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Unpacking package free shopping: Alternative retailing and the reinvention of the practice of shopping

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A B S T R A C T

The aim of this paper is to understand how the practice of package free shopping takes shape and is established. Taking a shopping-as-practice approach, and drawing on an ethnographic study of a Swedish ecological food store, this paper shows that to be able to successfully remove a key artefact - packaging - from the practice of shopping, the practice itself must be reinvented. Developing package free shopping therefore requires the re-framing of the practice of shopping (making it meaningful in a new way), the re-skilling of the consumer (developing new competencies needed for its performance), and the re-materialization of the store (changing the material arrangement that makes this mode of shopping possible). This suggests that the promotion of alternative modes of sustainable shopping is a complicated matter that requires a profound understanding of the practice of shopping.

1. Introduction

Package free shopping is attracting attention as a new form of sustainable consumption (Rapp et al. 2017). Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned by the amount of waste generated by packaging and are seeking to address this issue (Lindh et al. 2015). Much of the critique of packages revolves around plastic, an ubiquitous material that has paved the way for multiple new food packages and food products, effectively reconfiguring everyday food practices (Hawkins, 2018). Against this backdrop, shopping at package free stores is seen by both consumers and retailers as a (plastic) waste reduction practice, a way of reducing the environmentally problematic materials that go into packaging (Zeiss, 2018). In this discourse, packages are framed as unsustainable objects that need to be reduced or completely removed. Similar to the case of the plastic shopping bag, efforts are being made to remove a previously important shopping tool in order to address the environmental problems it generates (Hagberg, 2016). Package free shopping is thus an example of an increasingly common pro-environmental behavioural change initiative focusing on removing unsustainable objects rather than "greening" existing products and objects.

However, accomplishing this behavioural change is not uncomplicated. As studies have shown in the past, sustainable consumption, in general, and sustainable shopping, in particular, are difficult endeavours. Sustainable consumption does not automatically follow from environmental awareness or knowledge (Longo et al., Forthcoming). Like many other forms of sustainable consumption (e.g., Connolly and Prothero, 2008), package free shopping requires consumers to rethink their way of shopping, to acquire new competencies, to break old habits and to establish new ones, often forsaking some of the convenience that comes with normal shopping (Fuentes, 2014; Rapp et al. 2017; Venn et al. 2017). Moreover, unlike many other forms of sustainable shopping, this type of shopping does not involve the acquirement of specific sustainable products, but the exclusion of a problematic element - packages - which are considered central to grocery shopping. Food packages serve a number of important functions, e.g. food safety, food freshness, assisting storage, acting as information sources, and serving as marketing devices (Fuentes and Fuentes, 2017; Cochoy, 2004; Zeiss, 2018; Hellström and Olsson, 2017). Therefore, efforts to remove these artefacts from the practice of shopping are accompanied by a set of specific problems and complexities. What is required, then, for package free grocery shopping to develop? What problems arise when attempts are made to remove an important artefact from the practice of shopping? How are these problems managed by the retailers and consumers involved in this mode of shopping?

While sustainable food shopping is a much researched area, the focus, in the field of marketing, has mainly been on consumers' decision-making processes and their intentions to purchase ecological or fair-trade food products (Schröder and McEachern, 2004), or the psychographic profiling of so called "green" consumers (Peattie, 2001). Less attention has been paid to more alternative modes of sustainable food shopping/acquirement, e.g. food sharing or package free shopping (for an exception see, Rapp et al. 2017).

Conversely, although there is now a growing field of sustainable retail research (Wiese et al. 2012), much of this research examines more conventional efforts to promote sustainable consumption, focusing, for example, on the impact that signage, eco-labels, and in-store marketing

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can play (Jones et al. 2005b; Guyader et al. 2017), on the role of the product range (Sadowski and Buckingham, 2007), or on how the work of the staff can promote the consumption of green/ethical products (Fuentes and Fredriksson, 2016). These studies have offered us valuable insight into the marketing, shopping, and consumption of ecological/fair trade products, but they have rarely examined more unconventional sustainability efforts. The need thus exists to explore alternative modes of sustainable retail and shopping, and to examine how these new practices (or practice modes) emerge, stabilize, or disappear. Package free shopping, we argue, warrants scholarly attention, both in its own right but also as an example of a particular form of green/sustainable shopping.

The aim of this paper is to understand how package free shopping – as a new and alternative mode of sustainable shopping – takes shape and is established (or not). We are interested in how consumers are recruited into this practice, in how this mode of shopping practice is performed, and in the resources involved in enabling this new way of shopping. Underlying this is a more general aim of understanding the mechanisms involved in reconfiguring the practice of shopping. This is key to efforts to make shopping and consumption more sustainable.

Taking a shopping-as-practice approach (Keller and Ruus, 2014; Fuentes, 2014; Gram and Grønhøj, 2016), we conceptualise package free shopping as a new mode of shopping, a variation and reconfiguration of the practice of shopping which draws on and interconnects a specific combination of meanings, competencies, and materials. Methodologically, our analysis draws on an ethnographic study of package free shopping conducted at a Swedish ecological store *Matkooperativet* – subsequently referred to as the Food Store Co-op. This study combines observations, interviews and focus group interviews in order to explore the performance of package free shopping.

