TACTICAL COMPETITION AND MOVEMENT OUTCOMES ON MARKETS

The rise of ethical fashion

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Scholars of social movements have long ignored the consequences of movements on markets. But in the past decade, a number of studies bridging various disciplines started analyzing how movements interact with corporations and provoke market change (de Bakker et al. 2013; King, Chapter 9; Soule and King 2014; Walker 2012). In a review of this burgeoning literature on the “contentiousness of markets,” King and Pearce (2010) distinguish three major approaches through which movements attempt to change markets: contentious actions inside and outside of firms, collaboration, and the developing of new products and categories that constitute new market niches. Many studies have shown how the “success” – i.e., the resulting market change – of given tactics is mediated by contextual conditions (King 2008) and depends on processes involving different actors – movements, firms, states, and other relevant players – trying to shape new markets (Bartley 2007; Weber et al. 2008, 2009).

But while it is possible to assess the outcomes of different tactical approaches individually, they are actually related to one another. Movement organizations are part of “multi-organizational fields” (Curtis and Zurcher 1973) or social movement arenas (Jasper 2011). They pursue similar goals, but use different tactical approaches depending on their social and organizational identities and “cultures of action” (Klawiter 2008). In a dynamic process involving different movement players and their targets, the consequences of one approach may then become an important factor in the contextual “conditions of success” for another one. Focusing on one or the other of these tactical
approaches, most studies do not explicitly address this interplay in the transformation of a given market. This is also more generally the case in studies on movement outcomes in the political arena. From an empirical point of view, however, different movement actors very often pursue different approaches concomitantly, and they may be in a competitive or even conflicting relationship. Different tactics such as those of radical and reform-oriented organizations may be complementary and reinforce each other's outcomes, but they may also clash and provoke disputes between movement actors. Given the frequency of such conflicts, studies on movement outcomes have paid surprisingly little attention to their role in achieving change.

This chapter addresses this issue of tactical competition and its role for movement outcomes. How does the interplay of different tactics used by different movement players shape market change such as the emergence of niches? To tackle this question, I study the rise of ethical fashion in Switzerland (Balsiger 2014a). On this market, one observes three kinds of approaches movement actors used to fight for ethical fashion. Some movement organizations launched campaigns targeting fashion brands to push them toward the adoption of codes of conduct and their independent monitoring. Others developed ethical labels, such as for fair trade or organic cotton production, often in collaboration with particular clothing firms or retailers. And some activists and organizations tried to promote an alternative ethical fashion niche, identifying and supporting new producers of ethical clothes. The study shows how the transformations of the clothing market in Switzerland are the result of the interplay between the different approaches. Campaigning put the issue on the agenda of firms and opened the gates for NGOs pursuing collaboration tactics, but collaboration was also a major competitor for the campaigns as it allowed firms to sidestep campaign demands. Attempts at creating an alternative niche, meanwhile, took place in a context shaped by the market transformations that the previous interactions among campaigns, NGOs pursuing collaboration, and firms, had provoked. Focusing on the interplay of tactics enables a better understanding of the process of market transformation and highlights how competing approaches shape movement outcomes.

1 Notable exceptions are Piven and Cloward's study on poor peoples' movements (1977) and studies revealing the so-called radical-flank effect (Haines 1988), which addresses the diverse interplay between moderate and radical groups (see Koopmans 1995).
Social movements and market changes

Authors studying the role of movements in market change (i.e., Davis et al. 2005, 2008; King and Pearce 2010; Rao 2009; Soule 2009; Walker 2012) have pointed out that contentious tactics such as protests are but one way how movements attempt to change markets. Besides such classic movement tactics, movements also collaborate with firms and sometimes act as economic actors themselves, contributing to the creation of new markets. Taking up and slightly modifying King and Pearce’s classification (2010) of the contentiousness of markets, Figure 10.1 distinguishes the different roles movements play in market change. Under contention, one finds what is usually considered as classic social movement actions, i.e., mobilization with a goal of social change targeting specific institutions through extra-institutional means, whether from without, through public shaming, boycotts, or the mobilization of consumers (Bartley and Child 2007; den Hond and den Bakker 2007; Weber et al. 2009; King 2008; Balsiger 2010; Dubuisson-Quellier 2009) or from within, through tactics such as shareholder resolutions or the formation of special interest groups (Scully and Segal 2002). The second way movements change markets is through collaboration: movement actors collaborate with corporations to establish new forms of regulation, certification, or labels (Bartley 2003, 2007),

