

IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO: CO-CREATION FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE FOOD RETAILING
SECTOR

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Abstract

Sustainable development (SD) issues are one of the top concerns of contemporary societies and whose problems are a responsibility shared by all countries, individuals, governments and businesses. The environmental impacts derived from current production and consumption habits are not sustainable for the planet and more than a quarter of these can be blamed on the food industry. If firm measures are not put into practice quickly, the future of upcoming generations will be compromised. The normalization of integrating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as an embedded part of businesses' strategy has undoubtedly help to raise awareness on the importance of SD, but companies cannot succeed alone. Consumers are also a key part on the process of achieving SD and without them, it will not be possible to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations. The concept of Consumer Social Responsibility (CnSR) is thus introduced not only as a way of holding consumers responsible in the battle for SD too, but also to understand the drivers of consumers when it comes to sustainable food purchasing. Finally, Co-creation is suggested as a solution to connect retailers and consumers so that, together, they can pursuit SD. As to access the research question, a qualitative study was performed with interviews including both consumers and retailers and it was concluded that there is still a lot of work that must be done by both parts.

Key words: Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable Development, Consumer Social Responsibility, Co-creation

JEL classifications: M14; Q01

Resumo

As questões relacionadas com o Desenvolvimento Sustentável (DS) são uma das maiores preocupações da sociedade contemporânea e cujos problemas são uma responsabilidade partilhada por todos os países, indivíduos, governos e empresas. Os impactos ambientais derivados dos atuais hábitos de produção e consumo não são sustentáveis para o planeta e mais de um quarto destes é causado pela indústria alimentar. Caso não sejam adotadas medidas firmes rapidamente, o futuro das gerações vindouras será comprometido. A normalização da integração da Responsabilidade Social Corporativa (RSC) como parte integrada da estratégia das empresas sem dúvida que ajudou na consciencialização para a importância do DS, mas as empresas não podem ser bem-sucedidas sozinhas. Os consumidores são um elemento chave no processo de atingir o DS e sem eles, não será possível cumprir os Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável propostos pelas Nações Unidas. O conceito de Responsabilidade Social do Consumidor é deste modo introduzido não só com uma forma de responsabilizá-los na luta pelo DS, mas também para entender as motivações dos consumidores no que toca à compra sustentável de comida. Por fim, a Co-criação é sugerida como uma solução para conectar os retalhistas e consumidores para que, juntos, possam na procura pelo DS. Para confirmar as perguntas de investigação, foi adotado um estudo qualitativo onde se realizaram entrevistas aos consumidores e retalhistas e onde se concluiu que ainda há muito trabalho para ser feito de ambas as partes.

Palavras-chave: Responsabilidade Social Corporativa, Desenvolvimento Sustentável, Responsabilidade Social do Consumidor, Co-criação

Classificações JEL: M14; Q01

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research problem and questions

When the movie *Inconvenient Truth* about global warming debuted in 2006, it predicted that a combination of a massive storm with the rise of the sea level - caused by global warming - could provoke such a flood that it would reach the 9/11 Memorial in New York City, which has over 300m of distance separating it from the river (Gore, 2017). Back then, climate change sceptics found this affirmation ridiculous and completely absurd but the fact is that, in 2012, hurricane Sandy indeed caused a massive flood in the 9/11 Memorial (Gore, 2017). This is just one of many examples of what is currently happening in the environmental crisis we currently live in and, as such, we must take climate change seriously and assume the responsibility to change it (García & Sanz, 2018).

The thing about climate change is that its consequences affect the whole globe and are all complexly interconnected. The rise of the CO₂ level in the atmosphere caused by factories, among other agents, originates the melting of polar caps, which consequently rises the average sea level and cause floods, which destroy not only human populated areas, but also animals natural habitats (Gore, 2017). The rise of the Earth's average temperature is also the originator of heat strokes that kill thousands every year, severe droughts that lead to food shortage causing hunger and the proliferation of viruses like Zika, that caused thousands of babies to be born with congenital malformations in Brazil in 2016 (Gore, 2017; United Nations, 2018). As a matter of fact, all the things we have in life require some kind of production and a simple 1 ton of paper actually requires the usage of 98 tons of other resources (Leonard, 2010). We need materials to make the saws that will cut down the wood, trucks to drive the wood to the factories, petroleum to make all the machines in the factory work and a lot of water to turn the wood into paper (Leonard, 2010). It is thus crucial that we, as a society, make an effort to reduce both production and consumption levels, which addresses directly to the consumerist lifestyle observed in the expanding middle class all over the globe (Alfredsson et al., 2018).

It all started with the beginning of the economic expansion in the 20th century, that has been constantly growing ever since and that has been a huge cause of environmental degradation and exhaustion of human, material and capital resources, all in the name of profit growth (Szwajca, 2018). These less fortunate events were deeply enhanced by the

globalization phenomena observed in the last decades, which was powered essentially by companies that have the distribution and logistics capability to reach global markets (Paterson, 2006). However, if in developed countries production processes are a target of more regulations and are generally more energy-efficient, the same does not happen in poorer countries (Alfredsson et al., 2018). In some areas of Bangladesh, where a lot of factories that manufacture products for the entire world are located, people live side by side with the toxic residues of their production and the worst part is that they are not informed about the dangers of it: children play next to it and adults walk with their bare feet on it (Leonard, 2010). This does not mean that people who live in developed countries do not experience the negative effects of climate change. With the fossil fuels footprint reaching levels four times higher than developing countries, in 2016, 91% of the air quality in urban centers did not oblige to the guidelines required by the World Health Organization (United Nations, 2018). From extraction, production, distribution, consumption and elimination, all phases of the products we consume are sources of CO₂ emissions so the logic could not be any more simple: the more we consume, the more we pollute (Leonard, 2010).

Out of all the things humans consume, food is the one that is absolutely indispensable, since it is a basic human need (Notarnicola, Tassielli, Renzulli, Castellani, & Sala, 2017). However, our current habits of production and consumption are not sustainable and are responsible for 20-30% of the overall environmental impact on the planet, with meat and dairy being the dominant contributors to this numbers (Notarnicola et al., 2017).

Figure 1 shows clearly the actual amount of land that is needed to cater for the meat and dairy industry in Europe alone (European Environmental Agency, 2017). The production of plant-based foods, which also includes foods that are not contemplated in the staple food wheels – coffee, alcoholic beverages, sugar - totals 28100 ha. Meanwhile, 133200 ha of land are needed to produce dairy and meat, since the land needed is not only the one where the animals live, but also the land required to farm the food they eat. Overall, 72% of all land needed to feed Europe is being occupied by the meat and dairy industry. As observed in Figure 2, food consumption requires the input of several natural resources and puts a lot of pressure into the environment. Food consumption is a process that can be divided into five phases – producing; processing and manufacturing; supply retail and services; consuming; and waste management – and all of these stages have a significant impact on the environment (European Environmental Agency, 2017). There

are a lot of tips given by Gore (2017) that consumers can follow to reduce the environmental impact of their food consumption. Eating a lot of meat results into the rise of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere so a vegetarian or even vegan diet can significantly improve one’s carbon footprint. There should also be a preference from the consumer for local products, since 11% of the food related emissions are linked to their transportation.

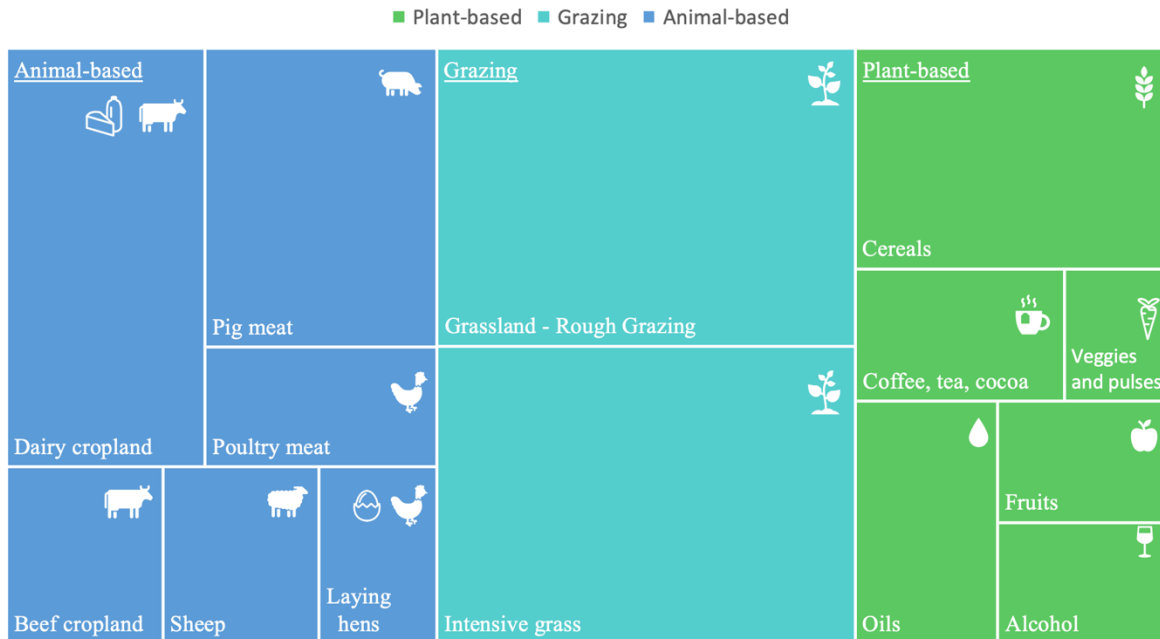


Figure 1 –Land needed to produce Europe’s food; Adapted from European Environmental Agency (2017)
 Source: PBL, compiled from Eurostat, 2016 (ef_oluft); Lesschen et al., 2011; FAOSTAT 2013 data (soybean products); Euromalt (www.euromalt.be) statistics; European Feed Manufacturers Federation (www.fefac.eu) data; and the European Vegetable Oil and Protein Meal Industry Federation (www.fediol.be) data.

Moreover, 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions are caused by deforestation, which is currently happening to free more soil to be available for cattle production. Buying organic produce is also a way consumers can contribute to the environment, since it uses up until less 50% of energy in comparison with regular agriculture. At last, buying in bulk is also a good option, since it uses less or no packaging at all and saves trips to the store, which also help to reduce the transportation footprint (Gore, 2017).

However, a scenario where everyone in the world is vegan and goes to the organic supermarket to buy local products, putting them in reusable produce bags and glass jars is somehow utopic. In a study performed by Notarnicola et al., (2017) using data from the environmental impact of the main consumed products in the European Union in 2010, it was assessed that the typologies of food with the biggest impact on the environment were meat and dairy. In comparison, fruit and vegetables presented a much lower footprint, since it requires less resources to produce and do not have to be mandatorily

packaged (Notarnicola et al., 2017). In another study by van de Kamp et al., (2018) taking into account the diet of the average Dutch, it was found that in order to achieve a sustainable and healthy consumption of food, cheese consumption should be reduced by 22%, fish by 56% and red meat consumption should decrease by an astonishing 65%. The study also revealed that incorporating a healthier diet with more non-animal products and less processed foods, which are not only generally unhealthy but also highly packaged, improved significantly the greenhouse gases emissions (van de Kamp et al., 2018).

It has been shown by several studies that reducing the consumption of meat, dairy and processed foods is not only good for the health of the individuals, but for the environment as well. In order to achieve sustainable development (SD), it is essential that there is an offer of healthy and sustainable food in all categories (Hoek, Pearson, James, Lawrence, & Friel, 2017). However, changing the food we are used to eat is not that easy to do and the higher prices associated with sustainable products often push the consumer away (Devinney, Auger, & Eckhardt, 2012).

As Figure 2 shows, consumers are only a part of the whole process of food consumption and this thesis will attempt to shed a light on retailers, which are present in all other stages. Not only they are responsible for the sustainability initiatives done in-store, but are also accountable for the development of these actions upstream and downstream the supply chain (Chkanikova & Mont, 2012). Additionally, it should not be forgotten that retailers are not only stores where products from food companies are sold: they also have products of their own private brand, whose portfolio has been increasing over the years and that provides them with a direct source of profit (Kremer & Viot, 2012), which makes them directly accountable for the sustainability of their own products.

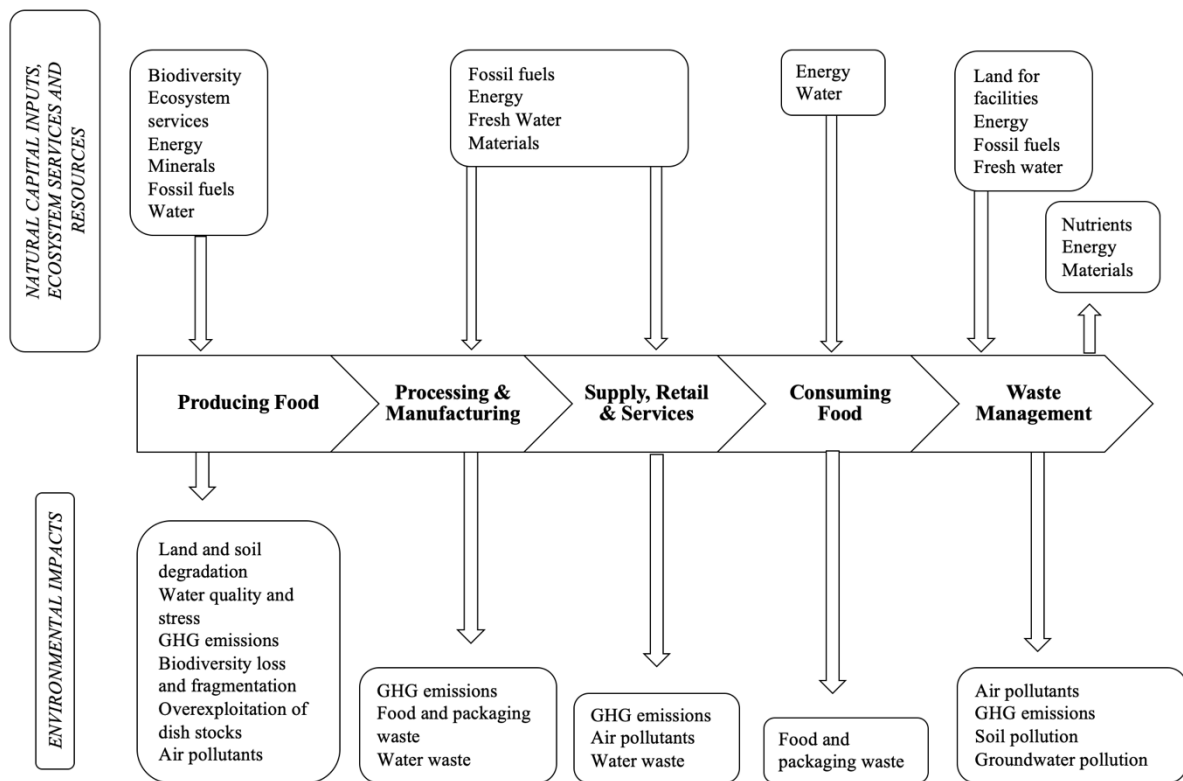


Figure 2 – Environmental Perspective of Food System Activities;
 Source: Adapted from European Environmental Agency (2017); EFA

We need to change our food consumption habits, but how well informed are consumers about these statistics? What about the food sector, are they fully aware too and, if yes, what are they doing to change the game? A simple shopping trip to buy milk is an example of how hard it is to make the most sustainable choice. Cow milk is, by far, the least sustainable choice but however, soymilk is known by having a great probability of containing genetically modified organisms and almond milk is also tricky, since it requires up to 5 liters of water to grow one single almond (Abrahamse, 2019). So, is there really a sustainable way of consuming certain food groups? And are the consumers really interested in sustainable products and are they willing to pay the extra price that is associated with such foods? Or, on the contrary, are consumers demanding more sustainable food options and companies are the ones whom are not responding? What are the drivers that motivate an individual when making a food purchase? Do they take sustainability in account and if yes, in what ways?

