Consumers’ Collective Action in Market System Dynamics: A Case of Beer

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Per Østergaard was an associate professor at the Department of Marketing & Management and research director for the Innovation Network Brandbase. Sadly, he passed away during the final stages of this project. We dedicate this article to his memory. Per was educated in philosophy (BA), social science (MA) and Marketing (PhD) from Odense University, Denmark. His research can be divided into two streams: a theoretical interest in analysis and deconstruction within marketing and consumer research concepts and an empirical interest in developing qualitative methods that he used to study primarily re-enchantment processes in consumer culture and tourism.

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Abstract

This paper examines how consumers may work strategically to alter market dynamics through formally organized activities. We address this issue in the context of the Danish beer market and its evolution over the last two decades, with a specific empirical focus on the role of a formally organized consumer association. We draw on key tenets of recent advances in sociological field theory, which views social order as comprising multiple and related strategic action fields. From this perspective, we describe the Danish beer market and its transformation, with an emphasis on how Danish beer enthusiasts played a significant role in altering the logics of competition in the market, but also played a significant institutionalized role within the field itself. We theorize this activity as consumers’ collective action.
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Consumers are well known to have an impact on market formation, change, and maintenance, as research has demonstrated that market dynamics are influenced by consumers’ attempts to resist and reject current market conditions (Kozinets, 2002; Giesler, 2008; Goulding and Saren, 2007). This contributes significantly to the shaping of market logics. Consumers may also shape market dynamics by influencing institutionalized logics either intentionally (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013) or unintentionally (Dolbec and Fischer, 2015). Finally, consumers may be the locus of market change through non-antagonistic entrepreneurial activity (Martin and Schouten, 2014). However, little research has explored how consumers may work strategically to alter market dynamics through more formally organized activities. We address this issue in the context of the Danish beer market and its evolution over the last two decades, with a specific empirical focus on the role of a formally organized consumer association, Danske Ølentusiaster (translated as “the Danish beer enthusiasts” and hereafter DØE).

We draw on key tenets of recent advances in sociological field theory (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; Laamanen and Skålén, 2014), which views social order as comprising multiple and related strategic action fields (SAFs). We describe the Danish beer market and its transformation from this perspective, with emphasis on how DØE came to play a significant role in altering the logics of competition in the market, but also played a significant institutionalized role within the field itself. We theorize this activity as consumers’ collective action – a form of governance that resides at the intersection of the community, market, and state (Streeck and Schmitter, 1985). At the end of the paper, we relate our results to previous marketing and consumer research that explored the role of the consumer in market dynamics, and we outline potentials for future research.

Consumers and market dynamics

Prior research has demonstrated that consumers actively participate in the formation and dynamism of markets. One stream of research has demonstrated how consumers’ participation ranges from being
active market users (Thompson and Haytko, 1997) to being active market shapers and makers. For example, consumers may generate and mobilize competing expert systems for the navigation and formation of market offerings (Thompson, 2005; Kristensen, Boye, and Askegaard, 2011). Furthermore, consumers actively align with producers to establish the viability of alternative production and distribution systems (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007). These studies illustrate how consumers reconstruct and reorient the market institution for alternative valorizations (Arnould, 2007).

Likewise, a number of studies have demonstrated that markets evolve through an ongoing series of contestations and compromises (Giesler, 2006, 2008, 2012). Marketplace evolution may exhibit a dramaturgical nature in the form of a continuous struggle between opposing groups of consumers, as reflected in a process model of market evolution in which markets move through stages of structural instability as a result of ideological contradictions between consumers and producers (Giesler, 2008). A similar process emerges from examination of the evolution of Botox Cosmetic’s brand image as rooted in conflicts between nature and technology (Giesler, 2012).

More specifically, consumers have been theorized to influence choice and product diversity, an influence that can be both intended and unintended. Contestation of the limited choice for large women in the fashion market by the so-called “Fatshionistas” demonstrates how dispersed consumer action works to alter institutional logics of choice in terms of product diversity (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013). Conversely, consumers’ cumulative actions may unintentionally alter markets, for example through the precipitation of entrepreneurial opportunities based on activities of engaged consumers (Dolbec and Fischer, 2015).

Consumer engagement may also evolve into consumers taking the role of protean producers. Analysis of the MiniMoto market demonstrates how logics evolve consensually over time, and shows that consumers may form the wellspring of entrepreneurial activity that ultimately changes the nature
of the field in terms of product variety, company forms, and the overall composition of a product category (Martin and Schouten, 2014).

This overview testifies to a vibrant research domain that reaches many aspects of consumers’ participation in market dynamics. However, not all is said, as “we lack investigations of consumer-initiated or consumer-fueled dynamics in markets where innovations rely less upon taste and more upon technology or legislation” (Dolbee and Fischer, 2015: 1465). We address this gap, and in doing so also question the implied separation of taste, technology, and legislation. Furthermore, our study highlights market dynamics emerging from the highly formalized organization of engaged consumers’ activities, a process that is unexplored in prior literature.

**Market dynamics – logics, movements, and fields**

In the following, we outline our theoretical perspective of markets as strategic action fields that serve as a toolkit for analyzing the role of organized consumers in the dynamics of market structure and logic in the Danish beer market. We outline principles of institutional theory and social movement theory, both of which are synthesized in recent sociological advances on field theory (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012).

