

Market transformation in the food industry: Evidence from the Eataly case

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Abstract

Consumer criticism of and resistance against the extant culture and dominant ideology in food production, distribution, and consumption are becoming increasingly important. Counter-cultures and social movements' actions interpret this consumer quest for authenticity and sustainability. In the literature, their roles are depicted as mainly reactive, but there is scope for a more proactive market stance. This paper aims to analyse a special kind of market transformation induced by anti-consumption. In this transformation, a company and a social movement cooperate to co-design a new business venture. Eataly, a new, fast-growing Italian chain of large food stores (Milano, Bologna, Tokyo, and New York) is the result of an interesting form of interaction between corporate power and consumer resistance movements (Slow Food). Before starting up its new business, Eataly asked Slow Food to collaborate and commit to founding and developing the initiative. In this sense, Eataly is an example of convergence between business management and social movements, which is aimed at anticipating and meeting consumers' critical concerns about 'mainstream' food suppliers in terms of their product characteristics as well as their store/channel structures and processes. Through multiple method research, we investigate the agreement/coordination process between Eataly and Slow Food in developing the new venture, and ordinary consumers as well as Slow Food members' agreement/reaction attitudes and behaviours towards this new, more sustainable chain of food distribution.

Keywords

Consumer resistance, anti-consumption, sustainability, quest for authenticity, Slow Food

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Introduction

Recent research into food production, distribution, and consumption suggests that ideology and counterculture are important factors that affect consumer choices in terms of the outlet where food is bought as well as the kind of food chosen (Thompson, Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Furthermore, food consumption is increasingly driven by explicit and implicit symbolic arguments: particular foods, their manufacturing and preparation methods, and eating patterns seem to be symbolic (Kniazeva, Venkatesh, 2007). Among the arguments supporting this symbolism, the fairness and authenticity of the relationship between demand and supply are growing in importance (Arnould, Price, 2000; Holt, 2002). The industrial organisation of food production and distribution is likely to change, as corporate strategies are being forced to be more responsive to individual consumers and collectives' expectations (Dalli, Corciolani, 2008; Newholm, Shaw, 2007; Peñaloza, Venkatesh, 2006).

A few years ago, Slow Food and Oscar Farinetti (an Italian entrepreneur), formerly the owner of a national chain of home electronics, co-operated to design a new chain of food distribution: Eataly. "Eataly is an alliance of small-scale producers, who have been making the finest foods and beverages in limited quantities for generations. They have joined together to offer quality products at sustainable prices. ... Direct from the producer to the consumer with no middlemen: Eataly offers quality food, selected in collaboration with Slow Food" (www.eataly.it).

The paper focuses on Eataly, because it emerged from an *ideological alliance and a mutual organizational commitment between corporate power and social movements*. How this venture came about and the extent of consumer involvement in its development are particularly interesting. From this perspective, Slow Food's role (Petrini, Padovani, 2006) in Eataly's history can be interpreted as a social movement's transformation of the market (Pietrykowski, 2009; Wilk, 2006).

The case study's original and innovative dimension is twofold: *firstly*, the dialectic relationship between the company and the social movement began before the launch of the new business. *Secondly*, Eataly and Slow Food were mutually and significantly involved at the organizational and managerial levels to ensure that the business and ideological expectations were satisfactorily integrated. From the beginning, and before the opening of Eataly, the company sought to introduce the Slow Food counterculture's core values and issues into the new venture's design and implementation process.

Market transformation means that new corporate initiatives are developed and a new market structure (demand and supply), is created, which is grounded on a new and more responsive ethical agreement between customers and suppliers. Social movements mediate and direct this agreement and their role is therefore expected to change from a reactive to a more proactive stance towards the market. From this perspective, Eataly is indicative of a special kind market transformation that previous literature did not addressed.

From a theoretical point of view, we will analyse the Eataly case from an anti-consumption perspective: anti-consumption research focuses on reasons against consumption rather than on pro-social movements (Kozinets et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2009). The more consumers detach from the traditional market offering, particularly food production and distribution, the more scope there is for new and more sustainable business ventures (Schaefer, Crane, 2005), some of which depend on actual consumers' involvement (Moraes et al., 2010). Consequently, consumers resist extant supply modes and their ideological discourses to achieve a more genuine consumption style (product attributes, value chain properties, store environment, etc.). Consumers (as individuals and as a community) thus act as agents of resistance to extant supply modes and agents of change for the development of new ones.

The aim of the paper is to investigate the way in which the market transformation occurred and the new venture was developed. In particular, the objective of this research is to understand how and to what extent the community and corporate stances have been mutually adjusted. Finally, we will consider whether the community (and its more radical members) have accepted this form of compromise with the market ideology by pursuing authenticity and sustainability and, if so, how.

