was also given tips on good second-hand shops in Cologne. Exactly, it’s these types of things.” (Janina, funder, Tante Olga: 124-126)

⁵² See Quote 19 in Appendix D.

Mutual learning. In short, insights are drawn from the entire network of supporters and shared between different stakeholders. Janina, for instance, benefited from the broad expertise of Dinah, a co-founder, as well as knowledgeable customers, who were eager zero waste practitioners and able to give advice on common challenges. The “butter substitute” here exposes the kind of competences required to solve problems associated with this lifestyle, such as producing goods at home that are not readily available in unpackaged form, not even at zero waste outlets. The sharing of recipes, tips, product suggestions, and do-it-yourself instructions was mentioned by many respondents. Users, consequently, form a second major group that facilitates an engagement with zero waste ideas and broadens the access to knowledge resources. Put differently, they are “carriers of practice” (Reckwitz 2002) that help others orient themselves on zero waste terrain. This highlights the role of “collective learning in the construal of competence” (Warde 2005, p. 140) and how appropriate conduct may be identified and developed in different consumption areas, so that zero waste thinking moves beyond the immediate shop context into fields where waste reduction can also be endorsed. In this case, second-hand consumption aligned with the zero waste discourse by extending the lifecycles of used goods. The zero waste lifestyle, therefore, entails a wide range of skills, which are built up through social interactions in these stores. Lara shows that this exchange of ideas can go both ways:

“Every time you go there you *exchange ideas*. I told [Wiebke] about our cotton diapers last time, which we’ve been using for half a year and ... would fit right into her store ... I also *told her about* different toothbrushes ... that have a higher share of bamboo and are completely compostable. It’s a constant exchange, you always check out the *new things* she has and [share] what novelties you have discovered yourself.” (Lara, funder, Unverpackt Lübeck: 84)

Reciprocity and participation. The uptake of the zero waste philosophy is a continuous learning process that is not achieved once and for all, but rather practices need to be updated or consumption items replaced by more sustainable options, as better (e.g. more regional or less packaged) solutions emerge on the market. The store owners constantly look for better ways of meeting zero waste needs, while customers return the favour by reporting the products or providers they discover. The hints given to Wiebke, the initiator of Unverpackt Lübeck, about the cotton diapers or full-bamboo toothbrushes are examples of this phenomenon. These infrastructures, consequently, foster a certain form of reciprocity, where the various constituents work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for everyone. Indeed, the stores maintain some of the participatory spirit of the initial phases of the projects through the integration of feedback mechanisms into their operations. Hannah, for instance, outlined that they encouraged customers to submit product wishes to them at Ohne, which led to the inclusion of new

goods in their portfolio over time.⁵³ Likewise, David appreciated the opportunity to “make suggestions” and have a “say in things” at Tante Olga, where a similar approach was taken.⁵⁴ These quotes demonstrate that zero waste stores are not only markedly different in their outlook on sustainability, but also in the type of sociality they foster compared to conventional supermarkets. A close relationship to their customers was important to many store managers, who integrated feedback in their decisions to upgrade their product portfolio.⁵⁵ The possibility to influence organisational processes, in turn, nurtured a feeling of participation and empowerment that is rarely found in fast-paced, efficiency-focused supermarkets. These opportunities, as well as a mutual interest in sustainability, were valued by the users of zero waste stores and bred a sense of community.

7.4.1.2. Embodied Infrastructures and the Acquisition of Competences

Infrastructures are often thought of primarily in terms of grand constructions, such as road networks, bridges or public transport systems. This view neglects the importance of humans in facilitating the provision of services. Tonkiss (2015) stresses the integral function of people through his discussion of “embodied infrastructures”. He describes the physical work that individuals do in securing the supply of necessities in developing regions. Tonkiss (2015) writes “the infrastructure of things ... is mediated and underpinned by networks of embodied labour that produce and distribute material goods, circulate and channel information, collect fuel, gather water and generate energy, provide transport services and dispose of the waste that results” (p. 389). In times of crises, the human dimension may even be aggravated, as people compensate for gaps in the provision of services (Dalakoglou 2016). Accordingly, the activities conducted by people take on various forms and are equally evident in modern contexts, where logistic systems still depend on the personal delivery of parcels or consumption infrastructures require the performance of particular tasks, like weighing or scanning items. This latter aspect is found in zero waste stores, where consumers transport, weigh, fill and carry goods in their own containers. More important for the present discussion, though, are the activities surrounding the sharing of information and knowledge through social interactions.

⁵³ See Quote 20 in Appendix D.

⁵⁴ See Quote 21 in Appendix D.

⁵⁵ Several initiators explicitly mentioned that customer feedback had an impact on their product range: Sonja (166); Bettina (27); Wiebke (54).

Zero waste infrastructures help consumers acquire competences in several ways. First, they act as knowledge repositories, where people find information on many topics related to zero waste consumption. In particular, the ability to get advice from expert staff, themselves lead users of the zero waste discourse, was valued by respondents. Hence, ethical advice is a key part of the service delivery at zero waste stores, which is something unheard of in conventional supermarkets. Here, the sales staff is not trained to facilitate the uptake of responsible consumer behaviour, as doing so could cast a negative light on the product range and run against sales maximisation goals. Second, the users and the managers of the stores are all in constant exchange with each other. Customers learn how to combine different basic ingredients into cosmetic or cleaning products through talks with their peers as well as staff members. The sharing of recipes or specific procedures for producing alternatives to mainstream goods, such as butter, broaden the skill set and self-dependence of users. The advice given also incorporates market insights. Consumers are made aware of good second-hand shops, local markets and fairs, or repair cafés that allow them to fix broken equipment. Likewise, the store and their customers mutually learn from each other, as they share their knowledge about products, providers, and novel solutions with each other, leading to a reciprocal and participatory spirit in these places. Zero waste infrastructures thus create a completely different sociality to mainstream retail outlets that equips people with the knowledge and tools to push sustainable behaviours into ever more domains.

7.4.2. People like Me: Zero Waste Infrastructures and Social Affordances

7.4.2.1. Zero Waste Communities: The Social Acceptance of Practices and Identity Space

The above discussion has focused on the importance of attaining and sharing knowledge about zero waste practices, while the significance of social interactions and relationships in reinforcing behavioural patterns was not given due credit. The sociality of zero waste stores, however, is quintessential to the customers who go in and out of these places on a regular basis. It is, in other words, not just a space where information is exchanged and new practices are learned, but also an area where one can feel as part of a community and live without the fear of being resented. Many individuals felt misunderstood or isolated before they came across zero waste stores, as they knew few people who shared their concerns for sustainability. Several interview participants picked up on this point:

“I informed myself about the economy, ecology, sustainability and ... discovered that things are adrift almost everywhere and that the main reason for this seems to be that people don't seem to care ... This disturbed me, often made me very sad, and somehow gave me a *feeling of helplessness* ... I didn't receive much of a reaction from my personal surroundings. *Very few of my friends and family members* are open to these issues or *wanted to join* my efforts ... and take on responsibility. [...] Outlets, such as ... the zero waste store offer you possibilities. They *created a space for me*, where I can shop the way I want to, the way I want to live my life.” (Jens, consumer, Tante Olga: 83+87)

“I have experienced a *feeling of support* there, that I am *not insane* ... if I don't use shampoo to wash my hair, which most people in my personal surroundings tend to see critically ... I found people at Tante Olga, who are also into this and want to *exchange their views with me*.” (Eveline, consumer, Tante Olga: 56)

Identity space and the social acceptance of practices. The statements highlight that the social interactions with staff and other customers fulfil an important motivational function. Jens' elaboration on his efforts to build a better understanding of sustainability issues and the corresponding desire to take action was met with little enthusiasm by the people around him. The feelings of helplessness and sadness that arose from the lack of care that others displayed towards addressing these issues, were one of the reasons why Tante Olga “created a space” for him, where he could follow his beliefs without having to deal with adverse preconceptions. He no longer was a lone wolf fighting for the betterment of society in solitude, but rather had a place where he could be himself and meet people with similar interests in responsible consumption. It helped him move out of isolation and lift the negative affect stemming from the low engagement of his peers with sustainability. Likewise, Eveline experienced an environment, where her practices were embraced, rather than seen critically or deemed bizarre. This “feeling of support” and the willingness of other people to “exchange ideas” with her provided the social acceptance that she needed. Indeed, the suspicion levied towards zero waste practices at ordinary supermarkets can be a major deterrent:

“Time and again it is a nice feeling to be in the shop, to have bought something, and to speak to the people ... When I drop by it is like a *place of calm*. You know ... they are on the same page and you *don't have to justify your efforts* to preserve the environment. [...] Yes, it is still pretty *exhausting to go shopping* occasionally ... because everything is packaged straight away and nobody really thinks about it ... It is next to impossible to put down your own container in a butcher shop and to get it filled. You might get an awry look or they might think, ‘There she is again. Now it's going to get complicated.’, simply because they can't put everything into one bag ... Yes, this can be tiring, especially at the beginning, when you're turning things around. The *explanations*, ‘Why do I want to take the bread directly into my hands and not in a bag?’, are often straining. You almost *feel bad about* having a few *more demands* towards the lady behind the counter, since she needs to break her rhythm. These things are sometimes annoying.” (Ella, funder, Tante Olga: 47-49)

Social Affordances. Ella's account is typical for the experiences that people have, when they want to apply zero waste principles in traditional retail outlets. It is suffused with expressions of challenges and misunderstandings that zero waste practitioners face in conventional shops, which can discourage the uptake of sustainable behaviour. The

exhaustion linked to justifying efforts to avoid packaging waste or having to explain why one wants to have products placed within a reusable container, for example at the butchers or bakery, is a constant source of frustration and deters such conduct. Indeed, making demands may even lead to negative emotions or feelings of guilt for complicating the lives of employees, who need to put additional effort into meeting their needs, through breaking their “rhythm” or not being able to fill “everything into one bag”. In contrast, zero waste stores are perceived as a “place of calm”, where positive feelings about purchases and social encounters dominate. They provide a space where one can consume responsibly without reservations, especially in respect to refusing any form of packaging (i.e. the *Refuse* dimension), and receive emotional support for such behaviour. Hence, consumption infrastructures are linked to different social affordances (Valenti and Gold 1991), in that certain behaviours are socially appropriate within them, while others are merely condoned, met with suspicion, or looked down upon. In this respect, zero waste infrastructures go a long way in alleviating the “psycho-social anxieties” usually experienced when enacting responsible behaviours (Soroni 2010). Furthermore, they foster social interactions that help evade feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment by connecting like-minded individuals with each other. Paula explains the sense of community that emerges around these shops:

“The shop *connects* a lot of people with each other, who have an interest in sustainability and want contact to people. [...] It is a *place of encounter*, I would say. [...] It is about going out of the door and having this social connection. It is about speaking to each other. I think you have to be there to know how it is ... If I don't go outside, then I don't feel like I'm *part of the community*, I feel isolated. I think it is a great source of joy to feel, for instance, that there is a *common interest* within this store. Even if people don't know each other, they all go there because they *see a purpose* in it and take their time.” (Paula, funder, Tante Olga: 18-22)

Community and social identity. Paula's depiction of a collective that forms around zero waste outlets is significant for two reasons. First, the community is built on shared meanings, the zero waste principles, and practices. The practices include, amongst others: planning and executing unpackaged shopping trips; producing household items from basic ingredients (e.g. detergents, washing liquids, or deodorant crèmes); applying the zero waste lifestyle in other life domains, such as eating out or home storage; and sharing insights with other community members. This “common interest” and the joint goal to promote sustainable behaviours create positive attitudes towards the store. Being part of this community, however, requires personal contact and seeing a “purpose” behind the whole endeavour to circumvent the isolation that comes from tackling the lifestyle alone. The sociality of the place, in other words, produces a positive feedback loop, where the collective reinforces certain behaviours and keeps people engaged by weaving zero waste practices into social relationships. It creates “linking value” (Cova

1997) and satisfies people's "desire to feel connected" (Miller and Gregan-Paxton 2006), which plays an important role in establishing sustainable behaviours. The social identity of users, or the "perception of oneness" with the community (Ashforth and Mael 1999), consequently, deepens the engagement with zero waste practices. This matches the findings of previous research, where group or shared identities have been found to have a positive influence on responsible consumption (Granzin and Olsen 1991; Papaoikonomou, Cascon-Pereira, and Ryan 2014). Second, this contests past attempts to explain ethical behaviour premised on individual differences, such as values (see Section 2.1.2.2.). Seen from this perspective, the often criticised attitude-behaviour gap may be explained in part by the lack of emotional support encountered by ethical consumers in everyday settings. The focus on finding individual explanations for inconsistencies in ethical behaviour obscures the impact social surroundings have on consumers. A zero waste practitioner will always find it difficult to follow the lifestyle in contexts where packaging is omnipresent, as neither the physical means nor the socialities of these places facilitate the adoption of such practices. The importance of embedding responsible consumption in social contexts and letting whole collectives work towards particular goals thus offers a promising avenue towards increasing ethical consumer behaviour.

7.4.2.2. The Emotional Work of Infrastructures: Social Interactions and Reflexivity

In more abstract terms, the sociality that forms around zero waste stores is not just important for familiarising people with the underlying principles and equipping them with the necessary competences. The collective is equally important in providing a supportive emotional environment that reinforces certain behaviours through positive social feedback. Angelo and Hentschel (2015) see infrastructures performing important social work, in particular by shaping the "collective social imaginaries" of people. They create certain subjects (see also Section 7.2.2.3.2.) and allow individuals to make sense of large-scale changes and their wider environment. Through interactions with like-minded people, zero waste infrastructures promote "imaginaries" that align the practices of individuals with the underlying discourse. While asking questions about the origin of products and bringing one's own containers to the counter might be met with suspicion at traditional supermarkets, zero waste stores actively encourage these behaviours. There is, in simpler terms, a high social acceptance of and support for zero waste practices amongst customers and staff, which motivates people to apply the lifestyle to many consumption domains. This helps to offset the isolation experienced by zero

waste users and the frustration linked to disinterested social surroundings through the presence of appropriate “emotional infrastructures” (Deuze 2016), where responsible behaviours are linked to positive feelings. Zero waste infrastructures, therefore, make sustainable consumption both emotionally and socially attractive.

Reflexivity embedded in consumption communities. Zero waste infrastructures also promote a sense of community that reflexively mobilises people to scrutinise their own behaviour. Lash (2007) discusses how the “we” can prompt reflexivity through situated practices, which have specific meanings inscribed into them. He places “hermeneutic reflexivity” against individual notions of the term, namely “cognitive” and “aesthetic reflexivity”, to argue that communities guide behaviour through general understandings of “what is regarded as substantively good” (p. 157). In zero waste stores, the overarching goal is to avoid all forms of waste. This ideal is evident in the underlying philosophy and associated practices, including going on unpackaged shopping trips or reusing equipment over and over again. In addition, unpackaged shopping is connected to other ways of thinking that support less resource-intensive lifestyles and extend the consumption cycles of objects, such as only buying as much as one needs and appreciating the goods that are purchased. In other words, by promoting certain practices, the zero waste community already pre-establishes specific meanings and forms of conduct, which define what it means to become a true zero waste practitioner. Lash points out that the “substantively good is not encountered by communal beings as an ‘imperative’, divorced from the mundane and the everyday. It is instead already present in the world of meanings and practices into which human beings are thrown when they become part of the ‘we’.” (p. 157). In the case of zero waste infrastructures, the community valorises sustainable consumption through the endorsement of particular practices. These shared practices involve other people, the objects and tools used in the process, and the things that result from such undertakings (ibid). Put differently, zero waste practices are tightly intertwined with the material assemblages and social interactions found within the stores and reinforce sustainable behaviours. In this way, individual forms of reflexivity, which arise from the encounter with the material environments and the holistic sourcing strategies of zero waste infrastructures (i.e. cognitive and aesthetic reflexivity), are in harmony with the reflexivity promoted by communities (i.e. hermeneutic reflexivity, see Lash 2007, pp. 158–159). All three forms of reflexivity are mobilised in the service of the zero waste discourse, so that the mind,

the senses, and the social relationships of people work together to establish, extend, and sustain the zero waste lifestyle.

Zero waste infrastructures versus brandscapes. Sustainable consumption, consequently, becomes more likely when it is embedded in cultural contexts that positively reinforce desirable practices on multiple levels, rather than sending out conflicting messages of what types of behaviour should receive priority. Brandscapes, in comparison to zero waste infrastructures, are much less likely to fulfil this purpose. Here, ethical goods are dropped into hostile territory, where they have to compete with an armada of consumerist meanings transmitted by the surrounding environment. Indeed, the effort and cost (i.e. price premiums) linked to sustainable consumption render such behaviour cognitively undesirable, while branded packaging and hedonistic appeals entrap the aesthetic reflexivity of consumers. It is, quite simply, more rewarding to follow personal interests under these circumstances. The sociality encountered within mainstream supermarkets, lastly, does its part, as sustainable practices, such as bringing one's own container to the store, are met with suspicion or annoy other people, who might have to spend a few more seconds in front of the counter. In a cultural environment, where individuals are responsabilised for the ills of market systems, yet thrown into contexts that incentivise self-interested behaviour, sustainable behaviour will continue to struggle to become the dominant mode of operation.⁵⁶ Creating ethical shopping environments that cultivate a sense of community can be a crucial puzzle piece in countering this trend. Self-organised value creation may bring about such spaces, as the crowdfunding campaigns enabled communities of users to form around zero waste stores that did not exist before.

⁵⁶ Please return to Section 3.4.1. for a discussion of dominant social paradigms and how people are responsabilised in their role as consumers.