Institutional theory focuses on identifying shared, preconscious understandings that lead to organizational change and stability (DiMaggio, 1988). Institutionalization refers to the mechanisms by which social processes, field-wide activities, obligations, or actualities take on a rule-like status in social thought and action (Meyer and Rowan, 1991). Institutional fields are governed by institutional logics, which “refer to the belief systems and related practices that predominate in an organizational field” (Scott, 2001: 139). These logics provide organizing principles that serve as guidelines for the actors in carrying out their work and hence ideologically and culturally organize, in the context of a market, practices of production and consumption. The Fatshionistas mentioned previously relied on the logic of commerce and the logic of art to make their claim about clothing, and they did so to broaden the choice in the market (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013). Logics are socially and culturally
constituted, and a variety of logics permeate society and culture. Logics are mobilized to legitimate and give sense to or transform the dynamics fields, in this case markets.

As an example, a new market – the casino gambling industry – was legitimized through strategies of frame alteration (Humphreys, 2019). In the case of the casino gambling industry, the interests of legitimated, partially autonomous, subsidiary institutions sometimes diverge from those that govern the core institutional form. This divergence sets in motion a process of de-institutionalization, where professionals may demand delegitimizing changes or challenge the legitimacy of the core institution and the logic it adheres to (DiMaggio, 1988). However, to facilitate such change, discursive framing that resonates with underlying cultural currents must take place (Werner and Cornelissen, 2014).

Social movements have been theorized as one source of the framing of a challenge to existing field logics and the propagation of new logics. Social movements typically operate from a political or ideological contention of existing logics (King and Pearce, 2010), and engage in collective action to alter field-level logics by seeking to de-institutionalize existing beliefs, norms, and values and establish new beliefs, norms, and values (Rao, Morrill, and Zald, 2000). Collective action refers to “a broad range of purposive collective behavior, the most organized of which are social movements that occur over longer time stretches, are driven by long-term goals, and develop formal organizations” (Rao et al 2000: 242). The role of the role of social movements in changing markets has, for example, been studied in the US beef market, where consumers coalesced in a social movement to alter the norms, values, and beliefs around beef production and propagate alternative “cultural codes” (Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey, 2008).

Processes of institutionalization and processes of social movement contention take place in strategic action fields (SAFs) (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012), which are fields of action in which actors not only compete on the basis of their resource base but also collaborate to reach agreement about the “stakes at stake” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and the logics along which the field works. That is, they
hold shared cultural understandings of the field, albeit with different positions and perspectives. Hence SAFs are sites of contention and competition as well as mutuality and collaboration (Laamanen and Skålén, 2014). Furthermore, SAFs operate at a meso level of analysis that seeks to balance a structural and an agentic perspective. SAF theory acknowledges both structural domination and the agentic possibilities of actors. At the core of the conceptualization of SAFs is a combination of institutional theory and reliance on the institutional reproduction of dominant logics with tenets of the sociology of social movements (e.g. Rao et al., 2000; Werner and Cornelissen, 2014).

Actors have a shared interest in the maintenance of the field. Therefore, the unit of analysis is not so much the actions of individual actors. Rather, the analysis examines the dynamics of collective strategic action that reproduces predominant field logics. In field theory, the main actors are conceptualized as incumbents, challengers, and governance units that typically function to establish formalized agreements and settle disputes within the field. Social movements may oppose such logics and alter the overall orientation of the strategic action of field-level actors.

In the following, we apply SAF theory to the context of consumer markets, specifically the product category of beer. In doing so, we follow up on conceptual groundwork in marketing theory on collective-conflictual dynamics in markets (Laamanen and Skålén, 2014). We argue that the role of DØE in influencing the market over time and its current institutionalized role as a powerful market agent in terms of the structural and cultural make-up of the field are better understood theoretically as consumers’ collective action.

**The Danish beer market as a strategic action field**

In the years around the turn of the millenium, the Danish beer market underwent profound changes. The market was dominated by incumbents – major industrialized corporations supplying the market with predominantly pilsner beer. Different numbers circulate, but estimates generally suggest that toward the end of the 1990s, around 15 breweries remained in the Danish market, of which eight were members of the field’s industry governance unit, the Danish Brewer’s Association. Today the
association has 44 members out of an estimated 150–200 breweries, the vast majority of which are small-scale craft breweries that emphasize variety and novelty. Estimates are that approximately two new beers are launched on the Danish market per day. Beers are typically brewed at traditional breweries and distributed to retail and on-site distributors (bars and restaurants) rather than being produced and sold at brewpubs. While incumbents still exist – Carlsberg A/S has a 62.9% market share while Royal Unibrew A/S has 16.4% – the overall logic of what constitutes the product has fundamentally shifted. For example, recently the Danish Brewer’s Association published a magazine hailing “The Danish Beer Revolution 2000–2015” with company presentations of both incumbents and challengers. This transformation of the Danish beer market seems similar to that in the US in the 1990s (e.g., Rao et al., 2000; Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). The transformation of the Danish market can be viewed as part of a more globalized social movement around craft beer and local food production, a process that might be understood as mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) across national SAFs. However, while consumers’ role has been described as one element of a general microbrew movement (e.g. Rao et al., 2000), our context allows for additional insights into this process. The focus of our work is thus the specific role of consumers’ collective action in terms of the degree of formalization and relationships beyond taste formation to legislation and technology.