In the first section, we present a brief review of the literature on anti-consumption leading towards authenticity and sustainability and the social movements at the root of the market transformation processes. In the following sections, the interaction between the company and the Slow Food movement is analysed. We then present data on consumer behaviours, attitudes, and voices. Finally, we discuss our findings' contribution to the extant theoretical debate and their extension to other settings.

Conceptual background

Anti-consumption is considered a form of detachment that alienates consumers from markets. As Lee et al. (2009, p. 145) note, "anti-consumption research focuses on reasons against consumption [...] reasons for avoiding a product or brand". For example, voluntary simplicity implies that, as responsible consumers, we should consume less in order to reduce the wastage

of resources as well as to foster more sustainable development (Ballantine, Creery, 2010; Cherrier, 2007, 2009b).

Nevertheless, consumers must eat, and if they do not buy a specific item, they will buy something else. Anti-consumption studies, along with consumer resistance theories¹, help us understand that any single act of avoidance as well as a more complex avoidance strategy implies some form of identity construction activity based on both negative and positive consumption practices (Cherrier, 2007). That is, when consumers choose not to consume a good or a brand, they will choose to consume something else, and both of these activities are integrated into a process of identity construction (Newholm, Shaw, 2007). Following Micheletti (2003; 2004), political consumerism occurs when these decisions are inspired by ethical concerns – a perspective that has recently applied to the study of boycott (critical, negative) and buycott (constructive, positive) behaviours (Neilson, 2010).

Individual acts of anti-consumption and/or resistance can, as such, be regarded as forms of identity construction activities, but also as forms of collective action when they converge towards counter-cultures (Desmond et al., 2000; Thompson, Coskuner-Balli, 2007) or new social movements (Buechler, 2010). In both cases, collective action aims at criticizing extant culture and dominant ideology, giving counter-culture members a sense of new and resistant collective identity (Hollenbeck, Zinkhan, 2010). Social movements also possess transformative properties when they react to corporate market strategies, forcing companies to change their conduct.

As individuals and as members of a social movement, consumers engage in the market process (Peñaloza, Venkatesh, 2006), supporting the segments, channels, and companies that seem or prove compatible with their ideological strategy (Holt, 2002). This process resembles the reproduction-resistance dialectic described in Arnould and Thompson's (2005) review and it is mediated by meanings and symbols. It has been observed in its positive, constructive dimension, but can also be viewed from a critical, deconstructive point of view (Cova, Dallı, 2009): consumer resistance is a form of co-creation when it moves resources away from a specific market/segment and takes it elsewhere.

This usually happens at the consumption community level (Cova, 1997; Cova et al., 2007): given that individual consumers cannot influence corporate power, communities do. There are cases of communities taking resources from the market and developing peer-to-peer or social

¹ We follow the position by Zavetosky (2002) and Cherrier (2009a), according to which resistance can be regarded as a more profound and committed set of attitudes and behaviors within the broader domain of anti-consumption.

production modes (Dalli, Corciolani, 2008; Kozinets, 2007) as well as cases where they take old and/or rejected products back to the market (Leigh et al., 2006). In other cases, communities criticize corporate activities, forcing them to change (Hollenbeck, Zinkhan, 2010; Kozinets, Handelman, 2004).

The case presented here is slightly different from extant theories of both counter-cultures and social movements, because Slow Food had a constructive, constitutive, committed role in the development of the new business. In this sense, this paper provides a new perspective for the analysis of the relationship between corporate power and critical consumers and movements: the market's transformation does not necessarily rely upon the traditional market-mediated action and reaction between companies and consumers, while there is the possibility of negotiating and co-design new and more sustainable forms of production, distribution, and consumption.

In figure 1A, we compare the traditional and simplest condition in which companies' strategies point at consumers that react positively or negatively. On the basis of these reactions, companies adapt their strategies.

----- Figure 1 about here -----

In figure 1B, movements develop aggregating individual consumer initiatives: they can be supportive or critical, and they can have an effect on companies' strategies. Even in this case, the process is of a reactive nature. Figure 1C represents the Eataly and Slow Food case: the company and the movement interact to develop more appropriate combination of goods, services, and ideological stances to be delivered to consumers, who – in their turn – react accordingly.

In more detail, individual and collective initiatives in the field of food purchase and consumption are often aimed at seeking authenticity: consumers look for authentic objects with intrinsic properties, but they also engage in consumption activities that convey authentic experiences per se, regardless of the intrinsic properties of the goods involved (Beverland, Farrelly, 2010; Grayson, Martinec, 2004). Moreover, authenticity is 'constructed' according to individual goals and contextual determinants (Arnould, Price, 2000), as well as social and cultural constraints (Peterson, 2005). As with wine (Beverland, Farrelly, 2010), authenticity seeking can also take the form of a more intangible, service-oriented activity in which co-creation and contextual interaction are very important as far as food is concerned. An important issue regarding context is the relation between the good and the territory: "truly authentic food should not be separated from its source, because when replicated in other

countries, it loses its truly authentic appeal” (Kniazeva, Venkatesh, 2007, p. 428). This also holds in terms of food production and delivery: consumers want a more direct relationships between the place of production and the place of consumption. They want to consume products produced locally. The argument has been developed by scholars studying tourists’ authenticity seeking and local systems of (sustainable) food production and distribution (Askegaard, Kjeldgaard, 2007; Bardhi et al., 2010; Sims, 2009).

