Tiia-Lotta Pekkanen

WHAT CONSTRAINS THE SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR DAY-TO-DAY CONSUMPTION? A MULTI-EPISTEMOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO CULTURE AND INSTITUTIONS

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS LAPPEENRANTAENSIS 945

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Abstract

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What constrains the sustainability of our day-to-day consumption?
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Environmental crises unfold. The conditions for life are threatened. Unsustainable ways of living pervade; change is called for. As consumption is an intrinsic part of the system in crisis, it can provide a window of opportunity for change. This requires a thorough understanding of the structural conditions in relation to individual action. This dissertation focuses on the impact of culture and formal institutions, asking how they together come to constrain or enable the sustainability of everyday consumption. The dissertation, therefore, engages in the discussion on the limits of consumer agency.

The three articles comprising this dissertation reflect the literature on sustainable consumption and consumption ethics more broadly. They form an eclectic whole, conducted through different epistemological lenses. The first article builds on the logical positivist tradition in presenting a quantitative study on the characteristics of consumers whom the sustainability information in a grocery store is likely to reach. The second article is an institutional ethnographic study that eventually revisits the agency–structure debate in conceptualising it as a multi-layered cultural embeddedness of day-to-day consumption practices at home. The third article is a critical discourse analysis, drawing on the hermeneutic research tradition. The study illuminates how organisational discourses responsibilise consumers in the name of national and environmental welfare.

Together, the articles come to tell a story of cultural–institutional constraints on the sustainability of day-to-day consumption. Overarchingly, the three articles and their results are interpreted through a theoretical framework that builds on institutional economics and a philosophical commitment to critical realism. Institutional economics facilitates the conceptualisation of contextual constraints that are a result of cultural and institutional co-evolution over time. Critical realism, then, enhances the framework towards a more comprehensive understanding of how human beings, as carriers of practices and discourses, may connect with structural conditions in society.

Overarchingly, the study argues that culture, together with formal institutions, creates conditions of possibilities both for consumer sustainability agency and unintentional sustainability in everyday consumption. These conditions of possibilities may be purposefully designed and orchestrated, or they can be a non-agentic result of cultural-historical-institutional development over time. The study argues that a culturally shared understanding of the economy, sustainability, and society at large is likely to play a remarkable role in conditioning the creation of possibilities for institutional changes and their effects on sustainable consumption. From a policy perspective, effective sustainability interventions would need to appreciate the level of cultural embeddedness of action targeted for change. For institutional economics, the study contributes a more permeable understanding of culture, highlighting its relevance for present-day economic outcomes.

Keywords: sustainable consumption, culture, institutions, institutional economics, critical realism

Tiivistelmä

Tiia-Lotta Pekkanen
Mikä rajoittaa arjen kulutuksen kestävyyttä?
Moniepistemologinen tutkimus kulttuurin ja instituutioiden yhteisvaikutuksesta
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Elämme kestävyyskriisin aikaa. Yhteiskunnallinen muutos on välttämätön, jotta maapallomme pysyy elinkelpoisena. Kuluttaminen on osa ongelmaa, se voi olla osa ratkaisua. Väitöskirjassani lähestyn arjen materiaalisen kuluttamisen kestävyyttä rakenteiden ja yksilön toimijuuden rajapinnassa, hyväksyen ja hahmottaen että kulttuuri piirtyy molempiin. Erityisesti kysyn, kuinka kulttuurillinen ja institutionaalinen ympäristö yhdessä rajoittaa ja mahdollistaa arjen kulutuksen kestävyyttä.

Väitöskirjani koostu kolmesta artikkelista, joiden muodostama kokonaisuus heijastelee kulutuksen kestävyyden ja etiikan tutkimuksen eklektisyyttä. Kaikki artikkelini pohjautuvat erilaisiin ontologisiin oletuksiin ja ovat näin epistemologisesti myös omanlaisiaan. Ensimmäinen artikkeleista seuraa loogisen positivismin paradigmaa tarjoilemalla kvantitatiivisen analyysin kuluttajista, jotka ovat taipuvaisia etsimään kestävyystietoa päivittäistavarakaupassa. Toinen artikkeleista rakentuu metodologisesti institutionaaliseen etnografiaan. Tutkimuksessani etsin vastausta kysymykseen, kuinka paljon arjen materiaalinen kuluttaminen on kiinni motivoituneista tietoisista valinnoista, kuinka paljon se kumpuaa institutionaalisesta ympäristöstä. Kolmas artikkeli ammentaa hermeneuttisesta tutkimusperinteestä esittäen kriittisen diskurssianalyysin kuluttajille kohdistetuista kampanjoista, joissa kuluttajaa vastuullistetaan interdiskursiivisesti ympäristön ja kansallisen hyvinvoinnin nimissä.

Väitöskirjan johdanto kuroo artikkelit tarinaksi kulttuuris-institutionaalisista rajoitteista arjen kulutuksen kestävyydelle. Tuon kolmeen eri tutkimusperinteeseen pohjautuvat tutkimukset ja niiden tulokset yhteen teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä, joka rakentuu kriittisen realismin stratifioidulle ontologialle. Teoreettinen viitekehys ankkuroituu tieteenalallisesti instituutiotaloustieteelliseen kirjallisuuteen kulttuurin ja instituutioiden yhteisvaikutuksesta taloudelliseen toimintaan.

Läpileikkaavasti väitän, että kulttuuri ja yhteiskunnan formaalit rakenteet yhdessä luovat mahdollisuuksia ja rajoitteita niin kuluttajien kestävyystoimijuudelle kuin tahattomalle kestävälle kuluttamiselle. Kulttuurillisesti jaetut ymmärrykset kestävyydestä ja talouden ja yhteiskunnan toiminnasta voivat raamittaa yksilön toimintaa suoraan tai välillisesti rakenteiden kautta. Tutkimuksessa käsitteellistän yhteiskunnallisten rakenteiden ja yksilön toimijuuden välisen dynamiikan monikerroksisen kulttuuris-institutionaalisen juurtumisen ja kuluttajan tietoisen valinnan väliseksi suhteeksi. Ulkopuolelta kohdistuva muutospaine, kuten politiikkainterventio, vie todennäköisemmin yksilön toimintaa kestävämpään suuntaan, kun muutospaine ei ole ristiriidassa syvemmälle kulttuurillis-institutionaaliseen ympäristöön juurtuneiden käytänteiden tai ymmärrysten kanssa. Jos epäkestävyys kuluttamisessa on juurtunut kulttuuris-institutionaalisesti muovaantuneisiin käytänteisiin, informaatiokampanjat kuluttajan preferenssien muuttamiseksi voivat vaikutuksiltaan jäädä marginaalisiksi, jollei näiden välittämät diskurssit kasva yhteiskunnassa laajasti jaetuiksi käsityksiksi.

Avainsanat: kestävä kuluttaminen, instituutiot, kulttuuri, instituutiotaloustiede, kriittinen realismi

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my thanks to everyone who has supported my journey to becoming a researcher. There are very many of you, but space is very limited. I remember you all.

My supervisors at LUT School of Business and Management, Satu Pätäri, Heli Arminen, and Ari Jantunen – it has been a pleasure working with you. Satu, you have been kind and sharp and considerate and amazingly available throughout the process. I would choose to do my dissertation under your supervision any time over again. Heli, I am very grateful for having had you as a mentor during my first years of teaching. I found my place in our small but brilliant economics group (thank you also Jorma Sappinen!). Ari, thank you for the opportunity to do my doctoral dissertation at LBM, and thank you for your encouragement during the years.

Thank you Satu, Ari, and Laura Albareda for co-authoring my first ever publication. That was a good experience to start with. Visa Penttilä, we came a long way with our paper, and I am glad that our work ended up in my dissertation. What I later write about co-authoring at its best, very much applies to you.

I wish to sincerely thank the Academy of Finland funded projects FORESCOF and ORBIT and their project teams, both at LUT and at the University of Helsinki. It has been my privilege to grow as a researcher in such knowledgeable (and fun) company.

I wish to express my gratitude to the pre-examiners of my dissertation, Örjan Sjöberg and Eva-Karin Heiskanen. Thank you very much for taking the time to read my work and comment on it very thoughtfully. At the time of writing this, the defence is yet to come, but I feel privileged and glad to have you as my opponents.

I wish to address all the people who have cared to share with me their thoughts about my research and research in general. Thank you for the talks at conferences, seminars, and doctoral courses, on buses and balconies, in pubs and parks. Thank you to the LBM community for sharing the everyday working life of a researcher, over some thousands of cups of coffee.

Today, I am also reminiscing about the years spent studying in London and Moscow. Warmest thanks to my peers. With all the talks and enthusiasm there, I grew confident that I wanted to be a researcher.

I will leave here my thanks to all who have helped me further and encouraged me to pursue my dreams. I am grateful to several anonymous reviewers; thank you for your efforts to help me write better publications. Thank you for each and every letter of recommendation.

I wish to thank the Foundation for Economic Education and the Research Foundation of Lappeenranta University of Technology for financially supporting my conference visits. The Emil Aaltonen Foundation – a warm thank you for the grant.

Now that I am already taking another page here
I wish to add that
I would not be the researcher I am without the life I’ve lived.
I hold close the memory of shared moments of companionship;
encounters of kindness and compassion.
Be they
a cup of coffee in a rainy park in London,
a place offered for rest on the outskirts of Moscow,
shared thoughts in corners of the world and somewhere north of Gothenburg,

kesän kisailut ja yhteinen joutilaisuus,
ensi-illan jälkeinen aamuhämärä,
vaihtuvan kaupungin valot
ja hiekkalaatikkopuhe ja rikkinäinen polkupyörä.

Kiitos.

Kiitos Tommi, elämänkumppanuudesta ja yhteisistä unelmista,
kiitos Untamo Ukko, olet meidän rakkain.

Tiia-Lotta Pekkanen
December 2020
Lappeenranta, Finland

“Virheetöntä kertomusta ei ole. Vain vanha puu on virheetön,
salaman lyömä, elävä.”

(teoksesta Haavikko-niminen mies, kirj. M. Saari)

Contents

List of publications

This dissertation is based on the following papers.
The publishers have granted the rights to include the papers in this dissertation.

I. Pekkanen T-L, Pätäri S, Albadera L, Jantunen A. (2018) Who Cares about Product Sustainability Information at the Moment of Purchase? — Consumer Evidence from Three Countries. *Sustainable Development*, 26: 229-242.

II. Pekkanen T-L. (2020) Institutions and agency in the sustainability of day-to-day consumption practices – an institutional ethnographic study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, in press.

III. Pekkanen T-L, Penttilä V. (2020) The responsibility of an ethnocentric consumer—nationalistic, patriotic or environmentally conscientious? A critical discourse analysis of 'buy domestic' campaigns. *International Marketing Review*, in press.

Author's contribution

I. I am the principal author of the paper. I was responsible for the analysis, and positioning of the study in extant literature. I participated in writing of the literature review. I analysed the results and wrote the discussion. I was mainly responsible for the revisions during the publication process.

II. I am the sole author of the paper.

III. The paper was an equal joint effort of the two authors. I was mainly responsible for the literature review and positioning of the study, whereas my co-author's main responsibility was in the method section. Both authors had a strong ownership in the analysis. The discussion and conclusions are mainly my writing, however done in close collaboration between the authors. I was mainly responsible for the revisions during the publication process.

1 Introduction

Our world is facing massive environmental crises. We, human beings, are putting such a stress on the global environmental system that its impact risks being irreversible, to the loss of future generations (Steffen *et al.* 2015; Rockström *et al.* 2009). The loss of biodiversity is real in vast places on earth (Mace *et al.* 2018), the climate is warming (Allen et al. 2018), and the nitrogen cycle of the earth has been disturbed (Gruber and Galloway 2008) – to name but a few anthropogenic interferences in the ecologies surrounding us. The earth is undergoing a human-induced change, the ramifications of which we can hardly anticipate (Steffen *et al.* 2015; Rockström *et al.* 2009; Crutzen 2002).

Action is required. Timely expressions of the proposed actions include the widely known United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2015) and the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (*e.g.* IPCC 2019). Societies will have to change in order to secure a more sustainable future – or a future at all (Hickel and Kallis 2020; Svenfelt *et al*. 2019). Structural changes in sectors such as water (Gleeson *et al*. 2020) and energy (Markard 2018), food (Kahiluoto *et al.* 2014), and transport (Geels *et al.* 2012) are called for. Health and education systems, and city planning are recognised as crucial in the pursuit of sustainable development (Wolff *et al.* 2020; Aalto *et al.* 2018; Liu 2020; UN 2015). As a counterpart to such socio-technological changes, there is a role to be played by individual agency, although its form and impact remains debated (Koistinen 2019).

The solution to the grand sustainability challenges requires multi-party action and co-operation (Reid *et al*. 2010). While the role of each party in the change remains an issue to be seen (and studied), there seems to be a consensual understanding that consumers do have role (Köhler *et al*. 2019; Yildirim 2020). For example, consumer action may have a political influence (Stolle and Michelitti 2013); pressures on the demand side may guide production towards sustainable product offerings (Staniškis 2012); anti-consumption lifestyles contribute towards a less resource-dependent society (Hüttel *et al.* 2020), and consumer practices may enable sustainable structural changes to take root in society (Juntunen 2014; Heiskanen *et al.* 2013). Moreover, there is ample evidence that consumers have remarkable concerns regarding the environmental and social impact of their actions (Harrison *et al*. 2005). However, unsustainable consumption patterns pervade (Bonnedahl and Caramujo 2018).

This is the picture of the world on which I will draft my thesis.

1.1 Background and research objectives

Considering the state of the world, a deceptively obvious question arises: what constrains us? Why are we not more sustainable consumers? What constrains the sustainability of our day-to-day consumption? In this dissertation, I present three articles that eventually tell three different stories about constraints on sustainability in everyday consumption. The focus is on the role played by formal institutions and culture in relation to individual effort and motivation. Moreover, the research problematics allow for building an understanding of who or what exercises agency in the formation of the sustainability of day-to-day consumption.

Before moving on to lay out the substantive and theoretical backgrounds of my research, a word on the storyline of my dissertation is due. The three articles are accompanied by this introductory section to my dissertation, which serves a few purposes. First, there is the positioning of my research in wider literature, which in my dissertation has a two-tailed nature. Substantively, my work is about sustainable consumption, and I begin by positioning my work therein. Moreover, as the focus of my research questions is on the institutional–cultural constraints on sustainability of consumption, I draw theoretically on institutional economics. I compose a theoretical framework that enables the overarching interpretation of the results of the three distinct articles, conducted through three different epistemological lenses. Building the theoretical framework forms the core of this introductory section. I embark from the literature on the interaction of culture and formal institutions in an economic context, complementing it with a critical realist understanding of how to derive knowledge of the institutional structure and the individual capability to act within it.

The methodological choices of the three articles are reflected upon in the theoretical framework. Thereafter, the article selection is introduced. The articles are published separately, each thus forming its own whole. The theoretical framework, then, guides the discussion of the results and the conclusions to be drawn on the institutional constraints on the sustainability of consumption.

To begin with, however, I present a glimpse into sustainable consumption and the three research articles approaching it from three different points of view.

1.1.1 Sustainable consumption at the crossroads of individual and structural paradigms

Sustainable consumption is one of the many terms denoting consumption that is in one way or another responsible or ethical. The term sustainable consumption has been incorporated under the broader scope of sustainable development by the United Nations, which in turn bears consequences for how the term is widely understood. *Sustainable development* is a concept established on the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental wellbeing, with the widely known constraint of meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”

(WCED 1987). Notably, the wording *sustainable consumption* was first launched at the Oslo Symposium 1994 with a definition emphasising the environmental impact of consumption, in technological terms: “the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations” (from Kovačič Lukman *et al*. 2016: 142, originally Oslo Symposium, 1994). The UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2015), however, emphasise the three-dimensionality of sustainability in the definition: “Sustainable consumption and production is about promoting resource and energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, and providing access to basic services, green and decent jobs and a better quality of life for all. Its implementation helps to achieve overall development plans, reduce future economic, environmental and social costs, strengthen economic competitiveness and reduce poverty.”

The term *sustainable consumption* is in use across disciplinary borders, but it seems particularly popular in technologically oriented literature in environmental sciences. Industrial ecology (Tucker et al. 2010) and the systems perspective literature on the circular economy (Camacho-Otero *et al.* 2018) and sustainability transitions (Geels *et al.* 2015) seem to be rather consistent in talking about *sustainable consumption*. However, when stepping towards individualist paradigms, the terminology starts proliferating. Sustainable consumption overlaps and is sometimes used interchangeably with responsible, conscious, green, or ethical consumption – to name a few (Carrington *et al.* 2020, also *e.g.* Liu *et al*. 2017; Connolly and Prothero 2008; Garcia-Ruiz and Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2014). Carrington *et al.* (2020) provide an illuminating multidisciplinary literature review of consumption ethics and end up arguing that the inconsistent terminology can be traced back to different disciplinary traditions. Furthermore, they postulate that interdisciplinary work on different aspects of consumption ethics could significantly advance scholarship. My dissertation is one answer to that call.

The origin and definition of sustainable consumption carry connotations that expose some particularities in relation to other concepts of consumption ethics. *Sustainable consumption is impact-oriented in a normative manner.* To illustrate this, an extensive focus of studies on household sustainable consumption has been on addressing the environmental impacts of consumption and their measurement (Tucker *et al*. 2010; Liu *et al*. 2017). In a similar vein, a sustainable consumer could be defined as a consumer who behaves in a way that minimises the harmful impact of their consumption, though there is hardly any consensus on this definitional matter (*e.g.* Mont and Plepys 2008).

Furthermore, sustainable consumption is intrinsically a normative concept in that it refers to patterns of behaviour that contribute towards a desired, sustainable world. The normative nature of the term reveals the grand question driving research on sustainable consumption: how do we initiate change? From this angle, the multi-disciplinary literature serves several leverage points: a palette of drivers for sustainable (or ethical, in some sense) consumption behaviour, which can offer a range of feasible points for policy intervention (Jackson 2005; Tucker *et al.* 2010). Theories informing studies on sustainable consumption build on individualist, structural, and integrative approaches that together can advise an initial conceptual understanding of constraints on sustainable consumption (Jackson 2005).

Many authors argue that the main paradigm has long been the one building on the individual approach (*e.g.* Perera *et al.* 2018; Keller *et al.* 2016; Halkier 2013). A major interest has long been the profile of an ethical consumer, both psychologically and demographically (Carrington *et al.* 2020). By and large, this line of research maps attributes and characteristics of individual consumers and their preferences. Attitudes, values, motivations, beliefs, perceived norms, and the like can all matter in the attempt to behave responsibly as a consumer (*e.g.* Khan and Moshin 2017; Sachdeva *et al.* 2015; Suki 2016; Abdulrazak and Quoquab 2018). The effect of these drivers is often modelled through consumer *intentions, w*hich has led to the conceptualisation and exploration of a phenomenon named the intention-behaviour gap (or attitude-behaviour gap or value-action gap), as consumers do not always put their self-proclaimed concerns into action (*e.g.* Biswas 2017; Chandon *et al.* 2005; Carrington *et al.* 2014; Chatzidakis *et al.* 2007; Young *et al.* 2010).

The individual paradigm tends to build on the implicit assumption that a sustainable (or otherwise responsible) consumer makes informed and motivated consumption choices, be it the purchase of green or organic or otherwise sustainable products (Panda *et al.* 2020; Pekkanen *et al.* 2018; Oroian *et al.* 2017; Ladhari and Tchetgna 2015), voluntary anti-consumption (Hüttel *et al.* 2020; Lee *et al.* 2020), collaborative consumption (Hossain 2020), intentional adoption of sustainable lifestyles (Casey *et al.* 2017), and so on. From the behavioural perspective, the individualist paradigm relies on enhancing the sustainability agency of conscious and motivated individuals who are able to initiate change through marketplace choices (Spaargaren 2011; Halkier 2013). Then, if we accept this neo-liberal understanding of a responsible consumer, endowed with the capability to solve sustainability issues through market transactions (Trnka and Trundle 2014; Shamir 2008; Henry 2010), the question to be answered becomes: how do we initiate change in the motivational basis of consumers?

The dominant policy approaches to sustainable consumption have tended to follow the individualist paradigm, responding to the question of behavioural change with measures to provide information to consumers (Spaargaren 2011; Jackson 2005; Moloney and Strengers 2014; Watson *et al.* 2020). Information can be a powerful tool, though not uncontroversial. For example, product information can have an impact on purchase behaviour (Suki 2016; Edinger-Schons *et al*. 2018). Information on energy consumption may lead residents to adopt less energy consuming activities (Ueno *et al*. 2006). Critics, however, bring up the difficulty in providing feasible and sufficient information that can guide consumers to act on environmental, social, and/or economic concerns (Longo *et al.* 2019; Shao 2016). Furthermore, there are different interest groups in shaping this sustainability information, at least from multinational organisations to states and commercial and religious agents (Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Sandikci 2020; Duffy and

Ng, 2019; Spaargaren and Oosterveer 2010), rendering sustainable consumption an arena of discursive struggle over its meaning (Pekkanen and Penttilä 2020; Caruana and Chatzidakis 2014).

The individualist paradigm produces a versatile and nuanced body of literature on the complex motivational basis of conscious consumers. Although such research may successfully serve marketers in guiding, for example, market segmentation strategies (*e.g.* Seegebarth *et al.* 2016; Finisterra do Paço and Raposo 2010), the picture remains one-sided from the behavioural change perspective. Indeed, a growing number of voices have begun to cast doubts on the limits of consumer agency (*e.g.* Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Pekkanen 2020; Watson *et al.* 2020; Nair and Little 2016; Dolan 2002; Warde 2014). The alternative approaches are referred to as structural and integrative paradigms (Jackson 2005; Spaargaren 2011).

The structural paradigm refers to contextual influences on sustainable consumption. Social structures, such as family, social class, religion, women's rights, or 'patriarchal subordination', among others, have been found to have an impact on the sustainability of consumption behaviour (*e.g.* Meenakshi 2019; Abdullah and Keshminder 2020). Furthermore, the structural paradigm may refer to technologically oriented literature on sustainable consumption, which often draws on socio-technical transitions literature (Spaargaren 2013). The structural paradigm, therefore, takes the focus off the individual consumer, emphasising the role of companies, NGOs, and governments on various levels in driving behavioural change. Producers and their technological innovations are given the primary position in initiating sustainability change (Spaargaren 2011). Accordingly, Spaargaren (2011) argues that the main policy approach based on the structural paradigm targets the producer side with direct regulation.

In the middle ground, however, the theories on the mechanisms through which the contextual structure, together with individual-level characteristics, influences the sustainability of consumption are rather incipient (Warde 2014; Schultz *et al.* 2019; Nair and Little 2016; Martinez *et al.* 2015). The central paradigm in these integrative studies builds on theories of practice (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005; Keller *et al.* 2016), often combined with socio-technical literature in the consumption domain (McMeekin and Southerton 2012). Practice theories, by and large, understand social reality through practices that take place within larger societal conditions, and whose carriers are the individuals (Shove *et al.* 2012). I will continue the discussion on sustainable consumption in section 2.4, especially from the viewpoint of the integrative approach around practice theories, and their promises and limitations for addressing the joint impact of individual agency and institutional environment. For now, I wish to bring up an aspect that is very vaguely considered in relation to 'structure and agency' in the integrative research: that of culture. Integrative research says relatively little about cultural impacts on consumption (Warde 2014; Spaargaren 2011).

However, culture, too, can form a contextual, social arrangement that has been found to influence the sustainability of consumption (*e.g.* Spaargaren 2011; Dermody *et al.* 2015;

Seyfang 2004). Culture and consumption are often addressed under a wide array of consumer culture theories that focus on consumer actions and cultural meanings in the marketplace, and offer a perspective on society and markets that shape lived culture (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Arnould *et al.* 2019). Consumer cultures are understood as market-mediated relations between social, symbolic, and material resources and lived culture (Arnould and Thompson 2005). As such, consumer culture does not refer to the context of consumption in the same sense as the so-called structural paradigm, which focuses on social or socio-technical structures. Rather, consumer cultures are enacted on these structures; consumer cultures embodied in identities, ideologies, beliefs, and practices emerge against the backdrop of socio-cultural structures (in the context of sustainable consumption, see *e.g.* Garanti and Bergeroglu 2018; Mkono and Hughes 2019; Niinimäki 2010). Warde (2014: 283) argues that the cultural turn in consumption studies, although critical towards the sovereign consumer in economics, "upholds models of an active, expressive, choosing consumer motivated by concerns for personal identity and a fashioned lifestyle". The consumer, in other words, is seen as an active agent making conscious and deliberate choices, just as in the individualist paradigm in consumption studies.

So far in this brief introduction to sustainable consumption studies, I have illustrated that both individual characteristics and contextual factors inform sustainable consumption, and both approaches provide leverage points for intervention measures. The contextual approaches to sustainable consumption, however, have developed within rather isolated disciplines and research traditions. The interactions between institutions and culture have remained out of the spotlight. This is where I position my study.

1.1.2 Research questions

The article collection in this dissertation comprises three pieces of research that together allow for the exploration of the cultural and institutional constraints on sustainable consumption. I focus on the consumption of mundane, necessary commodities, as their consumption is firmly rooted to institutionally moulded practices and, thus, provide a window to understanding the institutional embeddedness of consumption.

The study at hand drills into the constraints on sustainable consumption through ***the role of the surrounding institutional structure in shaping the sustainability of day-to-day consumption.*** In particular, ***how does the interaction between culture and formal institutions matter for the sustainability of consumption?*** Furthermore, the approach allows for analysing ***who or what exercises agency in the formation of sustainability in consumption.*** The dissertation consists of three distinct articles, each of which illuminates a partial picture of the overall inquiry.

The first paper sets the scene. The article is titled '*Who cares about product sustainability information at the moment of purchase? – Evidence from three countries'*. It sets out to study how sustainability action in grocery shopping is shaped by personal values and the perception of one's own pro-sustainability behaviour. The study compares three nationalities: Chinese, Spanish, and Finnish. The paper emphasises the limited role of personal motivation, calling for a more holistic approach to address the interplay between contextual factors and individual agency.

The second paper, in turn, drills into the interplay between *institutions and agency in the sustainability of day-to-day consumption practices*. The study explores everyday necessary consumption in the light of how much it derives from personal motivation and to what extent it is a result of the surrounding institutional environment. To that end, the study conceptualises how individual agency relates to the structures in shaping sustainable consumption behaviour.

The third paper is titled 'The responsibility of an ethnocentric consumer – nationalistic, patriotic, or environmentally conscientious? A critical discourse analysis of "buy domestic" campaigns'. In examining the responsibilisation of the consumer in meta-organisational discourses, the study addresses how information purposefully produced by commercial actors shapes the sustainability agency of a consumer. The study uncovers how "buy domestic" campaign texts create conditions of possibilities for ethnocentric consumption through responsibilising discourses on nationalism, patriotism, and environmental responsibility.

Finally, in order to answer the overarching research questions, the results of the presented three papers are brought together through the theoretical framework derived from institutional economics and critical realist ontology.

1.2 Points of departure in theory and methodology

There is no one grand theory of sustainable consumption and how it relates to societal structures. Rather, sustainable consumption is a phenomenon that has been approached and explained from various angles, under multiple epistemological lenses, and in theories adopted from many disciplines and research traditions. That said, we still do not quite know how to advance sustainable consumption on a global scale, in a way in which it would necessarily have an impact on the lives of future generations. The dissertation at hand does not aim to initiate some grand theory of sustainable consumption either, but aims to introduce a theoretical angle that captures something overarching and eventually new about what we may already know about the sustainability of consumption.

The overarching positioning of this dissertation is theoretical, drawing on institutional economics, with an ontological commitment to critical realism. The former refers to the substance at hand, the institutional constraints; the latter to the overall understanding of *what is there to be known*. In sections 2 and 3, I will lay out a theoretical, conceptual, and methodological understanding of *an institutional structure* that further informs the overarching theoretical framework. The framework will guide the interpretation of research results, derived from epistemologically different traditions, in terms of how culture and formal institutions pose constraints on the sustainability of individual consumers' actions. First, I briefly refer to the disciplinary background of the study, including elementary definitions of key concepts. These will be elaborated further in terms of their social ontology in section 3.

Institution can be a treacherous concept to work with. Its disciplinary meanings vary, but even within a discipline it may have diverging definitions (Fleetwood 2008). Institutional economics is no different. To start with, I take on the Northean way of thinking about institutions: “Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North 1990: 3). This is the common understanding in new institutional economics, and this is the common way to define institutions, to cite this exact passage from North’s (1990) seminal book *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Institutions are devised by humans, and they are constraints. They are also relatively durable. This simple enough definitional basis lays conceptual foundations for empirical work. It implies important delimitations. First, it rules out geography and climate, natural endowments as such, and wild nature – factors that may shape our economies, but which endure without humans.

Since North’s (1990) account of institutions and institutional change, economics has largely accepted the idea that *institutions matter* for economic performance (Rodrik *et al.* 2004; Mueller 2019). Even in university textbooks on (standard) economics, institutions get mentioned – perhaps not analysed but mentioned (Pohjola 2019). However, it remains far less obvious *how they matter*. North (1990: 27) builds his theory of institutions on ‘a theory of human behaviour combined with a theory of the cost of transacting’. The latter, in particular, echoes the development of institutional economic theory thereafter. The empirical literature on institutions leans heavily towards the role of selected formal institutions, such as the rule of law, property rights, financial regulation, constitutional quality, and juridical independence (see *e.g.* Chang 2011; Efendic *et al.* 2011; Mickiewicz 2010; Mueller 2019). Their role in shaping economic performance is well established (Efendic *et al.* 2011). Recently, the roles of political institutions (Acemoğlu and Robinson 2016; Acemoğlu *et al.* 2020) and culture (Alesina and Giuliano 2015) have both gained increasing attention. My work taps into the latter.

Indeed, much in a similar way that economists today are acknowledging the role of institutions in economic performance, economists studying institutions are more and more beginning to recognise that *culture matter*s for institutional performance (Alesina and Giuliano 2015).[1] And much in a similar vein, it remains far from obvious *how* culture matters. It was, again, North (1990; 2005) who brought the issue to the fore. The distinction between formal and informal institutions has been prominent since North’s (1990) definition. The terminology, however, seems to be continuously changing. For example, some argue for the distinction between internal and external institutions (Voigt 2019); some use culture and informal institutions interchangeably (see discussion in Alesina and Giuliano 2015); and conference rooms have heard discussions on the

[1] At the moment of writing this dissertation, a special issue on culture and institutions in economic contexts is being edited for the Journal of Institutional Economics. In addition, culture and/or informal institutions get prominent attention in conferences on institutions, such as the annual conference of the World Interdisciplinary Network for Institutional Research.

usefulness of the whole distinction. North (1990: 6) elaborates: "Although formal rules may change overnight as the result of political or judicial decisions, informal constraints embodied in customs, traditions and codes of conduct are much more impervious to deliberate politics. These cultural constraints not only connect the past with the present and future, but provide us with a key to explaining the path of historical change."

Empirical accounts have found evidence of the impact of cultural variables on institutions and vice versa; and their coevolution is acknowledged in the literature (Alesina and Giuliano 2015). *Culture in interaction with formal institutions has proved relevant for economic outcomes*. I discuss how the contemporary institutional economic literature understands the interaction between formal institutions and culture and/or informal institutions in section 2. In particular, I will look at the cultural embeddedness of institutions, which is an avenue, if not forgotten, at best vaguely followed (Williamson 2000; Williamson 2008).

In order to address the cultural–institutional impact on sustainability in consumer behaviour, the picture needs to be complemented with the idea of *the consumer*. The previous section illustrated the prominence of the individualist paradigm in sustainable consumption studies, and the evidence it has provided for the existence of a consumer able and capable to take deliberate action. I borrow Archer's (1998: 190) riddling words: "What is it that has no organizational form without us, yet which also forms us its makers? And what is it whose constitution never satisfies the precise designs of anyone, but because of this always motivates its attempted reconstitution?" Although this dissertation is essentially about the 'organizational form', which I call institutional structure, it needs to be recognised that it would not exist without us, human beings. In other words, agency needs to be acknowledged. Agency is understood here as the capacity, capability, or ability to take action in an intentional, deliberate, and reflexive manner (Archer 2003). The definition contrasts active versus passive agents, with the latter referring to "people whose subjectivity makes no difference to the play of objective circumstances upon them" (Archer 2003: 299). However, the habitual nature of everyday life is acknowledged and discussed in relation to agency in more detail, along with the thoughts of Bourdieu (1990; 1998) and Reckwitz (2002). Here, the theoretical frame comes closest to the particular theories applied to guide empirical studies on sustainability of consumption, those of practice theories. Discussion follows in section 2.3.

Furthermore, studying human beings in an institutional frame may seem to produce an epistemological dilemma. Consumers make choices in their subjective realities, within an institutional structure that is somehow 'external' to them, or more objective, if I may. The article selection in this dissertation reflects these different ontologies. One is conducted under the logical positivism paradigm; another is a hermeneutic study; one is an institutional ethnography, an ontology in itself. I bring these studies together through the theoretical framework, which, in addition to institutional research, builds on critical realism. Intrinsic to critical realism is the distinction between the world and our perception and experience of it. However, critical realism is not merely a compromise philosophy between interpretivist and positivist understandings of reality. Rather, it is an overarching metatheory, enabling reasoning from data about events to the transfactual processes that originally caused them (Bhaskar 1975; Lawson 1998). Furthermore, Bhaskar and Lawson (1998: 3) characterise critical realism as “a reorientation of philosophy towards a non-anthropomorphic conception of the place of humanity in nature”. Critical realism is discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2.

Institutional economics and critical realism do not obviously go hand in hand. In fact, the new institutional economics follows dominantly the same ontological ideas as the neoclassical approach, that of realism. There is a world out there that we can access through objective research. Arguably, culture – and human beings as carriers of culture – are difficult to fit into that paradigm. Indeed, Lawson (2019) argues that economics as a tradition of science often leaves the questions of social ontology unpronounced. He makes the case that practical failures of economics may come down to careless and inexplicit consideration of the ontological foundations underlying research. Lawson (2019) advocates that the substantive endeavours in social theorisation should be pursued with equal attention to social ontology. Section 3.3 continues on the issue of social ontology of institutions, institutional structure, culture, and human beings.

Here, I wish to touch upon *original institutional thought.* It is my understanding that, compared to contemporary, modern economics, the original institutional literature paid more careful attention to the questions of social ontology, the questions of structure and agency, and the nature of human action. All of these are central to my work. All this could also be more easily compatible with critical realist ontology. In addition, although contemporary institutional economic research on consumption is scarce, the original institutional literature did address consumption as a societal phenomenon (Veblen 1899; Hamilton 1987). In my dissertation, I am pointing towards linkages from my own theorisation to original institutional thought, especially in Article II. However, overarchingly I am building on the contemporary institutional economic understanding of culture and institutions. I made this choice, for I understand that to further the science, it may be essential to build on “live” theories.

As a final introductory theory note, this dissertation is not a critique of mainstream economics, nor does it aim to give an account of any such sort (for this, see *e.g.* Lawson 2017; Morgan and Patomäki 2017). From the window of economics, to be frank, my work is a heterodox endeavour. I subscribe to the critical realist critics of the neglect of social ontological considerations in much economics research (Lawson 2019) and the call to understand the reciprocal nature between agency and structure: “micro-economic theories should connect up with propositions about economic systems and their reproduction, and are inadequate to the extent that they do not” (Outhwaite 1998: 293). If successful, my thesis will contribute to the questioning of whether there is a need to maintain strict borderlines between economics and other social sciences (see *e.g.* Downward and Grønhaug 2007). It is my understanding that institutional research is progressing towards obscuring such disciplinary borderlines, and it is my normative but sincere belief that this is the way to go, should an adequate understanding of the workings of an economy be advanced.

1.3 The argument(s)

My work in this article selection, and in the accompanying introduction, makes contributions on several levels. First, the published articles carry their own distinctive contributions. The first paper adds to the knowledge of the kinds of consumers that sustainability information in a grocery store is likely to reach. The second article presents an institutional ethnography that eventually revisits the agency-structure debate in conceptualising it as a multi-layered cultural embeddedness of day-to-day consumption practices at home. The third article illuminates how organisational discourses responsibilise consumers in the name of national and environmental welfare. Each article is positioned somewhat differently in the relevant literatures and bears theoretical contributions accordingly. The articles and their contributions are summarised as separate works in section 4, and the full articles follow, after their overarching analysis in this introductory narrative.

The article selection reflects the literature on sustainable consumption at large. It is eclectic, multi-disciplinary, and conducted under various ontological underpinnings with corresponding methodologies. Here, I narrate a story of how they all contribute to our understanding of the constraints of the sustainability of consumption, the point of departure being how culture, together with institutions, may give rise to conditions of possibilities for such action. In doing this, my work contributes, overarchingly, to the body of literature under the umbrella of sustainable consumption studies. The contribution to sustainable consumption studies is mainly substantial, but theoretical insights also follow. Through the overarching theory frame, the study contributes to the theory of institutional economics, and especially to what we know about the interaction between formal and informal institutions.

My work contributes especially to the emerging doubts on the limits of consumer agency (Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Spaargaren 2011; Warde 2014; Watson *et al.* 2020). I argue that institutions and culture are intertwined in various ways and together emerge to condition the possibilities both for intentional sustainability agency and for (un)sustainable consumption practices. Sustainability of consumption can be embedded in commonly shared cultures to various extents, which has an effect on how changes in formal institutions may be realised in consumer action. My major contribution to institutional economics is ingrained in this thought. My work, furthermore, proposes that commonly shared understandings of societal realities may have remarkable power on consumer action; I argue that cultural dispositions, and cultural context more generally, may condition the success of external interventions targeted at changing people's intentional preferences. Moreover, the structural constraints and enablements may emerge agentically or non-agentically. In the big picture, my work builds understanding of how institutions can be approached in relation to sustainable consumption outcomes, giving a linkage from consumption to societal structures, and a novel way to start analysing the prerequisites for the normative aim of rendering consumption sustainable.

2 Theoretical background

The theoretical umbrella used to interpret the sustainability of consumption embraces the idea that individual behaviour is, to some extent, embedded in an institutional structure embracing both formal institutions and culture. In this section, I will first look into the contemporary literature on the interaction between culture and institutions, moving on to institutional embeddedness and its application in economic contexts. Thereafter, I discuss the theoretical common ground between institutions and embeddedness and sustainable consumption studies.