The analysis developed will show that removing packages made planning to shop, shopping in store, and the post shopping practice of cooking inconvenient since the functions previously provided by packages have to be transferred to shoppers or to other artefacts. When package free shopping was enabled and performed, in spite of these difficulties, it was dependent on the development of a fragile assemblage of meanings, competencies, and materialities. Promoting package free shopping was thus more complicated that merely introducing sustainable products and it required much more than communication.

This paper, we argue, contributes to the field of sustainable retailing and consumption by offering an analysis of a hereto neglected mode of shopping and illustrating some of the complex socio-material processes involved in efforts to reconfigure the practice of shopping and make it more sustainable. It also shows the usefulness of taking a practice theory approach when trying to understand efforts to promote sustainable consumption.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. In the next section, we move forward by outlining our practice theoretical approach to shopping, and its reconfiguration. This is followed by a description of the ethnographic method and study on which our analysis is based. After having explained our theoretical and methodological approach, we then move on to the main part: the findings and analysis. This part is divided into three sections. We begin by explaining the retailing practices of the Food Store Co-op and how this store works towards promoting package free shopping. This is followed by an analysis of how consumers are recruited (or not) into this practice, the performance of this new mode of shopping and the difficulties involved, and by a discussion of the specific combination of meanings, competencies, and artefacts involved in the promotion of this sustainable mode of shopping. In the final section, we develop our conclusions and discuss the contribution made by this study to the field of sustainable retail and consumption.

2. Shopping practice and its reconfiguration

In this paper, we draw on practice theory in order to conceptualize package free shopping. Practice approaches are now well established in the field of consumption (Shove et al. 2012; Röpke, 2009; Warde, 2005), and have also increasingly been employed to conceptualize shopping (Gregson et al. 2002; Fuentes, 2014; Keller and Ruus, 2014; Gram and Grønhøj, 2016; Elms et al. 2016; Bulmer et al. 2018).

A central tenet of practice theory is that the social consists of sets of interconnected practices and that "the social" is produced and reproduced in and through these practices (Schatzki et al. 2001). Thus, doing practice theory research often entails seeing practices – commonly defined as sets of bodily and mental activities, involving and linked through understandings, know-how, meanings, and material artefacts (Reckwitz, 2002) - as the smallest unit of analysis. Practice theory informed research sets out to "develop an account of practices" and/or to "treat the field of practices as the place to study the nature and transformation of their subject matter" (Schatzki et al. 2001: 2).

Drawing on practice theory, shopping has been conceptualized as a set of doings and sayings aimed at "procuring many of the goods and services consumed in the course of other practices" (Röpke, 2009: 2495). The practice of shopping, like all practices, involves specific competencies; how (e.g. what counts as good food, how to pick ripe tomatoes), meanings (e.g., shopping as pleasure or as part of being a good parent), and materials (e.g., shopping tools such as lists, apps and physical settings such as stores or websites)(Fuentes and Svingstedt, 2017). From a practice theory perspective, it is evident that more is involved in shopping than just intentions, attitudes and values. Neither is shopping merely about meaningful experiences and identity-making. Instead, the development of shopping practice involves assembling a heterogeneous set of elements that includes material artefacts, meanings and understandings, as well as know-how and knowledge. Shopping – like any practice - is dependent on, but also reproduces, this complex and often fragile arrangement (Fuentes, 2014).

It is also important to accentuate the fact that shopping practice, like all practices, is *routinized*. As is often stressed in practice theory, social practices become routinized, taken for granted, and locked into specific material arrangements. The vast majority of everyday practices are performed in routinized ways and involve little reflexive thought; they are embodied and draw on practical rather than discursive consciousness (Shove, 2003a). Shopping is no exception. As has been noted by Miller and colleagues (Miller et al. 1998), day-to-day grocery shopping, for example, is mostly performed as a routine task, with little deliberation and reflection; consumers move through the store following an established pattern, often making the same purchases. This does not mean, however, that shopping is banal or unimportant. On the contrary, everyday shopping is deeply meaningful (Miller, 1998), this only means that its performance is often unreflective and routinized. This also makes shopping practice difficult to change as it involves changing routines and interfering with habits that have become established over time.

However, shopping practice is *also dynamic and changes over time*. Practices form and reform as elements are added or removed from the arrangement, or as the relationship between the elements of a practice changes (Shove et al. 2012; Hand et al. 2005; Shove and Pantzar, 2007). Practices can, for example, change as new material devices are introduced, e.g. digital photography (Shove et al. 2007). Even the most routinized of practices go through cycles of evolution over time as the socio-material arrangements that hold them in place, and the practices themselves, co-evolve (Shove, 2003a). The evolution of self-service, for example, which has laid the groundwork for shopping as performed today, and which we now take to be the norm, is the result of a dynamic change process that involved the large-scale re-materialization of stores and the reconfiguration of consumers (du Gay, 2004).