![Figure 10.1](image)

Figure 10.1 Movement approaches to change markets (after King and Pearce 2010).
where practices are assessed against previously established standards. Most of the time, private regulation initiatives involve the participation of social movement or “civil society” actors, firms, and (sometimes) state actors. Finally, movements also contribute to the rise of new market actors and categories. New markets can be the very expression of social movements; activists may become entrepreneurs or give cultural and material resources to entrepreneurs (Hiatt et al. 2009; Weber et al. 2008; McInerney 2014). Here, I term this “alternative niches” to highlight that such new markets, which are the expression of social movements, rise outside of established market actors and can thus be theoretically distinguished from forms of collaboration between movement actors and companies. In this last form, the distinction between movement actions and movement outcomes can also be blurred. Movement actors may promote or favor the establishment of alternative niches, but they may also directly create them, through forms of prefigurative politics (Polletta 1999) as for instance in the case of fair trade shops.

**Contexts, movement outcomes, and the dynamic interplay of tactics**

Building on political opportunities research, scholars studying movements in markets have highlighted characteristics of corporations (corporate cultures, vulnerabilities, internal allies in the management) and of industries (position as incumbent or challenger, competitiveness, or ties to the government) as determinants of movement outcomes (King 2008; Schurman 2004; Wahlström and Peterson 2006). In addition to corporate or industry characteristics, scholars have also stressed the importance of cultural opportunities to explain movement dynamics and outcomes (Lounsbury et al. 2003; Schurman and Munro 2009). The cultural and structural contexts movements face may be favorable or constitute barriers for movement outcomes.

Most studies in this tradition treat opportunity structures as given, static, and somehow passive contexts. But this sometimes leads to neglecting movements’ capacity to change structures. To avoid the pitfalls of structuralist models (Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Fillieule 2006; Jasper 2011), scholars have suggested an interactionist and strategic perspective that conceptualizes a movement’s targets as active players that try to shape the further outcome of the interaction to their advantage (Jasper 2011). In such a perspective, “our crisis is our adversary’s opportunity, and vice
versa” (Jasper 2011: 12). Actors are embedded in structural contexts, but within such contexts, they engage in strategic interaction. And such interaction between movements and their opponents can lead to structural change. Contexts, therefore, are themselves susceptible to be changed by movements. One can speak of “strategic action fields” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012) or interaction arenas with movement players, their opponents, and other relevant players rather than distinguishing between (active) movement actors and their (largely passive) context.

In a perspective attentive of the heterogeneity of movement actors and the conflicts and complementarities between different tactics, one movement player’s outcome may thus affect the context of another player’s actions. Conflicts between movement actors may arise, for instance, when the actions of movement player B tend to create a more unfavorable environment for movement player A because B’s tactics allow A’s targets to sidestep demands. This articulation among strategic interactions, the interplay of tactical approaches used by movement players, and contextual factors lies at the heart of the analysis of movement’s role in market change proposed here. The perspective enables one to take into account the diversity of tactical approaches and highlights the conflicting and complementary modes of their interplay, without neglecting the role of contextual factors to explain movement outcomes.

**What kind of market change**

Market boundaries are porous. Markets are best understood as fields where producers occupy specific positions, “observe each other” (White 1981), and guide their actions toward one another (Aspers 2011; Beckert 2010; Fligstein 2001; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). A market is distinct from every other market through its specific set of network structures, cultural framing, and institutional rules (Beckert 2010). New markets or niches can rise at the borders of existing markets. Geographical location, technology (such as new products), or cultural categories (such as framing products as ethical) can lead to the redefinition of field boundaries and the creation of niches, populated by existing firms, new emerging firms, or a combination of both. In turn, the transformation of markets – the potential for the rise of new niches, for example – depends on the configuration of organizational fields, i.e., the structural and cultural characteristics of existing markets (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000; Rao et al. 2000; Sikavica and Pozner 2013).
Through the deployment of various resources, social movements bring grievances to markets that can push corporations to adopt change or serve as cultural templates for the rise of niches. Based on a conception of markets as fields with porous boundaries with specific sets of rules, networks, and cultural frames, one can theoretically conceive of different kinds of change movements can contribute to:

- Market change can mean the change of rules or practices in the existing market. In this case, change concerns all market players equally, either through external coercion (state power) or through normative institutional change.
- Market change can mean the rise of new markets/niches that distinguish themselves from existing markets. Such new niches can form:
  - around new categories/products developed by existing market actors;
  - around new categories with new emerging producers;
  - around new categories with both new producers and established ones competing.