2.1 On culture and institutions

Formal institutions do not operate around our economy in a social vacuum. Put similar institutions in different societies, and they work differently. A natural experiment about this was provided by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the whole communist regime in Europe and Asia in the beginning of the 1990s. Market institutions were introduced to countries from Kyrgyzstan to Estonia – countries whose post-communist economic development differ greatly. Although there were different routes followed to introduce formal institutional reform (see Åslund 2002), many authors argue for the impact of *initial conditions* on economic performance in post-communist countries (Falcetti et al. 2006; Fisher and Sahay 2004; EBRD 2004). Initial conditions include a variety of societal aspects spanning both formal and informal institutions. They range from the initial state of economic development to conditions of civil society, pre-communist imperial legacy, trust, time under communism and market memory (Fisher and Sahay 2004; Katchanovski 2000). Mickiewicz (2010) states: “It is not the legacy of formal institutions but the legacy of informal institutions that make the post-communist countries in Europe and Asia still a distinctive region in some respects.”

Ample evidence exists that culture, together with institutions, plays a role in the economic performance of and within societies. Much of this evidence originates from historical accounts (*e.g.* Tabellini 2010; Guiso *et al.* 2016). An illuminating example is provided by Putnam *et al.* (1993) and Guiso *et al.* (2016), who both address the same natural experiment on institutional reform in Italy in the 1970s. The Italian government introduced fifteen regional governments, which in practice worked very differently in southern Italy than in central and northern Italy. Putnam *et al.* (1993) hypothesised that this difference is due to different levels of trust, cooperation, participation, and social interaction in these regions. Differences in this ‘civic capital’, in turn, can be traced back to whether these regions had experienced the history of free cities several hundred years ago. Putnam *et al.* (1993) reasoned that the legacy of free cities, which represented an early version of participatory democracy, was transmitted as a cultural trait of cooperative behaviour throughout the centuries, and eventually explained the different functioning of regional governments in the late 20th century. Guiso *et al.* (2016) test these hypotheses econometrically, finding empirical support for them.

The historical accounts, furthermore, tend to portray a world where culture is highly durable, determining economic outcomes for centuries to come. Indeed, Chang (2011) argues that the dominant discourse about institutions and development in economics maintains the idea of cultural determinism. However, the example provided by Putnam *et al.* (1993) and Guiso *et al.* (2016) is eventually a story of two-way causality between institutional development and culture. The institutions of free cities initiated the cultural change that proved to have long-lasting effects. Indeed, the literature has suggested that cultural inertia may break due to external shocks (Williams 2007; Aoki 2001). Accordingly, in terms of an economic transition towards sustainable societies, a pandemic could open a window of opportunity for a cultural change, for example.

It is the ultimate argument of the economists Alesina and Giuliano (2015), in their extensive review of culture and institutions, that culture and institutions evolve together, complementing each other in informing economic outcomes. This is the argument of Chang (2011), too, in his criticism of mainstream economic discourse on institutions and development. Alesina and Giuliano (2015) call for empirical research on cultural and institutional change over time, to advance our understanding of their two-way causality in economic contexts. Coevolution of culture and institutions is a slow, non-linear process whose impact on economic outcomes is poorly understood (see also Chang 2011). Although this statement is hardly contestable, it delivers an utterly sad message for the prospects of institutional change in the transition towards sustainable societies. These societies need rapid change.

To better understand the mechanism through which institutions and culture jointly influence economic performance, we need to understand *what culture is*. Here, I want to distinguish between two questions: *what is culture* and *what is culture in economic research*. The latter is easier to explain. Guiso *et al.* (2006: 23) argue: "A necessary first step is to define culture in a sufficiently narrow way, so that it becomes easier to identify a causal link from culture to economic outcomes." This characterises economic research that includes cultural aspects. Culture needs to be reduced to a variable. Guiso *et al.* (2006: 23) continues: "For this reason, we define culture as those customary beliefs and values that ethnic, religious, and social groups transmit fairly unchanged from generation to generation." Their definition has become widespread. Alesina and Giuliano (2015) summarise that empirical research in economics treats culture as values and/or beliefs, being often ignorant in distinguishing between them. Furthermore, the specific values and/or beliefs that have received the most attention in economic research include trust (*e.g.* Butler *et al.* 2016), individualism versus collectivism (*e.g.* Gorodnichenko and Roland 2011), family ties (*e.g*. Alesina and Giuliano 2010), and generalised morality (*e.g.* Tabellini 2008). These are often called cultural traits.

In general, some questions arise. Of all the cultural dimensions, are the chosen cultural variables those that are most relevant for the studied phenomenon? What if it is the economic outcome that affects cultural traits? Although omitted variable bias and reverse causality can be (sometimes) treated in econometric models, a big question remains. Reducing culture to a simple variable makes it easier to isolate a causal link from the variable to economic outcomes, as stated by Guiso *et al.* (2006), but does it reveal the causal link from *culture* to these economic outcomes? In addition, what if another cultural dimension simultaneously works in a reverse direction to the chosen variable?

What is culture, then? How can we approach culture in institutional research in a way that better appreciates its diversity and versatile nature?

2.2 Culture, institutions, and embeddedness

The understanding of culture that I wish to push forward in an economic context is that deriving from cultural theories, and especially those embracing theories of social practices. This understanding is brought together and spelled out in Reckwitz's (2002) influential article "Toward a Theory of Social Practices, A Development in Culturalist Theorizing", and, as elaborated in the article, this understanding eventually goes back to such authors as Bourdieu, Giddens, Schatzki, late Foucault, and finally to late Wittgenstein and early Heidegger.

Cultural theories understand human action differently from what is implied by 'homo-economicus' and 'homo sociologicus' (Reckwitz 2002). Frankly put, the former represents the view that rational choice and individual intention and interest are the explanans of human behaviour; the latter understands action stemming from collective norms and values. In that, the institutional economic literature seems to have taken a step towards 'homo sociologicus' in the attempts to understand cultural interference in institutional functioning. For the cultural theory understanding of human action, I wish to directly quote Reckwitz's (2002: 245-246) crystallising words. Cultural theories understand human action "by reconstructing the symbolic structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms, and to behave in corresponding ways. Social order then does not appear as a product of compliance of mutual normative expectations, but embedded in collective cognitive and symbolic structures, in a 'shared knowledge' which enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world."

The cultural theory perspective, in other words, emphasises the tacit, collective understanding of the world that embeds human action. Practice theories, then, place practices as the units of analysis, in contrast to the mind, texts, or interaction in other cultural theories (Reckwitz 2002). A practice is "a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood" (Reckwitz 2002: 250). Practices take shape over time, in connection with the development of infrastructure and the society at large (Shove 2003). Thus, the idea and definition of a practice embraces the very idea that behaviour is, to a certain extent, embedded in contextual matters, both formal structures and culture. I argue that cultural embeddedness can offer a concept that allows for deeper appreciation of what culture is than is commonly understood in institutional economic literature. Instead of a belief or a value, culture can be seen as a system of beliefs; a web of intertwined tacit understandings of the world.

Turning back to institutional economics, Williamson (2000) presents a widely cited conceptualisation of institutional hierarchy that brings the issue of cultural embeddedness to the fore. Oliver Williamson did not exactly study the interaction between culture and institutions himself – he was a giant in transaction cost economics – but he emphasised the importance of cultural impact on the functioning of institutions in economic contexts. He presents the realm of economics of institutions as a four-level hierarchy, the first level of which refers to *culture*: "This is where the norms, customs, mores, tradition, etc. are located" (p. 596). Williamson (2000) further characterises these cultural institutions as spontaneously emerging, and thus non-calculative in nature. In line with Chang's (2011) words, Williamson (2000) also notes that institutional economists tend to take "Level 1 institutions", that is culture, as given.

Furthermore, Williamson's (2000) hierarchy presents formal institutions on Level 2. Here, he refers to polity: "the executive, legislative, juridical, and bureaucratic functions of governments" that underly economic performance of a society (Williamson 2000: 598; see also North 1994). Williamson (2000) calls these structures an "institutional environment". Level 3, in turn, refers to governance, especially in relation to contractual relations. Level 4 is for resource allocation: prices and quantities. Williamson (2000) further clarifies that the question of culture in the institutional hierarchy falls into the scope of social theory, whereas Levels 2 and 3 concern New Institutional Economics and Level 4 is devoted to neoclassical economics. Notably, Williamson (2000) views institutional economics as complementary to neo-classical economics, not a rival to it.

Although Williamson (2000) articulates that culture is a matter of social theory beyond the scope of institutional economics, he nevertheless highlights the importance of advancing the understanding of culture: "An identification and explication of the mechanisms through which informal institutions arise and are maintained would especially help to understand the slow change in Level 1 institutions" (p. 597). Williamson returns to call for better understanding and conceptualisation of embeddedness in his forewords to New Institutional Economics, A Guidebook (Williamson 2008; see also Opper 2008). However, the research on the interaction between informal and formal institutions has hardly followed this call (see Voigt 2019; Mueller 2019; Bednar 2019 in the edition "A Research Agenda for New Institutional Economics"). Furthermore, the recent extensive review of culture and institutions by Alesina and Giuliano (2015) does not even touch upon the issue of embeddedness.

Williamson (2008) argues that the concept of embeddedness is vague. When discussed in institutional economics, the reference is made to Granovetter's (1985) concept of embeddedness (see Dequech 2003). Granovetter (1985; 1992; 2005) advocates the idea that economic action is embedded in a social structure denoting social networks or relationships between actors. The idea rests on three pillars: trust, information, and reward and punishment, which are shaped by social relationships and inform the economic choices of individuals. DiMaggio (1994), in turn, discusses embeddedness in economic contexts in a broader manner, illuminating the idea of cultural embeddedness. He makes a distinction between "constitutive" and "regulatory" forms of culture (see Dequech

2003). The former refers to foundational, collectively shared understandings; the latter to such cultural aspects as values and norms. He reasons: “Those who view culture and economic behavior as mutually generative tend to emphasize the former: culture provides the categories and understandings that enable us to engage in economic action. Those who treat economic behavior as analytically distinct from culture stress the ways in which norms and conventions constrain the individual’s untrammeled pursuit of self-interest” (DiMaggio 1994: 28 in Dequech 2003: 463). Considering the art of economic research discussed above, it seems obvious that it has taken on the latter approach, which infers the analytical distinctiveness of culture and economic behaviour. Cultural theory understanding would rather align with the former.

Boettke *et al.* (2008) introduce the idea of institutional stickiness, which is eventually a way to explain institutional embeddedness in the context of institutional change. Boettke *et al.* (2008) use the term stickiness to explain why institutions transplanted from top-down take hold in some contexts and fail to work in others. They talk about institutions that are “indigenously introduced but exogenous in nature” (p. 334), which can be seen as an extension to Ostrom’s (1990; 2000) work, which compares spontaneously emerging institutions to those imposed from outside. In the context of sustainable economic transition, considering the need for rapid change, institutional reform is likely to resemble the idea of indigenously introduced institutions that are exogenous in nature; the reform is going to be introduced by national governments, but the institutions are exogeneous in the sense that they are imposed from above. Boettke *et al.* (2008) make the case that transplanted institutions are likely to take hold if they align with “indigenous institutional order”, referring to local informal ways of conducting economic (and other) life (p. 354). The reasoning of Boettke *et al.* (2008) is in line with the ‘transplant effect’, which suggests that imported legal rules need to be adopted in a local context in order to function effectively (Berkowitz *et al.* 2001).

The conceptual idea that formal institutional structures are embedded in a cultural context (Williamson 2000; Boettke *et al.* 2008) has proven insightful and found ample support from empirical investigations. For instance, Seidler (2014; 2018) narrates an analysis of institutional transfer in post-colonial African states. He emphasises the role of local context in the functioning of imported institutions (also *e.g.* Rodrik 2008; Grajzl and Dimitrova-Grajzl 2009), and further argues that a chosen transfer strategy for implementation may or may not succeed, depending on pre-transfer local conditions. Furthermore, Seidler (2018) argues that importing both formal institutions and informal institutions behind them can help in successful transplantation. He makes the case that a successful implementation of new legal institutions was associated with British colonial officers staying in service in these African states after independence. British colonial officers were familiar with both the cultures that the implementation of formal institutions (from the UK to African states) brought together. In that, Seidler (2018) also brings up the agency perspective in institutional transfer processes.

On the quantitative side, hierarchical linear modelling techniques enable the study of the simultaneous impact of individual-level characteristics and national-level variables (such as institutions and culture) on individual behaviour (Hofman 1997). Estrin *et al.* (2013) use such multilevel modelling to study institutional embeddedness in the context of entrepreneurial aspirations. In line with Williamson's (2000) institutional hierarchy, Estrin *et al.* (2013) distinguish between two levels of institutions: Level 2 institutions (here, property rights and corruption) and Level 3 institutions (government size). Estrin *et al*. (2013) find that secured property rights and non-corrupt society encourage growth aspirations of entrepreneurs, but at the same time large government may hinder these aspirations. Furthermore, echoing Granovetter's (1985) theory on embeddedness as an issue of social networks, Estrin *et al.* (2013) find that individual social networks may moderate the impact of deficient national institutions on entrepreneurs' growth aspirations. The results of Estrin *et al.* (2013), in other words, imply a multilevel embeddedness of economic action in which both formal and informal institutions are at play in informing economic outcomes.

In my reading, the literature has firmly established that institutional embeddedness is a phenomenon, and that it is relevant for economic outcomes on both individual and national levels. However, the empirical evidence tells little about the mechanisms through which embeddedness works. Arguably, the study of such mechanisms could further benefit from explorative, qualitative research approaches that, by their very nature, are often well-suited for the creation of such a deep understanding of how and why things happen the way they do (*e.g.* Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

2.3 Discussion: Institutions and embeddedness meet sustainability of consumption

The rhetoric that individual consumption behaviour is embedded in various contextual conditions is common, even widespread. Often, it seems, this leads to an elaboration of the contextual impact on sustainable consumption. However, this research seldom, if ever, combines culture with institutions. In light of the evidence discussed in the previous section, culture and institutions are likely determinants of economic outcomes, such as consumption. Here, I will first review a few illuminating empirical examples that provide insights into the joint impact of individual characteristics and either the institutional or cultural context of sustainable consumption. Thereafter, I discuss what seems to be the most promising paradigm to approach the joint impact of structure and agency in sustainable consumption studies, that is, theories of practice (Warde 2014; Keller *et al.* 2016). None of these, however, address the joint impact of culture and institutions. Cultural embeddedness of institutions, as reviewed in the previous section, is a topic uncovered in sustainable consumption studies, to the very best of my knowledge.

For instance, Pelau and Pop (2018) study the impact of culturally shared values on renewable energy use in a cross-national context. Using Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension, they use panel data analysis to confirm that nationally shared culture plays a role. Renewable energy consumption is more likely in countries that are *not* characterised by values such as achievement, heroism, and material reward. Accordingly, Pelau and

Pop (2018) propose that cultural features should be taken into consideration in policy design. Culture matters.

Some empirical studies provide insights into the joint impact of institutional context and individual characteristics, too. For instance, Martinez *et al.* (2015) study the institutional impact on pro-sustainability attitudes and behaviour among Philippe consumers, using structural equation modelling. Their constructs for institutional environment are derived from Scott's regulatory, normative, and cognitive dimensions, and catch the consumers' perception of whether these institutions promote environmental awareness and action (see Scott 2013). They conclude that a pro-sustainability institutional environment is likely to encourage the development of such attitudes on an individual level, and that these attitudes may be further realised through eco-behaviour.

Furthermore, Wang (2017) uses multilevel modelling to study the impact of national environmental governance on pro-sustainability attitudes and behaviour on an individual level. She finds that effective environmental governance encourages sustainable consumption practices in high-income countries, whereas in other countries, it discourages such behaviour. In a similar manner, Wang and Hao (2018) study the impact of nation-level internet penetration on individual-level sustainable consumption. They find that internet penetration *per se* does not increase sustainable consumption, but it does help in translating pro-sustainable attitudes into corresponding behaviour.

The examples above give a clear indication that individual motivations and contextual factors matter together for the sustainability of consumption. The research paradigm regarded as the most promising one to address this interaction would be the theories of practice (Warde 2005; Keller *et al.* 2016). I will take a brief look at these theories, as my work subscribes to the idea of the nature of human action characteristic of practice theories, as elaborated below. My aim here is not to develop an institutional theory of practice, but rather to acknowledge that this could be the space in sustainable consumption studies to incorporate institutional theory of some sort (see also Warde 2014; Geels *et al.* 2015).

Practice theories are a bunch of theories, and the concept of practice itself sees various operationalisations in empirical work (see Welch and Warde 2015). Warde (2014: 285) articulates that "[p]erhaps what is most definitive [for practice theories] is that which they oppose and which they seek to minimise when offering explanations". Foremost, theories of practice arose to challenge the dichotomy between research traditions preoccupied, on one hand, with individual's preferences, desires and tastes, and on the other hand with structural determinism (Keller *et al.* 2016; Røpke 2009; Warde 2005).

The central thinkers behind the emergence of this integrative paradigm include Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1990). Their ideas on agency and structure can be seen to underly practice theories. According to Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, structure does not predetermine action (consumption behaviour in this case), but social structure is constantly reproduced through the enactment of practices. In that, the structure comes to form both a constraint and a resource for consumption practices. Agency, the capability to act deliberately, occurs in the flow of action, in a constant dialogue with the structure (Giddens 1979; 1984). Accordingly, in practice theoretical thinking, the *social* is understood to be the practice, instead of the enacting actor or the structure that embeds the practice (Reckwitz 2002).

A practice is "a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge", according to Reckwitz's (2002: 249) widely adopted definition. Bourdieu's (1990; 1998) founding concepts *disposition*, *habitus*, and *field* offer a theoretical way to approach the *social* in practice theoretical thinking. Each person has a *habitus*, depicting their *dispositions* to act, behave, and perceive in the flow-conduct of life. It emphasises the taken-for-granted, tacit knowledge; something that we know without deliberate, conscious knowing. A person's habitus develops within the social reality and circumstantial factors embracing them – within the social *field*. The habitus binds the objective structures with subjectivity; "agents absorb objective social structures into a set of somatic dispositions, making their subjective structures of action commensurate with the objective structures and extant exigencies of the social field" (Butler *et al.* 2016: 890). Article II in this collection taps into the theoretical ideas elaborated above to study how agency is related to institutions in day-to-day consumption outcomes in the domain of home.

Practice theories have been roughly categorised into several waves, and the social theoretical approach elaborated above represents the first one (Postill 2010; Warde 2014). Warde (2014) recounts that the later philosophical turn is characterised by the works of, especially, Schatzki (*e.g.* 2002), and the third turn focuses on "how various themes arising from the heterogenous sources of the first two phases of theoretical development might be employed to address problems of *description*, *interpretation* and *explanation* of social processes and behaviour in a particular domain" (Warde 2014: 285, italics added). While the empirical and theoretical developments have come to fruition in a diverse manner, works building on the social theoretical founding ideas of Bourdieu and Giddens continue to be conducted and published (*e.g.* Jacobsen and Hansen 2019; Schultz *et al.* 2019; Miettinen 2017). However, despite the founding emphasis on a structure–agency continuum, practice theoretical research still falls short in establishing a (theoretical and empirical) linkage from the institutional environment to the conduct of practices involving the conscious agent with their motivations, desires, and concerns (Warde 2014; Kemp and van Lente 2013; Brown *et al.* 2013; Schultz *et al.* 2019).

In the sustainable consumption domain, it is probably the science and technology focused studies that come closest to linking practices to institutional impact (Shove 2003; Shove *et al.* 2012; Spaargaren 2011; Spaargaren *et al.* 2016). These studies emphasise things and materiality in consumption, as objects and machines are fundamental in the constitution of practices and their environmental impact (Spaargaren 2011; Reckwitz 2002). "[U]nderstanding specific practices always involves apprehending material configurations", as expressed by Schatzki *et al.* (2001: 3). In the household context, the use of electrical appliances, heating and cooling (Butler *et al.* 2016; Kuijer and De Jong 2012; Hafner *et al.* 2019), cooking (Herington *et al.* 2017), and doing laundry (Shove 2003; Mylan and Southerton 2018) are good examples where changing practices has the potential to lessen the environmental burden of everyday practices. Accordingly, practice theory-based approaches have broadened the policy discussion around sustainable consumption from informative measures to policy palettes of synergetic instruments (Nissinen *et al.* 2015, also Spaargaren and Mol 2008). Information provision has also been considered from different angles, from nudges (Lehner *et al.* 2016) to sensory information (Martin 2020).

Beyond the immediate physical enablers of consumption practices (such as machines) in the home, facilitators outside the home obviously have an impact on consumption practices. Indeed, infrastructure, local transportation, and housing types are considered integral in the constitution of practices (Moloney and Strengers 2014). However, taking a step further to broader societal conditions, linking practices to the institutional structure has proved challenging (Warde 2014; Kemp and van Lente 2013; Brown *et al.* 2013; Welch and Warde 2015). Warde (2014) argues that such an institutional extension to practice theories would require a complementary theory. One candidate, perhaps the prominent one, for addressing societal conditions and consumption practices together comes from studies on socio-technical transitions (McMeekin and Southerton 2012), building on the multi-level perspective by Geels (2002; also Geels *et al.* 2015). The model has its roots in innovation studies and explains socio-technical changes through ideas of stable-ish socio-technical regimes (on a meso-level) that may be challenged by nascent technological innovations (micro-level) under favourable pressure from exogeneous macro-level landscapes (Geels 2002; Geels and Schot 2007).

The multi-level perspective has been applied to consider sustainable consumption initiatives and their upscaling into mainstream practices (Seyfang *et al.* 2014; Seyfang 2010, see also McMeekin and Southerton 2012). In Article II, I argue that the model does not quite appreciate the routinised nature of practices and the impact that the macro-level *institutions* have (had) in shaping them. Instead, consumption innovations are seen as highly agentic. Jalas *et al*. (2017) propose, in a similar vein, that "[t]ransitions in practice could be better argued to imply local innovative ways of taking technical solutions into use in everyday life rather than developing them in a particular (protected niche) selection environment, set apart from an everyday life context."

On the other hand, Geels *et al.* (2015) propose considering practices as parts of socio-technical systems. Various actors reproduce these systems, guided by 'existing regimes' such as 'semi-coherent regulative, cognitive, and normative rules' (p. 6). Furthermore, socio-technical systems are seen as difficult to change due to, for example, institutions that are seen to create 'lock-in' mechanisms. This thought enterprise is a work in the making, as the authors themselves put it, and there are a couple of evident gaps that are of relevance in light of my work, namely those pertaining to culture and institutions. According to Geels *et al.* (2015), system change happens through the moments of favourable realignment between ‘configurations of heterogeneous elements’ (Geels *et al.* 2015: 5). The proposed units of analysis are, furthermore, socio-technical systems as well as practices. The link from these to institutional structures that are recognised as creating ‘lock-in’ mechanisms, however, remains out of focus. In fact, the empirical literature is heavily focused on technological niche innovations as drivers for system change.

In other words, stronger institutional approaches could add to the big picture in advancing knowledge of how everyday practices are conditioned – and further reproduce societal structures beyond ‘socio-technological regimes’. For example, how do everyday consumption practices reproduce markets in (a particular) society? What is the role of market and political institutions in shaping consumption practices? Why do the immediately available facilitators of practices (technologies, infrastructures) differ between countries? Ideally, if institutional theory would allow, such approaches could have the potential to advance understanding of deep determinants of behaviour, beyond individual deliberation and habituation within immediate physical facilitators such as infrastructures. However, studying the relationship between broad ‘macro landscapes’, to borrow multi-level perspective vocabulary, would shift the analysis perhaps towards more uncertainty. For instance, the impact of institutional change on consumption behaviour is not likely to be immediate, and thus, for instance, experimentation (as in *not* experiments, see Jalas *et al.* 2017) becomes difficult.

Moreover, the notion of culture in relation to practices deserves some further attention. Spaargaren (2011: 818) writes: “Perhaps because of the desire to stay away from the value-based agenda and approaches of the individualist paradigm, the cultural dimension of green lifestyles and consumption routines has been left rather under-theorized among authors working within the practice paradigm.” Accordingly, an intriguing side note made by Geels *et al.* (2015: 9) reveals the state of the art: “substantial reconfigurations are likely to require new cultural discourses to provide societal legitimacy for the change processes.” In other words, there is *likely* to be a major role played by cultural discourses, but we know, at best, very little about the effect and the mechanisms beyond. Welch and Warde (2015) second the thought, emphasising that practice theories have left cultural discourses and ideological and political projects beyond their scope.

Spaargaren (2011) offers grounds to think about culture in connection with the ‘agency and structure’ of everyday practices. Building on Collins’ (2004) theory of interaction rituals, Spaargaren (2011) emphasises the role of objects in reproducing cultural meanings and a shared sentiment of morality and solidarity. She sees the potential in sustainable consumer cultures to arise through the positive and ‘energising’ meanings bestowed in objects and symbols, which are released when enacting practices upon them. The approach can be seen to emphasise the symbolic reward of consumption, which is characteristic more widely of the cultural turn in consumption studies (Warde 2014). However, instead of focusing on self-development and self-expression, Spaargaren’s (2011) ideas emphasise situated interactions and emerging ‘collective effervescence’, resulting in shared standards of morality and solidarity.

3 Methodology and the underlying philosophy

In this dissertation, I am presenting three distinct pieces of research that each represent different research traditions in terms of methodology; different methods justified by different ontological assumptions. Yet, my study is about one particular phenomenon: the constraints on sustainable consumption. Accepting that research methods are not independent from the research problem (Töttö 2000), how do I justify the approach? And even propose that such a multi-methodological approach has the potential to illuminate the overarching research problematics with a light more revealing than one ontological commitment? I offer two answers. One pertains to the overall philosophy of how the world is and what the world is like – *the philosophical ontology*; and the second must be the nature of the phenomenon itself – *the social ontology*. In this section, I uncover the philosophical and social ontological developments that underly my research, justifying the selection of methods and guiding the overall interpretation of the results.

Ontology is the science of being; the nature of existence and reality. Every piece of research builds on an ontology; it is the intrinsic nature of any inquiry to carry assumptions about what is real. I build my overarching thesis on critical realism, which is a philosophy of social science originating from Roy Bashar's works. The critical realist view described here draws from Bhaskar's early work (2008/1975; 1998a/1979), which Bhaskar (2020) himself calls *basic critical realism*. Elder-Vass (2007a: 227), in turn, refers to this view as a "pre-dialectical, pre-transcendental version of critical realism". This version of basic, pre-dialectical critical realism seems to guide much of the recent applied critical realist work (*e.g.* Bunt 2018; Hu 2018; Hoddy 2019; Patel and Pilgrim 2018). Indeed, in addition to being a philosophy of science, critical realism offers a methodological framework for empirical study, although it refrains from advocating particular methods (Elder-Vass 2007a) or subject-matter theories (Fletcher 2017). Here, I build the overarching theoretical framework from the critical realist stratified ontology, together with the theoretical ideas of cultural embeddedness of institutions, which suits the study of sustainable consumption – a social phenomenon studied through a plethora of theories and methods.

3.1 Critical realism in theory

Critical realism makes a distinction between our experience of the world, and the world beyond our experience (Bhaskar 2008/1975). According to the seminal work of Bhaskar (2008/1975), the relationship between these two is explained through the ontological domains of *the real*, *the actual*, and *the empirical.* The empirical refers to our experience of the world. These are the observed events and phenomena on which we obtain data during the conduct of research. The real, in turn, refers to structures with causal powers to initiate change in open systems. The "real is whatever exists, be it natural or social, regardless of whether it is an empirical object for us, and whether we happen to have an adequate understanding of its nature" (Sayer 2000: 11). The actual refers to events that occur when the causal powers of structures are activated. Fletcher (2017) proposes an iceberg metaphor for these three domains of reality. The empirical is the tip of the iceberg: the events we observe and understand through human interpretation. Beneath the empirical lies the actual: all the events that occur whether we observe them or not. Underneath it all, there is the real: structures causing events to occur higher up in the iceberg.

In addition to the stratification of reality, central to the ontological depth in critical realism is the divide between intransitive and transitive objects of knowledge (Bhaskar 2008/1975; Archer *et al.* 1998). The existence of *intransitive* objects does not depend upon humans, their perceptions, or any scientific inquiry about them. They are “real structures which endure and operate independently of our knowledge, our experience and the conditions which allow us access to them” (Bhaskar 1998b: 19). Transitive objects are knowledge about things, such as theories and models. They are social constructs. Bhaskar (2020) himself coins the very beginning of critical realism in the argument against epistemic fallacy; the dissolution of ontology in epistemology. According to critical realism, what can be empirically known does not delimit reality; the reality goes beyond our understanding of it. In that, the intransitive is about ontology; the transitive about epistemology.

The goal of social scientific inquiry, according to the critical realist view, is getting closer to a truth through understanding the causal mechanisms behind events occurring in *the actual* and observed in *the empirical* (Archer *et al.* 1998). Central to this is the concept of *emergence* (Bhaskar 2008/1975; Bhaskar 2020). Broadly, emergence refers to the processes in which *entities* in lower-level reality get relationally organised so that together they give rise to an entity in an upper-level reality (Lawson 2019). For example, emergence can refer to structures in *the real* causing effects in *the actual* that can be further observed in *the empirical* (Fletcher 2017). Elder-Vass (2007a: 229) defines entities as “wholes composed of other entities that are their parts”. An entity comprises a set of parts organised in particular *relations.* In that, these wholes of entities are relational *structures*.

These structures can have causal powers, also called emergent properties or emergent powers (Elder-Vass 2007a; Lawson 2019). Causal powers are properties of entities, but not properties of the parts that form an entity (Lawson 2019; Elder-Vass 2007a). The existence of a causal power of an entity depends on the interaction of its parts (Archer 1998; Lawson 2019). Causal powers are capacities of relational structures (or entities) to bear a causal effect, such as an observable event or phenomenon (Elder-Vass 2007a). The events emerge contingently, but not necessarily from the structures. In other words, when causal powers are activated, events may or may not occur, depending on circumstantial factors (Mingers and Standing 2017). In that, the activation of causal powers does not pre-determine the events. Furthermore, events that occur may go observed or unobserved: “to be [ ] is not to be perceived” (Outhwaite 1998: 282). Critical realism, thus, understands causality as tendencies (Outhwaite 1998).

3.2 Critical realism in practice

Social events unfold in an open system (Sayer 2000). In other words, social scientific inquiry does not enjoy the luxury of a real experimental control (Lawson 1998). The 'central mode of inference' in critical realist empirical work is the one of retroduction (Lawson 1998: 156), which allows reasoning from data about events to the transfactual processes that eventually have caused them. The aim, therefore, is not to establish generalisations, or general laws, about a phenomenon (Lawson 1998). The overall aim of retroduction is to explain events through the identification of causal powers that can at least facilitate if not produce the observed events (Bhaskar 2008/1975; Lawson 1998). In that, and in Hu's words (2018:122), "a retroductive study requires at least two things: (1) explication of the focal event (domain of the actual) from empirical observations and (2) a hypothesis of the existence of causal powers, mechanisms and their underlying structures that are not subject to direct observation".

Recent years have seen an increasing number of articles that apply critical realism to empirical analysis (see *e.g.* the collections edited by Price and Martin 2018 and Price and Lotz-Sisitka 2016). Although there is no agreed upon method of applying critical realism to empirical studies, commonalities seem to emerge (Price and Martin 2018; Fletcher 2017; Hu 2018; Simmonds and Gazley 2018; Hoddy 2019; Parr 2015). In practice, a natural point of departure for an inquiry is the description and explication of the event under study (Hu 2018), in search for tendencies or so-called demi-regularities (Lawson 1998; Fletcher 2017). In Lawson's (1998: 149) words: "A demi-regularity [- -] is precisely a partial event regularity which *prima facie* indicates the occasional, but less than universal, actualization of a mechanism or tendency, over a definite region of time-space." These demi-regularities occur in the domain of the *empirical*, and are often grasped through interpretive methods (Hoddy 2019).

Furthermore, the heart of a critical realist empirical inquiry is in the mapping of the structural relations and conditions that enable events to occur. The thought operation from 'manifest phenomena of social life, as conceptualized in the experience of the social agents concerned, to the essential relations that necessitate them' is referred to as retroduction (Bhaskar 1998a/1979: 28). Retroduction is reasoning back and forth between the empirical observations and the more abstract, sometimes unobservable reasons behind them. Retroduction is the search for causal hypotheses (Lawson 1998). It is about identifying factors that help produce what has been empirically observed – and identifying the necessary conditions that enable causal powers to produce the observed effect (Lawson 1998; Fletcher 2017).

There is no one way of conducting retroduction. The process of retroduction emphasises the role of the researcher, and it is said to be less structured, leaving space for creativity (Lawson 1998; McAvoy and Butler 2018). In addition, several methods are proposed and used to guide the conduct of retroduction. For example, Hoddy (2019) advocates the use of grounded theory for retroduction, whereas Fletcher (2017) sees that grounded theory is in contradiction to the place of initial theory in critical realism. Indeed, views differ on whether *a priori* theory is needed for critical realist inquiry (McAvoy and Butler 2018). According to Bhaskar (1998a/1979), theories are fallible, and a researcher should avoid strictly committing to specific *a priori* theories. Many authors have chosen to apply abduction in conjunction with retroduction, which allows for an initial theory to facilitate the analysis without falling into theory-determinism (*e.g.* Hoddy 2019; Fletcher 2017). Abduction is also called theoretical re-description, and in retroductive work, it is used to re-describe empirical demi-regularities with concepts guided by initial theory (Fletcher 2017). This approach is also adopted in my dissertation.

Finally, critical realist inquiries often refer to *rational judgement* (or judgemental rationality) in comparing and evaluating competing explanations about the causes of observed events (Price and Martin 2018). The guideline for rational judgement is to judge possible explanations or theories in the light of collected evidence for and against, and in Outhwaite's words (1998:291-2), "[w]e shall therefore feel that we have a good explanation if (1) the postulated mechanism is capable of explaining the phenomena; (2) we have good reason to believe in its existence; (3) we cannot think of any equally good alternatives."

It becomes clear that the application of critical realism is in a rather nascent stage (Bhaskar 2014; Fletcher 2017; Bunt 2018). The terminology is not always consistent, and neither are the procedures followed. First, retroduction has been advocated and used both as a methodology and as a framework (Hu 2018; Bunt 2016). Hu (2018) refers to retroduction as a methodology in comparing it with inductive and deductive approaches that, from a critical realist perspective, are both seen as explaining observations of events in the ontological domain of the *empirical*. Patel and Pilgrim (2018) argue for a retroductive framework to serve as a common logic allowing for cross- and multidisciplinary understanding of an issue or event, especially cutting across approaches of experience and those of formally codified understanding. Each theory, drawing on its epistemological commitment, is seen to uncover a particular aspect of the causal mechanisms that underpin the observed phenomena (see discussion in relation to theoretical triangulation in Modell 2015). As such, the framework serves well the study of human behaviour in an institutional environment that may seem, at first, to provide an epistemological dilemma: our subjective realities are influenced by entities of a more objective nature. Hu's (2018) and Patel and Pilgrim's (2018) points are not mutually exclusive. However, in my dissertation, I am building on the latter, in that I use the framework to interpret the results of studies conducted through different epistemological lenses.

Second, Lawson (2019) argues that the literature on emergence is inconsistent and uninforming in terms of guiding research on the mechanisms that bring entities into being. Lawson (2019: 197) writes: "the category of emergence seems often to serve as little more than a placeholder to indicate an incompleteness or gap in the analysis, and specifically an absence of any account of processes whereby unprecedented phenomena occur." He amplifies that the gap is to be filled with further historical and diachronic research. In the context of culture and institutions, I understand that this could refer to the historical coevolution that has shaped the current institutional structure. My research in this collection, however, does not involve the time dimension and, as such, the mechanisms that historically have formed such ‘entities with causal powers’, as crucially important as they are, fall beyond the scope. In corresponding words, my work here mainly revolves around the issues of identifying the parts of the entities and their relations that together form causal powers, which furthermore have reflections in the observable reality (see Elder-Vass 2007a). Their further elaboration is an issue for social ontology.

3.3 On social ontology

Understanding the nature of the very objects of the study lays the foundations for any social (and why not natural) scientific inquiry (Lawson 2019). This is the question of social ontology. Any discipline defines the entities under scrutiny and within its interest. Elder-Vass (2007a: 228) argues that social sciences fall short in social ontological rigour in loosely employing concepts such as “discourse, the state, institutions, values [- -] and human individuals”. Lawson (2019) argues that this is especially the case for modern economics.

Here, I have adopted the New Institutional Economic definition, according to which institutions are rules that guide human interaction (North 1990). These rules can be formal or informal (ibid.). In terms of critical realist stratified ontology and the nature of social reality, elaborations are in order. The existence of intransitive objects, which are independent of our knowing of them, is central to critical realist theorising. If institutions are human-devised (North 1990), how can they be intransitive? The matter is not simply straightforward (Archer 1998; Outhwaite 1998). Bhaskar (1998b: 41) posits that structures and generative mechanisms “exist and act independently of the conditions that allow men access to them” and that they are “relatively independent of the patterns of events and the actions of men alike”. In other words, structures are seen as having temporal priority or temporal pre-existence vis-á-vis individual action (Archer 1998), which means that they are seen as durable for a certain time-space. Archer (1996), moreover, maintains that, in a similar vein, culture can be seen to have such temporal pre-existence.

The pre-existence of institutional structure underpins my research, too. The assumption that formal or otherwise established structures, such as laws or a retail market structure within a country, pre-exist for a consumer at any given point of time, appears rather self-declaring. However, what Archer (1996; 1998) and Bhaskar (1998b; 1998c) are referring to is *social structure*. Although institutional structure and social structure are sometimes used interchangeably, as pointed out by Fleetwood (2008), there is social ontological work to be done to define these concepts. This is, in fact, an arduous task, and doing justice to the nuanced discussion on the matter exceeds the possibilities of this forum. Thus, I briefly lay out my understanding of these concepts, and refer the reader to other sources for further reflection (see Fleetwood 2008; Hodgson 2004; Elder-Vass 2007b).