As mentioned, the field is circumscribed by the Danish Brewers’ Association, which functions as an industry association for breweries and bottling plants in Denmark. Its purpose is to represent and communicate the interests of the beer and soft drink industry to parliament, public authorities, media, and the general public, acting as a “governance unit” in SAF terms. This role involves influencing political issues such as health, environment, food safety, and general interests of the industry (Bryggeriforeningen, 2014). Another important actor in the field is Dansk Retursystem (the Danish bottle deposit system), which has the exclusive rights and responsibility for handling all bottle deposits in Denmark. Lastly, the market includes home brewers who are affiliated with different home brewer
associations in Denmark. These brewers make up a small portion of the breweries in Denmark and are partly self-sufficient but also serve as incubators of craft beer start-ups.

**DØE’s evolution from enthusiastic consumers to powerful field actor**

DØE is a formally organized consumer interest organization. It is registered as an association with the Danish Business Authority, which is a state-level organization responsible for registering all profit and non-profit organizations and associations, including volunteer and charitable organizations. The association comprises beer enthusiasts with the mission of disseminating knowledge about quality beer (DØE Foreningen, 2014). DØE states that it works for diversity in the supply of breweries, beer, and beer types and informs and establishes debates about beer to support and stimulate Danish craft brewing, whether in public or at home. It claims to do so from a stance critical of political and competitive structures. Currently, membership is relatively constant at a little more than 9,000 members, self-proclaiming to be the largest organized consumer association in Denmark. Of the total members, 81.43% are male. The association consists of a national executive committee of seven board members, under which 11 regions exist with one chairman or -woman, a vice chair, and a local editor. The direct connection to the members is channeled through 53 local departments. The members of the community are therefore automatically allocated to local departments on the basis of their residence. The local departments organize events and are responsible for disseminating locally oriented news.

DØE was founded on September 5, 1998 at a meeting in Carlsens Kvartér, a pub located in Odense, Denmark. Twenty-two beer enthusiasts from various parts of Denmark attended the meeting and signed up for the association. At this founding meeting, the members passed a set of tentative rules for the association, marking the beginning of the consumer association Danske Ølentusiaster (Historien om DØE, 2014). In the beginning, DØE’s events had a national outreach with a modest attendance, but this changed when the community recognized the need for regional events. In 2002, when membership had grown to 4,000, DØE members reached agreement that the structure of the association should be grounded in regions with local departments.
Associations are formalized, member-based, and often democratically organized forms for civil society. Associations represent a spectrum of activities ranging across political to religious, economic, and leisure domains. Members typically devote time to associational activities on a voluntary basis. Associational life in Denmark is multifarious, with associations formed around the labor market (e.g. trade unions), leisure and sports (e.g. football and athletic clubs), societal issues (e.g. the protection of animals), special needs (e.g. physical or psychological disability), community issues (e.g. coordinating business and social life in local communities) or consumer interests (e.g. consumer interest groups, consumer rights movements). Associational life has an almost mythical character in Danish society: it is a way of organizing in which social class distinctions and formalized sources of power such as economic capital are smoothed out, or disguised, for the purpose of a common good. A cultural idiom is that “if more than two Danes meet they will immediately form an association.” As has been pointed out, associational life is constitutive of “what it means to be Danish” (Jenkins, 2012). This legal and culturally institutionalized infrastructure of associations facilitated the spread and localization of DØE. The organizational frame of associational life in Denmark grants DØE a formal structure around which to coordinate consumer passion. DØE thus attains regulative legitimacy on the basis of its formalized features, but also acquires cultural-cognitive legitimacy given that this organizational frame has cultural resonance in Danish society (Scott, 2001).

Immediately after its founding, DØE applied for membership in the European Beer Consumers Union. Even more importantly for its political role, in 2004 DØE joined The National Consumer Council with the purpose of gaining more clout, a larger network, and more political influence. DØE was given a seat in the contact committee in the Danish bottle deposit system the same year. Also in 2004, DØE began to work closely with the Danish Brewers’ Association, which had until then been mainly concerned with the interests of the incumbent breweries. The goal was to be able to challenge those breweries on matters of disagreement, but also to support them on matters where the parties agreed and where joint collaboration could prove beneficial. The association’s existence is validated
by forming coalitions and social ties with other existing and accepted organizations and agencies – an important part of gaining legitimacy in the field.

In summary, DØE formalized its existence by building on the already established structures of Danish associational life, which gave it both regulative and cultural legitimacy (Scott, 2001). DØE formed alliances and coalitions with other established associations and actors to gain regulative legitimacy in the field and to challenge key institutional logics. The earlier observation that the official industry organization has only approximately one-fourth of the producers as members provides DØE with additional legitimacy in terms of speaking on behalf of the whole sector.

Over time, DØE has come to play significant formal and informal roles in the Danish beer market with respect to molding consumer tastes, forms of market competition, and political legislation. In the findings, we analyze how DØE’s work, understood as consumers’ collective action, played a fundamental role in shaping and transforming the Danish beer market.

**Method**

We engaged in multiple methods of data collection. Under the guidance of the first author, one junior member of the research team carried out ethnographical fieldwork that combined interview methods with research in archival data and involved participant observation at events and meetings. The other members of the research team have been researching aspects of beer consumption and the brewing industry over the last five years.