Just as the tactical approaches used by movements, these market changes are also interrelated. The study of the processes of market transformation can show how they may be in conflict and how specific configurations and interactions produce market change.

**Research strategy and methods**

The results presented in this chapter draw on fieldwork conducted between 2006 and 2008 on social movements actions on the Swiss market for clothes and on the transformations thereof. The primary scope of the market transformations studied here is limited in two ways. First, I only discuss market transformations that are directly visible to consumers, in the forms of labels or new ethical brands for example. Everything that leads to clear signals for consumers – what can be called market equipment – is analyzed. This excludes from the study important transformations on the markets for clothes that are not directly visible to consumers, but are clearly linked to movement activity, too. These are market transformation upwards the commodity chain; not signaling downwards, from producers to consumers, but moving up the chain from brands to their contractors. In particular, an organizational field around the conduct of social audits has emerged. Second, the scope is limited insofar as I focus on markets for individual consumers. The market for clothes also contains an important segment catering to collective consumers, notably in the production of uniforms or other working wear. I do not consider this market here.
research goal was to reconstruct social movement activity in the clothing sector and to study the market changes that resulted from this (Balsiger 2014a). The empirical inquiry’s starting point was the Swiss branch of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), with the goal of tracing its activities over time. The study thus covers the period from the late 1990s to around 2008. My approach was empirical and inductive. Starting from a first actor – the CCC – I aimed at the identification of all social movement actors active in this field; the field was reconstructed through the information I gathered in interviews. Through interviews with key figures of the CCC as well as the attendance of events organized by the campaign and documentary research on movement initiatives and actions in the garment sector, I identified other social movement actors that intervened. The interviews first led me to follow the lead of the actors involved in the campaign’s monitoring initiative. From there, I approached officials from the main label initiatives (Max Havelaar, Helvetas, Coop’s Naturaline) as well as some firms. Finally, I participated in a volunteers group of the social movement organization conducting the campaign (the Bern Declaration) while they worked on the creation of a shopping map for ethical clothes, and identified other grassroots initiatives dealing with labor and environmental issues in the garment industry, some doing campaign work, others dedicated to promoting ethical consumption and production. In the latter case, an association based in Lausanne, called NiceFuture, was notably outside of the network linking the other actors identified, and was only found through a detour via the French field of ethical fashion, where I met one of its leaders at an event I attended. As many studies using ethnographic fieldwork (e.g., Klawiter 2008; Péchu 2006), I thus stress the diversity of actors and action forms active in this heterogeneous movement field.

I conducted semi-direct interviews with leaders and grassroots activists of all the identified initiatives. Interviewees were asked to speak about the initiatives of their organization over time and to identify the main difficulties it had faced. I also asked questions, while I progressed with the identification of field actors, about their relationship with one another. Finally, interviews dealt with the social and cultural

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3 The research draws on instead of my doctoral thesis, where I compared the fight for ethical fashion in Switzerland and France (Balsiger 2014a).
background of interviewees and their personal trajectories. All in all, twenty-four interviews were conducted, of which twenty were with social movement actors, three with officials from firms, and one with members of the State Secretary for Economic Affairs (seco).

Tactical interplay and the shaping of ethical fashion in Switzerland

In the following empirical discussion, I follow movement activity chronologically and address the interplay of different tactics and their consequences for movement outcomes as they occurred empirically. This means that I first discuss the “clash” between actors pursuing contention and collaboration. In a next step, I look at the attempts at promoting an alternative niche and discuss how this approach related to the two others, and what consequences this had for market change.