Concisely, Bhaskar (1998c), among other critical realist writers (*e.g.* Lawson 2019; Archer 1998; Outhwaite 1998), sees the intransitive in social sciences as *relational*: "relations between individuals (and groups), and [- -] the relations between these relations (and between such relations and nature and the products of such relations) (p. 209)". In the critical realist view, such relations are relatively and sufficiently enduring to be regarded as intransitive, and having temporal priority vis-á-vis individual action (Archer 1998). Thus, I understand social structure as relational structure between human beings (see also Granovetter 1985). Institutions, on the other hand, pre-exist (temporally) for an individual without reference to a relation to another individual or group of individuals. For example, social class is a social structure, but not an institution; a law is an institution, not a social structure. The distinction resembles the one presented by Fleetwood (2008), although his idea of formal institutions somewhat differs from the one presented in the previous section.

Moreover, according to Bhaskar (1998c), the temporal pre-existence of social structure entails a *transformational* nature of social activity. This refers to the connection between society (macro) and people (micro). The transformational model, in contrast with Weberian and Durkheimian ideas, suggests that "[s]ociety is both the ever-present *condition* (material cause) and the continually reproduced *outcome* of human agency" (Bhaskar 1998c: 215, see also Lawson 2019). Bhaskar (1998c) reflects the transformational model from Aristotelian and Marxian thoughts, but its more contemporary advocate, Giddens (1984), offers a connection between critical realist thinking and theories of practice: the transformational model resembles Giddens' (1984) structuration theory that has inspired developments of practice theories. In fact, Bhaskar's (1998c) own verbalisation about the objectivation of pre-existing structural conditions resembles the very idea of *a practice* in practice theoretical thinking (Reckwitz 2002). Bhaskar (1998c: 214) writes: "[C]onsider *saying*, *making* and *doing* as characteristic modalities of human agency. People cannot communicate except by utilizing existing media, produce except by applying themselves to materials which are already formed, or act save in some or other context. Speech requires language; making materials; action conditions; agency resources; activity rules". These ideas give rise to a crucial social ontological distinction between practices and institutions.

In institutional economic literature, practices are assigned different meanings. In the contemporary tradition, practices (or habits) are sometimes listed as informal institutions along with, for instance, values, customs, and traditions (*e.g.* Dobler 2011). Sometimes institutions themselves are defined as patterned behaviours (*e.g.* Foster 1981). I will want to argue for a different approach, which I see being in line with a critical realist transformational model of social reality – and with theories of practice. Practices are fundamentally different from institutions in that practices are the flow of human conduct of life for which institutional structure creates the conditions of possibilities. This is the approach that I have explicitly applied in Article II in this collection. Similar ideas have been presented by, at least, Fleetwood (2008), and to some extent Hodgson (2006). Fleetwood (2008) articulates that treating institutions as practices "confuses the *conditions* that make action possible with the action itself" (Fleetwood 2008: 243).

Finally, as to culture, I wish to make a note on the original or 'old' institutional literature. Bearing a resemblance to the transformational model of social activity, Veblen (1909: 629) writes: "The growth and mutations of the institutional fabric are an outcome of the conduct of the individual members of the group, since it is out of the experience of the individuals, through the habituation of individuals, that institutions arise; and it is in this same experience that these institutions act to direct and define the aims and end of conduct." Furthermore, Veblen (1909: 626) coins institutions as "settled habits of thought common to the generality of men". Veblen, in other words, sees the 'institutional fabric' as, to a large extent, *informal*, even *cultural* in that it embraces the historically shaped common understandings of how the social world functions. Commons' (1931) idea of institutions as historically accumulated understandings of rules that guide present individual action also seems to be compatible with Veblen's ideas, as argued by Tauheed (2013). In that, taking a step towards a cultural theory understanding of culture (discussed in section 2.2) echoes the original institutional thinking. Furthermore, Veblen's (1909) ideas of the habituated reproduction of rules resembles not only the transformational model but also seems compatible with the foundations of practice theoretical thinking – a connection further elaborated in Article II in this collection.

3.4 Theoretical framework, methods and data

To summarise the story so far, I assemble the overarching theoretical framework out of the ideas of critical realism and institutional economics, presented in the previous sections. The framework serves to guide the overarching interpretation of my three articles, which all build on different theories and are conducted through different epistemological lenses. The framework, therefore, is not a theory in itself. Instead, it offers a social ontological way to conceptualise the constraints on the sustainability of consumption, which the articles themselves illuminate from different perspectives and with different vocabularies. The theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

After presenting the framework, I introduce and reflect the philosophical assumptions underlying each study in relation to critical realism, focusing on the piece of knowledge that each of the individual articles can add to the overall picture. The data, and the methods used to collect and analyse them, are summarized in Table 1 and described in more thorough detail in each respective publication.

A foundational component of the framework is an institutional structure, or 'institutional fabric', to borrow Veblen's (1909) words. An institution is a human-devised rule that guides behaviour (North 1990). Institutions exist in countless relations to each other, forming a structure of structures that interact to cause effects in the observable world (Bhaskar 2008; Elder-Vass 2007a). Together, institutions have causal powers that are irreducible to the sum of causal powers that each individual institution might have (Lawson 2019; Elder-Vass 2007a). The institutional structure is intransitive, in that it exists spatiotemporally independently from the observer; the institutional structure has temporal pre-existence vis-á-vis individual action (Bhaskar 1998; Archer 1996).

The whole of the institutional structure remains unobserved, but the effects caused by the structural relations may be observed in *the empirical* domain of ontology (Bhaskar 2008; Sayer 2000). These observable effects may further guide human behaviour. We may also observe individual institutions that may directly guide human behaviour. We do not observe the causal powers that are the properties of institutions (Elder-Vass 2007a). Thus, observable events occur within a set of relational rules that can be observable or unobservable. Moreover, the world is an open system, and the effects, even if initiated, may not be realised as events due to circumstantial factors (Outhwaite 1998; Lawson 2019).

The institutional fabric is a web of relations between both formal and informal institutions. Informal institutions refer to *cultural* features in that they endure uncodified, and they are to some extent commonly shared. Furthermore, the framework suggests a distinction between *foundational culture* and definable *informal institutions*. In line with cultural theory understanding, foundational culture refers to collectively shared symbolic structures of knowledge that "enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world" (Reckwitz 2002: 245-246). In that, foundational culture comprises the resources for collectively shared understanding about the functioning of the world, or in Veblen's (1909: 626) words: "settled habits of thought common to the generality of men". Moreover, these knowledge structures can give rise to analytically more isolable informal institutions, such as certain kinds of conventions or traditions. The framework, furthermore, suggests that there are cultural features that pre-exist individual action (Archer 1996).

Building on the reasoning and evidence within institutional economics, the framework suggests the embedded nature of economic action, and the functioning of institutions (Williamson 2000; Boettke *et al.* 2008; Seidler 2014; Seidler 2018). Within the structure, there may be multi-layered embeddedness between culture, informal institutions, and formal institutions and their configurations.

The whole institutional structure forms the condition-makers for practices to emerge and endure. Practices are, therefore, partially embedded in the institutional structure; the structure comes to both constrain and enable the formation and moulding of practices. Here, I understand practices through some founding ideas of practice theories, namely those related to Bourdieu (1990; 1998) and Reckwitz (2002). Bourdieu's (1990) concepts *habitus* and *field* refer to the nature of human action that underlies the idea of a practice. To recall, an individual's *habitus* depicts socially acquired, cognitive, and somatic dispositions to orient herself in the flow-conduct of life. Habitus develops within the social *field* of an individual. In line with critical realist thinking, and the proposed socio-ontological distinction between social structure and institutional structure, I understand that the formation of a social field further reflects the intransitive, institutional structure that the individual encounters in her life. Thus, individuals come to engage with the structural environment through practices that, in the context of everyday life, take a routinised but not non-reflexive form. Practices interconnect mental and bodily activities with material surroundings and (often tacit) knowledge about the use of structural resources and their imbued meanings (see Reckwitz 2002). I will revisit the concept of a practice in relation to discourses in the discussion on Article III.

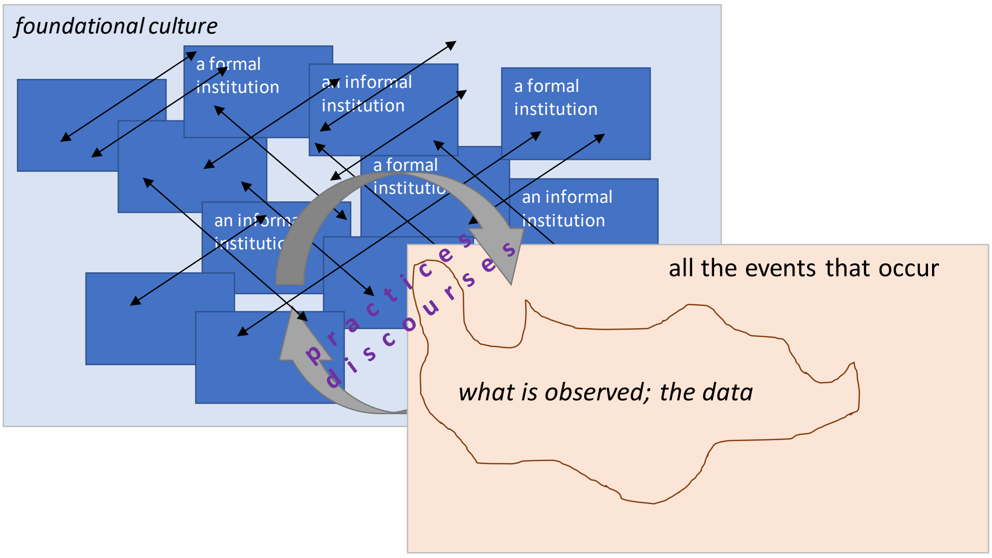

Figure 1. An illustration of the theoretical framework. The events emerge from the structure.

Below, I turn to the three articles in this dissertation. Each of them has been conducted under a different research tradition. The purpose here is to consider the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions of the articles in light of the theoretical framework presented here. Due to the different research traditions in the articles, their vocabulary and concepts also differ[2]. The aim is not to unite the deployed concepts, but rather to interpret the results on a higher level of abstraction, through commensurable understanding of the nature of what is real, and what is there to be known.

[2] For example, in this dissertation, a practice is operationalised on an empirical level only in Article II. The article analyses the agentic versus embedded nature of everyday practices at home, drawing intellectually from Bourdieu and to some extent Giddens. In the sustainable consumption domain, therefore, the analysis has traces from Spaargarenian thought, which emphasises individuals' capability to challenge and change the prevailing structures (Spaargaren and Van Vlient 2000). However, the context of the study, situated practices at home, is more characteristic of a Shovenian line of research (Shove 2003). The analysis emphasises the moments of consumption within practices (Warde 2005), instead of focusing on the use of technical systems that feature in the research of Shove and others (*e.g.* Shove 2003). However, the analysis itself taps into the resources of both lines of thinking, in that it acknowledges the path-dependency in practice formation together with the agentic capacity to drive change. See further discussion on the divergence of the thoughts of Spaargaren and Shove in Welch and Warde (2015).

Article I

The conduct of the first article in this collection is based on the paradigm of logical positivism. At the outset, critical realism arose from the criticism of positivist understanding of epistemology (Bhaskar 2008/1975). Bhaskar (2008/1975) critiqued positivism for epistemic fallacy; that ontology is reduced to epistemology. In positivist metatheory, knowledge is what can be empirically verified; it is derived from observational evidence coded into reliable measurements – and that forms what is real (Chirkov and Anderson 2018; Lainá 2018). Logical positivism enhances the scope of pure empiricism to allow for logical theorisation beyond the directly observable (Lainá 2018). The goal of science, according to the variants of positivism, is to empirically discover regularities that are replicable and representative of the nature of the studied phenomenon (Chirkov and Anderson 2018).

Critical realism shares the realist ontology with positivism in that both subscribe to the view that there is a world beyond our minds and human-devised constructs. However, the stratified ontology characteristic of critical realist philosophy and the different views on epistemology bear several consequences. First and foremost, there is the issue of causality. To recap, critical realism does not aim to empirically prove a causal link from X to Z, but understands causality through underlying mechanisms that work through the stratified ontology (Bhaskar 1998a/1979). In this light, the ideal of replicable empirical relationships looks contestable, too (Bhaskar 2008/1975; Chirkov and Anderson 2018). The causal mechanisms may not always produce their effect in the observable domain of the empirical due to circumstantial, spatial-temporal factors.

In line with the logical positivist research tradition, in my first article in this collection, I derive a model of value-driven consumer behaviour based on previous literature, and use inferential statistics based on null-hypothesis tests of significance. As a result, I present a statistically significant model depicting regularities in consumers' personal characteristics and their inclination to look for sustainability information at a grocery store. Then, what knowledge does the research offer? Chirkov and Anderson (2018: 730) argue, in their critical realist critique of statistical positivism, that such inquiries, no matter how rigorously conducted, offer "a de-personalized, a-contextual, and a-historical abstract conglomerate of variables connected by statistical associations that reflect nothing more than these variables' covariances". The study does not say anything about causality, I agree. A multiple linear regression model shows how much variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variation in the independent variables, and this does not mean that the independent variables cause the dependent variable in any way. Neither does the model itself contribute towards a general, universal law. This is not only due to the relatively small sample size (N=350), which is hardly generalisable to some population, but to the very purpose and goal of such an inquiry. To illustrate, I agree that such models give "de-personalized, a-contextual, and a-historical" accounts of phenomena. Instead, I interpret the model as a tendency, a demi-regularity that we observe in the ontological domain of the *empirical*. In other words, *this is what seems to be happening in the world*, or at least among the sample of university students in Finland, Hong Kong, and Spain. As such, it gives an idea of a tendency that depends on various mechanism that, in turn, arise from a relational structure of formal and informal institutions. Together with complementary accounts of the phenomenon, a more coherent picture can be drawn of these underlying contextual causes.

Article II

Article II is an institutional ethnographic study. Institutional ethnography is a methodology to grasp how practices, as in lived experiences of people, are coordinated and controlled by processes that "extend outside the scope of the everyday world and are not discoverable within it" (Smith 1987: 152). The approach sees the lived practices being institutionally coordinated through "institutionally designed realities", and these come in the form of texts and discourses (Smith 2005: 27). Key terminology in institutional ethnography includes the *standpoint*, *problematic*, and *ruling relations* (Rankin 2017a). Their elaboration reveals the ontological groundings of the "alternate sociology", as Smith (2005: 50) describes institutional ethnography.

The standpoint refers to the people being studied: the people do not transform into objects of the study, but retains their position as subjects within a standpoint (Smith 2005). A standpoint has an empirical locality within a particular set of institutional relations that shape what is common in the people's experiences (Rankin 2017a). A standpoint is from where an empirical inquiry begins; from the people's reality within which the people themselves know best *what is going on in their daily lives* (Smith 2005). However, "their knowledge is examined for its social construction and its embedded contradictions. What is regarded as 'true' is the material description of things that happen—that loosely agreed upon 'world in common'", in Rankin's (2017a: 2) words. What, in turn, is objectified in an institutional ethnographic study are the ruling relations that orchestrate the daily lives (Smith 2005). The research problematics becomes the whole arena of this orchestration, recognising "the real interpenetration of the present and immediate with the unknown elsewhere and elsewhen" (Smith 2005: 41). Thus, in institutional ethnography, the ontological ground extends beyond people's socially constructed realities (Smith 2005). The *social* becomes real in the coordination of people's doings (ibid.).

Smith, the founding mother of institutional ethnography, quite evidently does not seem to be a critical realist. She, in fact, refuses to make epistemological statements: "Problems of how we can know the social, the objectivity, or the status of institutional ethnography's findings vis-à-vis 'reality' are largely irrelevant to a project of inquiry that does not claim to transcend indexicality, that is, the actualities from which its findings are extracted and which the latter refer back" (Smith 2005: 52). Smith, in fact, rejects the idea of social structure, but sees the coordination of people's activities to be found in the people's activities.

In my study, I have reasoned the people's experiences within an institutional setting that, implicitly, is assumed to exist beyond people's experiences. Furthermore, the coordination, or the institutional influences, are seen and reasoned as they are realised in the people's activities. However, I assume in my study that these acts of coordination could be imposed from outside, and thus they could be approached as acts separate from people's activities. In fact, I assume an institutional structure. Thus, implicitly, I am placing, very gently, my institutional ethnographic study within a critical realist stratified ontology. I am not the first to talk about institutional ethnography and critical realism together, however. Longhofer *et al.* (2013) use an institutional ethnographic case study to illustrate policy influence on clinical practice within a broader philosophical commitment to critical realism. I also see manners of description in institutional ethnographic accounts that could be reflected from a critical realist philosophy. For example, Rankin (2017a: 3) describes ruling relations as "generated at a distance from the 'standpoint'", but as being "'activated' by people in a local setting". Thus, ruling relations could be seen to have causal powers that can be activated by the actions of people to cause observable effects in the open system.

Article III

Article III draws on the hermeneutic research tradition. Discourse analysis – as wide and versatile a research enterprise as it may be – is representative of the social constructionist linguistic turn in social sciences (Phillips and Oswick 2012). Generally, discourse analysis understands language as constitutive of reality; as a constructive force defining what reality is (Hardy *et al.* 2005). That is, language is not seen as merely a reflection of reality. This view, and social constructionism more generally, is traditionally linked with anti-realist ontology (Elder-Vass 2012). However, several authors have argued for at least partial compatibility between social constructionist research and the critical realist paradigm despite their diverging ontological understandings (Sims-Schouten and Riley 2019; Al-Amoudi and Willmot 2011; Elder-Vass 2012; Newton *et al.* 2011; Price and Martin 2018). Indeed, Fairclough (2005; 2018) argues that a critical realist approach to discourse analysis may enhance its potential to study social change. After all, the contribution to change is seen as a key aim of critical discourse analytical research (van Dijk 1993).

Both social constructionism and critical realism share a common understanding of relativist epistemology, in Lawson's (2003: 162) words "the idea that our categories, frameworks of thinking, modes of analysis, ways of seeing things, habits of thought, dispositions of every kind, motivating concerns, interests, values, and so forth, are affected by our life paths and socio-cultural situations, and thereby make a difference in how we can and do 'see' or know or approach things, and indeed they bear on what we seek to know" (see also Newton *et al.* 2011; Al-Amoudi and Willmot 2011). This view is especially pronounced in critical discourse analysis, for socio-political stance is characteristic of it (van Dijk 1993).

More broadly, critical discourse analysis does not take discourse as exhaustive of reality, but relates it to societal conditions, especially to power relations between groups (van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 2005). While such a view already seems reasonably commensurable with the critical realist social reality, Fairclough (2005: 916) takes a step further in seeing discourse "in a relational way, with a focus on relations between linguistic/semiotic elements of the social and other (including material) elements". Following this view, critical discourse analysis can build knowledge on these relations, including how discourses can initiate change in non-discursive elements (Fairclough 2005). In other words, in critical realist reasoning, discourses are not seen as merely reflections of reality, nor as the only constitutive force of reality, but as an intrinsic part of social processes.

The Faircloughian approach to critical discourse analysis is not only relational, but also dialectical (Waugh *et al.* 2016; Banta 2012), denoting both dialectical reasoning and assumed dialectical relations between discourses and the non-discursive social realm (Fairclough 2018). Dialectic reasoning resonates the focus on societal change in critical discourse analysis; in Fairclough's (2018: 14) words, dialectic reasoning is "a way of reasoning from critique of discourse to what should be done to change existing reality, by way of explanation of relations between discourse and other components of reality". When contended that social phenomena are socially (also discursively) constructed (Fairclough 2005), such dialectical approach reveals conceptual compatibility with the critical realist transformational model. Discourse and 'other components of reality' condition one another (Fairclough 2018), and discourses reproduce the reality and social phenomena (van Dijk 1998); just as individual action reproduces 'the social structure' (Bhaskar 1998c). Fairclough (2005) sees discourses and social practices as intertwined: "Social practices may 'internalize' discursive elements, but they are not reducible to discourses" (Fairclough 2005: 924). Indeed, Fairclough (2005) understands social practices as mediators between structures and events in a critical realist sense.

The third article in this selection builds on the idea that organizational discourses, as forms of corporate communication, actively influence the social reality of a citizen-consumer (see also Caruana and Crane 2008). The study uses critical discourse analysis to study how nationalistic and pro-sustainability discourses are brought together to responsibilise a consumer. These organizational discourses, furthermore, can influence our understanding of nation and nationhood (Aronczyk 2013) and, on the other hand, consumer responsibility. They work to reproduce both nationalism and consumer responsibility in society. In a Faircloughian sense, these discourses can be further internalised into consumption practices. Indeed, Castelló and Mihelj (2017) define consumer nationalism as "a set of discourses and practices that attach national significance to consumer objects". Such practices and discourses are, furthermore, maintained and transformed by their carriers, the consumers. Simultaneously, and according to the transformation model, consumers may come to transform the societal structures in which these practices endure (see also Shove 2003).

Building on the 'philosophical underlabouring' laid out in this section, the following table presents the choices of methods and corresponding data in each article.

Table 1. Methods and data in the three distinctive articles

	Objective	Theoretical perspective	Methods	Data
Article I Who cares about product sustainability information at the moment of purchase? – Evidence from three countries	Analyses the impact of personal characteristics (esp. values and nationality and the respondents' perception of their own pro-sustainability behaviour in general) on the inclination to look for sustainability information in a grocery store.	Sustainable consumption studies on values, information, and buying behaviour, individualist paradigm.	Quantitative analysis; multiple linear regression analysis, using ordinary least squares (OLS). The value constructs derived from Schwartz's (1992; 1994) value theory. Self-developed measures for information searching behaviour (constructed of three survey items) and for perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour (constructed of six survey items).	Cross-sectional survey data collected from university students in Finland, Spain, and Hong Kong. The data was collected in 2015 using online questionnaire software. The research team had local assistance in distributing the questionnaire in each country. The total number of usable responses: 350.
Article II Institutions and agency in the sustainability of day-to-day consumption practices – An institutional ethnographic study	Explores to what extent sustainability in day-to-day consumption is embedded in the institutional structure; to what extent it is due to a well-considered choice of an individual.	Institutions and consumption (institutional economics), practice theoretical research on consumption.	The data analysis was explorative. The analysis was guided by theoretical concepts (esp. habitus & field by Bourdieu (1990)) that were used as analytical tools (as opposed to confirming a theory). Indexes were attached to data, to facilitate the linkages in the data. The data was compiled for each household and then compared. Institutional cues were detected from the data. Sustainability was assessed on a relative basis.	Data collection methods: participant observation (field notes), visual diaries of informants, interviews, diary for introspection. The data was collected in 2016 in a medium-sized Finnish city with 18 informants, aged 22 to 37. Informants had a university or college degree or studies under way.
Article III The responsibility of an ethnocentric consumer – nationalistic, patriotic, or environmentally conscientious? A critical discourse analysis of "buy domestic" campaigns	Analyses how consumer reality is constructed through meta-organisational discourses; how the use of nationalistic discourses, together with discourses on responsible consumption, creates opportunities and constraints for consumers to take action on environmental, social, and economic concerns.	Ethnocentric consumption (international marketing literature), critical organisational discourse analysis.	Theory-driven data analysis facilitated by coding of descriptive categories. The theoretical focus was on how discourses construct concepts, objects, and subject positions (Hardy and Phillips 2004), drawing interdiscursively (Fairclough 2018) from discursive resources on nationalism, patriotism, and responsibility more broadly. The texts were coded by two researchers and analysed together to understand the discursive responsibilisation of an ethnocentric consumer.	Campaign texts (Blue-White Footprint and Produce of Finland) collected from the organisations' Internet sites from 2014–2016. The data from the Blue-White Footprint campaign consists of 193 news articles, 38 research reports, 156 press releases, and 62 blog posts. The complementary data of the Produce of Finland campaign consists of 37 web pages and 27 press releases.

Finally, a note on sustainable consumption as a concept. Section 1 elaborated a broad understanding of sustainable consumption as building on environmental, social, and economic responsibility over the effects posed by consumption. While subscribing to this notion, I further acknowledge that the operationalisation of the concept requires further definition. All of the attached three articles in this dissertation discuss *sustainable consumption*, and further define the concept for the purpose of each study, as each article approaches sustainability from a different angle. The first paper addresses the characteristics of people who are likely to look for product sustainability information at the moment of purchase. As such, the paper addresses sustainability through a particular kind of information that is available to consumers; the question of whether this sustainability information corresponds to some particular definition of sustainability falls beyond the scope. In turn, the second paper addresses sustainability more directly, as it asks whether sustainability of day-to-day consumption is a conscious choice or more of an embedded nature. The paper takes a relative approach to sustainability, defined broadly as an action that is likely to contribute towards sustainable development more than an alternative action. The third paper discusses most directly the concept of sustainable consumption *per se*, as it studies how it is discursively configured together with other seemingly separate discourses. The paper, therefore, touches upon the definitional boundaries of sustainability of consumption in relation to similar concepts and concepts that are different but used in similar contexts.

3.5 A discussion on rigour and the researcher's position

As the three distinct articles are all conducted methodologically under different research paradigms, the traditions to evaluate their rigour also differ from each other. Creswell and Miller (2000: 124) propose that the procedures for establishing validity in research reflect "the lens researchers choose to validate their studies and researchers' paradigm assumptions". Moreover, plain disputes arise on how to address the quality of a study, often across the qualitative–quantitative border (see *e.g.* Cypress 2017; Morse 2015). Sometimes these disputes go unmentioned but become evident in the language used in discussing the quality of research; condescending or defensive tones, too, reflect the preoccupation of the researcher (see discussion in Töttö 2000).

Then, how is it possible to induce the *quality* of research, if both the conduct of research and its evaluation are ultimately subjective matters? Several authors have proposed general frameworks to ensure the quality of research (*e.g.* Guba and Lincoln 1986; Creswell and Miller 2000; Tracy 2010). However, Guba and Lincoln (2005) turn to question the fruitfulness of universal criteria for (qualitative) research (see also Bochner 2000; Schwandt 1996). An alternative – or complementary – approach suggests that each research paradigm is best suited to decide on the terms of evaluating the research within it (Healy and Perry 2000; Madill *et al.* 2000). In the face of the cornucopia of suggested criteria for evaluation of, especially, qualitative research, acknowledging that each paradigm has its own traditions, expertise, and excellence to ensure credibility, has certain appeal.

The overall frameworks to assess the quality of the research differ in scope and content, but they seem to share a common idea of *credibility* as a sign of quality (Creswell and Miller 2000). Good research is *credible.* Credibility is characterised with words such as trustworthiness, plausibility of research outcomes, and verisimilitude (Tracy 2010). I hold credibility as an overarching quality aim of my research, which is, to be explicit, again a value-laden choice of a researcher. There are, arguably, few approaches to credibility that rather generally apply to the conduct of a research inquiry. When assessing the quality (or rigour or credibility) of a piece of research, there are two angles to it: the evaluation of the end result, and the evaluation of the process of doing the research (Cypress 2017). It is the evaluation of the whole doing of the research that, in my opinion and understanding, applies broadly to various kinds of research endeavours. I will first lay out my understanding of these, and then move on to reflect the credibility of each individual study under its own particular paradigm.

First, there is the issue of the researcher's position. As has become quite clear so far, I conform to a critical realist view on epistemological relativism. I acknowledge that as a researcher, I bring my own *a priori* knowledge to the process of doing research. This influences my research. Although such a 'confession' is characteristic of a qualitative researcher, I subscribe to the view that this is an inescapable feature of all research, for several reasons.

To begin with, the research questions pursued do not appear from a vacuum. In Bhaskar and Lawson's (1998: 14-15) words: "[T]he sort of issues that are addressed in science will reflect the situations, perspectives and personal-social histories, and so forth, of the scientist without supposing thereby that all knowledge is merely a social construct, immune to rational critical assessment." So, if asked, would anyone else compose a doctoral dissertation in a critical realist institutional economic framework to address the questions of institutional, cultural, agentic, and discursively constructed constraints on sustainable consumption? My fair guess for an answer is 'no'. Then, does this establish a bias in my research? Ménard and Shirley (2014) give an illuminating account of the development of New Institutional Economics, reflecting the personal academic histories of key authors in that field. Their review shows that it is not only individual pieces of research that are influenced by the personal histories of researchers, but also whole bodies of literature. Frankly, who one meets, who one talks with, and who one reads matter for one's research, as arbitrary as it might seem.

Perhaps a more controversial aspect of the researcher 'biases' is the impact that a researcher's preoccupations may have on the process of doing research. Again, I wish to make it visible that *who I am* influences the way I do research. I will reflect this through the example of interviewing, from the point of view of both collecting the data and analysing the data. I see interviews never as only about soliciting information from respondents, but as interactive situations (see Ellis and Berger 2001). I acknowledge that, as an interviewer, I bring my own subjectivity into the reciprocity that emerges in interview situations (Ryan *et al.* 2009). As an interviewer, I am foremost a listener, an underframe for people to talk and narrate their story. Although this is a choice I make as a researcher, it is also a choice that aligns with my personality and my ontological preoccupations. I aim for a dialogue with the interviewee, which I believe can help dissolve the hierarchical gap that the research situation is likely to encourage between the interviewer and interviewee (Legard *et al.* 2003). In that, my interviewing style resembles reflexive dyadic interviewing, in which "[t]he interview is conducted more as a conversation between two equals than as a distinctively hierarchical, question-and-answer exchange, and the interviewer tries to tune in to the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics within the interview itself" (Gubrium and Holstein 1997 in Ellis and Berger 2001: 854). In the interviews that I conducted for my institutional ethnographic study, for example, we started talking about day-to-day consumption without any reference to sustainability from my side. This approach let me observe how the interviewee herself constructed the idea of sustainability in the consumption context, which often also revealed deeper attitudes towards the issue. This approach also helps to prevent me from bringing in my own pre-understandings of sustainability, which have taken shape through my education.

On the other hand, as interviewees and interviews are all very different, I end up with a rich dataset that, however, might be difficult to expose to inter-interview comparisons. Certainly, 'coding' the text for emerging themes will appear challenging and even controversial. The data analysis is hardly objective in terms of high inter-observer consistency. Instead, the credibility of the analysis can be induced through *transparency* and *self-reflexivity*, which Tracy (2010) together calls *sincerity* (see also Richardson 2000). "Sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher's biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research" (Tracy 2010: 841). Part of the transparency is making the subjectivity visible. In each study, I have attempted to give a thorough account of what has been done, and how, in the process of conducting research. I have also paid significant attention to being aware of what I am doing, and what others are doing, and making both as explicit as I could. However, there is not always the space to do so in an article to be published (in 10 000 words) in an academic journal, and thus I am devoting a few pages to it in this introductory part of my dissertation.

As for self-reflexivity, I wish to say out loud the concern about conducting a multi-epistemological dissertation. Is it possible to conduct three pieces of research under three different research paradigms without compromising the rigour and the credibility of the studies; is it possible to master three different methodologies? Here, I hope that transparency in the research conduct will speak for itself. Furthermore, "[a] research endeavour, whether quantitative or qualitative, is always evaluated for its worth and merits by peers, experts, reviewers, and readers", articulates Cypress (2017: 255). These feedback-givers, ideally, represent the same research tradition, and apply established criteria to evaluate the particular piece of knowledge in question. Thus, peer-reviewing and conference presentations can, ideally, serve to induce the credibility of research. Each article in this collection is published in a peer-reviewed academic journal, and each one has been presented on several occasions: at conferences, seminars, and workshops. In addition, co-authoring at its best is a continuous dialogue between the researchers throughout the research process and, thus, potentially induces reflexivity on research conduct, subject-matter, and self.

Moreover, closely related to sincerity, I understand research integrity, or “responsible conduct of research”, to be a vital part of credibility (Steneck 2006). In a very pragmatic manner, it extends the concern from the way research is carried out to the potential consequences of research (Chen 2016). First and foremost, I understand this as the potential harm my research could do to the informants who share part of their lives for research purposes. Informed consent and responsible data management are key, but I also sincerely aim to write research in a ‘truthful’ way that respects the informants’ understandings in their contexts. The communication of the results should also be respectful of the informants involved in the study. Overall, the research has been conducted under the guidelines provided by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity.

Now, I turn to research paradigmatic evaluation of the three research articles. As to the quality assessment of the research results, there are well-established concepts for the evaluation of quantitative research: validity and reliability, generalisability, and objectivity (*e.g.* Lincoln and Cuba 1986). Article I makes use of summated scales, and their reliability was ensured through internal consistency of the constructs. This ensures that the items included in a construct are highly correlated and, thus, they measure the same thing. Internal consistency was evaluated using the reliability coefficient, Cronbach’s alpha. The Cronbach’s alphas for all the constructs were higher than the recommended cut-off value of 0.7, and thus the measurement scales are deemed reliable. For the models, standard procedures were carried out to ensure that violations of the assumptions for multiple linear regression would not occur. Furthermore, no omitted variable bias, functional form misspecification, or simultaneous causality bias were observed. This builds up internal validity for the model; that the models are not biased or inconsistent.

Furthermore, a word of caution can be cast on the self-developed scales. Their internal consistency is acceptable, as discussed above, but the scales were not cross-validated, and their stability over time remains unknown (see *e.g.* Neff 2003). This is mainly due to the cross-sectional nature of the dataset. In addition, the empirical model was derived from a large dataset, partly in a rather explorative manner, though guided by theoretical understanding of the matter at hand. This sort of research practice is, however, somewhat questionable from a hypothesis testing perspective. Finally, the sample size is small, and as such, generalisability becomes an issue. Inferences made to (any) larger population should be very careful. However, as discussed in previous section, I will interpret the results as tendencies, or demi-regularities in an open world, and as such they give valuable insight into the subject matter of this dissertation.

The second article is an institutional ethnographic study. Its evaluation criteria are not quite straightforward. The methodology and methods used do not equal ethnographic research; for example, institutional ethnographic studies can be conducted without participant observation, and the study does not need to include living with a community of informants (Rankin 2017a). Although evaluation criteria for ethnographic studies do not necessarily apply without caution, they provide an angle for looking at the research.

Richardson (2000) lists five (widely cited) criteria according to which she reviews ethnographic works: whether the research makes a contribution to understanding social life; whether it expresses a reality; whether the text is reflexive and whether it affects the reader; and what are the aesthetic merits of the paper. I will first take on the reflexivity. The written analysis could be more reflexive. It is written in the third person; it does not explicitly situate the writer, that is myself, in the story. I would do it differently, if was to write the paper again. The article was the first piece of work of my very own, and I was insecure writing myself into the paper. As to the aesthetics of the text, I was not quite aware of this criterion when writing. “Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?” (Richardson 2000: 254). I would hope so, but I lack the tools to self-evaluate this. Also, how the text affects or moves the reader is left for them to discover. However, I do think that the paper makes a nice contribution to understanding social reality, and how it links to more external circumstances, as discussed in the paper and in this dissertation introduction.

Rankin (2017b) provides a practical guide for conducting an institutional ethnographic inquiry, and gives a list of cautions, or pitfalls that researchers may encounter. Rankin (2017b: 9) warns that the researcher may “become trapped in the local”, in that they give thick descriptions on the informants’ everyday lives within the standpoint but fail to map the from-outside-coordination of their activities. I recognise that my written work revolves around the everyday lives of the informants. However, the whole analysis is guided by the idea that *everything we do connects to what others do and what happens outside our immediate life*. This, again, is in line with institutional ethnographic grounding, and this very principle leads me to explicate the presence of unconscious embeddedness of sustainability in consumption. However, I do not use textual analysis, which is one prominent approach to the ruling relations and their influence in everyday lives. In fact, my third article can be understood as an example of such textuality in the ruling relations.

Finally, there is the toughest critique that can be cast on my work. Rankin (2017a) advocates that institutional theory should not incorporate any *a priori* theory, and neither should it aim to create one. Furthermore, institutional ethnographic inquiry should not be combined with other conceptual frameworks, of which Rankin (2017b) specifically mentions practice theory. My work, in my view, concurs with the first principle. I am not, as such, imposing a theory onto my data, and as a result, I present a conceptual understanding of how the coordination may have an impact on our daily lives. In that, my work can be seen to “empirically link, describe, and explicate tensions embedded in people’s practices” (Rankin 2017a: 8). As for the latter, the suggested inappropriateness of using complementary conceptual frameworks, I feel unease. I obviously violate this principle. I use Bourdieu's (1990) habitus and field to help explicate the research problematic in my work. Rankin (2017b: 8) states: "While IE may be congruent with other critical analytical frameworks, IE's social ontology demands an explication of the materialized social relations that coordinate what actually happens in the practices of people—that the researcher problematizes." Rankin (2017b) uses the institutional ethnographic ontology to argue for the inappropriateness of using complementary frameworks, but it is exactly the materialised social relations that I am after in my study, and that is why I use institutional ethnography in the first place. Obviously, this is seen as questionable.

The third and final piece of research is a social constructionist work, using critical discourse analysis as a methodology. Accordingly, evaluation criteria for social constructionist work can serve as the starting point, extended with methodology-specific criteria (Ong *et al.* 2020). According to Ong *et al.* (2020: 462), the proposed general criteria span the issues of the "appropriateness of the qualitative approach for the research question, connection to the literature, selection of data, analytic processes, clear presentation of findings, and position of the author(s)." Especially the issue of the selection of data has been discussed in critical discourse analytic work in a critical light (Widdowson 1998). In Potter's (1996: 21) words: "[p]erhaps the most important and distinctive feature in the validation of discourse work is the presentation of rich and extended materials in a way that allows readers of discourse studies to evaluate their adequacy." Thus, the credibility and dependability of critical discourse analytic work can be induced by transparency in data collection and presentation of the texts, and theory guided analysis (see also Moisander and Valtonen 2006).

In our work, we present the analysis so as to allow the reader to evaluate our interpretations; excerpts of the campaign texts are presented with the interpretations made. Furthermore, we are explicit about the analytical concepts and their use in the analysis. An additional data table is presented in the appendix of the article to allow for a more extensive presentation of the data, according to the conceptual categories used to explicate and interpret the data. As for the more general criteria, we do not explicitly position ourselves in the analysis, which is unfortunate and a disadvantage in our study.