Recruitment of informants for ethnographic depth interviews was made through access to DØE members via the association’s webpage, drawing on the information that this communication platform discloses about key members. Using e-mail contacts, we received responses from an overwhelming number of the people addressed. This response resulted in the key informants shown in Table 1, all of whom participated in interviews of around 35 to 70 minutes’ duration.
Table 1. Key informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Role in DØE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ole</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Chief editor ØLentusiasteN, co-founder of DØE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Editor and communicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Danish Beer Brand committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grete</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Chairwoman, Østfyn department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claus B.</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Member of the board, Odense department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claus M.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Communication coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anders</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Editor of Ale-mail, co-founder of DØE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jørgen</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karsten</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The recruiting process skewed the selection of informants in the direction of those playing a particular and often quite significant part in the activities of the association. By informant request, the majority of the interviews were conducted in public places that had an affiliation with beer – a context that added valuable understanding of the interaction between members and bartenders. To build a conversation-like dialogue with the informants, the interview guide was structured with open-ended and exploratory questions in the beginning and more direct and factual questions toward the end (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994).

To get deeper contextualized knowledge and an etic understanding of the association, its members, and the interactions between members, one member of the research team took part in four independent events in Denmark. One day was spent following the chairman of the local DØE chapter at multiple affairs in the town of Kolding, visiting specialty retailers, a local brewery, and a locally renowned beer pub. A second observational study took place at a beer-tasting evening hosted by DØE at the above-mentioned Carlsens Kvar tér pub in Odense, with an invited speech from one local
microbrewer. A third event was the DØE Annual General Meeting at the agricultural college in Odense, an all-day affair with a lengthy formal meeting relating to the association’s foundations and formalities followed by a beer tasting. The fourth event was the 2014 Beer Festival, DØE’s annual beer-tasting event, a vast gathering of beer enthusiasts and “ordinary consumers.” All of these observational studies gave ample evidence of the interaction between members of the association and their relationship to brewers as well as to the distribution channels and other market agents.

To support the ethnographic content and the information from the interviews, and to triangulate data, we relied on content from the community’s website and from the member magazine ØLentusiasteN (Bowen, 2009). The interviews made clear that the creation of communication platforms was key for the association to assemble and form. These platforms on the one were hand web-based and digital, and on the other hand involved the distribution of a hard-copy membership magazine. The content from the website consists of all the news that has been posted on the website from 1998 to 2010 as well as an e-mail archive downloaded from the website (AleMail). This archive contains 258 e-mails distributed to all members of the association from 1998–2014. Additionally, the website contains annual reports from the executive committee from 1999–2013 and, lastly, the 80 published editions of the association’s magazine, ØLentusiasteN.

The prolonged immersion in the field through events and interviews spread out over a longer period of time gave the analysis numerous series of part-to-whole iterations (Thompson, 1997). In a first step, we undertook a careful but general reading of collected interviews, field notes, e-mails, and annual reports. This review provided contextualized information about those categories of characteristics that seemed to appear across the different sources of data and paved the way for the establishment of several categories for use in the analysis. The second step involved rereading all material with a specific focus on these categories, changing them and their content as new interpretations were brought in. The document analysis served as a vital supporting element for these themes by corroborating member statements and other material.
Findings

In the following, we first analyze how DØE challenged a number of prevalent logics of the field on political, production, and consumption dimensions. We then analyze how ritualization and authentication were mobilized to propagate legitimacy of alternative logics of consumption and production.

Challenging the institutionalized logic of mass production and consumption

This section explores how DØE, along with a small number of emerging small-scale producers, helped establish challenges to the prevailing institutional condition that had settled in the beer market in Denmark. At the time DØE was established, very few craft producers were present in the market. The field was dominated by a few incumbents with a few minor locally oriented companies that emulated the market leaders in terms of focus on standard lager beer:

So it was lager beer, right? The provincial breweries copied Carlsberg and Bryggerigruppen, and more and more types of beer disappeared from the market, and there was no innovation at all. (Anders)

The interviews and archival material demonstrate that the association directed its energy and thrust toward this one common reference point. It was argued that the large breweries relied on the mentality that “big is beautiful and efficient” (AleMail 147). This critique of incumbents is illustrative of the
onset of processes of deinstitutionalization and delegitimization (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).
Several informants allude to the monotonous and standardized condition of the products that prevailed
in the market and hence provoked a rally based on the position that the supply restricted the
development of a more advanced consumption and taste culture: DØE was, as expressed through the
AleMail communication list, a community for “everybody that is devoted to beer beyond the ordinary
‘down-the-throat’ culture” (AleMail 002).

This domination also manifested itself in the power structures of the field. DØE rallied around
the exclusivity deals between bars, pubs, and breweries, which stipulated that the bar or pub served
only beer types from a single brewery. As the association wrote in one of the AleMails, “Numerous
restaurant owners are put under obligation, illegally, by the brewery giant Carlsberg” (AleMail 147).
This obligation meant that the number and types of beers available at serving spots were being held
donw by these exclusivity deals. As Michael said:

You couldn’t do that in the beginning, because at that point in time, there were deals
with the breweries... simply that you were only allowed to sell either one brand or
another, right? And that was actually one of the first things that DØE raged against…
those established exclusivity deals where you got tables and parasols, and stuff like
that, in return for selling only Albani. And it is not in the interest of the consumers
that you can only get a standard lager! (Michael)

DØE made use of the normative pillar to challenge the current institutional setting by relying
on value-laden arguments in relation to appropriate corporate behavior. This challenge referred
specifically to a David versus Goliath type of struggle between incumbents and consumers.