7.5. Summary and Answer to Research Question 3: Self-Organised Value Creation, New Thought and Consumption Patterns, and Market Evolution

The examination of zero waste stores has shown that self-organised value creation can give rise to new material realities that have an impact on various stakeholders. A variety of factors worked together in these novel consumption infrastructures, which grew out of crowdfunding campaigns. First, material assemblages, quite literally, set the ground for particular action possibilities and suggested subjectivities to consumers, which favour certain behaviours over others. Brandscapes endorse consumerist meanings and material ways of satisfying needs, which encourage consumers to focus on personal gains that are mobilised to meet corporate objectives. In particular, the sensory experiences and, with them, the aesthetic reflexivity of consumers, are generally geared towards higher individual consumption levels, which increase the earnings per customer within stores. This suppresses sustainable behaviour, not the least because conventional supermarkets complicate ethical decision-making through the vast array of choices and the conflicting meanings inherent to them (see also Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård 2007). Zero waste infrastructures, in contrast, provide coherent ethical experiences. The upcycled and second-hand interiors, the bulk dispensing systems, and the objects present within these stores all encouraged users to critically reflect on their consumption practices. More specifically, a mindful consumer image is conveyed, where greater care for the environment and others is propagated by the objects and materials found in the shopping context. Second, organisational processes have a bearing, as business logics affect the material make-up of infrastructures as well as the products and services that travel through them. The options available to end users in retail spaces are the result of choices made higher up in the provisioning chain and, accordingly, influence the sustainability of consumption infrastructures. The various fair-trade and local goods, as well as the selection of lifestyle tools, make zero waste stores a safe haven for ethical consumers. In addition, the diligence of the store managers and the attention paid to the use of resources along entire value chains, act as a good example and inspire other stakeholders. Sourcing arrangements, however, are not completely up to single market actors, but rather embedded in larger supply networks. This creates difficulties for zero waste stores, which require novel delivery and dispensing systems to implement their philosophy. This was seen in relation to the deliveries made by local partners with reusable containers and the challenges linked to these efforts. Finally, the sociality encountered within infrastructures acts as a lubricant that smoothens consumption

processes. Social interactions confer necessary skills to individuals so that they can competently engage with provisioning systems, such as the bulk bins, and take up specific practices, like producing household items. Moreover, they generate emotional support that reinforces behaviours, so that practices become engrained in everyday routines and are sustained over time. They provide social support and motivate people to keep going, as they connect users with like-minded individuals. Each of the outlined aspects of consumption infrastructures will be discussed below to show that the outcomes of self-organised value creation nourish ethical behaviours.

In relation to the literature review and the third research question several observations can be made. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter (Section 7.0), retail environments and atmospherics are prominent topics within marketing. Many studies have looked at shopping contexts and how they help build strong brand ideologies. The discussion of brandscapes highlighted the consumerist meanings found in conventional outlets and how these leave little room for ethical considerations. In other words, the work within this area has mostly looked at retail environments that are guided by corporate interests and favour modes of conduct that generate higher profits, rather than responsible behaviours. In contrast, this thesis pointed out how engaging ethical contexts facilitate sustainable consumption. First of all, it shows how important infrastructural arrangements are in offering certain action possibilities to consumers. Material constellations shape both the physical and mental means of consumers to act on their beliefs and, consequently, offer different *lifestyle affordances*. More specifically, the bulk dispensing systems made a self-determined, mindful use of goods possible, as they allowed people to extract exact amounts of a product for their individual uses. In this way, zero waste infrastructures inhibit typical pick-and-drop shopping strategies, which produce excessive packaging waste and often prompt overconsumption, as customers have little choice but to settle with standard sizes when they buy something. This shows how important it is to consider the socio-technical systems that surround consumers on a daily basis, as they precondition certain levels and forms of resource use. A pile of plastic waste almost inevitably builds up after a trip to a conventional supermarket, whereas zero waste stores evade this problem. It is, consequently, not surprising that previous research has called for practice-oriented designs, to which bulk dispensing systems can be counted, to promote sustainability (Pettersen 2016). Likewise, the choice of retail channels has been found to affect the

environmental footprints of products (Seebauer et al. 2016), which shows that ethical consumption should go beyond choosing options to include systemic considerations.

The objects found within the zero waste stores were a second major factor contributing to the adoption of sustainable lifestyles. The *clustering of lifestyle resources* encouraged users to scrutinise their consumption in multiple domains, leading to critical awareness of unsustainable behavioural patterns and possible solutions to these. Consumption items attract the attention of users around them and have the ability to recruit people to new practices, when their purpose resonates with those that encounter them. Non-human entities can develop “thing power” (Bennett 2004), so that objects nudge potential users to give them a try. The products stocked in zero waste stores, for instance, revealed sustainable alternatives to conventional goods (e.g. toothpaste tablets), opening up new ways of seeing that stimulated people to seek out responsible options. The viewpoint that material things have agency is popular amongst researchers looking at the role of technology in everyday life (see, for example, McCarthy and Wright 2007). Marres (2015) attributes objects the “capacity to inspire, disturb, provoke and surprise in socially, politically, and morally significant ways.” (p. ix), which means that products should not only be seen as targets of consumer decision making, but actively affecting the deliberations of individuals themselves. If the surrounding environment is predominantly suffused with consumerist messages, it is difficult to select ethical options and to act out of line with the meanings propagated by the majority of conventional goods. Choice contexts can, therefore, undermine sustainable consumption, if conflicting demands are placed on users or when other modes of action are rendered more desirable. In this respect, the organisational processes behind consumption infrastructures are crucial, as they effectively control the make-up of the product range. In addition, they uncover the invisible work behind supply chains (see Star 1999), which has a substantial bearing on the total material throughput of infrastructures. The environmental footprint of any good is not just determined by what happens when the end user first comes into contact with it, but also by the countless steps that lead up to that point. Holistic sourcing arrangements and closed loop systems (Ghisellini, Cialani, and Ulgiati 2016), for instance, can go a long way in reducing the use of resources by creating lean arrangements, minimising distances, and avoiding unnecessary waste in intermediate business steps. In generating new consumption infrastructures and business processes, self-organised value creation plays a crucial role in providing the types of spaces that cultivate sustainable behaviours.

A third aspect is the unique aesthetic appeal of zero waste infrastructures. It is rare that ethical meanings, in this case the zero waste principles with their many links to other sustainability issues, receive centre stage in a retail environment. Quite to the contrary, the convenience and fun associated with regular options often overshadows the efforts to consume responsibly in mainstream outlets, as it is more costly and cumbersome to live up to high ethical standards. The upcycled built environments, the dispensing systems, and the objects found within zero waste stores create unique *ethical experiences* that reinforce sustainable consumption. The aesthetic reflexivity that arises from the interplay of the various elements of the material surroundings, links responsible behaviours to positive feelings, where natural colours or pleasant smells naturally lead users to give different ethical options a try. Nuttavuthisit (2014) argues that consumers are aesthetic subjects that seek pleasure out of even mundane everyday items. In line with this perspective, ethical experiences can do more to convince people to act responsibly than sophisticated educational campaigns, which move to the background in situations where consumerist meanings overwhelm all but the most dedicated ethical users. Zero waste stores, with their focus on mindful practices and the avoidance of all forms of unnecessary resource use, could thus be linked to what has been called “alternative hedonism” (Soper 2014). Through the mobilisation of an “anti-consumerist aesthetic” other ways of living may start to appear as real alternatives (ibid), so that ethical consumption becomes pleasurable, rather than an effort linked to sacrifice and constant self-control. In short, instead of placing all the bets on cultivating greater awareness of environmental issues and insisting on the moral superiority of ethical consumption, a fruitful avenue to nurture sustainable behaviour is to draw inspiration from experience marketing. Pine and Gilmour (1999) argue that brands should engage all senses to ensure the power and integrity of experiences and by removing all potential negative cues that could interfere with these goals. Transferring these insights to the context of zero waste stores, we can see that the coherence between the various elements of the material environment send out a clear message that facilitates the engagement with sustainable behaviours. Indeed, previous research has shown that holistic experiences may best be understood in terms of their gestalt, or the overall perceptions that emerge when environmental cues work together in harmony (Schmitt 1999). The different physical manifestations of the zero waste discourse act as experience vehicles that together create a coherent impression and make visits to these stores emotionally gratifying. By looking at ethical experiences in this way, research on sustainable consumption can help overcome reductionist assumptions about consumers

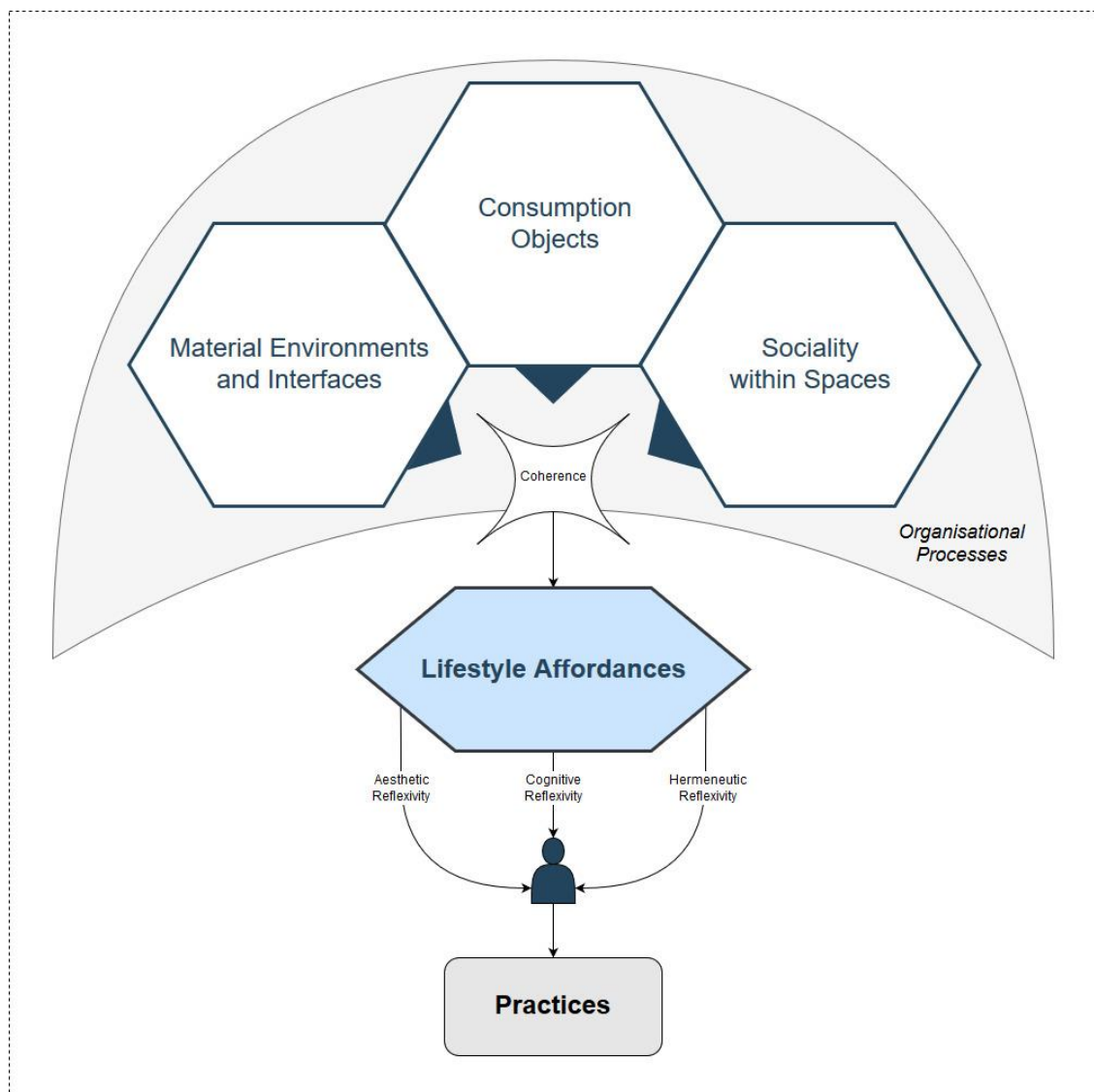
that focus primarily on rational choices and the cognitive side of ethical behaviour, while they are “disembodied and decontextualised from social material worlds” (Wallenborn and Wilhite 2014, p. 56). Consumption infrastructures reveal these socio-material worlds and, thereby, provide a better understanding of how to engage larger parts of the population in sustainable practices, as it not only becomes a logical, but also a satisfying thing to do. These new material realities would probably not emerge through traditional financing mechanisms (e.g. venture capital or bank loans), as it is unlikely that the consistent focus on zero waste principles would align with the return expectations of institutions, which highlights the need for self-organised value creation.

Finally, zero waste infrastructures connect users with similar interests. The socialities within these stores facilitate both the acquisition of new capabilities and motivate consumers to adopt zero waste thinking in more life domains. Regarding the former, broader skill sets are developed through talks with expert staff, reading books, and following up on recipe tips and online resources. The self-dependent production of zero waste alternatives (e.g. cleaning liquids), for example, can be learned through instructions that are provided during social encounters. The goal of working together towards the greater good fostered a reciprocal spirit in these places, which, once again, would likely not appear if the initiators were only trying to get rich through their shops. The *social affordances* of consumption infrastructures are equally important. Emotional support mechanisms assist people in their endeavour to apply zero waste practices, as they naturalise certain behaviours and encourage new adopters to ask questions. The suspicion levied towards people in conventional supermarkets, when they want things placed in their own containers, would be socially expected, or even physically necessary, in zero waste infrastructures. In this way, these shopping contexts provide an identity space for the zero waste lifestyle, which did not exist before.

Taken together, all these elements create a coherent understanding, which is built on the diverse ways of experiencing and knowing the zero waste philosophy. Consumption infrastructures set different emphasis through alterations, deliberate or not, in these three components. In doing so, they offer different lifestyle affordances, which, in turn, create various forms of reflexivity (see Figure 11). These might be more or less directed towards sustainability, depending on what lifestyle resources they harbour. In the case of zero waste stores, all aspects unify into a holistic ethical canvas, as the idea of avoiding all types of unnecessary resource use runs through the built environment, the

user interfaces, the objects found within the place, the operational processes behind the provisioning systems, and the social interactions that occur between individuals in these consumption infrastructures. The opposite may be observed in normal supermarkets, where brandscapes channel consumer thinking towards personal gratification, products are sourced from all over the world and constantly available, and social interactions make ethical behaviour less desirable, as the focus lies on efficient transactions and the carefree enjoyment of consumption. Different socio-material arrangements, therefore, have consequences on what types of behaviour come naturally to people, as they offer deviating ethical experiences and affect the overall sustainability of consumption patterns. In this respect and to conclude, this investigation has shown that self-organised value creation can impact on many market constituents through novel infrastructures, so that the third research question was answered.

Figure 11 – Consumption Infrastructures: Socio-Material Constellations, Lifestyle Affordances, and the Reflexive Mobilisation of Consumers for Sustainable Practices



Chapter 8 – The Discussion: Self-Organised Value Creation, Participatory Market Infrastructures, and Marketplace Change

8.0. Introduction to the Discussion Chapter

This thesis set out to explore how empowerment can be conceptualised, if we challenge the popular notion that ethical consumption can change the world for the better. In reviewing the literature, several shortcomings of consumer ethics research were outlined, including the infamous attitude-behaviour gap and explanations for its existence. Nevertheless, the underlying assumption was still that if deficiencies in the purchasing or avoidance strategies of individuals could be fixed, responsible consumption patterns could emerge through and transform the mainstream market. This Choice Paradigm was then challenged from multiple perspectives, not the least by outlining the growing role of consumers as co-creators of value. In this respect, a differentiation was made between company-led and self-organised value creation, ultimately leading to the inquiry if and how the latter form of organisation can establish new ethical opportunities for users and what factors influence their ability to take part in such processes. Based on the study of crowdfunding and the emergence of zero waste infrastructures in particular, the research questions were answered, showing that self-organised value creation opens up new possibilities by allowing various discourses to enter the market, which then shape the conduct of both consumers and other organisations through their presence. This part will delve deeper into the material presented in the two findings chapters by looking at the wider significance of self-organised value creation and the appearance of new consumption infrastructures.

The following discussion will address both findings chapters in two overarching sections. First, the findings of Chapter 6 will be put into broader perspective by looking at: i) co-creative empowerment, especially the importance of participatory market infrastructures and collective market entrepreneuring for allowing users to directly shape what offerings become available; ii) the implications of collective market entrepreneuring in terms of discourse diversity and sustainability, including how this raises the awareness of specific issues and recruits users for causes; and iii) the positive side effects of engaging more people in value creation activities. Second and corresponding to Chapter 7, the influence of new material realities that emerge through

self-organised value creation will be discussed. More specifically, the contribution of the concept of consumption infrastructures to research on ethical consumer behaviour will be elaborated. For this purpose, the role of various infrastructural elements is outlined. Starting off with the materiality of consumption infrastructures, the lifestyle affordances offered by different physical arrangements will be appraised, featuring both the concrete action possibilities they provide and how they reflexively mobilise consumers through varying meanings. In particular, the importance of holistic ethical experiences and aesthetic reflexivity will be examined, by focusing on the significance of coherent contextual cues and the insights that emerge from encounters with these. This will be done by comparing brandscapes and ethicsapes, a concept that I will introduce in this chapter. In addition, the socialities found within infrastructures will be discussed, looking at the role they play in the transfer of capabilities and the emotional support they provide to people. Fourth, the organisational processes behind consumption infrastructures and the evolution of market segments will be explored, especially in respect to how these lead to institutional reflexivity. Finally, a short summary, which highlights the interplay of these elements, will close the discussion.