A practice can also develop as new practitioners are *recruited* (Shove and Pantzar, 2007). Practices and practitioners co-produce each other. As practices capture new practitioners, these develop and change as a result of their engagement with, and performance of, that practice. The practice in question can thus change as the practitioners recruited into

the practice develop as practitioners, becoming more skilful or merely changing their skill sets. Conversely, practices change as new practitioners, possessing new background knowledge, skill sets, and meanings, are introduced into the practice. New practitioners do not come to the practice as clean slates; what they bring with the practice shapes how they define and perform that practice (Warde, 2005). This has been exemplified in research on digital photography (Shove et al. 2007), floorball (Shove and Pantzar, 2007) and, of importance to this study, shopping (Fuentes, 2014; Fuentes and Svingstedt, 2017).

We also adopt a *distributed agency approach*. This means that we view agency as distributed between the elements of a practice. Following what has at times been called the post human approach to practice theory (Schatzki, 2001), we hold that it is not the human element alone that shapes how a practice is performed. Instead, taking a symmetrical approach, agency is seen as distributed among the elements involved in the practice. When one element of a practice changes the ability to perform that practice is also altered in some way. To take a simple example, a shopper with a shopping cart can perform tasks that an unequipped consumer cannot (Cochoy, 2009). Therefore, although the shopping cart does not act alone, it shapes what can be done, it shapes the practice of shopping.

This also entails that, when shopping practice and shopping assemblages change, so too does the distribution of agency; tasks and the ability to influence the performance of a practice change as the constitution of the elements is modified. For example, Hagberg (2016) discusses how the introduction of the shopping bag reconfigured the practice of shopping, allowing goods to be easily carried and thus replacing home delivery services, while also (supposedly) encouraging impulse purchases. The introduction of the shopping bag, however, also served as a new form of marketing device, promoting retailers and enabling identification with the brand. The introduction of the shopping bag thus had multiple consequences. In this example, we see how the task of transporting goods is transferred from staff to consumer and bags, but also how the new, added artefacts gain agency as a marketing or promotional tool, thus extending the reach of the retailer.

In this paper, we draw on practice theory and, more specifically, the concepts of shopping practice and distributed agency in order to conceptualize and analyse the reconfiguration of the practice of shopping which results from efforts to promote package free shopping. We examine the performance of this specific mode of shopping, and the elements which make it possible, paying particular attention to how this shift in shopping rearranges the assemblage of shopping and redistributes agency. What is specific in this case is the fact that change happens when a previously key element of shopping – i.e. packages – is removed. As we will show, this leads to a re-arrangement and re-materialization of the practice of shopping which has consequences for the actors performing it.

3. An ethnographic study of package free shopping

An ethnographic approach was used to study an effort to promote package free shopping.[1]. The case studied was Matkooperativet – a store in the Swedish city of Helsingborg and its efforts to promote package free shopping. As will be explained in more detail in the next section, the Food Store Co-op (FSC) is a non-profit food store with a strong commitment to sustainability issues. Its mission is to make sustainable and locally produced food available as economically as possible. Its drive to promote package free shopping forms part of its efforts to promote sustainable food consumption.

This ethnographic study aimed to generate material that would allow a contextualised and detailed understanding of package free shopping. Also, like most ethnographic studies, this one combined various data collecting techniques (Crang and Cook, 2007); interviews, focus group interviews and observations made at the store were used to collect material regarding this new mode of shopping, and as regards the competence, meanings and materials involved.

More specifically, five in-store observations were made lasting between 60 and 100 minutes each (totalling more than 7 h of observations). Access was negotiated before the study began and the Food Store Co-op mediated contacts with store staff and facilitated the observations performed there. The observations were conducted using an observation guide designed around three main themes: (1) the organisation of the store (with a particular focus on the package free section), (2) consumer activities in-store (and, in particular, in the package free section), and (3) consumer interactions with staff while doing package free shopping. The observations thus had a two-fold objective; to understand how the store promoted and enabled package free shopping and to investigate how consumers performed this practice in-store. The observations were scheduled for when the consumers were at their most active. Four of the observations were performed on weekday afternoons and one on a Saturday. The observations also included "ethnographic chats" with the staff concerning their store, their everyday work, and the actions of the consumers. Field notes were taken either by hand or electronically both during and after the observation session.

To understand the role that the staff play in promoting this new mode of sustainable shopping, we also conducted two interviews with store workers. These interviews lasted 60 and 46 minutes and were audio recorded and then transcribed in full. The interviews, which were conducted using an interview guide using open-ended "grand tour" questions (Spradley, 1979), revolved around the organisation of the store, in general, and the communication and promotion of package free shopping, in particular.

Finally, to understand more about the development of package free shopping as an emergent mode of sustainable shopping, interviews were conducted with consumers, i.e. 2 focus group interviews with 4 participants in each and 3 individual ethnographic interviews (resulting in a total of 11 consumers). Focus group participants were recruited by posting on Facebook, through referral, and by drawing on personal networks. Informants ranged from 21 to 57 years of age and varied in their experience of package free shopping. Some were merely considering trying out this mode of shopping, while others had tried it, with a final group of informants being habitual package free shoppers. The goal was to assemble a heterogenous group of informants of differing ages who had different ways of relating to package free shopping, who had diverse competencies, and who attached different meanings to this mode of shopping. Of the 11 consumers interviewed, 1 was male and rest were female. The focus group interviews were guided by a theme-based interview guide and lasted 90 minutes each. The interviews were conducted at Lund University, audio recorded, and transcribed in full.