Playing on the myth of freedom and propagating a logic of diversity and craft production
resulted in the development of alternative structures of distribution: the introduction of Den Frie Hane
(The Free Tap), which was developed through a joint venture between DØE and MicroMatic, a local
world-leading producer of beer tap equipment. This effort was directed toward pubs, granting them the
possibility to mount their own draft beer taps without any obligations, marketing grants, or demands. “The Free Tap is completely free [of obligations], and all kinds of beer can be served from it” (DØE internal document 2004). This active shaping of the supply structure enabled small challengers with limited resources to enter the on-trade market. The David versus Goliath narrative and symbolic crusade against monopolistic market tendencies united the association and strengthened the ties between its members (Cova and Cova, 2002).

In terms of legislative influence, the relationship between DØE and the Danish bottle deposit system also demonstrates the association’s role in mobilizing challenges to the institutional logics during its formative years. The Dansk Retursystem came under thorough scrutiny from the association when it was introduced in 2000. The system was built on the philosophy that the handling of bottles should be controlled by a single, all-encompassing system. Importantly, in the Danish market consumers pay a deposit for all bottles and cans, which is refunded at bottle return facilities at retailers. However, DØE emphasized that this practice would constitute a significant competitive disadvantage for small breweries and distributors, as the fees for handling many different types of bottles favored large-scale production (craft brewers typically emphasize bottle designs that are unique compared to the standard Danish beer bottle). This stance gave way to such descriptions as “an abominable, centrally planned monstrosity of a return system monopoly” (Magazine 9), and it was argued that this position was an example of “power tyranny, distortion of competition, technical trade barriers and state monopolism, that reminds us of Eastern Europe before the fall of the iron curtain” (OE14: 2). This issue was essentially political, and the DØE wrote:

To create the necessary changes of the new bottle deposit system, the community has, on the 17th of March, written to all of the members of the parliament and the Danish members of the European parliament to call attention to the unreasonableness that characterizes the law surrounding Dansk Retursystem right now (AleMail 089).
The law was subsequently modified, but DØE continues to be involved in debates regarding the system.

Over time, DØE has attained a significant role in the field. One informant (Michael) referred to this role as reflecting a “yin and yang” relationship between the community and the breweries. As the DØE evolved and the numbers of craft producers grew, the association and the brewers were increasingly interrelated. The relationship between the association and the formation of breweries is often characterized as symbiotic:

We work for a common cause. And many microbreweries are also home brewers who started at home in the kitchen and then derived such a great passion for their hobby that they say, “Well, this is what I want… I don’t want to go to the office everyday anymore, I want to be able to live off of this,” and then they start a microbrewery. And that has usually been someone who has been part of our community at some point in time or something. So, we probably coalesced in some kind of way. (Claus M.)

Not only is the relationship characterized by friendliness resulting from ideological agreements, but the parties are also interwoven, in that the brewers have been or are members of DØE. DØE hence came to play a role in fostering challengers in the field. Furthermore, the home brewer has a market – the association – that appreciates, acknowledges, and legitimates the craftsmanship and the abilities of the home brewer. In this respect, the DØE works as a venue through which home brewers and local beer enthusiasts can realize that “this is possible on a commercial level” (Christian). In several instances, informants talked about brewers who had built their business around the philosophy that DØE is an important community in terms of attaining both formal (celebrations) and informal (word-of-mouth) attention in the broader public.

Furthermore, as a result of their regulative, normative, and cultural legitimacy, and because of their establishment and hosting of important field-wide events, other actors look to DØE as being able
to establish communication across the field. This communication is seen as pivotal in gaining the legitimized role that the association has today:

Of course, it has been a question about establishing contact between those pubs that are interested in beer and then the producers. So I think that… it has, at any rate, functioned as a catalyst for them to meet each other there. (Christian)

This institutionalized role in the beer market means that a wide range of field actors orient themselves toward the association:

Well, the recent shops that have opened enquire spontaneously, you know, simply talk with them, and now a new café has opened, and the owner is like “would you mind coming down here to talk about beer, what we are to serve from our taps and stuff like that,” “yeah sure.” (Karsten)

The association is formally and informally in contact with market agents across the field – from producers to service provider to consumers.

Summing up, DØE challenged the prevailing logic of standardization and mass production through scapegoating incumbents, through political lobbyism, and through entrepreneurial activism at the level of supply structures. For this challenge DØE mobilized a mix of ideological resources: the ideology of free consumer choice; the leveraging of taste, quality, and craft as an antidote to standardized taste structures; and the ideology of free competition in the form of a David versus Goliath myth. As a consequence, the association has grown to be a powerful institutional actor that collaborates with and assists smaller challengers in the field and is also a source for the fostering of new producers in the form of home brewers. Finally, DØE, given its size, takes on a maieutic role as a consumer segment for small start-ups.

*Advancing alternative logics through rituals and authentication*
The discussion above shows how DØE assumed a crucial role in the field through formal organization to challenge the prevailing logics. In this section we explore how DØE was able to propagate alternative logics of the field through ritualization and authentication.

In 2000, DØE started awarding the Årets Danske Ølnyhed (Danish Beer Novelty of the Year) based on members’ tasting and voting. Within DØE, the award has become one of the pivotal annual events:

A record-setting number of local departments have held beer tasting finals in January in order to help the members select between the candidates in the election of the Beer Novelty of the Year 2009. (AleMail 235)

DØE also elects the Årets Danske Bryggeri (Danish Brewery of the Year). Interestingly, in the first few years these awards were given to incumbents, and only in the early 2000s were they given to challengers as the micro breweries began to emerge. The awards are described as a way to nurture small players in the field and promote diversity in the beer market:

We give them the boost and the reason to do it, and I’m sure that it boosts their sales.