Contention and collaboration approaches

On the social movement side, the first actor to raise the issue of production conditions in the clothing sector was the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), whose Swiss campaign was launched in the late 1990s. Three organizations were behind the campaign: the Bern Declaration (an advocacy group for development politics founded in the late 1960s) and two development aid NGOs – Bread for all (a protestant organization) and Lenten Fund (a Catholic one). The campaign put pressure on corporations in order to have them adopt codes of conduct about the issue of conditions of production in clothing factories, and urged them to join so-called multi-stakeholder initiatives to independently monitor codes. The targets were the biggest sellers of clothes – two general retailers and many more specialized clothing firms. Through petitions and ratings, the campaign publicly shamed retailers for their practices. But it also gave them positive incentives by educating consumers and giving them the tools to become political consumers (notably through the “ethical ratings” of firms) (Balsiger 2010).

While the CCC was putting pressure on corporations to adopt social standards, some movement actors developed organic and social labels that firms could use to designate parts of their clothes as ethical. Two prominent initiatives of this kind were launched in Switzerland in
the early to mid-2000s (that is, several years after the CCC had launched its campaign). The organizations behind both of them came from the development aid sector. The first one, a label for organic cotton developed by the NGO Helvetas, the biggest Swiss development aid organization, was actually a development aid project: producing organic cotton should give farmers in developing countries greater revenues and protect them at the same time from environmental hazards. The project started off once it found commercial partners (the retailer Migros and the clothing firm Switcher) who guaranteed a long-term commitment to buy the organic cotton the project’s farmers produce. It was subsidized and supported by the Swiss government. The second such initiative was fair trade cotton labeled and certified by Max Havelaar (MH). It was developed at around the same time. The first MH cotton was sold by Switcher, Migros, and Manor in 2005. In spite of its NGO background (MH Switzerland was created by the country’s six most important development aid NGOs, among them Bread for all, Lenten Fund, and Helvetas), the functioning of MH is very much business-oriented. Firms are licensees and have to pay MH a fee in order to carry the label; in exchange, they benefit from the legitimacy and the high profile of the name Max Havelaar. As such, it resembles the Helvetas organic cotton project, with which it actually collaborated since part of the organic cotton was also certified as fair trade by MH.

A third initiative shared some characteristics with these two collaborations, but did not involve the participation of a social movement organization. Coop, the main competitor of Migros in retailing, also developed its own product line of ethical (organic and socially responsible) clothes, called Naturaline. This was not an NGO but a business project, developed by a cotton trading firm. It originated in the early 1990s as a personal project of the owner of the firm. In an interview, he presented himself as someone whose family lives a somewhat alternative lifestyle inspired by the biodynamic principles of the humanist Rudolph Steiner. As the head of the cotton trading firm, he started a small experiment with organic cotton in India – at first, in his own words, as a “hobby.” Coop quickly became the project’s main economic partner; for the retailer, the mid-1990s corresponded to the time when it started developing its offer in organic food; organic cotton fit well into this

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4 Max Havelaar Switzerland is part of Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO), the international labeling initiative for fair trade.
strategy. In the course of the years 2000, the cotton trading firm converted
fully to organic cotton and launched its own label, called BioRe, which
takes into account both organic and social standards. By selling BioRe
products, Coop became one of the world’s leading outlets for organic
clothes.

Contention and collaboration were in many ways distinct tac-
tical approaches. The CCC can be characterized as a classic (if highly
professionalized) social movement organization with a contentious
action repertoire. Instances of labor abuse are taken up and firms pub-
licly held responsible for it. Solutions for how to deal with the issues
were developed, but the core domain of the CCC was contentious
targeting and campaign making. The organizations pursuing collabora-
tion, on the other hand, did not use contentious frames or action forms.
Instead they developed, often in collaboration with firms, concrete
solutions for problems. While both approaches shared a general,
abstract goal of improving social and environmental conditions in
industrial production, they aimed at different immediate results. In the
case of the CCC, the goal was that firms submit their entire production
to independently monitored labor standards. In the case of collabora-
tion initiatives, the goal was to certify specific products, and thus to
single out value chains that correspond to better standards.

