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Connection points: The dynamics of recruitment to packaging-free shopping

Practice theorists have indicated the importance of understanding everyday life – how it changes and stays the same – in responding to current environmental problems, including the proliferation of food packaging waste. Focusing on individuals as carriers of practices who carry them out is essential for the diffusion of sustainable practices because, the more carriers are recruited by less wasteful food consumption, such as packaging-free shopping, the more they are likely to spread. Thus far, however, insights regarding the dynamics of how practices recruit their carriers have been limited. Based on a focused ethnography in a recently opened packaging-free shop and its customers' homes in Germany, this study specifies the dynamics of recruitment by introducing the concept of connection points. The presence of connection points enables a practice to recruit carriers, allowing them to maintain daily routines to a certain degree, while in the process of adopting a new practice that entails changing their everyday life. This reveals a paradoxical dynamic: continuity, in very diverse ways, seems to pave the way towards change.

Keywords: practice theories, recruitment, connection points, continuity, change, packaging-free shopping, food consumption, plastic waste

Introduction

Nowadays, food packaging is usually discarded after a single use, resulting in increasing amounts of packaging waste that, meanwhile, pollute almost every corner of the earth, posing a serious threat to terrestrial and marine ecosystems (Li et al., 2016) and even our human existence (Prata et al., 2020). In addition to food provision (Sattlegger et al., 2020), it is therefore essential to shift food consumption in ways that reduce packaging waste. This, however, might be difficult, as the dominant food consumption depends on disposable packaging which, for example, is seen as saving time and space and making consumption easy, fast and clean (Müller and Süßbauer, 2022). Nonetheless, a small percentage of consumers have recently turned to packaging-

free shopping in specialised stores (Fuentes et al., 2019; Hawkins, 2021), bringing their own reusable containers from home and filling them with bulk foods on site, thereby contributing towards reducing packaging waste. This shift in food consumption, from using disposable to reusable packaging, joins studies on (un)sustainable consumption which are rooted in theories of social practice. They argue, in line with Shove et al. (2012), that when responding to environmental issues it is vital to understand the dynamics of social practices, as the source of changed behaviour lies in them (Warde, 2005: 140). This position shifts analytical focus away from individuals as agents who take conscious decisions, but they only act as ‘carriers’ that ‘carry’ and ‘carry out’ social practices, meaning that they take on the bodily and mental patterns required to perform them in routinized ways (Reckwitz, 2002: 256). Nonetheless, those who perform practices are still crucial for their survival, because if practices are to persist they need to recruit carriers who perform and, thereby, reproduce them (Blue et al., 2016; Reckwitz, 2002; Shove et al., 2012). Thus, for sustainable practices such as packaging-free shopping to spread, they need to recruit carriers: the more people become attracted to them, the more they are likely to expand, creating more sustainable ways of life (Shove et al., 2012). To date, however, little research has been done regarding how people are recruited by more sustainable practices. In the present study, the emergent practice of packaging-free shopping serves as an example for specifying recruitment dynamics. To this end, I firstly explore the current literature on packaging-free shopping and spotlight concepts anchored in practice theory that can shed light not only on practices but also their carriers. I then describe the data-collection and analysis of this study, for which I conducted a focused ethnography at a packaging-free shop and the homes of some of its customers in Germany. After describing their daily practices, indicating the various dynamics of their recruitment – captured through the concept of

connection points – I discuss an apparent paradox: being recruited by a practice implies not only change but also continuity. Overall, this study is intended to contribute towards current debates within practice theories on transforming everyday life in ways that are more sustainable (Watson et al., 2020) – here specifically from wasteful to less wasteful everyday food habits.