The argument about authenticity is important with respect to the Eataly case’s contribution to the sustainability issue raised in this special issue’s call for papers: the way in which this new business’s supply chain is organized depends on consumers’ expectations and requirements regarding food’s safety, genuineness, and regional character. They ask for local produce and ‘locality’ seems to emerge as a specific attribute of sustainable offerings.

The Eataly formula

Eataly is an innovative experience that entered the Italian food market in 2007. It was created by Oscar Farinetti, who had previously been in electronics retail. The company offers an original combination of goods and services (mainly raw food, restaurants, and training) for food preparation and consumption.

Slow Food is a worldwide organization devoted to protecting and supporting food culture. It was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and a fast life, as well as the disappearance of local food traditions by promoting “good, clean, and fair” food. Slow Food’s main objectives are to spread taste education, to connect producers and consumers of excellent foods through events and initiatives, and to build new communities of quality food supporters. Today, Slow Food has over 100,000 members in 132 countries and operates through local territorial branches.

Slow Food and its president, Carlo Petrini, played a primary role in this new business adventure, influencing many of the business formula’s founding ideas. Before the official opening of the first shop, more than two years’ research by a joint task force of both Eataly managers and Slow Food delegates went into identifying and developing alliances with the producers of food and wine who shared the same high quality concept.

The first Eataly shop, which opened in Turin in 2007, is the flagship store and embodies the new venture’s core principles. The shop is located in an old factory that previously produced Carpano – a traditional brand of spirits – and it’s a good example of industrial restructuring. Another seven branches were opened in the domestic market (Pinerolo, Milan, Bologna) and

abroad (Tokyo, New York). Scheduled shop openings should result in Eataly having 25 branches across the world by 2015.

In keeping with the sustainability criterion of reducing transportation costs (*Kilometri zero*)², fresh produce is sourced from the surrounding areas. Where possible, the same logic applies to different categories as well as to the branches in Japan and New York. In a sense, the made-in-Italy character and its apparent appeal to foreign markets are replaced by a different discourse that relates to fair and sustainable food production and distribution (Askegaard, Kjeldgaard, 2007; Kniazeva, Venkatesh, 2007). From this perspective, consumers in Japan and the US should not be attracted by the ‘country of origin’ formula, but mainly by the combination of sustainability and the products’ authenticity.

Methodology

In order to pursue our research objectives, we employed a multiple method approach: this allowed us to address broad research questions, to develop more robust findings, and to avoid single-method biases (Davis et al., 2010).

In particular, we opted for a mixed methods design (Creswell, 2003) that combined both quantitative and qualitative methods. Among the four purposes for multiple methods designs (development, initiation, complementarity, and interpretation), we adopted the initiation design that, according to Davis *et al.* (2010), draws on the outcomes from a preliminary study to inform a second study undertaken by means of a different method. The weights of the adopted methods are unequal: the less weighted method is instrumental to the research launch, while the second method assumes a primary role in the development of the main study.

In the first stage, we seek to understand Eataly’s effectiveness, which allows consumers to perceive the sustainability and authenticity. We undertook a survey of a random sampling of 300 Eataly customers. This survey provided data on their attitudes towards and perceptions of Eataly. Over a period of 3 days during the week immediately before the 2008 Christmas holidays, data were collected at Eataly’s Turin branch. The time and place for data gathering were selected on the basis that they would ensure a good flow of heterogeneous customers.

In the second stage, we explored the relationship between Eataly, its customers and the Slow Food movement in depth: we investigated the alignment between the values underlying the movement, the Eataly business idea, and its customers’ actual perceptions, whether they were Slow Food members or not. Our objective was to reveal the role of shared values, such as

² *Zero kilometers* means that suppliers are chosen on the basis of the shortest distance between the place of production and the place of consumption.

authenticity and sustainability, in customers' shopping experiences. In this sense, we opted for a qualitative approach. Data were collected from five different sources (table 1): in-store observations at Turin and Milan shops; semi-structured interviews with customers in the two shops; in-depth interviews with customers, Slow Food managers as well as Eataly managers and employees; blogs and forums; and secondary data about Slow Food and Eataly (books, websites, internal data).