The difference in approaches corresponds to different organiza-
tional positioning in the social movement arena and different social
backgrounds of the individual actors behind the initiatives. However,
one must not overstate the differences; there is actually a lot of overlap
between the two “cultures of action.” Indeed, it seems more appropriate
to speak, in this case, of a continuum between an activist and a business-
oriented pole. The overlap is organizational: two development aid
organizations were initially part of the CCC. The overlap also concerns
action forms: development aid organizations often support campaigns
more or less actively, and the CCC wanted to establish a collaboration
with firms to monitor codes of conduct. And the overlap also concerns
individual actors. Within one organization, one can find more or less
“radical” employees with more or less strong activist backgrounds, and
there are no recruitment barriers between the two poles. Thus, while
campaigning and collaboration are distinct approaches, they were often
used concomitantly by the same organizations or by organizations that
are associated in a dense network.
Contestation and collaboration: interplay effects and outcomes

How did the coexistence of tactics of contentious campaigning and collaborating affect the shaping of the market for ethical fashion? At the core of the analysis, there is a triangular relationship between the CCC, the collaboration initiatives (MH and Helvetas organic cotton), and the firms. The CCC preceded the collaboration initiatives, and it initially faced a relatively favorable environment. In view of its goals, the campaign had some quick successes: most targeted firms adopted codes of conducts (although not exactly the code of conduct advocated by the campaign), and three of them (Switcher, Veillon and Migros) agreed to participate in a pilot project on code monitoring. Several elements favored the establishment of an independent monitoring initiative at this stage. Characteristics of the responding firms and their position in their respective markets certainly played an important role. Two of them saw an opportunity in positioning themselves as “ethical” brands, while the third one (Migros) was in an “ethical” competition with its main competitor on the retail market, Coop. Furthermore, it is likely that the proximity between the campaign actors and the firms was important. In the past, there had been similar campaigns that had opposed the same actors. In the course of these precedents, firm officials and campaign organizations had gotten familiar with each other.

Finally, the campaign hit at a time when the market for ethical products had already started to develop in Switzerland (with organic and fair trade goods available at the big retailers, for example), giving signals to retailers that ethical issues may pay off. In sum, there were a number of structural factors that favored campaign outcomes at this early stage.

The collaboration initiatives entered the game at a later stage. Their “environment” was constituted of the same relatively favorable contextual factors that the CCC faced – appeal of “ethical” markets and “ethical” competitions, proximity between social movement actors and firms. One of them – the Helvetas cotton project – furthermore also benefited from state subsidies. But in addition to this, the previous activities of the CCC have to be counted in as an important factor. Through its campaigns on the issue of production conditions in supply chains in the clothing sector, it had put pressure on clothing brands and retailers and raised consumer awareness on ethical issues linked to fashion. Doing so, the campaign had contributed to creating opportunities for movement actors that proposed forms of collaboration to
retailers. Firms were under public pressure and looked for ways of dealing with the question of production conditions and showing their ethical commitment. Collaboration through labels was a handy way to do so and widely adopted by firms. As we have seen, many of the major companies targeted by the campaign started selling organic or fair trade textile products: Migros (MH and Helvetas), Coop (through its own label), Switcher (MH and Helvetas), or Manor (MH).

In addition to other contextual factors, the collaboration initiatives thus also benefited from the activity of the campaign, which served as a gate-opener; collaboration initiatives promised a market-based solution that allowed firms to partly respond to the pressure put up by the CCC. But while the campaign favored collaboration initiatives, the opposite was true in the other direction, from collaboration to campaign. Once in place, collaboration initiatives changed the configuration of the game for the campaign. From the campaign’s perspective, tactics were in conflict since targeted firms could use collaboration as a form of sidestepping the more encompassing demands of the campaign.

For the organizations behind the campaign in Switzerland, the competition between their campaigning approach and the collaboration approach by other NGOs was evident and perceived as a danger. The case of MH textiles most explicitly reveals this conflict between different approaches within the social movement arena. The launching of MH fair trade cotton coincided with the pilot project involving firms and the campaign organizations around code monitoring. The two staff members heading the campaign at the BD at the time were strongly opposed to the launch of certified clothes which, according to one of them, “ruined the campaign”; “we were conducting a campaign for all firms to adopt a code of conduct as a basic system for their entire production. In this situation, having MH arriving and saying ‘listen, we do not look at everything you do, make a niche, propose 1% of your production, and that’s it’ – there were big conflicts there.” (Interview, campaign official, July 2007).

