

# The Meanings of Collective Experiences in Alternative Marketplaces: Case Cleaning Day

Marketing  
Master's thesis  
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2015

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**Title of thesis** The Meanings of Collective Experiences in Alternative Marketplaces: Case Cleaning Day

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**Degree** Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration

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**Degree programme** Marketing

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**Thesis advisor(s)** Sammy Toyoki

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**Year of approval** 2015

**Number of pages** 73

**Language** English

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## Abstract

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Consumer preferences are slowly undergoing a transformation that can be seen in what and how people consume. Goods are more and more shared, bartered and exchanged in the marketplaces that are “peer-to-peer”, organized by consumers for consumers (Botsman & Rogers 2010, p. xv). The goal of this thesis is to understand the collective nature of alternative mode of acquisition in the context of peer-to-peer marketplaces wherein consumers exchange secondhand goods in return for monetary compensation. Cleaning Day recycling event serves as an example of these kinds of peer-to-peer marketplaces where people don’t only exchange products but also many personal and social meanings that they attach to their items and participation. Previous research has focused on descriptive and behavioral aspects of alternative consumption and the purpose is to move beyond this to study experiential elements and the meaning creation process.

### METHODOLOGY

This thesis is qualitative and interpretative in nature. Five participants of Cleaning Day event were interviewed and the interviews formed the primary empirical data of this study. Online research was used as a secondary source of information. Moreover, the approach is existential-phenomenological and instead of only explaining the experiences of participants, the purpose of the study is to understand as they emerge or as “they’re lived” (Thompson et al. 1989).

### FINDINGS

The key finding of the research is that consumption in alternative marketplaces has multiple meanings and these meanings are both personal and social. This study recognizes six dimensions of consumers’ collective experiences in alternative marketplaces that are 1) construct of “good deals”, 2) escape from everyday life, 3) control, 4) authenticity, 5) trust and 6) social connections. According to findings, utility seems to be as desirable as hedonistic benefits of the experience. Still, valuing utility and longevity could also mean that consumers are willing to re-evaluate the role of possessions in their life and shift to buy only what they actually need and borrow or rent the goods they only need occasionally. The findings also indicate that social connections are gaining foot in consumption experiences.

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**Keywords** alternative marketplaces, collaborative consumption, flea markets, consumer tribes, consumption experiences, meaning creation, phenomenology

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# 1 Introduction

*“It is the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed” - Charles Darwin*

Consumer preferences are slowly undergoing a transformation that can be seen in what and how people consume. For instance, ethical consumerism drives consumption of green, local and responsibly produced products (Gansky 2010, p. 72-73). Some take even more radical steps by voluntarily choosing to work and/or consume less (Schor 1998, Cherrier & Murray 2002). This group of people is often called downshiffters who obtain environmentally conscious and less materialistic values (Nelson et al. 2007). However, mainstream downshiffters operate inside consumer culture and do not leave the marketplace but rather choose alternative forms of consumption and work (Nelson et al. 2007). They seek secondhand goods (Shaw & Newholm 2002) and aim to remove complexity in their lives by recycling, either donating or selling items that are rarely used (Elgin 2000). Goods are more and more shared, bartered and exchanged in the marketplaces that are “peer-to-peer”, organized by consumers for consumers (Botsman & Rogers 2010, p. xv). The goal of this thesis is to understand the nature of alternative mode of acquisition in the context of peer-to-peer marketplaces wherein consumers exchange secondhand goods in return for monetary compensation. Cleaning Day recycling event serves as an example of these kinds of peer-to-peer marketplaces where people don’t only exchange products but also many personal and social meanings that they attach to their items and participation.

Current changes in consumption have been linked to “a wave of social innovation” (Schor 2011) that is fueled by **sustainability movement**, **digital revolution** and the **recession** in the first 2000s (Gansky 2010, p. 63). According to Gansky (2010, p. 28-29) along the economic crisis that broke out in 2008 people have questioned what they consider valuable in life and this has opened a door for new ways delivering products and services with less cost. Population growth and scarce resources also drive the change of consumption habits. As population exceeds over 9 billion by the year 2050, it has to be considered how the resources could be shared and delivered more sustainably and efficiently. Many new businesses and organizations that base their idea on sharing and collaboration have evolved. Among these enterprises is for example Ebay, multinational e-commerce company that provides consumer-

to-consumer sales services. These kinds of businesses take advantage on social media and “web-enabled mobile networks” in order to deliver highly personalized services at the right time and place (Gansky 2010, p. 63-64). Social media has also enabled a development of consumer collectives that consists of people with similar consumption interests but who can be geographically dispersed. These contemporary collectives share social meaning systems and are defined by mutuality and emotional bond (Papaoikonomou et al. 2012).

Hyperconsumption was seen to dominate the 20<sup>th</sup> century but one of the advocates of collaborative consumption Rachel Botsman suggests that sharing and redistributing defines the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we’re slowly turning from “me” generation to “we” generation (Botsman & Rogers, 2010, p. 62). A view on “you are what you own” is gradually changing into “you are what you share” (Belk 2007) and this is driven especially by consumers’ urge to participate (Nelson et al. 2007, Botsman & Rogers 2010) and to form meaningful connections with each other. The research has shown that people who own a lot of stuff isn’t necessarily happier than others (Schor 1998). Happiness studies also show that people feel contentment through experiences far more than through purchasing (PwC 2015) and instead of stuff consumers are more in the search of interactions and community. As Charlie Denson, a former president of Nike, states: *“Consumers want to be part of a community whether it’s a digital community or a virtual community or whether it’s a physical community. They want to feel like they’re part of something. They want to be engaged.”* (Botsman & Rogers 2010, p.200) According to Albinsson and Perera (2012) a sense of community is both a driver of participation and an outcome of alternative, peer-to-peer marketplaces. Thus what can be argued is that people seek increasingly consumption experiences that fulfil their need of social interaction and belonging.

This thesis studies whether there is actually a shift from “me” to “we” in consumption by exploring consumers’ consumption experiences in alternative marketplace. Even though social connections are formed in alternative marketplaces it should be further explored what is the meaning of them to consumers and in which situations these take place. Social interaction is a prerequisite and an outcome of exchanging products in alternative marketplaces (Albinsson & Perera 2012). Yet, it’s vague whether the participants actually value the social element that exchanging second hand goods holds and this question is also addressed in this study. Previous research has focused on descriptive and behavioral aspects of alternative consumption and the purpose is to move beyond this to study experiential

elements and the meaning creation process. Furthermore, consumers form ephemeral communities around shared consumption interests and this is why tribal theory offers great insights for this study at hand.

### **1.1 Case: Cleaning Day event**

Cleaning Day, twice a year held recycling event was founded in Helsinki, Finland by organization called Yhteismaa - Common Ground. The event was launched when one of the members of this non-profit association, Pauliina Seppälä, was wondering what to do with all of her stuff as her family was trying to cope with lack of storage space. She was frustrated and posted on her Facebook page asking who would organize a recycling event, one day during which anyone could bring stuff outside to the streets. The idea received an immediate positive feedback among her Facebook friends and so was the first Cleaning Day arranged in May 2012 by a group of active people.

According to Cleaning Day website the event “changes cities and neighborhoods into huge flea markets and marketplaces”. The idea is that anyone can sell anywhere his/her preused belongings during one day. Individuals place their stands to online map on Cleaning Day website or through mobile application and provide information what they have on sale. Participants can easily locate nearby sales activity and also browse offering based on what they’re looking for (e.g. clothes, books and furniture). Local recycling centers have participated in the event by bringing recycling points to public areas for people to dispose unsold goods. Aside individuals the event is also meant for associations and organizations such as sport clubs and schools as well as companies that can sell their employees secondhand items. Many cities have given permission to citizens to use public parks, streets and other spaces for standing up their sales racks. However, the extent of freedom to use public areas varies still between cities. Some cities have wanted to reserve only certain areas for the use of Cleaning Day.

Ever since the first Cleaning Day the amount of participants has grown from few hundreds to thousands all over Finland. Cleaning Day has gained foot also abroad, particularly in Russia and Japan and is expanding to other countries as well. Cleaning Day Facebook group has up to 47k followers (April 2015). Related articles and news on recycling, sustainability and social wellbeing are posted and discussed actively by the members in the group. Subgroup “A

year without new clothes” was created in 2014 to encourage people to cut down clothing consumption and reduce textile waste. People in this group are committed for one year to not buy new clothes from the stores. The Facebook group allows the participants of the challenge share experiences and to seek support from their peer members.

Cleaning Day resembles a second type of collaborative consumption systems, peer-to-peer marketplace where goods are redistributed from where they’re not needed to where they are (Botsman & Rogers 2010, p.72-73). According to Botsman and Rogers (2010, p. 73) redistribution is the fifth “R” of waste hierarchy - reduce, recycle, reuse, repair and redistribute. According to Albinsson and Perera (2010) recycling events are meeting spaces for people with multiple backgrounds, interests and motives for participation. Members of Cleaning Day are from different parts of Finland, hold variant professions and are different age. However, 89% of fans are women, 32 % are 25-34-years-old and almost half of the fans on Facebook come from Helsinki. Despite some larger segments in the group, it can be argued that Cleaning Day community isn’t a group of homogenous persons but is rather heterogenic in terms of members’ values and lifestyles. Members are rather linked by a collective passion towards second-hand items.