Packaging-free shopping

Historically, food markets have changed from the dominance of the corner shop to that of the supermarket (Everts and Jackson, 2009). Studies on packaging-free shops as a current alternative to supermarkets mainly seek to understand the specifics of packaging-free shopping by comparing it to supermarket shopping. Currently, packaging-free shopping is being sustained by only a small share of consumers – it is a small movement (Hawkins, 2021). These consumers have identified packaging waste as a problem and, therefore, want to reduce it (Fuentes et al., 2019; Hawkins, 2021; Zeiss, 2018). Bissmont (2020) notes that employing reusable containers also bestows upon consumers a certain kind of status: of *not* following the wasteful habits of mainstream society. Thus, for packaging-free shops, the notion that packaging is problematic is key to attracting new customers (Fuentes et al., 2019). However, Fuentes et al. (2019) propose that packaging-free shopping requires consumers to break with their routines, not only in terms of what they do in-shop but also pre- and post-shopping. Before shopping, customers need to prepare themselves by, for example, accumulating a supply of empty containers, cleaning them, selecting suitable ones for items on their shopping list, and transporting them to the shop (Kröger et al., 2019b). Kröger et al. (2020) term these activities ‘container management’, which some consumers consider ‘annoying, boring and burdensome’ (Rapp et al., 2017). In-shop, packaging-free shopping takes more time (Wagner, 2013), as consumers have to take over the work of packaging their

foods. Hawkins (2021) notes how the awkward gestures of shoppers occupying the aisles of today's packaging-free shops already indicate the physical unfamiliarity of packaging-free shopping. After shopping, consumers may be confronted by information shortages (Fuentes et al., 2019), such as storage tips. Furthermore, packaging-free consumers usually cannot find all desired items in the same shop and, consequently, need to visit multiple shops (Bissmont, 2020; Zeiss, 2018). Since packaging-free shops are not widespread, consumers often cannot shop for groceries on the way to other everyday destinations, such as work, and have to think ahead in terms of feasible routes (Fuentes et al., 2019). Essentially, recent studies illustrate how packaging-free shopping recruits those who want to reduce packaging waste while also revealing that they need to change their everyday food routines to do so.

Practices and their carriers

Practice theories, which frame this study, are not a unified theory but, rather, a family of orientations that commonly foreground social practices as their basic domain of study (Reckwitz, 2002). Here, I use concepts specifically focused on the ways practices and carriers come to intersect. As these theoretical concepts are presently 'underdeveloped' (Fuentes et al. 2019), I also draw on findings from other empirical studies.

Accumulation of competences, meanings, and materials

A practice is 'a routinized type of behaviour' that is culturally shared, consisting of several elements interconnected with one another (Reckwitz, 2002: 249). Shove et al. (2012) specify that these elements include materials (e.g. infrastructures, objects), competences (e.g. skills, know-how) and meanings (e.g. ideas, conventions).

Considering the availability of such required elements, as shaped by past and present practices, is crucial for understanding the ways practices recruit their carriers. Along

their life paths, people constantly adopt and abandon practices (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005), but participation in practices always leaves marks on their carriers that can be relevant for structuring access to the uptake of new practices (Shove et al., 2012). Once a carrier no longer performs a practice, the elements of which it consisted do not suddenly vanish (Shove et al., 2012; Shove and Pantzar, 2005). Instead, they tend to exist beyond the life of the practice of which they were once part. For example, competences can lie dormant in bodies and minds without being activated for years, meanings might be overlain by other significances, and materialities can be stored and merged into other practices (Shove et al., 2012). Elements thus have relatively autonomous lives (Shove et al., 2012), circulating between one practice and another – in time, from past to present, and in space, from one location to another (Shove and Walker, 2010). Hence, when carriers participate in a specific practice and, accordingly, acquire the specific materials, competences, or meanings that constitute it, these elements can facilitate the performance of future practices.

Organization of practices in time and space

Since a practice is not enacted in isolation but, rather, in relation to others, Gherardi (2013) uses the metaphor of ‘texture’ to emphasize that they are interwoven, interconnected, and intertwined in daily life. Besides the distribution of their elements, understanding how practices recruit carriers requires investigating the connection of multiple practices (Shove et al., 2012). For a carrier, performing a practice necessitates weaving it into the existing temporal and spatial texture of daily life (Shove, 2009; Shove et al., 2012). Each practice comes with its own temporal demands conditioning its performance (Shove, 2009; Shove et al., 2012; Southerton, 2006). Such features matter for the ways that practitioners can allocate given practices within the flow of their daily routines (Blue, 2019; Blue and Spurling, 2017; Southerton, 2006). Yet, such