Hence, this thesis intends to better understand the sustainable food consumption panorama in Portuguese supermarkets by getting to know the purchasing habits of consumers, their awareness on products' sustainability and by checking directly with retailers in the field what is currently being done to achieve SD to answer a question: How can retailers and consumers, together, achieve SD through co-creation?

1.2 Thesis structure

Due to the recent awareness of climate change related issues, “sustainability has been on top of the international agenda in the last few years” (Biggemann, Williams, & Kro, 2014:3), with SD arising as a matter of greatest importance and with companies engaging in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in order to pursuit it (Salvioni & Gennari, 2017). As much as companies acknowledge that profits are essential for the survival of the business, the truth is that they are only able to earn them because of the society they are inserted in (Chandler & Werther, 2014). Therefore, there is an undeniable interdependence between companies and their consumers, so these last ones must not be denied a role in SD nor be unaccountable for the consequences of their purchase actions (Carroll, 2009; Chandler & Werther, 2014). Co-creation thus emerges as a possible solution to achieve SD, since it promotes a transparent and propitious collaboration between companies and consumers (Biggemann et al., 2014) in order to create more conscious products that consequently will contribute to achieve long-term SD.

This thesis will then begin with a literature review where all the concepts mentioned above will be further investigated and explored. After the literature review about these subjects, the investigation in order to answer the research questions will follow. It will firstly be explained the methodology used to examine the problem, in which will be justified why a qualitative approach was selected. Finally, the discussion of results and findings from the study will be provided and analyzed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Development & Corporate Social Responsibility

Over the last decades, debates about sustainability have been more and more common, with the number of academic papers on the subjects of SD (Silvestre & Țircă, 2019) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) registering an increase each year (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006). Although the concepts of responsibility and sustainability ended up converging in some points, they have different roots: responsibility has its origin in economics and ethics, whereas sustainability emerged out of the interdisciplinary field of systems science (Bansal & Song, 2017). As demonstrated by Figure 3, corporate responsibility and business sustainability begin apart and eventually ended up following the same path of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), which formed what is now known as CSR in strategic management literature (Bansal & Song, 2017).

As it will be further explored in detail, CSR and sustainability share the ultimate goal of balancing environmental, social and economic responsibilities (Montiel, 2008).

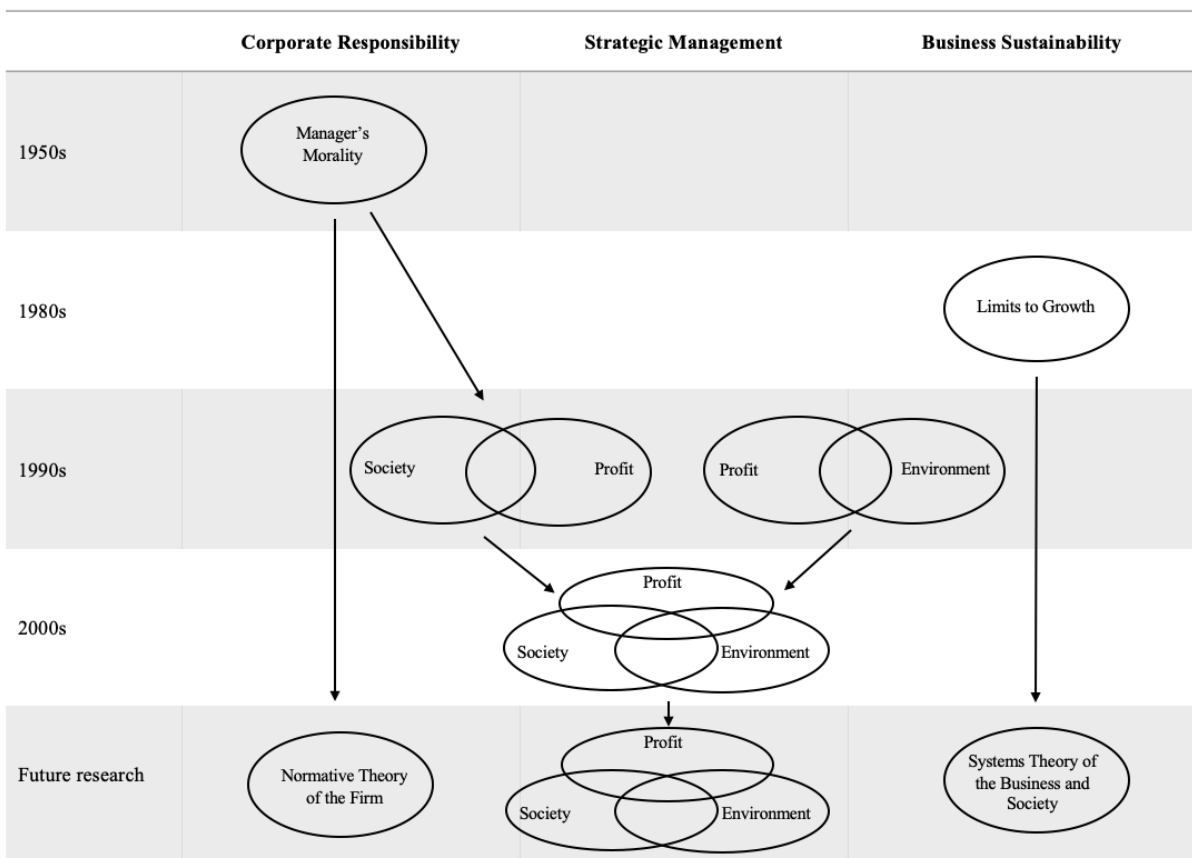


Figure 3 – The Evolution of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability
 Source: Adapted from Bansal and Song (2017)

Both responsibility and sustainability address to the same business crowd and share a mutual interest in the connection existent between business, the society and the environment but blurring the two concepts has led to the disorientation of managers and academic researchers (Bansal & Song, 2017). Although the two concepts are highly interdependent and connected by a solid bond, they are not synonymous, and it is therefore important to establish the differences existent between them (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006).

2.1.1 Sustainable Development

Although it seems a contemporary concept, the term SD actually dates back to the 18th century in Britain, France and Germany (Grober, 2007) and was applied in forestry, when it was established a limit on tree cutting to ensure a stable wood supply to future generations (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006; Grober, 2007). This concern was successively extended to the conscious exploitation of other resources, which evoked the current SD mission statement (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006). In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) composed the Brundtland Report where they wrote one of the most commonly used definitions of SD in literature (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006; Geissdoerfer, Morioka, de Carvalho, & Evans, 2018; Grober, 2007; Lacoste, 2016; Marcus & Fremeth, 2009; Scherer, Palazzo, Seidl, & Seidl, 2013; Sinakou, Boeve-de Pauw, Goossens, & Van Petegem, 2018) which states that “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (United Nations, 1987:41). As much as this definition is very straightforward and simple to understand, it is too vague (Reid, 1995). It lacks complexity and leaves some very significant unanswered questions, considering it gives no clues about putting SD into practice and what needs to be done to achieve it (Reid, 1995).

SD is actually a holistic concept which englobes three spheres: sustainability of the environment, society and economy (Biggemann et al., 2014; Giddings, Hopwood, & O'Brien, 2002; Marcus & Fremeth, 2009), which are collectively known as the triple bottom line (TBL). The concept was coined by Elkington twenty-five years ago (Elkington, 1997) and stands for the equal balance between people, profit and planet (Alhaddi, 2015; Slaper & Hall, 2011). Elkington actually proposed a recall on the concept

per occasion of the 25th anniversary of TBL¹. In this article, Elkington explains that businesses did not follow the TBL as it was meant to be reflected, since it has been seen simply as an accounting tool and not a way for businesses to reflect on how capitalism should change.

Having sustainability at its core, TBL aims to measure the performance of companies on all these three levels (Slaper & Hall, 2011). As for people, it claims that businesses should not only treat their workers in a fair manner but also give back to the community, with the consequence of neglecting this sphere being the negative performance of the firm. Environmentally speaking, businesses should use the resources needed for its operation in a responsible way and if it is not possible, they ought to compensate their negative actions. Finally, TBL looks at profits in an interesting way through the sustainability lens, since it actually considers economic prosperity an opportunity for the sustenance to future generations (Alhaddi, 2015). In order to achieve it, planet Earth's limitations should be taken into consideration (Meadows, Meadows, & Randers, 2005), and it is a task that needs to be executed by the joint forces of corporations, government and civil society (Sachs, 2012; Szwajca, 2018).

Since SD is a broad topic that covers several different matters, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were created in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). These goals “are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.” (United Nations, 2015:16) and it is up to each government to establish their own targets for their country. The established set of 17 different SDG ultimately advocates to stimulate prosperity of humanity whilst taking care of planet Earth. Each one covers a specific subject, being some examples to end poverty – goal 1 –, to reduce inequality – goal 10 –, or to promote decent and sustainable work conditions for all – goal 8 (United Nations, 2015). As referent to the subject of this thesis, both goals 2 – end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture –, and goal 12

¹<https://hbr.org/2018/06/25-years-ago-i-coined-the-phrase-triple-bottom-line-heres-why-im-giving-up-on-it>; 22-06-2019

– ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns - (United Nations, 2015), are particularly important. As per goal 2, according to the SDG Report of 2018, both world hunger and general food prices have risen, which may affect food security in a negative way (United Nations, 2018). Regarding goal 12 and despite being relative to all consumption and production and not only food, 108 countries had national policies targeting this subject and 93% of the world's largest companies are reporting on sustainability (United Nations, 2018).

Taking in mind the perspective of ethics, which defines what is right or wrong, businesses should actively work towards SD (Chandler & Werther, 2014; Payne & Raiborn, 2001). Rationally speaking, the preservation of the environment is vital so that all of the Earth's living beings can inhabit it and thrive and, as so, the lighter financial costs of exploiting resources should not overlap life itself (Payne & Raiborn, 2001). Earth does not belong exclusively to humans and both fauna and flora are not only unaccountable for the negative actions of human kind, but also are not capable of fixing them (Payne & Raiborn, 2001). Since SD highlights the use of resources, it is not hard to understand why companies should be interested in being sustainable (Baumgartner & Library, 2014). After all, the main cause for the severe depletion of resources that has been occurring since the 20th century is the production activity of companies (Szwajca, 2018), considering the private sector is the main wheel of the economy (Sachs, 2012). It is actually worrying that crescent economic development powered by corporations and the world's population growth are causing tremendous pressure onto ecosystems, which are already causing devastating consequences to not only humans, but the planet as well (Sachs, 2012).

The lifestyle based on consumerism is pushing the environment to its limits (Sachs, 2012; Szwajca, 2018) and its consequences are more complex than we think. In fact, it creates a snowball effect as described by Crocker (2016): with the industrial revolution, companies started to be able produce more goods, which allowed a reduction in prices and encouraged people to buy more. Later on, the rise of technology that granted the society 24h access to social media and introduced them to online shopping, has caused people to constantly compare themselves to others and feeling the need to self-express in a materialistic form. This lead to a rapid cycle of buying, using and discarding as a result of a deadly combination of massive advertising campaigns and products being designed to have a short life cycle (Assadourian, 2010; Crocker, 2016; Hamilton, 2009). Pointing

the matter of study of this thesis, food also entered this vicious cycle of consumerism. As for an example, the hamburger was considered poor people's food in the early 1900's but by the mid of the century it gained such popularity that it actually driven the phenomenon of fast-food, which not only produces lots of disposable materials, but also led to the obesity epidemic (Assadourian, 2010).

Right up front, the problem begins with the neglect of one of the premises of the Brundtland Report (1987), which stated that sustainability should envision all countries and, as so, no country should harm the resources of others. Sadly, this is not the reality and the out of control consumerism of developed countries is not only harming themselves, but developing countries too (Sachs, 2012; Szwajca, 2018), inducing direct implications on all three dimensions of the TBL. Social problems like obesity (Assadourian, 2010) and depression (Crocker, 2016) are found in developed countries, whereas child labor and poor access to basic sanitation (Devinney, Auger, & Eckhardt, 2010) are common in developing nations. Economically speaking, excessive credit debt (Balderjahn et al., 2013) is typically found in developed countries, whilst poverty (Devinney et al., 2010) is frequent among developing communities. Regarding the environmental sphere of TBL, there are problems that are more commonly found in developed countries, like excessive amounts of waste (Crocker, 2016) or deforestation (Devinney et al., 2010) in the case of developing nations. However, environmental issues end up reflecting on the entire planet in a more homogenous and palpable way, regarding political borders. Climate change, mass pollution, extinction of species and acidification of the oceans (Cardoso & van Schoor, 2017; Sachs, 2012) are environmental concerns that affect the entire globe.

Ultimately, consumerism causes an overwhelming overburden of goods and increase of waste (Sachs, 2012; Szwajca, 2018). Due to the rampant and out of control over consumption, companies escalate their manufacturing and the increase in the production of goods consequently originates, among others, high emissions of greenhouse gases and water poisoning (Sachs, 2012). In light of the fact that companies are the main agent responsible for these unfortunate events, the following statement arose: "The main question is not why a corporation should act more sustainable, but how can corporations be more sustainable" (Baumgartner & Library, 2014:259), which is where CSR steps in to play its crucial role on saving the planet Earth.

2.1.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

Since its emergence in the 1950's (Carroll, 2009) the concept of CSR has been thriving strongly, being a matter of amply discussion, research and with plenty theories built around it for decades (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Archie Carroll is one of the most famous authors linked to the CSR subject and in 1979 he wrote one of the must cited definitions in academia that states that “the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point of time” (Carroll, 1979:500). A business that focuses on CSR is the “one that proactively offers social benefits or public service, and voluntarily minimizes practices that harm society, regardless of any legal requirements” (Vitell, 2015:767). As one can imagine, there are hundreds of approaches to the concept of CSR but the key idea of it is simple: Corporations should have the responsibility to create a positive impact on both society and the environment by pursuing other goals than purely growing profits (Chandler & Werther, 2014).