8.1. Self-Organised Value Creation and Participatory Market Infrastructures: Decentralisation and Its Implications

8.1.1. Co-Creative Empowerment: Direct Market Shaping, Participatory Market Infrastructures, and Collective Market Entrepreneurship

The investigation of crowdfunding, as a form of self-organised value creation, has provided many important insights on co-creative empowerment. Existing research on consumer empowerment has mainly treated users as choosers of marketplace options or adopters of avoidance strategies (e.g. Friedman 1999; Shaw, Newholm, and Dickinson 2006; Wathieu et al. 2002), which are implicitly based on a consumer sovereignty model of power (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006). This was criticised not only because it plays down the issues related to choices (i.e. cognitive overload, vulnerability, sustainability, and cultural factors), but also because it largely ignores the role users occupy within value creation activities in modern society (see Labrecque et al. 2013). The innovation literature, on the other hand, has mainly looked at co-creation as a way in which companies profit from the creative labour of users and consumer communities (Bogers, Afuah, and Bastian 2010; Bogers et al. 2017), which has been

criticised for being a form of governmentality and exploitation (Bertilsson and Cassinger 2011; Comor 2010; Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008). In these contexts, the value creation possibilities of users are set within tight boundaries, as organisational interests determine what options can be pursued. This should be seen as the limited view of *co-creative empowerment*, where the ability to customise or alter the designs and performance dimensions of products (i.e. user consultation at the later stages of product development cycles), the flexibility to interpret brands as floating semiotic devices, and knowledge input in sponsored innovation communities are the main sources of power (Black and Veloutsou 2017; Fisher and Smith 2011; Fuchs and Schreier 2011; Füller et al. 2006). In contrast, I have argued that true user power resides in the ability to shape value creation activities at every stage, which includes financing innovation activities that determine the availability of marketplace offerings. Therefore, the extensive view of co-creative empowerment, which is advocated here, is crucial, as value creation essentially starts with the funding of ideas. Unless innovations are backed with appropriate resources and launched onto the market, they have no chance to influence the wider public. Accordingly, shaping the market becomes a question of having access to participatory market infrastructures, which allow users to self-organise value creation activities from the beginning.

In this respect, the thesis contributes to the literature on user innovation. It identifies the conditions under which self-organised value creation is likely to flourish, by going beyond the contexts of open source software development and consumer communities (e.g. Cova and White 2010; Cromie and Ewing 2009; Füller, Schroll, and von Hippel 2013), which are often invoked in studies on this phenomenon. By shifting the focus away from the internal dynamics of “communities of creation” (Sawhney and Prandelli 2000), it showed that access to *participatory market infrastructures* sets the ground for value creation activities. While extant research has looked at innovation strategies that grant a certain level of participation to users, such as the lead user method (Lüthje and Herstatt 2004), idea competitions (Piller and Walcher 2006), design interfaces (Buur and Matthews 2008), and interaction tools (Füller et al. 2009), these are guided by institutional interests and offer little autonomy to determine marketplace outcomes. Crowdfunding, meanwhile, represents a *democratic medium* through which people mobilise resources towards a common purpose. Three main features were identified in this respect. At the core was open access, which means that as many people as possible should be able to take part in value creation activities by setting the entry barriers

deliberately low (e.g. reward levels starting at a few Euros). The second element was transparency, which ensured the legitimacy of crowdfunding projects and acted as a system of checks and balances (Frydrych et al. 2014; Gegenhuber and Naderer 2018). Lastly, collective decision making made it possible for people to implement ideas independently of the agendas of established market players. This was in large part due to the sense of agentic involvement and the ambition to work towards the common good, which set free various forms of support that helped overcome the resource constraints usually faced by sustainability projects (see also Calic and Mosakowski 2016). Without widely accessible, transparent, and collectively-organised value creation vehicles, people would have little means to bundle their power to achieve these types of market outcomes. The infrastructural view on value co-creation that was developed within this thesis, therefore, complements past research, which has mainly focused on innovation tools, as those outlined above, or user communities dedicated towards a narrow range of topics (Cova and White 2010; Füller, Schroll, and von Hippel 2013; Füller and von Hippel 2008). It highlights, in particular, how institutional demands impact on the value creation activities of users, which is something that is naturalised in studies on company-led innovation. On a more specific level, the discussion of *crowd resources* offered original insights into the intangible benefits that can arise from publicly-accessible and collectively-organised value creation activities. This was evident in relation to peer credibility and the advantages it brought to the negotiations with stakeholders (e.g. SirPlus attracting new business partners in this way), which is an idea that has not been raised in relation to crowdfunding (see Moritz and Block 2016). It reveals the fine-grained benefits of this form of market entry, which are especially relevant to sustainability projects, as these are generally resource-strapped, but bound to generate a lot of goodwill that can be converted into free voluntary support and contributions.

Cultivating a collective orientation towards affecting marketplace change also contrasts with the main stream of ethical consumption research, which focuses on purchasing decisions as the main means of wielding an influence in the economy. This form of responsabilising consumers for sustainability problems was critiqued throughout the thesis. The discussion of ethical subjectification, in particular, highlighted the tendency to promote individual agency as a solution to societal ills, while the identities of people and their field of opportunities are bound by business interests (see, for instance, Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Moisander, Markkula, and Eräranta 2010; Soneryd and Ugglå 2015).

This undermines other forms of empowerment, especially those linked to collective action (Middlemiss 2014; Schwarzkopf 2011), and the creative capacities of users. People are limited to the choices that are available to them, leading to passivity and dependence on organisations to develop appropriate solutions for societal issues. Self-organised value creation, in contrast, requires people to actively work together to attain necessary resources, allowing them to extend the frontier of possibilities for themselves. The funders appreciated crowdfunding because it enabled them to directly support things they wanted to see on the market (e.g. SirPlus as a convenient option for saving food), compared to hoping that their purchases would someday sway existing organisations to launch products that address their concerns. In relation to this, collective market entrepreneuring was offered as a concept to reflect how people join forces to achieve social change through coordinated value creation activities.

Collective market entrepreneuring adds to our understanding of collective action within the economy. A vast body of research on social movements, for instance, has demonstrated that subversive or confrontational tactics, such as protests and boycotts, lead to institutional changes and sway businesses to alter their conduct (Bakker et al. 2013; Briscoe, Gupta, and Anner 2015; Rao 2009; Soule 2012; van Jakomijn et al. 2013). Similarly, consumer communities have been shown to raise awareness for the needs of particular subpopulations in the fashion industry (Dolbec and Fischer 2015; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). In other words, these movements seek social transformations by communicating their concerns to existing market actors to influence their behaviour. This corresponds to the “voice” strategy outlined by Hirschman (1972), who looked at how people respond to inadequate organisational performance, which can include ethical considerations. The other two strategies are “loyalty” and “exit”, where the latter refers to switching to different providers or market alternatives. For example, research has shown that consumers seek to escape globalised food supply chains through partnerships with local producers (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007a, 2007b) or by forming responsible consumption cooperatives (Papaoikonomou and Alarcón 2017; Papaoikonomou, Valverde, and Ryan 2012). Collective market entrepreneuring, then, presents a concrete possibility to not only exit prevailing market structures, but to *actively develop new solutions to societal problems* (i.e. a “create” strategy). The desire of funders to support pioneers of change and the goal of initiators to sensitise and recruit people to discourse communities pays tribute to the ambition to shift markets towards sustainability. It illustrates how social change is increasingly

sought through value creation activities, rather than individual ethical behaviour, which consumer society tries to cultivate. Indeed, even social movements have adopted market mechanisms to develop alternatives to mainstream products and to affect institutional change (Akemu, Whiteman, and Kennedy 2016; Desirée, Jeffrey, and Timothy 2014; Hargrave and van de Ven 2006; King and Pearce 2010). This study showed that participatory market infrastructures can go a long way towards making collective market entrepreneuring a more common phenomenon, allowing a wide range of ideas to emerge from self-organised value creation.

8.1.2. Crowdfunding and the Diffusion of Ideas: Diversity Through Collective Market Entrepreneuring

The previous section discussed the characteristics of participatory market infrastructures and why collective market entrepreneuring is seen as a meaningful avenue for social change. In this section, the implications of this form of collective innovation agency, where value creation activities are decentralised, rather than orchestrated by one dominant player, will be explored. More specifically, it will be argued that looking at market infrastructures exposes hidden business conventions that affect what options are available within the economy. It highlights that crowdfunding is linked to different understandings, where: i) funders of projects want to directly influence what ideas make it to market and promote diversity; ii) initiators seek independence to be able to achieve their goals; and iii) both parties want to enact social change through establishing new cultural resources that address sustainability problems.

The decentralisation of value creation activities that is inherent to collective market entrepreneuring is significant for several reasons. First of all, due to the inclusion of large numbers of people in participatory market infrastructures, a *multiplicity of decision frames* are brought to innovation activities. Collective decision making means that individuals from varying backgrounds and with different preferences judge the merit of ideas, which leads to the acceptance of a broader range of projects compared to the standardised processes and the concentration of authority found within organisations (please also return to Figure 1 for an overview). Companies have diverse reasons to avoid the development of sustainable offerings (see Husted 2016), as institutional demands guide their investment strategies and development cycles. As Barman (2016) succinctly captures “settling on a specific quality of worth, a measuring device

determines what counts and how to count it” so that its application “reduces a plurality of available orders of worth to a single type of value” (p.222). Hence, even if social value is considered by organisations, they are likely to only produce solutions that adhere to their idea of responsibility, which, more often than not, has to link back to some kind of reputational or strategic advantage. This focus on corporate objectives and the desire to seek consistent outcomes can, in fact, be seen as “a mode of colonising the future” (Giddens 1991, p. 133). Corporate innovation processes, with their tendency to create market segments and brands that provide relative security in certain life domains, can count as abstract systems that have a significant bearing on the evolution of markets. Vested interests and the prevalence of financial investment criteria in institutional decision processes make it hard for responsible options to emerge organically from existing players within the market. This constrains the field of possibilities of consumers not only in the here and now, but also in the foreseeable future, as dominant institutional logics keep churning out products that play down sustainability concerns. They lead, to a certain degree, to the constant return of the same outcomes. King and Pearce (2010) write:

“Incumbents resist efforts to change market conditions inasmuch as they benefit from current arrangements, and logics and categories create inertia through taken-for-granted conventions, beliefs, and practices. Because of these powerful incumbent interests and cultural anchors, markets do not change by themselves. Actors must mobilise resources and promote change-oriented collective action to generate lasting institutional change.” (p. 250)

Collective market entrepreneuring is one way of addressing this problem by letting networks of users decide what ideas should be implemented. The funders, in particular, saw crowdfunding as a tool to help build a more colourful and diverse marketplace through active participation in funding processes. In theoretical terms, this offers important insights into how different modes of user innovation affect market outcomes. Existing research has mainly looked at the impact user innovation has on companies, such as the effect of empowerment on customer satisfaction and product demand (Bendapudi and Leone 2003; Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Heidenreich et al. 2015), its relationship to corporate performance (Poetz and Schreier 2012; Ramani and Kumar 2008; Rass et al. 2013), or its contribution to the development of radical innovations and industry practices (Hyysalo 2009; Lettl, Herstatt, and Gemuenden 2006). In studies where users do take the lead role in innovation processes, on the other hand, the principle focus has been on how they commercialise products and the internal dynamics of these developments (Füller and von Hippel 2008; Hiennerth 2006; Shah and Tripsas 2007). Collective market entrepreneuring, in contrast, highlights the *social change potential of decentralised value creation* and how it promotes *discourse*

diversity, as people with different backgrounds support ideas that align with their outlooks on life. In this way, sustainability issues, niche market segments, and vulnerability concerns (e.g. the integration of refugees in the economy), which would normally be disregarded by profit-driven organisations, are tackled. By looking at the outputs of value creation, this research offers a new angle on innovation systems. It shows that offerings that are created through the active collaboration between users in participatory market infrastructures cater for particular lifestyles and a broader variety of needs. These tend to match the demand of target groups better, as they are consulted early on in the development cycle, compared to traditional innovation processes, where users are confronted with finished products.

Second, due to the collective nature of self-organised value creation, initiators are freed from the requirements usually placed on them by institutions. In crowdfunding, many people are needed to implement campaigns, spreading the risks amongst different constituents and offering room for experimentation. It does not oblige initiators to provide any personal assets as securities and creates less pressure to generate a lot of revenue in a short period of time to pay back debts. The initiators valued the independence they gained from shifting away from traditional means of attaining funds, enabling them to try out *alternative organisational forms*. In this way, different business models materialise through collective market entrepreneuring, which offers new insights on the emergence of hybrid organisations. Recently, there has been a growing interest in ventures that mix non-profit logics with commercial outlooks and how these conflicting goals can be aligned in one entity (Battilana and Lee 2014). In particular, the rise of benefit corporations and social enterprises has been studied, including what mechanisms drive the establishment of these organisations and related legal forms (Hiller 2013; Miller et al. 2012).⁵⁷ This thesis points to a link between collaborative forms of organising (Kolbjørnsrud 2018) and their ability to cultivate projects that seek to address the common good through the marketplace. The institutional independence promoted by collective market entrepreneuring offers an optimal departure point for these new entrants, which is, however, linked to the ability to mobilise networks of people and their resources behind an idea. Participatory market infrastructures facilitate this, as their democratic nature grants many people access to value creation activities

⁵⁷ A full exploration of the social entrepreneurship literature was beyond the scope of this thesis. Please refer to one of the excellent literature reviews on the topic (see Dacin, Dacin, and Matear 2010; Dacin, Dacin, and Tracey 2011; Mair and Martí 2006).

and provides the necessary legitimacy through transparent processes. The focus on societal value by social enterprises is an advantage under these circumstances, as people want to take part in improving the state of the world. The sense of agentic involvement is a defining feature of collective market entrepreneuring, which social enterprises cannot easily replicate through other forms of market activity. The findings, thereby, advance our understanding of the conditions under which hybrid organisations are likely to flourish (i.e. when resources are mobilised by users, who become active co-constructors of change) and establish a link to the user innovation literature, which could lead to the cross-fertilisation of these fields. The decentralisation of value creation activities, therefore, can be seen as one avenue to sustainability, as it extends the horizon of possibilities for all involved parties.

Finally, while funders and initiators cherish different aspects of crowdfunding (i.e. diversity and independence, respectively), they are united in what they want to achieve. The goal of both parties is often to solve sustainability problems by *mainstreaming alternative discourses*, so that ideas are diffused beyond the core groups of dedicated users. The zero waste discourse, for instance, received a physical presence through the stores, granting new population groups access to this form of consumption. The exposure to the concept can then lead to the ideological recruitment of people (see Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007a) to the zero waste community, so that successively more users engage in sustainable practices (e.g. unpackaged shopping and producing self-made household items). *New cultural resources* thus emerge through collective market entrepreneuring and establish alternative meanings on the market. In this respect, the thesis adds to research on institutional innovation, which has taken an interest in how collective action and social movements affect change (Hargrave and van de Ven 2006; Rao 2009). Studies in this area have, for instance, emphasised the role of discursive tactics, the deployment of cultural codes, or “disruptive truth-telling” by social movements to create acceptance for different market practices (Dey and Mason 2018; Ruef 2000; Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2008). Collective market entrepreneuring, in contrast, not only does the cultural ground work for new practices, but also offers direct action possibilities through the launch of marketplace offerings.⁵⁸ That is to say, it enhances the cultural receptivity to certain debates and alternative

⁵⁸ The cultural ground work consists of building legitimacy through campaigns and engaging crowds of people in the co-development of ideas. Examples of new action possibilities can be found in the cases, where the zero waste stores helped consumers to save countless tons of packaging, SirPlus redistributed scores of rescued food, and the Karma Classics range offered sustainable substitutes for fashion brands.

meanings by moving them out of their niche existence and allowing them to enter the standard consumption repertoire of individuals. Over time these meanings may become widely accepted and are integrated into the cultural fabric of a society, so that collective market entrepreneuring leads to institutional change.

8.1.3. Cultivating a Society of Prosumers: The Systemic Value of Crowdfunding

The preceding section showed that collective market entrepreneuring breeds diversity on the market and enables alternative forms of organising, so that new ideas and meanings reach different population groups. In this part, I want to draw attention to the wider cultural significance of self-organised value creation in contemporary society. I will consider crowdfunding not as a means to an end, but as a cultural resource in itself, to uncover the positive side effects of participatory market infrastructures.

The discussion so far has primarily looked at the direct implications of crowdfunding and what participatory market infrastructures contribute to the study of user innovation. Publically-accessible and transparent value creation activities, however, also have positive side effects at a macro level. While the benefits of openness and the free revealing of information have been documented in relation to innovating users and companies (Baldwin and von Hippel 2011; von Hippel and Krogh 2006), little research has looked at its societal implications. This thesis suggests that *participatory market infrastructures* increase the engagement of people in value creation through three means. First, they *demystify innovation processes*. In relation to crowdfunding, the ability to observe the emergence of market innovations helped people to understand what it takes to realise ideas. Innumerable success stories and failures are just a click away on these platforms, so that launching projects seems like an achievable task. In particular, the existence of high-impact cases (e.g. Original Unverpackt) motivates people to start their own campaigns. Initiators are also not portrayed as unapproachable geniuses, but as people who one might interact with on a daily basis. This tackles the psychological barriers associated with realising own ideas and strengthens the confidence of individuals that they are capable of writing similar success stories. These positive side effects have not yet been observed in crowdfunding research (see Moritz and Block 2016). Second, participatory market infrastructures *educate potential initiators* by providing process knowledge and ideographic blueprints. The openness of crowdfunding allows people to learn from and model their efforts on past projects, so

that the hurdles of planning a market entry are reduced. In other words, participatory market infrastructures are far better in conveying the feasibility of innovations, compared to closed systems, where value creation processes cannot be witnessed until the actual launch of a product.