temporal demands are not simply intrinsic features of practices, as practices themselves create the temporal rhythm of daily life and, in turn, this rhythm configures the temporal demands of practices, enabling or constraining carriers in performing them (Blue, 2019; Blue and Spurling, 2017; Shove, 2009; Shove et al., 2012). Thus, whether a practice with its own temporal demands can be knitted into a carrier's daily routines depends on the temporal flows of their daily life, as shaped by other practices. Naturally, practices not only have temporal demands but spatial ones as well. Inspired by Ingold (2000), Hui (2013) claims that carriers move along with, are 'mobile-with', the spatial demands of practices. Trips to the supermarket, holiday visits to tourist attractions, or meeting with friends at a coffee shop are all comprised of distinct patterns of mobility. As people participate in many practices, their spatial requirements may contradict or support each other (Hui, 2013). Although practices are more or less mobile, they are usually embedded within immobile spatial arrangements, including infrastructures (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Shove et al., 2015).-They not only act as gates or borders channelling the movement of practices (Sheller and Urry, 2006) but also as sites that enable or limit them. In this manner, spatial arrangements simultaneously shape and mirror the ways practices are performed (Shove et al., 2015). Hence, the capacity of practitioners to weave a particular practice into their daily routines depends on whether they can meet the spatial demands of the practice, which must also fit into existing infrastructure at a particular location.

Essentially, the availability of elements in the lives of potential carriers as well as the position of a practice within the temporal and spatial texture of their everyday lives seem to shape whether the lives of carriers and particular practices can intersect. Thus, contrary to findings on packaging-free shopping, practice theoretical studies rather point towards the continuity inherent to the dynamics of recruitment.

Focused ethnography in a packaging-free store and its customers' homes

To explore the dynamics of recruitment exemplified by packaging-free shopping, I conducted field research for one month in October 2021, in a rural area in Germany where a packaging-free shop had recently opened. Inspired by Knoblauch's (2005) focused ethnography, I mainly observed and interviewed (Spradley, 1979, 1980) packaging-free shoppers at the store and in their homes, focusing on their daily food practices – both before and after they began packaging-free shopping.

To access the field, I offered my assistance at a packaging-free shop and supported the owner with daily work activities which allowed me to observe customers while shopping and informally chat with them. Naturally, practices related to daily food routines are not limited to shopping (Müller and Süßbauer, 2022) but also take place in the home, making them difficult to study (Evans, 2012) because what happens there often remains behind 'closed doors' (Mannay et al., 2018; Miller, 2001). My assistance at the shop, however, opened these doors for me: nine customers invited me to visit them in their homes. The 'visits' (Miller, 2001) usually began with an interview and then transitioned into 'home tours' (Serjeant et al., 2021), during which customers showed me how they transport, store and cook food. I usually talked with the customer I had met at the store, but sometimes other household members joined in. Depending on the atmosphere, I decided how far it was possible to intrude; some customers opened all their kitchen cupboards, for example, whereas others only provided a glimpse of their pantry. The store's customers, including those I visited at home, were predominantly women in their early 20s to late 60s, responsible for their households, and mostly living in spacious single-family homes with their partners, some with children. Their involvement in packaging-free shopping varied (Gronow, 2018; Kröger et al., 2019a).

Both in-store and at customers' homes as well as on my way to their homes and back, I documented my observations by taking fieldnotes, audio recording the interviews and some chats, and occasionally taking pictures or videos. After coding the data, I tried to find relationships between the codes and searched for core themes. Here, diverse practices and their facets turned out to be relevant for recruitment by packaging-free shopping. Inspired by Watson et al.'s (2020) change points approach, I was able to systemize my findings through what I call 'connection points': nodes where a practice dovetails with carriers' daily life, allowing practices and carriers to intersect seamlessly, thereby enabling practices to recruit their carriers.