Finally, the external validity, as in how generalisable the results are for other contexts, will be discussed further with other research limitations in the concluding section of this dissertation. The issue of external validity, I would say, comes largely down to what I am actually attempting to say, based on the results. This discussion follows after the summaries of the research articles.

4 The three articles – summaries and discussion

"For when phenomena in an open system are determined by a multiplicity of causes, the particular one singled out for attention depends upon the contrastive identified as puzzling, surprising, unusual, undesirable or otherwise of interest" (Bhaskar and Lawson 2019: 15). Here is my selection.

The independent summaries of the attached articles are presented following the framing in each individual study. Each article is an independent piece of study, published separately, which partly explains the nuances in the framing of the background literature. After the summaries, a discussion section follows, to bring the three articles together in the light of the overarching theoretical frame. The results of the articles are reflected upon in the question of the constraints on sustainable consumption.

4.1 Who cares about product sustainability information at the moment of purchase? Consumer Evidence from three countries

4.1.1 Background and objectives

As elaborated on in the theory section, a vast body of sustainable consumption literature relies on the individualist approach. Popular policy approaches follow this line (Keller *et al.* 2016; Halkier 2013; Mont and Plepys 2008). Providing information to consumers, indeed educating people on sustainable consumption, is often seen as the way to initiate desired behavioural change (Spaargaren 2011). This opens up a whole avenue of relevant research questions on the relation between information and behavioural change in the consumption context. Of most relevance, what kind of information is likely to initiate change in consumers' behaviour towards increased sustainability (Lehner *et al.* 2016; Martin 2020); who are the people that this information is likely to reach, and what kinds of people are eventually adaptive to this information? The article takes on the latter in asking: who cares about product sustainability information at the moment of purchase? More specifically, the article inquires about *the characteristics of consumers who look for product sustainability information in a grocery store*. The study surveys millennials in Finland, Spain, and Hong Kong. The conceptual model is presented in the following figure.

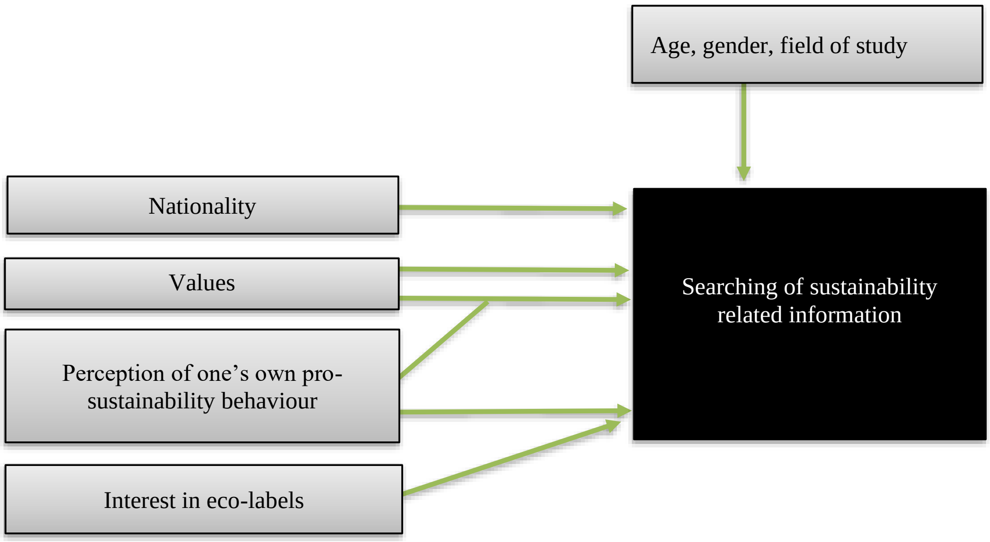

Figure 2. The conceptual model in Article I (Pekkanen *et al.* 2018)

The conceptual model explains information-searching behaviour in grocery stores through personal values, perception of one's own pro-sustainability behaviour, and interest in eco-labels. Additionally, nationality and several demographic control variables are included. The construct of information-searching behaviour pertains to concrete actions, such as searching for responsibly produced options on the shelves when shopping in a store. In contrast, the items constituting the construct of perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour describe a general understanding of how one sees one's own action. The value constructs are named conservation, self-enhancement, and openness to change and self-transcendence. Conservation comprises the values of tradition, conformity, and security; self-enhancement the values of power, achievement, and hedonism; openness to change the values of stimulation and self-direction; and self-transcendence the values of universalism and benevolence.

4.1.2 Main findings

Values differ between nationalities. However, people with similar values in different countries are as likely to look for product sustainability information at the grocery store. The results suggest that the value dimension *conservation* has a direct impact on information-searching behaviour. People who value security, conformity, and tradition are less likely to look for product sustainability information. To illustrate this, Chinese respondents reported more conservative values than Spanish and Finnish respondents. Thus, the results hint that searching for sustainability information could be rather rare in China at large. However, those Chinese people who have less conservative values would still be looking for product sustainability information. The result is politically and ethically challenging. Changing conservative value orientation is likely to be very difficult. Moreover, it would imply a normative statement of the desirability of one kind of a culture over another. Perhaps designing sustainability information to appeal to conservatively inclined people would open an avenue forward.

The second result of the analysis pertains to the value orientation *openness to change and self-transcendence*. It does not seem to directly explain the searching for sustainability information. The value orientation comprises values of self-direction, universalism, benevolence, and stimulation that together imply altruistic values and a taste for creative freedom in one's life. It does, however, affect information searching together with the respondents' perception of their own pro-sustainability behaviour. The results suggest that the value orientation affects information searching more strongly if the respondents think highly of their own sustainability behaviour. Perhaps perceiving oneself as a sustainable person can funnel altruistic values into acts of sustainability concerns. This result would speak for the potential in promoting sustainable lifestyles broadly. If people would like to recognise themselves as sustainable consumers, then together with altruistic values, this would likely enhance the sustainability information reach among people.

4.2 Institutions and agency in the sustainability of day-to-day consumption practices – An institutional ethnographic study

4.2.1 Background and objectives

In order to achieve pervasive sustainable consumption, both structural and individual behavioural changes are required. However, studies on sustainable consumption have long built on either the individual or structural paradigms, leaving the question on how these relate to each other with less attention (Keller *et al.* 2016; Spaargaren 2013). Practice theories serve an integrative approach in acknowledging that consumption practices have taken shape with societal change over time (Shove 2003). These theories consider consumption in connection with everyday life practices that we often carry out in a taken-for-granted manner (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005). However, studies building on practice theories tend to focus on the practices themselves, and the link to the surrounding institutional environment remains, at best, elusive. This is the theoretical void the article taps into. The article considers practice theoretical premises together with old institutional understanding of human nature, and uses their common ground as theoretical concepts deployed in an institutional ethnographic analysis (see Smith 2005; Veblen 1899; Hamilton 1987; Trigg 2001).

Against the theoretical backdrop presented above, the article poses three interconnected research questions. First and second, *how much is sustainability in our consumption embedded in the institutional setting of a society; how much is sustainability due to individual agency?* And third, *how do embedded sustainability and self-motivated pro-*

sustainability agency relate to each other and to external changes? These questions are tackled through institutional ethnographic analysis of day-to-day consumption practices that are carried out in the home and that intrinsically involve the use of material consumable goods.

4.2.2 Main findings

The study finds that the sustainability of day-to-day consumption at home can be rooted in different natures of action that each bears sustainability in its own way. Sustainability can be driven by preferences, but it can also be an integral part of routines, or the cultural context that embodies both practices and cultural dispositions. Practices are understood as culturally shared ways of carrying out ordinary daily life, whereas cultural dispositions refer to culturally shared ways of understanding what the world is like – what is ordinary. Together these form a hierarchical structure with an internal logic that, in turn, has consequences for how external changes may influence the sustainability of consumption. The hierarchy is illustated in a conceptual model (Figure 3).

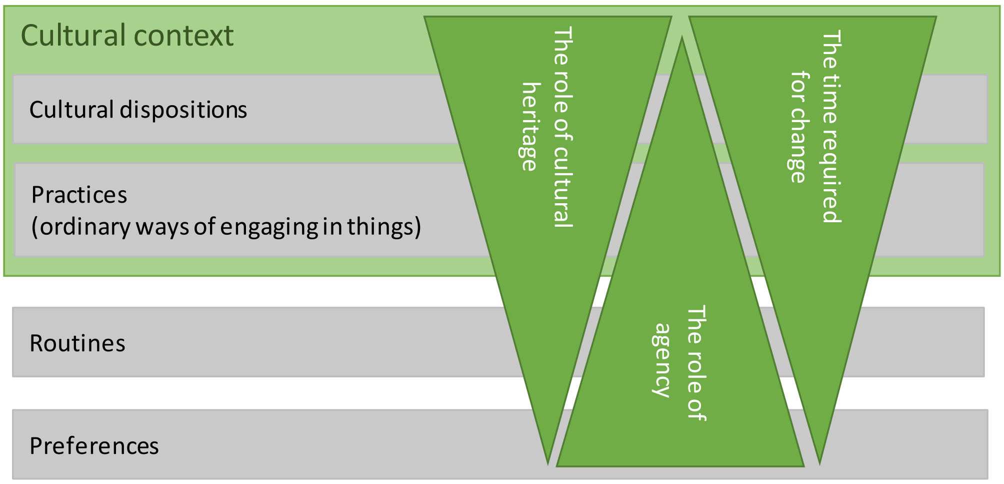

Figure 3. The hierarchy of informal institutions (Pekkanen 2020)

The hierarchy consists of four layers that differ in terms of the role of agency versus cultural heritage. Preferences are mainly guided by agency, whereas cultural dispositions tend to be adopted without conscious deliberation. In that, the time required for each layer to change is an essential characteristic of the hierarchical structure. Preferences can change in a heartbeat; routines already need more time to change, and cultural context even longer. These two characteristics of the hierarchy are interlinked, and together they form a central internal logic of the hierarchy: the more permanent higher levels in the hierarchy can be seen to pose constraints on the lower-level layers. This, in turn, explains why some external interventions may or may not take hold. To illustrate this, if a policy measure was to be introduced to initiate behavioural change, the goal of the intervention at a certain level would need to be in line with the higher levels of the underlying structure of action.

These logics illuminate the dilemma of sustainable consumption at the cross-pressures of institutions and agency in several ways. First, the sustainability of consumption is likely to be more pervasive if it is embedded in practices, since these are culturally adopted and shaped over time, alongside institutional development. At the same time, if an individual wants to make a change to their unsustainable practices, they need to make a significant conscious effort – agency. Accordingly, if a practice is unsustainable by its very nature, policy efforts to change people's preferences are not likely to lead to a desired change in behaviour. For example, the promotion of eco-labelled products is not likely to take hold if the culturally formed understanding of what is sustainable builds on more frugal living. In this sense, the higher levels define what is seen as legitimate by an individual.

4.3 The responsibility of an ethnocentric consumer – nationalistic, patriotic, or environmentally conscientious? A critical discourse analysis of "buy domestic" campaigns

4.3.1 Background and objectives

Our era in the beginning of the third millennium is characterised by global environmental and social challenges. We are also witnessing a wave of nationalistic counterforces to globalisation. Consumer responsibility has been called for to alleviate social and environmental challenges globally (Giesler and Veresieu 2014; Kipp and Hawkins 2019), but also to protect national economies and jobs locally (Lekakis 2017). These pressures are likely to pose consumers with contradictory ways of acting responsibly; consumption has become the stage for a discursive struggle over the meaning of consumer responsibility. Against this backdrop, *the study addresses the discursive responsibilisation of an ethnocentric consumer in two meta-organisational "buy domestic" campaigns*. The study explores the discursive structure at play in creating possibilities for ethnocentric consumption – and furthermore, how this discursive structure embodies various responsibilising discourses.

Ethnocentric consumption denotes the preference to buy domestic products at the expense of imports (Shimp and Sharma 1987). "Buy domestic" promotions are typically launched in the name of protecting domestic jobs and the national economy (Lekakis 2017; Castelló and Mihelj 2017). In marketing literature, ethnocentric consumption is a derivative from the concept of ethnocentrism – a concept loaded with nationalistic sentiment (Sumner 1906; Shimp and Sharma 1987; Bizumic 2019). Accordingly, the consumer is understood as a self-defining moral agent, whose ethnocentric tendencies arise from nationalism, socio-economic conservatism, and protectionism (Shimp and Sharma 1987; Upadhyay and Singh 2006). The studied case campaigns, namely the *Blue-White Footprint* campaign and *Produce of Finland*, however, draw on a wider conceptualisation of socioeconomic–ecological responsibility. Accordingly, the focus of the analysis reaches beyond nationalistic discourses to the exploration of other discourses used to responsibilise the consumer. In particular, the use of patriotic versus nationalistic (Druckman 1994; Balabanis *et al*. 2001) discourses is scrutinized, and the use of environmental consequences to responsibilise the consumer is given focus.

4.3.2 **Main findings**

The study illuminates how discursive dimensions labelled here as argumentative, positioning, and classificatory interdiscourses transform the ideal of responsible consumption into comprehensible practice in a national context. These discursive processes that create possibilities for ethnocentric consumption are threefold: they define subject positions for consumers, provide a conceptual basis for engaging in such consumption, and separate categories of objects to be engaged with in such a practice. In particular, the analysis illuminates how specific types of texts, especially consumer research reports and traditional cultural imagery, are used to construct a stable basis for consumer identity in a national context. Following this, the paper argues that such subject positions are enhanced with objects and concepts that provide a rationale for the action, mainly through discourses on economics and the Finnish economy, as well as the social and environmental responsibility of nationally produced food. Finally, these discourses are entangled and brought together through certification that provides the opportunity for consumer action. While the latter might seem like a minor detail, it is in the crux of responsible ethnocentric consumption. Objects of consumption emphasise the materiality of discourse: by attaching definitions to material reality, the otherwise meaningless reality becomes actionable.

The paper shows how different organisational texts are deployed in bringing about the idea of consumer responsibilities, and how such a phenomenon is related to nationalistic and patriotic discourses. The paper argues that the notion of responsible or sustainable consumption is inseparable from other discourses that delimit and circumscribe it; not just at a general level of mixing discourses but also in specific ways, responsible consumption is made intelligible in national contexts. In that, the analysis sheds light on how nationalistic and patriotic discourses may ultimately alter our understanding of the responsibility of consumption: nationalistic/patriotic ingredients provide easy heuristics for consumers to make consumption decisions. The findings call into question how bounded nation states are brought to signify consumption practices in a tug of war between global and local consumption: whether local consumption can address national concerns or even alleviate global issues, and how associated discourses can muddle up what responsibility in consumption means.

On the other hand, the study sheds a new, critical light on the various aspects of responsibility in ethnocentric consumption. Previous (marketing) literature on ethnocentric consumption emphasises nationalistic responsibilisation of an ethnocentric consumer. The campaigns reveal a more nuanced responsibilisation of an ethnocentric consumer, drawing remarkably on patriotic discourses instead of brute nationalism. That is, they invoke a love-like feeling towards one's own nation, instead of provoking a sentimental confrontation with other nations. Moreover, the responsibilisation in the name of environmental wellbeing is practically an untouched area in ethnocentric consumption studies.

Finally, the study conceptualises a way in which "buy domestic" campaigns funnel macro-tendencies into possibilities for consumer action. Furthermore, the paper posits that there are active, commercial agents that purposefully bring discourses together to accomplish ideologically and financially motivated ends. As ethnocentric promotions may have the power to alter how consumers act on various responsibility concerns, the study essentially highlights the responsibility of commercial entities for their responsibility communications.

4.4 Discussion under the overarching theoretical framework

<u>Article I</u>

The results of Article I imply that values may work on different levels of institutional structure, perhaps even in contradictory directions. To recap, people with certain kinds of personal values tend be more inclined to look for sustainability information in a grocery store. Frankly, this is the 'manifest phenomena of social life' (Bhaskar 1979: 32) that I claim to have uncovered in my research; this is what seems to be going on among young academic adults. In an institutional light, the observation that people with similar values in different countries seem to behave similarly, even though people of different nationalities have different values on average, illuminates the potential power of personal values. To recap, respondents of one nationality reported more conservative values than other nationalities. However, the results say that people with less conservative values, regardless of nationality, are more likely to look for sustainability information than those with conservative values. Thus, in a conservative country, too, people with less conservative values would be inclined to such pro-sustainability behaviour. In other words, personally acquired values could be a stronger driver for a certain kind of behaviour than culturally adopted values.

Moreover, the results suggest that there are likely to be underlying forces that enable the linkage between values and pro-sustainability behaviour to emerge. The results, furthermore, suggest that there are likely to be differences in cultural contexts across the countries. Thus, there are forces that create a similar effect in countries with different cultural contexts. At least, it can be said that the behaviour is not embedded in cultural context directly. There remains space for individual agency, and possibly space for different structures to enable the space for this agency. Sustainability in consumption can be constrained by culturally adopted values, lack of individual agency (value-based motivations) or lack of structures to enable the space for individual agency. The study also implies that there are people whom the sustainability information at the grocery store does not reach.

Article II

The second article argues that there is multi-level cultural embeddedness of the sustainability of daily material consumption, and through that, the interaction between culture and formal institution may have different effects on individual consumption. As such, the conceptual model derived from the analysis echoes the theoretical framework, proposing certain clarifications to it. The data tracks the (relative) sustainability of daily consumption that can be taken as observable effects. These may materialise through conscious choices, deliberate agency. They may also come into being as effects of cultural embeddedness, or of cultural and institutional embeddedness. *Practices enable the effect of sustainability to emerge from the structure through their embeddedness in it. This process works in constant dialogue with agency; however, the agency may not be directed towards sustainability.*

The results suggest multiple roles and places for agency in the formation of sustainability in consumption. There is, perhaps most approachably, the sustainability agency of a consumer, as in deliberate acts motivated by a conscious pursuit of sustainability. Sustainability agency can be value-driven. There is, additionally, a lot of agency in consumption choices that are not directed at being sustainable (i.e. it is not *sustainability agency*), but that create sustainable effects, often in interaction with the institutional and/or cultural structure. Moreover, sustainable effects may emerge from the institutional/cultural structure without much or any (sustainability) agency. In these instances, in other words, sustainability is not derived from some sustainability agency, if agency at all. However, it is suggested that sustainability effects could be attempted through agentic interventions (or coordination) from outside. Whether the causal powers of designed intervention instruments will be activated depends on the level of cultural embeddedness of the target action.

Thus, values may work on different levels to cause sustainability effects. The interpretation of the Article II results reinforces the finding in Article I. There are agentic values and there are culturally learned values without (much or any) agency, and these can have different kinds of effects on the sustainability of consumption. Agentic values may prove to be strong predictors of sustainability agency; culturally adopted values may constrain or enable the emergence of non-agentic sustainability effects.

Furthermore, the role of discourses warrants further analysis. The analysis suggests that *cultural dispositions* can be strong constraints on how sustainability interventions take effect. Generally, understanding about the functioning of the world, ingrained in us non-agentically, creates conditions of possibilities for sustainable action. If it is taken that people carry such understanding in a linguistic form, discourses can be seen to be from (part of) a cultural repertoire that has the power to position us to take action on sustainability concerns. On the other hand, as suggested by the theoretical framework and its groundings, discourses can have another role, too; internalised into practices. Article III illuminates further how this can connect institutional/cultural structure to observable sustainability effects.

Article III

The third article builds up knowledge of how organisational discourses make responsible consumption (and consumer nationalism) possible. In creating conditions of possibilities for responsible and ethnocentric consumer behaviour, these organisational discourses aim to actively influence the reality of a citizen-consumer. In that, organisational discourses can have the power to structure or to constrain how consumers make sense of responsibility-related matters. The offered rationales to act responsibly as a consumer may deviate from other ways of understanding the responsibility of consumption. If internalised into consumption practices, responsibility concerns may be realised in acts that compromise the initial responsibility concern. The article illustrates that responsibility (or sustainability) in consumption has become a site of discursive struggle over its meaning.

The article highlights that there are active commercial agents (with commercial motivations) that create conditions of possibilities for consumers to act responsibly. In addition, the studied organisational discourses can be seen to funnel socio-economic-ecological macro-tendencies into possibilities for consumer action. In terms of the theoretical framework of this dissertation, the organisational discourses can be seen to subsume facets of the structural conditions (see Fairclough 2005). The structural conditions provide resources for these discourses, although purposefully orchestrated to serve commercially motivated ends. Some notes on the interplay between formal and informal structures follow.

Ethnocentric promotions, such as ‘buy domestic’ campaigns, are a widespread phenomenon; such discourses are being machinated in numerous countries (Lekakis 2017). Given that the institutional relations in each country may differ remarkably, the widespread emergence of such campaigns is likely to reflect global, or at least transnational, nationalistic tendencies (the origins of which are an issue in their own right). As such, nationally functioning agents (commercial or other) draw on discursive resources from transnational cultures in creating discourses that may shape consumer practices. In that, the transnational understandings or cultures interact with national institutional structures to give rise to the phenomenon of ethnocentric promotions. Paradoxically, if I may, the article shows how the campaigns tap into national cultural resources, too, to interdiscursively create conditions of possibilities for responsible consumption – and to provoke a sense of national belonging. Here, in other words, the formal structures interact with both transnational and national cultures to have effects on consumer reality.

5 Conclusions

Sustainable consumption is for all
but there is no such thing as a sustainable consumer.

5.1 Contribution to sustainable consumption studies

Finally, studies on sustainable consumption, and consumption ethics more broadly, are versatile, and they all provide knowledge that is of value *per se* (Carrington *et al*. 2020). Each article in this collection contributes to the corresponding theory frame, elaborated separately and together in the previous section. My dissertation as a whole does not build on any one particular theory of sustainable consumption. However, in order to tease out the avenues for rendering consumption more sustainable, it might be useful to advance an overarching theoretical framework that allows for the interpretation of results from a variety of epistemological perspectives. My dissertation provides an example of how this could be thought of and done. Such a theoretical framework operates on a higher level of abstraction than individual empirical studies themselves, and in that it may shed new light on what we might already know about sustainable consumption. Overarchingly, my dissertation comes to illuminate a few points that may prove insightful on substantive, theoretical, and policy levels.

To begin with, institutions are intertwined with culture in numerous ways, and together they emerge, at any given time, to shape the conditions of possibilities for sustainability agency and the sustainability of consumption more generally. These are, importantly, two different things. Sustainability agency, or the lack of it, forms an individual-level constraint on the sustainability of consumption – quite obviously. I define sustainability agency *as the capability to enact deliberate acts motivated by a conscious pursuit of sustainability.* The ethos of the so-called individualist paradigm trusts exactly in enhancing the sustainability agency of consumers with the underlying assumption that proper information would make consumers aware and thus turning them into *sustainable consumers* (Perera *et al.* 2018; Keller *et al.* 2016). Based on my research, I argue that it would be analytically clearer to talk about (and study) *consumers with sustainability agency* instead of *sustainable consumers*. There are several reasons for that.

First, consumers may act sustainably without sustainability agency. This idea is much in line with how Shove and others approach sustainability change in consumption, in the light of practice theory (*e.g.* Shove 2003). According to Welch and Warde (2015), the Shovenian approach emphasises the role of surrounding conditions, the immediate materiality, leaving little space for agency. My research highlights that, depending on consumers' sustainability agency, they do make conscious, reflexive choices that challenge the surrounding conditions – and the way practices are performed – all the time. However, such agency is not necessarily directed at promoting behavioural change or sustainable lifestyles more generally or on a larger scale. Consumers with sustainability agency are not necessarily environmentalists with an agenda, unlike Spaargaren and others tend to consider (*e.g.* Spaargaren and Oosterveer 2010). Sustainable acts in everyday consumption may or may not come down to sustainability agency, and in both cases the underlying drivers are more versatile than just values or interest in environmental issues. There are, however, several aspects to constraints on the sustainability of day-to-day consumption.

With regard to sustainability agency and non-agentic sustainable consumption behaviour, the institutional structure conditions these differently. The overall role of institutions and institutional structure would be to create conditions for individual sustainability agency and possibilities for its realisation. On the other hand, the institutional structure may give rise to conditions for non-agentic sustainability behaviour. These are phenomena that are not *either-or*, as the previous literature still tends to suggest, but they work in parallel. There are dynamics between these two. I argue that better understanding of how culture is interwoven into these issues can illuminate the nature of these dynamics. There is hardly any ‘agency and structure’ without culture, which is ingrained in both.

Culture conditions the possibilities for sustainable consumption, together with institutions, in an intertwined manner. My work suggests that culturally shared understandings of the economy, sustainability, and society at large are likely to play a remarkable role in conditioning the creation of possibilities for institutional changes and their effects on sustainable consumption. In the empirical work in my Article II, these general understandings are labelled cultural dispositions. However, what Welch and Warde (2015) call *general cultural understandings* and *overarching cultural discourses* seem to depict the same idea[3]. Welch and Warde (2015: 97) write: “Schemas [- -] which lack analytical differentiation between very general cultural understandings and practice-specific orders of meaning run the risk of obscuring the structuring effects upon practices of widespread, adjacent or overarching cultural discourses.” This is exactly what my work says. These overarching cultural discourses form general, external understandings that may condition the way everyday life is *practicised* (as in the way practices endure in everyday life), and further, how life is routinised upon practices. Finally, in the everyday flow of life, consumers make choices within this multilevel embeddedness of action. Agency can run against all that, but it requires not only awareness of environmental or sustainability issues, but also cultural awareness to a high extent.

The multilevel cultural embeddedness that mediates structure and agency sheds light on the connection between macro-level changes and individual action – an issue that has attracted rather little attention or theorisation in the context of sustainable consumption (Warde 2014; Welch and Warde 2015; Kemp and van Lente 2013). In that, my work plays

[3] In fact, *general cultural understanding* might be terminologically clearer, since dispositions are central, in their distinct meaning, to Bourdieu’s work. Bourdieu (1977: 72) reasons habitus as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures”. These dispositions take shape and existence within a social field. In my work, cultural dispositions, or general cultural understandings, are seen more as higher-level ‘external’ understandings about *the whole*, with which practices engage (Welch and Warde 2015).

its part in filling the void in theories that connect culture with other societal structures and agency in the context of consumption (Warde 2014; Spaargaren 2011). The effect of a macro-level institutional change or a policy intervention differs between the different levels of embeddedness; external changes produce different observable effects, depending on how much agency versus cultural heritage plays out in the target behaviour. Furthermore, an external change can be effective in affecting people's agentic sustainability behaviour, if it pushes the behaviour in the same direction as the conditioning cultural context. In such a case, the space for individual sustainability agency widens. On the other hand, widening the space for non-agentic sustainability behaviour would require changing the institutional structure that maintains undesirable practices.

My work, therefore, suggests that institutional origins of sustainable consumption cannot be considered separately from culture. My view, however, differs from the dominant line of consumer culture theories, which focuses on consumer cultures that emerges in a market-mediated manner (Arnould *et al.* 2019). I argue that it has explanatory power to consider culture as having temporal priority vis-á-vis individual action, that is, a conditioning nature.

Although institutions are referred to as 'humanly devised constraints', it is noteworthy that the formation of an institutional–cultural structure cannot, by default, be traced back to some sustainability agency of a definable entity, given that culture and institutions have evolved together over a long period of time (e.g. Putnam *et al.* 1993; Guiso *et al.* 2016). Thus, the (relational) institutional–cultural structure poses constraints on individuals' sustainability acts without an intentional cause. However, my work also illuminates the agentic, though not necessarily intentional, side of structural constraints on sustainability of consumption. Organisational discourses, such as those studied in this dissertation, may have the potential to contribute towards a widely shared cultural understanding. Although the awakening discussion about the limits to consumer agency (see Carrington *et al.* 2020) recognises the responsibilising effect of discourses (Giesler and Veresiu 2014), such an aspect remains absent in the sustainable consumption research that recognises both structural and agentic dimensions. In Welch and Warde's (2015: 96) words: "Theories of practice have tended to neglect the role of collective social and political projects, ideologies and cultural discourses."

Although the theoretical linkages from discourses to cultural-institutional structures and practices remain, here, on a rather hypothetical level (refer to the theoretical framework; esp. Fairclough 2005), my work clearly indicates that discourses are an intertwined aspect of the realisable sustainability of day-to-day consumption. My work discusses how organisational discourses may shape consumers' understanding of what amounts to sustainable consumption, and thus constrain (or enable) the sustainability agency of an individual. In addition, organisational discourses, and especially those with interdiscursive logics, may create conditions of possibilities for sustainable consumption for consumers with no conscious sustainability agency. Furthermore, when such discourses with interdiscursive logics are internalised in consumption practices, they may manifest themselves as sustainable or unsustainable consumption. My work emphasises that analysing sustainable consumption as a (partly) discursive phenomenon necessitates an understanding of how it is intertwined with other discourses. It also emphasises the elusiveness of the term ‘sustainable consumer’, and indeed questions the analytical relevance of such a term.

5.2 Institutional economics: theoretical contributions and methodological notes

“We will be able to break away from the cultural/institutional determinism so prevalent among mainstream institutional discourse [- -] only if we recognise the complexity of the nature and the evolution of culture and institutions, on the one hand, and accept the importance of human agency in institutional change, on the other hand” (Chang 2011: 494). The main message of my dissertation echoes Chang’s words. I offer some ways forward along these lines.

First, the literature on culture and institutions within institutional economics emphasises historical analyses, and calls have been made for econometric modelling of their historical co-evolution (Alesina and Giuliano 2015). This would lead to a more elaborate understanding of *why we have the institutional structure that we have*. Certainly, this is of crucial importance. I highlight, in addition, the importance of understanding how culture and institutions interact to inform economic action *today*. The findings of my research, although conducted in the present day, align with many of the conclusions from historical analyses, while revealing new nuances in the dynamism between culture and institutions.

Previous literature has argued, and indeed provided empirical evidence for, the durable and even determining role of culture in the functioning of institutions (Putnam 1993; Guiso *et al.* 2016; Seidler 2014). My message on the role of *cultural dispositions* echoes this understanding. However, my work does not reduce culture to one underlying determinant, but acknowledges its multilayeredness in relation to formal institutions. Institutional economics has conceptualised a hierarchy of formal institutions, where culture is given the underlying determining role (Williamson 2000). I argue that culture also forms multiple layers, which eventually enables a more malleable nature for culture in institutional analysis. Accordingly, the way forward in appreciating cultural impact within institutional research would lie in a deeper understanding of *embeddedness*.

I argue that analysing embeddedness requires careful consideration of *what culture is*. In other words, I argue for a more thorough appreciation of the social ontology of institutions and culture in institutional economic research. I suggest that conflating culture with informal institutions is analytically misguiding. In my work, I show how culture works on different levels of analysis: as an intertwined aspect of an institutional framework and on an individual level, such as when values guide the inner and conscious motivation of the consumer. In that, cultural disposition, as in a shared understanding of how the world is, may embed consumer behaviour or the functioning of institutions, enabling a certain kind of consumer behaviour. Such a cultural context would be most feasibly modelled through the idea of embeddedness. At the same time, analytically more 'graspable' concepts, such as values, may guide consumer behaviour directly, through their direct impact on consumers' sustainability agency on an individual level. I suggest that such concepts could be referred to as informal institutions. In turn, practices, though not understood here as informal institutions, may carry connotations similar to traditions, customs, and codes of conduct. My findings suggest that practices are institutionally more permeable than the determining culture known to institutional economists.

Agency, indeed, would warrant its place in institutional economic research involving the interaction of culture and institutions. Institutional structure not only shapes the choice set of a conscious, active (rational or boundedly rational) individual consumer, but more accurately, it constrains and enables the emergence of the conditions of possibilities for sustainability agency and (un)sustainable consumption practice. Moreover, my work shows that the issue of agency goes beyond individual consumer agency. There are active entities that exercise agency in the formation of the institutional structure (see also Seidler 2018). My work also highlights the role of information in relation to institutional change.

Furthermore, I suggest that critical realism can complement the institutional economic idea of embeddedness. Instead of seeking a causal mechanism from culture to institutions, or vice versa, critical realism offers another way of thinking about causality. Culture and institutions together form an institutional structure that gives rise to causal mechanisms that we may finally observe as 'something that happens'. This view entails that we cannot model the entire structure, but we can observe phenomena that arise from it and analytically reason about the causal mechanisms behind these events. Critical realism also provides a window of opportunity to integrate both agency and the role of information into the analysis.

My final point in this section is more of a statement based on the work presented in this dissertation. Methodologically, mainstream modern economics leans heavily on mathematical modelling (Lawson 2019; Lawson 2017; Morgan and Patomäki 2017). When acknowledged, the place of qualitative research in economics (and in New Institutional Economics) is most commonly perceived through its capacity to enhance understanding of a certain phenomenon before or after modelling it or, in other words, to provide 'a reality check' for the models (Alston 2008; Williamson 2008). This sort of validity-checking and the complementary information perspective are both common ways to reason about the linkage between qualitative and quantitative research in terms of triangulation (Hammersley 2008). In this dissertation, based on the applied critical realist approach, I make the case that not all aspects that affect our economic behaviour (and that are of interest to economists) are reducible to numbers; neither do these aspects serve the role of 'a reality check'; nor do they provide pre- or post-modelling understanding of the modelled phenomenon. Yet these aspects have crucial policy relevance. There are two implications I wish to highlight.

In order to advance knowledge of the interaction between culture and institutions in economic contexts, the research enterprise of economics would benefit from a deep look at relevant research done within other disciplines. In this dissertation, I have touched upon a few – especially practice theories and, to a small extent, original institutional thought. Certainly, there are more to explore within and beyond these lines of literature. This disciplinary expedition could either give new insights for the economic (mathematical) models, or if expanded beyond the traditional methodological line, could potentially broaden the pursuit of understanding the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon and its impact on economic outcomes. In the latter case, one might argue that the approach would turn economics into *not economics*. On the other hand, it could also take economics towards *economics as part of social sciences*.

5.3 Policy implications

The formation of an institutional environment, as a historically and culturally shaped whole (Putnam 1993; Guiso *et al*. 2016; Alesina and Guiliano 2015), is to a large extent beyond any definable agency, which makes it more difficult to change. Furthermore, initiating changes in the structure is also difficult because we can hardly ever uncover the whole structure and the relations between all the cultural aspects and formal institutions within it. This is the baseline for policy-making. There will always be a lot of uncertainty. Even if we could trigger the structure (a relation within the structure) to cause a desired effect, it may not be realised in the real world due to circumstantial factors. There will be uncertainty.

Successful policy interventions are likely to be context-specific, and they take into account culturally shared understandings and ways of engaging in everyday life. To illustrate, and to recap, policy measures targeted at changing people's preferences are more likely to prove successful if they align with culturally adopted ways of life, such as cultural understanding of what is sustainable. In addition, if such policy measures contradict institutionally shaped practices, their adoption requires the sustainability agency of the consumer. Moreover, non-agentic sustainable consumption offers a promise of widespread, non-value-laden sustainable consumption. This would require deep understanding of the culturally adopted and institutionally shaped practices, in order to design structures and structural changes that break the unsustainability in behaviour. Thus, an obvious recommendation would be to include cultural researchers in policy-making processes. Further research is also called for to better understand the specific, contextually bound cultural and institutional relations and their impact on resource-intensive practices.

Finally, the difficulty in designing policy measures lies in defining the desired outcome of such sustainability interventions. In the household context, reducing consumption is perhaps a legitimate target for energy use, but the question gets (politically) complicated with material consumption. Should we reduce consumption or nudge people to make more sustainable purchases and promote the efficiency of products consumed (Moloney and Strengers 2014; Mont and Plepys 2008)? Before we can understand what kind of institutional reform should be initiated, we need to understand what we are aiming for. If the chosen way is to improve product efficiency and promote eco-products, this will appear more legitimate in countries with overarchingly more materialist values. If we go for dematerialisation of consumption practices and societies as a whole, sustainability is likely to be most difficult in materialistically inclined populaces. This is all due to cultural dispositions. My work suggests their conditioning role in successful policy outcomes; the importance of common understanding on where we are going. A common understanding could legitimise actions even if they fail to achieve the desired effect.

But can cultural dispositions be changed?

Should they be changed?

I will need to leave these questions largely open, although my work offers some insights into the problematics. First, making people aware of the culturally learned ways of doing things can make it easier for them to consider changes. This approach leans on the sustainability agency of the consumer. On the other hand, the work in this dissertation presents a case in which information targeted at a large (nation-wide) audience aims to shape people's understanding of what is responsible in consumption. Based on the presented work, I cannot claim a link from these organisational discourses to cultural disposition, but, given that these discourses could be internalised into taken-for-granted practices (Fairclough 2005), there could be one. As a speculative note, the fact that these information campaigns are firmly intertwined within the formal institutional structure may further facilitate their adoption into daily practices, as the institutional structure already shapes the way people conduct their everyday lives. This may serve as a way to influence people's understanding without resorting to their reflexive capacities. However, I will leave my word of caution here. Influencing people's deep understanding of (sustainability) issues, especially if using interdiscursive logics, may lead to outcomes that deviate from other ways of understanding sustainability and that serve special interest groups. If this can be done while bypassing people's agentic deliberation, the question becomes a moral one – one that can be further weighed in the light of the ethics of propaganda.

5.4 Limitations of the study

There are plenty of limitations to the study, as with the majority of studies. Each piece of research attached has its own limitations, discussed in this introductory chapter as well as in the articles. My main strategy in addressing the limitations throughout the research project has been the careful consideration of what can be inferred from the results.

As a whole, my dissertation is a highly multi- and interdisciplinary endeavour to explain the constraints on sustainable consumption within the pressures of culture and institutions, recognising the role of conscious motivation. In that, it also raises the obvious question of why some theories of certain disciplines are chosen instead of others. For sure, there are more theories that would cast their own light on the conducted study, and giving an exhaustive list of all these potential theoretical angles is hardly plausible. Perhaps most obviously, institutional theories in organisational studies and in political economy could complement the analytical approach, given that consumption would be framed as an organisational or political action. In particular, Scott (2013) emphasises the cognitive side of institutional behaviour. Moreover, economic sociology could enrich and deepen the discussion on structure and agency, as well as embeddedness (*e.g.* Granovetter and Swedberg 2018). Perhaps an obvious candidate for further theoretical elaboration would be that of Archer's (1996) morphogenetic/morphostatic approach to culture-structure-agency. However, I raise some preliminary concerns on the compatibility of her view on culture with the one emerging from cultural theories.