Third, they *inspire people* to actively solve their problems within the market. Participatory market infrastructures promote, what I have called, role reflexivity. *Role reflexivity* describes when a person critically scrutinises what subject position may be best suited to achieve desired goals. For example, instead of accepting suboptimal outcomes in the market through the adoption of the consumer role, people might look for ways to develop their own solutions. Many of the initiators who were interviewed for this thesis were disgruntled consumers before they decided to launch their own campaigns. The founders of zero waste stores typically had a long track record of avoiding waste until they established outlets across Germany. The lead figure behind SirPlus, Raphael, even lived without money for five years and collected discarded food from supermarkets, before he found a team to build up a secondary market for food. This shows that collective market entrepreneuring becomes an option for users that cannot meet their needs through conventional providers. So far, this has only been examined in research on counter brands, where whole communities of frustrated users get together to create alternatives to existing brands (Cova and Cova 2012). Consequently, through inspiring people to become active co-creators of change, participatory market infrastructures promote a critical engagement with and resistance to consumer subject positions (see Dobscha and Ozanne 2001; Valor, Díaz, and Merino 2017). This may enrol a larger proportion of the population in innovation activities, which is likely to generate a virtuous circle, through which continuously more solutions find their way onto the market and encourage new generations of initiators to realise their ideas. In this respect, the thesis contributes to research on innovation ecosystems (see Bogers et al. 2017), by showing that the micro practices linked to participatory market infrastructures (i.e. observing and learning from crowdfunding projects) have positive effects at a societal level, especially by fostering the knowledge and capabilities people need to engage in co-creation. Furthermore, the discussion of collective market entrepreneuring contrasts with existing, individualistic models of entrepreneurship found within the literature by showing how people unite to achieve marketplace change. Overall then, crowdfunding is more than just a simple financing tool, but a cultural resource that fosters value creation activities.

8.2. New Material Realities: Consumption Infrastructures and Their Implications

8.2.1. It's a Material World: Material Constellations and Their Implications

8.2.1.1. Consumption Infrastructures, Lifestyle Affordances, and Cognitive Reflexivity

The previous sections looked at the benefits of self-organised value creation and how it opens up new possibilities for various market players. In the following paragraphs, I will explain how the market presence of user-led innovations influences the behaviour of consumers. In order to do so, I will first look at the lifestyle affordances granted by consumption infrastructures, both in terms of the interaction possibilities they offer and the objects that they harbour, before I move on to the various forms of reflexivity they mobilise to change the routines of consumers.

In Chapter 7, I described various material elements of consumption infrastructures, including the built environment, the bulk dispensing systems, and the objects found within the retail context. The latter two are primarily responsible for shaping the action possibilities of consumers. One central feature of consumption infrastructures is the types of user interfaces they offer. The application of the concept of *affordances* (Gibson 1979) emphasised that shopping contexts grant different opportunities to their users. That is to say, every consumption infrastructure enables certain forms of behaviour, while others are constrained. This infrastructural view offers new insights to the ethical consumption literature. More specifically, it generates a better understanding of how situational contexts and actual behavioural control affect consumer behaviour, which so far has mainly been addressed in conceptual work (e.g. Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell 2010; Phipps et al. 2013). In zero waste stores the bulk dispensing systems allowed consumers to extract desired amounts of a product, whereas conventional supermarkets, where standardised packages have to be bought, do not offer this option. This does not mean that responsible consumption is impossible in these contexts, but rather that it is limited to choices that align with the underlying pick-and-drop retail concept, such as ethically-labelled products. Even if consumers have the intention to buy things unpackaged in supermarkets, such a task would be difficult, as the store setup and goods do not cater for these needs. Hence, the study of consumption infrastructures reveals how certain lifestyles and levels of resource use are, to a certain extent, preconditioned by material environments. This questions the capacity of ethical consumers to stick to their ideals across shopping contexts and may explain some of the

paradoxes created by the attitude-behaviour gap, as the structural limitations that consumers face in shopping contexts are exposed.

The types of objects that flow through consumption infrastructures are another crucial aspect that defines the possibilities of consumers. In zero waste stores, various *lifestyle resources* are available that facilitate the integration of zero waste practices in everyday life. Stainless steel containers, cutlery sets, toothpaste tablets, bamboo toothbrushes, shampoo bars, deodorant creams, and beeswax wraps are products not normally available in supermarkets, which enable people to save waste in many consumption domains. The thesis made several contributions to the ethical consumption literature in this respect. First, although past studies within marketing have examined the sales impact of “other products” and product bundling (Shocker, Bayus, and Kim 2004; Stremersch and Tellis 2002), the influence of these strategies on responsible consumer behaviour has been overlooked. This thesis argued that the *clustering of ethical objects* in a confined space exposes people to marketplace alternatives, which stimulate the uptake of sustainable practices. It, thereby, added to our understanding of how ethical consumption spreads to diverse lifestyle sectors and how behavioural spillovers (see Dolan and Galizzi 2015; Margetts and Kashima 2017; Truelove et al. 2014) emerge from retail environments. Second, it was argued that objects carry latent reflexivity within them and nudge consumers to try out new things. This suggests that consumption infrastructures are not neutral backgrounds, but may *recruit people to certain practices*. The encounters with zero waste stores and the lifestyle resources they stock (e.g. toothpaste tablets) can act as a destabilising events (Thompson et al. 2018), which lead to the *scrutiny of naturalised aspects of everyday consumption*.⁵⁹ Many respondents, for example, said that they only realised how much packaging they used on a daily basis after they had been exposed to the zero waste concept. Previous research has mostly discounted the possibility that material realities affect ethical consumer behaviour, as rational decision making models assume that individuals are driven by pre-existing values and preferences. The investigation of consumption infrastructures puts these influences back into the equation, by showing how lifestyle resources promote cognitive reflexivity and enhance the critical imagination of people.

⁵⁹ See also Chapter 4, pages 109-114, in Giddens (1991) on how fateful moments present important decisions in a person’s life trajectory, which can include the adoption of new lifestyles.

Moreover, the thesis suggested that specific capabilities are necessary to make effective use of different consumption infrastructures. Zero waste stores demand and build up production skills, while supermarkets offer ready-made solutions that essentially displace many of these capabilities to industrial systems (e.g. all-in-one cleaning liquids and microwavable food). Put differently, consumption infrastructures lead to the *deskilling or reskilling* of users in specific life domains (see also Giddens 1991). Conventional supermarkets, to a certain degree, lead to deskilling, as people develop a growing dependence on brands and convenience goods (e.g. ready-made food and lack of cooking competences), which predetermine the use of resources due to their high packaging-to-content ratios. Zero waste infrastructures, on the other hand, require consumers to reskill and attain knowledge to navigate these spaces. Not only do they have to adjust their shopping styles, as seen in the amount of preparation that goes into visits to these stores, but they also have to know how to process the products available in them (see Section 7.2.2.3.1.).⁶⁰ The ethical consumption literature often precludes the possibility that users acquire new skills through encounters with retail environments. Adopting an infrastructural perspective, therefore, aids our understanding of the interdependencies and dynamics involved in sustainable behavioural change, offering a more nuanced view than the purely rational models found in earlier research.

Finally, the character of consumption infrastructures is shaped by the coherence between the different elements. The bulk dispensing systems and the requirement to take over production-related tasks create a very different experience in zero waste stores. Yet, in order to provide a *holistic ethical consumption space*, the credentials of the goods that travel through these infrastructural arrangements are equally important. Most options stocked in the zero waste stores were organic, regionally sourced and from responsible suppliers, which often had their own sustainability agendas (e.g. Ruby Cup and El Rojito). If the offerings in zero waste stores were made by irresponsible organisations, such as coffee from plantations that use child labour, the integrity of the concept would be endangered, as environmental aspects would be offset by social issues in the supply chain. Here, a bridge can be drawn to the organisational processes behind these outlets. The funders and consumers stressed their deep appreciation of the strict ethical regimes implemented by the initiators on various occasions, as these ensured that

⁶⁰ Consider, for example, the creation of self-made household items or deodorant creams, which require the ability to combine certain basic ingredients that are available in zero waste stores. If someone does not know the functional characteristics of the core components, it will be difficult to produce do-it-yourself solutions for that person.

optimal solutions in terms of sustainability were found for them. This was evident in the single-option policy of the zero waste stores and the reluctance to add exotic offerings to the assortment, which signalled the diligence of the founders in building a sustainable product range. The primacy of ethical meanings in the sourcing arrangements of the stores reassured consumers that they could place their trust into these consumption infrastructures.⁶¹ The literature on servicescapes has seen a growing interest in how the congruity and interaction between different environmental cues provide convincing service encounters (Mari and Poggesi 2013; Rosenbaum and Massiah 2011). However, little has been said on how these understandings can be leveraged to encourage responsible behaviours. Conventional supermarkets often provide fragmented ethical consumption spaces, as consumers need to make trade-offs between ethical dimensions (Tanner and Wölfling Kast 2003) or functional features are de-coupled from moral claims (Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård 2007). Zero waste stores, in comparison, generate *coherent ethical impressions* because they align different infrastructural elements. In combination, the bulk dispensing systems, the concentration of lifestyle resources, the do-it-yourself component, and sophisticated organisational processes create critical awareness of marketplace alternatives, leading to cognitive reflexivity about what actions should be pursued to realise ethical ideals. These aspects are rarely considered alongside each other in ethical consumption research. This thesis, thereby, addresses concerns that have been raised in relation to the influence that choice architectures wield on consumers (Akenji et al. 2016). That is to say, it contributes to the study of ethical consumer behaviour by delineating how material constellations unify in holistic ideational spaces that facilitate the adoption of sustainable lifestyles and affect the imagination of consumers.

8.2.1.2. Consumption Infrastructures, Ethical Experiences, and Aesthetic Reflexivity

In the previous section, I have mainly drawn attention to the ways in which consumption infrastructures offer different lifestyle affordances by highlighting the role of user interfaces (i.e. bulk dispensing systems) and lifestyle resources (i.e. zero waste tools and ethical products). In this part, I will shift the focus away from the action possibilities provided by infrastructural arrangements to the forms of reflexivity that arise out of them. This perspective is premised on the late modernist assumption that

⁶¹ I would like to remind the reader about the importance of corporate associations for the ethical judgements of consumers. Please return to Section 2.1.2.3. for a review of the literature on this topic.

individuals, as well as institutions, constantly change their behaviour in the light of new knowledge or information that pertains to specific action domains (Giddens 1991). Consumption practices, in simpler terms, are altered based on users' evolving understandings of what the best possible approach is within a particular lifestyle sector. The goal here is to show the importance of aesthetic reflexivity in creating behavioural change and how contexts are involved in crafting desired subjectivities and forms of action.

The ethical consumption literature is often preoccupied with individual attitudes and values to predict responsible consumer behaviour. Yet, this ignores the ambient conditions of everyday life and how embodied experiences supplement the cognitive understandings of people (Larkin 2013). I underscored the importance of *aesthetic reflexivity* throughout Chapter 7 by showing how zero waste stores produce coherent ethical perceptions and, thereby, nudge consumers towards sustainable behaviours. The use of second-hand equipment and upcycled materials, the natural colours of goods visible through the bulk bins, the smells of fresh produce and cosmetic items, as well as a broad range of zero waste products experientially reinforced the underlying discourse. These aspects lead to an *embodied appreciation of sustainable consumption* by linking it to positive emotions and symbolising ethical meanings in the environment. Aesthetic reflexivity, according to Lash (2007), works through resembling the signified. That is, the meanings that are supposed to be conferred are not communicated directly, but rather implicit in the retail context. The control over purchasing volumes, which is made possible through the bulk bins, for instance, mimics a mindful approach to consumption. It signals that users should only take as much as they need and value the things they buy. Similarly, the use of upcycled materials represents the zero waste principles, as unnecessary resource use is avoided in the built environment. In the same way that paintings contain messages, such as the anti-war sentiment conveyed by Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, which makes the horrors of conflicts aesthetically accessible, consumption infrastructures transport meanings that can be leveraged towards sustainable behaviours. The information and knowledge that leads to a change in consumer practices, therefore, does not have to be understood merely in terms of pure reason, but can also be embodied in emotions (e.g. the terror and injustice of mass murder and the futility of civil war as seen in *Guernica*). This insight is important for the study of ethical consumption in multiple ways, as the following paragraphs will show.

The first contribution is that ethical consumption needs to become more experientially engaging to create broader marketplace acceptance. Due to the popularity of cognitive decision making models in the literature (e.g. the Theory of Planned Behaviour) this aspect has received relatively little academic attention. Most notably, the works of Kate Soper (2007; 2014) on alternative hedonism and anti-consumerist aesthetics have advanced thinking in this area, showing that the distancing from affluent consumption can coincide with a higher quality of life. Other research has looked at ethical experiences outside of everyday contexts, such as through ethical tourism (Malone, McCabe, and Smith 2014) or the transformative potential of alternative break programs (Ulusoy 2016), and how this is linked to positive emotions. This research, in contrast, focused on consumption infrastructures and how they create aesthetic reflexivity through built environments, user interfaces, and lifestyle resources. It, thereby, not only extends our understanding in this nascent research stream, but also suggests that *experiential marketing and atmospherics* can be *deployed towards sustainable behaviours*. Existing research in this area has predominantly focused on the sales benefits of contextual cues (Baker et al. 2002; Mari and Poggese 2013; Rosenbaum and Massiah 2011), whereas their ethical implications are rarely acknowledged. In zero waste stores, the absence of packaging, the reuse of materials, and the natural colours and smells sensually embedded ethical meanings in the retail environment, so that embodied experiences further strengthened responsible consumption tendencies. In these settings, consumers enjoy engaging in ethical behaviour, so that there is no need to find excuses for avoiding moral conduct (see Chatzidakis, Hibbert, and Smith 2007; Eckhardt, Belk, and Devinney 2010; Pereira Heath and Chatzidakis 2012). Aesthetic reflexivity thus reinforces the cognitive contemplations and critical awareness that are already generated by the exposure to marketplace alternatives. This lays the foundation for research into ethical aesthetics and sustainable experiences, which provide a counter-design to the consumerist meanings propagated by brandscapes.

A return to consumer culture theory is instructive here. In the literature review the operation of brand and commercial meanings was elaborated at length, showing that ideologies propagate certain consumer identities and that people engage in an interpretive dance to find and protect their preferred subject positions (see Section 3.5.). We also saw that countervailing meanings and ethical ideologies have mainly been studied in relation to community-supported agriculture and consumer movements (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007a, 2007b), while

retail themes have primarily been left to the devices of brands (Borghini et al. 2009; Foster and McLelland 2015). Given what we have learned about zero waste infrastructures and how their material constitution physically and reflexively mobilises users to adopt sustainable practices, it is time to break the commercial stranglehold on shopping contexts. In order to do so, I advance an addition to Kozinets et al.'s (2002) typology of retail themes. Four different types of themes are outlined in their work: 1) landscape, retail themes with a cultural connection to nature; 2) marketscape, retail themes with a cultural connection to community; 3) cyberscape, retail themes with a cultural connection to electronics and innovation; and 4) mindscape, retail themes with a cultural connection to growth and development. I propose the inclusion of *ethicscapes*, which are retail themes with a cultural connection to sustainability and communal growth. Although these relate to the idea of mindscapes, in the sense that they seek to access the “metaphysical inner space” of consumers (ibid), they are different in that they promote the common good through providing responsible consumption opportunities. Zero waste stores are an excellent example of this type of theme, as the discourse guided the crafting of the physical space, the make-up of the product range, and the expert ethical service provided to customers. As a result, ethical marketplace discourses lead to ideologies and identity positions (see Thompson 2004) that nurture mindfulness, greater care for the environment, and other-directed thinking, as opposed to consumerist meanings. Retail brand ideologies, more simply, can be replaced by ethical ideologies, such as the zero waste philosophy. The comparison of zero waste stores and brandscapes provided evidence for this argument, as these contexts naturalised other ways of life by privileging different meanings and subject positions (see Section 7.2.2.3.2).⁶² The thesis, thereby, showed that consumption infrastructures impact on the behaviours of people through ethical regimes and ideals, which is a topic that had so far mainly been addressed in cultural anthropology (see Anand 2011; Schnitzler 2013; Simone 2004). Conclusively, if organisations establish consumption infrastructures with a clear link to sustainability, rather than just altering their assortment to feature ethical goods alongside conventional ones, more people would be swayed into adopting responsible consumption habits.

⁶² Conventional brandscapes naturalise ways of thinking that focus on personal gains, where consumers are addressed as efficient choosers that seek to maximise the amount of goods they can acquire with a given budget. This is reflected in the pick-and-drop shopping style, convenient packaging, recurrent discounts, and even, at a symbolic level, the logos of discounters. Here, the attention of individuals is channelled towards prices and brand meanings, so that greater revenues can be generated by companies (see also Wood and Ball 2013). Zero waste stores, in contrast, cultivate a mindful approach to consumption by giving their users control over the amounts of product they can purchase, exposing them to ethical debates, and motivating them to extend their moral deliberations to diverse lifestyle sectors.

8.2.2. It's a Social World: Socialities and Their Implications

So far, I have summarised and linked the material aspects of consumption infrastructures back to the literature to show how they contribute to the study of ethical consumer behaviour. This section will supplement this discussion by looking at the social implications of consumption infrastructures. In relation to this, I will stress two main points: 1) the competences required to engage with infrastructural arrangements and how social interactions help to acquire these; and 2) the social affordances of infrastructures and how they motivate behaviours. Taken together, they address the often underemphasised role of social aspects in ethical consumption research.