The organization behind Cleaning Day acts as a facilitator that offers premises for the participants who then co-create the Cleaning Day experience. For example, Cleaning Day offers a marketing material bank on their website for the participants. The sellers participate in marketing of the event by printing and distributing Cleaning Day posters around their neighborhoods and placing their sales stands on the virtual map. Hence, the active participants are responsible for the creation of whole Cleaning Day experience.

## **1.2 Research objectives and questions**

The goals of the research are twofold. Firstly, I aim to contribute to the existing literature on alternative, peer-to-peer marketplaces and secondly understand consumption experiences in the flea market setting. There is currently limited research on alternative consumption (Albinsson & Perera 2009, Albinsson & Perera 2012) partly because this field in consumer research is relatively new. This study also offers new insights to flea markets that have remained understudied field despite their sociocultural significance and important position as alternative market system (Sherry 1990). Some scholars (e.g. Roux & Guiot 2010; Petrescu

& Bathli 2013) have studied values, motivations and behavior of consumers who participate in recycling events. One stream of research has concentrated especially in experiential and social benefits that these alternative marketplaces provide for consumers (Belk et al. 1988; Sherry 1990) and this view is adopted in this study. However, emphasis has been lonely in individual experiences neglecting the fact that the individuals are also part of larger consumer collective and even social movement when participating these alternative marketplaces whether consciously or unconsciously. My purpose is to fill this gap by exploring the meanings drawn from the participation in one type of alternative marketplace, recycling event Cleaning Day and elements of consumers' collective experiences.

My main research question is:

*What kinds of meanings do consumers link to their collective consumption experiences in alternative marketplaces?*

To answer this broad question of how consumers experience alternative marketplaces and what meanings do they draw from their participation, I need to explore how people exchange meanings through products and social interaction. In general products hold multiple meanings that are important for individual and collective identity construction (Belk 1988). There are also meanings that are not product related but still relate to the exchange and social bonding. Secondly, I need to understand what kinds of experiential benefits alternative marketplaces offer to consumers. It should be considered to what extent utility and hedonic aspects define alternative consumption experience as they explain what drives people to join alternative marketplaces in the first place.

Two sub-questions are:

- 1. How people socialize and exchange meanings through products?*
- 2. What kinds of experiential meanings alternative marketplaces hold?*

The idea of this existential-phenomenological study is to focus on lived experiences of consumers and look at consumption from a micro-social perspective that highlights the interaction between people rather than macro-social factors such as cultures and lifestyles (Cova & Cova 2002). Cleaning Day can be regarded as temporary marketplace and a



platform for people who share interest towards secondhand items. These consumers are good indicatives of future trends in consumer behavior and acknowledging their preferences and drivers of participation can help businesses and other parties in marketing (Albinsson & Perera 2012).

Membership or friendship is one contributor of sense of community (McMillan 1996). Kozinets (1999) has presented two antecedents of community membership. The first is the centrality of consumption to a self-concept and the second the intensity of social relationships with other members. Mitchell and Imrie (2011) in their research of membership of vinyl record collectors propose that further research should examine if these antecedents can be applied to other tribes as well. Therefore it should also be considered how significant are the values of Cleaning Day to members, how they perceive the strength of the relationships in the community and how these antecedents affect their experience.

Tribes offer an alternative approach in consumer behavior and segmentation since consumers are grouped based on their meaningful shared characteristics instead of more traditional or “arbitrary” segmentation criteria (Cova & Cova 2002, Mitchell & Imrie 2011). Studying consumer tribes can offer many benefits to businesses. First, it can provide new way connecting with consumers and help to gain insight on those consumer-driven groups that hold shared beliefs, passions and ideas and use consumption as a means of constructing one’s self-identity and creating community (Cova & Cova 2002, Mitchell & Imrie 2011). Second, recognizing the key members and influencers in tribes helps to connect with the tribe at large (Mitchell & Imrie 2011). Third, Mitchell and Imrie (2011) found that connecting with tribes lead to customer loyalty. Despite the acknowledged benefits, managerial implications are rarely given in consumer tribe studies “since tribes are driven by strange logics that result from the constant playful re-imagining of community and identity” (Cova & Cova 2002, Goulding et al. 2013). Tribes are often considered unmanageable and resistant to managerial control (Goulding et al. 2013). Still it is useful for managers learn how to adopt facilitator role in creating and sustaining consumer communities (Mitchell & Imrie 2011).

### **1.3 Thesis structure**

This study is divided into five chapters. First introduces the topic of the study and presents the research questions and objectives. Second chapter goes through theoretical background of

the study and provides previous theoretical discussion on alternative marketplaces, experiential consumption and contemporary marketplace communities. Third chapter explains research methodology including the research approach, data collection and analysis methods. Chapter four presents findings of the empirical study. In the end chapter five links literature review and findings of the empirical study together and proposes areas for future research.

## 2 Literature review

In this chapter current theoretical discussion on alternative marketplaces, consumption experiences and consumer collectives is represented. One stream of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), marketplace cultures, serves as a guiding lens in describing how consumers build “feelings of social solidarity and create distinct and sometimes transient cultural words through the pursuit of common consumption interests” (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Individuals use possessions to extend, expand and strengthen a sense of self (Belk 1988, Ahuvia 2005). However, Belk (1988) acknowledges that individual aims to maintain multiple levels of self since “because we not exist only as individuals, but also collectivities” and people define themselves also through group identity. According to Arnould and Thompson (2005) marketplace cultures build upon especially work of Maffesoli (1996) on neotribes. He believes that radical individualism and a quest of personal distinctiveness have led to dispersion of society. As a countermovement consumers are looking for “ephemeral collective identifications and participate in rituals of social solidarity that are grounded in common lifestyle interests and leisure avocations” (Arnould & Thompson 2005).

### 2.1 Alternative marketplaces in postmodern era

Alternative consumption (the way people rent, lend and share goods) contrasts the materialistic and individualistic oriented Western consumer culture (Albisson & Perera 2012) in which individuals are believed to demonstrate their existence and differentiation through shopping (Belk 1988, Cova 1996). According to Cova (1997) “the conquest of self has become inescapable and each individual, wherever they come from, must accomplish the feat of becoming someone by showing their difference”. Marketplace provides expansive and heterogeneous palette of resources from which consumers construct individual and collective identities (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Furthermore, consumers actively rework symbolic meanings of advertisements and brands to manifest their personal and social circumstances and their identity and lifestyle goals (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Similarly alternative consumption, for example second-hand purchasing, has seen to produce meanings and construct identities for the participants (Williams & Windebank 2005). Adopting the alternative consumption practices allows individuals to express who they are and who they desire to be (Black & Cherrier 2010). For instance, car-sharing services such as Zipcar and

Uber are blooming in the U.S. and Belk (2014) argues that this is partly because young people no longer regard car ownership as important to their self-definition.

Materialism emphasizes the importance of the material possessions to one's happiness (Belk 1985). Yet, increased consumption rarely leads to increased welfare (Schor 1998, Sheth et al. 2011). Overconsumption has been linked to issues such as low levels of savings and high levels of debt that are harmful for the individual's financial health and for the economy (Sheth et al. 2011). Botsman and Rogers (2010) talk about "buy now and pay later" culture that is a consequence of credit cards. A phenomenon "decoupling" is related to credit cards meaning that the transaction feels less real when buying with a credit card and this can lead to more impulsive purchase decisions. Moreover, materialistic values and overconsumption make people devalue human relationships (Sheth et al. 2011).

Sheth et al. (2011) link three types of behaviors to overconsumption. *Acquisitive consumption* involves obtaining goods more than what the actual need is. One outcome of this is the problem of the storage space. The amount of stuff exceeds the space available and many rely on self-storage services to store what they can't fit in their homes. *Repetitive consumption* refers to cycle of buying that has become shorter thanks to disposable products and product obsolescence. The appeal of disposable products such as paper plates, plastic cups and razors is based on their convenience and time saving. Obsolescence can be technological, economic or psychological. In fashion obsolescence is usually psychological since new clothes are considered more attractive than old due to ever changing style trends. Thus they're replaced not because of a need but a desire. Products such as cellphones, cars and apparel also fall under this category. Last type is aspirational consumption or often called *conspicuous consumption* that means spending money on luxurious cars or homes or designer bags. Overconsumption is also bad for the community wellbeing. Overconsumption neglects environmental degradation that is harmful for the society in the long run. Private consumption may lead to decline of public services that takes place especially in the U.S. where private transportation has superseded public transportation systems. (Sheth et al. 2011)

The fragmentation of society is one consequence of postmodern individualism. Cova (1997) regards postmodernity as "a period of severe social dissolution and extreme individualism". Putnam (2000) in his books "Bowling alone" remarks declining social capital in the society. People don't know their neighbors or attend family dinners like they used to. People also

belong to fewer organizations and engage less civic activities. One reason is industrial and commercial development that has led to “home shopping network” meaning that individuals can shop from their home without being physically or socially present (Cova 1996, Cova 1997). At the same time individual is both isolated and virtually in contact with the whole world (Cova 1996).