CSR definitions	
<i>Reference</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Purcell & Albright (1974:437)	“Corporate social responsibility means a willingness on the part of the corporate manager (acting not only as an individual but as a decision-maker implicating his firm) actively and with moral concern to confront certain social problems he deems urgent and to bend the influence of his company toward the solution of those problems insofar as the firm is able to do so. Such responsibility requires that the manager balance intelligently the needs of the many groups affected by the firm so as best to achieve both profitable production and the common good, especially in situations in which he is not required to do so by law or by external pressures which the company cannot easily resist.”
Jones (1980:59-60)	“Corporate social responsibility is the notion that corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stock- holders and beyond that prescribed by law or union contract.”
McWilliams & Siegel (2001:117)	“Actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law.”

Marrewijk (2003:102)	“CSR refer to company activities – voluntary by definition – demonstrating the inclusion of social and environmental concerns in business operations and in interactions with stakeholders.”
Hohnen (2007:4)	“CSR is understood to be the way firms integrate social, environmental and economic concerns into their values, culture, decision making, strategy and operations in a transparent and accountable manner and thereby establish better practices within the firm, create wealth and improve society.”
European Comission (2011:3)	“Corporate social responsibility concerns actions by companies over and above their legal obligations towards society and the environment.”
Vitell (2015:767)	“A CSR focused business is best defined as one that proactively offers social benefits or public service, and voluntarily minimizes practices that harm society, regardless of any legal requirements”

Table 1 - CSR definitions

CSR thus proposes the stakeholder theory, a management approach that takes into account all stakeholders involved in the business, which are all individuals that can benefit or be harmed with its operation: local community, customers, employees, suppliers, owners and management as seen in Figure 4 (Freeman, 2001). Payne & Raiborn (2001) go even further stating that from the SD perspective, stakeholders are all living creatures on Earth, both humans and animals. By integrating the stakeholder perspective into the firms strategy, it can better respond to their demands, thus boosting economic and social value (Chandler & Werther, 2014).

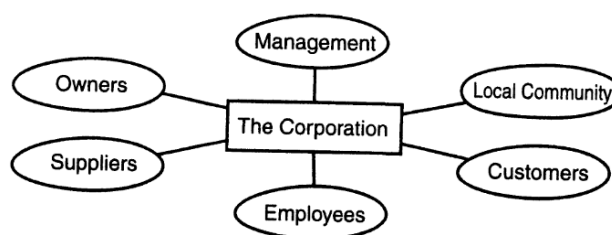


Figure 4 - A Stakeholder Model of the Corporation. Freeman (2001)

Unlike the shareholder theory, which only worries about paying earnings to stockholders as they are key to the firm's survival, the stakeholder theory englobes all stakeholder as important parts of the firm (Freeman, 2001).

In practice, it surely is impossible to pay equal attention to every one of the stakeholders, especially if we take in consideration that sometimes their interests enter in conflict (Chandler & Werther, 2014). However, businesses cannot constantly ignore all stakeholders interests, no matter how low they are in the firm's priority list (Chandler & Werther, 2014) and a fair balance is needed to assure the long-term sustainability of the business (Salvioni & Gennari, 2017).

In the beginning this concept was looked at as a parody and being accused of having completely inconsistent premises by the skeptical enterprise community, with mid-level managers often facing CSR as a cost with doubtful outcomes (Lee, 2008) and with shareholders pushing their influence towards economic responsibility only (Salvioni & Gennari, 2017). We cannot discuss theories against CSR without mentioning Milton Friedman, one of the most popular opposers that articulated harsh critics towards CSR, whom even called advocates of CSR "unwitting puppets" (Friedman, 1970:122). Friedman firmly argued that the only responsibility a business should have is to maximize profits for its shareholders and that businessmen should not be bothered to be concerned with social issues (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Friedman, 1970; Lee, 2008). He defended that managers, as persons, may have social responsibilities to charity, church and to his country but that those were a part of his personal life sphere, not to be mixed with his job (Friedman, 1970). Some of the other arguments against CSR that emerged in the 1970's stated that businesses were not operationally prepared to deal with social activities, that it caused the mitigation of the firm's purpose of making profits and that it made businesses less competitive on a global scale (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Luckily for CSR, it slowly became popular in the late 1990's, it was already widely accepted and endorsed "by all constituents in society from governments and corporations to non-governmental organizations and individual consumers" (Lee, 2008:53). In the present days, CSR is usually associated with mitigating the adverse outcomes of commerce, business and marketing (Marquina Feldman & Vasquez-Parraga, 2013).

To fight any negative criticism against CSR and to express the depth of the concept, Chandler & Werther (2014) gave four arguments in favor of it from different

perspectives: ethical, moral, rational and economic. First of all, there are two ethical reasonings in which CSR is valid: consequentialist (doing the greatest good for the greatest number of individuals) and categorical (following ethical principles no matter their outcomes). As so, both these philosophical approaches should be integrated in the firm's Code of Ethics since it is expected from them to engage ethically and to do the right thing in matters like human rights or environmental conservancy. Second, there is also a moral argument advocating CSR which recalls that there is a relationship of interdependence between business and society, and because the former operates mandatorily in the latter's sphere, society has the right to establish their expectations for businesses. According to this argument, the existence of society is what makes businesses possible so in return, businesses should act in their benefit and according to its boundaries. Anticipating highly analytical critics like Friedman, a rational argument was too proclaimed. If a business does not feel compelled to engage in CSR due to ethical and moral reasons, it should at least do it so for a third argument, i.e. a rational one (Chandler & Werther, 2014). Following this line of thought, in order for a business to maximize its performance, it needs to minimize possible sanctions. Laws must be followed, and fines can be avoided if firms take a proactive approach to responsible behavior, which will consequently help to shape current jurisdiction towards a fairer one. Finally, there is an economic argument supporting CSR, which is based on the fact that it adds value and constitutes a differentiation point to the firm in relationship with their competition (Chandler & Werther, 2014). A business success is deeply related with its values and if its perceived as socially irresponsible, its public image can shatter which diminishes its value and decreases its attractiveness to investors (Chuang & Tai, 2014).

CSR is a broad topic and the literature about it reflects that evidence, since it is characterized by being both vast and hugely fragmented into specific disciplinary fields (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012), which reveals the influence CSR can have. Scholars approach it both conceptually and empirically, primarily through the lens of a particular department, like marketing, finance, corporate strategy, among others (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). It has been studied as being an integrated part of a corporation's strategy (Chandler & Werther, 2014), calculated its impact in the access to finance (Cheng, Ioannou, & Serafeim, 2014), considered its effects on purchasing behavior through marketing campaigns, (Ko, Hwang, & Kim, 2013), explored how satisfaction from human resources affect it (Edmans, 2012), to name a few. Over the last decades, CSR has registered not

only a noticeable evolution within the scope of academia, but it has actually managed to be tremendously embraced by corporations (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). The explosion in popularity of CSR within corporations was induced mainly by a combination of the acknowledgement of the negative impacts that a business can generate, as well as the increasing concern of companies and consumers with both the environment and society (Öberseder et al., 2017).

In a broader view, Schwartz & Carroll, (2003) also developed a three-domain model to better understand the dimensions of CSR. Through the conception of a Venn diagram, the model presents the three responsibilities a corporation should have: Purely Economic, Purely Legal and Purely Ethical. As the name suggests, the economic domain involves all activities of the corporation that impact positively on profit and/or share value. The legal sphere refers to the corporation's jurisdictional obligations like payment of taxes, not polluting above the established levels or manufacturing safe to use products. The ethical dimension covers the firm's ethical responsibilities expected by its stakeholders (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). All three domains overlap between each other, but the optimal intersection of CSR is the one that combines all of them. A business that takes CSR into its core strategy is the one who has a proactive attitude on these three spheres, promptly minimizing practices that cause any harm (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003; Vitell, 2015) by having policies regarding "environmental sustainability, community support, cause-related marketing, and employee enablement" (Ailawadi, Luan, Neslin, Taylor, & Jordan, 2011:3). Such practices have been proven to positively affect corporation's performance like increase in sales and customer retention, which has turned shareholders from opposers into supporters of CSR (Carroll, 2009; Lee, 2008; Vanhamme, Lindgreen, Reast, & Van Popering, 2012). Consumers are also highly influenced by CSR, since it allows them to choose to be associated with a certain brand as to define themselves as a person (Ho, 2017). In fact, the purchase likelihood actually increases if the consumer has a positive CSR belief on a certain company, as well as it fosters long-term loyalty (Chuang & Tai, 2014). CSR is therefore turning into a true business driver, pleasing both consumers and investors whom are happily prompt to support companies that aim towards creation long-term of sustainable value (Lee, 2008; Salvioni & Gennari, 2017), which strengthens the proposition of "doing well by doing good" (Karnani, 2011; Price & Sun, 2017).

Businesses aim to profit from the production and selling of their products and it is sometimes hard to make them shift to a sustainable-oriented model since it does not generate profits in its initial phase (Soni & Dawar, 2018). It is a solid challenge for those in managerial positions to raise awareness related to the TBL issues into the corporate strategy of the company, but ethical leadership is absolutely needed to achieve sustainability (Chuang & Tai, 2014). As business competition is expected to continue to grow intensely, it becomes clear to many that CSR can only be sustainable as long as it adds value to the corporation's success (Carroll, 2009; Lee, 2008; Vanhamme et al., 2012). However, "being green" is becoming mainstream among competition and demanded from consumers, so although it is a challenge that will take time, it is needed for the sake of sustainable development (Carroll, 2009; Soni & Dawar, 2018).

The concept of CSR itself relates directly with companies and its responsibility to care about other issues beyond making profit, but the fact is that it implicitly involves its stakeholders (Chandler & Werther, 2014). As much as a company wants to practice CSR, the truth is that it will not be successful if the individuals and groups that relate to them do not comply along (Vitell, 2015). Therefore, responsibility on reaching a long-term sustainable development should not rely solely on the retailers and the public must be supportive too (Carroll, 2009; Chandler & Werther, 2014).

2.1.3 CSR and Retailers

As mentioned, our purchasing habits have changed drastically in the last decades and are heavily marked by consumerism. If in 1945 a typical grocery store offered a range of 1.400 products (Beitzen-Heineke, Balta-Ozkan, & Reefke, 2017), nowadays a supermarket sells about 8.000 different products and hypermarkets 14.000 (Teller, Holweg, Reiner, & Kotzab, 2018). Consumers demand the shelves to always be stocked, with a wide range of products to choose from and with food that is neither local – like tahini sauce - or in season – like fresh strawberries in January (Beitzen-Heineke et al., 2017). Globalization has put a lot of pressure on retailers as a result of consumers asking for a wider variety of products and at a cheaper price, which makes retailers engage fiercely in the fight of price competition with each other (Beitzen-Heineke et al., 2017; Chkanikova & Mont, 2012).

Current literature often explores companies in the food industry, but few take a look on retailers and their importance in the supply chain (Chkanikova & Mont, 2012). Hence,

this thesis will attempt to fill in this blank space by focusing the study on retailers and their potential to ignite the sustainability dynamism through the whole food supply chain.

When it comes to the retailer's role on sustainability, we often only think about the store itself. However, in regards to this topic, retailers have the power to change the whole system, as they are responsible not only for the in-store actions but also have influence upstream and downstream the supply chain (Chkanikova & Mont, 2012). As seen in Figure 5, there are some drivers and barriers to sustainability initiatives that can be taken by retailers up and down the stream. To embed such actions upstream is quite difficult for the retailers, since most regulations are dictated by governments and other institutions. It is also challenging due to the high prices associated with sustainable products, who tend to push most customers away and the limited authority to stimulate suppliers to provide better and less expensive sustainable products.

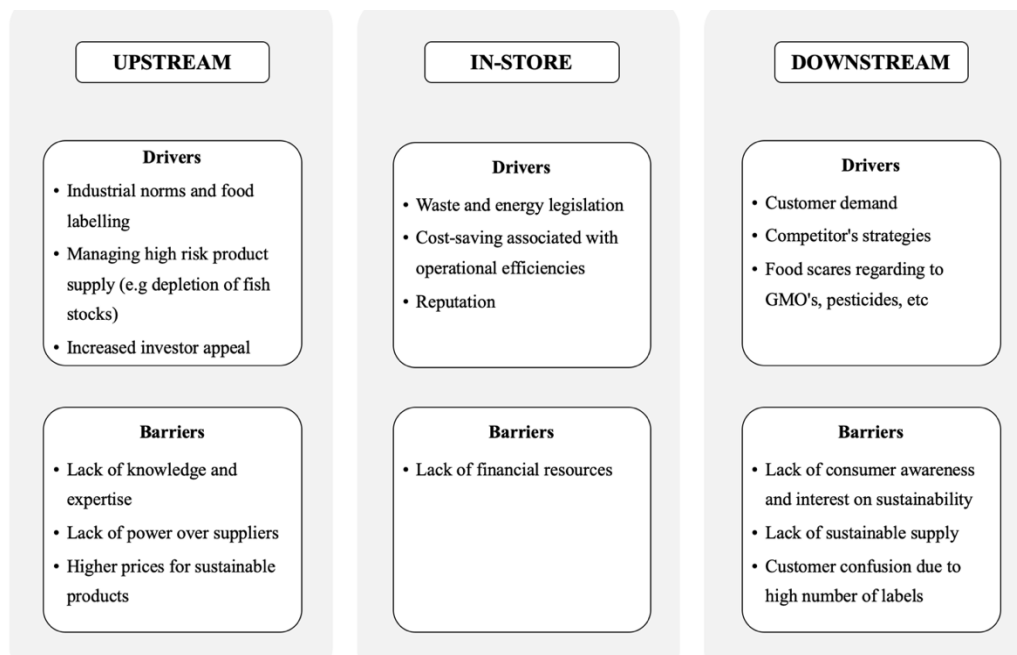


Figure 5 - Relative Importance of Drivers and Barriers for Supply Chain Sustainability Initiatives; Adapted from Chkanikova & Mont (2012)

Despite the difficulties, retailers can still prosecute their influence by having cross-industry open debates about sustainability in order to both suppliers and retailers share ideas on the topic and to engage in initiatives, like re-designing packaging (Chkanikova

& Mont, 2012). As per an example, Portuguese retailer Pingo Doce has been re-designing their packages since 2011 in order to them to be more sustainable and already saved over 15.000 tonnes of packaging materials in several of their products (Pingo Doce, 2019). In-store sustainability initiatives address directly the internal operations of the store like waste management, logistics and applying energy efficient methods. The lack of financial resources constitutes a strong barrier that discourages retailers from adopting measures that require larger investments, like putting solar panels on the outdoors parking lots (Gore, 2017). Finally, retailers can also generate positive sustainable initiatives downstream the food supply chain, especially driven by the demand of sustainably aware customers and strategies from other retailers to become greener. Removing unsustainable products from the shelves is an option that seems simple, but in reality, it is not recommended as consumers may swap to other store in search for those products. Plus, it is often hard to find sustainable products at a reasonable price (Chkanikova & Mont, 2012).