Setting the scene

Since 2018, more than 450 packaging-free shops have opened in Germany (Unverpackt-Verband, 2022), usually self-operated by owners and represented by a national association. The owners are often lateral entrants into the food sector, so their shops are typically located where they live, making packaging-free shops present in both urban and rural areas (Unverpackt-Verband, 2022). As these shops do not belong to chains, each one is individual. The packaging-free shop of this study is owned by Moni, who is in her early 50s, supported by her husband Thorsten. It is in a rural area in Bavaria, Germany, located on the first floor of their house in a residential neighbourhood, which are very common in this area. In front of the shop, there are two parking spaces for customers. Customers usually come to the shop by car with their own shopping basket, in which they transport their empty containers from home to the shop's door. The shop itself has a 37m² sales room, which is itself divided into several sectors named according to the kinds of products available there, including 'tea corner', 'snack corner', or 'oil and vinegar corner'. Foods are stored in various ways, ready for customers to serve themselves: some products are offered in silo-like dispensers hung side-by-side on

the walls, whereas others are stored in large jars, placed on shelves. At the entrance to the sales room, which also serves as its exit, there is a sign explaining the steps of packaging-free shopping. In the back of the shop, customers firstly need to weigh their own empty containers, label them with their empty weight by using a provided scale, pen and tape. Then, some customers walk with their shopping basket through the different corners, filling their containers as they go, whereas other customers leave their basket in a corner, going back and forth to get and fill containers one at a time. Finally, clearly visible in the back of the shop is a counter equipped with a combined scale and cash register, used to calculate product prices for customers. This is where Moni usually stays, except when someone needs help, which was also my main observation point.

Dynamics of recruitment

In the following, I outline the results of my fieldwork by describing selected everyday practices of the packaging-free shop's customers: in-shop, at home, and in between. For each practice, I highlight a different dynamic, made explicit by connection points, regarding how packaging-free shopping has recruited these customers – in ways sometimes more and sometimes less obviously related to the desire to avoid single-use packaging itself.

Getting there: Connecting with spatial organization

Recently, my parents came to visit me, and I said, 'I'll show you how I shop here'. We first drove to the organic farm, where we picked up our box of fresh vegetables, and then went on to the packaging-free shop, where I mainly buy dry products. Then my mother was like, 'Oh, too bad we don't have that at home'. But I honestly doubt that she would do it this way. She prefers to go somewhere where she can buy everything at once. (Interview with Sabrina, 14 October 2021)

Sabrina's weekly shopping tour is quite mobile, but what does its spatial organization

have to do with her being recruited by packaging-free shopping? Shopping at packaging-free shops entails different mobility demands compared to supermarket shopping (Bissmont, 2020). Some of the packaging-free customers, however, are used to driving to different places to source their foods. These customers only purchase certain products at each location, such as cheese at the farm shop, milk at the dairy, vegetables at the farmers' market, and mainly dry products at the packaging-free shop. One reason for driving to different locations is that such customers often maintain personal relationships with those involved in their food supply. Judith, for example, said, 'I know Moni personally, I actually know the whole family, and I just want to support her. This is one reason I shop there.' While those who normally shop at supermarkets, such as Ulrike's mother-in law, find the selection at the packaging-shop 'way too small', the shop's customers rather claim to appreciate it, because they feel overwhelmed (decision fatigue) by the great product variety typical of supermarkets. Ulrike, for example, reports that having only one type of a given product offered at the shop is a relief: 'Ok, do I want wheat now or do I want spelt? That's the decision in the packaging-free shop, that's it, not this brand, that brand, cheap, expensive. That's totally easy for me.'

Buying certain foods in different places – especially at the package-free shop – is facilitated by using a car, which customers in the countryside usually own because, according to Sabrina, 'it's not like in the city. You rely on the car.' A car not only facilitates shop access and transport of containers but, even more importantly, also enables customers to spatially combine shopping with other daily activities, as they can store containers in their car, before and after shopping, rather than having to lug them around. Consequently, they break down shopping into smaller activities, transforming it into a discontinuous journey (Hui, 2013). They can combine it with other everyday

practices, as reported by Lena, ‘I have my basket for my containers. I put the basket with the containers in the car before I go to work. I drive to work first, leave the basket inside, and after work I stop by the packaging-free shop.’

Although packaging-free shopping is hardly attractive to consumers who, like Sabrina’s mother, are used to one-stop shopping at the supermarket (Müller and Süßbauer, 2022), it can recruit those like Sabrina because the spatial organization of their daily practices is already quite mobile, thus creating a connection point for weaving packaging-free shopping seamlessly into their daily lives. Since they are already used to driving between different places to buy different kinds of food, the packaging-free shop becomes just another stop on their journey. Thus, their existing set of food routines and packaging-free shopping support each other in terms of their spatial organization, creating continuity.