It is argued, however, that postmodernity is more the era of the tribe than the individual since today’s consumers are in a desperate search of social links (Cova 1996, Cova 1997). This sociological school sees that there is a countermovement in which individuals that have succeeded to free themselves from modern social links are recreating their social universe on the basis of a free choice (Cova 1997). Cova (1997) argues that tribalism explains deconsumption better than individualism. Deconsumption, often too simply regarded as a consequence of unemployment and consumer anxiety, can be linked to consumers’ desire for community. According to Cova (1997) purchasing of the new loses its meaning and consumers rather seek direct satisfaction through experience shared with others, not through consuming with them but being with them. Postmodern individuals value the social interaction and consumption becomes secondary. Moreover, individuals value especially products and services that unite them with other people and promote social aspects of life (Cova 1996, Cova 1997, Cova & Cova 2002). It is often referred to “social linking value” of products that is used by tribes to create community and express identity (Cova 1997, Mitchell & Imrie 2011).

### 2.1.1 Definition of alternative consumption

In their study of alternative household consumption practices, Williams and Windebank (2005) define alternative consumption as acquisition practices that exclude obtaining new goods from formal retail outlets and web stores. This can be acquiring goods from friends and family, through personal adverts for example in local newspapers and in garage sales, second-hand stores and markets. In this sense alternative consumption means reusing goods that is “against all three processes that define consumption: acquisition, usage, and disposition” (Black & Cherrier 2010). Reusing is against the acquisition and use of new products and against unnecessary disposal of products (Cherrier 2010, Black & Cherrier 2010).

William and Windebank's (2005) definition on alternative consumption can be considered somewhat imperfect since it only takes into account reuse of products in the form of consuming second-hand items. Consumers also reject a wide range of products, brands and consumer practices (Black & Cherrier 2010). For example in Black and Cherrier's (2010) study one informant stated that she doesn't buy non-organic fruits due to pesticides and the other said to avoid printing out paper and instead read from her computer despite the fact that it was more uncomfortable. In addition, their analysis showed that consumers reduce consumption levels. Rather than rejecting the whole practice of driving a car one informant said that she tries to drive less (Black & Cherrier 2010).

Alternative consumption may thus imply anti-consumption, a form of resistance that is "both an activity and attitude" (Cherrier 2009, Albinsson & Perera 2012). Anti-consumption has been linked to variety of practices such as boycotting, brand avoidance, ethical consumption, voluntary simplifying and consumer resistance (Ozanne & Ballantine 2010). Anti-consumption literally means "against consumption" (Lee et al. 2009), is essential part of sustainable lifestyle and is practiced through acts of rejection, reduction and reuse (Black & Cherrier 2010). According to Black and Cherrier (2010) anti-consumption is more of an integral part of trying to live a sustainable life than the purchasing green products. This can also offer an explanation to widely researched attitude-behavior gap, the question why pro-environmental attitudes do not contribute to greener purchasing (Black & Cherrier 2010). Consumers rather give up on consumption of some products than buy environmentally friendly products.

Alternative consumption also comprises collaborative consumption (Albinsson & Perera 2012) that is strongly linked to concept of sharing economy. Collaborative consumption is "traditional sharing, bartering, lending trading, renting, gifting and swapping" (Botsman & Rogers 2010, Belk 2014) that enables access over ownership and that defines not only what we consume but how we consume. Belk (2014) however sees this definition too broad and defines collaborative consumption as "coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation". His definition includes practices such as bartering, trading, and swapping that include giving and receiving non-monetary compensation but excludes sharing activities that has no compensation involved. Thus, his definition comprises flea markets, online auctions and Facebook flea-market groups through which items are exchanged for money.

At least two commonalities exist in sharing and collaborative consumption practices (Belk 2014). They use temporary access non-ownership models of utilizing consumer goods and services and they rely heavily on the Internet, or Web 2.0 to operate. Sharing is defined by Belk (2007) as “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use”. Belk (2014) divides sharing into non-ownership-based and transfer of ownership and reciprocal exchange that are usually case with gift giving and marketplace exchange. Belk (2010) regards sharing as a communal act that unites people. He refers to practices *sharing in* and *sharing out*. *Sharing in* occurs usually within the family as ownership is regarded as common in a way that “others are included within aggregate extended self”. This is the case with sharing a family dinner or car for instance. *Sharing out* on the other hand does not include expanding the sphere of extended self beyond the family but is more sharing between separate economic interests so that the boundary between self and others is sustained. Sharing a car within a car sharing organization is often a case of sharing out (Meijkamp 1998, Belk 2010). However, smaller car sharing arrangements, for example some ride sharing communities in Facebook, can be somewhere between sharing in and sharing out (Belk 2010).

Botsman and Rogers (2010) recognize three distinctive systems of collaborative consumption. These are redistribution markets, collaborative lifestyles and product service systems. Firstly, redistribution markets represent marketplaces where unwanted or underused goods are redistributed. Flea markets, second-hand markets and online services for unwanted goods such as Freecycle and Ebay serve as examples of these kinds of marketplaces. Secondly, collaborative lifestyles refer to non-product assets such as skills, space and money that are exchanged in new ways. Time banks and other resource allocating services such as TaskRabbit belong to this category. TaskRabbit called as “eBay for errands” matches individuals and businesses that need help with little tasks. Lastly, product service systems are services that offer an access to a product without needing to own it. For instance ridesharing services such as Uber and Lyft are platforms in which ordinary drivers can make extra money by providing a ride to anyone who needs it. In this study redistribution markets are looked at. Cleaning Day serves as an example of marketplace that is organized by consumers to other consumers and where second-hand goods are exchanged. In other words, Cleaning Day resembles a big flea market. Before going to the aspects that drive alternative consumption the academic discussion on flea markets is represented.

### 2.1.2 Flea markets as alternative marketplaces

Flea markets are real periodic marketplaces consisting independent vendors and resemble the oldest and most basic form of commerce (Schiffer et al. 1981; Belk et al. 1988). Flea markets occur usually during the weekends and in public places such as parking lots and market squares, primarily used for other purposes (Schiffer et al. 1981). Flea markets support a form of lateral recycling meaning that object is transferred without change in use from one person to another (Schiffer 1981; Stone et al. 1996). Schffer et al. (1981) recognize three kinds of vendors; *one timers*, *part timers* and *professionals*. *One timers* are sellers who visit flea markets occasionally, *part timers* are hobbyists that might be specialized in clothing or other collectives and *professionals* are those who make their main income by selling new or partly used items.

Earlier research on flea markets has for example focused on motives (Petrescu & Bathli 2013), practices and behaviors of those consumers who go to flea markets (Belk et al. 1988; Sherry 1990; Stone et al. 1996; Sherry (1990) acknowledges the importance of flea markets as alternative, second market systems that can offer valuable insights for marketing and consumers who engage in alternative form of consumption. Moreover, Petrescu & Bathli (2013) see that studying flea markets provide knowledge on behaviors of lower income consumers and Bottom of the Pyramid market that has often been overlooked by businesses. Yet, flea markets are not only meeting places for low income shoppers but similarly for other consumer groups as well (Petrescu & Bathli 2013). Especially due to current unstable economic conditions consumers are careful and hesitant to make big investments. This is likely to increase the popularity of flea markets and make them more “mainstream” option.

Sherry (1990) situates flea market in his general marketplace framework into the center of structural economic-festive and functional formal-informal dimensions and argues that flea markets as an institution “embodies the tension inherent in formal-informal and economic-festive dialectics to a greater degree than those marketplaces traditionally investigated by consumer researchers”. Formal structure is regarded as official and rationalized when again informal structure is seen as less controlled and reactive. Economic function is characterized by utility and rationality and festive function defined by hedonic and experiential characteristics. In Sherry’s study one informant considered flea markets more personal and



less sterile than malls. She also acknowledges that flea markets require more creativity since not everything's as organized as in the malls.

Morales (2011) addresses that the markets have political, economic and social outcomes. For instance flea markets support green ideology and promote recycling that is good for the society. Morales (2011) also points out that the markets are safe and lively public spaces. In general they increase interaction between people and thus improve community relations. Secondly, they raise awareness and affect attitudes among shoppers who don't only see themselves as utilitarian or hedonistic consumers but are actively concerned with their personal health, neighborhood and community (Morales 2011). Thirdly, markets can become tourist attractions and serve as cultural inspiration. This is the case for example with Cleaning Day that is celebrated around Finland and also abroad, and promoted in many Finnish tourist websites as "a day of celebration for friends of flea markets and recycling" (Visit Helsinki). Fourthly, markets provide employment for people, especially for those in lower income groups. Selling second-hand items at the flea market is a fast way to earn money. In order to sell goods means of course that the person must have a full access to modern retail channels. Critique represented towards flea markets is that they can become outlets for selling stolen goods aside that income from sold goods is not reported and taxes are not paid (Schiffer et al. 1981; Belk et al. 1988). Moreover, it's been criticized that people who used to donate goods to charity have now switched to sell them in flea markets (Stone et al. 1996) that of course affects negatively on charity stores' sales and development aid.