In addition to the observations and interviews, material was also collected from the Food Store Co-op's social media platforms and websites. Screenshots and downloads were used to document the material. Media articles concerning package free shopping, in general, and the Food Store Co-op, in particular, were also collected using Mediearkivet – a Swedish database.

The material was analysed during two sessions when the authors took turns to analyse and comment on it. The analysis was guided by the twofold aim. We wanted to understand how package free shopping, as a new mode of shopping was being promoted by the retailer and also how it was being performed by consumers, what competence, meanings and materials were involved in its performance, and how this performance differed from regular shopping. This analysis of marketing and of shopping, followed the procedures of the constant comparative method. It was further informed by the theoretical concepts of practice theory and loosely organised around three main questions: how is package free shopping promoted? How is it performed? What difficulties are involved in promoting and performing package free shopping?

[1] The study was conducted by Petronella Enarsson and Love Kristoffersson as part of their Bachelor thesis project, and supervised by Christian Fuentes.

In what follows, we present the results of this analysis and illustrate them using extracts from the material collected.

4. Package free and the reinvention of the practice of shopping

4.1. The food store Co-op and the promotion of package free shopping

The Food Store Co-op is owned and run by members who do not work for a salary but in order to receive a discount (20%) on food purchases in lieu of volunteering to work 6 h a month. The aim of the store is to "make sustainable food available to everyone living in the city of Helsingborg". The Food Coop aims to be a one-stop-shop for consumers' sustainable grocery shopping:

> We make exacting demands that everything we sell is sustainably produced, from farm to fork. Our planet deserves to be treated in the best possible way, and we have to look after it.// We focus on food that's produced locally. In this way, we can support local farmers and contribute towards the prosperity of the region.// We care about the entire chain and want to act as a bridge between you and the fantastic food made in our region. (www.matkooperativet.se)

The Food Store Co-op frames its retail outlet as a promoter of sustainable food products and a bridge between local producers and consumers. The store is also a choice editor, making sustainable consumption easier for consumers who shop there, by offering local and ecological food products (Gunn and Mont, 2014). In contrast to many other sustainable retailing efforts, motivations here do not seem to be primarily financial (Piacentini et al. 2000).

In-store, the local, and ecological quality of the food products is communicated via the signage, design, and organisation of the store. These communicative devices play here an important role in profiling and clarifying the sustainability approach of the store while also arranging the store so that its retailscape enables browsing for sustainable products (see also, Fuentes and Fredriksson, 2016). The store décor is arranged to harmonise with the style of a traditional rural grocery store. "Natural" pastels are used in the simple and toned down décor of the store. On entering, one sees glass jars stacked on wooden shelves and the store's logo – white text on a green background with "Matkooperativet – Helsingborg". Fruit, vegetables and bread are displayed in wooden boxes. Plastic packaging, so common in conventional stores, is nowhere to be seen. The signage is handwritten, often in chalk.

This is the setting for promoting package free shopping. There is, within the co-operative movement, a strong commitment to the reduction of waste and an aim of playing a part in the zero-waste movement. The sourcing and marketing of package free goods is not, however, an easy endeavour.

- Well, there is that business of not everything being possible. I asked "how could we sell package free cakes?" That's what they do in bakeries and so on but here the intention is to sell lots and… How do we manage that, for example? There are, of course, things like this. Can we sell milk package free? Yes, you can, but then there's such a lot of dust everywhere. How do you solve problems like that? Milk is something we'd sell but there are lots of restrictions on that. So there's a lot to work on. (Individual interview with staff)

In of spite these restrictions and difficulties, the store has been successful in developing its range of package free products, which today consists of a number of products, e.g. lentils, beans, pasta, nuts, dried fruit, sugar, cornflakes, olive oil, vinegar and hygiene products. The receptacles are transparent, allowing consumers to see the merchandise, and handwritten signage details the content and informs consumers of how to prepare and use the products. These receptacles are grouped together in the same section of the store, making package free shopping easier for those who wish to engage in this new mode of shopping. The store offers consumers two ways of shopping package free; either they can purchase one of the reusable paper bags, cotton bags or glass jars that the store offers or they can bring their own receptacles.

A marketing campaign was launched to promote this new way of shopping. Signage was put up in-store, information about the campaign was posted on the webpage, and numerous posts were written on Facebook and Instagram explaining and promoting package free shopping:

> Do you want to get started with Zero Waste and buy items in loose weight? All through August, you'll receive the receptacle* of your choice into the bargain when you buy a minimum of 3 different items in loose weight. *This offer is valid an unlimited number of times and concerns receptacles like glass jars (435 ml), glass bottles, spice jars or cloth bags. (facebook.com/matkooperativet, 1st of August 2018)

Here, as in other contexts, teaching consumers to shop sustainably is a key issue (see also, Fuentes and Fredriksson, 2016). These endeavours also seem to have succeeded. On its website, the Food Store Co-op reported, in September 2018, that it had achieved its goal of making package free foodstuff 10 % of its total sales. What lies behind this number? When and how do consumers become committed to package free shopping? In the following sections, we unravel package free shopping and discuss the difficulties and complexities involved in this new mode of sustainable shopping.