Shopping: Connecting with temporal organization

It the morning: I notice a shopping basket on the floor behind the counter with several empty containers. Me: ‘Moni, what’s going on with these containers?’
Moni: ‘She had to go to work; it was a bit too much stress for her. I fill them for her. She wouldn’t come otherwise.’ So, I take over the filling and get the bill ready.
In the evening: A line has formed around the counter, and the beginning and end are not clearly visible anymore. A woman rushes into the shop. She pushes her way to the counter. Moni looks at me and points to the containers I have filled, which I realize are the woman’s. Before I can say anything, she says, ‘I have to go right away to pick up the kids.’ I hurry with the payment process. (Field diary, 27 October 2021)

This customer obviously does not have time to fill her containers with food herself, whereas other customers do, but what does the temporal organization of her other everyday practices, such as work and childcare, have to do with her being recruited by packaging-free shopping? Shopping at packaging-free shops takes more time to

accomplish than at supermarkets (Wagner, 2013), due to the additional sets of activities that customers need to perform. Magdalena, who is already familiar with packaging-free shopping procedures, explains:

I have to weigh the empty containers, write the weight on some tape and stick it on the containers, fill them with food, and sometimes I need to tell Moni at the cash register what I filled if she can't identify the food. (Interview with Magdalena, 19 October 2022)

Such activities associated with packaging-free shopping are more demanding than those at supermarkets because they require particular mental and bodily activities that are usually unfamiliar to customers. While filling, for example, customers transfer loose products from the bulk station into their own containers. Compared to just grabbing packaged products from a shelf with a flick of the wrist, this is a sophisticated act, so they need to develop *filling competences*. On the one hand, this involves 'training the body' (Reckwitz, 2002), here selecting, using and coordinating various material elements with different characteristics to take products (from flour to dates) out of storage containers (from jars to caddies) with diverse utensils (from ladles to tongs) and put them into suitable containers (from jars to bags). Here is a typical example of a customer negotiating the unfamiliar procedure of dealing with bulk products:

A customer is standing in the spice corner. In her right hand she holds a ladle, in her left hand an empty container, in front of her the open cinnamon tin. She inserts the ladle completely into the tin, digs deep into the cinnamon, angles the ladle, and brings it back out of the tin. The ladle is full to the brim. The customer accidentally bumps the handle against the shelf, and some cinnamon falls out of the ladle onto the floor. Then she tries to insert the ladle into her own container, but the opening is too small. So, from a small distance she lets the cinnamon fall in unevenly in the container, producing a small dust cloud. (Field diary, 13 October 2021)

In addition to inscribing such subtle movements into the body, filling, on the other hand,

also requires different ‘mental activities’ (Reckwitz, 2002). Above all, customers need to develop a *sense* for the relationships between quantities and prices of products, as these are not predefined in a standardized way via packaging. Using their own containers, customers themselves decide on the desired quantity of a given product, with each filled container resulting in an individual price. Generally, it seems that such a sense is not common sense, because customers reported that they took too little or too much product, meaning their containers were too small or large:

I filled a jar with almonds and then had to pay over seven euros. I was actually shocked. But, at home, I had a closer look at the receipt. I first looked at the weight and then at the price and then I thought, ‘Inge, take it easy, that’s how much you pay in the supermarket as well. You just buy a small bag there, not a whole big jar.’ (Interview with Inge, 23 October 2021)

Thus, due to these unfamiliar activities, shopping at packaging-free shops usually takes more time than at supermarkets, implying that it cannot precisely fit the previous timeslots consumers have allotted for food shopping, so they need to reconfigure the temporal organization of their daily routines. Whether this is feasible or not depends on other practices in which they are engaged. As Shove and Cass (2018: 9) propose, some practices are more ‘flexible’ than others, meaning they are relatively detached, not tied to specific times. Consequently, packaging-free shopping can recruit consumers whose temporal organization of other daily practices is rather flexible and can be rescheduled, thereby creating a connection point for packaging-free shopping to recruit them. For example, Magdalena says, ‘I have time. I am retired. I would find it strange to say that it should go faster, as I do not have many obligations where I need to be here or there’. To such customers, shopping in the packaging-free shop is even considered a welcome deceleration of daily life, an ‘enjoyable trip’ (Inge) that is sometimes extended by long talks in the shop. Meanwhile, the customer who rushes in

and out of the shop is unable to reschedule work and childcare but, with Moni's help, does manage to fit the packaging-free store into her busy schedule.