In the foregoing discussion we have seen that zero waste stores offer very different lifestyle affordances to consumers. In order to navigate these new infrastructures, users need to have certain competences, which are in large part acquired through social interactions and knowledge resources found within these spaces. These included ethical advice from expert staff, mutual learning through encounters with knowledgeable users, and, not the least, books, flyers and other information sources found within the retail environment. The initiators, in particular, saw their stores as places of exchange and platforms for knowledge sharing, rather than just mere commercial sites with an alternative shopping concept. The ethical consumption literature is silent about the possibility that stores provide ethical consulting services or environments where various stakeholders exchange their ideas and expertise on responsible consumption. In part this may be traced back to the focus on cognitive decision making models that assume people already know what they are doing and have clear preferences, but another explanation could be that such environments are simply not very common. In this respect, the examination of the *embodied infrastructures* (Tonkiss 2015) found at zero waste stores offered new insights in this research area. Zero waste stores, with their participatory and reciprocal spirit, cultivated a communal outlook, where information was freely shared with other members in the network. Everyone was acknowledged as a potential carrier of useful practices and knowledge (see Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005). This would hardly happen in supermarket chains, as there is less concentrated expertise on sustainability and people tend to focus on their own needs, with little interaction going on between customers. The sociality found in shopping contexts thus does not only affect the judgements of servicescapes (Rosenbaum and Massiah 2011), but also has an educational function that allows users to competently manoeuvre in these spaces

and develop ethical behaviours (see also Burton 2002). Hence, the study of consumption infrastructures reveals the ways in which users attain competences through social encounters in retail environments and how these facilitate the adoption of certain lifestyles.

Another key contribution can be seen in the examination of the social affordances granted by consumption infrastructures. The term *social affordance* describes the forms of behaviours that are socially appropriate in particular shopping contexts and the types of interactions made possible in these. It tackles the issue that ethical consumption research is often too focused on individual factors, while the influence of “formative social processes in defining the actual meaning of 'right' and 'good' consumption” (Caruana 2007a, p. 289) is obscured. The comparison of conventional supermarkets and zero waste stores, as seen from the perspective of consumers, was useful for this purpose. More specifically, users experienced zero waste stores as places where they could act on their ideals without reservations and meet people with similar interests. They represented an identity space, where zero waste practices were socially accepted and actively encouraged, while similar actions would have raised eyebrows in regular shopping contexts (e.g. asking for a piece of cheese to be placed in a personal container). In other words, consumption infrastructures reinforce behaviours through the *emotional work and social feedback* that takes place within them, which may either work for or against sustainable lifestyles. An approving nod can go a long way towards helping people develop sustainable habits, compared to feelings of guilt that arise through complicating the lives of others. The importance of social support for the uptake and retention of lifestyles has, for instance, been examined in relation to veganism (Cherry 2015), but with little reference to how consumption environments may be conducive towards this end. The concept of social affordances captures how social expectations channel behaviour in different consumption infrastructures and offers new insights into the study of ethical behaviour. In this respect, the incorporation of *hermeneutic reflexivity* (Lash 2007) highlights the role of communities in shaping what is interpreted as good or bad conduct. Becoming a true zero waste practitioner, for instance, already presumes the acceptance of certain meanings and entails the uptake of associated practices to count as a full member of the community. This sense of being part of a “we”, of a movement or community, and the mobilisation of social identities led to a deep engagement with the zero waste lifestyle through these infrastructures. Conventional supermarkets do not offer such feelings of belonging and group

association, which may further engrain self-interested, rather than ethical, consumption tendencies in the minds of consumers. This lends further support to research that has argued that social factors are important in motivating ethical consumption (Cherrier 2007; Granzin and Olsen 1991; Soron 2010). Overall then, the socialities found within consumption infrastructures are important for both educating and motivating people to engage in certain behaviours.

8.2.3. It's a Networked World: Organisational Processes, Interdependencies, and Market Evolution

The discussion up to this point has looked at the various ways in which consumption infrastructures impact on consumer behaviour and what this research contributes to the literature on ethical consumption and user innovation. This part looks at how the market presence of projects, which arose out of self-organised value creation, affects other organisations. It will focus especially on the efforts of zero waste stores to pioneer new practices and establish intermediate infrastructural solutions by collaborating with other stakeholders. Moreover, it will cover the influence these stores wield on other entities, both directly, through their market power, and indirectly, through promoting institutional reflexivity.

In Chapter 7 a detailed outline of the various aspects of organisational processes was given and linked to several theoretical implications. Zero waste stores, however, also have an effect on other market actors, as they champion *new business practices*. In particular, their focus on eliminating all forms of waste in their provisioning chains through holistic sourcing arrangements required intermediate infrastructural solutions that do not belong to the standard repertoire of suppliers. This was evident in the discussion of re-localised distribution chains, where deposit schemes and circular economic thinking were cultivated by the shop owners. Numerous examples were given of how the zero waste stores had built partnerships with regional suppliers to exchange reusable containers (e.g. hobbocks, buckets, envelops) during deliveries to avoid waste. The collaboration with firms in geographic proximity was important in this respect because the heavier weight of glass and stainless steel containers, which were used for this purpose, would have otherwise used up a lot of energy and led to pollution. The thesis, thereby, supplemented conceptual work on the dematerialisation of economies and the development of closed loop supply systems (Bakker et al. 2014; Braungart and

McDonough 2008; Geissdoerfer et al. 2017; Ghisellini, Cialani, and Ulgiati 2016; Steinberger, Krausmann, and Eisenmenger 2010), giving insights on how these ideas can be applied at a local level, including the challenges that arise with the implementation of such changes. Furthermore, it suggests that consumption infrastructures are at least partially built on existing market constellations that cannot be transformed by one actor alone, but rather through several constituents that work together. This reflects the element of accretion in infrastructural thinking (Anand 2015) and highlights that changes start with small, independent innovations that become mainstream over time (Larkin 2013). In part this is achieved through cooperation, as seen in the case of Stückgut and its close ties to El Rojito, or through joining forces to develop market power, as seen in the founding of a zero waste cooperative by various store owners in Germany. Collaborative efforts, therefore, have far-reaching implications when they question established business standards and shape the institutional field.

The success of new retail concepts does, of course, not go by unnoticed by other market players. Aside from influencing the conduct of direct stakeholders through collaboration and market power, crowdfunded projects inspired other actors to take in sustainability ideas. The discussion of *institutional reflexivity* underscored the fact that self-organised value creation had an indirect influence on incumbent firms, as these innovations raised the cultural receptivity to new discourses. Many of the funders deliberately supported projects for this purpose and wanted to create a chain reaction, so that the zero waste concept, for instance, could spread to more and more areas. The fact that some respondents observed changes within the local retail landscape (e.g. the adoption of bulk dispensing systems by competitors), speaks for the general dispersion of ideas through imitation processes. These findings contribute to the user innovation literature by showing that sustainable business practices, that are pioneered by crowdfunded outlets, have a wider impact by inducing organisations to scrutinise prevailing industry conventions (see also Hyysalo 2009). In addition, realised projects can not only provide an ideographic blueprint, through the accessibility of information on the campaign over the crowdfunding website, but also a physical prototype for potential initiators. This was seen in relation to other founders visiting zero waste outlets in Germany, so that self-organised innovations nurture further entrepreneurial activity, as they act as models for similar future undertakings. These knock-on effects have not been observed in previous research and show that collective market entrepreneuring can lead to market

evolution and societal progress in various ways, if sustainable solutions emerge from these endeavours.

8.2.4. It's a Synergistic World: The Interplay of Different Infrastructural Elements and the Reflexive Mobilisation of Consumers

The previous sections looked at various aspects of consumption infrastructures. Even though the different elements were treated separately in the discussion, they should be seen as parts of one unified system. Material environments and user interfaces determine what consumers can do within consumption infrastructures, such as in what size or volumes certain products can be bought. The objects found in shopping contexts, meanwhile, present different lifestyle resources, which are more or less conducive towards the adoption of certain practices. In zero waste stores, various tools are available that enable people to save waste in their lives, which would not normally be found in supermarkets. Moreover, these outlets offered ethical consulting services and the opportunity to connect with like-minded people, so that sustainable behaviours were underpinned by the development of competences and social interactions. Finally, the organisational processes behind these infrastructures ensured that customers could place their trust in the stores, as they sourced the most sustainable products and optimised their supply chains through deposit schemes. In other words, various infrastructural elements worked in concert to provide a holistic ethical experience that reinforced certain behaviours. While the importance of congruent contextual cues has been emphasised in the marketing literature (e.g. Baker et al. 2002; Helmefalk and Hultén 2017; Spence et al. 2014), this thesis looked at how the coherence between different infrastructural elements influences the uptake of certain lifestyles. This not only offers a new angle on the above research streams, but also the ethical consumption literature, which tends to focus on individual behavioural factors.

On top of looking at the possibilities afforded by consumption infrastructures, the thesis also examined how different forms of reflexivity arise from the infrastructural elements. Here too, various effects were observed. The material environments, dispensing systems and objects found in zero waste stores produced both cognitive and aesthetic reflexivity. The exposure to bulk dispensing systems and the clustering of lifestyle resources led to the awareness of marketplace alternatives and an enhanced critical imagination, as consumers questioned normalised aspects of conventional supply systems, such as the

omnipresence of packaging in supermarkets. In this way, users understood and became aware of different action possibilities, so that cognitive reflexivity increased the appeal of sustainable practices. Furthermore, the embeddedness of ethical meanings in the retail context, as seen in the use of upcycled materials and the dominance of natural colours, linked responsible consumption to more enjoyable experiences. All too often ethical behaviour is only pushed through moral appeals, which leaves aside the advantages of crafting engaging retail environments in the service of sustainability. The introduction of aesthetic reflexivity and, specifically, the concept of ethiscapes sought to remedy this problem. The thesis, consequently, offered a counter-design to the brandscapes that are often discussed in consumer culture theory (e.g. Borghini et al. 2009) to suggest ways how the substantial knowledge in this area could be leveraged to promote the common good. Finally, the consideration of different socialities highlighted the role of people in consumption infrastructures. Social interactions affect people's interpretation of the world and motivate different forms of conduct. In zero waste stores various sustainable practices, such as the self-production of household items, were actively encouraged through tips and social support. This is hardly the case in supermarkets, where everyone tends to go about their own business and where any extraordinary demands might be met with little enthusiasm or even resentment. The socialities found in places frame what meanings and practices are accepted, so that certain forms of behaviour are privileged over others. The discussion of hermeneutic reflexivity considered this aspect of consumption infrastructures, which also added to the literature that stresses the importance of social factors in ethical consumer behaviour (Cherrier 2007; Granzin and Olsen 1991; Soron 2010). In zero waste infrastructures, all of these forms of reflexivity formed a unified voice that gently swayed consumers to expand their ethical behaviour to new domains. That is to say, the alignment of these various forms of reflexivity mobilises individuals rationally, emotionally, and socially to engage in sustainable practices. Conclusively, the socio-material constellations found in consumption infrastructures provide different lifestyle affordances to consumers and reflexively mobilise them in multiple ways, leading to the adoption of various practices (please also refer back to Figure 11 for an overview).

Chapter 9 – The Conclusion: Lighting the Spark

Imagine all the people.
John Lennon

9.1. Theoretical Implications

9.1.1. Co-Creative Empowerment and the Factors that Facilitate Self-Organised Value Creation

This thesis has looked at various aspects of self-organised value creation, starting with the importance of participatory market infrastructures and moving on to the implications their outputs have within the market. In this process, it contributed to various literature streams. First of all, it advocated a more encompassing view of co-creative empowerment than that found in extant research. It argued that it is not enough for users to be consulted at the later stages of product development cycles, as most decisions about the further development of innovations have already been made at that stage. Rather, to truly change markets users need to be involved in value creation processes from the beginning, which includes being able to influence what ideas get financed in the first place. It, thereby, closed an important gap in the consumer empowerment literature (see Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006) and provided an answer to the first research question.

Second, and in response to Research Question 2, various factors that facilitate self-organised value creation were identified. Crowdfunding was introduced as a participatory market infrastructure to emphasise the importance of democratic vehicles for shaping market outcomes. This contrasted with the dominant focus in the innovation literature, where company-led co-creation is mainly investigated to see how organisations take advantage of the creative capabilities of external stakeholders (Bogers and West 2012; Bogers et al. 2017). The discussion outlined the institutional constraints that users face under these circumstances, as business interests first and foremost lead to offerings that create a lot of profits (see also Husted 2016; King and Pearce 2010) and, consequently, channel value creation activities in certain directions. Participatory market infrastructures overcome these obstacles, as their openness, transparency, and collective organisation allow resources to be mobilised by people

towards the realisation of many ideas. The thesis especially stressed the intangible benefits that accrue to ethical projects through crowdfunding, due to the agentic involvement of users and the goodwill generated by their sustainability focus. These aspects had previously not been considered in that form in the innovation and crowdfunding literature. Lastly, the thesis outlined the systemic value of participatory market infrastructures. It was argued that crowdfunding encouraged more people to engage in value creation by demystifying innovation processes, educating users about what it takes to launch ideas, and inspiring potential initiators to take action. Here, the knowledge and capabilities attained through participatory market infrastructures were identified as another factor that promotes value creation activities. Moreover, it described how role reflexivity led people to question their subject positions as consumers, promoting a more active approach to solving societal problems. It, thereby, contributed to the study of innovation systems by showing how micro practices impact on people's tendency to engage in value creation activities.

Third, the thesis offered a new perspective on collective action and social movements within the market. More specifically, collective market entrepreneuring was identified as another way through which societal outcomes are achieved, where users mobilise resources towards a common purpose to affect social change (see also King and Pearce 2010). It was shown that collective innovation agency leads to more discourse diversity, as alternative forms of organising and new cultural resources are promoted. In particular, the thesis provided insights on how hybrid organisations may emerge, which do not have a chance to get funding through mainstream financial mechanisms. In this way, novel action possibilities develop through decentralised value creation, which offers an alternative view to previous research that has mainly looked at the outcomes user innovations generate for companies. It thus showed that self-organised value creation can generate ethical consumption opportunities and answered the first part of Research Question 3. Accordingly, the ability to develop marketplace alternatives was seen as an addition to Hirschman's (1972) classic three approaches to dealing with decline in organisations, namely a "create" strategy. Hence, this investigation expands our understanding of how marketplace change emerges through collective market entrepreneuring.

9.1.2. The Outcomes of Self-Organised Value Creation and Their Implications: Consumption Infrastructures, Lifestyle Affordances, and Reflexivity

In terms of the influence that self-organised value creation has on market developments, the concept of consumption infrastructures was invoked to show how projects impact on consumer behaviour and other market actors. The zero waste stores gave a previously little known discourse a presence in the real world, so that new material realities arose out of these campaigns. The discussion of different infrastructural elements then dissected the implications of these retail concepts and answered Research Question 3, generating knowledge in the area of ethical consumer behaviour in the process.

One major contribution of this thesis was to show that variations in material arrangements give rise to different lifestyle affordances. Most research on servicescapes, retail environments, and atmospherics is only interested in the sales benefits of alterations in shopping contexts (Baker et al. 2002; Foster and McLelland 2015; Mari and Poggesi 2013; Rosenbaum and Massiah 2011; Shocker, Bayus, and Kim 2004; Turley and Milliman 2000), but pays little attention to how they affect the uptake of sustainable practices. In contrast, this investigation showed that the bulk dispensing systems, the clustering of lifestyle resources, and the coherence of different infrastructural elements found in zero waste stores facilitated responsible consumption tendencies by providing different action possibilities to consumers and nurturing their critical imagination. Compared to the pick-and-drop shopping styles that are typical in traditional supermarkets, a holistic ethical space was created, where coherent inferences fostered the uptake of sustainable practices. This suggests that the attitude-behaviour gap might be asking the wrong question altogether, as consumption infrastructures could simply not be designed to promote ethical consumer behaviour. It is, consequently, important to consider how material constellations precondition certain forms and levels of consumption.

The second major contribution is the incorporation of aesthetic reflexivity into the domain of ethical consumption. Most research in the field focuses on cognitive contemplations, whereas experiential aspects remain somewhat of a black box in relation to responsible consumption. Consumer culture theory, on the other hand, is too focused on consumerist meanings, where brandscapes and commercial themes channel the attention of individuals in captivating retail environments. The investigation of zero

waste stores revealed that this does not have to be the case. Here, the built environment, the user interfaces, and the objects found within these retail spaces all communicated zero waste ideas to their users, so that coherent ethical experiences emerged from the interplay of these elements. Material arrangements can resemble desired ethical meanings (e.g. upcycled materials symbolise waste avoidance), nudging individuals to reflect not just cognitively about sustainable practices, but also at a more liminal level through feelings. Therefore, the use of ethicsapes, or retail themes with a cultural connection to sustainability and communal growth, was advocated as one solution to promote a broader engagement in ethical consumer behaviour. It, thereby, made use of the long tradition of research on micro-cultural consumption contexts (Borghini et al. 2009; Kozinets et al. 2002; Kozinets et al. 2004; Peñaloza 2000; Thompson 2004) and recalibrated it in the service of sustainability. The emergence of ethically-themed stores could, therefore, lead to the greater acceptance of alternative forms of hedonism (see Soper 2007, 2014) that make responsible behaviour fun and extend its reach to mainstream consumers. Self-organised value creation, as seen in the crowdfunding projects that established zero waste stores across Germany, can be the starting point for such transformations.