2.2 Consumer Social Responsibility

Although all stakeholders have an important role in the long-term existence of a firm, consumers are ultimately its economic engine and, without them, firms would lose its legitimacy (Chandler & Werther, 2014). In a simpler way: A business exists as long as customers exist. Following this line of thought, consumers end up being the rulers of a business, since their needs and desires will dictate the validity of a company (Chandler & Werther, 2014). As for CSR, if it is true that the pull marketing strategy is sometimes what makes companies act more responsibly since they are being pressured by the consumers, the opposite also happens (Balderjahn et al., 2013; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In fact, it is believed that CSR cannot be completely and successfully achieved if consumers do not engage and support their efforts (Soni & Dawar, 2018; Szwajca, 2018; Vitell, 2015). Hence, this thesis will take an in depth look into consumers, taking in mind a not so much explored concept: Consumer Social Responsibility (CnSR), which is a notion with a similar content as the terms socially responsible consumer behavior, consumer reactions or consumer awareness of CSR (Marquina Feldman & Vasquez-Parraga, 2013).

CnSR was defined “as the conscious and deliberate choice to make certain consumption choices based on personal and moral beliefs” (Devinney, Auger, Eckhardt, & Birtchnell, 2006:3). It happens when the consumer has some knowledge of what is behind their purchases and seeks to act responsibly in all three phases of consumer behavior – obtaining, use and disposal (Vitell, 2015). This means that when making a purchase, the consumer will take into consideration other elements that are non-functional to a product (Devinney et al., 2012), like if the product is organic, the package is recyclable or if it is made out of child labor (Devinney et al., 2010; Soni & Dawar, 2018). Globalization played a significant role on the rise of conscious awareness of the consumer, since it helped to the establishment of the shared economy concept between developed, developing and underdeveloped nations with the goal of sustainability (Soni & Dawar, 2018).

However, CnSR is not as simple as it might seem at first sight. Its dynamic is quite complex (Hingley, Lindgreen, Reast, & Manning, 2013) and it is crucial to realize that there is a clear distinction between socially responsible consumers and ethical consumers (Devinney et al., 2012). Ethical consumers determinedly will not buy anything that is not environmentally and/or humanly ethical, being heavily guided by the morality principles of what is wrong or right (Devinney et al., 2012; Soni & Dawar, 2018). Unlike socially responsible consumers, they are easily identified mostly because they are “loud” about it, since they actively participate in protests against brands and post on their social media the latest news about the unethical practice’s companies do. Socially responsible consumers are silent about their purchase’s reasons and therefore, they are nearly impossible to be identified (Devinney et al., 2006). Contrasting with ethical consumers, socially responsible consumers are not fundamentalists and most certainly will not sacrifice for the cause (Devinney et al., 2006). They do not renounce product functionality, even if it is for a socially better cause and highly need incentives to change their behavior (Hingley et al., 2013). What makes it difficult to understand the drivers of these consumers is that they will shop ethically for the matters they personally care about (Devinney et al., 2010). Each person has its own ideas of what is ethical or not and, therefore, it is impossible to predict their choices like it is with ethical buyers. This means, as for an example, that socially responsible consumers can feel driven to support McDonald’s not for the Ronald McDonald charity institution they run, but because they offer some healthy items on their menus (Green & Peloza, 2011), which sometimes does

not happen with other fast-food chains. Table 2 summarizes the main differences between socially responsible consumers and ethical consumers as for their drivers of consumption.

Socially Responsible Consumers vs Ethical Consumers		
<i>Socially responsible consumers</i>	<i>Ethical consumers</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Will not sacrifice functionality	Will sacrifice functionality	(Devinney et al., 2010; Hingley et al., 2013)
Based on specific personal beliefs and morals (e.g.: may worry about child labor but not care about fair-trade)	Based on personal beliefs and morals; They care almost about all forms of ethics	(Devinney et al., 2006, 2010)
Generally, not willing to pay more for ethical products	Willing to pay more for ethical products	(Devinney et al., 2006, 2010; Soni & Dawar, 2018; Sudbury-Riley & Kohlbacher, 2016; Vitell, 2015)
Aware of some ethical issues in product's features	Highly aware of ethical issues in product's features	(Devinney et al., 2006; Vitell, 2015)
Does not take into account the reason for consumption	Concerns about the reason for consumption	(Devinney et al., 2012)

Table 2- Socially Responsible Consumers vs Ethical Consumers

To complicate things even more, several studies have demonstrated that surveys are not the answer to try to understand who the socially responsible consumers are and what are the drivers that determine their intention to make an ethical purchase (Devinney et al., 2012). It has been proved that surveys tend to suffer from social desirability bias (Öberseder et al., 2017), since the matter under investigation is very sensitive and deals with the ethical attitudes of the individual (Devinney et al., 2010). On paper, consumers declare to be activists, just truly noble people that are concerned about ethical matters and motivated to support brands who practice CSR but in reality, “consumers are not willing to put their money where their mouth is” (Devinney et al., 2006:4). They simply will not

pay more for an ethical product even if they state that they care about CSR and ultimately want a good product for a good price (Devinney et al., 2012; Vitell, 2015). CnSR is a deeply complex dynamic and the majority of consumers will only change if there are some kind of incentives to do so (Hingley et al., 2013).

As a way of clarifying and organizing ethical matters, Devinney et al., (2010:140-141) suggested a set of topics to measure the consumer's degree of concern : “(1) animal rights in product testing; (2) the use of animal by-products; (3) product biodegradability; (4) products made from recyclables; (5) the provision of product safety information; (6) human rights; (7) packaging recyclability; (8) product disposability; (9) the payment of minimum wages; (10) whether unions are allowed; (11) whether minimum living conditions are met; (12) sexual orientation rights; (13) the guarantee of safe working conditions; (14) the use of child labor in production; (15) genetically modified material usage; and (16) gender, religious, and racial rights”.

This assortment of ethical issues clearly demonstrates the variety of existent topics and the reality is that it is impossible to care about every matter in an equal form, so there will always exist issues that will just not be a part of our concerns (Devinney et al., 2010). Some disagree with this division of ethical matters because it breaks the TBL pillars of sustainability into single facets of sustainable behavior, with no focal point whatsoever (Balderjahn et al., 2013). As an alternative, a three-dimensional scale to measure conscious sustainable consumption was provided that divides consumer's ethical beliefs under the umbrella of TBL, measuring the importance consumers give to the consequences of their purchasing actions (Balderjahn et al., 2013). Therefore, the conscious sustainable consumption conceptual model presents itself as a more structured way of analyzing CnSR, since it compiles some of the ethical matters mentioned above though connecting them to the TBL. However, despite consumers having knowledge of all of these terms and are aware they exist, the truth is that they do not have enough knowledge of what it really takes for a product to be in their hands (Devinney et al., 2006).

Some argue that consumers need to be educated by the companies about the consequences of their purchasing actions so they can transform their behavior into a more conscious one to, consequently, achieve sustainable development (Soni & Dawar, 2018). Unfortunately, consumers tend to have a lot of misconceptions about the impact of the food they eat. In a study with 1055 participants performed by Lazzarini et al., (2018),

consumers had to choose the most environmental product out of two hypotheses which included food like pork strips, parmesan cheese, tofu and minced beef. Tofu, falafel and meat substitutes were always the most environmentally friendly choice in comparison with any of the other animal-based products, but the participants almost invariably perceived these plant-based products as more environmentally damaging than they really were. In fact, the percentage of correct answers on some items was astonishing: only 28% guessed correctly that falafel was the correct choice in comparison with Gruyère cheese, between chicken breast and tofu, 16% guessed tofu as the right answer and only 9% of participants guessed correctly that tofu was the true answer in comparison with Gruyère cheese (Lazzarini et al., 2018). In another study by (Hoek, Pearson, James, Lawrence, & Friel, 2017b) with 29 interviewees, it was concluded that the overall perceived idea of not eating a lot of highly processed and packaged foods was very difficult, although they have shown to be highly aware of the amount of packaging products have and that those products are generally not healthy. As regarding to wasting food, participants showed strong negative emotions like guilt and shame when they wasted food but that it was sometimes difficult to avoid due to bad planning and impulsive buying (Hoek et al., 2017b)

That is why research on the consciousness of purchasing choices of consumers is so important, since it aids practitioners to better understand them and to help them to engage in sustainable consumption (Balderjahn et al., 2013). And specifically regarding to food, this means that consumers need to eat less animal-based products, thereby increasing the consumption of plant-based foods, as well as to reduce the overconsumption of food that surpasses the daily energy needs and reduce food waste (Hoek et al., 2017b) This mutual support between CSR and CnSR can happen in many forms, as described in Figure 6 by Szwajca (2018). Once consumers are enlightened about the magnitude of their buying choices, the importance of their “purchase vote” and are assured of the benefits of the non-functional elements of a product, they become more rational buyers (Soni & Dawar, 2018).

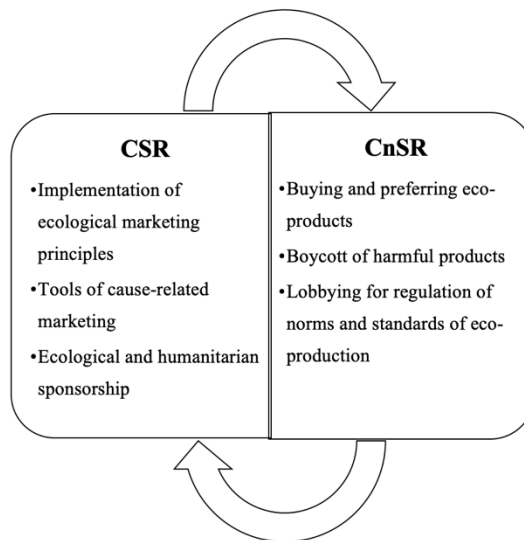


Figure 6 - Mutual support between CSR and CnSR;
Source: Adapted from Szwajca (2018)

The positive truth is that times are changing and consumers are becoming more aware of the power they have to influence corporations and are increasingly educated about ethical matters of consumption (Soni & Dawar, 2018; Szwajca, 2018). Therefore, research on CnSR is needed now more than ever to aid companies to better understand consumer's ethical beliefs and to guide them towards a more sustainable consumption (Balderjahn et al., 2013). Additionally, it is also crucial to take into account the current food trends and the market opportunities they provide to retailers. Individuals are increasing their consumption of fruit and vegetables due to their health benefits, since they are low in calories and highly rich in vitamins and minerals (Santeramo et al., 2018). People who follow alternative diets like vegetarianism, that eliminates fish and meat or veganism, that eliminates all products derived from animals are increasing rapidly (Farm Animal Investment Risk & Return, 2018). In Europe, the demand for meat substitutes is increasing about 8% per year and it is estimated that in a five-year period, alternatives to animal protein will represent one third of the total protein demand with millennials are playing a key role in these numbers, since 30% are eating meat alternatives every day (Farm Animal Investment Risk & Return, 2018). The demand for plant-based milk is increasing as consumers want an alternative to cow's milk, making it 10% of the overall dairy market (Abrahamse, 2019).

CSR and CnSR must therefore walk side by side to reach SD and the literature as the answer on how they should do it: through co-creation.

2.3 Co-creation

Business relationships used to have clear and separate roles, where the company was the active provider of goods responsible for production and the customer was a passive spectators responsible for consumption, who simply purchased the goods that companies sold (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). However, customers were sometimes displeased with the offer available and began to push their influence into all the business chain (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), having an active role on both phases of production and consumption (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Rakesh Ranjan & Read, 2016; Vargo & Lusch, 2004) which is what is called co-creation. The term itself is quite recent, being firstly introduced by Prahalad (2000) in the light of customer demand for different products (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) and the rising environmentally awareness of consumers, pressuring companies to be more sustainable (Lacoste, 2016).

Co-creation was defined in literature as “the joint, collaborative, concurrent, peer-like process of producing new value, both materially and symbolically” (Lacoste, 2016:644), “the process of creating something together in a process of direct interactions between two or more actors, where the actors’ processes merge into one collaborative, dialogical process” (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014:209) and the “enactment of interactional creation across interactive system-environments (afforded by interactive platforms), entailing agenting engagements and structuring organizations” (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018). Simply put, co-creation is a paradigm that allows a synergy to happen between companies and its stakeholders to create value (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Payne et al., 2008). In this thesis, co-creation is where CSR and CnSR connect and will therefore focus on the company-consumer relationship for value creation.

Literature often divides value into value-in-exchange, which is the potential value formed by providers and value-in-use, which is produced by consumers when using a product (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This means that value creation ends up being all about value-in-use, which translates into customer satisfaction and therefore it does not contemplate value creation for the other actors involved (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014). This distinction caused a gap in the co-creation literature between the concepts co-production and value-in-use (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018), which was studied in detail

by the literature review of Ranjan & Read (2016). The conclusion they reached demonstrated that co-creation literature lacks a more unifying view of the concept, since of the 149 analyzed papers, 71 only consider co-production, 46 only consider value-in-use and 32 consider both. Additionally, the literature often also focuses on studying the value creation process aiming their attention to discussing who creates value and who benefits from it (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018), arguing for a customer-centered view as in service logic (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Merz, Zarantonello, & Grappi, 2017) and an all-actors view as in service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016). Taking this into account, this thesis will take a more consolidated approach of co-creation endorsed by Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2018), who defend an interactive system-environments theory where value can be found anywhere regardless if its derived by producing, exchanging or using goods.

Establishing co-creation within the companies' DNA is challenging and demands a change on all platforms so that everyone can co-create (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). According to literature, putting co-creation into practice is still far from perfect. Consumers end up having a passive role in value creation, since they are observed, segmented, engaged into focus groups but do not take really a part of the conception of the product (Arnold, 2017; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014), since they are only able to give their opinion when everything is already done. Consumers are presented with the finalized packaging and the campaign that the company believes it is right for them, but they do not actively participate in the making of it (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2014) give the example of Nike and its wear-testing platform for their running shoes. Nike involves runners into the creation process of the product by sending them samples of shoes, so they can test them under real weather and surface conditions. As much as this interaction provides great feedback for Nike and allows them to manufacture a product that was tested in the real world (and not only in the laboratories), it is not a genuinely co-creative collaboration. For co-creation to truly happen, customers should be viewed as co-producers involved in the whole value chain instead of being just a target (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In the case of Nike, co-creation would exist if the testers and the developers worked closely as a community in the codesign of the shoe, allowing richer inputs to arise and increasing strategic value (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). It is

most desirable that the agents involved in the co-creation process with the goal of reaching sustainability have both experience and knowledge regarding the subject, either by working or leisure activities (Arnold, 2017), without forgetting that they have to be engaged on the same level as corporations (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). It is also important that they are present in the early stages of production so they can contribute in all its phases being those the origin of raw materials and production process, product usage and product disposability (Biggemann et al., 2014; Lacoste, 2016). However, the presence of the customer into the heart of the production raises some ethical questions regarding legal rights. If the consumer brings an idea to the table that ends up being implemented, they often do not have any rights over it, which is a question that needs to be changed urgently (Arnold, 2017). For co-creation to be successful, Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2014:xvii) suggested that some components must be integrated into its thinking, being those:

“Jointly creating and evolving value with stakeholding individuals; purposefully designing platforms of engagements; affording a variety of novel, personalized interaction environments; meshing together ecosystems of capabilities; augmenting creative capacities of enterprise architectures and management systems; enabling and supporting individuated value creation, personally and in the social, business, civic and natural communities in which individuals function; connecting with the quality of actual experiences of engagements through the platform and of the outcomes of value that result; using rapid experiential learning, insights, and knowledge to coevolve human stakeholder experiences of value; building new strategic capital for enterprises; and expanding wealth-welfare-wellbeing.”