At the end of the day, the question is whether the chosen theories and bodies of literature comprise a coherent whole at an acceptable level of credibility. As it is rather impossible to master and cover all aspects and disciplines and theories and empirical research around such a broad societal phenomenon as the one in question here, one might wish to weigh whether I have been able to bring relevant new knowledge to the theories and subjects that I have studied. At least, have I been able to ask new questions that have the potential to advance knowledge on these matters? In the broadest picture, I am convinced that bringing cultural understanding closer to economics is important. In my dissertation, I am offering a more elaborate angle to explain how culture may interact with the functioning of an economy. On sustainable consumption, I offer a nascent understanding of the way institutional structure (comprising both formal structures and culture), together with individual effort, can lead to more sustainable outcomes. This is enabled by the theoretical frame I have built for the interpretation of the results.

Furthermore, some limitations concern the geographical focus of the research. Articles II and III are conducted in a Finnish context. This gives me the advantage of having an in-depth knowledge of the studied cultural context, which, for instance, enabled the analysis in Article III. In an ethnographic setting, however, doing research in my own cultural context may make it more difficult to disentangle my own pre-understanding of the issue from the pre-understanding of the informants. After all, I propose that culture embraces the very way we have grown up to understand the world. However, research traditions such as institutional ethnography emphasise the role of introspection, holding that an inquiry can embark from "the very same world we live in, where we are in our bodies" (Smith 2005: 2).

The question of generalisability warrants a note. A lot of the observations presented in Articles II and III cannot be generalised, perhaps even in the Finnish context. It is the overall picture drawn in these studies that must be reflected against broader societal contexts. Article II argues that sustainability in everyday life is embedded in multiple layers between conscious choice and cultural context, forming a hierarchy that explains why some policy responses may better take hold in a certain societal context than others. Although this conceptualisation is derived from the Finnish context, it can offer a way to analyse successful policies in other contexts, too. Article III exposes the way Finnish people are being discursively responsibilised in 'buy domestic' campaigns. The overall message, however, is hardly limited to the Finnish case. Active agents, commercial or otherwise, create possibilities for consumers to act on responsibility concerns. These conditions of possibilities for responsible consumption may differ from other, perhaps more established, ways of understanding said practice.

As to the limitations emerging from the methods and data, I hold that research methods are not independent of the research problem (Töttö 2000). Accordingly, although the constraints on sustainable consumption could have been approached from a variety of other methods, too, the knowledge generated in this article collection could not have been generated using other methods. Frankly, I assert that Article II and Article III could not have been conducted using, for example, hypothesis testing methods, and neither would this have been desirable. I do not claim to have exhausted the question of constraints on sustainable consumption, but to have offered new insights into their institutional nature.

Many of the limitations of the individual articles were discussed in section 3.5, but I will add some notes regarding the methods and data. First, very obviously, the institutional ethnographic study could have generated a more nuanced account if data had been collected from a broader set of social strata. Moreover, the data was collected in 2016, but the article was published only in 2020. Trends in sustainable consumption may develop quickly, and this could have been shown if the data had been collected closer to publication. Finally, with regard to Article I, the model tests moderation, but not mediation, and this choice is not backed by any theory.

Lastly, I revisit the issue of geographical focus. I want to repeat my own words from Article II: "[T]he study accumulates knowledge on sustainable consumption in the very context that is already most covered by academic literature: in a high-income country in the Northern hemisphere." To address sustainable development globally, we need more information and knowledge on the constraints on sustainable consumption within societal contexts that are getting onto the ladder of development. For example, knowledge of cultural understanding that maintains unsustainable desires regarding consumption could be of crucial importance in rendering development sustainable. My research can hopefully offer avenues or tools or ideas for addressing these issues.

5.5 Future research lines

My research offers some answers but, more than that, it opens up a wide avenue of further questions, as inspiration for a whole research agenda.

First, and as a matter of fact, I am combining two different discourses in my dissertation: institutional development (in the economic realm) and societal sustainability change. Both eventually address the issue: advancing our understanding of how to change economies. Interdisciplinary work may, at best, pave the way to overarching understanding of urgent societal matters. I offer a framework to interpret results originating from different research traditions and theories. The framework builds on critical realist stratified ontology and is inspired by institutional economic ideas on the cultural embeddedness of institutions. The framework is not a theory *per se*. However, I discuss practices and discourses in relation to the framework, and I strongly assume that there might be a place for a combined theory of practice and institutions, which would deserve closer investigation (see also Trigg 2001; Schultz et al. 2019; Warde 2014).

For institutional economics, my work suggests several open avenues. Following the prominent research tradition, econometric modelling of institutional structure and its impact on economic outcomes could incorporate the idea of multi-layered cultural embeddedness. The analytical distinction between culture and informal institutions is suggested. Moreover, forms of agency in the historical process of institutional evolution seem to have attracted very little attention. In a similar vein, the study of sustainable consumption brings forth the issue of information. Its role in institutional change seems obvious, as is also noted in North's (1990) writings. I emphasise, especially, the place of discourses in institutional change. Indeed, there are aspects to human behaviour that cannot be quantified. Understanding their nature may prove of utmost importance in understanding institutional performance and creating sustainable societies.

My research suggests that what I call *cultural dispositions* may have the power to frame the sustainability of our practices in everyday life. Several questions arise. What are these cultural dispositions with more conceptual and contextual precision? How do cultural dispositions form to shape the sustainability of consumption practices? I suggest that cultural dispositions depict the way we grow up understanding what the world is and what it is like, including understanding how to live in order to sustain life on earth. I furthermore suggest that there are similarities in these ways of understanding within groups of people that have grown up in similar environmental circumstances. The formation of such adopted, often less consciously perceived, understanding could be elaborated and further studied from the sociology of knowledge or psychological perspectives. Moreover, combining these views with theorisation of the institutional origins of such beliefs would fit the critical realist approach adopted in this dissertation.

The link from organisational discourses, especially those that use interdiscursive logics to responsibilise consumers, to people's sustainability agency, their cultural dispositions, and the actualised sustainability of their consumption behaviour, would warrant attention.

How are ‘buy domestic’ campaigns internalised into consumption practices; what is their impact on the sustainability of day-to-day consumption. Furthermore, I suggest an elaboration of the role and potential of texts and other forms of art in changing people’s shared cultural dispositions towards pro-sustainability. On the other hand, what kinds of institutional structures would enable the emergence of art that affects people’s willingness to take voluntary pro-sustainability action?

Moreover, the question of how different cultural and institutional environments give rise to different and differently sustainable consumption practices is one of urgent policy relevance. Conversely, exploring a specific practice and its cultural embeddedness in an institutional environment would shed a crucial light on the potential to change unsustainable practices. Furthermore, evaluation of implemented policy measures and their effectiveness in the light of the cultural–institutional understanding described in this dissertation could shed new light on my findings.

My findings suggest that going against the institutional environment requires substantial sustainability agency on the consumer’s part. In that, studying eco-communities in different cultural and institutional environments could shed light on the institutional forces that they have had to confront in establishing a distinctively and agentically pro-sustainable lifestyle. Comparative work could further help to reveal the unfavourable institutional structures that hinder the realisation of sustainability agency.

There are more.

> Potential research questions include the role of individual sustainability agency in reproducing structures that may diminish other people’s willingness to partake in sustainability action, or that may enable the inclusion of people with no sustainability agency.
>
> The role of commercial agents in reproducing structures (discursive or other) that compromise consumers’ space for sustainability agency, or that enhance that space could be further explored.
>
> How do peers responsibilise each other discursively?
>
> What kinds of societal structures does such peer-responsibilisation reproduce? What might be the cultural-institutional structures subsumed in such discursive practices?

To begin with.

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Publication I

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Who Cares about Product Sustainability Information at the Moment of Purchase? Consumer Evidence from Three Countries

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Who Cares About Product Sustainability Information at the Moment of Purchase? Consumer Evidence from Three Countries

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ABSTRACT
Sustainable consumption is a crucial contributor to sustainable development. Often, environmental policy approaches to promote sustainable consumption rely on increasing the awareness of consumers through information provision. Hence, it is important to know what kind of people the sustainability information is likely to reach, and what kind of people would need to be reached by other means in order to green their consumption. We advance the question of the characteristics of consumers who look for information about sustainability when making grocery purchasing choices. We focus on value-based buying behaviour of Millennials, drawing from consumer surveys carried out in Finland, Hong Kong and Spain. The results show that values differ between the studied nationalities, but when modelling how values affect the pro-responsibility behaviour the effect of nationality vanishes. Also, high perception of one's own sustainability related behaviour seems to enable altruistic, self-directed people to act on environmental concern.

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Keywords: sustainable consumption; buying behaviour; product information; corporate social responsibility; national differences; Millennials; values

Introduction

'WE [COUNTRIES] COMMIT TO MAKING FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN THE WAY THAT OUR SOCIETIES PRODUCE AND CONSUME goods and services', posits the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The urgent need to address the environmental and social stress posed by our consumption has resulted in a proliferating academic response, often with a normative twist in pursuit of finding ways to initiate behavioural change. Although the paradigms under which sustainable consumption has been studied are numerous, the theoretical approaches used to address behavioural change towards more sustainable consumption fall roughly into three categories: the individualist paradigm, the systemic paradigm and the integrative approach (Jackson, 2005; Seyfang, 2004; Tucker *et al.*, 2010). Social psychology and economics traditionally place the

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individuals with their attitudes and preferences as the unit of analysis, assuming that behavioural change is realized through individual choices (Jackson, 2005). Several authors have shed some critical light on the fact that much of policy approaches to address sustainable consumption rely on educating consumers to make better-informed and more responsible choices (e.g. Akenji, 2014; Halkier, 2013). Consumption, after all, often occurs as habits, integral part of day-to-day practices and different lifestyles, and may be challenged by significant lock-in mechanisms created by circumstances (van't Riet *et al.*, 2011; Wood and Neal, 2009; Shove and Walker, 2010; Weber and Perrels, 2000; Sanne, 2002).

While the systemic paradigm, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of state and formal structures, the integrative paradigm attempts to acknowledge both ends of the axis between social structure and methodological individualism: consumers act partly rationally, partly as an outcome of circumstances (Spaargaren, 2013; Røpke, 2009; Warde, 2005). The empirical research under the integrative paradigm is growing, commonly building upon ethnographic methodologies to address various aspects of consumption as part of socio-historically moulded practices (Keller *et al.*, 2016; Reckwitz, 2002). The paper at hand acknowledges the importance of understanding the influence of both structural environment and individual characteristics in the formation of sustainable consumption patterns, addressing quantitatively one of its crucial aspects that may guide both sustainable consumption policy and the integrative research tradition: what kind of people can be influenced through information provision. Additionally, the other side of the coin appears as interesting: what kind of people would need to be reached by other means in order to make their consumption more sustainable?

The paper at hand, hence, advances the question of the characteristics of a consumer that looks for sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) related information when making purchasing choices: consumers who make use of environmental product information, or more broadly product sustainability information. In other words, the study aims to shed light on what kind of people the sustainability information is likely to reach, for, in order to understand the possible impact of the policies based on information provision, it is crucial to understand what kind of people are likely to possess absorptive capacity and aptitude for information related to sustainability of products.

We draw from a consumer survey that was carried out in Finland, Hong Kong and Spain in several universities. In explaining who looks for product sustainability information at the moment of purchase, we focus on consumers' personal values, and perception of the sustainability of one's own behaviour, as well as nationality and other demographic factors. In the following section, we elaborate on the literatures that give rationale for our conceptual model, as well as for our choice of sample, Millennials in three distinctive countries.

Literature Review

On Sustainable Consumption and Individuals

The growing of sustainable consumption has been a key dimension of the transformation of consumption patterns since the publication of the Brundtland Report (Brundtland Commission, 1987) and the implementation of Agenda 21 (UN, 1992). The concept of sustainable consumption has been growing in complexity in the last decade around the principles and approaches developed by the UN (the Millennial Development Goals (2000) and Sustainable Development Goals (2015), and the European Commission (2008) with the Sustainable Consumption and Production Policy). Sustainable consumption and production refers to 'the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations' (from Kovačič Lukman *et al.*, 2016, p. 142, originally Oslo Symposium, 1994). There are also many related concepts and terms such as green, ethical or (environmentally) responsible consumption, pro-environmental behaviour and responsible consumption that are used interchangeably. The notions themselves are neither straightforward nor unproblematic, as all of them encompass both conservation and consumption of resources. However, minimizing the impacts and not compromising the needs of future generations depict well the basic ideas behind sustainable consumption. (Ladhari and Tchetgna, 2015; Nair and Little, 2016).

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Although during the last two decades the interest in sustainable consumption behaviour has broadened from a more narrow definition of green consumption towards systemic transformation, it has been argued that the dominant approach in political and scientific context still culminates in consumer demand and its manipulation (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013; Kovačič Lukman *et al.*, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2017; Keller *et al.*, 2016). Sustainable consumption is seen as a result of technological changes, such as energy efficiency and related solutions, which are assumed to spread through markets due to consumer demands. In other words, sustainability transitions should originate from changes in consumer demands that can, in turn, lead to changes in the markets and the growing of sustainable products (Kovačič Lukman *et al.*, 2016).

Sustainability transition through increase in consumer demand for more sustainable products is further conceptualized through green consumerism: consumption behaviour that involves commitment to environmental issues, pro-sustainability attitudes and behaviour. Green consumers strongly believe that their actions have an impact on the environment (Lu *et al.*, 2013; Hanss *et al.*, 2016). Their concerns for the natural environment enhance consumer values and lifestyles towards green products promoting green industry, and the purchasing of green goods (Robert, 1996). The conception of green consumerism is closely linked to human values that have been found, in a plethora of empirical studies, to affect (self-reported) pro-responsibility behaviour of consumers (e.g. Watkins *et al.*, 2016; Ladhari and Tchetgna, 2015; Khan and Mohsin, 2017; Awuni and Du, 2016; Şener and Hazer, 2008; Suki and Suki, 2015; Thøgersen and Ölander, 2002; Pepper *et al.*, 2009). For example, environmental value orientation has been found to strengthen pro-environmental behaviour (Watkins *et al.*, 2016; Khan and Mohsin, 2017). In particular, biospheric and ecocentric values, as in appreciation for the intrinsic value of the ecosystem and biosphere, have been found to most strongly predict pro-environmental consumption behaviour (Perlaviciute and Steg, 2014; Nguyen *et al.*, 2016). Also a more universal approach to the impact of human values on consumption has been adopted: for example, Şener and Hazer (2008) apply Schwartz's (1994) value orientations in exploring pro-sustainability behaviour of Turkish women, and find that values depicting benevolence and universalism correlate most strongly with environmentally friendly behaviour, whereas values related to self-enhancement show either weak or no correlation at all.

To address the weaknesses of self-reported behaviour in consumption models, scholars of several disciplines have used the constructs of *purchase intention (PI)* and more lately *sustainable purchase intention (SPI)* and also *green customer purchase intention* in analysing sustainable consumption, as intention is seen to precede actual buying behaviour (de Carvalho *et al.*, 2015, see also Chekima *et al.*, 2016). In addition to personal values, a vast number of factors that may affect SPI – or, more generally, sustainable consumer behaviour – have been identified, including demographic characteristics, product-related factors and information (quality, characteristics, subsidies and promotions, eco-labels), market-related factors (price, availability), consumers' trust, and cultural and institutional factors (peer opinion, brand attitudes) (Chekima *et al.*, 2016; Eijgelaar *et al.*, 2016; Lin and Huang, 2012; Shao *et al.*, 2016; Watkins *et al.*, 2016). However, the link between intention and behaviour can be far from straightforward (Young *et al.*, 2010; Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2007). Although many studies and instances report consumers' general concern over the environment, these concerns rarely show as actual behaviour that is also evident in the low market shares of green products (see Chekima *et al.*, 2016). In essence, consumers' consumption behaviour and purchase patterns do not change easily. This gap between intention and behaviour is typically referred to as the *awareness–attitude gap* or *attitude–behaviour gap* or *values–action gap* (Carrington *et al.*, 2014; Barbarossa and Pastore, 2015; Chandon *et al.*, 2005). In order to understand consumers' behaviour, studies thus need to focus on analysing the relationship between green intentions and actual buying behaviour. (Eijgelaar *et al.*, 2016; Lin and Huang, 2012).

Moreover, it is acknowledged that sustainable consumption is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that is seen to be driven also by contextual and cultural factors (Milfont and Markowitz, 2016; Nair and Little, 2016; Ceglia *et al.*, 2015). However, as stated by Milfont and Markowitz (2016), contextual factors (such as cultural norms, and availability of low-impact alternatives) and their impact on sustainable consumption are often lacking from studies that have analysed sustainable consumption at the individual level. Moreover, research that would have analysed how individual and contextual factors interact with one another in the context of sustainable consumption also seems to be lacking. As discussed above, many studies have reported that personal values influence sustainable consumption, but in different contexts the influence of values on consumption may not be uniform (Milfont and Markowitz, 2016).

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Why Millennials Matter?

On the route towards sustainable consumption, the role of Millennials, i.e. young consumers born between 1985 and 1999 (Bucic *et al.*, 2012), has been identified to be significant, as they have a completely different approach to consumption compared with previous generations, such as baby boomers. According to Bucic *et al.* (2012, p. 114), they are the 'most consumption oriented of all previous generations, including 1.8 billion of people worldwide'. Accordingly, they represent a key group for the current and future consumer and economic impact, as 'they are the most powerful consumer group in the global marketplace' (Bucic *et al.*, 2012, p. 114). Millennials have been raised in a wealthy economic period, and they have been considered the most well educated, technologically savvy and environmentally conscious (Lu *et al.*, 2013). They are the first group of consumers whose values, behaviours and consumer practices have been shaped by the Internet and the digital environment and social networks (Bucic *et al.*, 2012). In addition, their family expenditure exceeds previous generation expenditure (Bucic *et al.*, 2012).

Millennials have been addressed in the context of sustainable consumption too. Bucic *et al.* (2012) set out to study the main ethical attributes of Millennials as ethical consumers in a cross-nation study by contrasting developed and developing countries and by measuring the impact of country of residence on cause-related purchase decisions. Their study shows three different subgroups of Millennials as consumers, which emerge from three dimensions: gender, prior cause-related purchase behaviour, and motivation toward it. First, women show a more concerned behaviour in developing and developed countries across different ethical issues (access to clean water in developing countries, health, environmental damage, local societal problems). Second, the study finds a clear differentiation among those Millennials who were, during adolescence, exposed to concerns of cause-related products, due to for example family background. Third, Millennials were clustered into three different motivational groups: the *indifferent* group (30% of the respondents), the *reserved social conscience* group (40%, respectively) and the group of *committed* respondents. The largest group, characterized by reserved social conscience, is aware of the benefits to themselves and society, but exhibit both positive and negative motivations, personal and social, towards cause-related purchase. Furthermore, demographic variables (gender and ethnicity) are important dimensions on ethical decisions, although Millennials show many similarities across cultures. To summarize, the potential of Millennials to advance the spread of sustainable consumerism becomes evident. Moreover, it is often thought that the current university students' perceptions on CSR give valuable information on the future of CSR at a broader level (Amberla *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, addressing Millennials may give crucial information on consumers, or managers, of the future.

The Conceptual Model

The previous sections have highlighted the prominent individualistic paradigm in greening consumer behaviour, and elaborated upon the research along the same lines. As discussed, although this kind of individualistic approach to promoting sustainable consumption is likely to constitute only one aspect of a successful policy palette, the role of information in consumers' perceptions, expectations, attitudes and finally behaviour should not be dismissed (see, e.g., Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2008; Bögel, 2016; Kozup *et al.*, 2003; Olkkonen and Luoma-aho, 2015). Product information has been found to shape peoples' purchasing intentions (Suki, 2016; Alniacik *et al.*, 2011). Suki (2016) concludes that knowledge on green brands forms the most significant determinant for purchase intentions of green products. However, several studies argue that eco-labelled products remain in niche markets (Martinez-de-Ibarreta and Valor, 2017; Kolk, 2013; Chekima *et al.*, 2016). This raises the question of the reach of product sustainability information. Also, while the policy approaches to promote sustainable consumption often rely on information provision, it is of importance to understand whom the sustainability or corporate social responsibility related information is likely to reach. Hence, we pose the question of the characteristics of the Millennials that look for such information at the moment of purchase.

Previous research has brought up the issues of the lack of sufficient information, and the role of various information channels in the context of sustainable consumption choices (Shao, 2016; Oates *et al.*, 2008). As the scope of our study spans daily consumer goods, typical low involvement purchases, we choose to focus on information searching with regard to product sustainability information, as in information available at hand in grocery stores. Our conceptual model explains information searching behaviour in grocery stores though interest in eco-labels,

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perception of one's own sustainability related behaviour and personal values. Additionally, nationality and several demographic control variables are included.

As attitudes and values have been found to be important factors to shape the intention to buy sustainable products, our conceptual model comprises well established, universal value dimensions that are derived from Schwartz's (1994) value pattern. The constructs are elaborated in more detail in the next section. The variable depicting the perception of one's own pro-sustainability behaviour relates to the gap between intention and behaviour: whether a picture of oneself as being a sustainable consumer translates to searching information about the sustainability of consumer goods. Interest in eco-labels is included to reflect potential knowledge of eco-labelled brands. Finally, nationality as a contextual factor is of our central concern, as we introduce a comparative analysis studying different cultures, and their impact on information searching behaviour in the context of sustainable consumption. Widely used demographic variables such as age, gender and field of study are controlled for. Figure 1 summarizes our conceptual model.

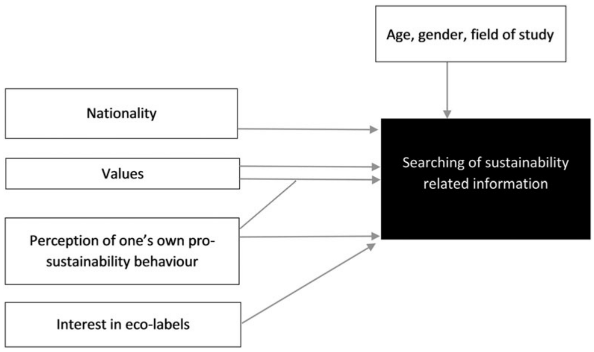

Figure 1. The conceptual model

Method

The Sample and Data

In order to study the impact of personal values on the inclination to search for information about sustainability related matters, a survey was carried out in three countries. This allows for testing whether values influence information seeking propensity differently in different cultural contexts. Accordingly, Finland, Spain and Hong Kong (China) were chosen to reflect different cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980). In addition to native Finnish, Spanish and Chinese students, the respondents included other nationalities, coded in the data as a fourth nationality group 'other'. The effect of generational differences was controlled for by surveying university students. The total number of respondents was 360, 39% of whom were Spanish, 20% Finnish, 27% Chinese and 14% other.

The survey was conducted in Finland and Hong Kong in early summer 2015 using Qualtrics Online Survey Software; in Spain, the survey was distributed in the following winter with the use of Google Forms online

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questionnaire builder. In Finland, the survey along with a cover letter was distributed in three universities[1] through official student e-mailing lists and Facebook groups relating to studies. In Hong Kong, the cover letter was posted on a public student forum open for every university student. In Spain the survey was distributed directly in class.[2]

In Spain and Finland, the questionnaire was distributed in the English language; in Hong Kong, both Chinese and English were used. The survey, first written in English, was translated by a Chinese native translator, and further back-translated into English to check its correctness. The questionnaire was pre-tested before wider distribution.

The Model and Measures

The relationship from values, perceptions and nationality to the information searching behaviour was modelled through multiple linear regression, using ordinary least squares (OLS). The estimated models were of the following form.

$$y_{INFO} = \beta_1 + \sum \beta_V x_V + \beta_{ECO} x_{ECO} + \sum \beta_N x_N + \sum \beta_C x_C + e \tag{1}$$

$$y_{INFO} = \beta_1 + \sum \beta_V x_V + \beta_2 x_{PERCE} + \beta_{ECO} x_{ECO} + \sum \beta_N x_N + \sum \beta_C x_C + e \tag{2}$$

$$y_{INFO} = \beta_1 + \sum \beta_V x_V + \beta_2 x_{PERCE} + \sum \beta_i x_V x_{PERCE} + \beta_{ECO} x_{ECO} + \sum \beta_N x_N + \sum \beta_C x_C + e \tag{3}$$

where

y_{INFO}: searching for sustainability related information
x_{PERCE}: perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour
$\sum \beta_V x_V$: values x_{V1}, x_{V2}, x_{V3}
x_{V1}: conservation
x_{V2}: self-enhancement
x_{V3}: openness to change and self-transcendence
x_{ECO}: interest in eco-labelled products
$\sum \beta_N x_N$: dummy variables for nationalities
$\sum \beta_C x_C$: set of control variables: age, gender, field of study
$\sum \beta_i x_V x_{PERCE}$: interaction terms.

The dependent variable, y_{INFO}, depicting the self-reported information searching behaviour, is a construct compiled from three survey items, measured on a seven-point Likert scale. The statements in the items pertain to *concrete actions*, such as searching for responsibly produced options on the shelves when shopping in a store. In contrast, the items constituting the construct of perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour describe a *general understanding* of how one sees his or her own action. For instance, the items include a statement 'I consider the ethical reputation of the businesses when I shop'. The construct consists of six items, measured on a seven-point Likert scale as well. Reliability analysis was performed to construct the measures, and to check for their internal consistency. The Cronbach alpha value for y_{INFO} is 75% and for x_{PERCE} 88%, respectively. Detailed information about the items of each construct is given in Appendix 1.

In addition to the perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour (x_{PERCE}), the independent variables comprise three constructs indicating the respondents' values: conservation, self-enhancement, and openness to change and self-transcendence. The constructs are derived from Schwartz's value theory (Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 1996), which is prominently applied in studies on the role of individuals' values in various phenomena, sustainable consumption and CSR too (Siltaoja, 2006; Pepper *et al.*, 2009; Wang and Juslin, 2012). Schwartz's (1992) value theory comprises a universal set of originally 56 motivational value items that constitutes a value structure based on conflict and compatibility between these values. The value structure is further realized through 10 value types that can be

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illustrated in a two-dimensional circular structure: adjacent values represent compatible pursuits, opposite values conflicting ones (Pepper *et al.*, 2009). The 10 motivational value types are power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security. Following Lindeman and Verkasalo (2005), the Schwartz's Value Survey was incorporated into the questionnaire in its short form: the 10 value types were presented together with the related original items as descriptors, and the respondents were asked to rate, on a seven-point Likert scale, to what extent they consider these values as a life-guiding principle for themselves. For example, the respondents were asked to rate, to what extent they consider power, as in social power, authority and wealth, as a life-guiding principle, from 1, against my principles, to 7, of supreme importance. A principal component analysis was conducted for the value types, and three factors emerged to form the measures of values: conservation, self-enhancement, and openness to change and self-transcendence (refer to Appendix 2). These constructs are in line with Schwartz's (1994) categorization of the 10 value types into four value orientations: conservation comprises the values of tradition, conformity and security; self-enhancement the values of power, achievement and hedonism; openness to change the values of stimulation and self-direction; and self-transcendence the values of universalism and benevolence.

Furthermore, interest in eco-labelled products, nationality and a set of control variables are included in the model as independent variables. The interest in eco-labelled products is measured through a single survey item measuring whether the respondent pays attention to eco-labels on the products. A seven-point Likert scale was used. Nationality is coded into four dummies: Finnish, Spanish, Chinese and other. The control variables comprise gender, age (up to 25 and 26–30) and field of study, which was coded into a binary variable: natural sciences (medicine, mathematics, information technology, engineering, and agriculture and forestry) return value 1, social sciences (humanities, business, economics, law, education) value 0.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The distribution of age, gender and field of study by nationality is presented in Table 1. The dependent variable as well as four constructs used as independent variables are summarized for means and standard deviations in Table 2 by each control variable. Additionally, the differences between mean values were tested using the *t*-test and one-way ANOVA, respectively. All the analyses were performed with the software SAS EG, Version 6.1.

The gender distribution over the whole sample is fairly even (44% male; 56% female); among the Chinese respondents, females are overrepresented, with the distribution of 36% male, 64% female. Finnish respondents

Nationality		Gender		Age group			Study field		
		Male	Female	Up to 25	26–30	31 and over	Natural sciences	Humanities and social sciences	Total
Hong Kongese/Chinese	*N*	34	61	15	69	11	33	60	95
	%	35.8	64.2	15.8	72.6	11.6	35.5	64.5	27.1
Finnish	*N*	35	36	3	30	38	27	44	71
	%	49.3	50.7	4.2	42.3	53.5	38.0	62.0	20.2
Spanish	*N*	60	76	115	20	1	18	113	136
	%	44.1	55.9	84.6	14.7	0.7	13.7	86.3	38.7
Other	*N*	25	23	3	29	17	21	27	48
	%	52.1	47.9	6.1	59.2	34.7	43.8	56.3	14.0
Total	*N*	154	196	136	148	67	99	244	350
	%	44.0	56.0	38.7	42.2	19.1	28.9	71.1	100.0

Table 1. Distribution of control variables by nationality

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		Searching for sustainability information	Perception of sustainability behaviour	Interest in eco-labelled products	Conservation	Self-enhancement	Openness to change and self-transcendence
Gender							
Male (*N* = 154)	Mean	3.02	4.31	4.16	4.94	5.08	5.44
	Std dev.	1.21	1.13	1.47	1.21	0.81	0.90
Female (*N* = 191)	Mean	3.58	4.64	4.59	5.10	5.00	5.59
	Std dev.	1.36	1.24	1.52	0.98	0.95	0.96
t-test for means	*t*	−3.83	−2.40	−2.48	−1.33	0.83	−1.48
	P-value	0.00**	0.02**	0.01**	0.18	0.41	0.14
Nationality							
Hong Kongese/ Chinese (*N* = 92)	Mean	3.25	4.65	4.53	5.06	4.88	5.17
	Std dev.	1.07	1.06	1.34	1.03	0.98	0.94
Finnish (*N* = 71)	Mean	3.39	4.64	4.84	4.90	4.98	5.62
	Std dev.	1.60	1.20	1.58	1.11	0.90	0.97
Spanish (*N* = 136)	Mean	3.45	4.44	4.16	4.94	5.06	5.62
	Std dev.	1.22	1.20	1.42	1.05	0.79	0.88
Other (*N* = 47)	Mean	2.91	4.05	4.15	5.38	5.39	5.80
	Std dev.	1.53	1.41	1.86	1.24	0.90	0.86
ANOVA	*F*	1.98	2.74	3.53	2.25	3.59	6.90
	P-value	0.13	0.04**	0.02**	0.08*	0.01**	0.00**
Study field							
Natural sciences (*N* = 99)	Mean	3.15	4.33	4.38	5.26	5.15	5.49
	Std dev.	1.39	1.37	1.66	1.08	0.95	0.95
Humanities and social sciences (*N* = 240)	Mean	3.38	4.53	4.39	4.93	5.00	5.54
	Std dev.	1.30	1.13	1.46	1.08	0.87	0.93
t-test for means	*t*	1.34	1.34	0.03	−2.54	−1.39	0.46
	P-value	0.18	0.18	0.98	0.01**	0.17	0.65
Age							
Up to 25 (*N* = 136)	Mean	3.40	4.38	4.12	4.97	5.09	5.60
	Std dev.	1.50	1.17	1.41	1.04	0.81	0.87
Between 26–30 (*N* = 144)	Mean	3.27	4.54	4.48	5.14	5.03	5.40
	Std dev.	1.43	1.19	1.53	1.08	0.99	0.98
31 or over (*N* = 66)	Mean	3.25	4.56	4.79	4.88	4.95	5.63
	Std dev.	1.46	1.34	1.64	1.19	0.81	0.94
ANOVA	*F*	0.39	0.69	4.17	1.48	0.56	2.07
	P-value	0.68	0.50	0.02**	0.23	0.57	0.13
Total (*N* = 346)	Mean	3.32	4.48	4.39	5.02	5.04	5.52
	Std dev.	1.33	1.21	1.52	1.09	0.89	0.93

Table 2. The constructs by control variables: means, standard deviations and difference of means
**Statistically significant at 5% risk level.
*Statistically significant at 10% risk level.

are on average the oldest, Spanish the youngest: 85% of the Spanish respondents were under 25 years old, whereas the corresponding figure for Finnish respondents is 4%. The majority of Chinese students (73%) were between 26 and 30 years, which was the largest age group among the whole sample too. As for the field of study, humanities and social sciences (mainly economics, business and law) dominate over natural sciences in every nationality group.

As can be seen from Table 2, gender matters. In the whole sample, females report statistically significantly higher values for each of the sustainability related variables: searching for sustainability information (y_{INFO}); perception of one's own sustainability behaviour (x_{PERCE}); interest in eco-labelled products (x_{ECO}). However, the value dimensions do not differ between genders to a statistically significant extent.

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Furthermore, age seems to be of lesser importance in reflecting differences between the value dimensions and sustainability related variables. Only interest in eco-labelled products shows statistically significant variation between age groups: the oldest group seems the most interested. The same goes for the field of study: only one variable shows a statistically significant difference between students of natural sciences versus social sciences, namely the value dimension of conservation. Students of natural sciences tend to be more conservative than students in the fields of social sciences.

Nationality, on the other hand, appears as an interesting divisor. First, however, the means for searching for sustainability related information (y_{INFO}) do not differ between nationalities. The perception of one's own sustainability behaviour does (x_{PERCE}), as does the interest in eco-labels (x_{ECO}). Hong Kongese students report the highest perception of their own sustainability behaviour, followed by Finnish and Spanish students. However, both Finnish and Spanish students seem to look for sustainability information more actively than do students in Hong Kong, the differences in means however not being statistically significant. The nationality group 'other' reports the most modest perception of their own behaviour, as well as the propensity to look for sustainability related information. As for eco-labels, the means between nationalities differ too to a statistically significant extent: Finnish students show the highest interest in eco-labels.

As for the value constructs, the means do not differ between age groups and gender in a statistically significant way, but those between nationalities do, for all three value constructs. The group of other nationalities appears the most conservative, followed by students in Hong Kong. Also, the nationality group 'other' appears the most open for change, indicating greater pursuit for stimulation and propensity for self-direction, which seems plausible since the group consists of people who have moved to study in another country. Chinese respondents appear the least inclined to self-enhancement and the least open for change. In other words, Chinese and the nationality group 'other' represent the extreme groups for conservation as well as openness to change and self-transcendence, whereas Spanish and Finnish respondents fall in between. For self-enhancement, other nationalities are most prone, followed by Spanish and further Finnish and Chinese respondents.

Generally, the construct concerning the perception of one's own sustainability behaviour shows higher values compared with the measure depicting concrete, self-reported acts of engaging in information searching. The same applies to eco-labels: respondents generally report higher values for interest in eco-labels than they do for concrete information searching behaviour.

Estimation: Determinants of Sustainability-Related Information Searching

A multiple linear regression model (OLS) sets out to explain what kind of people look for sustainability related information when making purchases. The explanatory variables include the value dimensions conservation, self-enhancement, and openness to change and self-transcendence, as well as perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour, interest in eco-labelled products and nationality. Age, gender and field of study were controlled for. The results are shown in Table 3.

For the final model (Model 3), visual inspection of residuals did not reveal signs of violation towards the basic assumptions of OLS estimation: residuals were approximately normally distributed; no autocorrelation and no sign of severe heteroscedasticity was detected. The Durbin–Watson test was performed to confirm that no autocorrelation occurred. Furthermore, partial correlations and VIF statistics did not reveal multicollinearity.

According to the model, the value dimension *conservation* seems to have a direct effect on people's behaviour: people valuing tradition, conformity and security are less likely to look for information about sustainability. Self-enhancement, depicting power, achievement and hedonism as life-guiding principles, does not explain information searching. The value dimension *openness to change and self-transcendence*, on the other hand, enters the regression statistically significant only when the interaction term between the value dimension and perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour is introduced. This value dimension, consisting of stimulation, self-direction, universalism and benevolence, seems to affect information searching differently depending on the perception of the sustainability of consumption, as people themselves see it. The higher the perception of one's own pro-sustainability consumption behaviour, the stronger the effect of openness to change and self-direction on information searching.

Furthermore, people who already pay attention to eco-labels are likely to search for information about sustainability during purchase. Gender also appears statistically significant: women are more eager for sustainability information. Nationality, however, does not seem to have any explanatory power; none of the dummy variables appear statistically significant. Neither does age nor field of study.

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	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Estimate	*t*	*P*-value	Estimate	*t*	*P*-value	Estimate	*t*	*P*-value
Constant	0.64	1.13	0.26	0.22	0.43	0.67	2.59**	2.02	0.04
Conservation	−0.14**	−2.29	0.02	−0.13**	−2.38	0.02	−0.12**	−2.2	0.03
Self-enhancement	0.08	1.06	0.29	0.05	0.78	0.43	0.03	0.46	0.64
Openness to change and self-transcendence	0.07	0.91	0.36	−0.05	−0.72	0.47	−0.47**	−2.14	0.03
Interest in eco-labelled products	0.46**	10.67	0.00	0.29**	6.46	0.00	0.28**	6.40	0.00
Perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour				0.48**	8.47	0.00	−0.06	−0.23	0.82
Interaction: openness to change and self-transcendence and perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour							0.10**	2.02	0.04
Nationality: Finnish	0.14	0.58	0.56	−0.06	−0.29	0.77	−0.09	−0.41	0.68
Nationality: Spanish	0.37	1.41	0.16	0.16	0.67	0.50	0.13	0.54	0.59
Nationality: Hong Kongese/Chinese	0.08	0.36	0.72	−0.23	−1.08	0.28	−0.22	−1.05	0.29
Female	0.36**	2.70	0.01	0.33**	2.79	0.01	0.32**	2.76	0.01
Study field: natural sciences	0.02	0.13	0.90	0.12	0.85	0.40	0.10	0.71	0.48
Age: up to 25	0.20	0.74	0.46	0.22	0.91	0.36	0.25	1.02	0.31
Age: 26–30	0.17	0.88	0.38	0.14	0.80	0.43	0.15	0.85	0.39
R square	34%			47%			48%		
Adj. *R* square	31%			44%			45%		
F	13.73**		0.00	21.63**		0.00	20.49**		0.00

Table 3. The estimated models, dependent variable: searching for sustainability related information
**Significant at 5% risk level.