4.2. Recruiting new package free shoppers: growing a new mode of shopping

Essential to the development and establishment of a new practice, or practice mode, is the recruitment of new practitioners (Shove and Pantzar, 2007). This can be a particularly difficult endeavour in the case of alternative forms of shopping and consumption. How, then, are consumers recruited into this new mode of shopping? What enables, or stands in the way of, recruitment?

Key to package free shopping is the notion that packages are problematic. This notion justifies this mode of shopping, it is its rationale, one could say. This notion also seems very widespread among consumers:

- Absolutely. And I also get so terribly angry a lot of the time when I stand there as these packages are so unnecessary.
- It's just a matter of seeing what you collect in a week or a few days, you know, when you collect the packaging at home. There's a heck of a lot, just for one person. //… It's also about the generations, that they'll be ok too. And for the planet and so on. (Focus group interview with consumers)

As these extracts show, and as other studies confirm (Zeiss, 2018; Lindh et al. 2015), packages are seen as problematic to the extent that they evoke strong negative feelings. In these and other accounts, it becomes clear that consumers are concerned about waste and see packages as a waste problem.

However, even though almost all the consumers interviewed in this study stressed the problematic relationship between packages and the environment, they approached this problem differently. The fact that consumers see packages as environmentally problematic does not automatically lead them to commit to package free shopping. In many cases, consumers rationalize their lack of commitment to package free shopping by pointing to the many difficulties involved in this mode of shopping; i.e. there are few stores which are often located away from consumers' normal shopping routes and which have more limited opening hours. The practice of package free shopping, they argue, is inconvenient and demanding (see also, Zeiss, 2018).

In other cases, consumers employed alternative modes of shopping that addressed the problem of packaging albeit without avoiding packages altogether. One such strategy was selecting what was seen as

less environmentally-problematic packages:

- What's your preference as regards packaging?
- Um, paper or canned. Not plastic, which I try to avoid as much as possible. But paper above all when it comes to dry items, beans and well… /yes, paper certainly that. When it comes to most things. Cartons.
- And the reason from what I understand it's that you… Is it the environmental aspect?
- Yeah, it's the environment. Yes, exactly, that's what it is. (Focus group interview with consumers)

In this interview extract, we can see that consumers value packages differently. As other studies have also shown, plastic packages are seen as problematic while paper packages are seen as less environmentally damaging (Lindh et al. 2015). The selection of this less problematic packaging is thus a competing sustainability strategy that has allowed consumers to address the issue of problematic packages and to green their shopping practice (Fuentes, 2014) without engaging in package free shopping.

Nevertheless, package free shopping, for many of the consumers we interviewed, was a viable approach to trying to green their shopping practice and reduce the waste generated by packages. They had, in effect, been recruited into this practice.

- Yes, smaller and sort. Yeah, it's really. Everything's really linked to the environment and green thinking.
- Yes, I only do it, I think, to… from the point of view of the environment. But then it's a plus that you have less to sort but most of the time I think… or right now I think that it's more complicated for me to buy package free, but that I then do this for that reason, the environment. (Focus group interview with consumers)

As these extracts illustrate, consumers framed package free shopping as a way of contributing to sustainable consumption and as a way of simplifying their everyday lives. Fewer packages meant less work. Sorting, storing and recycling packages was seen a necessary, but inconvenient, task. Package free shopping was a way of doing away with this task and decluttering their homes.

Social media played an important role in the recruitment of consumers:

- I'd probably also say social media primarily. It was something that I, or someone I checked out a bit. It was like this "zero waste", someone who had one of those Instagram accounts. Who really did have zero waste… yeah, I checked through that quite a lot anyway and it's probably planted a seed perhaps and I'm not there, absolutely not. But I can, I've thought about that a lot, that it'd be good if we cut down on it anyway, packaging waste. /…I can say that I had a little bit of oh, that feeling of oh, how could I cope with this. That it felt impossible. But at the same time, it was also, it'd have been really something to, well, to be able to reduce it. So, I was in two minds… it was a bit of both actually. (Focus group interview with consumers)

Here, we see how an Instagram account focusing on zero waste serves as an important source of inspiration. This social media account, and others like it, show consumers that sustainability practices are possible, framing these practices as meaningful and challenging and motivating consumers to follow their example. It is a form of digitally communicated "green living experiments" (Marres, 2009) intended to show what is possible and also motivate consumers to change their practices.

Needless to say, the store plays a major role in recruitment. As other studies have shown, package free shopping is almost impossible without the supporting infrastructure provided by a package free store or store department (Zeiss, 2018). By making package free shopping possible, by giving it its own department in the store and putting up signage explaining the concept, consumers previously interested in buying ecological and local food are now being encouraged to get involved in this new form of shopping. Here, as in other cases, the store becomes not only a communicator of sustainability messages but also an enabler of sustainable shopping practice (Fuentes, 2014; Fuentes and Fredriksson, 2016).