This shifts completely the traditional mindset of producing, selling and using to listening, personalizing and co-creating (Payne et al., 2008). These principles can be put into practice through techniques that map customers processes like process mapping or customer activity cycles, innovation workshops, an ideas competition and a web community (Arnold, 2017; Payne et al., 2008). In the end, by adopting co-creation into its production strategy, companies can optimize value creation for everyone, as long as the customer can be involved in all stages of production and a deep relationship based on trust is established (Arnold, 2017; Payne et al., 2008; Salvioni & Gennari, 2017).

2.4 Co-creation for Sustainable Development

After defining and exploring the above concepts of SD, CSR, CnSR and co-creation, this sessions establishes a link between all of them, with the goal of revealing the idea that co-creation can foster SD. Innovations on the field of sustainability have the goal of boosting the current state of society and environment and for that to happen, companies need special instruments and allies (Arnold, 2017). Luckily, today's consumers are very much interested on collaborating with product development (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014; Szwajca, 2018), which makes the task of co-creating that much easier to perform. The resulting value created by this interaction is based on the knowledge sharing between consumers and companies (Biggemann et al., 2014) and for that to happen, corporations need to form a relationship built on a solid basis of trust and transparency (Arnold, 2017). Co-creation is strongly linked with the sustainability knowledge of a company (Arnold, 2017) and, therefore, if the corporation gets more acknowledged about sustainability, the chances of it working towards SD are higher. Involving these kind of consumers in the whole value chain of the corporation is a way to improve the creation of sustainable value, but sustainability management frameworks should always be present (Arnold, 2017). In the long-run, incorporating sustainability-oriented consumers into corporations trough co-creation will expand new possibilities of innovations (Arnold, 2017), thus pushing businesses towards the global goal of reaching SD.

As stated previously, current co-creation dynamics between companies and consumers are deeply flawed since these last ones do not engage in the co-creation process at early stages. As so, it is important to study both consumers and retailers, as to access not only their awareness on sustainability but also their opinion on co-creation. By now, we know that although consumer knowledge on sustainability is improving, it is still far from perfect and they are not well-informed enough (Devinney et al., 2006). We also know that businesses are shifting towards a more sustainable strategy, but when it comes to retailers and the food industry, these efforts are too not enough (Chkanikova & Mont, 2012). Therefore, this study will approach the topics of sustainability and co-creation by trying to understand how consumers and retailers are working to achieve SD both individually and collectively.

3. Methodology

By now, it is clear that both companies and consumers are interdependent agents of change when it comes to achieve SD. As some argue, companies should “help to create the socially responsible consumer” (Devinney, Auger, & Eckhardt, 2012:232) and at the same time the consumer should also be conscious about their consumption and motivate companies to act more responsibly (Balderjahn et al., 2013). As so, this research would be incomplete if one of these agents was not included in the study, so both consumers and retailers were a part of it. As stated previously, in sensitive matters like these, surveys suffer from social desirability bias (Öberseder et al., 2017), so doing interviews was the evident choice as per method of data collection. Therefore, and inspired by similar studies (Hoek et al., 2017; Ricci et al., 2018; Van Dam & van Trijp, 2013) a qualitative approach was applied. It better suits this study since it allows to better understand the reasons behind consumption and delves into values and attitudes (Hoek et al., 2017b).

Relative to surveys, interviews are less likely to suffer from social desirability bias but it cannot be guaranteed in any study that the positive and negative attitudes towards respectively socially acceptable or not acceptable behaviors are 100% true (Osman & Thornton, 2019). However, as a way to counter the occurrence of social desirability bias in this study, more questions were applied on a given topic when participants answered in an exaggerate manner, as it happened on food waste, as to access the veracity of their statements. The interviews were carried face to face and individually, since self-presentational concerns arise when doing focus groups (Wooten & Reed, 2000) and in similarity to a study conducted by Öberseder et al., (2017), participants were told that the goal of the study was to understand their opinions and therefore, there were no right or wrong answers. Regardless and in accordance with Devinney et al., (2010), it was observed along the interviews that most participants were not willing to sacrifice functionality and convenience as to obtain social desirability.

3.1 Recruitment of the sample

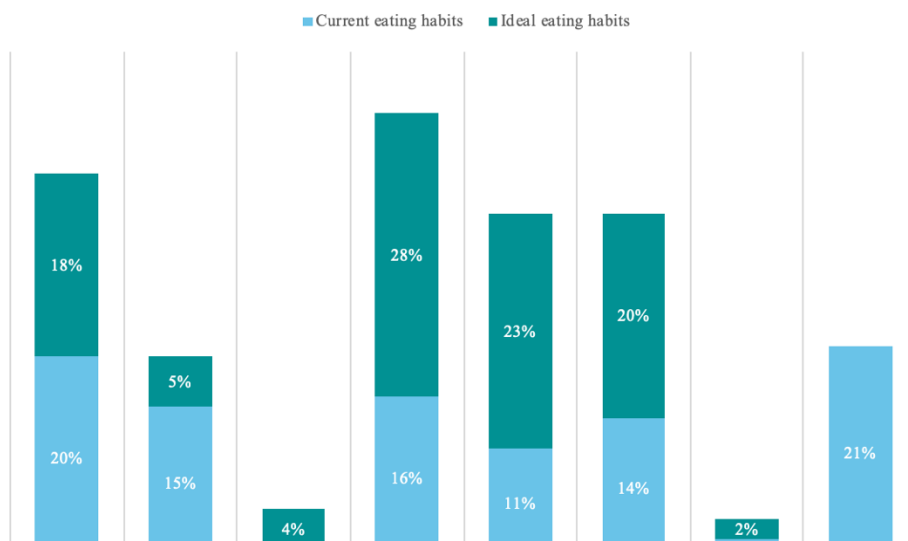
3.1.1 Consumers

Similarly to the study conducted by Van Dam & van Trijp (2013) about the importance of certified sustainable food consumption, the interviews were conducted with the individual who is the main responsible for the food purchases of the household. All

participants were Portuguese, spoke Portuguese as their first language and lived in Lisbon’s Metropolitan Area. The interviews were ceased after 17 participants due to reaching data saturation, which happens when surplusage of results exist and no new data longer appears (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018). Each study is designed in its own way and since “there is no one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation” (Fusch & Ness, 2015:1409), the saturation point will always differ between distinct studies (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The interviews were carried face to face and lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. An effort was made to include participants of different social-economic backgrounds, education, ages, diets and personal involvement with sustainable purchasing. In similarity with the study made by Hoek et al., (2017), the purpose of the study was explained to consumers in a general way, informing them that this research was aiming to understand in “how, what and why you buy the foods you do” (Hoek et al., 2017:119). The table describing the profile of the participants is an adaptation of the ones made by Hoek et al., (2017), Ricci et al., (2018) and Macdiarmid et al., (2016). The household income categories were divided based on the yield ranges envisaged by the Portuguese tax paying system of 2019.

Since this study was conducted with Portuguese people, it was also important to understand where they are standing in terms of nutrition. Unfortunately, and as shown in Graph1, the Portuguese population is not doing very well in terms of the recommended amount of food of each group they should eat (Lopes et al., 2017). The current eating



Graph 1 - What the Portuguese eat vs What they should eat; Adapted from IANF (2017)
Source: Universidade do Porto

habits of the Portuguese people are doing poorly, since the meat and dairy consumption is above the recommended values, the plant-based products consumption is lower than it should be and other food items like cakes and alcohol constitute 21% of the overall food intake. In the light of SD, food waste is also a topic where Portuguese people are also not doing well, since 1 million tons of food is wasted per year, with 42% of that waste coming from households (Baptista, Campos, Pires, & Vaz, 2012)

3.1.2 Retailers

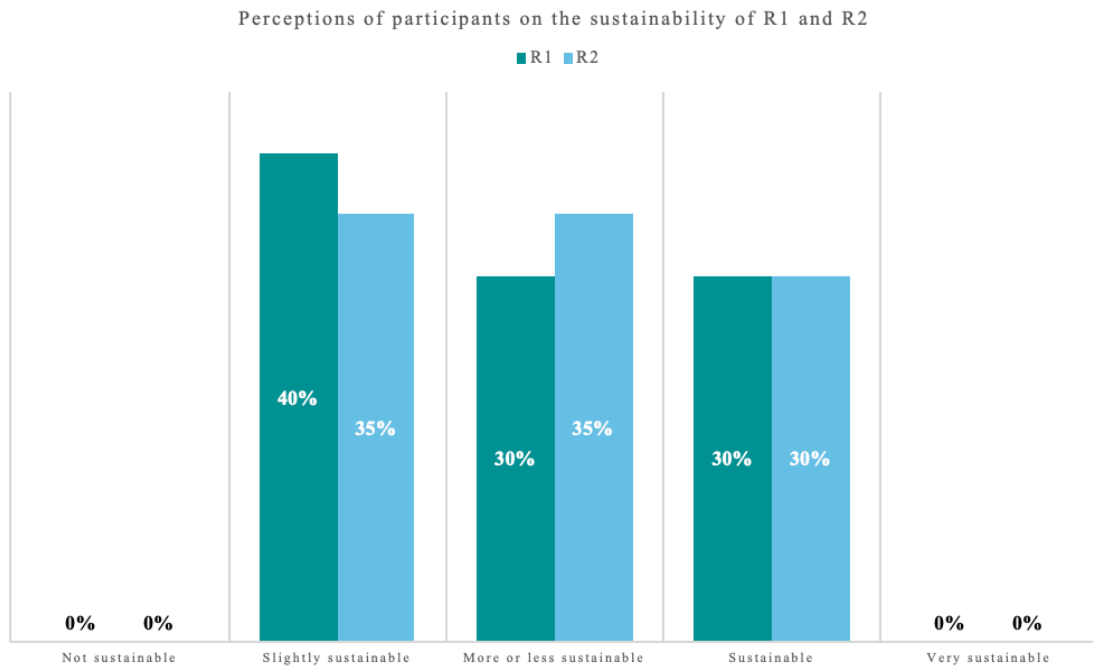
A lot of actors enter the food supply chain but the one that is responsible to deliver products to the consumer and, most of the times, the only one to have a direct contact with the client is the food retailer (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019a). The supermarket is the place where products and consumers meet and therefore, they should not be excluded of this study, which aims to understand the role of both retailers and consumers in the search for SD.

As stated in the literature review, few studies have been done regarding the role of retailers in the path of achieving SD. However, the concern of stakeholders on the sustainability of the food retail sector is growing (Chkanikova & Mont, 2012), so it is of the greatest interest to investigate retailers as agents in the sustainability supply chain.

The evidence was collected through personal semi-structured interviews with representatives of two different retailing companies, as well as with secondary data sources like websites to obtain relevant statistic information. Retailer 1 (R1) is the country's leader with about 22% of market share and owning over 550 stores and Retailer 2 (R2) occupies the third position, with 9,5% market share and having a little over 50 stores². Both have stores in hypermarket and supermarket format and are also present in e-commerce with their own store websites. A relevant difference between the two is that R1 is settled in one country, whereas R2 is present in 15 countries. For anonymity purposes, along the Discussion and Finding topic and in the transcription, the retailer's names were substituted by R1 and R2 respectively.

²<https://web3.cmvm.pt/sdi/emitentes/docs/FR69840.pdf>; 03-09-2019

Graph 2 shows the results on the perception of the sustainability of both R1 and R2. Neither retailers got extremely negative or positive opinions from the interviewees, being the results concentrated in the middle with a slight tendency towards negative perceptions towards these retailers. Perceptions of participants were equilibrate between the two retailers, with R1 having a slightly more negative score than R2.



Graph 2 - Perceptions of participants on the sustainability of R1 and R2

As a way of organizing the questions made to the retailers and in similarity with the study performed by Chkanikova & Mont (2012), four categories of factors that influence the drivers and barriers of sustainability were established, including:

- Resource factors: financial, material, reputation and knowledge, derived from pressure of shareholders and suppliers;
- Market factors: demands, competition and set of norms established by the actors in the market, derived from customers, competitors and industrial associations;
- Regulatory factors: mandatory and voluntary policies, derived from governments;
- Social factors: values and expectations of retailers, derived from society, NGO's, the media, academia and court pressure.

Co-creation is also a critical issue that was discussed, since it was important to know how co-creation works in the context of Portuguese food retailers and if it even exists and future perspectives.

3.2 Data collection and procedure

The interviews with the 17 participants were held from the 17th of May to the 25th of June of 2019 and were carried by the same interviewer. They were always executed face to face, lasting between 10 to 15 minutes each and being both audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim³. The recruitment of the sample was done primarily by convenience and was followed by the snowballing method, which happens when the interviewees recommend other potential participants (Öberseder et al., 2017). As stated in the literature, it is almost impossible to identify socially responsible consumers, so there is no data available on the percentage of population that engages in this type of consumption as to recruit the sample by quotas. However, some participants were purposely chosen as to get a broader view on the topic, as for instance participants of older age, participants with lower levels of educational background and a vegetarian. There were no preparatory tasks to be performed by the participants prior to the interview except for the form they filled out just before the interview with some personal data. These forms were given in paper format and the data was later passed onto Excel in order to analyze the statistics. As students were interviewed less than one month of finishing an educational stage, it was admitted the degree they were soon going to obtain as for statistics purposes. In Appendix 3, these subjects are identified as secondary or bachelor students. Qualitative information obtained from the interviews was analyzed through the MAXQDA software. Additionally, as to keep participants anonymous, a codification system was created (see Appendix 3). Consumer's perceptions on given topics, even if not solicited, were also incorporated into the analysis.

Besides personal information, participants had to classify their perception on the sustainability of the five main Portuguese supermarkets chains in a five-level Likert scale ranging from “Not sustainable” to “Very sustainable”, which is presented on Graph 2.

³ Interview scripts are available upon request

Along the literature review, the consequences of food production and consumption were specified, as well as some key actions to be carried out by consumers regarding sustainable consumption. As so, a set of behaviors to be adopted by consumers to achieve SD was created as follows:

- Less overconsumption & packaging (Hoek et al., 2017b)
- Less highly processed & more natural (Hoek et al., 2017b)
- Less food waste (Di Talia et al., 2019; Hoek et al., 2017)
- Less animal-based & more plant-based (Gore, 2017; Hoek et al., 2017b)
- Less global & more local (Gore, 2017)

4. Findings and Discussion

As mentioned in the methodology, the first phase of the interview consisted in a small survey to access the social and demographic profile of the participants, as well as to understand what were their perceptions on the sustainability of the main Portuguese supermarkets and the attributes they considered most when shopping. Table 3 shows the demographic and social profile of the participants.