Belk et al. (2011) argue that prior research that has regarded flea markets as a response to recessions has perhaps looked at flea markets purely as an economical phenomenon. Yet, consumers are searching for action and adventure as much as low prices. Some have witnessed motives such as aspiration and excitement in treasure hunting and in searching for bargains (Belk et al. 1988; Bardhi & Arnould 2005). The flea markets involve a strong recreational motive that is "fun" seeking. Moreover, there exists some evidence that consumers use flea markets when they face transitions in their lifestyle and status (Schiffer et al. 1981). These changes can be characterized as *age-dependent*, *rites of passage* and *achieved status positions* (Schiffer et al. 1981). For instance, children outgrow quickly from their clothing and that's why many parents resell children's clothes that are usually worn only over a short period of time. Death is the extreme example of rites of passage when belongings are redistributed through inheritance. New positions in life, especially during the adulthood,

encourage people to get rid of their old life by selling items that remind them from their former positions and acquire new products that better fit with their current position. For example, when a student enters into the working life she might feel that she needs to buy office clothes that better fit with her new status and sell those clothes that are strongly attached to her former student life. Next, factors that drive consumer participation in alternative marketplaces will be explained more in detail.

### 2.1.3 Drivers of alternative consumption

The reasons why people join alternative marketplaces and practice collaborative consumption might vary drastically between individuals and cultures. Some people avoid sharing goods since they don't want to feel dependent on others. However interdependence is considered more positively in Asia than in Western cultures (Belk 2010). Buddhism encourages to "dana" or generous sharing instead of consumption that leads to less materialism and more community (Santikaor 2005 in Belk 2010).

Traditionally alternative consumption practices were linked to deprived consumer groups who cannot afford to buy from traditional retail stores (Williams & Windebank 2005). Second-hand buying was regarded as less expensive and limited to "local forms of acquisition" (Roux & Guiot 2008). Moreover, earlier studies have recognized that deprived consumers are motivated by economic necessity and affluent consumers are driven by more agency-oriented motives (Williams & Windebank 2005). Indeed alternative marketplaces can be a real help for those who have limited economical capital. Nelson et al. (2010) found that some members of Freecycle community had a limited budget and participated to get things for free. Thus it's likely that some join alternative marketplaces out of economic and material necessity and some are doing it purely for fun. However, this assumption is somewhat narrow-minded as it seems that choice is not totally absent in deprived consumers' explanations either. For example in William and Windebank's (2005) study some deprived consumers saw taking a loan in a negative light and chose instead to purchase a secondhand household equipment. On the contrary, deprived consumers attempted to buy clothes from traditional retailers since the clothes are important part of maintaining self-respect.

Self-orientation refers to using the premises of community for economic purposes or for own wants or desires, to acquire wished goods. Though some consumers participate for altruistic

reasons, large number of consumers uses the marketplaces for self-interest meaning to make or save money (Nelson et al. 2007; Botsman & Rogers 2010; Albinsson & Perera 2012) or to get rid of stuff to make room for new (Albinsson & Perera 2009). In the extreme case, self-oriented values can be a concern for free-sharing platforms where individuals have seen to resell donated items that they have picked up for free (Albinsson & Perera 2012). Sheth et al. (2011) don't regard economic motives self-centered but acknowledge that they are important part of one's wellbeing. As stated in earlier chapter alternative marketplaces are often help for those who don't have an access to formal outlets. Sharing out of economic reasons is usually case with collaborative ownership that can offer an access to a vacation home that couldn't be afforded otherwise (Belk 2010). This brings up the question as Bardhi and Arnould (2005) and Roux and Guiot (2008) suggest: Whether, in compensation for seeking low prices, this form of acquisition allows people to own more objects and to satisfy materialist goals? According to Bardhi and Arnould (2005) moral representations that people construct around second-hand shopping is indeed an attempt to mask their attempt to accumulate.

Nevertheless, consumption at alternative marketplaces is taking root and studies show that financial interests are not definitely the only ones guiding this (Nelson et al. 2007). The channels providing second-hand goods such as second-hand stores and markets have extended partly thanks to Internet. The studies have found combination of economic and recreational benefits acquired through second-hand shopping (Bardhi & Arnould 2005, Roux & Guiot 2008). Bardhi and Arnould (2005) found in their study of thrift shoppers six dimensions that characterize second-hand shopping - carefully planning one's purchases, limiting one's expenditure, bargain hunting, extending product lifetimes, minimizing the use of new product channels, and recycling used products (Roux & Guiot 2008) - and these behaviors include many motivational factors, not just economic.

According to Bekin et al. (2005) by withdrawing from traditional marketplaces consumers can obtain less chaotic and more satisfactory life and some studies recognize the consumer's need to simplify their lifestyles by disposing goods in recycling events (Nelson et al. 2007; Albinsson & Perera 2009). Nelson et al. (2007) found in their study of Freecycle recycling community that the "simple life" was the most dominant factor in participation and was associated with the motive "caring for self". Sheth et al. (2011) acknowledge two aspects of well-being that are eudemonic (happiness) and economic. According to Frank (2004) greater

happiness isn't obtained by spending an increased income to conspicuous goods, for example a bigger car or a house. However, when excess income is spent on inconspicuous goods so that the consumer is freed from a long commute to work or a stressful job more happiness is gained. After a certain level is reached consuming doesn't bring in more satisfaction. Unnecessary stuff even if unseen and stored may cause stress and anxiety (Albinsson & Perera 2009). Thus, consumers get rid of stuff or "de-clutter" so that their lives improve (Nelson et al. 2007). Many scholars have named people who willingly reduce their consumption levels as "voluntary simplifiers" (Shaw & Newholm 2002).

Participating in alternative marketplace is also an opportunity to "do something good" (Albinsson & Perera 2009) that refers to altruistic values. For example in the study of Albinsson and Perera (2009) on consumers' disposition behaviors one informant stated that "by exchanging some of my clothes I'm conserving some resources by not buying new". Often altruistic elements of alternative consumption are linked to willingness to protect environment (Albinsson & Perera 2009). However, the extent of environmental concern varies greatly between consumers in alternative marketplaces (Nelson et al. 2007). Albinsson and Perera (2009) argue that self-concept is strongly related to disposition behaviors and consumers who regard themselves as environmentalists are more engaged in recycling and exchanging. Environmentalists also pay attention to attributes like product quality, packaging and advertising and are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly alternatives (Craig-Lees & Hill 2002). Consumers practicing voluntary simplifying are also more likely to be driven by values such as environmentalism and humanism (Craig-Lees & Hill 2002). According to Shaw and Newholm (2002) ethical consumers need to choose between reducing consumption to a sustainable level and refining consumption through acquiring more ethical alternatives. For many people radical anticonsumption practices, for example moving to New Consumption Communities (Marylyn et al. 2005), may not be an option and living in a contemporary society requires some level of consuming (Shaw & Newholm 2002). Shaw and Newholm (2002) argue that consumers in this sense need to adopt one or more behaviors such as downshifting, voluntary simplicity and/or more sustainable consumption choices. Hence Cleaning Day is assumedly a meeting place for consumers who engage in these behaviors in different degrees and forms.

Especially those who practice work downshifting and have reduced their working hours per week, use their spare time for civic purposes (Nelson et al. 2007). Participation is one of the

key drivers of collaborative consumption (Nelson et al. 2007, Albinsson & Perera 2010; Ozanne & Ballantine 2010). People who engage in sharing events are likely to involve themselves with environmental or social causes and favor surroundings that enable face-to-face interaction and create a sense of community (Elgin 2000, Albinsson & Perera 2010). Ozanne and Ballantine (2010) found in their study of toy library users that there was a group of “socialities” (26% of all participants) that were motivated primarily by social and community benefits and were the least materialistic from the informants. This group held the most positive attitudes towards visiting the library and borrowing toys and also enjoyed participating in the duties of the library. In this sense they constructed sharing as a form of “sharing in” or as an expression of community (Belk 2010, Ozanne & Ballantine 2010). However Ozanne and Ballantine (2010) found also a group of “passive members” (22% of the informants) that didn’t feel engaged with the community and were driven by materialistic values more than others.

Social networking that occurs in the peer-to-peer marketplace is often unexpected consequence and benefit (Albinsson & Perera 2009, Botsman & Rogers 2010, p. 130). Picking up the item acquired through Freecycle or participating in recycling event such Cleaning Day fosters face-to-face interaction and contributes to community building. According to Albinsson and Perera (2010) the core of consumer value no longer includes just products and services but also the interactions between community participants who exchange goods. The goods that are shared generate interaction and relationships between the members even so that what is shared loses meaning and how something is shared and with who gains more meaning.