While campaigning thus opened up opportunities for movement actors pursuing collaboration strategies, the latter had the opposite effect on the former: the development of labels helped firms sidestep campaign demands and made it harder for campaigners to achieve their goals. Figure 10.2 illustrates the interplay between the two tactical approaches, picturing the triangular relationship of campaigners, collaboration initiatives, and firms. The arrow that goes from campaign to collaboration signals that campaigning, by putting the issue on the
public agenda, opened up gates for collaboration initiatives. The arrow going from firms via collaboration to campaigns illustrates that collaboration forms allowed firms to sidestep the campaign, which had a hampering effect on the latter.

Activists often put forward this potential conflict between contentious campaigning and collaboration forms (see, for example, a report by the Maquila Solidarity Network (2006), a network of anti-sweatshop activists). Not all members of the campaign coalition saw such strong conflict between labels and the campaign; some were more pragmatic and saw both approaches as distinct and complementary. It is a case of the classic debate over the respective merits of radical and reform strategies: for reformers (in this case, collaboration NGOs), small steps can be a first stage to more encompassing change, whereas for more radical groups, they actually prevent broad change from happening. In this case, there is more evidence for the latter than for the former. Initial success of the campaign in the form of a monitoring initiative experienced a drawback when companies developed market-based counter-strategies such as labels. The rise of collaboration initiatives certainly complicated the picture for campaigners and gave firms more possibilities of reacting to campaign demands. However, there are also cases where firms use both labels and participate in private regulation through monitoring initiatives. Not all firms, therefore, use collaboration as a form of sidestepping.

Creating an alternative ethical fashion niche

Next to contention and collaboration approaches, other movement actors also attempted to create an alternative niche around new producers embracing ethical fashion. In Switzerland’s French-speaking part,
“NiceFuture,” which is dedicated to the promotion of a more sustainable lifestyle through different activities, organized the first Swiss ethical fashion show in Geneva in 2008. At this event, some twenty designers, shops, and associations exhibited. Among them there were some brands from France (where a similar ethical fashion show had existed for several years), some Swiss designers, as well as NGOs like Helvetas presenting its organic cotton label. The same year, a similar event had taken place for the first time in Basel in the German-speaking part of the country. Called Green Fashion, it was a section dedicated to ethical fashion within a fair on environment protection and sustainability called “Natur.”

Finally, the year before a group of activist-volunteers from the NGO Declaration of Berne had created an “ethical shopping map.” On this city map, the activists identified all the shops where ethical clothes can be purchased (Balsiger 2014b).

The two initiatives I studied had in common the use of broad criteria for what counted as ethical fashion. The two groups shared a common belief in the role individual change can play in bringing about social change. For the leaders of NiceFuture, a group founded by two young professionals running a “green” communication agency, ecological principles of sustainable development are a matter of individual change. Creating a more sustainable society does not require political and systemic change, or at least this is not the path they privilege. They defend an individualized ecology where a more sustainable society originates from individual and moral change. This individual change, in turn, can be brought about when ethical behavior is presented as easy, hip, and accessible to everyone. In its actions – a festival for sustainability, Facebook groups inciting small gestures for a more sustainable planet, or the ethical fashion show – NiceFuture tries to perpetrate this individualized vision of social change. The volunteers who created the ethical shopping map were driven by similar concerns. Most of the members of this small group were young undergrads or graduate students. In contrast to NiceFuture, they were more integrated into the Swiss social movement field, volunteering for the BD. But they, too, believed individual responsibility should play a part in bringing about social change; in their daily lives, for example, all of them took great

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5 Natur itself was incorporated into one of Switzerland’s biggest commercial fairs taking place yearly in Basel.
6 I did fieldwork on NiceFuture and the BD’s volunteer group, not on the Basel fair.
care to buy ethical products whenever possible. The shopping map reflected this concern, constituting a guide for people allowing them to shop in accordance with their ethical values.