Table 3 -Profile of participants

Gender	Females/Males	12F/ 5M
Age	Mean (range)	40
Household	Single person	8
	With partner	2
	With partner and children ≤18yo at home	3
	With partner and children > 18yo at home	2

	Single and children ≤ 18 yo at home	2
	Single and with children > 18 yo	0
Annual household income	$\leq 7091\text{€}$	3
	7091€-10700€	1
	10701€-20260€	3
	20261€-25000€	7
	25001€-36856€	0
	36857€-80640€	3
	$\geq 80641\text{€}$	0
Education	Secondary school	3
	Certificate level	2
	Bachelor's degree	8
	Master's degree	3
	Doctorate's degree	1
Diet type	Omnivore	12
	Vegetarian	1
	Vegan	0
	Other	4

The average age of the sample was 40, with 30% of male participants and 70% female participants, with 70% holding an academic degree and 82% earning up to 25.000€ per year. Regarding the household composition, 47% came from single person households and 41% lived with their children. As per diet type, the rough majority of participants (71%) were omnivore, with 1 individual identifying himself as a vegetarian and with 4 other participants choosing “Other” kind of diet, due to having specific health problems that conditionate their diet.

4.1 Consumers

4.1.1 *Less overconsumption & packaging*

Participants did not reported at any given point that they purchased more than what they needed, most likely because overconsumption is a loose concept, which does not specify the type of foods or behaviors (Hoek et al., 2017b). Only one participant referred overconsuming, as stated by I *“Sometimes I go to the supermarket and buy ten yogurts excessively. I end up not eating them and in the meanwhile their validity is expired”* (Interview, I) A participant in a study conducted by (Barone et al., 2019) admitted to be susceptible to promotional offers, falling for them regularly and ending up to throw food away. Despite realizing this fact and regretting it, the consumer persisted on this behavior, which suggests that retailers may help by reducing these kind of price promotions that incentivize consumers to purchase more than what they really need (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2019). Despite not mentioning overconsumption habits, one of the causes appointed for this behavior, similarly to the literature, was the existence of promotional offers that encourage consumers to purchase food at a low price (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2019; Barone et al., 2019).

Although the questions did not mention excess packaging, most participants revealed to be aware of the excessive packaging of certain products and make an effort to opt for sustainable choices on the daily basis, as explained by E *“I buy a 1 liter container of yogurt instead of little ones, I buy butter wrapped in aluminum instead of plastic and buy the big packages of cookies and separate them myself at home into small containers.”* (Interview, E) and K *“I always buy produce that is package free.”* (Interview, K).

Excess packaging was also mentioned by participants, as described by H “*I still buy cookies wrapped in individual packages because it is easier for my son, the same happens with the individual milk packages.*” (Interview, H). Q also added “*Only now I start to be more conscious about the excess plastic. However, because it is more convenient, we end up buying the products that are more practical which are the ones that have more plastic*” (Interview, Q). This is in line with the literature, since consumer’s convenience plays a higher role when developing the package of a product than its sustainability (Spaargaren, Oosterveer, & Loeber, 2012)

Price is also a factor consumers take first into account, as expressed by I “*Most consumers are not interested in paying more for a more sustainable package because they cannot pay it. The average consumer cannot afford to spend a few cents more just because the packaging is better for the environment*” (Interview, I). Aligned with the literature, following convenience, consumers look for products at a good price (Devinney et al., 2012; Vitell, 2015) and the sustainability of the packaging ends up not being a priority when making a purchase (Barosh, Friel, Engelhardt, & Chan, 2014).

Another interesting finding was that there is an impossibility of buying food in a more sustainable packaging, as mentioned by L “*If there were paper packages instead of plastic, of course that I would buy it. But at the moment, we cannot find it anywhere*”. Interview, L). M also added:

“When buying meat, there are a lot of them that come with excess packaging, they have several layers sometimes even dividing the meat itself. When that is the case, I always buy the one that has less plastic but the price has to be the same and I have to have that option” (Interview, M)

This is a confirmation that the current economic motivation for sustainability has a major flaw, which leaves the consumer with no choice between sustainable and non-sustainable options. Instead, it ultimately forces consumers to make the decision of buying or not buying a certain product (Balderjahn et al., 2013).

4.1.2 Less highly processed & more natural

Almost all of the participants showed to have little to no purchasing habits regarding highly processed ready meals, claiming vehemently that they rarely bought it, with feelings towards these kinds of foods being unanimously negative. Participants described

this kind of food as not healthy, artificial, with dubious ingredients and with a significant inferior quality compared to home cooked meals. As stated by F *“I am probably the last person that will buy those products. There are no certainties about the ingredients and the packaging is not very explicit about them. Because there is no information, I avoid them.”* (Interview, F) and D *“It is very rare, I usually keep one or two pizzas in the freezer for emergencies, but it is really a habit to cook from scratch.”* (Interview, D). H also added:

“I use a lot of frozen vegetables because they are practical, but foods that we just need to put them in the oven, I avoid them and prefer to cook them myself. A frozen burger does not have the same quality has a fresh burger. A frozen pizza does not have the same flavor has a pizza made with fresh ingredients.” (Interview, H)

This statements are corroborated in the literature about the perceptions of consumers on processed foods (Hoek et al., 2017b; Perry & Grace, 2015; Ricci et al., 2018; Santeramo et al., 2018).

Interestingly, they usually mentioned pizzas, lasagnas and fish sticks when asked about ready meals, which may suggest that there are not a lot of healthy options of ready meals available on the market (Ricci et al., 2018). Through a search to one of the country’s retailer’s website, it is possible to confirm this fact⁴. There were no store-brand ready-meals that were free from stabilizers and preservatives, either in the frozen or fresh sections. There was a single brand that sold a healthy, vegetarian, minimally processed frozen meal that costed 3,99€ per portion of 350g and sold solely 3 varieties of this product. On the same aisle, it was observed that there was a selection of 77 different pizzas from different brands, being the store-brand pizzas of the exact same weight as the healthy meal from a name-brand but costing only 1,99€, which is half of the price of the healthy option. To fight this scenario and aim for achieving SD, retailers could improve the nutritional content of their own-brand meals whilst keeping the prices equilibrate since it is improbable that improving the nutritional profile of ready-meals will drive an increase in cost to the consumer (Remnant & Adams, 2015).

⁴ <https://www.continente.pt/pt-pt/public/Pages/homepage.aspx>; 23-08-2019

Participants declared to consume little to no processed foods during the interviews, but what is curious is that according to the Graph 1, the overall food intake of the category “Others”, which include processed foods, is 21%. Although the participants stated that highly processed ready meals were not on their regular menu, during the interviews, most admitted purchasing processed foods such as salty and sweet snacks, as well as breakfast cereals. This may indicate that people generally perceive their food consumption healthier than it actually is (Hoek et al., 2017b), which reinforces the need to educate consumers on food choices that will help to achieve SD (Soni & Dawar, 2018).

One of the ways retailers can help consumers to increase their consumption of more natural foods is by following the CAN approach, which stands for making more Convenient, Attractive and Normal to purchase healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables (Wansink, 2017). According to Wansink (2017), as for convenience, retailers can put pre-cut vegetables in the meat section, put fruit and vegetables at the check-out instead of candy and offer tips that promote healthy eating in the store, website and mobile app. Regarding attractiveness, retailers can bundle recipe ingredients together to form a healthy meal, use “Did you know?” signs that inform consumers about the benefits of healthy foods and create a reward system with special deals or points for customers who purchase healthy items. Finally, they can make it normal to purchase healthy foods by co-promoting healthier options together with consumers in snack isles, offer pre-printed shopping lists with all the ingredients needed to make healthy meals and display posters around stores that educate them on the Half-Plate rule. The Half-Plate rule is a simple visual method that states that half of our plate of our main meals should be comprised by vegetables, fruits or salad (Wansink, 2017). Consequently, in order to eat half-plate of fruits and vegetables, consumers need to fill half of their cart with these products. This strategy helped a leading retailer in the United States and saw their sales of these products raise by 18% by physically dividing their carts in half and accompanying them with a visual sign encouraging to fill half their cart with fruit and vegetables, either fresh, canned or frozen (Wansink, 2017). This method proved to be effective and could be adopted by other retailers in order to promote the consumption of healthier products.

Another interesting finding was that younger people who identified themselves as students were the ones that showed to purchase more ready meals due to lack of time to cook during intense scholar periods, despite being the age group more aware of food sustainability. As stated by M “*I try to avoid them, but sometimes it is impossible... I am*

a student and sometimes it is difficult to find time to cook.” (Interview, M) and P “I buy them when it is exam season because I do not have time to cook, so there it goes a lasagna or a pizza...” (Interview, P). This may suggest that healthier and more affordable solutions for healthy foods are needed.

Regarding the ingredients and the nutritional value of products, the answers were more disperse. Whilst some participants admitted that they did not bother to look to the information on the package, some revealed to be concerned with them. These last ones checked the nutritional information especially due to health-related problems, like food intolerances. As stated by Q “Because I suffer from food intolerances, I always read the ingredient list on the package” (Interview, Q) and C “Yes, I tend to look at the ingredients because of my health. When there are those horrible “E’s”, I will not buy it” (Interview, C). Others reported to be concerned with the levels of macro nutrients such as sugars and fats, as mentioned by H “I tend to look at the ingredients, specially the calories, fats and sugars. I do not check it all the time, but when I can I always try to compare, like the light yogurt with the regular one.” (Interview, H). A solution that can be adopted by retailers in order to foster more informed choices on food ingredients is to use a traffic light system, which proved to be successful (Osman & Thornton, 2019) and is actually adopted by one of the retailers of this study.

4.1.3 Less food waste

The answers regarding this topic were quite curious, since every single one of the participants have demonstrated significantly strong negative feelings towards this behavior, as stated by B “I try not to waste any food, I really don’t like it” (Interview, B) and H “It really bothers me to feel that I’m throwing food away.” (Interview, H). F also added:

“That is one of the things that I feel aversion the most... I think it has to do with the way I was raised. Throwing away food is one of the worst things we can do. I have a little kid and sometimes he does not want to eat... But I always try to reinvent the food to the maximum.” (Interview, F)

There was even a participant that stated that food waste did not even existed in their home: E “It does not exist in my home” (Interview, E). All participants answered that food waste happen rarely in their households and only when it was stated to them that it is

impossible to not throw food away ever and that at some point of our lives, everyone throws away food, they reluctantly admitted throwing food scraps to the trash bin. The most common stated reasons for that to happen was the lack of planning of the meals of the week as mentioned by L *“Sometimes is because I didn’t do the math right for the planning of the week”* (Interview, L), unforeseen events, as stated by K *“When it happens is because we end up not eating at home due to professional reasons”* (Interview K), cooking more than what was needed, as stated by Q *“Sometimes I overcook.”* (Interview, Q) and fresh fruit and vegetables that have rotted, as added by O *“It’s not common, normally is fruit and vegetables that have gone bad. It happened the other day, actually, I bought vegetables that I end up not using.”* (Interview, O). The testimonies of the participants of this study go against current data about food waste which, as stated previously, it is estimated that 42% of food waste in Portugal come from households (Baptista et al., 2012).

Although leftovers were one of the arguments for the occurrence of food waste in their households, most of them revealed to be a common practice to reinvent food from them or bring them to work the next day. As stated by D *“We don’t throw out food scraps at home. The leftovers are kept in the fridge and I reinvent them. I shred the meat and transform it into meat rice...”* (Interview, D) and added by I *“If there are leftovers, I bring them to work the next day. If there are a lot of leftovers, I transform them into a new meal.”* (Interview, I).

Regarding avoiding food waste, N appointed a personal behavior that helps him avoid this at home and that could be used as a communication strategy by retailers which is buying products for the week instead of the month, as stated *“I prefer to shop for the week to be more aware of what I will consume.”* (Interview, N). Retailers are crucial to change the behavior of consumers and as a way to prevent food waste, they can step in by providing consumers with some knowledge about suitable storing techniques to prevent food from getting rotted and disseminate information regarding the economics, social and environmental consequences that come from food waste (Schmidt & Matthies, 2018). Retailers can also “design packages with instructions about how to store food when it is close to the expiration date” (Barone et al., 2019), such as suggesting to freeze fruit to turn it into smoothies, or to create recipes with items that usually go to waste, such as broccoli stalks, the end slices of a loaf of bread or outer cabbage leaves (Nicholes, Queded, Reynolds, Gillick, & Parry, 2019).

4.1.4 *Less animal-based & more plant-based*

As expected, this was a sensitive topic. Participants have demonstrated to be reluctant when it comes to adopting a less animal-based diet, which is explained by the “perceived nutritional superiority of animal-based proteins” (Gravely & Fraser, 2018:147) and the idea that plant-based diets are nutrient deficient (Wirnitzer, 2018). As D pointed “*Sometimes people criticize me because I eat too much meat and fish, but at every meal it is a must to have some kind of animal protein. To change into a vegetarian diet? Not a chance.*” (Interview D) or K “*We try to include vegetables and pulses as much as possible but reducing animal-based products was never questioned.*” (Interview, K). Although it has been scientifically proved that is possible not only to fulfill all of our nutritional needs if adopting a proper plant-based diet, but even prevent and treat some diseases (Farm Animal Investment Risk & Return, 2018; Melina, Craig, & Levin, 2016; Wirnitzer, 2018), the majority of the participants of this study were highly skeptical about that and were reluctant to consume a more plant-based diet.

Some participants revealed to be open to plant-based diets, as N stated “*I think vegan products should highlight the amount of protein they have, so that people can understand that they can get it from plant-based foods too.*” (Interview, N). P also added “*I want to reduce my meat consumption, it’s one of my goals for this year. I just don’t have enough knowledge about plant-based foods to change my eating habits definitely.*” (Interview, P). In order to help fight the stigma of plant-based diets and help awared consumers like participant P, retailers can take some measures regarding the shopping floorplan, such as increasing the designated shelf space of these foods, putting them in the high traffic areas of the store close to meat and dairy, develop marketing initiatives to show how plant-based proteins can be a part of a healthy meal, creating special labels that praise their benefits and work closely with manufacturers to develop more convenient plant-based foods (Graça, Godinho, & Truninger, 2019; Gravely & Fraser, 2018).

An additional barrier to plant-based diets is that people do not know how to prepare or serve these kinds of foods. In-store campaigns that illustrate how it can be prepared have shown to improve sales and shopper confidence, as it happen with the largest tofu manufacturer in the United States when explaining consumers that tofu went from the fridge to the pan in just 10 minutes (Wansink, 2017). As a matter of fact, consumer’s motivation to follow a more plant-based diet is not so much enabled by arguing that is

better for their health and the environment, but rather by their perceived convenience and positive experiences with plant-based meals (Graça, Godinho, et al., 2019).