## **2.2 Consumption experiences**

The origins of experience go back to eighteenth century when change, diversity and imagination were part of romanticized way of life and development of interesting life was an end goal (Carù & Cova 2007, p. 5). Carù and Cova (2007, p.5) argue that when this was combined with the western society’s quest for an identity the experiences became something to aspire for. Also Cova (1996) notes that postmodernity is the “age of experience” rather than the “age of the image”. People no longer consume only to fulfill needs and to live but rather they consume to exist as through consumption people build up and reinforce their identities (Carù & Cova 2007, p. 5). Consumers prefer multiple experiences that offer a

chance to explore different lifestyles (Carù & Cova 2007) rather than ready made products or images (Cova 1996).

Consumption experience is not only seen as prepurchase activities (e.g. search for information) or postpurchase activities (e.g. evaluation of satisfaction) but they include a range of other activities as well (Arnould et al. 2002; Carù & Cova 2003; Caru & Cova 2007, p. 5). Consumption experiences divide into four phases over a period of time. Preconsumption experience includes searching for, planning and imagining the experience. The purchasing experience includes activities such as choosing the product, payment and the encounter with the service provider or environment. The core consumption experience involves feelings such as sensation, satisfaction/dissatisfaction and flow/irritation that come from using the product or living the experience. Last is the nostalgia experience, in which past experiences are relived through narratives and arguments. (Arnould et al. 2002)

Carù and Cova (2007, p. 12) point out that people's everyday lives are filled with consuming experiences that don't necessarily have a relation with the market. Instead, the experience can occur outside the sphere of the market even though the products from the market are used. Dinner at a friend's house serves as an example of these kinds of consumer-driven experiences. There are three types of experiences recognized by Carù and Cova (2007, p. 12-13) who have adapted theory of sociologists Edgell et al. (1997):

- Experiences that are principally constructed by consumer and that might involve company's products or services (e.g. organic products, non-profit associations).
- Experiences that are co-developed by companies and consumers. The company offers an experiential platform base on which the consumers can develop their own experiences (e.g. rock concerts, adventure packages).
- Experiences that companies have been developed and planned all the aspects on behalf of the consumer (e.g. fashion and sports brands).

It might be argued that alternative marketplaces are situated somewhere between the first and second types of experiences depending on whether the organizer operates in public or private sector. One perspective is that Cleaning Day experience is wholly produced by the participants since without the sellers and buyers the whole event wouldn't exist. However,

Common Ground association coordinates some practicalities of the event such as recruitment of volunteers, communication in Facebook group and in media, relations with municipalities and placement of recycling points. Thus as a non-profit entity it provides the platform for the Cleaning Day experience and mirrors the second type of consumption experience.

### 2.2.1 Consumer-driven experiences

Many consumer researchers acknowledge that value no longer lies simply in firm's products but rather in personalized consumption experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, Vargo & Lusch 2004). Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008) have proposed a service-dominant (S-D) logic framework opposed to product-dominant logic that implies that consumers partake in the value creation process from the preliminary design phase and throughout the whole usage life of the product. S-D logic research sees that there are two ways by which consumers create value, either through co-production of firm's core products or through "value in use", taking part of the product-related consumption activities (Hunt et al. 2012). Co-creation activities tend to lead to more positive consumption experiences. For example, Hunt et al. (2012) found in their study of customer co-production that participating in the production of service experience contributes to greater satisfaction in the product category. They studied community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs as alternative retail channel to acquire fresh produce directly from local farmers. The researchers also noted that co-production integrates consumers into a community and creates "a collective consciousness" between consumers and companies that work towards a mutual goal.

Carù and Cova (2007) highlight the concept of immersion in the experience. Simply the immersion produces the experience and is the means by which consumers access the experience. They see experience as a subjective episode that customers live through when interacting with the company's products or services. The participation is the essence of this experience as postmodern consumers participate in customization of their own world (Cova 1996). An experiential view sees consumers not as passive agents reacting to stimuli but the actors and the producers of their own consuming experiences (Crù & Cova 2007, p. 7). In this sense consumers do not simply find themselves in a state of immersion that implies passive enjoyment but rather they immerse themselves in a consumption experience (Ladwein in Carù & Cova 2007, p.95.). Hence, firms should create the environment on which the consumers can construct personalized experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004).

The firms who have acknowledged the co-creative role of consumers have set up “a theater” and “a stage” for their customers and offering. For example in a study Ludic Agency and Retail Spectacle (Kozinets et al. 2004) on spectacular themed environment, sport entertainment park ESN Zone Chicago, it’s noted that spectacles replace the reality with false image and delude consumers who no longer can separate their real identities from the fiction. It’s also interesting that these themed environments encourage consumers to do-it-yourself behavior and one person’s behavior can be other’s amusement, often referred to as “ludic autotely”. For instance watching someone’s attempt to hang glide is perceived as a performance that offers a delightful experience. Therefore consumers take the role of producer. Kozinets et al. (2004) argue that “*the wills of consumers and producers turn out to be far more overlapping, mutual, and independent than commonly recognized*” and call this process “interagency”.

### 2.2.2 Utilitarian vs. hedonic experiences

Since the early 1980’s next to utilitarian conception of consumption based on products’ use value has appeared more hedonic approach to consumption that sees consumption as an activity of a production of meaning (Carù & Cova 2007, p. 4). Thus experiences are a collection of meanings that are derived from the interaction with the products and services. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) are regarded as the pioneers of experiential consumption. In their study “The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasy, Feelings and Fun” the researchers contrast information processing and purchase decision model arguing that it perceives consumers logical thinkers who solve problems to make consumption decisions but neglects important aspects including “playful leisure activities, sensory pleasures, daydreams, esthetic enjoyment and emotional responses”. According to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) experiential view on consumption is “a primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria”.

Companies usually try to fulfill consumer needs by providing a set of benefits and solutions (e.g. Park et al. 1986). Park et al. (1986) divide consumer needs into three categories; functional, symbolic and experiential and they argue that many brands offer a mixture of these benefits. *Functional benefits* are usually linked to product-related attributes and tend to solve or remove a certain problem. The functional needs stem from basic physiological and



safety motivations. *Symbolic benefits* are normally non-product related and relate to needs for social approval, role position, group membership or self-image. *Experiential benefits* refer to feeling that stems from using the product correlating with product related attributes and satisfy experiential needs as sensory pleasure, variety and cognitive stimulation. Craig-Lees and Hill (2002) argue that products/brands whose main benefit is either experiential or expressive may be the most vulnerable and rejected by those who limit their consumption since they appreciate especially functional attributes in products such as quality and technical performance. However, it might be argued that those who engage in alternative consumption may also enjoy hedonic value in the search and construction of an identity.

This instrumental and hedonic distinction in consumer behavior has been popular (e.g. Lofman 1991; Babin et al. 1994) and has roots in psychology, especially phenomenological and humanistic schools (Lofman 1991). Koch (1956) originally suggested that behavior is either extrinsically motivated or intrinsically motivated, being a means toward an end (instrumental) or an end itself (hedonic). Instrumentally oriented studies have generally assumed a rational, problem solving consumer whose goal is to meet a specific need when again the hedonic orientation perceives consumer as an experiential being who consumes for pleasure and enjoyment (Lofman 1991). Utilitarian value reflect shopping occasions that are described by consumers as a task or a work (Babin et al. 1994). Hedonic consumption experiences relate to enjoyment that comes from different shopping activities and might involve purchasing but not necessarily (Babin et al. 1994). Already browsing can bring a significant amount of joy and affect the overall evaluation of the experience.

Consumption events always include an interaction between a subject and an object (Holbrook 1999) through which the consumer value is gained (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Addis & Holbrook 2001). Consumer value implies an overall judgement of the experience. The subject is a consumer who has his/her own personality and a set of subjective responses such as beliefs and feelings. The object is a product, a place or an event that involves a set of functional characteristics such as price. For some consumption experiences' objective features might outweigh the subjective responses like the use of trekking shoes since consumers are more interested in what they can gain from the physical characteristics. Consumer value is thus *utilitarian*. For other consumption experiences such as visiting a museum and looking at a painting the subjective responses weigh more than objective attributes of the product. This type of value is *hedonic*. Additionally some products can have

similar weightings of objective features and subjective responses and this kind of experience is *balanced* in nature. (Addis and Holbrook 2001)

### 2.2.3 Seeking fun, pleasure and authenticity

Many studies have noted the importance of emotions and feelings during the consumption experiences as they play major role in evaluation of the overall experience (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Arnould & Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993; Ladwein 2007). Pleasure is seen as hedonic and experiential consumption that stems from “product use that can be multisensorial, fantastical and highly emotional” (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Goulding et al. 2009). Many scholars have recognized different kinds of pleasures and their sources. Jordan (2004) distinguishes physiopleasures that come from the body’s sensory experiences, sociopleasures that people get from being together, psychopleasures that stem from emotional and cognitive responses to product/service use and ideopleasures that emanated from product meanings and personal values. According to Goulding et al. (2009) people are searching for pleasure from communal events such as sporting events and rock concerts and these shared pleasures serve the need of belonging. Even though consumption experiences are enjoyed alone, the pleasure increases when it’s shared with others.