4.3. Performing package free shopping: a new mode of shopping takes shape

The difficulties do not end once the consumer has been recruited into enacting package free shopping. The performance of package free shopping is also complicated. The removal of packages reorganises the practice of shopping, reconfiguring not only what happens at the store, but also the pre-store shopping planning and the post-shopping practices connected to the items purchased.

To begin with, in order for shoppers to be able to perform this seemingly straightforward new mode of shopping, they have to solve a number of problems that arise before shopping in-store. A package free shopping trip requires much more planning than a regular shopping trip (see also, Zeiss, 2018). Because the stores that support package free shopping are few in number, consumers have to plan their shopping more. For our informants, it often involves thinking ahead and the will to take another route home, or to work, in order to be able to visit the Food Co-op Store.

- Yes well, yeah opening hours and where these shops are, that it's not on your way to work for example, where I pass by most of the time. I have an ICA shop there so it's always… and it's open until 11 at night and early in the mornings so it's dead easy for me to shop there. They have packages. Where there's a bit more non-packaged stuff, they're not as straightforward for me, then I have to go a bit further away. Yeah, a detour then. (Focus group interview with consumers)

In addition, package free shopping commonly involves more planning because consumers have to plan what bags, jars and other receptacles to bring to the store, they have to consider the amounts they plan to buy and whether these fit into their existing receptacles.

- I suppose it's more about remembering and bringing along. It's more difficult to buy stuff spontaneously as you need to have your jars and all that, don't you? So, a lot of the time, a bit more planning is needed. But when it becomes second nature, then
- And that's a thing, or of course it's the thing that you have to remember the package. That's if you don't want to use what they have in the shop, that you can take off then. And then, it can get a bit heavy if you have lots of glass jars with you so maybe you won't be able to take as much, I think. Or maybe you have to think a bit about that. Things can get very heavy, of course, because they weigh a lot already. (Focus group interview with consumers)

As we can see from the interview extract, it is a matter of both changing habits (a difficult accomplishment in itself) and overcoming the material impracticalities of carrying your own receptacles when going shopping. Reconfiguring the practice of shopping means that consumers have to break established routines and establish new ones. They have to be, at least for a time, more reflexive about their shopping, and plan more. They also have to resolve the practicalities involved in this new mode of shopping. This is difficult, other studies have shown, and consumers commonly fail to perform the practice successfully, e.g. forgetting to bring their reusable receptacles with them (Rapp et al. 2017).

These are the main challenges when promoting package free shopping, something which the Food Store Co-op is aware of and which it

also addresses by organising itself to enable this type of shopping, equipping consumers with receptacles and informing them about the difficulties and opportunities of package free shopping, both in-store and online. The Food Store Co-op also seemed to be successful in introducing its more sustainable and reusable alternatives to packages:

- We sell loads of cotton bags, yes we do. And that's probably mainly to do with people starting to talk about carrier bags and plastic bags and so on. It's really important, and it's also become common to use when you go somewhere else. Initially, we sold loads of brown bags, small bags and carrier bags. But now we see that, those sales have decreased so people are reusing and starting to think. So I'm convinced that this has had some influence on that. Yes, it's actually, I haven't thought about that but… (Individual interview with staff)

The effort to equip consumers is key to constructing them as capable package free agents. This not only involves informing them but also provides the material resources required for them to carry out the desired practice; agencing consumers, rather than informing them, one could argue (Fuentes and Sörum, 2018). In the extract above, it also becomes clear that they hope to promote package free shopping in general, not just in their store.

Looking more closely at the performance of package free shopping at the store, it becomes clear that there is some variation, and that this variation has to do with how consumers equip themselves. What was striking about this was the fact that, while these various forms of shopping are (plastic) package free, they are certainly not immaterial. In all cases, a substitute for packaging has to be used, a different carrying device.

In some cases, package free shopping is carried out with the assistance of paper and cardboard containers and paper bags provided by shops. Here, consumers do not have to bring their own bags or jars, instead being able to use the more sustainable alternatives provided by the store:

- Yeah, trying to remember to take your jars. …. / They often have jars there that people have left… glass jars, so on the occasions when I've forgotten to take a jar with me, I've taken one there. And then they'll already have weighed it so it says on the lid what it weighs and then you won't have to pay for that. And then they have these bags. Yes, they do, cloth bags, and I bought some basmati rice in one, that's right, I really did. (Focus group interview with consumers)

In other instances, consumers bring their own receptacles – for example, their own cloth bags or glass jars – to carry their items home in. Here, product packages are replaced by bags or backpacks, and by glass jars, or by small bags brought from home when items cannot be carried in a larger bag (such as grains or dates). Most consumers combine these two approaches. What this exemplifies is the importance of packages as "mobility-things", that is material objects used to enable the mobility of shoppers, artefacts that extended the agency of consumers and allow them to complete the task of actually carrying the products home (Hansson, 2015).