----- table 1 about here -----

In-store observations. The three researchers independently visited the two Eataly stores in Turin and Milan in the first months of 2010. Their observations were individually recorded through notes and photographs, allowing the identification of the stores features in terms of layout, atmosphere, and internal communication.

Semi-structured interviews. Fifty personal semi-structured interviews were conducted at the Turin and Milan branch, using purposeful random sampling (Patton, 1990). Regular and occasional customers, Slow Food members and non members were selected.

In depth interviews. In our research, we were not only interested in taking the customer perspective into consideration, but also wanted to compare it with the company and the Slow Food movement's voices. We conducted personal interviews with Eataly's owner, two managers (in charge of external communication and sales) and two sales clerks (from the grocery department and the customer service). We interviewed a Slow Food executive who works at the Eataly headquarters, supervising the supply chain management and ensuring that the formula is in line with Slow Food principles. We interviewed another Slow Food member who participated in the Slow Food task force that, during the launch of Eataly, supported the suppliers' selection process. Ten one-on-one interviews were conducted with customers, who were interviewed in a store and at their homes between February and May 2010 (table 2).

----- table 2 about here -----

Blogs/Forums. Forums, blogs and Facebook pages were used to obtain data on customer attitudes towards Eataly. Between December 2008 and May 2010, more than 350 discussions as well as comments on public blogs or forums were analysed (40 pages of transcription). Each discussion was considered independently and analysed in its entirety. About 60 were considered relevant to our investigation (e.g., authenticity, sustainability, and countercultural movement) and analysed further.

Secondary sources. Data were gathered through four books published respectively by the founder of the Slow Food Movement, Carlo Petrini ("Slow Food Revolution", 2005, Einaudi ed., and "Buono, pulito e giusto", 2005, Rizzoli ed.) and Eataly's owner, Oscar Farinetti

(“Coccodé”, 2008, Giunti ed., and “Il mercante di utopie”, 2008, Sperling&Kupfer), corporate websites and internal company documents.

Each interview, blog, or forum post was transcribed (giving a total of 143 pages) and analysed separately by each of the three researchers. The data were further coded and analysed in tabular displays, using the main constructs from the literature (Spiggle, 1994). The adoption of a multiple method approach, the multiple data sources and the presence of three researchers strengthen the validity of the research findings.

Findings

Eataly and Slow Food: interaction and co-design

The Eataly experience allows us to understand the process by which companies and movements can interact dialectically in the process of value creation. Inspired by the changes affecting the conscious customers, as expressed by the Slow Food movement, Oscar Farinetti, Eataly’s founder, eventually decided to convey his experience in the retail business into a new concept. In fact, food quality, as interpreted by Slow Food, fascinated Oscar Farinetti: food must taste good, but it should also be ecologically and socially sustainable.

Petrini taught me to enter into a different relationship with food. He was the first to make me understand that behind food there’s a patrimony of culture and values. I simply tried to put these ideas into practice with the Eataly business model” (Farinetti, interview).

Besides providing food, Eataly seeks to provide a fusion of traditions, culture, and values embedded in a respectful relationship with food. Eataly promotes products that are good and tasty, clean (because the company respects raw materials and ensures transparent and traditional production processes), and fair (because it ensures adequate margins for producers and affordable prices for customers).

We want to show that it’s possible to achieve important results, merging entrepreneurship, ethics and a social perspective in our business (Farinetti, interview).

These values are rooted in both cultures and knowledge that can be (and actually are) taught and learnt. In this sense, Eataly acts as a cultural intermediary, seeking to teach consumers about food culture as well as promoting its business model. In fact, excellence in food and quality democratisation are not enough. Food habits should be corrected and taught and customers should be empowered to interpret and share the entire project philosophy.

From the beginning, the interaction between Eataly and Slow Food was an essential feature of the business formula. By expressing its social role as a counter-cultural movement, Slow Food participated actively in the definition and implementation of the Eataly business idea.

I was part of a team of four members of the movement who was delegated by the Slow Food chairman board. We worked directly at the Eataly headquarters, where we could share our opinions with the management. We spent two years identifying, selecting, and choosing producers and products that were suitable for the new venture. We went to the producers' plants many times to verify the product quality and that Slow Food values, such as sustainability and the principles 'Good, Clean and Fair', are respected in the production process, (Sebastiano Sardo, Slow Food Executive, interview)

In this sense, the team promoted an assortment of products that was the result of collecting suggestions from many Slow Food members from various local Slow Food groups.

The close collaboration also continued after the Turin store opening. A Slow Food executive was a permanent part of the Eataly management for two more years, monitoring and selecting partners and products, and training internal staff; he currently works as a consultant at the Eataly headquarters once a week to guarantee that the Slow Food principles are respected. One of his important tasks is producing the monthly report on the assortment, pricing, promotion, and communication practices, which is targeted at both Eataly and Slow Food top management.