Storing: Connecting with individual elements

Ulrike opens the front door. After passing through the entrance area, where shoes are neatly placed on a shelf, I stand directly in a spacious living room combined with an open kitchen. Everything looks extremely tidy, clean, and empty – no toys lying around in the children's play corner, the pillows and blankets on the sofa are neatly placed, and no dishes are waiting to be washed in the kitchen. (Field diary, 11 October 2021)

'Now I'm slowly getting around to cleaning up, drawing a line under the past: What gets thrown away, what remains in my household? What do I keep, and what do I not keep?' (Interview with Ulrike, 11 October 2021)

Ulrike had recently started to clean out her household, but what does the meaning of a decluttered life have to do with being recruited by packaging-free shopping? Customers usually fill loose bulk foods into reusable containers and, when these material objects enter their households, they often change their food storage routines:

I'm standing in the kitchen with Ulrike. She opens a kitchen cabinet, used as a storage cupboard. A large part of it is taken up by glass containers filled with spices, lined up next to each other. Ulrike: 'Yes, I've now got a different structure in my kitchen. And it's sorted in a completely different way. Before, I kept large stocks. Packages were scattered around here, but now I have a very clear order. Everything has its place. I just think it's totally beautiful. It's so nice and neat and sorted, and I don't want to have all those packages scattered here and there anymore.' (Home tour with Ulrike, 10 October 2021)

Before she began shopping at the packaging-free shop, like other customers, Ulrike stored food more or less haphazardly somewhere in the kitchen. Pantries filled to the brim, which is mostly what they had learned from their mothers, were considered important for being prepared for every eventuality in life – from unexpected crises to

surprise guests. Unlike consumers in city apartments (Müller and Süßbauer, 2022), country dwellers' spacious houses have cellars and separate pantries, providing ample space for storing large quantities and inhibiting any need for efficient storage solutions. However, since Ulrike began buying food from the packaging-free shop, she, like other customers, usually has only one container of each product at home, stored in a designated slot. Such stock reduction is partly related to the 'management of containers' (Kröger et al., 2019a) themselves. One container is, for example, easier to transport from home to car and car to shop as well as within the shop itself.

Usually, each container has its specified place within the kitchen into which they fit. As unpackaged foods are mainly dry products, refrigerator and freezer space is not an issue (Müller and Süßbauer, 2022), but customers tend to need more space in cupboards, larders, and pantries. Placed side-by-side on shelves, filled containers appear uniformly similar, unlike, as reported by Inge, single-use packaging with its colourful array of flashy brand names, serving suggestions and preparation instructions. This not only creates an information shortage (Fuentes et al., 2019), but customers may also not be able to distinguish products that are visually similar from one another, as with baking powder, baking soda, flour, and cornstarch, for example, all of which are white and powdery. Customers now have to find a way to deal with this lost function, labelling their containers with varying degrees of professionalism by hand or with a labelling machine.

While packaging-free shopping is less attractive to consumers who insist on maintaining large stocks, it can recruit consumers such as Ulrike, for whom decluttering daily life is already accepted as a desired meaning – it becomes a constitutive element of other domestic practices. This meaning has 'suffused' (Hui et al., 2017: 4) their storage practices and 'overlain' (Shove et al., 2012: 35) the previous meaning of

needing large stocks, thus creating a connection point for being recruited by packaging-free shopping. Decluttering can become what Pred (1981) calls a ‘dominant project’; embedded as a shared element of many practices at once, it orients the ways customers reorganize their lives. Generally, the new orderliness that enters their kitchens from packaging-free shopping is experienced as a source of great joy: customers find themselves more able to keep track of what foods they have on hand, as it no longer gets ‘lost’ in the pantry, supporting their desire for a well-organized way of life. When a container in its respective spot is depleted, they see directly what they need to buy next, signalled by the label. Some customers, such as Lena, even use empty containers as a shopping list.