The absence of packages also creates other problems once the items have been purchased and carried home. Packages help to identify the product when it is being stored at home; they provide information concerning nutrients and commonly contain cooking instructions. Advice regarding what kinds of meals to prepare with products also featured among the kinds of package information that consumers mentioned as valuable. Here, as in the case of in-store shopping, it becomes evident that packages serve a number of important functions and that removing them thus generates a number of new problems and issues that have to be addressed. This further illustrates the importance of packages and their role as co-producers of the practice of shopping. Not only do packages protect products and mobilize them they are also important marketing and information devices (Fuentes and Fuentes, 2017).

Consumers talked about a number of ways of addressing the information shortage resulting from the removal of packages. One of the more common techniques talked about was taking photographs using smartphones. They would photograph the information on in-store containers, and then consult this at home when cooking. Smartphones were also used to Google recipes, or to find other information online that would offset the absence of packages. "Checking the Internet", as the informants put it, was the most common response to this loss of information. It was something they were used to doing in non-package free shopping situations, too, and something that was not specific to package free shopping at the Food Store Co-op:

- Yes. Or the net as I also shop at Astrid and Aporna. That's a vegan shop right across from where I live. You can get quinoa there and all that stuff in loose weight, and then I check on the net.
- I didn't think of that but I've also shopped there. So, in that case I've done so several times. So then I've shopped there, loose weight, that's right. Beans and lentils and rice and so on. And then also at Gram. And then I've checked the Internet to find out how to cook those things. (Focus group interview with consumers)

Some also mentioned using their phones to take notes while in-store. It seems, in other words, that the smartphone, this advanced information and communications device, was to some extent able to compensate for the loss of another important information device, i.e. packages. As has been noted in other studies, smartphones are now commonly used in shopping; their introduction has reconfigured this practice, agencing consumers and making this practice more information intensive (Fuentes and Svingstedt, 2017).

4.4. The elements of package free shopping: assembling a fragile arrangement

In performing package free shopping, consumers draw on and interconnect a number of elements. To begin with, as we discussed when addressing the issue of recruitment, package free shopping needs to be meaningful to consumers. That is, as with any practice, this specific mode of shopping has a specific teleoaffective structure; it involves a range of ends – goals, end results that it seeks to achieve – and also a range of normativized emotions and moods – ways of feeling (Schatzki, 2002: 80). Because it is a way of shopping, one of the key ends is, of course, the acquirement of products needed for other practices (Röpke, 2009). However, beyond that, and more specific to the teleoaffective structure of this mode of shopping, there are two elements; package free shopping was understood as a practice that contributes to the reduction of unnecessary waste, thus being a way of both acting sustainably and simplifying life. Package free shopping, therefore, is meaningful in a specific way; although this meaning element is under development (and will never, of course, stabilise completely), it is still rather stable and shared by the informants of this study.

Second, to be able to perform this practice, consumers need to develop new competencies (Zeiss, 2018). They have to learn how package free shopping works. They have to learn to identify products without packages (what kind of lentil is this?), to learn what receptacles to use for what product and how to compensate for the information loss that results from removing packages (in certain cases, they also have to embody that knowledge rather than rely on packages).

Third, the development and (temporary) stabilization of package free shopping also involves, like any practice, a material infrastructure that enables its performance (Zeiss, 2018). Thus, the development of package free shopping is not in any way a de-materialization of a practice, as one might think, but a re-materialization (Magaudda, 2011). In this case, the removal of one important shopping device – the package – leads to the enlisting of multiple other artefacts to

compensate for that loss. Most importantly, the retail assemblage of the store is re-arranged to support package free shopping. As discussed above, this involves considerable rearrangement of the store, the introduction of new display devices, information signage etc. Receptacles and bags capable of replacing packages are also added, by the store, to the assemblage of the store in order to support package free shopping. The enabling of package free shopping is very much a material matter. Thus, for package free shopping to work the retailscape of the stores has to be reorganised to support this mode of sustainable shopping (Fuentes, 2014).

Furthermore, consumers not only use these material arrangements and artefacts, they also commonly enlist a number of new shopping tools in order to perform package free shopping; jars, cloth bags and other receptacles, as well as backpacks, are used to carry loose foods. Smartphones, already a part of the practice of shopping, were used in new ways to compensate for the loss of the package as an information device.

In sum, the development and temporary stabilization of package free shopping requires the re-framing of the practice of shopping (framing it as meaningful in a new way), the re-skilling of the consumer (acquiring the new competencies needed for its performance), and the re-materialization of the store and the re-equipping of the consumer (changing the material arrangement that makes this mode of shopping possible). While this has been achieved at the Food Store Co-op, it is a fragile arrangement. Package free shopping is not a normalized shopping practice; it is not widespread, coming with a specific set of problems and sometimes being ignored in favour of other competing sustainable shopping strategies.

5. Discussion and conclusions

We set out in this paper to empirically explore and conceptualize the emergence and temporary stabilization of package free shopping. Taking a shopping-as-practice approach, and drawing on an ethnographic study of a Swedish ecological food store we showed how consumers are recruited into the practice of package free shopping, illustrated the complexities involved in performing package free shopping, and brought to the fore the fragile arrangement needed for this mode of shopping to be possible. This analysis, we contend, contributes to existing research in three important ways.