**Interplay effects between contention and the promotion of alternative niches**

The initiatives aiming at the creation of an alternative niche (or at making such a niche more visible) were drawing on the CCC's anti-sweatshop campaign, as well as on many other movement campaigns that had revealed the "politics behind products." The CCC in particular had raised the issue of ethical production for clothes. Doing so, it had also created a demand for ethical fashion; consumers drawn to the campaign wondered where they could satisfy their desire to buy ethically produced garments. In the case of NiceFuture, the relationship to the campaign was not direct and conscious. The leaders of this group, more distant from the Swiss social movement arena, were more inspired by the French example of a thriving ethical fashion show and market. In the case of the BD volunteers, of course, the link to the CCC was much more present. They had been drawn to the regional volunteer group mostly because they had followed the CCC, were attracted to this particular campaign and wanted to contribute to it. They voiced personal frustration when trying to buy ethical clothes, as well as concerns by friends. One volunteer, for example, said: "I think when one buys clothes it is really stressful. Because somehow you can't just buy items Made in Cambodia and at the same time you don't know where to buy other clothes that you can still afford" (Interview, BD volunteer, August 2007).

For the campaign, the promotion of such a niche – whether it is populated by new emerging firms or by labels from established retailers – may be seen as complementary to the campaign and as a form of inciting not yet ethical producers to join the movement. This is what had happened once the conflict with MH was over; the campaign makers now had to deal with the existence of such a niche market and actually started to value it in their evaluations of brands. Retailers such as Coop or Switcher who had embraced collaboration with NGOs or launched important ethical product lines were listed as good examples in campaign brochures and thus rewarded. Showing up the feasibility of ethical production should serve as a model for other retailers. The ethical
shopping map was in the spirit of this strategy and responded to a consumer concern the campaign makers had heard very often.

But in other ways, the development of an ethical fashion niche also ran counter to the interests of the campaigning approach. In relation to campaigning tactics, the stakes are similar to the ones that oppose this tactic to collaboration. The rise of a niche – whether it consists of collaboration of NGOs with established firms or of new emerging firms taking up movement demands – can be seen as a potential obstacle to achieving encompassing change on markets. Again, this was most visible within the CCC itself, as the creation of a shopping map juxtaposed both approaches within the same organization, the Bern Declaration. In spite of the media success of the map and although the volunteers were highly motivated to produce maps for other cities, the campaign leader decided to stop the project. He clearly voiced concerns about demobilization; the existence and promotion of an ethical fashion niche could signify to the campaign’s public that action was no longer necessary and lead them to a retreat from public action, opting for exit instead of voice (Hirschman 2004). The existence of such a niche means that concerned consumers (i.e., those who are likely to mobilize in campaigns) can purchase their clothes at ethical stores, while the great majority of consumers do not care about this matter and no global change takes place on the mainstream market. Instead of broad social change, the result would merely be the rise of a small niche for ethical consumers. This perceived trade-off between contentious mobilization and the creating of alternatives characterizes all consumer campaigns and has been observed in many other movements (Balsiger 2014b; Dubuisson-Quellier 2009).

Two kinds of niches: interplay effects and outcomes of collaboration and alternative niches

Did an alternative niche that was distinct from the collaboration between established retailers and SMOs emerge? During the observation period and in the three identified attempts, it is striking that very few small Swiss clothing designers were actually taking part in this niche, whether by participating in one of the fairs or by figuring on the map. Most Swiss designers on the map had been included because they produced in Switzerland, but this did not necessarily mean that they self-identified with the category of ethical fashion. As for the
Geneva show, it was the stated goal of its initiators to show up the potential of ethical fashion to small Swiss designers: for example, one of NF founders told us that the show was also about “showing stylists that natural fabrics exist and that they can work with it, which is why we launch an ethical fashion award” (Interview NiceFuture, February 2008). Thus, the appeal of the “ethical” category was not (yet) self-evident to producers, and cultural work had to be done in order to promote it. This difficulty, I argue, must be linked to the outcome of the previous interplay between campaigns, collaboration initiatives and firms; i.e., the fact that established retailers had already “occupied” the niche for ethical fashion.