Beyond this collaboration, the movement and Eataly share strong mutual intentions: the opportunity to participate in generating a retailing solution to fit modern distribution logics and the high quality of the small food boutique, could help Slow Food extend its principles to a larger mainstream market.

Slow Food decided to participate in this new challenge, because we understood the risk of becoming an elitist movement for a snobbish food culture. Anyway, this strategy was strongly criticized by radical Slow Food members. That's why we paid so much attention to the Eataly offering and, on the one hand, to its harmony with the idea of the democratization of quality food to attract the mainstream market and, on the other hand, with the logic of authentic and sustainable food that attracts traditional Slow Food members (Sebastiano Sardo, Slow Food Executive, interview).

The internal communication, which has a edifying intention, seeks to develop a sustainable, fair, and reliable relationship with the customer. Shopping bags are made of fabric and are designed for re-use. There are no coupons or fidelity cards. This is again the result of the close interaction with the Slow Food movement and its philosophy. The partnership was not limited to the selection of products and suppliers. Slow food supported and inspired the internal and external communication in the light of a more respectful and careful relationship with the customers. There are, for instance, signs proclaiming that Eataly does not treat customers as numbers, but as individuals.

Help us avoid having to call out a number to serve you. We do not want you to become a number. We would like to look into your eyes. We even want queuing to

be a convivial moment. And, even then, we want to be different. Waiting in a queue is fine, if you are in good company. This could help us teach you to respect one another. There are people who do not get angry if someone jumps the queue and only complain gently. There are other people who furtively try to jump the queue and these are not welcome customers at Eataly (A sign at the counter).

As it emerges from the evidence discussed above, the company and the movement started interacting collaboratively as peers long before the opening of the first shop and this relationship is still strong. Contrary to extant theory and evidence from counter-cultures (Desmond et al., 2000) and social movements (Buechler, 2010), Eataly and Slow Food have cooperated pro-socially to develop a new, domesticated business model. There is no evidence of the sequential, reactive, and counter-reactive adaptation that has been described by extant literature on this topic (Thompson, Coskuner-Balli, 2007), besides the small group of consumers discussed below.

Consumer behaviours: remaining with and purchasing at Eataly

In the first stage of the research, 300 customers were interviewed at the Turin branch's point of sale: 53% were male, distributed across age, class, education, and employment, with a slight bias towards educated profiles and professional jobs (compared to the national population). 40 people (13%) were members of Slow Food. Approximately 100 people were shopping at Eataly for the first time.

Their reasons for spending time and money at Eataly are described in table 3.

----- table 3 about here -----

The vast majority of respondents consider Eataly an attractive shopping opportunity due to the intrinsic qualities of the food, its authenticity, and their support of critical consumption movements (Slow Food), which adds further value to this offering through certification (Beverland, Farrelly, 2010; Cherrier, 2007, 2009a).

At the same time, some discrepancies appear between Eataly's offering and the restricted group of Slow Food members. While there are no significant differences in the evaluation of the offering's specific aspects (e.g., the authenticity of products), Slow Food members analyse the overall Eataly format more critically than average customers. Only 30% of them believe that the Eataly formula is really representative of the Slow Food philosophy, while around 90% of non-members think that the philosophy and the offering are compatible. The power discourse that arises from these data resembles the argument by Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007), who hold that such views represent the dissent of the community's more radical and committed members who feel that their values are exploited by corporate power. The original point of the Eataly case is that there is no conflict between the community and

corporate power, as was the case in other studies (Hollenbeck, Zinkhan, 2010; Thompson, Coskuner-Balli, 2007), but there is some conflict between one group in the Slow Food community on the one side and the rest of the community as well as the company and all of the other customers on the other side.

We improved our research design to better understand the power discourse (Thompson, 2004) developing under the surface of this original and apparently successful alliance between a critical movement and a company. In early 2010, we initiated the second stage of data collection, interviewing consumers at the point of sale and at home, as well as collecting data from blogs and forums. Our aim was to better understand the relationship between Eataly and its customers, and particularly Slow Food members. It is possible to group the responses into two major themes: a) purchasing at Eataly as a form of resistance and b) the compromise between market transformation and community values.

Consumers' voices: resistance and the quest for authenticity and sustainability

Eataly customers are well aware of the trade-off between resistance and mainstream marketing; they avoid ordinary products and channels and seek authentic and sustainable offers from reliable suppliers. In this sense, we recognize the intimate relationship between acts of anti-consumption and more creative forms of resistance (Cherrier, 2009a; Newholm, Shaw, 2007; Shankar et al., 2006). Their quest for sustainability, which lies at the core of their choices, is clearly expressed by their statements.

Besides quality, the sustainability of products is essential. It is a different form of warranty that is becoming increasingly important, primarily when you have a family (Filippo).