The discussion of how consumption infrastructures are linked to different socialities offered the third major addition to research on ethical consumer behaviour. In general, the cognitive focus of studies in this area has led to a preoccupation with individual factors, while formative social processes are often underemphasised (Caruana 2007a). This research has shown that social processes are important for both educating and motivating consumers to engage in certain consumption practices. In particular, the upskilling or deskilling features of infrastructures shape the competences and abilities of consumers and are linked to the social interactions found within retail contexts, which is a finding that has not been advanced in this form in the ethical consumption literature. The ethical advice offered in zero waste stores and the possibility to exchange knowledge with other users enabled the uptake of do-it-yourself practices that are more in line with sustainability than the consumption of heavily-packaged industrial goods. Hence, retail environments act as knowledge repositories that nudge consumers to examine their habits and extend their ethical deliberations into various life domains, especially when expertise is concentrated in a holistic ethical shopping context. In this sense, ethicsapes are reinforced through expert ethical services, which do not exist in conventional supermarkets. Furthermore, the discussion of social affordances showed

that positive social feedback encourages ethical behaviours. When people can freely follow their ethical inclinations and are actively supported by like-minded people, they may experience locations as identity spaces, where they conduct themselves according to their ideals. This offered further empirical support to the importance of social influences in shaping consumption patterns (see Cherrier 2007; Granzin and Olsen 1991; Soron 2010). Finally, the introduction of the concept of hermeneutic reflexivity highlighted the fact that becoming a member of a consumption community already pre-establishes certain meanings and practices. A zero waste user would not be considered a true practitioner, if most everyday consumption needs are met through packaged goods at normal supermarkets. Zero waste stores thus facilitate reflexive communities, which stimulate consumers to scrutinise their habits on a regular basis to continuously search for and adopt the most sustainable practices (see Lash 2007). In covering all these points, the thesis showed that the human aspects of consumption infrastructures provide a refreshing perspective on ethical consumption and that self-organised value creation produces socialities that are more conducive towards fostering responsible behaviours.

The fourth and final insight that the investigation of consumption infrastructures provided was how organisational processes shape both the experiences of users and the conduct of other market actors. The holistic sourcing strategies found at zero waste stores made coherent ethical experiences possible, due to the founders' diligence in their handling of supply arrangements. If the stores merely offered ways to buy things unpackaged and paid no attention to the types of products that flow through the dispensing systems and how they are delivered, this form of shopping would only represent a hypocritical window-dressing exercise. The holistic solutions that were developed with the help of suppliers to avoid waste along the entire value chain, allowed users to place their trust in the zero waste stores. In the process, the founders, through their focus on zero waste practices, integrated different forms of thinking in the operation of the stores, such as cradle-to-cradle, circular economic, and dematerialisation ideas, that play a negligible role in commercial retail outlets. The thesis thus adds to the literature on corporate associations (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Brown and Dacin 1997; Pérez, del García los Salmones, and del Bosque 2013) by pointing towards ways in which these reinforce ethical perceptions together with other elements of consumption infrastructures, so that the adoption of certain lifestyles is facilitated. Moreover, alternative meanings make their way onto the market through self-organised value creation, as the efforts of the initiators enhance the cultural

receptivity to certain issues. This contributes to cultural consumer research by showing how new marketplace discourses and meanings are established, which provide a counter-design to usual commercial narratives (e.g. Belk and Pollay 1985; Hirschman 1988; Peñaloza 2000; Thompson 2004), so that sustainable business models emerge out of decentralised innovation. Collective market entrepreneuring, thereby, extends the nexus of meanings and interpretive positions available to consumers (Kozinets 2001, 2008), allowing users to move away from being passive bystanders in the formation of ideological fields (Kozinets 2008; Thompson and Tian 2008) to actively forming these as co-developers of marketplace offerings (see Fisher and Smith 2011). Finally, the discussion of institutional reflexivity showed that projects have an impact on various stakeholders, so that marketplace change may arise from initially small projects and spread to other market constituents over time.

9.2. Practical Implications

If we look at the discussion of the democratisation of value creation processes and the benefits that arise through crowdfunding, various insights are useful for entrepreneurs. Aside from lowering the entry barriers related to innovation activities (i.e. independence from institutional demands, such as securities or profit expectations), the ability to draw in crowd resources and to build a reputation before actual market entry can be worth more than money. This is especially true for social entrepreneurs, who tackle societal issues and struggle to attain funds from traditional institutions. Entrepreneurs should think about the ways in which a public market entry unlocks immaterial support and enhances the legitimacy of their cause. A large following does not only create peer credibility, but also opens up collaboration opportunities and partnerships. In addition, if entrepreneurs are unsure about the concrete features of an offering, greater market alignment can be achieved by working with users and iteratively moving closer to their needs (see also Viotto da Cruz 2018). It can also increase the emotional attachment to an offering, leading to a loyal group of supporters (Trauth et al. 2018). These advantages would not arise through private market entry and should be considered by entrepreneurs before they bring their ideas to life.

Businesses and institutions can also get involved in crowdfunding. Similar to entrepreneurs, organisations can benefit from the market alignment that arises through the funding process, such as by scoping for trends and determining demand for specific

offerings (see also Brown, Boon, and Pitt 2017). Instead of having to rely on a small group of decision makers, which may be non-experts in a particular field, potential users judge the merit of new value propositions (i.e. collective versus concentrated innovation agency). Indeed, several market actors have already profited from crowdfunding. One way is to launch contests that allow initiators to collaborate with industry players. For example, dm, a popular retail chain in Germany, launched dmSTART! to identify new offerings that could be added to their product range (dm 2018). In this case both the initiators and the company gained from the arrangement, as the former received access to the vast distribution network of dm, whereas the latter rejuvenated its assortment by adding innovative products to its range. Another approach is to create a corporate crowdfunding platform to launch the ideas of employees, as Sony did in Japan (Tech Crunch 2015), or to use the services of existing websites, such as Indiegogo Enterprise (Indiegogo 2018). In this way, established businesses can validate product concepts and reduce the risks of a full-fledged market launch through the prior consultation of user groups. Finally, institutions may allocate their limited funds effectively by working with crowdfunding platforms. Co-funding is a term used in this field to describe how contributions made by project supporters are matched by public bodies to maximise the impact of their investments. Several cities and regions in Germany have tried to accelerate local entrepreneurial activities through this mechanism (e.g. Nordstarter (Hamburg), Schotterweg (Bremen), Ideenwald (Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland)). The unique characteristics of participatory market infrastructures can be leveraged by various entities to achieve their objectives, but, at the same time, the corporate appropriation and professionalisation of crowdfunding threatens its independent spirit.

The insights attained through the exploration of consumption infrastructures can also be applied in practice. From a branding perspective, ethical experiences and the sensual engagement with responsible consumption open up new opportunities for companies with a focus on sustainability. Organic supermarkets, for instance, could think about not only offering organic goods, but also deploying upcycled and second-hand materials in the retail environment to reinforce ethical thinking. Bulk dispensing systems could form another part of this strategy to help reduce the environmental footprints of consumers. Some retail chains, such as Planet Organic (Planet Organic 2018), have already implemented unpackaged solutions in certain product categories (e.g. seeds and nuts). Moreover, clustering ethical options in a dedicated section can nudge consumers to extend their moral deliberations to different life domains. In other words, the

development of ethiscapes and the application of experience marketing principles (Pine and Gilmour 1999; Schmitt 1999) could be used to facilitate responsible consumption patterns, rather than consumerist meanings. If these material constellations are complemented by matching back-end processes, such as regional sourcing arrangements and reusable delivery systems, consumption infrastructures could take a decisive turn towards sustainability. Applying closed loop and cradle-to-cradle concepts to more and more supply chains, for instance, would prevent unintended resource use across a broad range of industries. Likewise, policy makers could reduce the total material throughput of infrastructures by promoting sustainable business practices through the right structural conditions and legislations. The planned ban of single-use plastic crockery and cutlery in the European Union is an example of how this could play out (see Guardian 2018). In short, consumption infrastructures could be reconfigured on multiple levels to naturalise sustainable behaviours.

9.3. Limitations

There are several limitations that affect the conclusions that can be drawn from this research. First of all, the study is based on a number of in-depth cases, which prevents generalisations about the prevalence and impact ethical crowdfunding campaigns have at a macro level. Even though the title and the discussion suggest that marketplace change can be achieved through crowdfunding projects, I do not mean to imply that it is a vehicle to overhaul the general constitution of capitalism by itself. Any such claim would be too grand to make, given that most financial capital is still concentrated in the hands of financial institutions and wealthy individuals. Moreover, sustainability-focused projects represent only a fraction of the total volume of crowdfunding, as the general sector is filled with ideas that do not directly promote the common good. Nevertheless, the detailed exploration of the cases, especially the zero waste stores, has shown that projects have a considerable impact on consumers and other stakeholders in specific market areas. A longitudinal study of a more diverse set of cases could track the progress of these projects to see how their influence unfolds. In relation to zero waste stores, for instance, the growth of the overall number of stores and the opening of branch locations could have been observed. A similar development can be seen in relation to SirPlus, which now runs several shops in Berlin (SirPlus 2018b).

Another limitation is that the cases were all drawn from one platform. Startnext was selected because it is the most popular crowdfunding platform in Germany, which may narrow the applicability of the findings in other contexts. For instance, crowdfunding websites differ in the type and volume of information required by initiators, which could reduce the transparency provided by project pages. Not all platforms require the same level of detail and not all initiators use blog posts or other communication tools to frequently interact with their supporters, so that it might not always be clear how projects are progressing and how funds are being spent. Other platforms, especially the two major international players, Kickstarter and Indigogo, may provide very different funding experiences. In addition, data was only collected for cases within Germany, which is a market that is susceptible to sustainability ideas. Funders in different countries may have diverging motivations and goals, which could constrain the amount of crowd resources set free in the process. Finally, Startnext is a reward-based platform and, thereby, the findings are restricted to this form of funding. Loan- or equity-based crowdfunding will probably not attract as much goodwill and voluntary support, as the general focus on earning money would offset such behaviour. A broader, multi-country study could address all of these issues.

Finally, crowdfunding has been praised as a participatory market infrastructure that is open to a large part of the population. I would like to stress here that it is not a medium that anyone can use. Of course, there are certain prerequisites that prevent total equality of access. For instance, it was argued that crowdfunding could help meet niche needs, especially those of vulnerable groups. Sticking to the example of refugees, several limitations become apparent. First, refugees might not have the necessary knowledge to launch campaigns by themselves. Language barriers may make it difficult to create content in German and to communicate their goals effectively. Second, they might lack the basic resources to start a project. A constant internet connection or a bank account might be hard to attain in such a position. If this is the case, people, who want to help them, would need to take over the role of initiators, as it occurred in several projects on Startnext. Similarly, elderly people and other population groups, who lack the skills or ability to access the internet, might be excluded. A growing body of literature has looked at the “digital divide” and how it can contribute to inequality, showing that it is an issue that should be taken seriously (van Dijk 2005; Warschauer 2004). Therefore, participatory market infrastructures help tackle particular problems, but they do not replace other modes of action, such as political engagement, to solve societal issues.

9.4. Future Research Possibilities

Self-organised value creation is a promising research area and bound to increase in prominence in the coming years, as the technical means and innovation opportunities available to users multiply. Accordingly, more work is needed on participatory market infrastructures to examine the conditions under which users can optimally develop new solutions. First of all, different forms of participatory market infrastructures should be explored. While crowdfunding is a promising vehicle for people to realise their ideas, other mechanisms may be more suitable for affecting broader marketplace change. The decentralisation of finance in the form of crypto currencies and the rise of smart contracts may radically overhaul industries. If people could decide which companies receive credit through, for instance, initial coin offerings, traditional financial institutions could lose some of their privileges in controlling innovation activities (see Tapscott and Tapscott 2016). In other cases, 3-D printing services may enable the small-scale production of user designs, so that offerings could be developed independently of large manufacturing firms. Under such conditions, entrepreneurial activities would flourish, blurring the lines between users and producers even further. More research should be dedicated to this topic to understand the implications of these developments and how they affect the practice of marketing. This fills earlier conceptual work in this field with life, which looked at participatory economic forms and their implications (e.g. Albert and Hahnel 1991; Arvidsson 2009; Nørgård 2013). Future research could also look into how participatory forms of organisation link back to and enable alternative marketplaces or economic spaces, topics that have recently received growing academic interest (Albinsson and Yasanthi Perera 2012; Fuller, Jonas, and Lee 2016). In particular, it could invigorate cooperative movements, which could aid sustainability goals due to their inherent long-term focus and balanced stakeholder orientation (Leroux 2016). Second, participatory market infrastructures require users to do more than just pick the best options from a set of alternatives. What sorts of capabilities and knowledge are necessary to become a competent co-creator of value? How can the acquisition of skills be facilitated within networks, so people can contribute to innovation activities? How would surplus value be captured and distributed in self-organised user networks? All these questions need to be answered to understand how these organisational forms allow people to develop solutions to societal problems and how they maintain their viability over time.

The study of consumption infrastructures opens up a whole range of exciting research opportunities. On a broader level, the investigation of infrastructural arrangements can reveal how provisioning systems enable or constrain different lifestyles and how these are implicated in various levels of resource use. Further research should look into how shopping contexts precondition certain forms of consumption through physical affordances, which could lead to the development of sustainable alternatives. Studies in this area should also explore how institutional standards and legislations obstruct change. In the case of zero waste stores, for instance, hygiene regulations made it difficult to offer options in particular categories (e.g. dairy products). The investigation of consumption infrastructures, therefore, responds to recent calls to move away from a focus on efficiency gains and individual behaviour to more substantive, deeper system transformations (O'Rourke and Lollo 2015). Exploring how circular economic forms could become more common without compromising on convenience, would be one fruitful departure point for such an endeavour.

Another approach could be to examine how consumption infrastructures cultivate certain modes of thinking, perhaps by drawing on work from cultural anthropology. This could include looking at how market actors seek to undermine the critical imagination of consumers through promoting certain forms of anti-reflexivity (McCright and Dunlap 2010), which so far has mainly been studied at the industry level, such as tobacco manufacturers fighting the facts on the health effects of smoking (Oreskes and Conway 2011; Samet and Burke 2001). Yet, certain business practices, such as subscription-based services, or technological interfaces, such as Amazon's dash buttons or Alexa speakers, may naturalise certain brands as default options, so that a choice between alternative providers is altogether removed. The rise of surveillance capitalism, where digital infrastructures are used to nudge users to behave in certain ways, may aggravate this problem even further, as personal sovereignty is threatened by concealed forms of control (Zuboff 2019). In a similar fashion, artificial intelligence could fundamentally change consumer behaviour in certain industries, as automated agents, such as robotic financial advisors, take over decision making processes. Studying the developments that are at the intersection of digital consumption infrastructures, technology and governmentality would shed more light on how corporate activity is affecting the mindsets of people.

On a more detailed level, the aesthetic mobilisation of ethical imaginaries could help improve the appeal of responsible consumption. In many consumers' eyes the purchase of ethical options is still associated with sacrifice and higher costs, rather than nurturing quality and well-being perceptions. The introduction of "aesthetic reflexivity" (Lash 2007) and the application of experience marketing to ethical consumption enriches the academic debate in this field. In essence, these concepts help answer the very simple question: How can sustainable behaviour be more fun? The feelings of enjoyment and calm described by many customers that entered zero waste stores are much more likely to produce mindful behaviour than simply proclaiming the moral superiority of certain forms of conduct. In particular, the congruent deployment of various sustainability cues in the retail environment (see Helme Falk and Hultén 2017), which leads to coherent impressions in ethiscapes, should be examined in greater depth. What sorts of materials and creation histories work best to reinforce sustainable behaviours? How can objects be clustered to maximise these effects? Many interesting findings could emerge from re-contextualising ethical consumption and looking at the infrastructures that consumers grapple with every day.

Finally, a famous football anthem goes "You'll never walk alone". What I mean to suggest is, of course, that it is not enough to look at individuals and their consumption as disconnected from social relationships. Every person is embedded in a net of social ties that are often linked to material use through shared practices and joint experiences (e.g. nights out or family celebrations). The collective aspect of consumption can be deployed to reinforce ethical behaviours. Zero waste stores were very effective in this respect, as the socialities within these places spread knowledge amongst users, making them proficient producers of their own household items, while the community of like-minded people motivated sustainable ways of living. The adoption of certain lifestyles is difficult without social support, as shifting consumption habits (e.g. the uptake of a vegan diet) will affect not only the person who is making the change, but also the relatives and friends around him or her (see Cherry 2015). How, then, can ethical consumption be integrated in everyday social experiences to promote sustainability? How can consumption communities be built around infrastructures that promote responsible practices and sustain them over time? Some evidence has already been gathered in studies on responsible consumption cooperatives (Papaoikonomou and Alarcón 2017; Papaoikonomou, Valverde, and Ryan 2012), but more needs to be done to mobilise the social imaginaries of mainstream consumers for the common good. Self-

organised value creation and participatory market infrastructures can be the starting point for such transformations by opening up new marketplace opportunities. After all, if everyone joins hands and works together towards the improvement of society, nothing is impossible.

9.5. Concluding Remark

In this thesis, I have argued that choices alone are problematic for addressing sustainability concerns and that marketplace change is unlikely to arise through pure voting with the shopping cart. In an economy that is still largely dictated by the dogma of profit maximisation, organisations often have good reasons to not offer ethical solutions to consumers, so that many options on the market will not be conducive towards shifting the economy in a sustainable direction. Instead, it is far better when many people engage in value creation to fulfil their own needs and to work towards the common good. General access to participatory market infrastructures facilitates this by allowing larger parts of the population to take part in and champion value creation activities. Multiplicity breeds diversity in many ways, so that everyone would gain from a participatory economy. Taking a systemic view by looking at the complexities and interdependencies involved in the creation and operation of infrastructural arrangements helps us understand the connections between production and consumption processes. In particular, the creation of new or the rejuvenation of existing consumption infrastructures can lead to positive societal change, as broader consumption patterns and business practices become more sustainable. Not only do novel action possibilities become available to the public, but different forms of thinking take hold when people are reflexively mobilised in new ways. In this way, self-organised value creation can go from humble beginnings to wider marketplace change, as the spark of innovation catches on and ignites the fire of collective ingenuity.