Cooking: Connecting with an entire practice

My mom had a corner shop. They had everything there. I grew up under the Maggi–Knorr [convenience foods] dynasty and used their ready-made products myself. But, for me, it really started with these ready-made meals. That’s when my physical intolerance started, because when I used them, then I realized, ‘ahh I felt so bad, I felt really bad.’ This is when I started to cook everything from scratch.
(Interview with Inge, 23 October 2021)

Although Inge often used ready-made foods in the past, nowadays she cooks from scratch, but what does this change in her entire cooking routine in the past have to do with her being recruited by packaging-free shopping today? Customers report that buying packaging-free not only means dealing with foods that are not packaged but are usually unprocessed, raw, as well. Such products, said Inge, require ‘that you work with them’, ‘that you take a hand’ and ‘conjure something out of them’, so cooking food seems to play a central role for packaging-free shopping. As preparing food matters for those buying packaging-free products, it already forms part of the shopping experience. On-site, Moni shares recipes and preparation tips with customers. Additionally, they can

already take initial processing steps in the shop, such as grinding grain into flour or crushing it into flakes or processing nuts into butters using a machine.

Packaging-free shopping has difficulties attracting those who do not know what to make out of offered products but, rather, tends to recruit consumers who are used to cooking from scratch. Such customers reported having undergone an important change in their daily life in the past, including experiencing health problems, like Inge, changing jobs, becoming pregnant, moving into a new house, or discovering new pastimes. As different as their reasons seem – some more obviously, some less obviously related to everyday diet – knowing what they are ‘putting into their bodies’ (Lena) became a priority. Realizing they had little idea what ready-made products consisted of, they started to learn cooking from scratch to, as Lena put it, do ‘something good for the body’. Thus, they have already accumulated the required materials, such as a fully equipped-kitchen, competences and meanings that constitute an entire practice (Shove et al., 2012): what packaging-free shopping demands in terms of cooking is readily available to them, thereby creating a connection point for being recruited by packaging-free shopping. Although it is not a new insight that life events change daily practices (Greene and Rau, 2018; Rau and Manton, 2016; Schäfer et al., 2012), packaging-free shopping reveals that such life events can also pave the way towards adopting future practices. Here, packaging-free shopping creates continuity for such customers in terms of their cooking routines, which are now even facilitated: ‘it’s totally easy’, said Luise, as there is no ‘need to compare packages to find out what the product is made of’ (Luise). Customers ‘no longer have to run down shelves in the supermarket to find products’ (Inge) and ‘can just buy the right amount of a product’ (Lena) which they need for a certain dish.

Connection points: Change through continuity

I have traced the dynamics of recruitment to more sustainable forms of consumption – exemplified by packaging-free shopping – by introducing the concept of connection points. Thus far, I have illustrated each connection point in isolation, but in what follows I consider them in their entirety to reveal the strengths of the concept for specifying the dynamics of recruitment, which is important for understanding how to spread sustainable practices.

The dynamics of recruitment to practices are marked by enormous variation, even for the same practice, in terms of the connection points, and thus pathways, that can draw different carriers towards performing it. Connection points refer to various practices of everyday life that are often beyond the practice of interest and address different facets of them, including the availability of elements, and the temporal and spatial texture of daily life (Blue, 2019; Hui, 2013; Shove et al., 2012). In terms of packaging-free shopping, this study specifies that a spatial mobility, temporal flexibility, the availability of individual elements, such as meanings, as well as the overall performance of an entire practice play a role. In addition to the notion that single-use packaging is problematic (Fuentes et al., 2019; Hawkins, 2021), consumers are recruited to packaging-free shopping because they are mobile and already shop for food at different locations, are flexible and spend more time on shopping, have a desire for order in their pantry, or are already used to cooking from scratch. Thus, it is not simply that they themselves as individuals who decide to join a sustainable practice (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005). Instead, being recruited is more influenced by the ways they are already enmeshed in daily routines, which can facilitate or hinder access to carry it out.