I want to know what I am going to eat and I don't want industrial 'bogus' goods. Here [at Eataly] I feel as if I'm purchasing directly from the original producer (Anna).

Eataly's customers do not trust the commonly accepted, mass market food distribution. They want authentic, local, sustainable, and ideologically acceptable produce, and they rely upon various institutions when purchasing: trade shows, purchasing groups, and movements (Slow Food).

I like to see many local, Italian producers. I often attend Slow Food events, where you can see the names of the producers and then I can find them here at Eataly. (Giulia).

It is evident that consumers seek both the intrinsic properties of goods (Grayson, Martinec, 2004) and the more general properties of the production and consumption process (Beverland, Farrelly, 2010). It is therefore not only the products per se that attract customers to Eataly, but

their involvement in a process that makes them “feel as if” the business differs from ordinary supermarkets. In this sense, there is a contextual, subjective dimension in this process: in order to appreciate the authenticity of what they buy, consumers need to be involved in a process in which they play an active role, have to “feel as if ” they are purchasing directly from the original producer (Arnould, Price, 2000).

The search for the intrinsic properties of food overlaps with the social and ideological stances that arise from various and interconnected networks: Eataly’s customers participate in various communities and related discourses that emerge from different conditions (Thompson, 2004).

Sustainability is important for me: I participate in a purchasing group of more than 150 families and we buy products and brands according to the Kilometri zero philosophy. I often come to Eataly to buy the same products that I usually buy through the Purchasing Group (Luisa).

The important point here is that these expectations are met by the interaction between customers and movements, on one hand, and the company, on the other. Eataly, Slow Food, and individual consumers have collaborated – even if at different levels and stages of the process – to create a new market form that is strongly rooted in ideology (Moraes et al., 2010; Newholm, Shaw, 2007).

I regard food as a cultural element that refers to identity and tradition and to a specific relationship between the producer and the land. And I try to translate these beliefs into consumption practices that are based, on the one hand, on a kind of imagery that our parents gave us and, on the other hand, on a sort of reaction against the homogenization of tastes driven by forces like McDonald’s: we react seeking variety, diversity, and, finally, identity through food consumption (Marco).

Consumer voices: community, compromise and transformation

Many consumers consider Eataly a compromise between radical forms of political consumption and the actual exploitation of business opportunities. Some accept this compromise

I have a lot in common with those whom I meet at Eataly. I feel like I have a lot more in common with them than what happens in a supermarket (Roberto)

others not.

I don’t like it, as it seems a ‘trendy’ supermarket. I prefer the purchasing group formula: it is easier and less pretentious. The group is more effective because we, as members, are directly involved in the selection of products. We are not always as good as we would wish, even if some of us are responsible for the search for small producers to be helped and supported (Luisa).

Firstly, the data suggest the communal – even tribal – nature of the discourse: loyal Eataly customers strongly identify with one another (Cova, 1997). They feel as if they have a lot in

common with other Eataly customers. Conversely, they disidentify with those who shop at traditional supermarkets. This kind of associative/dissociative thoughts help define loyal Eataly customers' attitudes as well as those of customers who are more critical (Arnould, Price, 2000; Giesler, Luedicke, 2007).

Farinetti is right when he says that it is good to spend more money on good food and avoid many superfluous things, paying more attention to what we buy. But in my opinion, it seems that here at Eataly they are moving towards an elitist market, something trendy (Claudia).

Critical customers who only visit Eataly occasionally, point to the ineffectiveness (compared to other institutions), elitism, and even the exploitative dimension of Eataly. As in other case studies (Bekin et al., 2005; Dalli, Corciolani, 2008), radical members of the community support a purist form of commitment towards the cause and do not accept commercialisation, even if it is directed towards the emancipation of mainstream consumers (Kozinets, Handelman, 2004).

I come to Eataly once a month because I can find all the products that I have to buy at various locations in the countryside. But I always have this unpleasant feeling of being in a place that is not mine. I am used to being on the farms themselves and I fear that this is a sort of commercial counterfeit. [...] Even those whom I meet here seem to be a bit different from me. I do not feel at ease with all these lights, billboards, well ordered stacks of stuff that are sometimes purposely messed up. It seems that they are displayed in such a way that tempts you to buy something that you don't really need (Maddalena).

The literature holds that, under similar conditions (Thompson, Coskuner-Balli, 2007), the community has the power to counteract corporate co-optation by moving their consumption practices away from the market. In respect of Eataly, the situation is slightly different, because the Slow Food community is intimately connected to the company, and detachment from it does not seem possible or likely. Moreover, although occasionally, even demanding Slow Food members do visit Eataly and some of them seem sincerely supportive of the positive outcomes of the organization's goals.