Discussion

To reiterate, if sustainable consumption is to be promoted through information provision, it is crucial to understand whom this information is likely to reach – and, perhaps more importantly, whom this information is likely not to reach. Hence, the main findings of this study have implications in light of both policy and business strategy.

First, all three value orientations differ statistically significantly between the studied nationalities. However, when modelling how values affect the pro-responsibility behaviour, the effect of nationality vanishes. Values, in other words, affect information searching behaviour in a similar way across the countries on an individual level. On an aggregated level, the information searching behaviour is likely to differ between countries due to the differences in prevailing value orientations on a societal level. This may furthermore have implications both on a state level, and within a country. To illustrate, according to the results of the study, people who value tradition, security and conformity as their life-guiding principles are less likely to look for sustainability related information at the moment of purchase. The tendency that some nations seem to appear more conservative than others, on average, implies smaller exposure to sustainability related information in these countries, at least when it comes to information attached to products, such as eco-labels. As Chinese respondents exhibited the most conservative values, information searching related to sustainability is likely to be less widespread in China than in Spain or Finland. Hence, from the managerial perspective, the markets in countries with less conservative values, on average, are likely to be more penetrable for product sustainability information. Furthermore, from both policy and business perspectives, if information provision is the chosen way to influence sustainability of consumption, strengthening the positive image of eco-labelled brands is likely to increase information searching behaviour.

Moreover, on an intra-state level, different groups of people are likely to exhibit different values. Say older people are more conservative than youth, and they would be less likely to search for sustainability related information;

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metropolitan areas as the less conservative parts of a country would offer greater potential for product sustainability information. Hence, combining the insights of this study with a more thorough understanding of a particular country's value profile across demographic groups and geographic areas could advise where and whom the sustainability related information is most likely to take hold on consumers. From a policy perspective, this could also inform on where information provision based environmental policy is not likely to have the desired effect. Speculatively, for instance, people in the countryside may base their consumption choices, sustainable or less so, on considerations other than product sustainability information.

The second main finding of the analysis has to do with the value dimension of openness to change and self-transcendence: high perception of one's own sustainability related behaviour seems to enable the direction of altruistic, self-directed people to act on environmental concern. In more detail, the value orientation depicting desire for self-direction and stimulation, as well as values of universalism and benevolence, explains information search only in interaction with the perception of one's own pro-sustainability behaviour. According to the model, people who are self-directed and prone to be more concerned for others over their own interest look for sustainability related information only when they have a high perception of their own sustainability behaviour. With low perception levels of one's own sustainability behaviour, the impact is negative: self-direction and altruism result in less interest in sustainability related information. It seems, hence, that sympathy towards sustainability issues directs altruistic, self-directed people to look for sustainability related information, and possibly act accordingly. Perhaps openness to change and self-transcendence are realized through other causes when sympathy towards sustainability is not present. On the other hand, the model implies that an increase in the value dimension 'openness to change and self-transcendence' increases the impact that the perception of one's own sustainability behaviour has on information search, but the order of magnitude is much less than the initial increase in values. From this angle, more self-directed and altruistic values may boost sympathy towards sustainability issues, but in a moderate manner. Hence, although the literature is concerned about the attitude–behaviour gap when it comes to sustainable consumption, and this study finds support for it, this study also suggests that it is of importance to enhance peoples' intentions about environmental behaviour, especially when altruistic values are prominent. Though wider cultural change is likely to be a slow process, arguably, it could be encouraged by favourable structures and policies in a society. This sort of interaction between formal and informal societal structures remains, however, to be further addressed in the literature (Kemp and van Lente, 2013; McMeekin and Southerton, 2012; Williamson, 2000).

As in any research, there are some limitations in this study. First, socially desirable response tendencies may pose bias in the survey data, as it is based on respondents' self-reported perceptions and behaviour. Second, the sample sizes were not equal between the studied nationalities. In the future, it might be useful to compare different product categories to determine whether the search for sustainability information differs between product types. Also, as easily approachable eco-labels could disseminate sustainability product information more effectively, studies could explore, for instance, what kinds of eco-label are considered most useful by consumers.

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Appendix 1. Constructs and Definitions

Dependent variable
Searching for sustainability related information
(seven-point Likert scale: 1, strongly disagree; 7, strongly agree)
- I search the options on the shelves to see if there are eco products when I shop.
- I normally just pick up a product that I like without considering the sustainability issues.
- I search for information about sustainability (e.g. CO_2 footprint, product ethical issues etc.) when I purchase a product.

Independent variables
Schwartz's value types
(Seven-point Likert scale: 1, against my principles; 7, of supreme importance)
- **Power** (social power, authority, wealth)

(Continue)

- **Achievement** (success, capability, ambition, influence on people and events)
- **Hedonism** (gratification of desires, enjoyment in life, self-indulgence)
- **Stimulation** (daring, a varied and challenging life, an exciting life)
- **Self-Direction** (creativity, freedom, curiosity, independence, choosing one's own goals)
- **Universalism** (broad-mindedness, beauty of nature and arts, social justice,
 a world at peace, equality, wisdom, unity with nature, environmental protection)
- **Benevolence** (helpfulness, honesty, forgiveness, loyalty, responsibility)
- **Tradition** (respect for tradition, humbleness, accepting one's portion in life, devotion, modesty)
- **Conformity** (obedience, honouring parents and elders, self-discipline, politeness)
- **Security** (national security, family security, social order, cleanliness, reciprocation of favours)

Perception of one's own pro-responsibility behaviour

(Seven-point Likert scale: 1, strongly disagree; 7, strongly agree)

- I avoid buying products that are harmful to the environment.
- I avoid buying products that are unethical.
- I would pay more to buy products from a socially responsible company.
- I consider the ethical reputation of the businesses when I shop.
- I avoid buying products from companies that have engaged in immoral actions.
- I would pay more to buy products from companies that show care for the well-being of our society.

Interest in eco-labelled products

(Seven-point Likert scale: 1, strongly disagree; 7, strongly agree)

- I pay attention to the eco-labels if they are presented on the products.

Appendix 2. Value Factors

	Rotated component loadings			Communality	MSA
	Openness to change and self-transcendence	Conservation	Self-enhancement		
Self-direction	***0.831***	−0.057	0.061	0.698	0.722
Universalism	***0.791***	0.065	−0.150	0.623	0.737
Stimulation	***0.646***	−0.136	0.377	0.618	0.799
Benevolence	***0.606***	0.382	−0.082	0.574	0.808
Conformity	0.038	***0.849***	0.039	0.747	0.674
Security	0.015	***0.773***	−0.039	0.592	0.781
Tradition	−0.001	***0.734***	0.104	0.575	0.746
Power	−0.269	0.164	***0.805***	0.699	0.602
Achievement	0.093	−0.035	***0.788***	0.647	0.705
Hedonism	0.320	−0.010	***0.561***	0.480	0.850
Eigenvalue	3.164	1.652	1.438		
Cum. % of variance	31.6	48.2	62.5		

Principal component analysis; oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization. Kaiser's measure of sampling adequacy overall statistic 0.741.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Institutions and Agency in the Sustainability of Day-to-Day Consumption Practices: An Institutional Ethnographic Study

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Abstract
Consumption is essentially an institutional action. While both the formal institutional environment and cultural embeddedness shape consumption, individuals may reciprocally amend the institutional setting through consumption choices that challenge the prevalent institutional constraints. This paper reconciles theoretical and conceptual premises from institutional and practice theory literature to study the sustainability of consumption. Using institutional ethnography as a methodological approach, the study explores the pendulum between embeddedness and agency in shaping the sustainability of day-to-day consumption of necessary goods; and further, how the external institutional environment may interact with human behaviour to contribute towards sustainability. The study finds a hierarchy of informal institutions, each level of which interacts differently with external changes. For example, sustainability is found to be more widespread the more it is embedded in practices, and this is a result of overall institutional development beyond regulation and choice editing. The results also highlight the importance of understanding unintentional sustainability in consumption practices.

Keywords Sustainable consumption · Practices · Institutional ethnography · Agency · Culture · Cultural context · Institutions · Informal institutions · Unintended sustainability behaviour

Introduction

Sustainable consumption is recognised as a crucial contributor to overall sustainable development. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly states that transition towards more sustainable consumption requires systemic changes in society: "We [countries] commit to making fundamental changes in the way that our societies produce and consume goods and services". However, we know surprisingly little about how institutions in society interact with individual efforts towards more sustainable consumption (Kemp and van Lente 2013; McMeekin and Southerton 2012). This paper aims to build knowledge on this crucial ground. Given that conventional policy approaches, such as information provision and targeted taxation, may fail to promote large-scale behavioural change (Akenji 2014; Spaargaren 2013), it is of urgency to widen understanding of how to build an institutional environment that could help transform, necessarily and sufficiently, our consumption patterns towards more sustainable practices. The link from practices to broader society remains, however, to be established, both theoretically and empirically, and this poses a crucial bottleneck to a wider understanding of how to promote sustainable consumption practices in society.

In order to initiate the above-mentioned "fundamental changes" in our societies, we first need to understand the status quo: how much is sustainability in our consumption embedded in the institutional setting of a society, and how much is sustainability due to individual agency? Furthermore, how do embedded sustainability and self-motivated pro-sustainability agency relate to each other, and to external changes, such as attempted policy measures? This paper embarks on an institutional ethnographic endeavour in order to conceptualise this bundle of research questions.

The issue of the importance of individual agency versus societal structures is studied through household practices whose performance intrinsically involves the use of material commodities. The data are collected in a medium-sized Finnish city with eighteen informants, using multiple methods: participant observation, visual (photographic) documentation, informal discussions, and interviews. In terms of

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the contested concept of sustainable consumption per se, the empirical analysis incorporates a relative approach (Jennings and Zandbergen 1995), as opposed to absolute sustainability (Rimppi et al. 2016). Actions are assessed on the basis of whether they are likely to contribute towards the macro goal of sustainable development: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987).

Institutional ethnographic methodology allows for building an understanding of everyday practices under the inbuilt idea of coordination and control of human behaviour beyond the microenvironment of an individual (Smith 2005). To grasp the agency dimension of action, the analysis further makes use of fundamental concepts that shaped the body of practice theories (Bourdieu 1990; Reckwitz 2002). Building on the practice theoretical understanding of consumption, the study essentially addresses the sustainability of the flow of material commodities as a part of the practice of running a household (Røpke 2009; Warde 2005; Reckwitz 2002). A practice is understood to be a routinised way of conducting life, interconnected to the formal and informal structures that allow the practice to emerge and endure.

The practice theoretical view on sustainable consumption implies that the stress our consumption poses on the environment and society depends largely on our way of living (Keller et al. 2016; Halkier 2013; Warde 2005), which links back to the interest in institutional impact. After all, our lifestyles have taken shape during societal evolution (Cockerham et al. 1997), firmly tied to its formal and informal rules (Williamson 2000). In enhancing the conceptual understanding of the interface between agency and structure in an institutional frame, this paper eventually addresses the question of the interaction between formal and informal institutions and their impact on people's economic actions (North 1990; Williamson 2000; Baumol 1990; Scott 2008). The importance of the matter is widely acknowledged but explored to a lesser extent. Empirical literature on the matter remains scarce, narrow in scope, or on a conceptual basis (Alesina and Giuliano 2015; Chang 2011). This paper makes connections to institutional economic literature along the storyline, to point out both its common ground with reasoning in practice theories and the relevance of the analysis to the institutional economic conceptualisations of informal and formal institutions.

The paper begins with a literature review that places the research questions within the studies on sustainable consumption, focusing on the position of practices in the literature. The methodological section introduces the approach of institutional ethnography, and further couples it with practice theory and institutional economic literature on consumption. After introducing the research methods, fieldwork, and data, the paper proceeds to a theory-driven analysis of the role of agency and embeddedness in the sustainability of day-to-day household consumption. Conclusions follow.

On Sustainable Consumption

From an Aware Consumer to Taken-for-Granted Practices

The sustainability of consumption is not a straightforward matter. Defining sustainable consumption proves challenging both technically (Rimppi et al. 2016) and epistemologically: sustainability means different things to different people, as it provides various motivations to act on environmental or social concerns (Toppinen et al. 2013; McDonald and Oates 2006). The term is often cited to refer to "the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations", as formulated by the Oslo Symposium in 1994 (Kovačič Lukman et al. 2016, p. 142). Although the definition of sustainable consumption remains elusive in academic and public debates, the working definition of the Oslo Symposium brings forth some widely shared understanding of the matter. The impact of consumption should be assessed on a life-cycle basis, and the costs of this impact should not be left on the shoulders of future generations. However, this definition puts a clear emphasis on the environmental dimension of sustainability, although sustainability per se is commonly used to cover ecological, social, and economic responsibility. In essence, parallel concepts, such as green consumption, ethical consumption, and political consumption, exist to emphasise the various connotations.

Regardless of the definitional complexities, a plethora of studies exist to address the various aspects of sustainable consumption. In the context of sustainable household consumption, energy is among the most studied commodities (Hafner et al. 2019; Abrahamse et al. 2005). Hafner et al. (2019) review the literature on psychological barriers to reducing demand for heating energy. They focus on individual decisions about investments in heating systems that reduce the demand for purchased thermal energy at home. The literature also addresses direct electricity usage, including, for instance, the role of information (Ueno et al. 2005) and the role of circumstantial factors in the childhood home (Hansen 2018) in enabling or constraining sustainable energy use.

The sustainability of material household consumption is most commonly studied in relation to food (Verain et al. 2012; Hughner et al. 2007). In particular, organic food consumption and related consumer characteristics, attitudes, and perceptions have attracted academic attention (Pearson et al. 2010; Lee and Hwang 2016; Oroian et al. 2017). However, the environmental sustainability of organic food can be contested (Meier et al. 2015), which renders the actual literature on sustainable food consumption scarcer and perhaps more controversial. Studies on the role of information in encouraging sustainable food purchases reveal the difficulties that consumers face in assessing sustainability (Lazzarini et al. 2018; Grunert et al. 2014). The same difficulty is likely to resonate on the level of empirical research too. For instance, studying the characteristics of a consumer who is most likely to act pro-sustainably becomes complicated in light of the complexity of assessing sustainability per se.

The sustainability of material household consumable goods, other than food, remains a less explored topic, in comparison to topics such as energy demand or the so-called high-involvement products. For example, sustainable consumption of forest products is mainly studied for such items whose purchase requires substantial consideration, such as wooden terrace products (Holopainen et al. 2014) or furniture, flooring, or other value-added wood products (Kozak et al. 2004). However, more mundane forest products such as toilet paper, purchased and used with less effort, have not been widely studied through the sustainability lens. Yet this sort of research could reveal the underlying structures that maintain practices through which daily consumption materialises.

Recent critics, increasing in number, claim that the prevailing paradigm in the proliferating sustainable consumption research often places an individual and their attitudes and preferences at the centre of the analysis (Keller et al. 2016; Halkier 2013; Spaargaren 2013). Despite the undeniable importance of understanding green preferences, this approach risks giving one-sided policy recommendations. According to the critics, many of the policy approaches addressing the problems of the transition to sustainable consumption focus on providing information to consumers (Akenji 2014; Spaargaren 2013).

Knowledge and information can be powerful tools to influence people's behaviour (Lazzarini et al. 2018; Ueno et al. 2005). However, in initiating behavioural change towards more sustainable consumption, this leaves at least two great questions uncovered. First, policy measures that rely on information provision assume that an individual, fed with the right information, would turn into a responsible consumer (e.g. Akenji 2014; Halkier 2013). Yet there is a well-documented phenomenon called the attitude–behaviour gap among people that do share green values and concern for the state of the environment (Carrington et al. 2014; Barbarossa and Pastore 2015; Chandon et al. 2005). People who self-claim to have pro-sustainability values and attitudes do not necessarily act accordingly. Second, there are people who do not receive this targeted information, or who might not care to act on it even if they were aware of this information content (Pekkanen et al. 2018). The question arises of whether it would ever be possible both to make everyone aware and to make everyone act upon this awareness towards sustainable choices. Would these choices suffice to guarantee overall sustainable development? The strategy towards sustainable consumption needs to acknowledge these issues and find broader avenues to account both for individual agency and, at the same time, for the role and impact of broader societal structures.

In the research on sustainable consumption, the practice theoretical view has grown to challenge the prevailing dichotomy between the so-called structural and individualist paradigms (Keller et al. 2016; Røpke 2009; Warde 2005). While the latter refers to the above-mentioned research on individual agents acting deliberately, the structural paradigm focuses on the impact of social structure on consumption. Practice theory is an emerging integrative approach that acknowledges human behaviour as being partially embedded in societal and cultural structures and partially due to individual agency (Spaargaren 2013). The methodological unit of analysis is the practice, and central research questions include the way people engage in consumption as part of their everyday life practices (Keller et al. 2016).

Practice theoretical view on how behavioural change can be initiated shifts the focus from convincing individuals 'to consume in a more sustainable manner' to understanding how resource-intensive practices come into being, what kinds of societal structures maintain them, and, finally, how they may change or be changed (Shove and Walker 2010; Warde 2005). According to Reckwitz's (2002, p. 249) widely cited definition, a practice is "a routinised type of behaviour which consist of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". He further reiterates that any practice as such cannot be disaggregated into one of the aspects mentioned above; a practice is an intertwined web of all of these aspects. Having practice as the unit of analysis therefore enables both contextual factors and individual agency to be accounted for in the analysis.

Several empirical studies address household consumption through the lens of practice theory. Energy consumption, as an inconspicuous commodity, serves as an enlightening example of how consumption can be inseparable from the practices to which it pertains (Butler et al. 2016; Strengers et al. 2014). Mylan and Southerton (2018) study laundry practices, advancing a framework that culminates on four mechanisms that relate household level variation in practices to broader coordination in society. These mechanisms pertain to gendered division of labour at home, material facilities such as spatial layouts, conventions concerning especially the cleanliness standards and, finally, collective scheduling of practice performances conditioned by, for example, office hours and leisure time. Mylan and Southerton (2018) argue that these elements link domestic laundry practice performances to broader patterns in society.

Furthermore, studies exist that address the relations of power as potential forces in the social ordering of sustainable consumption practices (Anantharaman 2018; Hargreaves 2011). Although these studies give a clear indication that practices are rooted in the surrounding structural environment, the nature of this linkage remains elusive, as will be further elaborated in the following section.

From Practices to the Broader Societal Context

Understanding practices in their social, historical, cultural, economic, political, and technological environments could offer a fruitful avenue to understand how transition in a society could be encouraged and initiated towards less resource-intensive ordinary, daily human behaviour. However, as Brown et al. (2013) articulate, the research on understanding practices has not quite expanded to cover the system perspective: how prevailing and evolving technological and other contexts link to the change of practices.

The suggested framework to tackle the link from consumption practices to societal evolution embarks from the literature on socio-technical transitions, and more specifically from the so-called multi-level perspective (Kemp and van Lente 2013; Geels 2002). The multi-level model and approaches building on it (Geels 2014; Frantzeskaki and Loorbach 2010) were initially and are essentially focused on meso-level sustainability transformations. In short, the model separates the macro-level landscape (geography, resources, cultural patterns, and lasting structures of society) from socio-technical regimes characterised by rather stable interlinkage between established technology, knowledge, infrastructures, and policy. Industrial changes are seen to arise from nascent micro-level (technological) innovations that may come to challenge the prevailing socio-technical regime (dominant design) under favourable macro-level pressure. Analogously, when applied to consumption practices in society, the micro-level refers to local practices that are shaped by the prevailing socio-technical regimes and, further, the macro-landscape (Kemp and van Lente 2013). The change drivers work from the bottom up, from the so-called grassroots sustainability innovations, which can emerge as path-breaking alternatives to the existing socio-technical regimes if the pressure from macro-landscapes aligns to favour transitional change (Korjonen-Kuusipuro et al. 2017; Hielscher et al. 2013; Seyfang et al. 2014). The change-favouring macro-environment, on the other hand, may open up due to environmental or political crises that ultimately cast a favourable light on grassroots innovations on a niche level (Hielscher et al. 2013).

Hess (2013) argues that the socio-technical transition approach to sustainability issues falls short in giving guidelines for fast enough transition pathways: the theory allows for a better understanding of long-term changes in socio-technical systems, and the empirical research has indeed been concerned with such historical case studies. Hence, the theory does not quite address the urgency of many environmental issues. Arguably, there are other shortcomings, too, when applied at the level of practice. The view that sustainability transition originates from various kinds of grassroots innovations emphasises the role of the motivation of individual people to initiate change. Although motivated individuals can and do initiate sustainability start-ups and community projects (Seyfang and Longhurst 2013; Seyfang 2010), which may act as vehicles of change from the bottom up, all the way to wider changes in society, this approach overlooks and simplifies the potential powerful influence of institutions on various levels. Indeed, the multi-level perspective has developed separately from institutional economics and organisational institutionalism (Geels and Schot 2007).

Moreover, the idea of local practices as micro-level change initiatives grants agency to the practices. In the case of high-involvement investments such as solar panel installation initiatives, this may prove sufficient. However, when dealing with more embedded practices, the grassroots innovation approach falls short in accounting for both agency and structure. To elaborate, as defined by literature on practice theory, practices are eventually ways of engaging in things, ways of doing things and thinking about things on a daily basis. Material consumption, for example, occurs as an integral part of various everyday life practices that, in turn, have taken shape as a cultural–historical–institutional outcome over time. The culturally and contextually learned aspects of practices therefore fit poorly with the grassroots innovation approach, which relies on highly motivated individual initiatives. The section that follows introduces an alternative methodology that has the potential to broaden understanding of the interface of agency and institutions.

Methodology

On Institutional Ethnography and Practices

Institutional ethnography is a methodology aimed at exploring how a practice is shaped by institutional forces (DeVault 2006). The starting point of an inquiry is identifying and understanding an experience or an everyday practice from the peoples' perspective. Smith (2005, p. 2) sees the roots of institutional ethnography in Marx's materialist method and ethnomethodology in that it commits "to begin and develop inquiry in the very same world we live in, where we are in our bodies". This standpoint deviates drastically from the hypothesis testing approach prominent in the social sciences. Indeed, institutional ethnography roots its methodology in the inductive side of the social sciences, which arguably facilitates the explorative nature of the inquiry (Locke 2007). Furthermore, in an institutional ethnography, there is an inbuilt idea of the existence of coordination and control of people's activities beyond the microenvironment of an individual. The *social* in institutional ethnographic research, then, becomes "the ongoing concerting and coordinating of individuals' activities" (Smith 1999, p. 6).

In an institutional ethnographic inquiry, the activities of individuals are often conceptualised as collective practices (Smith 1999, p. 6). Here, the methodology shares conceptual ground with practice theoretical research, discussed on an empirical level in the previous section. The first common cornerstone culminates in the way the nature of human action is conceptualised. Smith (1987) writes:

> The disjuncture that provides the problematic of this inquiry is that between the forms of thought, the symbols, images, vocabularies, concepts, frames of reference, institutionalised structures of relevance, of our culture, and a world experienced at a level prior to knowledge or expression, prior to that moment at which experience can become 'experience' in achieving social expression or knowledge, or can become 'knowledge' by achieving that social form, in being named, being made social, becoming actionable. (Smith 1987, pp. 49–50)

The idea of knowledge embedded in structure is intrinsic in the purpose of an institutional ethnographic inquiry, according to Smith's (1987) account. In a way, institutional ethnography aims to make this knowledge prior to social expression of experience visible. Understanding the role and realm of tacitly and intrinsically learned ways of participating in everyday life can lead us to further understand the role of agency, consciously made choices, and performed acts. Empirically, however, this requires further conceptual support. Practice theories have their roots in the very similar notion of the origins of human action, and can provide further guidance in the conceptualisations of agency versus structure.

Practice theories initially go back to Bordieu's (1990) and Giddens's (1984) works, which challenged the prevalent dichotomy between agency and structure. Bourdieu (1990) named the central concepts of his work as '*habitus'* and '*field'*. The idea of knowledge embedded in structure, discussed before, is reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1990) notion of '*habitus',* which emphasises internalised behaviour, such as beliefs, that in an individual's action does not necessarily go back to any rationale, but occurs as an adopted way of engaging in things. Habitus refers to the tacit way of understanding, the tacit way of engaging in things, which is embodied in individuals through learning and growing up in certain circumstances. Field, furthermore, refers to the limits for the experiences through which habitus develops.

Giddens (1984) writes about the relationship between agency and structure, treating the structure as a constraint and a resource for flows of action. Practice theoretical thinking, drawing on these ideas, places the *social* in a practice, instead of some mental capacity of an individual (as in rational choice theories) or any social structure of culture or class. A practice, as verbalised by Reckwitz (2002, p. 249), is "a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". Furthermore, Reckwitz (2002) points out that a practice, such as the practice of consuming or cooking, cannot be reduced to any of the above-mentioned aspects alone, but is an interconnected web of all that. Shove (2003, p. 2), in her practice theory account of comfort, cleanliness, and convenience, illustrates a practice in a similar vein as "the creep of convention and the escalation and standardization of conditions and circumstances that people take for granted".

Moreover, understanding the embedded role of sustainability requires the conceptualisation of a cultural context, meaning shared or collective "symbolic structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms and to behave in corresponding ways", as Reckwitz (2002) spells out the cultural theory point of view on social analysis. Through the concepts of *habitus* and *field*, the cultural context embedded in household practices could refer to the shared *dispositions* of individuals' *habitus* due to a shared cultural *field* in which they grew up.

Hence, making a practice the unit of study enables both agency and contextual factors to enter the analysis. Institutional ethnography, in turn, provides an open-ended methodology to explore and further conceptualise how various practices link to their context of ruling relations. Before introducing how the methodology is taken onto the level of conducting this empirical inquiry, a note on the century-old research line that links institutions to consumption may be in order.

A Note on Institutional Economics

Looking back over a 100 years sheds an interesting light on the contemporary void of theories on consumption and institutions. The very roots of institutional economics had indeed to do with consumption. Veblen (1899) wrote about conspicuous consumption in the wake of times of consumerism.

He saw consumption in relation to a broader cultural and societal development; in relation to status and its display, the desire to live up to the next class up in the social hierarchy.

The old institutional literature on consumption shares conceptual common ground with the approaches in practice theory. First, there is the conceptualisation of human action as being partially embedded in culture, partially due to the cognitive deliberation of an individual, a central tenet of practice theories. The institutional literature also infers the very idea that "behaviour is both individual and social at the same time and that the form that it assumes is a culturally conditioned and derived one", as Hamilton (1987, p. 1541) puts it. More specifically, Veblen's (1899) theory sees the preferences about the ways in which wealth is displayed evolving along with broader societal development. Hamilton (1987), in his writings on Veblen, articulates that the theory of the leisure class takes the study of consumption from an individual to a cultural level. Trigg (2001) further pronounces that Veblen's (1899) writings on conspicuous consumption include the very idea that not all of our actions are conscious for us; that there are cultural forces, of which we are unconscious, that guide our behaviour. The desire to "live up to the conventional standard of decency" may manifest itself in various ways, with motivations and reasons of which we may remain unconscious (Veblen 1899, p. 103). This idea of unconscious and conscious acts shaping our behaviour becomes perhaps more evident in Veblen's (1914) later writings, drawing on instinct theory (Asso and Fiorito 2004). Veblen (1914) posits that instinct, together with the material environment, gives rise to such informal institutions as habits and conventions. The later developments of institutions and consumption along this research line are rare, but they build on the same premises and understanding of the nature of human action (Dolfsma 2002; Coşgel 1997).

Second, another intersecting conceptual culmination between the thinking in practice theory and the literature on institutions and consumption seems to stem from the view that the consumption of material goods occurs along an ongoing process of events, as opposed to the idea that consumption is some sort of a grand end of economic activity. As Hamilton (1987, p. 1540) puts it: "Life is an on-going active process with nothing that can be substantively distinguished as a consummatory end from a productive means." Similarly, in practice theoretical thinking, we acquire goods and services in the course of engaging in practices; for instance, we buy groceries as part of the practice of running a household.

To emphasise the point, literature on practice theory and early institutional literature share not only the acknowledged focus on the external institutional setting, but also the profound way they conceptualise human action (Hamilton 1987; Reckwitz 2002; Trigg 2001). Although these similarities have been recognised in the literature before (Trigg 2001), the strands of literature have not developed together. Understanding of how the external institutional environment may interact with human (consumption) behaviour remains underdeveloped (Kemp and van Lente 2013; McMeekin and Southerton 2012; Geels 2002). The empirical work that follows uses these conceptual similarities under the guidance of institutional ethnographic methodology to explore the interface between everyday material consumption and institutions.

Fieldwork and Data

On the level of conducting research, institutional ethnographic inquiry proceeds, as presented by DeVault and McCoy (2002), most commonly in a three-stage manner: the practice of interest is identified and explored; the institutional forces or processes shaping the practice are identified; and the institutional processes of interest are explored further. The point of departure, to reiterate, is understanding the nature of a practice. This is, both within the institutional ethnographic tradition and in the framework of practice theories, primarily an ethnographic endeavour.

Smith (2005) emphasises the open-endedness of the inquiry: understanding how people put the world together on a daily basis, in connection with various chains of action that relate us to the formal and informal institutional environment, calls for explorative, inside-out methods. Smith (2005) further emphasises the role of introspection as the point of departure; another common starting point for such an ethnographic inquiry would be participant observation (Bernard 2002, p. 323) and, further, interviews (DeVault and McCoy 2002, p. 756). The role of interviews can be understood in two ways, differing somewhat in their epistemological perspectives. Building understanding about *what the practice or experience is like* proceeds through a web of conversations with informants, from formal interviews to informal "talking with people", in the pursuit of forming a general picture of what is happening. On the other hand, analysis of *how a practice comes into being* and what settings allow it to endure shifts the focus to institutional cues instead of patterns of action (DeVault and McCoy 2002, p. 753). Although ethnographic research often entails co-living in the studied community for a longer period of time, institutional ethnographic research often concerns circumstances and communities that the researcher is familiar with from the outset and, thus, shorter periods of fieldwork may prove sufficient (Bernard 2002, p. 330).

In this study, material day-to-day consumption, as part of the practice of running a household, was studied through a multi-perspective spectrum of methods: participant observation, visual (photographic) evidence, semi-structured interviews, and introspection. The fieldwork was conducted during the period from February 2016 to August 2016, in a medium-sized municipality (nearly 73,000 inhabitants) in Finland. Eighteen (18) informants, from a total of fifteen households, took part in the research. All of the informants were academic adults, aged 22 to 37, with either a university or college degree, or university studies under way. Educated, young individuals in an industrialised country constitute an interesting focus group from a policy perspective that emphasises the education of consumers and choice editing: these potentially highly eco-literate, environmentally aware, and often pro-responsibility people are those that are likely to be interested in sustainability-related information and to look for it when making purchases (Pekkanen et al. 2018). Although the market segmentation literature does not entirely agree on the characteristics of a potential green consumer (Laroche et al. 2001), the selected group of informants, based on the demographics, is likely to fall within the category of consumers with a propensity for pro-environmental action (Inglehart 1995; Marquart-Pyatt 2008). Moreover, the informants were selected in an attempt to control for cultural background, and thus, all the informants were born and raised in Finland. In addition to these homogenising background factors, there were differentiating demographics in terms of field of work/study, level of income, and mode of living. The gender distribution was ten (10) men, and eight (8) women. The background information about the informants is summarised in Appendix 1 in Table 1.

The informants were recruited through a snowballing technique, starting from acquaintances and students recruited in class.[1] Contact with informants was established either face-to-face or by phone. A confirmatory e-mail with detailed instructions and information on the research was sent to all informants. At the outset, the informants were told that the research concerned daily consumption practices, without referring to the sustainability dimension of the research question.

After establishing contact with an informant, participant observation began in a grocery store of the informant's choice. While specific attention was paid to the informant's way of choosing items, as well as the types of items selected, most of the informants naturally became engaged in an informal discussion at the same time, resulting in a more elaborate picture of their grocery shopping patterns, their motivations for selecting particular goods, and the kinds of products they purchased. As the purpose was to accompany informants during their shopping routines, some informants were met in one supermarket according to their grocery shopping patterns, and some informants were observed and followed in several stores during one shopping trip.

Thereafter, the informants were advised to take photos of their everyday household activities at home over a period of 1 week. They were instructed to focus on the moments of everyday routines that involved the handling of a commodity of material necessity. Both the observations and the photographs served as a basis for further interviews conducted in the homes of the informants. The semi-structured interviews, lasting from 50 to 90 min each, revolved around the practice of running a household, and consumption in general and as part of housekeeping. In addition, themes such as worldviews and values, and sustainability in general and in everyday life were elaborated upon (see Fig. 2 in Appendix 2 for the original interview guide). Whereas some of the informants from the same household were interviewed separately (and provided separate sets of photographs), some couples preferred to be interviewed together. In addition to interview transcripts and visual consumption diaries, the data comprise field notes from the grocery store visits and about several informal discussions with the informants. A research diary was also kept for personal reflection; introspection serves as a complementary perspective to the data gathered through other means.

Processing of Data

The data from all the available sources were first compiled for each household separately, to form a coherent picture of their everyday household practices. The sustainability of practices is assessed on a relative basis. In practice, the relative sustainability is considered between a realised action and an alternative to that action, the sustainability of which can reasonably be assessed by the agent. Reasonable alternative here refers to a choice that an informant could make in situ; for instance, not acquiring a certain product at all, choosing an alternative product from similar products, or choosing a substitute or an alternative way of accomplishing similar ends. For example, one can buy a larger package of hand soap and refill an existing bottle by the sink at home. This would be considered more sustainable than buying a bottle of soap each time. Another example of relative sustainability would be the use of eco-labelled products. Within the information reach of a consumer, eco-labelled products can be assessed as being more sustainable than non-labelled items.

The baseline for the awareness and understanding of sustainability, in turn, is derived from the interviews held with the informants. In other words, the choices are first considered in the light of a collective understanding of sustainability, based on which an informant could make informed choices. How such collective understanding looks in relation to more absolute, objective terms, and how possible discrepancies may influence the real sustainability of practices are further considered in the light of existing knowledge.

Understanding each informant's daily household practices, through which material consumption occurs, laid the

[1] Econometrics tutorials for advanced Bachelor's level students.

foundations for further analysis. Household practices were further compared across households, and the following analysis begins with the elaboration of these common practices. Understanding this common gridline of everyday life allows for the comparison of emerging differences fuelled by individual agency. The relative sustainability of the consumption of goods can further be detected both for the common, embedded ways of conducting everyday life and for acts due to deliberate choices by individuals.

The analysis was guided by the means of qualitative content analysis (Berg 2001): codes were attached to sustainability features at a household level, and further, the emerging similarities across households formed higher-level themes. The role of coding was facilitating, used as a means to explicate the data to recognise themes of collectively shared embedded or deliberate sustainability of household practices (Syrjäläinen 1994). First, the relative sustainability of consumption at a household level was coded both for the ways of consuming and for the characteristics of the consumed goods. The codes were attached to sustainability features in the interview data, but also to field notes and visual observations. Thus, the number of occurrences appears less crucial, emphasising the guiding role of coding, and the importance of theory-driven analysis.

To give examples of the sustainability features at a household level, buying unbleached filter bags for a coffee machine and eco-labelled toilet paper, and favouring potatoes over rice, are all purchases of lesser environmental burden. The ways of using and purchasing things were also considered. Minimal use of personal hygiene products and walking to the nearest supermarket would also pose a smaller stress on the surroundings. These sustainability features were then compared across households and further explicated in terms of the driving force for sustainability behaviour: whether it was a choice or whether it was a feature of embedded sustainability.

In contrast, the institutional cues were also coded throughout the different kinds of collected data, but the analysis was not driven by a search for emerging themes. Instead, the institutional references, often made implicitly, were treated as potential avenues for understanding the interrelatedness of external drivers and the emerged features of sustainability. At this stage, the content analysis proceeded in a theory-driven manner, in that concepts from practice theory and institutional theory were used to compile the whole picture of the sustainability of household practices in an institutional environment (see Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2011).

Accordingly, the following chapter progresses from consciously made sustainability choices towards the elaboration and analysis of more subtle, embedded sustainability features, with the analysis being guided by the practice theoretical concepts of habitus and field (see section "On Institutional Ethnography and Practices"). The theory-driven analysis, culminating in an overarching conceptual model of how the institutional environment interacts with the sustainability of domestic consumption, is reasoned thereafter.

Analysis

Material Consumption on the Gridline of Everyday Life

When the informants were asked to elaborate on material goods they use while running the household, they started with food. Many of the practices around food appear similar, although a lot of variation occurs in terms of preferences. In contrast, strikingly many forgot to document any use of paper products in their photo diaries. However, everyone uses at least toilet paper. The use of filter bags for coffee machines and baking paper is also firmly embedded in the collectively adapted ways of cooking and brewing coffee. Both kinds of paper products were eventually found in nearly every household.

Other household practices involving the use of material commodities pertain to personal hygiene and the cleanliness of the house. All the informants cleaned their homes and did their laundry themselves, and the minimum set of chemicals included some sort of multi-purpose cleanser, dishwashing liquid, and laundry detergent. The minimum set of personal hygiene products, in turn, seems to comprise shampoo (and often conditioner), shower gel, hand soap, and deodorant. However, although the cleaning and personal hygiene practices are very similar across households, the number of various hygiene and cleansing products varies a lot, reflecting different habits and preferences.

Material consumption, and the household practices embracing it, appears to fall into four categories. Food-related practices and personal hygiene form the most visible categories, whereas cleaning chemicals and paper products appear to be integrated into household practices to such an extent that they vanish from sight in the taken-for-granted setting of a household. Accordingly, food is the product category in which individual preferences, pro-sustainability or not, play out most significantly, along with personal hygiene products. The (un)sustainability in the use of paper and cleaning products is often more subtle, embedded in the ways of conducting everyday life at home, as will be elaborated upon in more detail in the following sections.

The Conscious Choice and Sustainability

Some of the informants self-declared as having pro-sustainability preferences, but not all. In food consumption, those who consciously took environmental considerations into account chose to favour plant-based and/or locally produced food. Two of the informants were (lacto-ovo) vegetarians; four other informants had consciously paid attention to meat consumption for environmental reasons. Although decreasing meat consumption was commonly understood as a way to lower the environmental burden of eating, replacing meat with plant-based protein is, however, exceptional in the commonplace diet in Finland (de Boer et al. 2006). Meat (pork, beef, fish, or poultry) is considered to be an essential part of every meal, which was reflected in the informants' eating habits, as well.