Transcendent state or flow experience appears through total involvement in the situation at hand and is usual for the high-risk leisure activities such as rafting, trekking and skydiving (Arnould & Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993; Ladwein 2007, p. 96). In the “flow” mode the one loses the sense of time while being completely self-aware and alive. According to Celsi et al. (1993) the flow state occurs when the context and person interact in a balanced way. Context needs to push the individuals near their physical and mental limits but still without overwhelming them. Context that lacks challenge won’t motivate the individual but too overwhelming one will produce stress. The end state of flow experience is zen-like, one where the individual feels satisfied, exhilarated and complete while being unaware of the self-awareness. This is sometimes referred to as a sense of self-authentication. (Celsi et al. 1993)

Authenticity is important part of the consumption experiences and “is consumer perception that occurs through a filter of one’s personal experiences” (Leigh et al. 2006). Simply authenticity means naturalness seen as the opposite of culturalness often linked to urban living

(Carù & Cova 2001, p. 101). Traditionally authenticity studies have been object-driven and concentrated how consumers experience authenticity of market offerings (Grayson & Martinec 2004). Moreover, some regard authenticity as one's evaluation of the object's or experience's degree of originality (MacCannel 1973) and some see authenticity something that is socially constructed and relates to one's personal dreams, fantasies and expectations towards object or the experience. According to the latter constructive view, consumers desire symbolic authenticity.

Newer school of authenticity has started to explore existential authenticity. It relates strongly to postmodernism and deconstruction. It is believed that consumers are not concerned with object-driven authenticity as often represented by consumer authenticity studies but they're rather in the search of "their authentic selves". Two types of existential authenticity have been recognized, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Intrapersonal authenticity refers to individual self, and his psychological and psychical aspects. Interpersonal authenticity on the other hand focuses on a collective sense of self encompassing social authenticity. In this view experience brings "individuals together for authentic interpersonal relationships". Social bonds are strengthened in collective activities such as flea markets and swap meets through interpersonal dialogues and experiential activities in an atmosphere in which individuals may experience their true selves in the presence of relevant others. Moreover, authenticity that is derived from these experiences isn't only because of the "exotic" nature of the experience but also enjoyment that comes from sharing and communication with others. (Leigh et al 2006)

In the study of farmers' markets McGrath et al. (1993) found that the market is "*a collective attempt to recapture or recreate an authentic, unmediated experience of a simpler, more wholesome era*". The local market offers an optimal stage for an authentic experience for the hurried city consumers who romanticize healthy and simple agrarian life. For a few hours in a week unemotional and anonymous individuals gather to the market that resembles almost like a little village. The market is an escape for the individuals from their hectic lives so they expect the experience to be entertaining and fun. McGrath et al. (1993) name the market a "third world" that was originally used by Oldenburg (1989) meaning that the site is a platform for "*the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work*". The market enables "*collective rituals and unplanned social gatherings*" and thus alleviates the alienation in the contemporary consumer culture.

## 2.3 Marketplace communities

The idea of communal consumption is not new (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). For example, Belk et al. (1988) studied specific nature of buying, selling and social interaction of swap meets and McGrath et al. (1993) explored the farmer's market as a temporary consumption community. What these alternative marketplaces have in common is that consumers return figuratively and literally to their roots (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001), back to the time where goods were exchanged at the local markets and not in big retail outlets. According to Cova (1996) tribes try to bring back the community archetype of the village or district.

Today's consumer is a member of several consumption communities (Wood & Judikis 2002, Albinsson & Perera 2010) and individuals belong to multiple tribes in which they adopt different roles and "wear a different mask" (Cova 1996). Maffesoli (1996) talks about "the time of the tribes" or "the time of the masses". These little heterogeneous tribes or *tribus* are distinguished by their members' shared lifestyles and tastes and are "the remainders of mass consumption society" (Maffesoli 1996). Moreover they're essential for people's experiences of life in general (Cova et al. 2007, p. 5). Maffesoli (1996) was one of the first sociologist and scholar to develop the concept of neotribalism (Cova et al. 2007), an ideology that individuals are social humans and are destined to live in a tribal society in contrast to mass society.

### 2.3.1 Consumer collectives

To understand how people form collectives based on shared consumption interests it's relevant to understand different types of consumer communities. There is three widely recognized consumption community concepts: subcultures of consumption, brand communities and consumer tribes (Canniford 2011). Some also distinguish e-tribes or online communities as one type of marketplace community (Kozinets 1999). According to Kozinets (1999) virtual consumption communities are "a specific subgroup of virtual communities that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests". Though all of the latter concepts reflect how social links are established through the shared use of services and products they also

provide variant views on how consumers socialize and form these “links” or personal relationships.

Subcultures of consumption are driven by the members’ “shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity” (Schouten & McAlexander 1995). According to Canniford (2011) subcultures of consumption are *dedicated*, *cohesive* and *resistant*. First, becoming a member of a subculture requires a lengthy process of acculturation and socialization that means experimenting with the new persona, unique rituals and sets of beliefs of the community and deepening the commitment to subculture’s values and ethos, the shared cultural meanings (Schouten & McAlexander 1995, Kates 2002, Canniford 2011). Second, inside the subculture lies hierarchical social structure based on the social statuses of members (Schouten & McAlexander 1995, Canniford 2011). The authorized figures and opinion leaders are usually the most committed members who maintain principles and hierarchical order. Third, subcultures usually oppose dominant values and social institutions that is “enacted through political and stylistic practices” (Kates 2002, Canniford 2011). For example the bikers acquire Harley-Davidson motorcycles and wear biker outfits including black leather jackets and black boots to differentiate from other people (Schouten & McAlexander 1995). The subcultures are quite homogeneous in nature and often feel excluded or superior to non-members (Schouten & McAlexander 1995).

Like consumption subcultures, brand communities are relatively stable and strongly committed (Muniz & O’Guinn 2001, Canniford 2011). Brand community is seen as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn 2001). At the heart of community is a branded good or service. However, communal belonging stems from shared consumption of brands between likeminded individuals rather than a resistant form of shared social activity (Canniford 2011, Goulding et al. 2013). Brand communities rarely oppose dominant social structures. On the contrary they sustain a dialogue between businesses and loyal consumers (Muniz & O’Guinn 2001, Canniford 2011).

A critique represented towards brand communities is that consumption communities don’t necessarily locate their socialization around single brands or products (Canniford 2011, Goulding et al. 2013). Some communities are driven by a shared lifestyle activity rather than a brand (Canniford 2011). Furthermore, brands may lose meaning in the community structure

when people are more interested in the social links than products themselves (Canniford 2011). Due to the fragmentation of society caused by individualism, contemporary consumers are in desperate search of social links and value goods that hold “linking value”, in other words permit social interaction and this way support their communal life (Cova 1996, Cova 1997). Some members also show only temporary commitment to community. Leisure subculturalists for example are affiliated with the subculture solely at weekends (Kates 2002, Canniford 2011) and a question arises whether these communities are then subcultures in the first place. Subcultures today are also less likely exhibit social resistance against dominant orders (Canniford 2011) and in some cases strong social structures and gender hierarchies have disappeared (Martin et al. 2006; Canniford 2011).

According to Cova (1996,1997) postmodern communities are unstable, small and “held together by shared emotions, life styles, new moral beliefs and new consumption practices. Postmodern individuals are members of multiple consumption communities at the same time and in each community individual plays a different role and wears a different mask (Cova 1996, Cova 1997) that makes the consumers almost impossible to classify (Cova 1997). Tribal theory offers an alternative way of looking at a marketplace community. Often described as a Latin approach, society is seen as a network of micro-groups in which individuals share strong emotions, a common subculture and a life style (Cova & Cova 2002). These micro-groups have their own meanings and symbols and form tribes that don't fit under the sociological analysis. Social status, a static position of an individual in one social class is losing meaning and replaced by social configuration, a dynamic and flexible positioning of individual within and between tribes (Cova 1996).

Tribes differ from subcultures of consumption and brand communities in few important ways (Cova 1997, Cova & Cova 2002, Canniford 2011, Goulding et al. 2013). First, tribes are *multiple* in a sense that consumers today belong to many communities (Canniford 2011, Goulding & Shankar 2011). Membership of one tribe doesn't exclude individual from belonging to other tribes, instead neo-tribal theory emphasizes the flows between different identities under different situations (Goulding & Shankar 2011). Tribes rarely dominate consumers' everyday life and are more a momentary escape from stresses of everyday working week (Goulding et al. 2002; Goulding & Shankar 2011).

Second, tribes are *playful* meaning that consumer tribes practice “active play” with the marketplace resources (Cova et al. 2007) such as aesthetics, emotions, discourses, institutions, material culture, brands, fashion, music, places, spaces and media (Canniford 2011). Consumers deconstruct and reassemble these resources placing little emphasis on products or brands. Instead value is found in the possibility to invigorate passion and generate social links (Cova et al. 2007; Goulding & Shankar 2011). Indeed, tribes concentrate on the “linking element” that holds individuals in the group (Cova & Cova 2002).