Eataly is a sort of exploitation of a cultural movement. I believe that it must be a great business because now that people can fill their bellies after centuries of hunger, they are allowed the luxury of food quality. Nevertheless, it seems that at Eataly's core there is a solid and reliable background of deep and well-rooted beliefs. I am a bit worried about the extension of this model, which exploits the commercial side of the movement: I hope that the existing coherence will never be lost. I hope that this initiative will positively impact production: those who stopped producing quality products because of poor market opportunities may now find that Eataly has given them an incentive to return to traditional and authentic products (Giulia).

In a sense, it seems that transformation occurs in both corporate activities and counter-cultural movements (Dalli, Corciolani, 2008) in which, given the positive trade-off between losing some of the original rigor, but gaining a more emancipated, genuine, and sustainable consumption mode by mainstream consumers as well as a more authentic food production mode, a process of radical thinking moderation arises. Nevertheless, some of these ‘radical’ consumers maintain their beliefs and rely on local purchasing groups and individual practices to pursue authenticity in its purest form.

Discussion and further research

The Eataly case demonstrates that corporate power and consumer movements can interact and collaborate in a different way than the one described in the literature, according to which counter-cultures and social movements react to business initiatives and – given certain conditions – are able to force them to counter-react accordingly (Buechler, 2010; Desmond et al., 2000; Hollenbeck, Zinkhan, 2010; Thompson, Coskuner-Balli, 2007). The company’s market offering was supported and validated through appropriate forms of cooperation at the organisational and strategic levels even before the opening of the new venture. The offering’s sustainability is grounded in various elements (Schaefer, Crane, 2005): the intrinsic product properties, the strong relationships with small, local manufacturers, its reliance on traditional production and consumption practices, and its ideological determinants. In this sense, Eataly appears to be an original and promising form of corporate-movement interaction in the light of a new, more participated market process (Peñaloza, Venkatesh, 2006) than those addressed in the literature (Thompson, Coskuner-Balli, 2007).

Eataly is a unique case of market transformation induced by anti-consumption, mainly because it is a peer relationship in which the company and the movement have cooperated in a complex co-design stage that has continued for two years and is set to still continue. In this case, detachment from mainstream marketing and distribution turns into a new venture supported and validated both directly (as customers) and indirectly (as members of Slow Food) by consumers. The data show how important this involvement is for consumers: they feel committed and identify with Eataly as a form of resistance against mainstream marketing and distribution and a form of constructive involvement in the new venture (Ballantine, Creery, 2010; Cherrier, 2007, 2009a). In this sense, the argument put forth by Cherrier (2009a) is reinforced even stronger at the individual level: consumers resistance strategies are complementary and integrated dimensions of anti-social and pro-social behaviors.

Following the sequence described in figure 2, after the stages of co-design, opening of the new venture, and development and structuration, Eataly is now in a stage in which reproduction and resistance processes interact (Arnould, Thompson, 2005).

----- figure 2 about here -----

On the one hand, many consumers like and support the new business model regardless of their ideological orientation. Even among Slow Food members, many are satisfied with the compromise between Eataly and Slow Food. Still, there is a group of consumers who, once exposed to the new formula, disliked it. This group, comprising critical consumers who are not necessarily members of Slow Food, can be considered an expression of counter-counter-cultural instances similar to those analysed by Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007).

Consumers' quest for authenticity and sustainability is the core of the alliance between the corporate power and the social movement. A strong mutual commitment, based on ethical concerns, is a prerequisite for this type of market transformation. There are two dimensions related to the ethical discourse: firstly, the intrinsic properties of the goods and the production and delivery process and, secondly, the process of consumer involvement in creating authentic consumption and shopping experiences (Arnould, Price, 2000; Beverland, Farrelly, 2010; Grayson, Martinec, 2004). Our data show that both of these dimensions are important and interdependent.

Furthermore, the process of creating authentic experiences is a critical, deconstructive dimension in which some of the customers criticize certain aspects of the initiative. Some of them accept the business's commercial nature as a kind of compromise, while others do not and distance themselves from it. Contrary to other cases considered in the literature (Thompson, Coskuner-Balli, 2007), only individual detachment occurs, while the movement as a whole is still well integrated into the new venture.

Ultimately, the story of Eataly so far suggests that there are opportunities for movements and companies to collaborate on the development of new business ventures with ethical concerns, which could lead to consumers' expectations being met on various levels: the intrinsic properties of the goods and services, consumer involvement in the creation of the shopping experience, community certification and support, etc. However, this experience shows that – even under these conditions – some consumers express criticism and detachment. The questions that still need to be answered are related to the medium and long-term effects of this kind of criticism within the community: will dissatisfied Slow Food members question their

participation in and support of Slow Food? Will they quit? Will they reduce their involvement and turn their attention towards other forms of collective action? More time and further research efforts are necessary to answer these questions.