Another interesting finding of this study was that most participants admitted consuming animal-based products on a daily basis, despite being fully aware that these have a significantly higher impact on the planet than plant-based foods. When answering the question *“Do you privilege more animal-based or plant-based products in your diet?”*, K answered *“Animal products, for sure”* (Interview, K) and C *“I think is balanced, I like vegetables, but I also buy a lot of animal products”* (Interview, C). To the question *“How do you perceive de impact of animal-based and plant-based foods?”*, K answered *“Obviously that it is not the same, animal production has a much greater impact.”* (Interview K) and C *“Animal products have more impact, for sure.”* (Interview C). To shape these kinds of opinions, key market actors such as retailers can develop strategies like the ones mentioned above, since actions that promote a transition to more plant-based diets focusing on giving food orientation have shown to be promising on altering highly animal-based purchasing behaviors (Graça, Truninger, Junqueira, & Schmidt, 2019).

Finally, the younger generation has demonstrated to be more open to change into a more plant-based diet and revealed to be more educated about plant-based nutrition. As stated by N *“My diet is about 50/50, but with a tendency to go with plant-based. I use a website that shows all the nutrients of foods and it helped me realize that it is not by leaving meat that we cannot obtain enough protein.”* (Interview, N), pointed out by O *“I am a vegetarian, so obviously I eat more plant-base. I do it for the environment and health reasons.”* (Interview, O) and added by M *“My diet is more plant-based because of the environmental sustainability, meat production consumes a lot of water and other resources. My girlfriend is vegetarian so I will definitely turn vegetarian once we start living together.”* (Interview, M).

Since eating meat regularly is embedded in the cultural tradition of most societies (Macdiarmid et al., 2016), literature suggests that it is of the highest importance that retailers educate consumers on the impacts animal-based foods have on the planet. As it was mentioned in the literature review, it is utopic to think that everyone will turn vegetarian overnight or even that everyone will eventually turn vegetarian. By taking small steps and adopt some of the measures described above, like releasing campaigns

that debunk the myth of the inferiority of plant-based protein, retailers can slowly educate consumers to adopt a more plant-based diet and, with it, become closer to reach SD.

4.1.5 Less global & more local

This topic led to quite interesting results. As stated previously, choosing locally produced food is the most sustainable option for the planet. During the interviews, participants revealed to be very concerned about the origin of the food they ate, with a special focus on fresh produce, meat, fish, dairy and eggs. However, it became clear that the reason why they preferred local food had nothing to do with sustainability, but rather with the pride participants had in consuming products from Portugal. As stated by C *“I buy Portuguese products almost every time, especially fresh produce. Our fruit is so good! Ours is much better than the foreign ones...”* (Interview, C), F *“There are products that I consume, like fruit, meat and fish that I prefer it to be from my country.”* (Interview, F) and H *“I prefer Portuguese products, especially dairy and eggs.”* (Interview, H). These statements are confirmed by a study conducted in the country, where it was found that almost 90% of the people polled said that they were proud to be Portuguese and that its gastronomy was the third best element to define the country’s image (Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 2014).

Despite these promising results, this behavior is atypical and does not reflect the reality of other countries, especially countries with harsher climate fluctuations. As for an example, according to Eurostat⁵, in 2018 the Netherlands occupies one of the top spots in imports of fresh fruits and vegetables, having spent 14,917,492,267€ worth of this food. Germany is also one of the main importers of dairy, having spent 7,691,040,647€ worth on these products.

One of the measures that can be adopted by retailers to increase local production and consumption is to sell food that is as geographically close to the store as possible as a way of not only reducing CO₂ emissions, but also contribute for local economies to boost (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019b). Co-creation is also a key element to make this happen, since involving pertinent actors enables knowledge sharing and helps to

⁵ <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>; 02-09-2019

guarantee that it comes up to those with the power to change the food system (European Environmental Agency, 2017), namely retailers. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2019), co-creation can create synergies that help to raise both efficiency and resilience of crops, which can help local farmers to be more productive and consequently more valuable to retailers.

4.1.6 Co-creation: client view

The results on this topic were also curious by a number of reasons. First and foremost, only one participant declared not to be amused with the idea of engaging in co-creation activities. All of the other 16 participants of the study showed a keen interest in cooperating with retailers with the objective of reaching SD. As stated by O *“Oh, I would go! I would be more than willing.”* (Interview, O), referred by F *“I would willfully do it, hoping that it had an impact on the price of products.”* (Interview, F). L also added:

“If we are on this planet, we have to use the abilities we acquire throughout our lives to make the life of others better, society’s life better and be an example for the ones that are around us. If I learnt useful things that can help other with the experiences that I got, why shouldn’t I do it?” (Interview, L)

This may suggest that a better direct communication strategy might be needed to capture consumer’s attention, so that these encounters promoting co-creation get broadly acknowledged (Payne et al., 2008).

In addition to revealing the interest in joining efforts with retailers through co-creation, almost all of participants declared to be willing to do so free from any rewards. Besides two participants that required a reward if the co-creation process took them a lot of time or commitment, as stated by D *“I would do it freely, as long as I didn’t have to sign a contract obliging me to go there or to be there for long periods of time. In that case, I would want a reward.”* (Interview, D), most participants proclaimed not expecting personal rewards. As stated by C *“The reward is to see things getting better.”* (Interview, C), declared by G *“Without a doubt that I would be willing to go. The reward is to change things a bit, willing fully”* (Interview, G) and added by H *“Just by knowing that it could be better for me, my family and other families, I would do it freely.”* (Interview, H).

Although these results might appear positive for retailers it is expected that by rewarding consumers, they become more likely to engage in co-creation activities (Merz

et al., 2017), since they are helping to enhance brand's value. According to a study performed by Filieri (2013) in which a co-creation online platform of a food brand was analyzed, it was assessed that the consumers register a mean of five new ideas every day over a three year period, which is a record almost impossible to attain solely by the company's marketing team. In that case study, nine submitted ideas were implemented by that company and one of them even led to an innovation in the production system with the creation of a steamed-oven cooking process. The transparency and fairness of the co-creation process should therefore be a priority, since consumer's ideas can bring profits to the retailer and, most of the times, they do not get to reap the fruits of their work (Arnold, 2017).

Another finding was that participants showed to be curious about how food processing is made and have demonstrated to be interested in visiting factories. As stated by N:

"I would like to go to the factories because I want to know more about it and I think everyone should know more about it. A lot of people are consuming products thinking that they fell out of the fridge and don't know what processes are behind them." (Interview, N)

During the interview, R1 declared that they have regular visits of consumers to the factories and that there is a department designated to organize those trips. However, the participants of the study did not have a clue that this was possible. As stated above, a better communication strategy might be a solution.

4.1.7 Other findings

An additional question that was not in the original script of the interviews was made to the elderly participants as to access their views on returning to the consumption habits they grew up in. Since, until a few decades ago, they were a generation with no supermarkets or plastic and where everything was sold in bulk, it was interesting to find their opinion on the subject. As A stated:

"I think there are good things about returning to what was before. Since there are these packages with right amounts it's worse, I often throw products away because they've gone bad. In the past, we only bought what we needed, by the weight." (Interview, A)

B also brought an interesting perspective, stating *“I think there’s much more population now, it’s difficult to go back to what it was. It would be better to buy in bulk, but with all these people is difficult.”* (Interview, B).

4.2 Retailers

4.2.1 Resource factors

The goal of this topic was to access how the retailer’s resources played a role on their pursuit for sustainability, namely the impact on their reputation. R1 stated *“It is clearly positive, we’re in an era where people value sustainability more than ever.”* (Interview, R1), which is has been confirmed in the literature to be positive for all of stakeholders (Salvioni & Gennari, 2017). Regarding the attitudes of shareholders in particular, R1 declared:

“It’s more and more a source of attractiveness. Right now, as a matter of fact, a lot of investors start the evaluation process of companies by looking at their sustainability policies. But there’s another reason which is very important: the ones who think about sustainability think about the future and that is something that brings comfort to investors because they realize that we have a long-term vision” (Interview, R1).

This statement confirms that sustainability is no longer a potential barrier to investment since in the past, CSR initiatives were not perceived as attractive to investment (Carroll, 2009).

Since investors are appealed by sustainability, it is expected that the allocation of financial resources follows their likings. This is the case of R1, which commented on the distribution of financial resources as stated, *“It’s becoming more and more relevant.”* (Interview, R1). This strategy works positively when attracting investment, since engaging in sustainability actions raises the economic value of a business (Price & Sun, 2017; Salvioni & Gennari, 2017; Scherer et al., 2013). As a matter of fact, there are even specific bonds designed to fund businesses’ environmental friendly projects called green bonds, which issuance was proved to retrieve net benefits for shareholders (Tang & Zhang, 2018), proving that sustainability will keep being a decisive factor when it comes to investment. R2 also brought an interesting perspective to the discussion, since they declared that sustainability goes across all departments *“We have a specific department*

for sustainability, but all areas end up working on it. Sustainability is not the job of only one department, all areas must work on it.” (Interview, R2).

4.2.2 Market factors

Businesses must be specially attentive to their competitors commitments with CSR, since if they are successful, it can weakens one’s position on the market (Falck & Heblich, 2007). R1 has demonstrated to be confident about their company’s sustainability strategy and not too worried about competitors, although he admitted observing what they do, as stated:

“I have to be honest, even if it’s not the politically right thing to say... We do not worry much for two reasons. First, we have a well-defined sustainability strategy and that is our main guide. We look at what’s around us and may even make some adjustments, but what’s important is part of what we believe in. On the other hand, and without wanting to seem presumptuous, we’re always ahead. Of course that sometimes, someone launches a very interesting initiative and we think about why we didn’t think about it as well. But our strategy is very well-defined by what we define according to what we study.” (Interview, R1)

Leading businesses in sustainability initiatives have a higher probability to be in the front line when it comes to market share, which is true for R1, since they improve their reputation (Falck & Heblich, 2007). More importantly, not only they can gain market share, but also change the industry as it happened with the leading retail chain in Switzerland, Migros, according to Falck & Heblich (2007). In 2002, Migros signed a commitment where it pledged to a standard regarding responsible sourcing of palm oil, which is an ingredient present in almost all product ranges in supermarkets, including food, and whose irresponsible exploitation causes major damages to the environment. This move shook the industry, since they would not buy products with palm oil that was not sustainably sourced. The standard introduced by Migros got them a UN award, which granted them influence, and opened the way for the development of an international standard on sustainable palm oil production.

R2, however, answered differently and showed to feel quite pressured by other retailers, stating:

“Of course we feel pressured by other retailers, we try to follow what they do. When we agree with their measures, we try to copy them or make something identical according to our strategy, other times we don't agree and we won't make them... We're not always following them, but we're aware.” (Interview, R2).

Retailers must have their own sustainability strategy well defined, as stated by R1, but must also not forget to pay close attention to their competitors, as referred by R2. Not only should they look at others to see what they are doing, retailers should also join efforts with their competitors when it comes to sustainability. R2 actually mentioned that there is an association that promotes knowledge sharing between retailers, all in the name of reaching SD. As mentioned, *“We don't reveal all secrets, but there's a macro strategy aligned between us. We work quite well together and sometimes we even put aside the fact that we're competitors. We have everything to gain with sharing experiences and solutions.”* (Interview, R2). This can bring several advantages such as gaining power over bigger players in the industry as to influence them to be more sustainable by unifying their requirements and igniting debates about implementation challenges.

4.2.3 Regulatory factors

If shareholders could constitute a barrier for retailers to become more sustainable as for resource factors, the same happens with government policies regarding regulatory factors. Regarding this subject, R1 stated *“Government policies usually act as a catalyzer for sustainability initiatives. If there weren't any laws about single use plastics, a lot of retailers would do their path slowly than what they are doing, so it accelerates the process.”* (Interview, R1).

R2 has a more pessimistic view on the subject, affirming that government policies can constitute both a driver and a barrier. As stated:

“It's extremely hard to donate food on a legal level, as incredible as it might seem. It's easier to throw food away than donating it, which should be forbidden due to food waste. We have legal limitations on doing it so, but we're working on it.” (Interview, R2).

Nevertheless, retailers also admitted that some policies are beneficial, like the one that taxed plastic bags at the cashier which meant that they were no longer given for free to

customers. According to R2 *“When the law came, we reduced our plastic bag production by 80%. It was for everyone and the customer didn’t have a chance. It was a cost for us and had a significant environmental impact, so it helped.”* (Interview, R2).

According to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015), in order to accomplish the SDG’s, governments should set their individual national targets and work closely with the private sector and communities to move all the necessary resources to change current production patterns. As for governments, it is their responsibility to follow-up the progress of businesses, as to make sure the SDG’s are attained by the expected time.

However, the government’s role cannot be performed by simply demanding businesses to act and penalize those who do not oblige. Rather, they must focus on voluntary agreements, dissemination of information and joint development efforts (Marcus & Fremeth, 2009). Nevertheless, and in similarity with the example given by R2, there are still some exceptions, as mentioned by R1 *“There are some government policies that don’t make sense and in this urge of looking for answers to fight plastic, we have to access if the solution isn’t worse than what already exists.”* (Interview, R1). R1 gave the example of a government measure that ended up being implemented after the interview that proves this point:

“It is on the verge the approval of a law that would force retailers to use bioplastic bags on the grocery aisle, which is a terrible environmental choice. Consumers would not know that it wasn’t plastic and would certainly throw them in the yellow bin. Not only we were not going to solve the problem, but actually to aggravate it since it was going to difficult the recycling process of plastic.” (Interview, R1).

The interview carried on with R2 was conducted after the approval of this law and they ended up also mentioning this example. They showed to be concerned since by 2023, all ultralight plastic bags will be forbidden. As stated:

“The solution that I see is using reusables, but the law has a paragraph where it’s allowed to use compostable bags. We have a lot of technical doubts, they aren’t a reality yet... We don’t know if they decompose on natural environments and in theory it won’t resolve anything. Besides, it’s more expensive. Let’s see what’s the outcome, but we’re worried.”

Until then, we hope consumers get used to use reusable bags.”

(Interview, R2).

R2 also mentioned that there are cases in which fruits cannot be transported in reusable mesh bags like strawberries, as explained *“There are products that are more sensitive than others and we must have other solutions. We can’t make changes without thinking everything through.”* (Interview R2).

Although it was demonstrated that the majority of times, regulatory factors do not constitute a barrier to retailer’s sustainability initiatives, it is also important to state that there are still some policies implemented that might be worse for the environment despite their good intentions, as it was the case of the law that approved that bans ultralight plastic bags for produce items. As so, a more collaborative relationship between the government and retailers where knowledge is shared might be beneficial to prevent the approval of laws that will make it harder to achieve SD.