On a personal note, I have certainly relished the opportunity to engage with this topic in such depth and will always remember how important it is to take a holistic look at societal problems and the complexities involved in affecting sustainable behavioural change. This includes the insights that can be attained through embodied experiences, which the song titles and excerpts sought to convey. Lastly, I hope that I was successful in lighting a spark, however small and fragile, in the academic community to further explore the ideas presented within these pages. I do believe the technological means are now available or in the making to allow self-organised value creation to take hold in many areas of the economy. Helping to build and study the consumption infrastructures of the future should be the outmost priority for the creation of a sustainable society, as it is truly hard to imagine change without all the people, who work to make the world a better place.

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Appendix A – Further Information on the Methodology

Table A.1. – Case Profiles

Case	Location	Year	Short Description
<i>Tante Olga</i>	Cologne	2016	Tante Olga was a crowdfunding campaign launched in 2016 to establish a zero waste store in Cologne. It was a very successful project run by a team of three zero waste aficionados, collecting 49,722 € within a month from more than 900 funders. The store offers various zero waste articles and acts as a collection site for a community-supported agriculture scheme. It also mobilises for other environmental initiatives, such as clean energy providers and regional food producers. In 2019 a second outlet was opened by the team in another part of Cologne, speaking for the growing resonance and success of this shopping concept within the city.
<i>Stückgut</i>	Hamburg	2016	Stückgut was a crowdfunding project launched in 2016 to establish a zero waste store in Hamburg. The project collected 43,153 € from a total of 955 funders. It was rolled out by a team of four people and established in Altona, a trending part of the city. A second outlet opened in 2018 in St. Pauli. On top of providing a broad range of unpackaged products, the founders have an interest in cultivating different zero waste practices through events, hosting a variety of talks and workshops to extend the skill sets of their customers. It also developed various local partnerships, such as with El Rojito, a coffee supplier based in the same borough that pioneered a reusable cup scheme.
<i>Veedelskrämer</i>	Cologne	2017	Veedelskrämer was a crowdfunding project launched in 2017 to offer unpackaged shopping in Ehrenfeld, a borough in Cologne. A team of two women established the store, receiving a total of 16,635 € in financial support from 157 funders. The store offers a broad range of products, with a special variety of sweets and snacks making up some of its unique appeal. The store also partnered with Tante Olga to jointly purchase certain goods, speaking for the desire to raise awareness of the zero waste concept, rather than engaging in intense competition.
<i>Unverpackt Lübeck</i>	Lübeck	2017	Unverpackt Lübeck was a crowdfunding campaign launched in 2017 to offer zero waste shopping in Lübeck. The two initiators received 16,635 € from a total of 348 funders. It had a particularly strong focus on using second-hand furniture and equipment, such as a coffee machine that was donated by a sponsor. Compared to the other zero waste cases in this data set, it was established in a smaller city, speaking for the growing popularity of the concept outside large urban areas.

<i>Ohne</i>	Munich	2016	Ohne was one of the first crowdfunding campaigns launched over Startnext in 2015, drawing in a total of 48,734 € from 951 supporters. It was initiated by a group of three people and opened its doors in 2016. A second branch was established in 2019 in a different part of Munich. The store has a strong regional focus to limit unnecessarily long transport routes, even offering a local gin variety in unpacked form. Furthermore, the founders developed a novel bulk dispensing system made of glass, which is deployed in the stores and sold to other interested parties.
<i>SirPlus</i>	Berlin	2017	SirPlus was a crowdfunding campaign with the ambition to develop a second-hand market for food. It was an immensely popular project that received 92,695 € from 1710 funders. The team of three initiators established a first outlet in Berlin, where they distributed saved food sponsored by various corporate partners. SirPlus quickly became a success story and was able to add several new stores and an online shop to its offering. In 2019 a second crowdfunding project collected 111,441 € from more than 2000 funders to roll out food saving across Germany. Although this latter expansion was not included in the investigation, it is an indicator that projects can have far reaching effects in the market.
<i>Karma Classics</i>	Berlin	2017	The Karma Classics range was launched to develop sustainable alternatives to mainstream fashion brands. In the campaign that informed this inquiry, this was a fair trade substitute for the Converse Chucks. The four initiators behind the project collected 34,044 € from 418 funders. Another project launched by this group was an alternative to Fjällräven backpacks, which was an idea that emerged out of feedback from their supporters. The series of crowdfunding projects spearheaded by the founders sought not only to offer responsible fashion substitutes, but also to cultivate a higher appreciation for the clothes people wear and the production conditions linked to the manufacturing of these goods.
<i>Radikalecker</i>	Berlin	2017	Radikalecker was a crowdfunding project launched by a collective of people, who wanted to establish a political, vegan café in Berlin. It had the goal to create a self-determined working space for its employees and to inform about veganism and solidary economic forms. It raised a total of 14,977 € from 171 funders. It provided useful information on alternative forms of organising, in particular collectives, which enjoy growing popularity in Berlin.

Table A.2. – Interview Questions

<i>Initiators</i>
Grand Tour Questions
What does crowdfunding mean to you? What do you associate with it?
Idea and History Behind Project
Can you tell me something about the history behind the project?
Can you tell me how you got this idea?
Can you take me through the process/development behind the project?
Why did you start the project over Startnext?
Crowdfunding Process
Can you describe the crowdfunding process in more detail?
Did you face any challenges?
What did you need to implement the project? (before, during, and after the project)
What did you learn in the process/from other stakeholders?
Stakeholder and Network Aspects
Can you tell me who supported the project?
What did other people contribute? In what form?
How did you interact with them? How did you communicate?
What role did social media play in the process?
<i>Funders</i>
Grand Tour Questions
What does crowdfunding mean to you? What experiences do you have with crowdfunding?
Crowdfunding Project and Motivation
Can you tell me how you came to support this particular project?
What did you find interesting about it? What did you like about the project or idea?
Could you take me through the decision making process for this project?
Crowdfunding Process
Can you describe the crowdfunding process from your point of view?
Can you tell me what delighted/disappointed you?
How did you find out about it?
Can you describe your role as supporter in the project? What did you contribute to the success of the project?
Can you tell me how you communicated/interacted with the project team?
Outcomes and Impact on Behaviour
What insights did you attain through your participation in the project?
What experiences did you make during the project?
Can you describe your initial reactions after the project was successful?
Did the project have an impact on your behaviour? Your consumption habits?

<i>Consumers</i>
Grand Tour Questions
How did you find out about the shop? Did you know anything about the crowdfunding project? Did you ever participate in crowdfunding?
Reactions to Store
Can you describe to me, how you experienced your first visit to the store? What were your reactions, when you first heard about the store /when you first visited the store? What do you think about the concept behind the store? Can you describe this to me?
Outcomes and Impact on Behaviour
Did the store have an impact on your behaviour/habits/lifestyle? What did you learn through the store? (critical/holistic thinking, awareness, inspiration) If the store ceased to exist, would this have an impact on you/your life? Did the visit to the store encourage you to reflect? In what way(s)?
Previous Knowledge and Comparison to Supermarkets
What did you know about zero waste/food saving before? Was it important to you before? What differentiates the store from conventional supermarkets? (products, atmosphere, service, interior, control, spending) Did you tell other people about the store? Did you help out in any other way?

Comments: Please note the questions here are presented in a generic format. The wording was adapted during the interviews to refer to the project that was the subject of the investigation. Terms like "the project" or "the store" were replaced with the actual name of the case. While the grand tour questions and main blocks remained the same throughout the interviews, themes and questions were added later on. Some of these are presented here, for instance, in the probing questions that were noted down in brackets. Major themes that were explored further included the stakeholder impact of crowdfunding (e.g. social proof and partnerships; voluntary support; and role reflexivity), sensitising people and deliberately raising awareness for particular issues, and the experiential aspects of the stores. These emerged organically from the data and were later explored through the use of additional questions in the interviews to check their relevance, which is typical for grounded, iterative data collection processes.

Appendix B – Rewards Offered by Zero Waste Stores

Table B.1. – Reward Levels Offered by Zero Waste Stores

Tante Olga	Stückgut	Veedelskrämer	Lübeck	Ohne
10€ Zero waste tips	5€ Donation	11,11€ Donation	5€ Donation	5€ Donation
20€ Cotton shopping bag	10€ Zero waste tips	11,11€ Voucher	8€ Coffee and chat	10€ Cotton bags
25€ Reusable coffee cup	12€ Organic tote bag	11,11€ Herb mix	10€ XL storage glass	20€ Cotton backpack
30€ Cotton bags for loose food	12€ Carrier bag	11,11€ Surprise package	15€ Cotton backpack	25€ Cotton shopping bag
35€ Lunchbox	15€ Organic cotton backpack	11,11€ Zero waste tips	20€ Cotton bag set	30€ Voucher
40€ Tante Olga backpack	20€ Zero waste starter set	16,11€ Cotton carrier bag	22€ Storage glasses with goodie	50€ Ohne Soulbottle
50€ Voucher	20€ Zero waste tooth care set	16,11€ Zero waste set	25€ Coffee cup	50€ Voucher
51€ Voucher	20€ Voucher	22,11€ Voucher	30€ Voucher	70€ Free home delivery
52€ Voucher	25€ Coffee cup	26,11€ Zero waste set L	40€ Breakfast "Special" for 2	80€ Zero waste set XL
60€ Solar jar lamp	30€ Lunchbox	26,11€ Veedelskrämer t-shirt women	50€ Coffee to go flat rate	100€ Zero waste consulting
250€ Honorary representation on bulk bin	35€ Voucher	26,11€ Veedelskrämer t-shirt men	50€ VIP Pass for opening ceremony	150€ Honorary representation on bulk bin
300€ Zero waste consulting	37,50€ Voucher	33,11€ Voucher	100€ Honorary representation on bulk bin	200€ Miracle box
300€ Opening ceremony	45€ Yoga session	56,11€ Goodie set	100€ Invitation as pilot customer	300€ Honorary representation on bulk bin (corporate)
500€ Honorary representation on bulk bin (corporate)	50€ Voucher	56,11€ Hoodie	150€ Treasure box	400€ Hall of Fame
1000€ Save the World - Wall of fame	50€ Tiffin box		250€ Voucher	600€ First customer and guest
	75€ Voucher		1000€ Donation hero	1000€ Zero waste trip (3 days)
	100€ Delivery of initial purchase by one of the founders			3000€ 18 month flat rate

	125€ Voucher and starter set			
	200€ Honorary representation on bulk bin			
	250€ All-inclusive set (combination of starter sets and voucher)			
	300€ Pre-opening store tour and shopping			
	500€ Opening ceremony			
	1000€ Zero waste weekend			
	2500€ Pamper package (1 year of zero waste supplies every month)			
Source: Startnext (2018e)	Source: Startnext (2018d)	Source: Startnext (2018g)	Source: Startnext (2018f)	Source: Startnext (2018c)

Comments: These various rewards allow people with different financial means to take part in the funding process. The similarity between the various rewards across zero waste projects also suggests that newer campaigns drew inspiration from established ones to facilitate the creation of a project page.

Appendix C – Diversity of Ethical Crowdfunding Projects

Table C.1. – Discourse Diversity: Selection of Projects Addressing Ethical Issues

Problem	Project Name	Year	Amount Raised, Funders	Core Issue	Short Description
Environment					
<i>Sustainable restaurants</i>	Resteküche	2017	40.154 €, 518	Food saving	Restaurant cooking with saved food
	Raupe Immersatt	2017	26.095 €, 586	Food saving	Café acting as food saving platform and distribution site
	Das Tiffin Projekt	2015	30.837 €, 759	Circular economy	Tiffin boxes as zero waste take away solution
<i>Sustainable food products</i>	Swarm Protein	2017	55.694 €, 1205	Resource intensity	Protein bar made from insects to save resources
	Knödelkult	2016	23.330 €, 445	Food saving	Dumplings made from saved bread
	Dörrwerk	2015	14.291 €, 596	Food saving	Fruit paper and chips made from saved food
<i>Sustainable shopping</i>	SirPlus	2017	92.696 €, 1717	Food saving	Supermarket and online shop for saved food
	Cradlelution	2015	8.389 €, 183	Circular economy	Online shop for cradle-to-cradle products
	Original Unverpackt	2014	108.915€, 4009	Zero Waste	Zero waste store for grocery shopping
<i>Sustainable fashion</i>	mimycri	2017	42.966 €, 927	Upcycling	Bags made from refugee boats
	Karma Classics	2016	45.975 €, 611	Fair trade	Fair-trade alternative to Chucks sneakers
	Kurzzug	2016	31.416 €, 141	Upcycling	Bags made from upcycled subway seats
<i>Sustainable products</i>	kiezbett	2017	32.138 €, 125	Local production	Sustainable furniture locally sourced, reusable packaging, and ecological delivery
	manaomea	2016	80.497 €, 314	Upcycling	Pens made from upcycled clothes
	Soulbottles	2016	51.831€, 779	Resource intensity	Aesthetic glass water bottles for tap water consumption
	relumity	2016	14.070 €, 177	Resource intensity	Energy efficient, repairable LED lamp

Social Issues					
<i>Fairness and Community</i>	Female Future Force	2017	381.241 €, 3161	Female Empowerment	Coaching series targeted at women to promote career success
	good	2016	22.316 €, 301	Community projects	Phone provider using part of returns for social projects
	Care2share	2016	10,261€, 191	Community projects	Soap producer using part of returns for social projects
	Einhorn	2015	104.345€, 1934	Fair trade	Fair-trade condoms
	Café Kogi	2015	44.293 €, 461	Fair trade	Naturally-grown, directly-imported coffee
<i>Vulnerability</i>	Jobs4Refugees	2017	49.007 €, 1084	Integration	Job placement for refugees
	Stitch by Stitch	2017	37.883 €, 914	Integration	Clothing company working with refugees
	Elbén	2016	20.433 €, 229	Integration	Restaurant working with refugees
	Kiron University	2015	537.359 €, 1582	Integration	Free online education for refugees
	Cucula	2015	123.461 €, 819	Integration	Crafts and design company working with refugees
	magdas Hotel	2015	25.436 €, 93	Integration	Hotel working with refugees
<i>Minority Interests</i>	Patchie	2015	76.165 €, 195	Inclusion	App supporting young mucoviscidosis patients and their relatives
	Kuchentratsch	2015	24.630 €, 381	Inclusion	Bakery project against poverty and loneliness of elderly people
	Max und Eni	2015	17.919 €, 181	Inclusion	App for developing communication skills of sign language learners

Comments: Projects are sorted by year and then by the funding amount raised. Although each project has been attributed a core issue, most of them tackle many sustainability problems at once. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather seeks to illustrate the diversity of ethical issues covered on the crowdfunding platform. Source: Startnext, 2018a.

Appendix D – Further Evidence: Interview Data

Section	Theme	#	Quote
6.1.1.	Openness	1	“It doesn’t matter if it’s five Euros or a thousand Euros, <i>everyone can do it</i> . It is a good thing that you are not obliged to give a certain amount, so everyone can give as much as he wants. I therefore think it’s a good possibility to realise own ideas.” (Ella, funder, Tante Olga: 9)
	Transparency (information)	2	“If I had to decide, I would probably say that the video made the difference because you could see the faces and could hear the people speak. You <i>know who you are dealing with</i> . [...] This is what is most important to me, that you are in <i>direct contact</i> with the people and <i>not some kind of delegate</i> , who is responsible for public relations. Rather, the person itself, who is the <i>head and heart of the whole operation</i> .” (Carolin, funder, SirPlus: 58 + 66)
	Transparency (process)	3	“I did <i>follow the progress</i> , ‘What are they doing?’, ‘How is the refurbishment going?’ ... which is information they share over the platform and the blog. You can <i>practically see and accompany the development</i> of the store because it doesn’t start ... [until] the money comes in. It is <i>like seeing a child grow up</i> ... which creates a bond over time. It is different to a shop that opens somewhere and you don’t have anything to do with it.” (Silke, funder, Stückgut: 16)
6.1.2.1.	Market alignment	4	“If funders really ask <i>questions</i> or say, ‘Hey, I would like to have this and that’, this is highly valuable for the person who starts a project. In most cases, he hasn’t produced anything and can then <i>modify the product</i> accordingly ... or perhaps the target group changes ... As a result, the product may change during the crowdfunding process.” (Tom, project adviser, Startnext: 143)
6.1.2.2.	Voluntary support (marketing)	5	“You have a completely different <i>way of involving people</i> . In this way, we secure <i>free multipliers</i> . How important is it for a business to have people out there, who act as <i>brand ambassadors</i> ? Because we <i>let</i> people take part, we <i>empower them</i> and show that they are extremely important in designing the product. This is part of the idea of <i>co-creation</i> , that you attract multipliers that don’t cost you anything.” (Shai, initiator, Karma Classics: 43)
6.1.2.3.	Peer credibility (social Proof)	6	“That’s something that is important, especially in Germany, where people always check: ‘Okay, is there any proof that this will work?’ You can see that in relation to the zero waste supermarkets. One attracted loads of money and now there are [many on our platform]. People always need <i>social proof</i> or something comparable in order to say: ‘Hey, this really does work!’” (Tom, project adviser, Startnext: 38)
6.2.1.	Market shaping (societal value)	7	“[Crowdfunding for me means] to <i>support ideas that I think are sensible</i> , which might need support ... to get a chance to establish themselves within our society. I wouldn’t do it for a product that already exists, I don’t know, a new sofa ... My ulterior motive is sustainability or to <i>start something meaningful</i> . [...] Small, new offerings that might <i>improve something</i> have to be able to start in the first place, so they can, through good quality or communication, convince more people it is worth spending 10€ more ... while doing something good at the same time.” (Henrik, funder, Veedelskrämer: 4-6)
	Societal value and crowd resources	8	“Many projects seek to <i>improve the state of the world</i> in some way. It can be a shop or a book that has an <i>influence on society</i> and where critical points are addressed. It often tends to go in the direction of sustainability, I would say. [...] I believe otherwise you would not be able to interest people in it. [...] In other words, it has to touch people, it has to startle, it has to sensitise people to a topic – that’s the <i>only way to win them over</i> .” (Anne, funder, SirPlus: 14-20)