Usually, carriers are not recruited by only one but, rather, a specific combination of connection points, shaped by their past and current practices (Shove et al., 2012). Depending on their personal histories (Rau and Manton, 2016), some connection points with a sustainable practice may be present, but others may be absent from potential carriers' everyday lives. The presence of connection points enables practices to attract consumers because they allow them, at least to a certain degree, to maintain their daily routines. While this is in line with practice theoretical concepts (e.g. Shove et al., 2012), it is only one side of the dynamics of recruitment, lacking a way of understanding the changes that follow. Being captured by a practice inevitably requires carriers to change current practices to a certain degree as well: as some connection points may be absent, the requirements of the new practice may not be easily integrated into their daily routines. Although this is in agreement with recent studies on packaging-free shopping (e.g. Fuentes et al., 2019), they have thus far overlooked the continuity inherent to the dynamics of recruitment. Here, the concept of connection points is useful because connection points make it possible to specify the extent to which sustainable practices might fit into the everyday lives of carriers. In particular, they shed light on facets of a sustainable practice that may harmonize with the lives of potential carriers, revealing the continuity that draws them towards adopting it; while also pinpointing areas where friction may arise, revealing the kinds of change that would be needed to retain carriers. Consequently, the dynamics of recruitment cannot be boiled down to one or the other – continuity *or* change – but, rather, need to be seen as unfolding as a patchwork, knitting together patches of both continuity *and* change. Hence, this highlights a paradox in terms of their relationship: without continuity, there seems to be no pathway towards change, as continuity paves the way for it.

Generally, potential carriers can be positioned on a continuum between continuity and change, depending on the presence or absence of connection points. Practices can very easily capture consumers with whom they share many points of connection and, thus, only require minimal change in daily routines, making their performance sometimes even more convenient. Conversely, it is difficult for practices to recruit consumers sharing only a few connection points, implying great alteration of their daily routines and usually making their performance even more inconvenient. Accordingly, practices have different potentials for recruiting carriers, yet it seems that more sustainable practices, such as packaging-free shopping, face greater difficulties in spreading because the currently dominant way of performing everyday practices tends to require change rather than continuity. Consequently, packaging-free shopping can only recruit from a very limited pool of carriers: those who have already deviated from mainstream food-consumption practices and, thereby, have created connection points, supporting the argument of Plessz and Wahlen (2020) that some practices are more shared than others – performed by more carriers than others. As opposed to most consumers, they typically do not shop with one big trip to the supermarket (Watson et al., 2020), do not seek to speed up daily life (Southerton, 2003), do not accumulate stuff (Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003) or do not use convenience foods (Jackson et al., 2018).

Overall, these findings imply for the diffusion of sustainable practices that it is essential to create as many connection points as possible between a practice and the everyday lives of carriers, so that they can be recruited relatively easily which can also be done incrementally. For example, to encourage packaging-free shopping this could mean creating opportunities for consumers to buy all desired products in one place by expanding product ranges in packaging-free shops or offering packaging-free products in supermarkets as well. While the concept of connection points as elaborated in this

study can take us some way towards explaining the dynamics of recruitment, further research is required on the involvement of carriers in the adopted practices over time.

Conclusion

In this study, I have introduced the concept of connection points for investigating the dynamics of recruitment, using the example of packaging-free shopping. There are different trajectories through which even the same practice can recruit its carriers: On the one side, connection points attract carriers to sustainable practices by creating connections for more seamlessly fitting the new practice within their daily lives, through some degree of continuity with existing routines. Packaging-free shopping can, for example, connect with the daily lives of carriers who are spatially mobile and shop in different places, are temporally flexible enough to take time for shopping, cook from scratch, or want to create order in their pantry. Yet, on the other side, having become attracted, being captured by a sustainable practice inevitably entails some change for carriers, as some connection points are generally missing, and the new practice rarely fits completely with existing routines. For example, while packaging-free shopping can connect with some customers who cook from scratch, it may conflict with the spatial organization of their food practices if they typically purchase everything at one shop. Shaped by each carrier's past and present practices, connection points are unevenly distributed across society, which makes it is easy for some and harder for others to join sustainable practices. Generally, it seems that sustainable practices have special difficulties recruiting carriers, as they often entail substantial changes, illustrating the different prospects practices have of spreading. The dynamics of recruitment, marked by the paradox that continuity seems to pave the way for change, have become visible by exploring packaging-free shopping, but connection points as a conceptual lens can be useful for anyone interested in promoting the diffusion of specific practices.

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