Not just within the confines of the community, but generally. If the brewery can make their retailers promote it, then surely these beers will get extra attention on the shelves and as a result also sell more. (Claus M.)

These events are culturally significant not only to DØE itself but to the broader market: every year, the nominations and awards receive significant media coverage, especially in regional media. They hence spread awareness of individual products and innovative companies to the wider consumer market, ultimately affecting institutionalized taste structures. Since 2001, DØE has hosted the Ølfestival (Beer Festival), held annually in former Carlsberg bottling facilities in Valby, Copenhagen. At the festival breweries, importers, hand brewers, and other people affiliated with the beer market come together in a context that has cultural and historical meaning in relation to beer and particularly
beer production. Through the Ølfestival, DØE has further demarcated its role as a challenger of the logic of standardization, efficiency, and mass-production.

They [microbreweries] can’t do it at all. And it is not very interesting if there is only one brewery, right? It is more interesting because there are many breweries, and you can walk around and shop and taste a wide range of diverse beers, right? (Anders)

Resource constraints prohibit brewers from financing such a promotional event. Furthermore, as the informant suggests, severe tensions would develop if one brewery were responsible for administering the event. DØE is able to manage the event because it is not commercially connected to any of the breweries, and because it is established as a proselytizer for a product category rather than a proponent of specific companies and brands.

Since 2002, DØE has hosted the annual Danish championship in home brewing. The championship is held in connection with and in the same facility as the beer festival, so it also attracts many home brewers, giving the home brewers an event in which to compete, claim honor, and attain acknowledgment and legitimacy. As the association writes: “The goal is to inspire the brewing of more exciting beer at home, and be part of removing the poor image that beer brewed at home has attained” (AleMail 085). This ritualization is a way to foster, and provide legitimacy to, new producers in the field as well as sustain product innovation velocity.

The celebration of Øllets Dag (Day of the Beer), which was held for the first time in 2003, is more closely related to the local departments of DØE. This celebration takes place the first Saturday in September, as close as possible to September 5, which is the date on which the organization was established. The purpose is to call attention to beer and beer consumption, and to make the entire country froth with local beer activities. Members from the various local departments team up with local breweries to organize activities involving beer:

And then you walk around, just like the actual Day of the Beer, pay for a token and there is food on the barbecue, so you can buy a food ticket. And there is live music.
So it is a large garden party, where it is actually the home brewers’ beer you can taste.

It is really good! (Karsten)

Thus while DØE is able to challenge the logic of standardization and mass production from the position of a highly organized associational base, the activities occur in a popular convivial atmosphere and are symbolic (e.g. “a large garden party”). This atmosphere and the “folksy” imagery surrounding the product category of beer resonate with a Danish cultural affinity for informality, which enhances the cultural legitimacy of an otherwise highly formalized organization. Furthermore, this environment resonates with the propagation of the alternative logic of diversity and craft. Consequently, additional legitimacy is established among consumers and other field actors, with consumers drawing on “populist worlds” (Holt 2004).

The interviews and the archival material revealed that ritualized beer tasting had proliferated widely at home and in workplaces:

It has become common: “shouldn’t we organize a beer tasting event?” or in connection to a party. Street party or a 40-year birthday or as a present for a dad that is really interested in beer... I mean different things, you know. Yes, it has become popular instead of organizing a wine tasting event, then you organize a beer tasting event. (Karsten)

And immediately after I co-founded that beer club, we wanted some knowledge about beer and wanted some exciting speakers, and then we went in and found out that there was something called the beer enthusiasts [DØE]. I didn’t know that, and that was the reason why I joined, in order to have something to contribute with in the club I was part of founding at my work place. (Grete)
Establishing associations around consumption, in this case in the workplace, is connected to the more formalized association of DØE. DØE hence is an institutionalized knowledge resource for ritualization of beer consumption in everyday life. Serving as a resource represents yet another way in which DØE is able to propagate the logic of diversity and craft, ultimately pushing for the institutionalization of alternative taste structures.

Besides instituting ritualization in the form of prizes and tastings, DØE established cultural authority in the form of authentication (Ger, 1999). In 2003, DØE started awarding *Det Danske Ølmærke* (The Danish Beer Label) to pubs and restaurants that give consumers special beer experiences. The label is handed out to help DØE members and other consumers navigate the serving landscape, but it is also an appreciation of the work of these places, and an encouragement to continue efforts to further the cause of “good quality beer” (DØE Dansk Ølmærke, 2014).

In addition to more formalized activities of ritualization and authentication, members also engage in small-scale individual activism:

Yes and many places – or more places – you can get a beer menu now, right?

And that’s fine. It is sort of the small effects, the thing about impacting, of doing it different places in the country…. They [pub owners] go out and say “there was a bloody idiot who came and asked for a beer menu!”, but if one more idiot comes in a few days after and says the same…. Then… (Michael)

Mobilizing their role as individual consumers to influence supply not only occurs in bars and pubs but also in contexts associated with gastronomy:

But for my part, and for some of those in the local department in Odense, we make inquiries about good quality beer at the restaurants, and that can have an effect at some point, I guess …. If they had the right kinds of beer that fit the right kinds of food, then they would sell much more of the right beer, and that would give people a better experience…. And then there are those who say that we can also get
*frikadellevin* [literally: “meatball wine”], but wine and meatballs just don’t fit at all.