Third, due to the rapid processes of active play, tribes emerge and reshape when the combinations of people and resources alter (Canniford 2011), making the tribes *transient* and *unstable* (Canniford 2011; Goulding & Shankar 2011). Cova and Cova (2007) recognize at least two types of tribal traces, temporal and spatial. In temporal terms tribes emerge, grow, reach their highest point, then fade and lastly disappear. Tribes are thus timeless and fragmented. For instance in the funky music scene, “*the tribe exists when it springs to life with the crowd*” (Cathus 1998, p. 92; Cova & Cova 2002). According to Goulding and Shankar (2011) these unpredictable and emergent experiences can be critical and liberatory at one time and at other time mean little beyond sensory intensity and pleasure. The tribes also exist and occupy space physically meaning that tribe members gather and perform their rituals in meeting places or public spaces, often referred to as “anchoring places” (Aubert-Camet & Cova 1999; Cova & Cova 2002). The platforms or social spaces of tribes emerge only when consumers and producers thread different consumption resources together and this way they are ever shifting (Canniford 2011). For instance platforms of Cleaning Day are streets, parks and other public spaces that are invaded by sellers and buyers all over the cities.

Fourth, tribes are *entrepreneurial*. The possibilities for play and open-minded attitude towards the market opens up new paths for entrepreneurial ventures (Cova et al. 2007; Canniford 2011; Goulding & Shankar 2011). Where brand communities are willing to engage with companies, tribes usually customize market offerings and are more likely to give rise to the brands of their own (Canniford 2011; Goulding & Shankar 2011). For example club culture was a tribal response to raves that were outlawed as dance music tribes began to rebrand nightclubs to replicate the atmosphere of the rave experience (Goulding et al. 2009, Canniford 2011). These practices transform the power balance between consumers and producers when tribal members take the lead through *co-production* (Shankar et al. 2006, Goulding & Shankar 2011). Goulding and Shankar (2011) recognize also the fifth element of

tribes, *engagement*. The members of neo-tribes need to learn the codes and etiquettes required to be a member of a particular neo-tribe. According to Maffesoli (1996) this process is highly ritualized as individuals move from being outsiders to legitimate members.

### 2.3.2 A sense of community

According to Hunt et al. (2012) a sense of community is a sum of how well “a community fulfills needs, provides opportunities to influence the group and supports feelings of belonging and connectedness among the members”. McMillan and Chavis (1986) originally proposed that a sense of community consists of four elements that are *Membership, Influence, Reinforcement* and *Shared emotional connection* but ten years later McMillan (1996) renamed them as *Spirit, Trust, Trade* and *Art*.

Membership stands for feeling of belonging to a group and creates boundaries between “us” and “them”. Spirit puts emphasis more on friendship and emotional safety that stem from belonging. Influence in a group is dualistic as community influences its members and the individuals must be able to influence the community and others. However, trust is the prerequisite of influence and McMillan (1996) argues that trust is gained through order, authority based on principles and social norms. Reinforcement relates to integration of needs as all communities need to maintain “a sense of togetherness” and cohesiveness. McMillan and Chavis (1986) state that people do what serves their needs and communities need to answer the variety of needs people have. Trade is the benefit that comes from being together in a community and highlights the importance of people giving for the sake of giving, not because they expect to receive something in turn. Lastly, art “represents the transcendent values of community”. McMillan (1996) sees that the experiences are in the heart of art and emerge when individuals are in contact with each other. He calls them “shared dramatic moments” that become part of community’s collective heritage. These events become community symbols and signal community’s values.

According to Kozinets (1999) the identification as a member of community depends on two interrelated factors. The first is the relationship a person has with the consumption activity and *the centrality of tribal consumption to a self-concept* or self-identity. The person is more likely to pursue and value membership in a community if shared activity, passion or belief of the tribe is regarded important to the to the person’s self-image. The second is *the intensity of*



*the social relationships the person has with other members.* The strength of these two factors affects the degree of participation and involvement with the tribe (Kozinets 1999, Mitchell & Imrie 2011) and thus sense-of-community.

Goulding et al. (2013) see becoming a member as a communal learning process that consists of *engagement*, *imagination* and *alignment* (Wenger 1998). *Engagement* refers to people doing things together and is essential for development of mutual rituals and traditions (Kozinets 2002, Goulding et al. 2013). *Imagination* is important for people, either as individuals or communities, to construct and develop a shared self-image that again facilitates the engagement (Goulding et al. 2013). Lastly, *alignment* is “the necessary act of community maintenance” as it involves the coordination of individual activities that can achieve some greater goal of the community. This leads to the fact the “belonging to a tribe is not the result of individual characteristics but the result of a common experience of reality” (Goulding et al. 2013). This learning process framework is adopted from Wenger (2000, p. 228) who studied communities of practice implying to “ongoing, mutual engagement in learned actions during which meanings are socially negotiated”. From this perspective knowing how to perform in a tribe does not pre-exist social experiences but is learned through participation in community of practice (Goulding et al. 2013).

Communities have a symbol system that is unique and symbolic rituals create a sense of belonging and being part of something important (McMillan 1996). Celsi et al. (1993) for example talk about “phatic communion” that has originally been represented by Malinowski (1923) as special form of communication within cultural groups. It’s a technical language, used by the members of the group who particularly share ritualistic experiences and might be difficult to understand by non-members. Myths are the stories and legends that bind communities together and also work as a “backbone” of the communal experience as well as provide narrative and a sense of continuity (Belk et al. 1989; Goulding & Shankar 2011). “Dramatic moments” introduced by McMillan (1996) are usually those that become community stories and symbolize heritage and values of community.

“Communitas” is a sense of community that exceeds social norms and protocols (Celsi et al. 1993). Moreover, communitas occur when individual with different backgrounds share a common bond of experience that is perceived unique or sacred (Belk et al. 1989; Celsi et al. 1993). As found in the subcultural study of skydivers, “flow” state that occurs during the

jump is transcendent at the individual level but common experience of “flow” creates a bond between members (Celsi et al. 1993). Therefore, *communitas* is shared flow (Turner 1972; Celsi et al. 1993). What is also important for *communitas* is that individuals share a liminal state between two statuses that is common especially when joining a religious group or countercultural movement (Celsi et al. 1993).

# 3 Methodology

In this chapter the research approach and data collection method for the thesis are presented. I also describe more in-depth how I proceeded the data analysis phase and what kinds of techniques were used.

## 3.1 Research approach

This thesis is qualitative and interpretative in nature. According to Moisander and Valtonen (2011) interpretative methodologies are particularly useful for gaining consumer market insight and help to explore the cultural and sociological categories, distinctions, relationships and identities through which consumers make sense of their everyday life, construct identities and achieve social order in the marketplace. I chose the interpretative view instead of positivist since the phenomenon is studied within a certain context (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). The aim of this thesis is to explore how the participants of one certain alternative/peer-to-peer marketplace, Cleaning Day, experience it. According to Hudson & Ozanne (1988) it is essential for researchers to acknowledge the context of behavior since consumers construct reality and give it a meaning based on context. Thus, consumers view information differently whether they are in the retail setting or in the alternative marketplace setting.

Interpretative research is particularly handy when seeking to understand human phenomenon and not trying to generalize findings or form valid predictions of causalities. The aim of the study is to understand the Cleaning day participants' behaviour, rather than to predict it and it's acknowledged that the findings of this research can't be generalized. This is because axiological assumption of interpretivist approach is that understanding is a never-ending process and interpretations are always incomplete forming a hermeneutic circle. (Hudson & Ozanne 1988) Furthermore, the approach is existential-phenomenological and instead of only explaining the experiences of participants, the purpose of the study is to understand as they emerge or as "they're lived" (Thompson et al. 1989).

The popularity of existential-phenomenological approach has grown during the recent years (Thompson et al. 1989; Goulding 2005). Especially in the field of marketing Craig Thompson

has presented underlying principles of phenomenological approach and how it can be linked to various research situations (Goulding 2005). Phenomenological studies have covered issues such as gendered consumption and lifestyle (Thompson 1996), dance culture and the emergence of neo-communities (Goulding et al. 2002). Existential-phenomenology emphasizes the individual experiences (Thompson et al. 1989), suits for research with discovery-oriented goals and thus is a relevant approach for this research. The participants of Cleaning Day are not studied separate from their environment, rather the view is that they are inseparable from the context in which they live (Thompson et al. 1989). Existential-phenomenology is a descriptive science that focuses on the life-world of individual (Thompson et al. 1989). Life-world is defined as the world in which we as human beings among other human beings experience culture and society and are influenced by and acted on objects (Goulding 2005).