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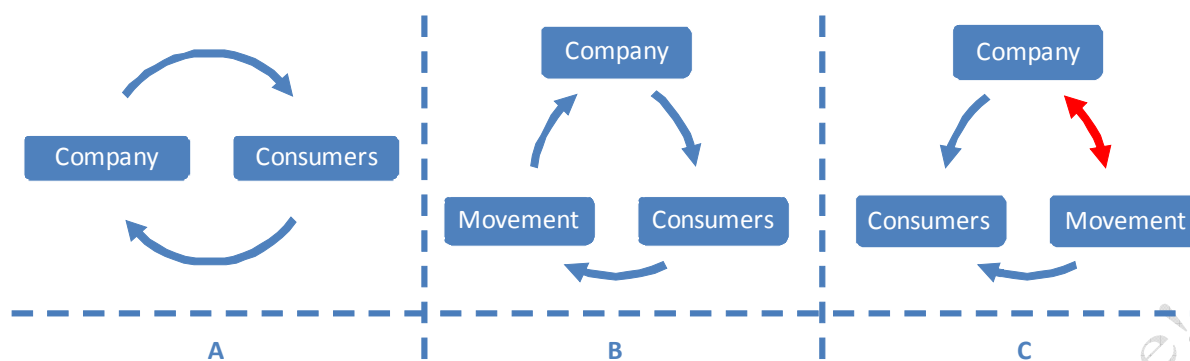


Fig. 1 – New relationships between companies, consumers and movements

Table 1. The data set

	Slow Food	Eataly	Consumers
<i>1st stage of research</i>			
Survey			300
<i>2nd stage of research</i>			
In store observations		Turin: 22 February and 26 April, 2010 Milan: 9 April, 2010	
Semi-structured interviews			50
In depth-interviews	2	5	10
Blogs/Forums			Over 350 discussions (60 eligible)
Secondary data	2 books Websites (www.slowfood.com, www.slowfood.it)	2 books Website (www.eataly.it). Internal documents	

Table 2. In-depth interviews with customers: the informants

Name	Profile	Gender	Age
Giulia	Loyal Eataly customer. Slow Food member	Female	58
Marco	Loyal Eataly customer. Slow Food member	Male	35
Maddalena	Occasional Eataly customer. Slow Food member	Female	32
Roberto	Loyal Eataly customer. Slow Food member	Male	40
Luisa	Occasional Eataly customer. Member of Cascina Roccafranca's Purchasing Group	Female	40
Filippo	Loyal Eataly customer	Male	34
Antonio	Loyal Eataly customer	Male	48
Anna	Occasional Eataly customer	Female	59
Claudia	Occasional Eataly customer	Female	45
Carla	Occasional Eataly customer	Female	38

Table 3. Reasons for remaining with and purchasing at Eataly

Reasons for remaining with Eataly	N*	%	Reasons for purchasing at Eataly	N*	%
Purchasing high quality products	216	72,0	Authenticity	231	77,0
Spending a pleasant time	166	55,3	Slow Food certification	184	61,3
For a meal	164	54,7	Display and product information	141	47,0
For curiosity's sake	132	44,0	Product trial	118	39,3
Gift purchasing	129	43,0	Personnel support	96	32,0
Participating in events	57	19,0	Price	55	18,3
* total count of those reporting the item as mostly (5) or very important (4) on a 1-5 scale					

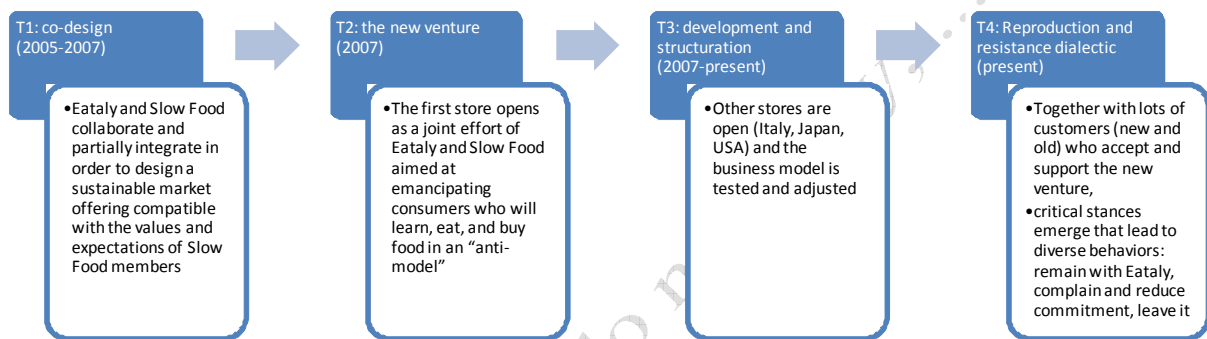


Fig. 2. The evolution of Eataly