Another food-related preference with a conscious environmental motivation concerns the domestic production and origin of the ingredients. Short transportation distances were considered environmentally friendly, and consuming domestically produced food was seen as responsible, in terms of supporting the domestic economy but also from the environmental and ethical point of view. Favouring Finnish produce and other groceries for the sake of responsibility appears as a prominent discourse; a collective way of understanding reality, verbalised and referred to as something commonly perceived.

Organic food appears as a more multifaceted sub-category of food. Since organic food tends to command a price premium, buying organic food is mostly intentional, indicating a preference for organic consumption. However, motivations for purchasing organic are diverse. Health and environmental reasons, and some sort of sympathy towards organic food production, explained informants' buying behaviour. It seems noteworthy that some informants, without having any self-expressed motivation for environmentally or socially responsible consumption, nevertheless bought organic food intentionally. From the group of informants in this study, this phenomenon seems to be connected to having grown up in the countryside.

Sometimes health and practical reasons overweighed sustainability-related preferences, even for environmentally or ethically motivated consumers. To illustrate this, only on rare occasions did the informants go to a specific shop to find some sort of eco-grocery, but for specific personal hygiene products or cosmetics, many were willing to make the extra effort. Sometimes practical reasons were also brought up to compete with environmental motivation. For example, one informant who would prefer both an eco-labelled laundry detergent and a big package size, said that this combination was not available.

The examples reveal the devious relationship between self-motivated choices and their sustainability outcomes. Some choices that are motivated by environmental concerns also turn out to be sustainable, such as reducing meat consumption, according to extant knowledge. However, the responsibility and environmental claims about Finnish produce may be problematic in many respects. Moreover, choices that are not motivated by sustainability concerns, but by something else, may turn out to be sustainable. Organic food provides an example of this.

Moreover, the data serve several examples of the uneasy relationship between pro-sustainability values and sustainability acts. Informants who eventually turned out to have deep environmental concerns wished to distance themselves from what they called "environmental hippieness". For instance, one informant packed mushrooms in a plastic bag in a grocery store, mentioning that she would have preferred a paper bag. The moment she ended that thought, she hurried to explain that she meant that mushrooms go bad in a plastic bag, and that there were no other reasons for her worry over choosing the plastic option. Another example would concern buying eggs originating from cage-free chicken farms: an informant who pointed out that he did not have any sustainability-driven motivations for consumption choices, bought eggs from cage-free farms. The only explicitly articulated reason was: "I don't want to buy from cage farms".

The Embeddedness of Sustainability

Cultural Dispositions and Practices

> Somehow, there is this endeavour to live within the cycle of nature, not to go backwards in development […] I wouldn't go to extremes, I don't know how to tell.[2]

This interview excerpt implies the deeply rooted, implicitly ubiquitous, collectively shared way of understanding sustainability at large. More elaborately, the path towards contributing to sustainable development would open up through a more self-sustained life, in a deeper connection with nature. In a very practical and realistic manner, the conception has a sense of a 'back to the nature' mentality combined with and supported by trust in technological development and the opportunities this may open. In terms of *habitus* and *field*, this could be conceptualised as a shared disposition of the informants' habitus due to the shared cultural field in which they grew up. These dispositions are difficult to detect from inside the cultural context, as they are essentially part of a shared, and often very unconscious, way of understanding and interpreting the world.

These dispositions seem to lay the foundations that shape practices—the gridline of everyday life. Culturally shared dispositions lay the foundations for regarding something as ordinary and may thus be realised through practices that are *sustainable* by their very nature. An example would be the berry-picking tradition and other personal use of forests.

[2] The interviews were carried out in Finnish, and the excerpts were later translated into English by the author.

Even though the informants live in a city, half of them went berry picking in the autumn, and preserved the berries in a freezer. Three of the informants ate game-meat regularly, and one other informant raised an interest in learning how to hunt. Some informants get produce from their parents' gardens. Notably, people do not pick berries because it is an ecological deed; it is part of an ordinary way of life that does not need justification or a reason. These are habits and traditions that involve people regardless of their attitudes, intentions, and motivations for pro-responsibility behaviour. In other words, when culturally widely shared practices embed sustainability, it is adopted by a variety of people and enables sustainability to pervade the society.

Sustainability at this gridline practice level concerns mainly the way we are used to using particular material goods in our daily lives; no one questioned the use of toilet paper, shampoo, or disposable sanitary pads, for example, although their use as part of household practices is neither self-evident nor universal. However, practices may involve choices that eventually become integral parts of the practices themselves. For example, the use of paper products was an integral part of practices that were similar across households. In that, the potential sustainability of paper use is limited mostly to the choice of products. The following concisely toned interview excerpt tells a prevailing story:

Interviewer	What is the trademark of the toilet paper you buy?
Informant	I don't recall
Interviewer	What is the reason you have chosen this product?
Informant	It doesn't cost like heck, and it feels okay in use
Interviewer	Does the colour matter?
Informant	Not really
Interviewer	What do you mean by not really?
Informant	Well it doesn't really matter, but it seems that those slightly better papers, those are white; and those like sandpaper, those have [a browner] colour
Interviewer	The paper you usually use, do you remember whether it has any environmental label on it?
Informant	I don't remember, I haven't checked
Interviewer	Would it matter for you in these kinds of products?
Informant	Not really, it's more like, if it turns out that something kills half of Finland, then I can switch to another product, otherwise it is not so strict

The informant did, in fact, use eco-labelled toilet paper. Nearly every informant used eco-labelled toilet paper, but only a few were aware of it. Similarly, not everybody recalled the trademark of the toilet paper that they used, not even in the common case that the informant would always select the same paper, out of routine. Notably, the informants who intentionally wanted to purchase environmentally friendly toilet paper assessed sustainability based on whether the paper was bleached, instead of choosing an eco-labelled product. Furthermore, informants who made no conscious effort towards sustainable paper purchases had a remarkably similar set of preferences to each other, which is evident from the conversation excerpt above: toilet paper should be inexpensive, but for reasons of convenience, not the cheapest option. Products meeting these preferences appear to be eco-labelled, as a rule. The choice of an environmentally sounder paper itself seems to be embedded in the practice due to a match between preferences and the available selection. Thus, when it comes to paper products, sustainability appears to be largely embedded in practices, equalising sustainability across various types of consumers.

People can also choose consciously to act against practices. This seems to require both extra effort and high motivation. A sustainability-related example of these widely shared ways of doing things would include the position of meat and milk in the commonplace diet. Being a vegetarian most often requires breaking away from the adapted way of carrying on with life, and learning deviating ways of doing things in the same institutional context that helps to maintain the traditional way of doing things. On the other hand, vegetarianism is enabled, for instance, by transnational learning, due to mobility and easy access to information, as well as markets that respond to an increasing demand for plant-based proteins. In addition to the effort, it requires conscious motivation: both of the vegetarian informants had a strong personal drive to live in an ecological manner.

Another example of the extra effort required to do things differently on the level of a culturally widely shared practice concerns patterns of shopping. The retail of day-to-day consumer goods in Finland is an oligopoly. The two major grocery retailers together hold a market share of over 80%. People are used to doing grocery shopping within the supply of these two chains, and many people buy all their day-to-day consumer goods from these stores, which has become the ordinary way of daily matters. Some of the informants, however, deviated from this pattern. One couple purchased produce from local farms through a small, locally operating non-profit organisation that arranges the delivery process. Another informant bought shampoo refills for her own bottle from a special shop. Both cases, again, involved a high level of self-motivation.

To reiterate, sustainability in culturally widely shared practices makes sustainable behaviour pervasive among a variety of people. When these practices are non-sustainable, however, it requires an extra high level of self-reflection and motivation to engage in more sustainable ways of carrying out things.

Routines

Largely constrained by the culturally widely shared ways of doing things, people develop different kinds of routines reflecting the different circumstantial social fields that conditioned the development of their habitus. The difference between practices and routines may appear subtle. To illustrate, everyone cleans and eats, and takes care of personal hygiene. In a given location, household practices tend to share remarkable similarities: people take care of their cleanliness in a certain manner, they are used to particular patterns of eating, and they shop for groceries, do laundry, and store items for further use in a certain way. However, the routines around these practices involve various kinds of products and their use.

Compared with culturally widely shared practices, the level of routines is generally more conscious to the agent. For instance, many of the informants were used to frequently picking up the same products from the grocery store, which was both evident from their way of acting in the store, and in many cases articulated explicitly by the informant.

Furthermore, routines change more easily than practices, either due to self-motivation or because of a circumstantial influence. The effect of a partner was evident. One informant had adapted to vegetarian eating habits at home due to a vegetarian partner; another said that she had a strong preference for vegetarian food before moving in together with her partner. Partners influenced food-related practices in a more subtle way, evident to the informants, too. Informants described putting more effort into cooking when sharing meals with someone, and being "lazier with food" when living temporarily alone. When asked what might bring about a change in consumption habits in general, an informant said:

> If I lived with someone. I'm just so used to making always the same food, but if someone put a list in my hand and told me to buy these things, that could change [my consumptions habits]

Routines may also appear as an outcome of a chosen lifestyle, or a lifestyle one has adopted less consciously, over a longer period of time. In particular, several informants lived a very minimalistic life in terms of material consumption, for various reasons. Some connected it with a desire to live as ecologically as possible, but one brought up an ascetic ideal of avoiding everything unnecessary; another said that her anti-materialistic lifestyle was a result of moving a lot and often. Although a minimalistic lifestyle was a choice for these informants, for some it seems to be a reflection of both personality and circumstances: the way life just is. One informant realised this during the interview; when asked whether he would describe his lifestyle as sustainable, he replied:

> No. Although I consume rather little, so that's positive, in the end I consume surprisingly little, now that I think about it [- -] [Interviewer: Why do you consume little?] Because I don't need anything. I've thought about this, that even if I had millions [of euros], I wouldn't probably consume any differently, because it does not mean anything to me.

Furthermore, the pure urge to consume only "what you need" seems to be connected with organised patterns of grocery shopping, few impulse purchases, and careful preservation of ingredients and left-overs, resulting eventually in negligible amounts of food waste.

Routines, in other words, relate to both practices and consciously made choices and preferences. Sustainable practices may serve as a platform for sustainable routines to emerge. Thus, routines may appear sustainable without consciously and pro-sustainably made choices. On the other hand, a conscious effort can be made to change one's consumption routines. Sustainable choices may become a natural part of everyday routines. However, preferences that are detached from sustainable motivations and intentions may also shape routines that are, eventually, sustainable.

A summary of the key observations on features of sustainability embodied at various levels of embeddedness is given in Table 2 in Appendix 3.

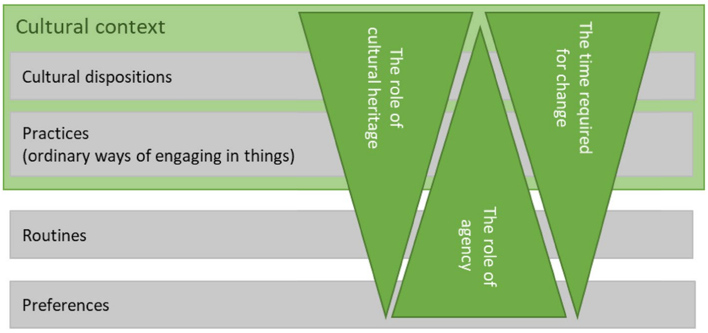
How Do Conscious Choices and Embeddedness Relate? (Institutions Revisited)

The theory-driven explication of the sustainability of household consumption in the light of *habitus* and *social field,* presented in the previous section, is summarised below in a conceptual model (Fig. 1). The model forms a hierarchy, ranging from cultural dispositions and practices to routines and preferences. Each of these levels depicts a nature of human action that bears sustainability in a distinct way.

The hierarchy that emerges consists of four layers of the underlying structures that shape our action. The levels differ in terms of how much power is exerted by agency versus cultural heritage (social structure) in each. In an attempt to render behaviour more sustainable, we thus need to understand from which level the reason for undesired action stems. *We also need to understand how the levels interact with each other, and with the surrounding institutional setting.* These issues are intertwined and shed some interesting light on the interaction between informal and formal institutions.

A central internal feature of the hierarchy lies in the time span that it requires for each layer to change; the higher the level, the more time it takes to change. Two of the top-most layers illustrated in the figure depict the so-called cultural

Fig. 1 Hierarchy of informal institutions



context: cultural disposition depicts the way the informants had grown up understanding and attaching meanings to the world; simply put, practices refer to the ways the informants had grown up doing things and engaging in things. The evolution of cultural dispositions is, arguably, an extremely slow process, connected with nature and geography, climate, and language, to say the least. The permanent nature of practices compared to routines and preference-based choices implies their firm interconnectedness to formal structures of society; practices, as taken-for-granted ways of carrying out our daily lives, have evolved together with the wider institutional structures in which our behaviour is partly embedded (Shove 2003). These institutional structures take a long time to change (Williamson 2000), implying that the moulding of practices, as a tied process to institutional structures, would also be a slow and long process. Routines, in turn, are built upon practices (and eventually upon cultural dispositions); they are different ways to perform things within the cultural context. They are more conscious to the agent than the cultural context, and they change more quickly. Preferences, in turn, may change overnight. Furthermore, routines and preferences are more likely to be affected by such institutions as discourses, media, and marketing, for they are primarily controlled by agency.

To illustrate this internal logic, many of the informants brought up a desire not to acquire and keep things that they do not need. Several of them made a comparison with their parents, who used to "hoard things". When asked to consider why their parents' behaviour differed in this sense, one informant said: "They are probably preparing for a winter war." Although it was said with a grain of sarcasm, the other side of the coin tells a story of how habits change due to evolving circumstances, but how it may take a generation for the change to be realised. Another informant, living a (not environmentally motivated) minimalistic life, said that money is purely a matter of security to him. Material possessions may have represented security for the parents' generation, in the same way that money does for the 30-year-old informant today. Security, after all, was the feature that was always brought up when the informants described a society that is good and desirable. Habits stick, and while the institutional setting is now shared by both generations, their behaviour differs.

Linked to the more permanent nature of the higher levels in the hierarchy, they can be thought of posing constraints on lower-level institutions. In practice, this means that if a behavioural change was initiated through external intervention, such as a policy measure, the goal of the intervention at a certain level would need to be in line with the higher levels of the underlying structure of action. For instance, if a practice is unsustainable by its very nature, changing people's preferences is not likely to lead to a desired change in behaviour. The higher level, in other words, defines what is seen as legitimate, to some extent. To illustrate, interventions planned to promote green consumerism, as in the buying of more environmentally friendly products, will not take hold if the goal of this intervention contradicts the cultural disposition shaping the understanding of what is sustainable and what kinds of actions would eventually contribute towards sustainable development. In the present study, a deeper connection with nature, living directly from nature as much as possible, was seen as the end of the sustainability axis. Purchasing eco-labelled products, in other words, is not seen as a way to make a difference. This is probably further reinforced by the evident suspicion towards marketing as an institution.

The hierarchy of cultural context and agency, as elaborated above, may inform us further about the potentially different ways in which certain formal institutions may interact with informal structures in society. Depending on the nature of the informal institution, its permanency, and its relation to other informal institutions, its interaction with an external institution may lead to various economic outcomes. This finding may open up new avenues for understanding, for example, why some formal institutions take hold in a society, whereas others do not. Moreover, the conceptualised hierarchy of informal institutions may further prove useful together with the hierarchy of (formal) institutions presented by Williamson (2000). These two hierarchies appear commensurable in their internal logic, and bringing these two hierarchies into contact may inform further hypothesis-building on the combined impact of formal and informal institutions on economic activity more generally.

Furthermore, instead of considering a practice as one informal institution, the study places the practice as the unit of analysis through which the economic action occurs. Consumption, as part of the practice of running a household, is considered to be shaped in interaction with various institutional forces, both formal and informal. In that, the angle of this study can be seen as an extension to the institutional economic idea of institutions and embeddedness; a practice also embodies the cultural context in which formal institutions may become embedded. Studying individual economic actions through a practice that is shaped by the institutional environment opens up an angle to reason how meso- and macro-forces come into contact with micro-activity.

Summary and Conclusion

Transitioning to a sustainable society is the challenge of our time, and patterns of consumption play a role in this challenge. Despite the academic interest and the acknowledged policy relevance of the issue, the question of how agency in sustainable consumption relates to broader societal structures remains largely unanswered (Kemp and van Lente 2013; McMeekin and Southerton 2012). The prevailing paradigm in sustainable consumption studies is still largely built on an image of a consumer whose preferences and values are to be ‘greened’ in order to achieve a more sustainable society (Keller et al. 2016; Halkier 2013).

However, we do not consume in a vacuum. Our consumption behaviour is affected by the structures and rules surrounding us. The study at hand set out to study how agency relates to societal structures in the context of sustainable consumption. Methodologically, the study builds on practice theoretical understanding of human action (Bourdieu 1990; Warde 2005), recognising the similarities it shares with the so-called old institutional economics (Trigg 2001). The explorative study draws on the methodological ideas of institutional ethnography. The aim of institutional ethnographic research, which is to give an analytical description of how the relations of ruling, organisation, and control shape the activities of people, provides a natural point of intersection with theories of practice and institutional theory.

The results of this ethnographic inquiry contribute to the literature both theoretically and on a subject level. First, the study concludes the theory-driven analysis with a conceptual model that can inform further studies and further understanding of how sustainability, rooted to different natures of action, interacts differently with different institutions. The paper argues that in order to understand how various institutions interact with the sustainability of consumption, it is crucial to recognise the underlying structures that shape the actions: cultural dispositions, practices, routines, and preference-driven choices all interact differently with external changes. Furthermore, these four layers form a hierarchy that imposes consequences for policy interventions. As the cultural context (cultural dispositions and practices) changes slowly and is likely to be firmly intertwined with the existing institutional environment, sustainability is more widespread if it is embedded in the cultural context, as opposed to being a result of more agency-driven forms of action. In other words, if a pervasive sustainability is to be achieved and maintained, it should be embedded in practices that have taken shape together with the wider institutional structures of society. Conversely, if sustainability is to be rooted through choice editing, the intervention is more likely to take hold the more it is in line with the more permanent structures of actions, meaning the cultural context. In this light, the evidence of this study gives a rather pessimistic view on choice editing. The informants’ intrinsic understanding of what is sustainable relates to a more self-sustained life, in deeper connection with nature. Buying products that claim to pose less stress on the environment than ordinary products is hardly perceived as being in line with the forces that could boost sustainable development.

Theoretically, the conceptual model has the potential to further widen the understanding of the interaction between informal and formal institutions within the literature on institutional economics. A stable view of culture is replaced by a holistic way of engaging in things: partially embedded in the social structure, partially due to the cognitive processing of an individual, and allowing for a dynamic view of the informal institutional framework and its interaction with formal institutions. As for the literature on sustainability transitions, the conceptual model offers insight into how cultural context interacts with sustainable consumption agency, which remains an aspect given very little attention in the literature.

Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of understanding the various roots and causes of consumption that can be considered sustainable. The evidence tells the story that practices may be moulded to become sustainable due to an institutional process over time; sustainable routines may emerge against this backdrop or they may be, for example, a result of a chosen minimalist lifestyle, due to ascetic ideals. The outcome of people's choices can be sustainable even though they were made due to preferences that were not linked to environmental or social motivations or values. The variety of reasons for which people behave sustainably without pro-sustainable intentions deserves and calls for further research, urgently. This non-intentional sustainability behaviour in consumption has gone under the radar in academic literature, although its policy relevance is obvious. The difficulty in getting people to act on environmental concern (let alone the difficulty in 'greening' peoples' values) is well documented. Understanding the reasons why people act in a sustainable manner without a conscious intention to do so could help in designing policy measures that would reach a wider group of citizens, beyond environmentally and socially aware consumers. The policy measures would need to acknowledge and address both the culturally embedded sustainable practices and the (non-green) preferences that lead to sustainable behaviour.

This study analysed household practices that involved the use of a range of consumer goods. Further insights could be obtained either by broadening the studied set of products or by narrowing it down to a more specific set of practices. The study is also delimited to a rather specific geographic and demographic stratum, which allows for a deeper understanding within this context, but at the same time limits the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, the study accumulates knowledge on sustainable consumption in the very context that is already most covered by academic literature: in a high-income country in the Northern hemisphere. In order to widen the understanding of sustainable development on a global scale, sustainable consumption should be addressed extensively in the context of developing economies, as well. In general, carrying out similar investigations in various contexts could further inform both the generalisability of the results and the desirable policy recommendations for reinforcing sustainability in various institutional contexts.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest Pekkanen T-L declares that she has no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Appendix 1

See Table 1.

Table 1 Background information on the informants and data sources by informant

Household	Informant	Age		Type of dwelling				Members of the household				Occupancy			Field of profession				Data sources by informant			Further notes
		22–30	30–37	Apartment	Attached house	Owner of the property	Tenant	Lives alone	Lives with partner	Lives with partner and children	Lives in shared flat	Student	Part-time job/summer job	Full-time job	Engineering, environmental/energy	Engineering, other	Business & economics	Health sciences, social services	Photo diary	Participant observation[a]	Interview[b]	
A	1	X		X			X	X				X				X			X	X	X	
B	2	X		X			X	X				X			X				X	X	X	
C	3		X	X			X		X					X		X	X		X	X	X	
	4		X	X			X		X					X	X		X		X	X	X	
D	5		X	X			X	X				X		X		X			X	X	X	
E	6		X	X			X				X	X	X				X		X	X	X	
F	7	X		X			X		X			X						X	X	X	X	One photo diary together
	8	X		X			X		X			X						X				Interviewed together
G	9		X	X			X	X				X					X		X	X	X	Interviewed in the interviewer's office
H	10	X		X			X				X	X	X					X	X	X	X	Participant observation in several grocery stores
I	11	X		X			X		X			X			X				X	X	X	
J	12		X		X	X				X				X	X				X	X	X	
	13		X		X	X				X				X	X				X		X	
K	14	X		X			X		X			X			X				X	X	X	One photo diary together
	15	X		X			X		X			X				X						Interviewed together

Table 1 (continued)

House-hold	Inform-ant	Age		Type of dwelling				Members of the household				Occupancy			Field of profession				Data sources by informant			Further notes
		22–30	30–37	Apart-ment	Attached house	Owner of the property	Ten-ant	Lives alone	Lives with partner	Lives with partner and chil-dren	Lives in shared flat	Stu-dent	Part-time job/sum-mer job	Full-time job	Engi-neering, environ-mental/energy	Engi-neer-ing, other	Busi-ness & eco-nom-ics	Health sciences, social services	Photo diary	Participant observation[a]	Inter-view[b]	
L	16	X		X			X				X	X	X		X					X	X	The inform-ant intro-duced his household products before the interview at home
M	17		X	X			X	X				X		X		X			X	X	X	Participant observa-tion in several shops
N	18		X		X	X				X				X		X			X	X		Extensive informal (unre-corded) discus-sions in the super-market and in the inform-ant's home

[a]In a grocery store

[b]In the informant's home

Appendix 2

See Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 Interview guide

Appendix 3

See Table 2.

Table 2 Key observations of features of sustainability embodied at different levels of embeddedness, categorised by product type and data source (*P* photo diary, *O* participant observation, *I* interview)

	Product categories			
	Food	Personal hygiene products	Cleaning chemicals	Paper products
Preferences	Vegetarianism, reducing meat consumption[P,O,I] Organic food (perceived sustainability)[P,O,I] Domestic origin of food/locally produced food (perceived sustainability)[P,O,I] Eggs from cage-free farms[P,O,I]	Organic products[P,I] Products not tested on animals[P,I]	Eco-labelled products[P,I]	Non-bleached toilet paper[P,O,I] Non-bleached coffee filter bags[P,O,I] Eco-labelled products[P,O,I]
Routines	Using re-usable bags for grocery shopping[P,O] "Buying only what you need" (prevention of food waste through planning and organised shopping patterns)[P,O]	Minimal use of hygiene products (only the minimal set)[P,I] Use of refill bottles for hand soap[P] Buying shampoo and soap in one's own bottles directly from the shop[P] Thorough use of purchased items[D,O,I] Careful selection of products (negligible impulse purchases)[P,O,I]	Favouring big package size[P,O,I] Minimal use of cleaning chemicals[P,I] Rare use of strong, special cleaning chemicals (such as for the oven)[P]/wide use of one or two eco-labelled multi-purpose cleansers[P]	Re-usable substitutes for baking paper[I]
Practices	Berry picking[P,I] Produce form parents' garden[I] Hunting[I] Careful preservation of food and left-overs[P,I] Separate disposal of compostable waste[I]			Minimal use of disposable paper towels (using re-usable cloths for wiping surfaces)[D] Unintentional and routinised use of eco-labelled toilet paper[P,O,I] Recycling of forest products[I]
Cultural dispositions	Understanding of game meat as sustainable food[I]	Understanding of minimal use of things as sustainable[I] Appreciation of things and food acquired as directly from nature as possible[I]		

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Publication III

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The responsibility of an ethnocentric consumer—nationalistic, patriotic or environmentally conscientious? A critical discourse analysis of 'buy domestic' campaigns.

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The responsibility of an ethnocentric consumer – nationalistic, patriotic or environmentally conscientious? A critical discourse analysis of "buy domestic" campaigns

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Abstract

Purpose – The study examines the responsibilisation of an ethnocentric consumer in commercial, meta-organisational discourses. In addition to nationalistic and patriotic discourses, the focus is on wider conceptualisations of consumer responsibility.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper uses critical discourse analysis as a methodological approach to conduct an empirical case study on the texts of two producer-driven labelling campaigns.

Findings – The campaign texts create possibilities for ethnocentric consumption with positioning, argumentative and classificatory discourses. Patriotic responsibilisation is emphasised, together with rationales to take action on environmental concerns.

Practical implications – The study highlights the responsibility of marketers over their corporate responsibility communication, suggesting that ethnocentric promotions may have the power to alter how consumers take action on various responsibility concerns.

Social implications – The study surfaces the tensions that responsible consumption can entail for consumers. Indeed, nationalistic and patriotic discourses may alter our understanding of responsibility issues that may seem completely separate from the concepts of nationalism and patriotism.

Originality/value – The paper shows how different organisational texts are deployed to bring about the idea of ethnocentric consumption and how this relates to responsibility discourses, nationalism and patriotism.

Keywords Ethnocentric consumption, Responsibility, Nationalism, Patriotism, Interdiscursivity, Critical discourse analysis

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Globalisation has recently faced counterforces from nationalistic tendencies. The political arena has seen the rise of populist right-wing parties, while protectionist policies have gained strength. Currently, there has been the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, which is also

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likely to bring new nuances into the ethnocentric rhetoric. As an example of this phenomenon, citizens are responsibilised in the name of protecting domestic jobs and the national economy through "buy domestic" campaigns, which can be commercially or state led (OECD, 2010; Lekakis, 2017). These campaigns aim at promoting *ethnocentric consumption*, favouring domestic products at the expense of foreign substitutes (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Bizumic, 2019; Shankarmahesh, 2006). At the same time, local consumer identities are constantly negotiated by global trends in consumer culture (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019; Cleveland and Bartch, 2019). For instance, social and environmental crises have become more and more global, and there have been calls to employ consumer choice and responsibility to help alleviate these issues (Giesler and Veresieu, 2014; Kipp and Hawkins, 2019). These pressures do not just concretise political, economic and environmental macro-tendencies; they also present consumers with potentially contradictory ways of acting responsibly. In other words, consumption has become the site of a discursive struggle over the meaning of consumer responsibility (Hobson, 2010; Gössling and Peeters, 2007; Caruana and Crane, 2008). However, the aspects of responsibility around ethnocentric consumption have not been explicitly discussed in international marketing literature.

The current study examines the concept of ethnocentric consumption in light of responsibility, extending prevalent understanding of how ethnocentric consumption is constituted. Empirically, we conduct a critical discourse analysis of two producer-driven Finnish labelling campaigns; these campaigns allow for exploration of the ethnocentric responsibilisation of a consumer beyond what is usually discussed in the literature on economic nationalism or ethnocentric consumption – that is, beyond patriotism and nationalism (Castelló and Mihelj, 2018; Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Traditionally, the international marketing literature has focused on ethnocentrism largely as an individual trait (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Shankarmahesh, 2006), guiding the implications for international marketing strategy (Steenkamp, 2019; Fong *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, the study illuminates the ways in which "buy domestic" campaigns funnel macro-tendencies into the possibilities for consumer action. Although the impact of the political and economic environment on ethnocentric consumption has been acknowledged (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Balabanis *et al.*, 2002; Bizumic, 2019), little seems to be known about the specific mechanisms that connect individual subjects to their contexts. The current study addresses this gap by analysing organisational discourses to understand how nationalistic tendencies and the responsibility of consumption are brought together to inform ethnocentric consumption practices. The study conceptualises the discursive mechanisms that provide the conditions of possibility for such practices to emerge.

2. Responsibility in ethnocentric consumption

Responsibility in consumption studies is most commonly understood through social and/or environmental responsibility (Carrington *et al.*, 2020). Sometimes, economic responsibility is included, too, especially in studies on sustainable consumption (Bruntdland Commission, 1987). The terminology around consumption ethics is voluminous and reflects different research traditions (Garcia-Ruiz and Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2014; Carrington *et al.*, 2020). Ethnocentric consumption, in turn, is thought to be driven by concern for the national economy, especially for the loss of domestic jobs (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). The responsibility of ethnocentric consumption, in other words, carries both social and economic connotations. However, despite the clear responsibility dimensions, ethnocentric consumption is not discussed within consumption ethics studies (see Carrington *et al.*, 2020). From a responsibility perspective, however, ethnocentric consumption shares common ground with several concepts used in responsible consumption studies.

Ethnocentric consumption is seen as a way to contribute towards change in the economic and/or political sphere. Here, the concept shares common ground with what is called *political* *consumerism* (Castelló and Mihelj, 2018), which is a form of economic action taken in the name of a cause – particularly with respect to political influence (Bossy, 2014; Holzer, 2006). Thus, ethnocentric consumption can be seen as a form of political consumerism. Ethnocentric consumption and political consumption can be realised through similar acts, such as boycotts or buycotts (Rössel and Schenk, 2018). However, political consumption often extends the scope from favouring products of certain national origin to wider aspects of responsibility (Rössel and Schenk, 2018).

The responsibility in ethnocentric consumption studies carries a nationalistic connotation (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Upadhyay and Singh, 2006), which may explain why it does not overlap with other consumption responsibility studies. The concept of ethnocentric consumption derives from Sumner's (1906/2007) ideas on ethnocentrism, which are charged with nationalistic sentiment. Contempt for outsiders is characteristic of Sumner's (1906/2007 p. 13) ethnocentrism; he formulated the phenomenon as originating from particular social relations: "[l]oyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, warlikeness without,—all grow together, common products of the same situation".

The feeling of superiority over out-groups is at the heart of definitions of nationalism (Adorno *et al.*, 1950; Druckman, 1994). Superiority towards other nations is also considered the dividing line between nationalism and patriotism (Adorno *et al.*, 1950; Feshbach, 1987; Kosterman and Feshbach, 1989; Karasawa, 2002). Both concepts have in common a love-like feeling towards one's own nation, but the concepts differ in their relationship towards out-groups. Patriotism is not seen as implying prejudice towards other cultures, nations and countries – whereas nationalism carries the connotation of superiority over out-groups (Adorno *et al.*, 1950; Feshbach, 1987). These conceptualisations and conceptual distinctions are adopted by the (international) marketing literature (e.g. Balabanis *et al.*, 2001; Vida and Reardon, 2008; Bizumic, 2019).

The concept of ethnocentrism was introduced to the marketing and consumer behaviour literature by Shimp and Sharma (1987). Their quantitative scale (CETSCALE), which reflects the level of consumers' ethnocentric tendencies, is widely used in marketing studies (e.g. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004; Steenkamp and de Jong, 2010; Cleveland *et al.*, 2009; Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2008; Yildiz *et al.*, 2018). Shimp and Sharma's (1987) scale of ethnocentric consumption tendencies reflects Sumner's (1906/2007) conceptualisation of ethnocentrism. Thus, nationalism is an inherent part of the CETSCALE. Upadhyay and Singh (2006) find that the 17 items forming the CETSCALE load on four factors: nationalism, socio-economic conservatism, protectionism and ultra-nationalism.

However, the question of whether ethnocentric consumption behaviour is *nationalistic* is not a straightforward matter. Studies have considered nationalism as an antecedent (Balabanis *et al.*, 2001) and mediator (Bizumic, 2019) to ethnocentric consumption tendencies. The literature appears somewhat elusive because ethnocentric consumption tendencies already comprise an inherent nationalistic component. Siamagka and Balabanis (2015) propose a reconceptualisation of consumer ethnocentric preferences; their construct includes altruism towards the national economy originating from patriotic love (see also Sharma *et al.*, 1995; Vida and Reardon, 2008). Balabanis *et al.* (2001) find that instead of nationalism, patriotism drives ethnocentric consumption in some contexts.

Moreover, consumers may prefer domestic products for reasons that do not obviously connect to nationalism. The concept of *local consumer culture* embraces consumption in relation to the local marketplace and its cultural meanings (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Steenkamp, 2019). Building on Arnould and Thompson (2005), Steenkamp (2019, p. 3) formulates local consumer culture as "a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are locally conceived and are mediated through geographically anchored, local markets". These "meaningful ways of life", which consumption enables, do not necessarily imply a nationalistic disposition, even though the mediating marketplace is local or domestic. For instance, environmental protection may play a crucial role in forming local consumer cultures around food consumption (Kennedy *et al.*, 2018; Götze and Brunner, 2020).

Finally, other research traditions may treat nationalism in relation to ethnocentric consumption differently than what is presented here. For example, the terms ethnocentric consumption and consumer nationalism are sometimes used interchangeably to denote the favouring of domestic products over foreign ones. However, studies on consumer nationalism often draw on humanities and social science research, further problematising the concept of nationalism in relation to consumption. For example, Wang (2005, pp. 223–224) uses consumer nationalism to refer to "consumers' invocation of collective identities based on their nationality to accept or reject products or brands from other counties". Castelló and Mihelj (2018, p. 6) define consumer nationalism more broadly as 'a set of discourses and practices that attach national significance to consumer objects'. Consumer nationalism, in other words, is seen as a form of banal nationalism, following Billig's (1995) definition. Banal nationalism refers to various mundane representations of nations that eventually build on a sense of shared national belonging.

To summarise, ethnocentric consumption is understood mainly through nationalistic discourses. However, ethnocentric consumption can share a conceptual common ground or common borderlines with other conceptualisations of responsibility. The approach in the current paper opens up the analysis to wider ideas of responsibility in constructing ethnocentric consumption.

3. A discursive perspective on the responsibility of ethnocentric consumption

Studies on ethnocentric consumption build heavily on an individualist paradigm (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Siamagka and Balabanis, 2015; Cleveland *et al.*, 2009; Sharma, 2015), understanding consumer ethnocentrism as "a trait-like property of individuals" personalities (Sharma *et al.*, 1995, p. 27). Thus, the responsibility of an ethnocentric consumer stems from an individual's moral and socio-normative cognitive perceptions about the consumption of domestic versus foreign goods. Personal values, demographic factors and personality characteristics have been commonly presented as affecting ethnocentric consumption (Balabanis *et al.*, 2002; Rawwas and Rajendran, 1996; Shimp and Sharma, 1987), whereas the role of the economic, political and societal environment in informing ethnocentric buying behaviour remains a less-explored topic (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Balabanis *et al.*, 2002; Crockett and Pendarvis, 2017). Although some studies do consider the societal context on ethnocentric consumption (Steenkamp and de Jong, 2010; Siamagka and Balabanis, 2015; Good and Huddleston, 1995; Strizhakova and Coulter, 2015), these studies tend to take societal factors as a given and as beyond the agency of definable entities. In other words, little is known about the mechanisms through which the societal context is funnelled to ethnocentric consumption tendencies.

Consuming individuals have also been examined in relation to societal structures. The *responsible consumer-citizen* is most commonly understood in the context of neoliberalism (Trnka and Trundle, 2014; Shamir, 2008); this approach conceptualises the decentralisation of markets, where free and highly aware consumers make individual choices to solve the environmental, social and economic problems of the world. Moreover, several authors – such as Arnould and Thompson (2005), Karababa and Ger (2011) and Borgerson (2005) – have noted that the impact of structural conditions on the creation of a consumer subject has remained absent in consumer research. As an alternative approach, Giesler and Veresiu (2014) argue that the creation of responsible consumer subjectivity requires active and purposeful management. Building on the theories on governmentality, Giesler and Veresiu (2014) propose a model of responsibilising consumers, demonstrating how responsible consumer subjectivity is created in the World Economic Forum's initiatives to solve social problems. They argue that the process of responsibilisation transforms the governmental responsibility into the shared responsibility of consumer subjects.

The current paper introduces critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a conceptual framework to systematically capture the constitutive nature of politico-economic institutions in creating consumer subjectivity in ethnocentric consumption. Consumers' concerns become actionable only through discourses that render these consumers – and the consumption itself – intelligible and that define opportunities for action. Organisations, both private (de Burg-Woodman and King, 2013) and public (Duffy and Ng, 2019), are active creators of such discourses.

The current study builds on the idea that organisational discourses, as forms of corporate communication, actively influence the social reality of a citizen-consumer (Caruana and Crane, 2008). A discourse can be defined as a collection of texts and related practices that bring objects into being (Phillips and Oswick, 2012). CDA can be seen as a set of theories and methods for investigating the connections between discourses and socio-cultural changes in various social spheres (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). CDA analyses the connections between – on the one hand – texts, communicative events and discursive practices and – on the other hand – social and cultural structures and relations (Fairclough, 1993). Although these links have been modelled in various ways (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), the current study draws on organisational discourse analyses (in its critical forms) (Caruana and Crane, 2008; Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Phillips and Hardy, 1997) because some main sources of texts related to ethnocentric and responsible consumption are the various organisations that promote it.