Both NF and the BD volunteer group wanted to show that it is possible to buy clothes that are both ethical and respond to esthetic concerns. “What we are interested in was fashion. Something that is contemporary, that men and women of our times appreciate. Nice cuts, textures, and so on” (Interview NiceFuture, February 2008). But rather than encountering small firms that actively embraced this ethical producer identity, the social movement entrepreneurs had a difficult task; indeed, at this stage ethical fashion still had a negative image among Swiss producers. This is what is suggested by a report based on a survey of small clothing brands in the Zurich area. It revealed that the label “ethical fashion” did not serve as a positive form of identification. It was not viewed as an opportunity to reach new consumers, but rather as potentially damaging for business. The designers interviewed for the study associated “green fashion” (Ökomode) and fair trade fashion to a negative image, “certainly not to ‘fashion’ or ‘design’” (Starman 2009: 27). None of them actively tried to position their brand as ethical fashion.

It seems that separating ethical fashion from an activist image and making it look fashionable and hip was made more difficult by the fact that big retailers and labels had occupied this niche. In this instance, the actors and frames with which ethical fashion were associated were important. On the one hand, these retailers were not known for making hip clothes and thus associated ethical fashion to mainstream clothing. But more importantly, through the collaborations, ethical fashion continued to be strongly associated with the activist world. Swiss retailers had actively sought out the proximity to movement actors and collaborated with them in order to have legitimacy as providers of ethical clothes. For existing retailers that had been targeted by an anti-sweatshop campaign for their labor conditions, collaboration with
NGOs was the best way of presenting oneself as an “ethically conscious” firm. Doing it without this caution contained important risks, as the campaign would inevitably denounce it. But this also meant that ethical fashion continued to be associated with NGOs and to a particular clothing style as it was sold at big retailers. The cultural meaning of the niche (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000) linked it to an identity that was different from the one promoters of an alternative niche had in mind. This context made it more difficult for a niche built on a different definition of ethical fashion as fashionable to emerge, which may explain the difficulties of social movement entrepreneurs to do so. Previous interactions between social movement actors and firms, resulting in the establishment of organic and fair trade labels and product lines, had thus shaped the opportunities for the initiatives promoting an alternative niche. Of course, this does not mean that different providers for ethical fashion, some catering to fashion-sensitive customers and others offering basic mainstream products, cannot coexist. The case just shows how processes involving different movement actors and firms matter and how they may shape the environment of one another.

Conclusion

Social movements consist of many individual and collective actors that pursue different tactical approaches. Such approaches can be complementary, but they may also be in conflict with one another. This chapter contributes to scholarly discussions on social movement outcomes and more particular social movements’ consequences on markets. Regarding social movement outcomes, the chapter suggests a greater emphasis on the interplay of movement actors using different tactics.

7 This can be seen notably in the case of Coop, which had an ethical product line that was not cautioned by a legitimate NGO. Although the organic and socially responsible Naturaline brand preceded NGO-backed labels, it came under attack by social movement actors once the latter got established. They criticized, in particular, Coop’s use of the term “fair trade” when advertising Naturaline. Coop benefited, however, from a certain credibility within activist circles as a pioneer in retailing organic and fair trade products; it was even awarded a price for its role in the development of the organic market in Switzerland by the Bern Declaration in 2007. This explains why the controversy on Naturaline remained fairly restricted to the “abusive” use – in the eyes of NGOs – of the term fair trade, without questioning the overall legitimacy of the “ethical nature” of this product line.
This not only applies to market contexts, but also to studies on other institutional settings where movements fight for change. Taking into account the diversity within the social movement arena is important when studying movement outcomes because it allows to see how different approaches are sometimes complementary and thus favor movement success, but can also be in competition with one another. In interaction processes involving different movement actors and their targets, the interplay between different approaches shapes outcomes; the outcome of one tactical approach, for example, may become the “political opportunity” for another one.

While a number of studies have increased our understanding of the process of market change through social movements focusing on one approach and treating others as contextual (Bartley 2003, 2007; Weber et al. 2008), addressing their interplay directly promises important future insights into the dynamics of market change. Such an analysis can then reveal, for example, how targets of a given movement may use the diversity of strategies to play out different movement actors against each other. Analyzing the interplay between different approaches also leads to a dynamic view of the process of niche creation. The main effect of the movement for ethical clothes was the creation of market niches, but such niches can take different forms. Collaborations between established firms and social movement actors can enable the creation of niches situated within established firms, with movement players giving legitimacy capital for the identity change. On the other hand, niches can also emerge around new market players that embrace an ethical philosophy and situate themselves at the boundaries between movement actors and market actors.

References