First, it contributes to the field of sustainable retail and consumption studies by illustrating an alternative mode of shopping – package free shopping - that has received scarce attention in the past. This analysis suggests that the promotion of package free shopping is not straightforward. Removing packages from the practice of grocery shopping is problematic, as other studies have also indicated (Rapp et al. 2017). It is, in fact, a reinvention of the practice of shopping. To begin with, the recruitment of shoppers into this practice was difficult. While consumers were aware of the problems created by packages, the inconvenience of package free shopping, as well as competing sustainable shopping practices, made recruitment into this mode of shopping more difficult. For those that were recruited into this practice, performing package free shopping was not easy. Removing an artefact such as the package, which facilitates self-service and accomplishes a number of important tasks, means that those tasks have to be assumed by others. Food packages have agency (Fuentes and Fuentes, 2017); they work as marketing devices qualifying products, they enable the transport of groceries, they enable the storage of food at home, and they inform cooking practices. When these important artefacts are removed, the tasks they accomplish have to be performed by others, both humans and artefacts. The promotion and stabilization of package free shopping is thus dependent on the successful re-distribution of agency or as others would argue a form of “work transfer” from packages to consumers. Furthermore, this is also because grocery shopping does not exist in isolation, instead being part of a nexus of everyday practices (Warde, 2005). These changes in shopping will have ripple effects in other practices (see also, Zeiss, 2018). Changing the practice of shopping thus means considering, and also changing, the practices that shopping is closely connected to; in this case, the storing and cooking of food. When package free shopping was enabled and performed, in spite of these difficulties, it was dependent on the development of a specific assemblage of meanings, competencies, and materialities. This was a fragile arrangement, and only temporarily stabilized. As practice theory studies have shown, normalization has to be continuously accomplished (Shove et al. 2012; Hand and Shove, 2007). The stabilization of this emerging mode of shopping is threatened by competing sustainability strategies (choosing more environmentally-friendly packages for example), infrastructures (regular supermarkets, for example, which offer convenience and a broader range of products), and shopping rationales (it has to be inexpensive). Thus, the establishment of this new mode of shopping is in no way a given. It has to develop in a socio-material landscape which, in many ways, works against its existence.

Second, the analysis developed also tells us something in more general terms about the marketing and promotion of sustainable consumption. Like many other practice-analyses, this analysis shows that sustainable consumption does not simply follow on from environmental awareness (Shove, 2003b). It also shows the importance of moving beyond purely communicative analysis focused on, for example, CSR reporting (Jones et al. 2005a) or CSR´s impact on store image (Anselmsson and Johansson, 2007; Gupta and Pirsch, 2008). To understand the role of marketing in the promotion of sustainable consumption we must also examine how shopping and consumption practices are and can be changed. In engaging with this issue, this study shows, like other practice theory analysis, that routines are difficult to change, and that both materiality and norms play an important role in the establishment of new and more sustainable practices (Hobson, 2006; Rettie et al. 2012). By doing this, the paper underscores the importance of the surrounding socio-material landscape in enabling but also delimiting the development of sustainable consumption practices (Jelsma, 2003).

Third, and more specific to this paper, the analysis we developed provides insights to the field of practice theory influenced sustainable consumption by drawing attention to the difficulties involved in a specific type of practice-change. It illustrates the difficulties of removing environmentally-problematic artefacts from established practices. While the environmental rationale for doing so may be clear, and while consumers may very well be both aware of and even concerned about the problems linked to this unsustainable object, its removal can still be a complicated endeavour with unforeseen consequences. The practice theory analysis conducted in this paper shows that the interconnectivity of certain shopping tools, or consumption objects, means that efforts to remove them will unravel the practice itself. Removing key artefacts from a practice thus involves reinventing the practice. This is an unresearched issue in practice theory studies of sustainable consumption which tend to favour analyses of the mechanisms of unsustainable consumption (Shove, 2003b) or opt for studies of practice-change programmes involving the introduction of new “ecological” artefacts (Hobson, 2006; Hargreaves, 2011). What we have tried to do in this paper is to open up space for a practice theory informed discussion of this type of sustainability strategy. It would be interesting to see similar analysis of more mainstream and large-scale efforts to promote package free shopping, involving other products and also less environmentally oriented consumers. It would also be interesting to study efforts to reduce car use when shopping – a more complex artefact that is central to shopping but also linked to multiple other everyday mobility practices.

Finally, in more practical terms, these findings suggest that efforts to promote sustainable consumption by removing or banning problematic objects should not focus solely on the problematization of consumption objects or tools, e.g. via marketing and communication campaigns. When trying to remove key shopping objects for sustainability reasons – such as packages, plastic bags, cash or cars - there must

be a practice-contextual understanding of the role that the unsustainable object has, of the tasks it performs in practice, and a willingness to re-frame, re-skill, and re-materialize the shopping practice in a way that compensates for or addresses in some way the loss of that object. Consequently, promoting sustainable shopping is not merely a matter of introducing more sustainability objects or removing unsustainable ones. Every effort to change the practice of shopping may involve the reconfiguration and subsequent reinvention of this practice. While this approach complicates matters, being aware of and researching these entanglements will allow the actor – in this case the retailer – to develop better-informed change programmes to promote sustainable shopping.

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