6.2.2.	<i>Discourse diversity</i>	9	In crowdfunding you might have an idea that is pretty strange, but if there are <i>enough other people</i> ... these <i>things can have a chance</i> . [...] There was, for example, a campaign by a specialist tomato grower ... [who] wanted to save a very rare breed of tomato from extinction ... It's <i>too small, too specific</i> for a bank to say, "Wonderful! I'll finance it for you!" [...] In this way, money can make the world, whatever is available out there, <i>more colourful</i> ." (Silke, funder, Stückgut: 8-12)
6.2.3.	<i>Inspiration (high-impact exemplars)</i>	10	"It gives me courage that it is possible to start things without money ... The whole thing [SirPlus and crowdfunding] is a <i>huge inspiration</i> . [...] It starts with a tiny movement, a quiet shout in a person: "Oh, that's not fair!" ... If this is handled constructively, you can really change something ... a small <i>spark can turn into a giant fire</i> . This gives individuals courage: "Hey, you <i>can really change something</i> . If you have something in the pipeline, don't hold it back, <i>just give it a try!</i> " (Carolin, funder, SirPlus: 96-98)
	<i>Role reflexivity (active approach to issues)</i>	11	"I believe many people think that they are <i>helplessly dependent</i> on what politicians decide and what the market system does ... I was not critical and always thought, "Oh well, whatever is out there, is alright." ... Through crowdfunding I have realised: Yes, you think something is critical, such as environmental pollution, but <i>there are ways to change it</i> . [...] You are <i>inspired ... to develop your own ideas</i> ." (Paula, funder, Tante Olga: 108-110)
	<i>Knowledge development (generalised procedural knowledge)</i>	12	"What I generally learned from the last projects that I supported is, for one, that it is possible to realise ideas ... I mean, before I had a certain hopelessness, I had a lot of doubts, if my ideas are in any way viable. This whole thing in the end <i>gives me courage</i> to work on my own things. On the other hand, I also learned, or saw, <i>how these things work</i> ... and why projects fail. Hence, I have already <i>learned something from other people's mistakes</i> ." (Elena, funder, Stückgut: 106)
7.2.1.1.	<i>Built environment (self-made)</i>	13	"We <i>made everything by ourselves</i> , so we didn't hire any craftsmen. Rather, Gregor [one of the co-founders] made it together with people from our family and friends. People, who liked the project, also got in touch and dropped by to help us out." (Dinah, initiator, Tante Olga: 75)
	<i>Built environment (coherence)</i>	14	"Attention to detail. Yes, it was visible that it <i>wasn't a chain</i> , you know? It somehow wasn't the standard imprint and standard furniture. You could see that it <i>wasn't mass-produced</i> . It was simply beautifully furnished. You could see that there were <i>people behind it</i> ... The shelves were <i>self-made</i> . It was completely different to usual store shelves." (Jens, consumer, Tante Olga: 75)
7.2.2.3.	<i>Infrastructures and routines (less spontaneous consumption)</i>	15	"If you stand inside a supermarket, there are always things that catch you eye, which you just take along. [...] Our shopping has become a lot more <i>structured</i> because we go [to Tante Olga] every week ... This means you rarely get into the situation, where you quickly pop into a supermarket ... so many <i>unnecessary things</i> have completely <i>fallen away</i> ." (Helen, funder, Tante Olga: 154 + 160)
	<i>Dispensing systems and mindfulness (variety seeking)</i>	16	"The good thing is that you can buy everything in small amounts ... You can't do that in a large supermarket. You have to take, say, one kilo of lentils, just to find out, "Well, that's not really it for me", and throw away the rest. [...] They also have sweets ... Here you can simply <i>combine</i> several sorts of chocolate [...] We only take a handful and I'm under the impression that [our kids] ... <i>pay more attention</i> to it, 'Okay, I'll just take one or two pieces, so I still have something for tomorrow.'" (Valerie, funder, Veedelskrämer: 43-55)
7.3.2.	<i>Regional sourcing arrangements (benefits of local suppliers)</i>	17	"We try to source everything that we can from the region, even when it comes to such things as coffee, which we buy from El Rojito. They sit just around the corner, a few streets down the block, so we are in direct contact with them. They just come around and deliver the coffee in <i>reusable buckets</i> and collect the [ones left in our store]. Of course, these kinds of <i>arrangements are helpful</i> and <i>enable us to communicate to the customers</i> , 'Yes, Robert was in earlier today to drop off the coffee. He recently was in Nicaragua and knows exactly where it comes from and will hold a talk here soon.' The project lives of these types of things." (Sonja, initiator, Stückgut: 148)

7.3.3.	<i>Coherent ethical perceptions (diligence and positive feelings)</i>	18	“I remember I had a conversation with Dinah about quinoa. There are two types of quinoa, dark quinoa and lighter quinoa, which comes from Germany. I was very impressed and delighted by the fact that they have this regional focus, on top of offering unpackaged and organic goods. They check who and what type of persons their merchants are. I thought that was great because it creates a <i>coherent overall picture</i> . I felt very positively about them being so diligent.” (Jessica, consumer, Tante Olga: 46)
7.4.1.1.	<i>Expert ethical advice (lifestyle experience of staff)</i>	19	“I feel it is extremely nice that the ... people behind the counter at Tante Olga also <i>live the concept</i> themselves ... I <i>always ask them</i> about something, how to make detergent or if they have tried the cocoa butter spread. If you have the time and feel like it, you can easily start a conversation with them.” (Jessica, consumer, Tante Olga: 28)
	<i>Reciprocity and participation (feedback initiator view)</i>	20	“We are extremely <i>close to our customers</i> . We have a <i>feedback box</i> , where you can submit product wishes. We check these every few weeks and complement our assortment. There are many products, which we stock now because our customers wanted them.” (Hannah, initiator, Ohne: 26)
	<i>Reciprocity and participation (feedback consumer view)</i>	21	“ <i>Self-determination</i> , for me, means having the option to decide ... how much I actually buy of something. Then, there is the possibility ... to <i>participate</i> . That is, being able to <i>make suggestions</i> as a customer, regarding the inclusion of particular goods in the product range ... Yes, to be able to take part in these kinds of processes ... [and to have] a <i>say in things</i> .” (David, consumer, Tante Olga: 18)

Appendix E – Further Evidence: Visual Data from Zero Waste Stores

E.1. Tante Olga

Figure E.1.1. – *The Built Environment: Upcycled Materials and Second-Hand Furniture Symbolising the Zero Waste Discourse*



Figure E.1.2. – *Dispensing Systems: Bulk Bins and Other Containers*



Figure E.1.3. – Household Items



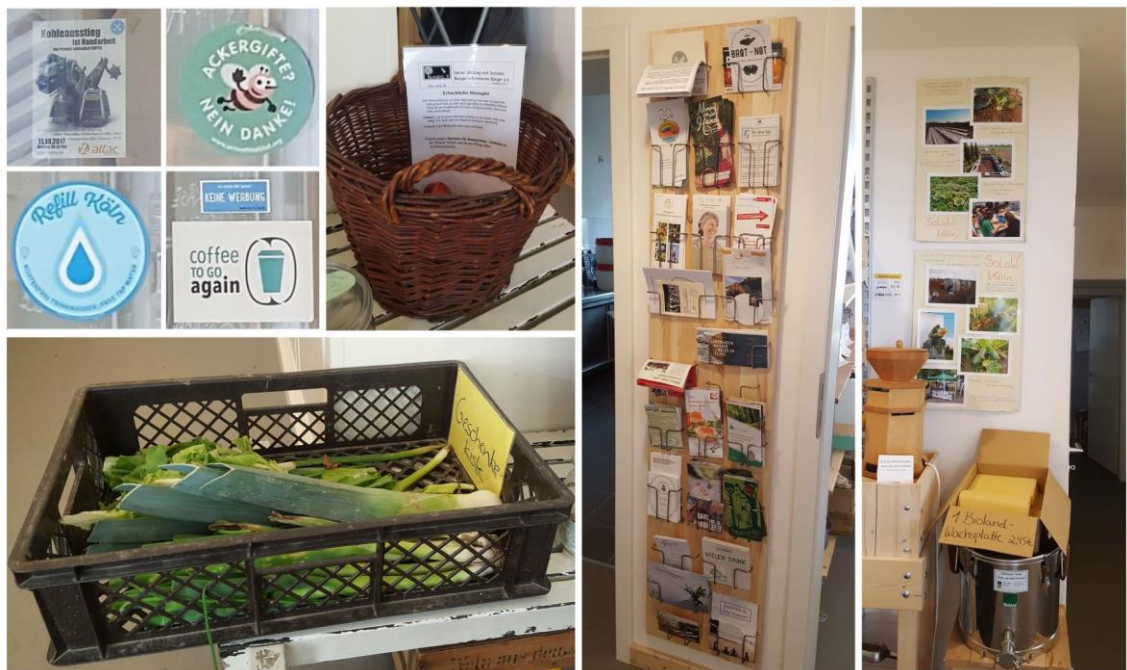
Figure E.1.4. – Lifestyle Tools: Products that Enable Consumers to Avoid Waste



Figure E.1.5. – Knowledge Resources



Figure E.1.6. – Information Sources: Objects Tapping Into Other Ethical Debates



E.2. Veedelskrämer

Figure E.2.1. – The Built Environment: Upcycled Materials and Second-Hand Furniture Symbolising the Zero Waste Discourse



Figure E.2.2. – Dispensing Systems: Bulk Bins and Other Containers



Figure E.2.3. – Household Items and Regional Produce



Figure E.2.4. – Lifestyle Tools: Products that Enable Consumers to Avoid Waste



E.3. Unverpackt Lübeck

Figure E.3.1. – The Built Environment: Upcycled Materials and Second-Hand Furniture Symbolising the Zero Waste Discourse

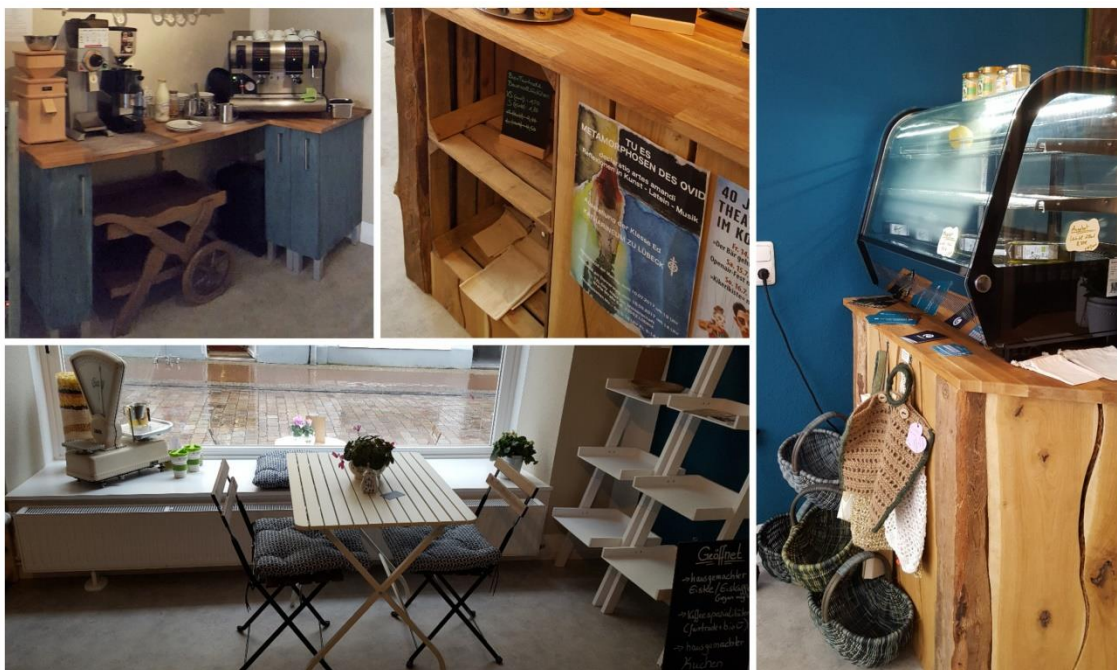
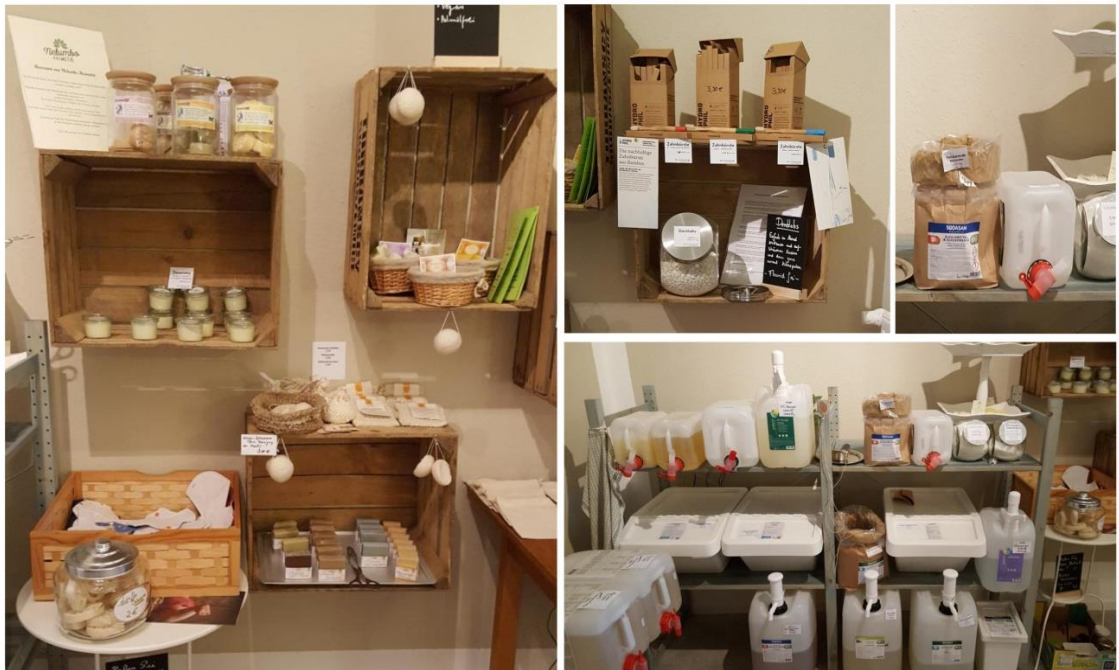


Figure E.3.2. – Dispensing Systems: Bulk Bins and Other Containers



Figure E.3.3. – Household Items



E.4. Ohne

Figure E.4.1. – The Built Environment: Upcycled Materials and Second-Hand Furniture Symbolising the Zero Waste Discourse



Figure E.4.2. – Dispensing Systems: Bulk Bins and Other Containers



Figure E.4.3. – Household Items and Regional Produce



Figure E.4.4. – Lifestyle Tools: Products that Enable Consumers to Avoid Waste

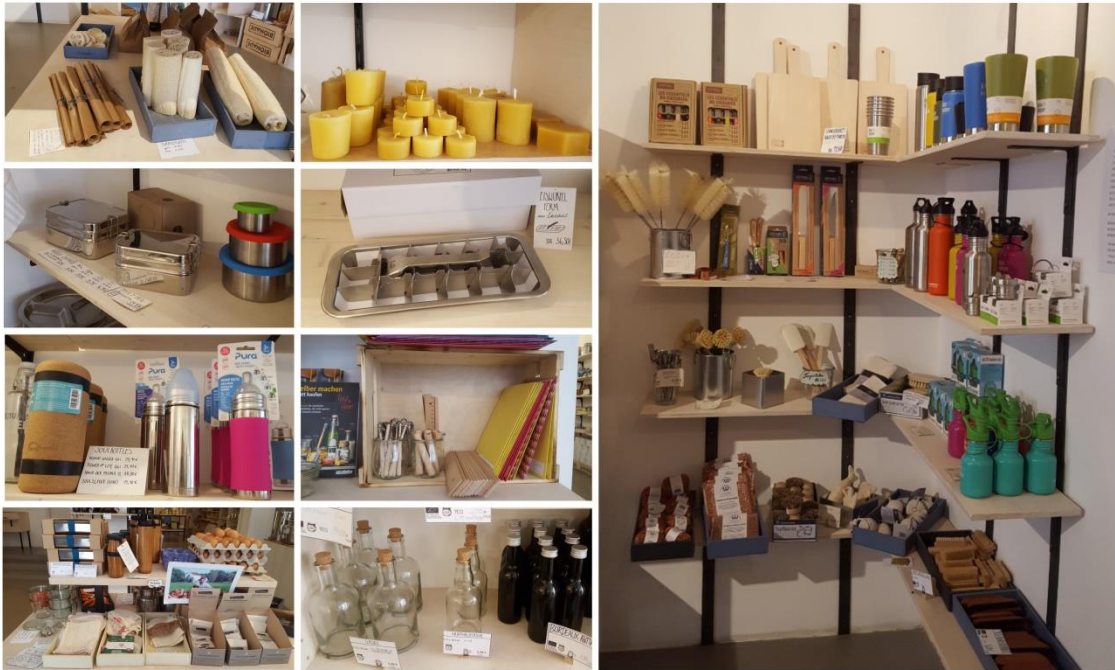


Figure E.4.5. – Knowledge Resources