4.2.4 Social factors

Concerning the pressure from consumers, R1 declared *“To be honest, we don’t feel a lot of pressure from consumers. They are more sensitive now than before but are rarely proactive. Sometimes we even feel the opposite, that we are the ones who influence them.”* (Interview, R1). R1 also added:

“There’s a lot of misinformation... On the other day, a client complaint because we change the paper label from water bottles to a plastic one. We explained him that we were working on the recyclability of our packages and in this case, the package is even more recyclable than the previous one. The water bottle was recycled but the paper ended up going to waste. People don’t need to be experts in plastic recyclability, but our big challenge is to access how we can pass this technical information. It isn’t easy, it’s a permanent challenge.” (Interview, R1)

R2 has a different experience than R1 when it comes to consumer pressure, stating *“It’s much easier when there’s consumer pressure, there’s a greater motivation to change.”* (Interview, R2). Despite having divergent opinions on consumer pressure, R2 agreed that there is a lot of misinformation out there. As explained *“Because of misinformation, plastic became diabolic. We can’t change every package form plastic to*

paper because it has a greater impact on the environment.” (Interview, R2). One of the barriers to sustainability initiatives carried on by retailers appointed by Chkanikova & Mont (2012) was that not all consumers are informed or interested in the social and environmental impacts food has.

This reinforces the need for retailers to educate consumers on sustainable consumption practices. Abrahamse (2019) gives four strategies of interventions that encourage sustainable food choices that can be applied by retailers, being them information and education, food labelling, nudging and pricing. Regarding the first topic, it is suggested the Meatless Mondays initiative, a strategy that stimulates people not to consume meat on this day, since by being the first day of the weekly routine it increases the chances of keeping through this behavior. As for food labelling, it was suggested the adoption of carbon labels with a traffic light system, which is an easy and visual way to teach consumers about the environmental impacts of their food choices. R1 is actually on planning to develop a food labelling system that helps consumers not about the impact of their purchase, but what they should do with the packaging at the end of their usage, declaring:

“A lot of times, people don’t know that some packages have two materials in their composition and that the only way to recycle it is by separating them, which sometimes is easy and other times is impossible. One of the initiatives that is taking place is to develop iconography on our packages to teach consumers how to recycle that package.”
(Interview, R1).

When it comes to nudging, a choice of architecture that modifies the design of the ambience to influence people’s decisions, simple actions like placing healthy foods instead of candy next to the checkout counters or displaying fruit at eye level helps to increase the sale of these products and to encourage sustainable food choices. Finally, pricing incentives and disincentives can influence consumers to make better options by simultaneously reducing the price of sustainable options such as fruit and raising the cost of unsustainable foods such as sugary drinks. As for an example, on the website³ of one of the country’s retailers, the retailer’s own brand 100% fruit juice costs 1,59€ for a 250ml bottle whilst a can of the world’s leading brand of soda costs 0,72€ per 330ml, making the healthier option more than double the price and with 25% less quantity of product.

Once again, it was demonstrated the need of educating consumers on sustainable options, especially by the retailers. It is also important not to forget that when it comes to pricing, the strategy must be reverted if we want to encourage more sustainable food consumption behaviors and, consequently, achieve SD.

4.2.5 Co-creation: retailer view

As for co-creation, R1 seemed to practice it only in the final phases of the product. As stated:

“We are completely customer centric. All of our own brand products are made in co-creation. We have a countless number of mechanisms... We have surveys, focus groups, shop-alongs... For example, in shop-alongs, we’re with the client during the purchasing process until they’re in their home, to fully understand what they want or not want. A lot of the times, surveys aren’t enough because they do not verbalize what the client really wants.” (Interview, R1).

R2 case is even more peculiar, since they only do co-creation with their staff, stating:

“We do blind tests with our workers, which at the end of the day are clients. We always do internal experimentation, we don’t do it outside. It’s a path, it’s easier to do internally, but I believe that in the future we will do it with consumers.” (Interview, R2).

As mentioned in the literature review, co-creation should be a process where the customer is involved at the heart of the process and participating in all phases of the creation of a product (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014, 2018).

According to Biggemann et al., (2014) and Lacoste (2016), this kind of practices are not enough. In order for co-creation to truly happen, consumers should be involved with product creation and not only when the product is already finished. This means that they should be involved as early as in the conception of a new product, so they can give their inputs right in the initial phase.

Despite not engaging fully in co-creation with their customers, R1 does do it with their suppliers, which are also an important stakeholder in the co-creation process (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). As stated by R1:

“We have a large team of brands that challenges suppliers and develops products jointly. Someone does de design, the communication, the technical development of the product... Teams are always blended and a lot of the times we have suppliers in our offices for weeks or even months to work side by side with our technicians. Sometimes is otherwise.” (Interview, R1).

R1 also declared to have their doors open to their customers and allowing them to navigate up and down the supply chain with no objections, as stated *“We have a lot of customers visiting our factories and the back office of our stores. It’s a common practice, our stores are spaces that we open with all pleasure and transparency towards society.”* (Interview, R1). On the other hand, R2 showed to be more conservative, revealing that mostly schools are the ones who visit the factories and consumers engage in discussions with the store manager. As declared:

“We have been encouraging visits, especially schools. We do a day at the bakery, so they understand how bread is made or a day at the warehouse to see how things are organized. They love it and transmit that passion to their parents. With consumers, we have round-table discussions with the store manager where they can give suggestions and ask questions.” (Interview, R2).

Regarding co-creation, it is clear that retailers still have room to improve and that a closer approach with its customers is needed in order for co-creation to happen in its most correct form. However, it is important not to forget that co-creation designed with the goal of reaching SD will work best if the engaged consumers are sustainability-oriented (Arnold, 2017). As observed during the interviews with the consumers, it was clear that they were interested in engaging in co-creation activities with retailers, but their contributions will only likely to be relevant for SD if they apply CnSR measures on their daily basis.

5. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

5.1 Conclusion

Driven by the awareness of the current climate crisis which was ignited by society's inordinate patterns of consumption and has been causing all sorts of environmental and social catastrophes, it became clear that accomplishing all 17 SDG's proposed by the United Nations requires the effort of every stakeholder involved in a business. More specifically, since studying every industry would be complex and too scattered to draw any explicit conclusions, the food retailing business was chosen as an object of study particularly because it involves the basic human need of food consumption. Additionally, in all the food industry supply chain, retail was selected as it is the one who's in the middle point and makes the necessary connection between food production by the industry and food consumption by the consumers, therefore having the power to exercise influence both up and down the supply chain. Bearing in mind the fact that businesses only exist because customers exist, this study aimed to put specifically these two stakeholders in the spotlight of this investigation. As so, the main objective of this thesis was to access the current relationship between consumers and retailers as to understand the potential power they can have together to achieve SD.

This study brings its insight about the concepts of SD, CSR, CnSR and Co-creation on existing literature and draws a research study on these matters, with a special focus on co-creation between consumers and retailers. The literature revealed some alarming data regarding the status of the planet and what scenario we are walking towards to if we do not change our behavior. It also gave an introductory framework on the above-mentioned topics, from which it was found that all the interdependent agents involved in SD are tangled in a complex relationship, so if we damage one, we damage all others too. It was also deduced that CSR is already part of the DNA of multiple businesses, although some issues regarding their authenticity may arise at a given point. It was further explained the not so much researched and highly convoluted topic of CnSR. An identification of the different characteristics of consumers ethicality regarding their food consumption habits was made and it was discovered that consumers are usually not willing to pay more for sustainable options and are also not informed well enough about the impacts of their choices when it comes to food. Finally, Co-creation between retailers and consumers was

introduced as a possible solution to fight the current environmental crisis we live in, which was partially created by food production and consumption.

By interviewing both consumers and retailers, this study tries to answer some questions related to the awareness on food sustainability by the consumers, their current behaviors towards food consumption and their willingness to change those habits, the drivers and barriers for sustainability initiatives to be put into practice by retailers and their views and practices on co-creation. Grounded on the literature review and supported by a lineup of open questions, both consumers and retailers had the freedom to express their opinions and describe their current behaviors and attitudes endured towards sustainability of food. This allowed to better understand the present panorama of perceptions and actions about food sustainability by both agents, to access in what way co-creation can connect the two and how this relationship can be built to achieve SD.

Results have confirmed what the literature states about SD, CSR, CnSR and Co-creation and brought some more insights on these topics. On the contrary of what was expected, it was confirmed that retailers are committed on actively working towards accomplishing the SDG's and that they are not unscrupulous businesses who worry only about numbers. Despite still being far from perfect, retailers have demonstrated to be working on making their business more sustainable and to educate consumers to follow along. They have shown to be increasingly worried about sustainability, confirming that their initiatives on this matter have been steadily rising and on top of their minds. Retailers also made clear that CSR is well embed into their working methods and that it is extremely relevant on the delineation of their corporate strategy. The one topic that must definitely be improved is co-creation, since it was observed in the interviews that it is not being done properly. Although retailers have a plurality of mechanisms to understand consumer's needs and engage in co-creation as a part of it, the truth is that they should be bringing sustainability-oriented consumers earlier in the production process as to create better products from the start instead of having to make multiple alterations until they are right.

On the other side of the spectrum, consumers unfortunately have confirmed what is said about them in literature, namely being resistance to change their consumption habits and not being informed well enough about food sustainability. What was startling about the majority of the interviews was that consumers do realize that changes must be made in order to SD to happen but are incapable to alter even small aspects of their habits. Except for a few participants which have declared to have altered their habits regarding

more sustainable packaging, the fact is that most consumers revealed to be reluctant to change, especially when it comes to reducing their meat consumption. Participants have shown to be somehow aware of the importance of sustainability, but still lack profoundly on knowledge about this topic. This gave even more strength to the importance on having retailers educating consumers on sustainability, since they alone do not have enough will and information to change their consumption patterns. As it takes two to tango, it takes both retailers and consumers to achieve SD.

It is important to keep in mind that food production is responsible for more than a quarter of the environmental damages caused to the planet (Notarnicola et al., 2017), but is also necessary to understand that the world will not change overnight. As the proverb states, “Rome wasn’t built in a day” and although it is urgent to create measures to stop climate change, we must find an equilibrium between demanding businesses to be more sustainable, understanding that changing consumption habits is a complex process that cannot be abrupt and that we as consumers also must change the way we purchase food. Rather than pointing fingers at retailers for being irresponsible, society should thrive to have better consumption habits and not blaming it all on retailers. Climate change happens because of all of us and there are no stakeholders more culpable than others. Therefore, rather than wasting time criticizing the society and accusing businesses of having all the fault, we should not forget that we are the society and that we must make an effort to start the change within ourselves as well as to start looking at retailers as allies instead of enemies in the fight for achieving SD that is a responsibility of all of us.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

As in all studies, this one also suffered from some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First and as expected, asking for professionals to take time to be interviewed for an academic study represented a substantial problem as most do not showed interest or availability in participating, therefore reducing the sample. Even though is believed that the answers would be similar across the retailer sample, it would be interesting to bring more opinions to the discussion since they could shine a light on more drivers and barriers to sustainability that affect themselves.

Methodological limitations impelled the making of a cross-country study, since the subject of the interviews was preferable to be done face-to-face and that interviewing consumers from different countries would require substantial external financing and

partnerships with local entities. This would allow to access different cultural points of view on the subject, since not all countries have the same views on sustainability or climate conditions to grow food, which makes them have to rely heavily on importing products from far away. As for an example, Scandinavian countries are known to have strong sustainability principles despite having a harsh climate, which could bring valuable insights for this study.

Despite the qualitative approach used, it was noticed during the interviews that participants tried to enhance sustainable consumption habits and there was no way of accessing the veracity of their statements, as it happened with the consumption habits of highly processed foods, as for an example. In future research, a more scrutinized approach should be considered and shop alongs with participants to the supermarkets they usually visit are advised as a way to evaluate their real food consumption habits.

Finally, it would also be important to attend one co-creation dynamic endured by retailers as to check how they conduct, what are the positive and negative aspects of it and how it translates to the final product.

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide for Consumers

1. CSR

- 1.1 Can you recall any purchased you have made based solely on a socially responsible advert?
- 1.2 How important special logos and certifications are important to you when purchasing a product?
- 1.3 How important is to you that the product you buy is from a socially responsible retailer? Have you ever stopped buying products in a certain retailer because they were not ethical?

2. *Less overconsumption & packaging*

- 2.1 In what ways does the type of packaging influence your purchase?
- 2.2 How would you define your purchasing habits regarding to pre-packaged food?
Is cooking from scratch a habit in your household?

3. *Less animal based & more plant based*

- 3.1 Do you privilege more animal-based products in your diet or plant-based ones?
Have you ever considered to change?
- 3.2 How do you perceive de impact of animal-based foods and plant-based foods?

4. *Less food waste*

- 4.1 How often is food wasted in your household?
- 4.2 If you happen to throw away some food, what is the reason?
- 4.3 How serious do you believe food waste is problematic for the planet?

5. *Less highly processed & more natural*

- 5.1 How does the ingredient list and nutritional values of a product influence your purchases?

6. *Less global & more local*

- 6.1 How important is the origin of products for you? Do you usually check it if its local or not?

8. Co-creation

- 7.1 In what ways do you think customers can help retailers to be more sustainable?
- 7.2 How willing would you be to participate if a retailer asked you to help them to be more sustainable? In what ways would you be willing to give your opinion?

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide for Retailers

1. Resource factors

- 1.1 What impact do you believe sustainability has on your reputation?
- 1.2 How does your involvement in sustainability impact the relationship you have with shareholders? Do sustainability initiatives constitute an interest to investors or do they push them away?
- 1.3 How relevant is sustainability on the allocation of financial resources of your company?

2. Market factors

- 2.1 How pressured do you feel to engage in sustainability initiatives by other retailers?
- 2.2 Do you believe that the current sustainability actions performed by your company were influenced in any way by your customers?
- 2.3 How further up and down the stream of the supply chain do you think retailers can apply their influence regarding sustainability?

3. Regulatory factors

- 3.1 Do you believe that current government policies constitute more of a driver or a barrier for sustainability initiatives?

4. Social factors

- 4.1 How pressured do you feel to engage in sustainability initiatives by society and the media?

4.2 How informed do you think the average consumer is about the environmental and social impacts of the food industry?

5. *Co-creation*

5.1 How much access up and down the supply chain do you allow customers to participate?

5.2 How do you incorporate customers on sustainability initiatives?

Appendix 3 – Characteristics of participants and code

Subject	Gender	Age	Education	Code
1	Female	81	Secondary	A
2	Female	67	Secondary	B
3	Female	73	Bachelor	C
4	Male	51	Bachelor	D
5	Female	32	Master	E
6	Male	42	Doctorate	F
7	Female	35	Master	G
8	Female	40	Certificate	H
9	Female	48	Certificate	I
10	Female	53	Master	J
11	Female	45	Bachelor	K
12	Female	36	Bachelor	L

13	Male	24	Bachelor (student)	M
14	Male	19	Secondary (student)	N
15	Female	21	Bachelor (student)	O
16	Male	21	Bachelor (student)	P
17	Female	28	Bachelor	Q