In any way possible. And there is something about the acidic wine that doesn’t fit very well with our food culture. (Claus B.)

Through opposition to wine, the association tries to legitimize the use of beer in conjunction with the preparation and consumption of everyday meals and at restaurants. This attempt at inserting an additional logic goes beyond catering to a particular segment or adding to the product range. Rather, we see in this process a more general formatting of consumption practices that ultimately reshapes food and restaurant culture. An example of a cultural technology that emerged from this change is the recent establishment of a new vocational training program to educate chefs and waiters to become beer sommeliers.

Through ritualization and authentication, DØE sought to ensure legitimacy of an alternative logic through the diffusion of the community’s cultural rituals and their validation more widely in culture in the period immediately after DØE’s formal founding. In this regard, it was essential for DØE to navigate the field as a commercially unaffiliated actor. Lastly, DØE developed rituals with the purpose of making beer tasting a common form of socialization. This popularization was accomplished through direct opposition to the foreign characteristic of the product category wine, as opposed to the cultural heritage and local anchoring in the consumption of beer. Collectively, the diffusion of the rituals worked to strengthen the commonality of gathering around the consumption of beer and also altered the cultural framing of the taste culture around beer. Furthermore, given the media attention these events receive, DØE has become a powerful gatekeeper for new and existing producers. Winning the annual award for most innovative brewery, for example, lends power to the producer in negotiations with retail purchasing departments. Thus while DØE fosters demand for diversity of supply and hence supports the livelihood of producers, it also has significant power. Informal conversations with numerous craft brewers revealed that in some cases producers resented this power.

**Discussion and conclusion**
We have discussed how one instance of organized consumer action significantly affected the evolving structural and cultural make-up of the strategic action field of the beer market in Denmark. DØE was organized through formal and culturally resonant forms, and as a formalized organization, DØE was able to establish organizational ties with key political and industry bodies in the market and subsequently exert political power. DØE then used this power to mobilize challenges to prevailing logics of the field of beer production and consumption, most notably contesting incumbents’ establishment of a taste structure of standardized, mass-produced beers but also supporting, fostering, and rallying around small-scale producers. DØE promoted an alternative logic of diversity and craftsmanship by way of ritualization and authentication.

Over time, DØE has come to fulfill a significant institutionalized role in the market through collective action. The interviews and the document material clearly demonstrated that, as proposed by previous researchers (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Rao et al., 2000), DØE gained much of its inspiration from looking at adjacent fields in other countries. This motivation is demonstrated in the member magazines that, during the formative stage, document many trips to beer festivals, breweries, and pubs in other countries. In one article, the author wrote about “beer in God’s own country,” and stated that this trip had been an inspiration and had added some new words to the Danish beer vocabulary (Magazine 2: 6). Prior to DØE, the market had gone through a period of standardization of production, resulting in limited product variety and a centralization of power. Standardization and mass production and its related practices dominated the field. The concrete manifestations of these processes were incumbents’ dominant role and new regulations that reflected this dominance. DØE came to stand for anti-corporate but for-profit resistance, and resonated culturally by providing an ideological antidote to standard corporate behavior. While DØE played a significant part in propagating an alternative logic of craft and diversity, the logic of standardization and mass production remained, yet was challenged. Arguably, the field changed not so much by an evolution from one logic (standardization) to another (craft) but by evolution from one logic to a field with
multiple logics. As a parallel one can refer to the logics of art and commerce that are shaping the fashion industry (Bourdieu and Delsaut, 1975; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013) or the editorial logic and the market logic at work in the publishing industry (Thornton, 2002). Ultimately, what we are witnessing in DØE is a group of consumers that organize to address a perceived imbalance between the logics of commerce and art.

The case of DØE as consumers’ collective action demonstrates how market dynamics can result from consumers’ embeddedness as internal change agents. Managers must find a frame to be used in the first stage of legitimating a new organizational field (Humphreys, 2010), with the frame chosen strategically so as to position the innovation to multiple stakeholders. In this light, the emergence of a new field logic is therefore an active and managerial matter, and consumers are primarily interpreters of these actions. A study of the emerging field of HIV/AIDS treatment emphasizes explicitly the agency entrepreneurs were able to mobilize as a result of their occupation of “subject positions” containing wide legitimacy and their ability to bridge between stakeholders (Macquire et al., 2004). Likewise, a study of the evolving yoga market in the US explicitly aims to “examine how brands confront plural logics and shape the competitive dynamics of markets” and outline strategies for how brands as institutional entrepreneurs enroll consumers in a field (Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli, 2015). In the domain of consumption, consumers have been theorized to influence market change when consumers can identify – and identify with – institutional entrepreneurs who they believe are actually challenging the status quo, they draw inspiration that encourages them to believe that they need not just cope with what they are offered by the market, but rather that they too can attempt to change the market (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013: 1244).