A central tenet of organisational discourse analysis is its attention to language – not as a reflection of reality but as a constructive force that defines what reality is (Hardy *et al.*, 2005). Discourse analysis "tries to explore the ways in which the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world come to be, or are enacted, through discourse" (Phillips and Oswick, 2012, p. 443). Thus, the produced texts can be viewed as "ruling in" certain possibilities for social structures and relations while ruling out others. The organising practices of ethnocentric and responsible consumption are instantiated in the texts comprising the discourse. That is, these texts provide the resources for organising social reality in a way that is conducive to a particular type of consumption. From this point of view, ethnocentric consumption and consumer responsibility become a complex set of ideas that are sustained in and through language and related practices. Because critical discourse analysis draws particular attention to the power relations between different entities, it is especially useful in considering a phenomenon with unstable and contested meanings.

A central focus of organisational discourse analysis involves how discourses construct *concepts*, *objects* and *subject positions* and establishes the power relations between them (Hardy and Phillips, 2004). Drawing on Fairclough and Foucault, *concepts* are defined by Hardy and Phillips (1999, pp. 3–4) as "ideas, categories, relationships, and theories through which we understand the world". *Objects* are seen as concepts that have material referents and *subject positions* as the ways in which subjects are formed through a discourse. For example, in dominant discourses, the concept of "concerned citizens" is understood revolving around markets rather than being predetermined and separate from the texts that define it (Caruana and Crane, 2008). Thus, the subjectivity of a responsible consumer is an effect of the discourses that construct such a position.

CDA can also grasp the overlaps between discourses through the concept of interdiscursivity. The analysis of "interdiscursivity of a text is analysis of the particular mix of genres, of discourses, and of styles upon which it draws, and of how different genres, discourses or styles are articulated ('worked') together in the text" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 218).

Such combinations of articulations can be seen at work in discursive and societal changes (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). These overlaps are at the core of the analytical framework because the focus is to point out how ethnocentric meanings and responsible consumption are configured with each other. The next section presents how the analysis is conducted to answer the following research question: How is ethnocentric consumption enabled through discourses of nationalism and patriotism, and how are consumers responsibilised through such discourses and potentially other discourses related to ethnocentric consumer responsibility?

4. Methods and materials

4.1 The case: Finnish producer-driven labelling organisations and their campaigns

To answer the research question, the authors conducted an empirical study on two labelling organisations and their campaigns, both in the Finnish context. Finland offers a timely example of the nationalistic political trend in Europe [1]. Also, Finland is being profiled as a particularly sustainable country [2]. Neither of these is in immediate relation to consumption practices as such. However, as particularly salient contextual factors, that might affect how the responsibility of consumption is understood, they provide an interesting societal backdrop for examining consumption discourses regarding responsibility and nationalism.

In contrast to previous studies, the labelling organisations and their communications – rather than the activities of individual corporations – were selected as the case studies. Indeed, these labelling organisations are important producers of the discourses related to responsible consumption because their non-firm-specific communications are used to change people's attitudes towards the topic. Labelling organisations can also be seen as forging network links among different actors, both organisational and individual, through the production of texts (Hardy and Phillips, 2004, p. 207). Thus, they become crucial agents in propagating discourses around a particular type of consumption.

The empirical analysis focuses on two labelling organisations and their communications to promote products and services of Finnish origin: the Association of Finnish Work, with its key-flag label and its *Blue-White Footprint* campaign (hereafter, "BW campaign") and the Association for Finnish Food Information and its *Produce of Finland* (PoF) label. Information on the labelling organisations, the campaigns and their labels are summarised in Table 1.

4.2 Data collection and analysis methods

To examine the labelling organisations and their campaigns, data were collected from the organisations' websites from 2014 to 2016. The time frame was selected because of the Association for Finnish Work's particular focus on the BW campaign during this period. However, the collection of texts was expanded from this initial focus to more fully explore the discourse on ethnocentric consumption. This was achieved by holistically gathering the corporate communications produced by the organisations during this time because these texts also provide the context for understanding the campaigns. The data gathering was then extended to other communications of the Association of Finnish Work – and to those of the Association of Finnish Food Information and its PoF labelling campaign. Texts related to these organisations were examined to explore the interdiscursive processes related to responsibility and nationalistic and patriotic discourses. In particular, examining the PoF campaign enabled the contrasting of the BW campaign with the other organisation's texts and to explore the similarities and differences among the texts.

Both labelling organisations have produced and published a variety of texts, both on their websites and physical products. These include press releases; research publications; and general information about certifications, their criteria and use. These texts also include narratives about certified companies, with an explicit promotional intent. Generally, communications can be seen

	Association for Finnish work [Suomalaisen työn liitto]	Association for Finnish food information; Finfood [Ruokatieto Yhdistys ry]
Scope and origin of labelling	Products and sevices (also design) Key Flag label was established in the 60s by Association for Finnish Work to promote products and services of Finnish origin	Food products (packaged) Established in 1993 to reinforce the image of Finnish food and communicate the Finnish origin of food produce to consumers
Labels (included in the campaign)	Existing lables in the campaign: Key Flag, Design from Finland, Produce of Finland* The umbrella label of the campaign: Blue-White Footprint	Produce of Finland [Hyvää Suomesta]
Campaign Main message/ argument	Blue-White Footprint (2014–2016) Promotes societally conscientious consumption in terms of domestic labor Postulates that buying Finnish products and services creates jobs in Finland, hence being sustainable in terms of the country's social and economic development	Produce of Finland [Hyvää Suomesta] "Labeled product & conscious consumer" Promotes Finnish food in the name of its social, economic, and environmental sustainability

Note(s): *The Association for Finnish Work runs the labels Key Flag and Design from Finland, and also owns the Blue-White Footprint campaign. Produce of Finland, though associated with the BW campaign, has its own background organization and brand, and is thus covered separately in the empirical analysis

Table 1. The two analysed labelling campaigns for Finnish products and services

as intentional texts produced to induce ethnocentric consumption; the texts are intended to be consumed widely in different instances: through media, campaigns and advertisements, on Facebook pages and in shops in a nationally limited area. The data from the Association for Finnish Work consists of 193 news articles, 38 research reports, 156 press releases and 62 blog posts. The complementary data of the PoF campaign comprise the contents of their web pages as of March 2017, including press releases back to 2014. There were 37 websites, and 27 press releases included in the analysis.

The data analysis proceeded in three steps. First, we oriented ourselves with the collected materials by reading and rereading the texts and making notes about nationalism, patriotism and responsibility. Second, both authors individually carried out a theoretically oriented analysis of the texts by coding passages of the data in accordance with the critical discourse analysis framework. To help focus on this process, we sought to answer the following questions: How are particular subjects positioned regarding ethnocentric consumption and the responsibility of consumption? How is ethnocentric consumption and responsibility of consumption argued for? How are classes of appropriate consumption objects for ethnocentric and responsible consumption constituted? These questions led us to concentrate on how consumers were conceptualised through different types of texts and wordings (such as consumer research reports); how the text established conceptual relations among consumption practices and abstract phenomena (e.g. the economy and labour); and how objects of consumption were brought into being with the texts. We used descriptive categories, such as "typical Finnish consumer" and "economic calculations" to pinpoint the aforementioned discourse analytical constructs in the texts. Third, we compared and discussed our respective analyses and combined our insights into a holistic framework to understand the role of discourse in responsibilising ethnocentric consumption. The quotes shown in the analysis section were considered particularly illustrative examples of the analytical dimensions. A supplementary data table is provided in Appendix.

To ensure the rigour and consistency of the critical discourse analysis, we drew on the general principles of qualitative marketing research and constructionist research (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006; Potter, 1996). Because of its basis in social constructionism, traditional ways of understanding reliability and validity are not applicable (Potter, 1996). However, the materials studied do "place limits on the specific ways in which they can be interpreted and understood" (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006, p. 26). Potter (1996, p. 21) has noted that "[p] erhaps the most important and distinctive feature in the validation of discourse work is the presentation of rich and extended materials in a way that allows readers of discourse studies to evaluate their adequacy". The analysis is presented so that there is a possibility to evaluate our interpretation. Moreover, Moisander and Valtonen (2006, p. 27) emphasise that "cultural researchers should pay particular attention to theoretical transparency" because the theoretical framework foregrounds certain interpretations at the expense of others. Thus, we were explicit regarding the concepts with which the discourse analytical focus provided.

5. Findings

5.1 Embedding consumption in a national context

Discourses are maintained and challenged through texts in the interactions that take place in particular societal contexts (Hardy and Phillips, 1999). That is, discourses are not separate from their societal-historical environments. The examined "buy domestic" promotions construct "Finnishness" as a central – albeit not the only – criterion for appropriate consumption. Thus, consumption is not a neutrally definable signifier but a contested concept with contextually dependent meanings (see Caruana and Crane, 2008).

The campaigns delineate a sphere of consumer action within a fixed nation-state, in accordance with the inbuilt logic in ethnocentric "buy domestic" campaigns (Lekakis, 2017). The national context is not, however, a neutral resource. Instead, it is made relevant in the campaign texts by selectively drawing on its possible meanings. This opens up the opportunity to select discourses that appeal to consumers in a particular context and bring them together to construct possibilities for ethnocentric and responsible consumption. By relying on the ideals of a contained and imagined nation, the texts of both campaigns connect to the other's texts and discourses (Hardy and Phillips, 2004).

A vivid illustration of the BW campaign's idea is seen in the rules of proper use of the campaign logo for the organisations taking part in it:

> Blue-white footprint is an ideology. Each Finn leaves her blue-white footprint on our society. [Slogan:] 'By buying Finnish products and services you increase the Finnish welfare'. (2014 November, BW campaign info)

In this excerpt, the effect of consumption choices is conceptualised with the term *footprint*, a common term used in evaluating the effect of consumption on the environment. However, rather than conceiving of the footprint as something that should be minimised, the campaign turns the metaphor upside down, emphasising the importance of enlarging the footprint. Regarding responsible consumption, this shifts the emphasis from the amount consumed to the quality of consumption. The interdiscursivity of ethnocentric consumption to an environmentally conscientious discourse using this metaphor is pertinent throughout the campaign because it functions as the visual epitome of the blue-white ideology. The colours are those of the Finnish flag, underscoring the ideal of a self-sustaining country where everyone's obligation is to increase their consumption footprint. By drawing on such ideals and establishing interdiscursive links, the campaign effectively structures consumer responsibility around a nationally bounded society.

Using the footprint to illustrate the effects of ethnocentric consumption serves as an interdiscursive example at its purest because it uses widely established conceptualisation in a context that is different from its original use in environmentally responsible consumption discourse. For the consumer, however, the use of the footprint may appear as a discrete hint of the embedded responsibility in its multitude meanings. In the PoF campaign, the embedding of responsibility in the national context is straightforward; the campaign establishes the responsibility of consumption in a clear statement:

> Choosing Finnish food is a responsible act.
>
> (Produce of Finland website as of March 2017, Why Choose Finnish)
>
> By eating food from Finnish farms and nature, we bear the responsibility over the ecological and ethical impacts of food production. (2015 February, Produce of Finland press release)

By stating that Finnish food is a responsible choice, the campaign constructs a conceptual perimeter around consumption – one with national borders. It ties together consumption and production and encloses them within a national context, leading towards the ideal of a self-sustained country. The PoF campaign further represents the choice as in "our hands", allocating the responsibility to the citizens, in much the same way as the BW campaign allocates this responsibility to their "footprints". Both campaigns can be seen as a "move from political ritual to commercial ritual that,—betokens an eclipse of the state by the market as the reference point for national belonging" (Foster, 1999, p. 264). Rather than locating citizenship in legally defined rights and obligations, these campaigns shift the focus to consumer behaviour. Consumption is framed as primarily increasing the welfare of society as a whole over the welfare of the individual. This subjugates the individual consumer to the greater good of nationally bounded societal welfare. The campaign texts include "each Finn" in the discourse; it is not just the people who are willing to participate in the campaign. Thus, responsible consumption draws selectively on possible articulations of what Finnishness means.

5.2 Establishing the Finnish consumer as a subject of consumption

The campaigns embed themselves in the pre-existing discourses of a bounded nation-state. However, a national context may be too vague to warrant a subject position for an ethnocentric consumer. Today, consumption is characterised by international trade. This eventually necessitates stronger arguments for specifying that consumption should take place within the national context. A step towards the practice of ethnocentric consumption is the creation of a position from which consumer subjects can speak and take action on different responsibility concerns. This is achieved through *positioning interdiscourses*, which locate the consumer in a particular, nationally bounded position.

To reinforce a sense of national belonging, the BW campaign utilises consumer research texts to "reveal" what Finnish consumers are like. The Association for Finnish Labour conducted several pieces of research on consumption patterns and opinions of people who live in Finland. These texts are portrayed in the BW campaign materials. Using the research genre is a way to enhance the credibility of the campaigns, as particular genres can be influential in creating discourses (Hardy and Phillips, 2004). These research reports can be seen as establishing knowledge of consumer subjects. It is not a neutral undertaking, however, because the research texts are produced in the context of the labelling association and connect with the organisation's other texts. This is the point where nationality and consumption practices are articulated together: these research texts establish links between citizenship discourse and consumerism. The following excerpt illustrates a typical highlight of such research in defining Finnish consumers and consumption:

> In an earlier campaign research, it was revealed that 84 percent of Finnish people favour Finnish products every time it is possible. According to [marketing director], origin labels help to have an effect with everyday choices. According to our research, consumption choices are made to affect Finnish employment and create societal good. (2016 September, BW campaign research release)

Although such research texts can be interpreted as promotional, the meanings they establish and draw on are more nuanced. These studies strive to normalise Finnish consumption by presenting percentages, proportions and majority trends around particular consumption behaviours. These statistical explorations can be seen as establishing identity for a class of responsible Finnish consumers. By showing "how, when, and what a Finnish person consumes", they strive to locate the subjects of their discourse with scientific accuracy. This is achieved by emphasising the proportion of people participating in certain practices related to the campaigns' goals. Thus, these campaign texts forge interdiscursive links between ethnocentric consumption and consumer research to locate the subject in the texts.

The campaign draws on and reinforces various stereotypes of Finnish culture. Christmas and Midsummer, for example, are particularly salient events in Finnish culture. Thus, the BW campaign can be seen as building its consumer research reports on traditionally oriented ways of understanding individual subjects in their cultural contexts. These instances provide ample possibilities for consumers to understand themselves as Finnish people with stable identities. The same logic is evident in the PoF campaign, too.

In building subject positions, the PoF campaign relies less on figures to profile Finnish consumers. Instead, it normalises the Finnish consumer through traditional cultural imagery. The campaign utilises both visual and verbal appeal to create unity through images that are commonly associated with national identification. The site features, for example, numerous photographs of nature in the national romanticism style previously used in the nineteenth century for national identity building. The label itself features a swan – the national bird of Finland. The campaign also uses general discourses on more modern ways of understanding Finnishness and Finland:

> Finland's position as the northern-most developed country with agricultural production renders Finnish produce unique. Clean land and air, plentiful clean water resources, the quality of education and high technological expertise are our main assets. (Produce of Finland website, as of March 2017; The Arctic Basis)

The positioning interdiscourse operates by placing consumers in a nationally stereotypic cultural context with descriptions of their position as carriers of cultural heritage – as performed through consumption practices. The individual's part in maintaining and developing the domestic food culture is clearly emphasised. As the Finnish consumer is identified as interested in domestic food culture, the origins of food and the societal and political impact of food production, the consumer is given an opportunity to realise a broader sense of national identity.

These texts provide discursive materials for defining a Finnish consumer. The positioning interdiscourses build on the national context, drawing on a sense of national belonging, which strengthen the consumers' position to take action on ethnocentric consumption tendencies. The responsibility of consumption implied for such subjects is not, however, clearly defined because it necessitates the conceptual relations between these subjects and their consumption practices.

5.3 Rationales for responsibility around ethnocentric consumption

The discourses around ethnocentric consumption must define their sphere of effect and rationale for morally higher ground. This national sphere of effect only establishes a stage of action, one that necessitates further ideational relations. In the campaigns, these rationales appear in various ways: from economic calculations to more ambiguous statements of environmental, social and ethical impacts. By relating consumers' actions to their effects, the texts provide a conceptual basis for specific consumption practices. These textual resources form the *argumentative interdiscourses*.

The mission of the BW campaign is rather straightforward: to promote societally responsible consumption by emphasising how consumers affect the welfare of Finnish society in terms of job creation. This is in line with the rationales for ethnocentric consumption (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). The central claim is that if each Finn spent 10 euros more on domestic products, this would create 10,000 new jobs annually. Given this premise, the whole campaign builds on constructing ways to spend the extra 10 euros a month. Behind this claim are input–output calculations made by a Finnish economist in the 1960s. These calculations are repeated in many of the campaign texts – either as minor side notes or as emphatic headings; they can be seen as providing the necessary conceptual relationship to connect the constructed subject position with a rationale for action:

> If every Finn used 10 euros more a month to buy Finnish products and services, it would create 10,000 jobs, the CEO [of the Finnish Labour Alliance] summarises in an event for partners. Sounds incredible, but behind these figures are accurate economic calculations. Even the small deeds have an effect. (2014 January, BW campaign press release)

The economic rationale is also crucial for constructing a sense of agency. It is not just because consumers live in Finland that they can take up the subject position of a Finnish consumer. It is also because they have the economic resources to influence the wellbeing of the whole country, constructing the possibilities for action. The possibility for action is emphasised in that 10 euros is enough to bring about a significant change in societal welfare. Thus, the possibility to partake in the campaign is not dependent on the economic position of an individual; this is very much in line with participatory practices of democracies.

Although these calculations are a theoretical simplification, they may carry a certain appeal to a consumer because it is easy to imagine a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship between domestic consumption and increasing demand for domestic labour. The calculation creates an interdiscursive relation with a text of theoretical economic discourse. Paradoxically, the economic argumentation of the campaign goes against well-established (neoclassical) economic knowledge, both empirical and theoretical (e.g. Krugman; Obstfeld, 2000). The past century has seen numerous successful growth stories – Finland included – that become tributes to international trade. Promoting consumer protectionism relies on a common misconception of the preconditions for gains from trade: an economy must have an absolute advantage in the production of any internationally traded good. Furthermore, consumers paying a price premium for "the Finnishness of the good" may eventually result in overpricing Finnish products, which would hamper the international competitiveness of these goods. Even though these economic arguments could also be contested, the campaign is silent here. Since the BW campaign builds its message on one simplified economic argument, the campaign leaves itself vulnerable to economic counter-argumentation.

The BW campaign defines *responsibility* in consumption using economic discourses, tying it together with the responsibility towards one's own nation. The BW campaign texts are generally careful not to discredit the consumption of non-labelled objects; there are no instances where buying foreign products is portrayed as detrimental. Thus, the campaign texts draw on consumers' fondness for their own nation rather than on a sense of superiority towards foreign nations. In this sense, the discourses construct a patriotic rationale for consumption (Druckman, 1994; Balabanis *et al.*, 2001). The silence regarding the consumption of foreign goods can be seen as congruent with the campaign's premise that consumption is a way to improve societal welfare, not abstaining from consumption. Yet it is also a central premise that products without the label and consumers who do not choose such objects fall outside the designated space for responsible action. That is, because the campaign "rules in" certain organisational actors and consumers, it also rules out those who do not participate in the practice. Thus, the argumentative interdiscourses can be seen as functioning by specifying relations between different actors and providing causal explanations between patriotism and responsibility.

While the BW campaign can be seen as constructing a patriotic rationale for responsibility, the PoF campaign has a stronger nationalistic tone. The argumentative interdiscourses of the PoF campaign construct a national obligation for consumers – one in explicit confrontation with globalisation. The campaign has its roots in the early 1990s, based on the concerns of agricultural interest groups regarding the ramifications of the potential EU membership. Although the campaign has grown in scope, the basic tenet is still the same: international trade is a threat. For example, the campaign emphasises the food security of domestic agriculture, asking: "*Who would feed us in case some kind of crisis disrupts our country's trade relations with the rest of the world?*" This statement draws on a strong nationalistic ideal of a self-sustained country, contrasting with a threatening image of globalisation in both the economic and political spheres. The message is later reinforced several times by explicitly contrasting Finnish food with nondomestic food, referring to food scandals from abroad and questioning practices outside Finland:

> In Finland, antibiotics are not used for growth promotion in cattle raising. The use of antibiotics for medical purposes is also on the second lowest level within the whole EU. The differences in the use of antibiotics within the EU are large, and the rest of the world is only beginning to understand the misuse of antibiotics. (2017 February, Produce of Finland press release)

The economic rationale does not appear as central to the construction of responsible consumption in the PoF campaign. Other conceptual arguments regarding social-economic-environmental sustainability are more prominent in the PoF texts. The campaign states the following:

> The responsibility of producing from our own land is a well-known fact. The wellbeing of humans, animals, and nature is taken care of in domestic food production. (Produce of Finland website as of March 2017, Why Choose Finnish)

The definition of responsibility refers to the ethical aspects of food production: mainly the treatment of livestock and the social security and professional skills of employees along the supply chain. Also, the healthiness, safety and purity of Finnish food are emphasised. The excerpt above states a given responsibility is consuming "produce from our own land". The campaign website also presents numerous research references to back up various positive attributes of Finnish produce, providing consumers with possible meanings of responsibility. However, the texts do not explicitly establish a link from these attributes to the responsibility for consumption; it is left to the consumer to construct this rationale. This ambiguity leaves the consumer with the interpretive space for determining what responsible production entails. This provides another instance of consumer agency. Here, again, the texts appeal to a rational consumer rather than to an obedient citizen. Finnishness, for example, is used to guarantee that – by consuming Finnish food – consumers eat in a safe, pure and healthy manner.

The argumentative interdiscourses manifest a variety of discourses used in constructing ethnocentric consumption tendencies. Here, the discourses harnessed to serve ethnocentric motivations represent those dimensions of responsibility that are not traditionally addressed in the literature on ethnocentric consumption. The PoF campaign uses discursive materials on sustainability. Both the environmental and socio-economic responsibility are used to construct rationales for choosing Finnish produce.

5.4 Defining objects for responsible and ethnocentric consumption

Responsible consumption would be meaningless without *objects* for such consumption practices. The campaigns involve and invite producers and service providers to present themselves as organizations that enable the performance of national identity and consumer responsibility through products and services. This process necessitates texts that set the criteria for producers and the objects they provide. These discursive resources can be understood as *classificatory*; that is, they signify a specific part of the general class of objects.

While the Finnishness of consumers is established through consumer research and traditional imagery, the Finnishness of organisations or their products is carried out by fulfilling certain production criteria; these primarily require yes/no answers regarding production conditions, the origin of used materials, service provision and so forth. These texts draw again on clearly articulated national boundaries. For example, if livestock is raised within the limits of the Finnish borders, then the meat is, by definition, Finnish. If eligible, organisations can use a particular label on their products and services for a fee. The certification label differentiates a group of objects for the enactment of ethnocentric consumption. The following excerpt, regarding the purpose of certificates from the BW campaign, illustrates the connection between consumers and producers:

> The labels direct consumption choices of consumers and your clients towards responsible choices. The labels inform your clients and stakeholders of the values of your company. (2015 August, BW campaign info for firms)

The certificates provide consumers with ways to exercise their responsibility in their quotidian activities, while simultaneously adopting banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) through consumption practices. Although the use of symbols in promoting national identity is nothing new, here such symbols are applied to the context of consumption – to guide the performance of both national and responsible consumer identities. These certifications provide the final "piece of the puzzle" of translating citizenship to consumer behaviour: by tapping into nationalistic/patriotic discourses, responsible consumption becomes possible in everyday actions. In a globalised world with a great deal of discursive ambiguity, seeing such a label simplifies and condenses social reality so that responsibility and citizenship can be articulated in an effortless way.

The use of such labels points to the materiality of discourses regarding consumption practices: rather than being something detached from materiality, the discourse manifests in concrete objects – or, rather, it brings these objects into being. This is also where the practices of consumption become actionable. In this way, both nationalism (and/or patriotism) and responsibility of consumption are enabled by defining proper *objects* for ethnocentric consumption through certification processes. By imbuing a product with meanings associated with Finnishness, the object becomes not just a symbol of a nation but of responsibility.

As a side note, it is not just the labelled objects that are affected by the interdiscursive creation of ethnocentric consumption. The involved organisations gain nationalistic or patriotic meanings through labelling. For example, the campaign texts include "stories" of Finnish companies, historical accounts of the organisations and products. Rather than being just commercial organisations that participate in markets, they become sites of nationalistic or patriotic reproduction.

5.5 Synthesis of the analysis and discussion

The analysis illustrates how different discourses are at play in responsibilising the ethnocentric consumer. Figure 1 presents a model of the discursive infrastructure that creates the conditions of possibility for ethnocentric consumption – and, thus, the possibility for the realisation of various responsibility concerns.

The positioning, argumentative and classificatory interdiscourses are embedded in the national context, which serves as the delimiting discourse for ethnocentric consumption. The national context is not evidently or necessarily nationalistic. In essence, the campaigns establish the perimeter for consumer action, making only implicit references to other nations. The "blue-white" ideal of a self-sustained country opens a path for both the nationalistic and patriotic construction of an ethnocentric consumer. At the same time, it rules out the realisation of consumer responsibility through other than nationally tied causes. For example, social concerns for labour issues are delimited within a national context.

Furthermore, the positioning interdiscourses focus on national identity building – to reinforce the national context for consumption. In reinforcing the sense of belonging and affirmation towards Finnishness, the positioning interdiscourses are patriotic.

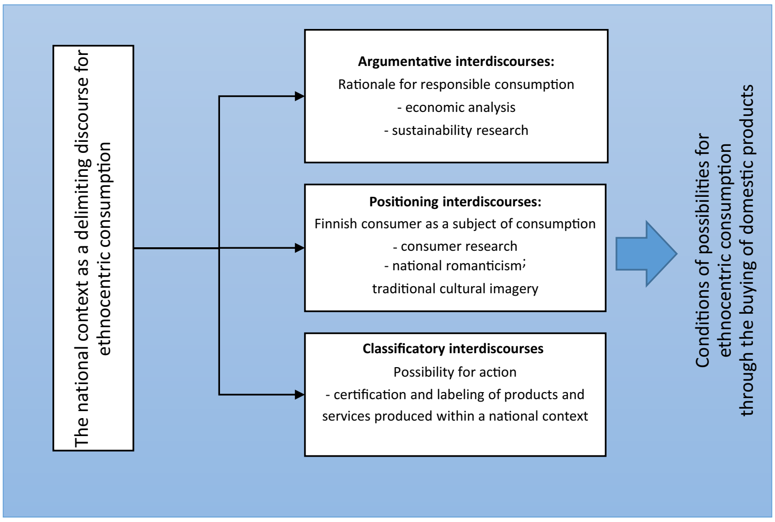

Figure 1.
The Discursive infrastructure creating conditions of possibilities for ethnocentric consumption

Argumentative interdiscourses constitute ideational relations between actors and causal relations between consumer behaviour and responsible outcomes. Here, both nationalistic and patriotic discourses are at play. The BW campaign builds on the moral obligation for one's own nation. This rationale carries a patriotic connotation. The language used is careful not to discredit the consumption of non-labelled objects. However, the PoF campaign has a stronger nationalistic tone: explicit confrontations with globalisation and foreign products are made in the texts.

Finally, the classificatory interdiscursivity can be seen to work through the relation between materiality and various responsibilising discourses. The labelled products eventually become symbols of both nation and responsibility – be it nationalistically or patriotically understood economic and social responsibility or an environmental one.

The analysis sheds new light on the concept of ethnocentric consumption. First, considering the nationalistic emphasis of ethnocentric consumption in the international marketing literature (Sumner, 2007/2007; Shimp and Sharma, 1987), the discursive responsibilising in the campaigns seems atypically patriotic: the language used in positioning the consumer within a national context does not use any superior tone towards the out-groups. The argumentative interdiscourses, in turn, do – at least in one of the campaigns. The explicit confrontation with foreignness works through discourses aiming to appeal to rationality rather than sentimentality, such as in the case of using antibiotics.

Second, the campaigns draw on more nuanced discourses of responsibility than those traditionally discussed; that is, they go beyond nationalistic and patriotic responsibilisation. The PoF campaign especially appeals to environmental responsibility and offers ethnocentric consumption as a way to act on environmental concerns. In that, the responsibility verbalised in the campaign comes to comprise economic, social and environmental dimensions, creating possibilities for sustainable ethnocentric consumption. However, the national delimitations of economic and social responsibility differentiate the concept from the traditional ways of understanding sustainable consumption. In ethnocentric consumption, economic and social responsibility always carry either nationalistic or patriotic connotations.

6. Conclusions

The present study set out to enquire about the discursive responsibilisation of an ethnocentric consumer. By examining the different texts used in two "buy domestic" campaigns, the analysis shows how different dimensions of organisational discourses (Hardy and Phillips, 2004; Caruana and Crane, 2008) are relevant to bring about the idea of responsibility in ethnocentric consumption. The organisational discourses construct consumption choices, offering the consumer the intertwined ideals of either nationalism or patriotism and responsibility.

The study makes two theoretical contributions. First, the current study has conceptualised a linking factor between macro-socio-political tendencies and individual-psychological inclinations in ethnocentric consumption. Thus, this study complements previous studies that have concentrated on individual traits (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). By drawing on a discourse analytical framework, the current study has provided a more detailed approach towards understanding how individuals engaged in consumption practices are actively constituted through corporate discourses. The positioning, argumentative and classificatory discourses that organisational actors produce to induce ethnocentric consumption can show how such consumption is propagated through markets. This is a novel approach in the international marketing literature that treats the contextual impact on ethnocentric consumption as externally given (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Steenkamp and de Jong, 2010; Strizhakova and Coulter, 2015).

The second theoretical contribution deals with the concept of ethnocentric consumption *per se*. The analysis suggests that ethnocentric consumption is a context-dependent phenomenon, supporting Siamagka and Balabanis' (2015) wider conceptualisation of ethnocentric consumption tendencies. However, the analysis highlights that active commercial agents have the power to use nationally appealing discourses in responsibilising the ethnocentric consumer. The current study shows how responsibility for ethnocentric consumption is not a taken-for-granted dimension. The analysed campaign texts suggest that ethnocentric consumption may draw remarkably more on patriotism than what has been previously discussed in ethnocentric consumption studies (e.g. Bizumic, 2019; Upadhyay and Singh, 2006). Moreover, the studied campaigns did not articulate nationalism on a general level but only in relation to specific aspects of production. The campaigns strive to create a particular understanding of the domestic products responsible in terms of both environmental impact and national welfare. Through such discursive processes, nationalistic symbols become heuristics for consumers to take part not just in reproducing mundane, banal nationalism, but also in responsible consumption in a wider sense.

As a managerial implication, the current study highlights how texts produced by organisations provide consumers with a variety of possibilities to understand ethnocentrism and responsibility, which may bring to the surface unintended tensions regarding consumer choices. In what sense are their products or services responsible, for example, when locality is not inherently more sustainable? How and to whom or for what is consuming particular products beneficial? Being aware of such tensions can provide marketers with a more reflexive way of producing marketing texts. At the same time, the current study highlights the responsibility of marketers over their corporate responsibility communication; this study suggests that ethnocentric promotions have the potential to affect how consumers take action on responsibility or sustainability concerns. For a consumer, this bears the risk of perceiving something that might be unsustainable as sustainable based on national origin. Thus, marketing that draws on ethnocentric discourses may have broader consequences for how consumption can (or cannot) become a means to alleviate global problems such as climate change.

In the case that "buy domestic" promotions are state led, the managerial implications pertain to public policy makers to a large extent. Drawing on various nationally appealing discourses, these promotions may actively and purposefully aim to build a local consumer culture that embraces an audience beyond those consumers who would be inclined towards ethnocentric consumption. The question finally comes down to shaping public understanding of the consequences of consumption. If ethnocentric discourses co-opt issues that are seemingly separate from those of nationalism and patriotism, the campaigns bear the risk of motivating domestic consumption at the expense of another cause, such as sustainability in its more global sense. This might expose such campaigns to counter-discourses and criticism, undermining their goals. However, further research on the nature of these potentially conflicting interests would be in order. Finally, the current study shows how marketing does not merely reflect nationalistic resurgence – it is a part of reproducing and spreading ethnocentrism through society. Thus, both policy makers and managers may reflect on how they participate in the phenomenon and on its implications for broader society.

As a limitation, although being critical in approaching the meanings of ethnocentricity and responsibility in organisational discourses, the current study did not take into consideration how consumers or other organisations can resist such discourses. For example, by producing texts that draw on other discourses, actors can subvert meanings related to ethnocentrism and responsibility in consumption. These cases can be seen, for instance, when foreign companies enter domestic markets or when activists scrutinise the responsibility claims of domestic producers. Examining such cases would improve the understanding of the dynamics of ethnocentric and responsible consumption as phenomena that are not only propagated but also actively resisted, here with implications for international marketing research.

Future critical research on responsibilisation in ethnocentric consumption is called for. First, similar studies in various national contexts would shed light on the contextual nuances of ethnocentric consumption. This would allow for the theorisation of how different cultural contexts embed various responsibility dimensions in ethnocentric consumption. Cultural context plays a role in the responsibilisation of an ethnocentric consumer. Thus, studies could combine the strong tradition of studying individual traits with ideas of national embeddedness, for example, through hierarchical linear modelling. Moreover, studies could model the link from people's wider pro-responsibility motivations towards ethnocentric consumption tendencies. Finally, the individual consumer side of the responsibilisation would be worth addressing: how "buy domestic" campaigns have shaped consumers' understandings of responsibility and how the constructed ideals are being transmitted into consumer identities and local consumer cultures.

Notes

1. The Nationalistic Party of Finland (Perussuomalaiset) gained 39 seats in 2011 compared with five seats in the previous elections.
2. Finland's Environmental Performance Index was the best in the world in 2016. The index measures the protection of human health and ecosystems, indicating that sustainability issues are given a high priority in Finnish society. http://epi2016.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2016EPI_Full_Report_opt.pdf

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Appendix

Table A1.
Datatable

CDA concepts	Guiding questions for analysis	Form of interdiscursivity	Theoretically oriented codes	Data examples (produce of Finland)	
Subject positions	How are particular subjects positioned regarding ethnocentric consumption and responsibility?	Positioning interdiscourses	Typical Finnish consumer Normative conceptions of Finnish consumers Consumers endowed with the economic resources to make a difference	*[visual imagery (e.g. rye bread, winter scenery, sun rise in the forest)*, available at: https://www.hyvaasuomesta.fi/english*]*	*The total amount of Finnish food exports to Russia was 430 million euros in 2013 [- -]. This is approx. 100 € per Finnish citizen. [- -] If every citizen would use that 100 euros more to Finnish produce, that would compensate for the loss from diminished exports. (11/8/2014 PoF press release)*
Conceptual relations	How is ethnocentric and responsible consumption argued for?	Argumentative interdiscourses	Economic calculations Competitive advantages Safety of consumption Societal sustainability Environmental sustainability Confrontation with global markets	*In Finland, antibiotics are not used for growth promotion in cattle raising. The use of antibiotics for medical purposes too is on the second lowest level within the whole EU. The differences in the use of antibiotics within EU are large, and the rest of the world is only beginning to understand the misuse of antibiotics. (PoF website 'Antibiotics only when necessary')*	*Will there be enough food in Finland, if a crisis disturbs our country's trade relations with the rest of the world? The answer is yes, as far as our food system is self-sufficient enough. Favouring Finnish food ensures the security of supply. (PoF website 'Who will feed us')*
Objects	How are classes of appropriate consumption objects for ethnocentric consumption constituted?	Classificatory interdiscourses	Labels as guiding consumers Labels as distinctions Labels as societal influence Labels as criteria	*For a consumer interested in the origin of food, package labels are the primary source of information. By using the voluntary Produce of Finland label, the producer communicates not only of the Finnish origin of their produce but also of their commitment to develop domestic food production and local welfare. (29/8/2014 PoF press release)*	*The basic idea of the label is simple enough, and the message can be communicated with only two concepts: labelled product and conscious consumer. (PoF website 'Label's history, Simple message connects')*

Data examples (The association of Finnish labour & blue-white footprint campaign)		
The most important shopping places for summer consumers are marketplaces (63%), shopping markets (57%) and small shops (43%). During the summer time consumers are more spontaneous (68%). 45% of Finnish consumers make unplanned purchases. (7/2014 BW campaign news)	*72% of Finns think that Finnish food producers are respected too little. (3/2016 BW campaign research report)*	*We as consumers are responsible for what happens to domestic labour. We all can affect with our actions and choices how Finnish labour is done and how services are bought. In the end this is what solves what happens to Finnish work and Finland. This belongs to all of us – a value choice. (5/2015 BW campaign blog)*

(*continued*)

Table A1.

Data examples (The association of Finnish labour & blue-white footprint campaign)		
Finnish food is even more significant for our customers, as the research reports of the Association of Finnish labour show. The retail sales of [a food chain] already now consists over 80% of Finnish products, so even by entering a [food chain store] the customer has made the decision to support Finnish labour. Finnishness and locality are a competitive advantage for us which we want to keep. (2/2015 BW campaign news)	*Finland has good workers who follow instructions, are reliable and committed. They do not need to be supervised separately. Logistics is precise and reliable. Transporting and warehousing related risks and threats are eliminated/diminished. Efficient machinery. Precise quality controls. Safe production materials. Finland is safe and politically stable country, no surprises and foreseeability is good. I did not come up with the previous arguments for domestic production. I asked some Finnish producers. They know why they are producing here. (1/2016 BW Campaign blog)*	*Each of us can affect the preservation of workplaces through our consumption choices. 72% of Finns said in research "The Finns and labour" conducted in spring 2015 that the closer the product they are offered is the better. Local products are associated with quality, employment effect and lower carbon footprint. Nine out of ten Finns state that Finnishness has a positive affect when doing groceries. (1/2016 BW Campaign blog)*
The blue-white footprint label helps customers to identify products made or designed in Finland, promoting Finnish labour (3/2014 BW campaign info)	*In April 2015 the key-flag label is on over 3000 products, product ranges or services. There is a variety of users with firms from all sectors. There are firms from producing industries, service firms, small, big, b-to-b-firms. (3/2015 BW campaign news)*	*'Choosing a key-flag labelled product or service is seen as societal influence and value choice that helps Finnish labour and wellbeing', says the CEO of the Association of Finnish labour. (12/2015 BW campaign news)*

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