Hence, market system dynamics are often thought to emerge from institutional entrepreneurs in the domain of production. However, in the case of DØE, the collective action of these consumers is more about being institutional entrepreneurs of alternative taste structures and fostering the emergence
of other institutional entrepreneurs in the domain of production as drivers of new taste structures. In its encouragement of new producers from home brewers to commercially viable microbreweries, DØE might be said to be engaged in a reverse process of “building brand communities” (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002), namely partaking in building producer communities. Hence, consumers’ collective action may extend beyond merely influencing taste structures or product variety, and through the advancement of alternative logics may actually encourage new actors and structures in the domain of production.

The impact on production in its largest sense as a cultural practice – that is, not just the physical brewing processes but also the promotion of particular production modes (e.g. craft vs. mass production), production and distribution systems (e.g. the Free Tap initiative), innovation velocity (e.g. the fostering of hand brewers) – is clear evidence of consumers’ collective action going beyond influencing taste structures and product range. This influence is one example of how consumer action may have a technological impact on market dynamics. Likewise, DØE’s political impact, in particular the successful altering of legislation regarding the Danish bottle return system, demonstrates the effect of consumers’ collective action on legislative market dynamics. Figure 1 illustrates this influence. Consumers act collectively to influence market system dynamics understood as logics structuring action in fields. Consumers not only act collectively, but also, in line with field theory, influence the collective action of field-wide actors.

We extend Cova’s (1997) notion of linking value in two ways. First, in contrast to brand communities and more like Scaraboto and Fischer’s (2013) Fatsionistas, the DØE association is tied together not so much by a specific product or brand, but more generally by a product category. Thus, the power of the linking value extends beyond single products, brands, and services. Second, DØE’s collective action ties together the other agentic parts of the market system: the institutionalized role of the association that resulted from collective action stands at the intersection of the domains of taste.
structures (i.e. consumption), technology (i.e. production/industry), and legislation (i.e. industrial and consumer policy). This study therefore begins to open the discussion about the role of consumers in innovation in the domains of technology and legislation (Dolbec and Fischer, 2015). Our study of DØE and the idea of consumers’ collective action demonstrates that taste, technology, and legislation are intertwined and mutually constitutive in market innovations.

The current state of the market in which DØE has become an institutionalized actor that is re-defining the logics of the field necessarily leads to a discussion of power in market fields. Foucault (1980) proclaims that prevailing power structures in an institutionalized state can be contested and that social issues can be redressed through social action. However, such “changes will precipitate new patterns of power relationships and precipitate new social problems that will in turn need to be contested and challenged” (Thompson, 2004: 173). The success of DØE’s collective action has brought about new patterns of power relationships. The association became an important actor in the market. It constituted a market in itself as an institutionalized maieutic consumer segment, and is a locus for fostering new producers. From a Foucauldian perspective, it is not surprising that DØE came to serve such an “empowered” role. Consumers’ collective action to promote diversity in the field resonates well with the neoliberal ethos of the market logic, free competition, and consumer choice (Thompson, 2004; Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford, 2006). Consequently, the consumer is now not free to merely consume a beer, but must deal with the contention of what a beer is and should be. In other words, consumers’ collective action feeds the paradox of having to make a choice (Schwartz, 2004). This perspective sustains the argument that power relationships in the marketplace are not just about producer–consumer relationships but also a matter of consumer–consumer relationships of power and domination (Kristensen et al., 2011).

The DØE case shows few signs of enduring tug-of-war mechanisms. Rather, it reflects the market dynamics involved in the incorporation of external and culturally valued logics. The feature distinguishing resistance-based studies (Holt, 2002; Giesler, 2008; 2012; Goulding and Saren, 2007;
Kozinets, 2002) from expansion-based studies (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Martin and Schouten, 2014) is that whereas the former focus on steep outbreaks and the direct rejection of logics, the latter focus on modifying and expanding the current logics in the field. The study of DØE is an example of a process where the market expanded ideologically so as to encompass the challenging voice of the consumer. DØE’s intention was never to break free from the established market configuration, but rather to modify it from within by heeding the voice of the consumer. Researchers have proposed that when fields are “hierarchically organized,” social movements rely on contentiousness to alter field logics, and when markets are fragmented, social movements can promote logic change by having a coordinating and more consensus-like role (Rao et al., 2000). In our case, the collective action of DØE started as contentiousness in a field dominated by incumbents and reflecting a homogenized taste structure. As the market has evolved to include more producers and a novel role for consumers, the market has become more fragmented. Consumers’ collective action has also become more consensus-like, and DØE largely sees its mission as one of maintaining a logic of diversity in the market.

Existing literature at times emphasizes consumers’ role in market dynamics as that of contention or expansion. Our study of consumers’ collective action demonstrates that consumers’ role can be dynamic over time, moving from contentiousness to consensus-making depending on the structural and cultural make-up of the field.

This study contributes in several ways to research on organized consumer activities, such as consumer associations, consumer interest groups, and consumer watchdogs. Our research shows that consumers’ formal organization can play a role in shaping the competitive and consumer cultural dynamics of markets. As research on the cultural role of formally organized consumer collectives in market dynamics is still scant, we hope that our reflections provide a starting point for research on the role of formally organized consumers in market dynamics in different types of markets and contexts.
References


Figure 1. DØE and the connectivity of domains in market systems

**Industrial and consumer policy**
- Consumer policy, anti-monopoly (DK and EU)
- State and EU regulation
- Member of industry

**DØE**
The linking value of a formal organization around a product category

**Consumption**
- Individual activism
- Shaping institutionalized taste structures

**Production**
- Fostering producers
- Expert collaborators
- Volunteering in the value chain
- Gatekeeping