The interpretivists seek to describe many perceived realities that vary between different contexts and time (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Ontological assumption is that no amount of inquiry can explain one reality as multiple realities exist and these realities are changing as they're socially constructed. The fact that I have similar background characteristics as my informants and I've been involved with Cleaning Day as a seller and buyer can't be ignored. Thus I have my own perceptions on the studied matter that can't be wholly excluded from the study. The interpretivists believe that the researcher comes into the research with some knowledge or preunderstanding, yet I attempt to be open to new information (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Interpretivists hold that the researcher and the informants interact with each other forming a cooperative inquiry and this perception guides the adopted research approach and method (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Moreover, the approach follows a logic of a grounded theory and that "theory evolves during actual research and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (Straus & Corbin 1988, p.158).

### **3.2 Data collection**

A two-stage methodology was conducted in a form of interviews and online research. I chose to use two different data collection methods as interviews were intended to provide information on the experiences of individual actors of Cleaning Day and ethnographic research in online environment or netnography was used to attain picture of the community and its symbolism, meanings and consumption patterns. The data collection followed a grounded theory

framework, as data was collected as long as new insights or topics were generated (Kozinets 2002; Goulding 2005). Moreover, it was seen which themes arise from the data and how they relate to existing theories (Goulding 2005).

### 3.2.1 Existential-phenomenological interviews

Primary data was collected through in-depth existential-phenomenological interviews as the interpretative and phenomenological approach stresses that interaction and cooperation are important in the research (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Phenomenological interviews are also helpful for gaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences (Kvale 1983). From existential-phenomenological perspective narratives or stories reflect an individual's lived experience and each narrative story is interlaced with a specific context (Cherrier & Murray 2007). The focus of inquiry was the first person descriptions of flea market experiences (Cherrier & Murray 2007) and how the informants tell their stories as their narratives also reflect a specific point of view (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 212). According to Cherrier and Murray (2007) consumer narratives help the research to understand the gradual development of the self in a certain context.

Informants that have been to Cleaning Day and lived the experience were chosen to the interviews. I interviewed five people using careful sampling and chose informants that are active flea market visitors and that have participated in Cleaning Day more than one time. Informants were recruited through friends and existing networks. Interviewees are all women but from different age groups (25-58). Men were not purposely ruled out but no men were available to interviews during the time the interviews were conducted in the spring 2015. Also, the informants represent quite well the demographic group of Cleaning Day "fans" on Facebook where nearly 90% of the community is women and where almost a third is 25-34 years old. Interviews lasted about one 45 minutes and were audiotaped.

Interviews were informal, loosely structured and open-ended. Only a few pre-planned questions were prepared and descriptive questions proposed by interviewer came up in the course of dialogue, since the purpose was to have a conversation rather than question and answer session (Thompson et al. 1989). The dialogue was conversational and was allowed to emerge based on the stories of the informant (Cherrier & Murray 2007). However, I had some pre-planned themes as suggested by Thompson et al. (2002) from which I wanted to

gain information. Every effort was made to keep the conversation on the right track and focused on experiences of flea markets (Cherrier & Murray 2007). I wanted to see first whether concepts such as communality come up and if not, I asked their opinions about them.

There were no prior hypotheses or propositions to be tested and the participants were encouraged to talk openly to gain as story-like answers as possible (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 216). The goal was to have the interviewees to describe with their own words their experiences of Cleaning Day and the way they understand their acts and objects in the experiences (Moisander et al. 2010). The role of the interviewer is to provide a context where respondents feel comfortable to describe their experiences (Thompson et al. 1989). In the beginning of the interviews I told the informants that the interviews are recorder, assured anonymity and encouraged them to talk freely. The interviewer should not start the interview feeling that she or he knows more on the topic than the interviewee as the informant must feel that she is an expert of her own experiences (Thompson et al. 1989). Phenomenologist perspective treats informants' experiences as facts since views of the participants are treated as a legitimate source of data (Goulding 2005).

The informants were allowed to select the places for the interviews to feel as comfortable as possible. Four of the interviews were held in the cafés and one in interviewee's home. I concentrated in active listening the respondent and I allowed the informants to take pauses as much as they needed in order to think through some happenings or recall the events (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 217). I only asked some follow-up questions and tried to avoid the "why" questions, as they might be perceived as a request for rationalization or put the informant in the position of "naïve scientist" meaning that the informant seeks to find a plausible reason for his or her actions (Thompson et al. 1989). I set the direction of the dialogue asking questions such as "Can you describe the time when you participated in Cleaning Day" and "What was the Cleaning Day like" and "How did you feel when you were a seller in Cleaning Day".

### 3.2.2 Interviewees

**Eeva**, 26, lives in Helsinki and has recently graduated from the university and started a new job. She loves to try different sports, do yoga and swim. She's also a frequent flea market visitor and likes to visit her neighborhoods self-service flea markets. She describes her

neighborhood as a little village where everybody says hi to each other and loves to participate in the communal events. Anna has participated in Cleaning Day as a seller and a buyer.

**Marja**, 56, lives in Helsinki near the city. On her free time, she enjoys meeting her friends over a coffee, being at home and do remodeling of her apartment. She also often explores different flea markets around Helsinki, and has been going to flea markets since she was young and know lots of people from flea markets. Marja has participated in Cleaning Day as a shopper.

**Tiina**, 27, is a mother of her newly born daughter and lives in east of Helsinki. Her hobbies include outdoor sports, flea markets and reading fashion and interior design blogs. Tiina visits flea markets almost weekly as a buyer. She also actively redistributes her stuff through recycling online groups, self-service markets and online auction platforms where she mostly sells her clothes and children wear. Tiina has participated in Cleaning Day as a seller and a buyer.

**Enni**, 27, is a graduated from the business school and lives in a quiet neighborhood in Helsinki. On her spare time, she likes to go to the gym, meet friends and travel. She likes to go to outdoor flea markets in the summer. Occasionally she also goes to flea markets to sell her stuff. Enni has participated in Cleaning Day couple of times as a shopper.

**Aino**, 58, lives in a city center of Helsinki and appreciates her neighborhood's vivid and colorful atmosphere. Just around the corner is a big outdoor flea market that is active during the spring and summer months. Aino has visited the flea market for many years. She also likes to go to other flea markets but mainly in the offline environment. She has been to Cleaning Day for few times as a shopper.

### 3.2.3 Netnography

Online research was used a secondary source of information in this study. Netnographic research is one stream of market-oriented ethnography that is aside focus groups and personal interviews one of the most popular qualitative methods (Arnould & Wallendorf 1994; Kozinets 2002). The roots of ethnography lay in anthropology and has gained popularity in fields such as sociology, cultural studies and consumer research (Kozinets 2002; Goulding

2005). In general, the aim of the ethnography is to observe how people interact with each other and with their environment in order to grasp an idea of their culture (Erksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 138). The ethnographic research process includes participating in everyday life of consumers in a particular social setting and collecting data using participant-observation and/or in-context interviews (Moisander & Valtonen 2011). Hence it's often extremely time consuming and elaborate method that requires researcher's considerable, interpretative skill (Kozinets 2002).

Netnography is ethnography executed in the online environment, thus in contrast to ethnography, netnography is far less time consuming as information in online is easy to obtain and immediately available (Kozinets 2002). Netnography provides "a window into a naturally occurring behavior" and a continuous access to informants in a particular social setting (Kozinets 2002). Netnography has been used in studying virtual brand communities for example, as they provide marketers information about brand image and consumer preferences of target markets (Kozinets 1999; Kozinets 2002; Moisander & Valtonen 2011).

Netnographic research was conducted by observing discussion on Cleaning Day Facebook page. Netnographic research was enacted to gain more in-depth knowledge on the participants of Cleaning Day, how the members interact with each other and what kinds of consumption symbols and signs are present. Virtual communities are considered as platforms for consumers engaging in active discussions where they inform and influence the opinions of other members in the group. My aim was to make sense of the cultural patterning of social action of the Facebook group (Moisander & Valtonen 2011).

### **3.4 Data analysis**

Interpretive research is emergent process as interpretivists seek to describe many realities that cannot be known before as they are time and context specific, and as these realities change the research design adapts (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). I feel that data analysis part was the most time consuming part of the whole research. I started the analysis process as soon as I begun the interviews. This was to see the emerging themes and whether my chosen interview technique suited for the purpose of my study. After conducting an interview I immediately transcribed it. The transcribed interviews became the texts from which my interpretations derived (Kvale 1983). The data analysis followed the part to whole framework offered by



Thompson (1997) proceeding through an interactive process (Goulding 2005). I used the seven-step-analysis procedure of Colaizzi (1978):

1. The first task of the researcher is to read the participants narratives, to acquire a feeling for their ideas in order to understand them fully.
2. The next step “extracting significant statements”, requires the researcher to identify key words and sentences relating to the phenomenon under study.
3. The researcher then attempts to formulate meanings for each of these significant statements.
4. This process is repeated across participants’ stories and recurrent meaningful themes are clustered. These may be validated by returning to the informants to check interpretation.
5. After this the researcher should be able to integrate the resulting themes into a rich description of the phenomenon under study.
6. The next step is to reduce these themes to an essential structure that offers an explanation of the behavior.
7. Finally, the researcher may return to the participants to conduct further interviews or elicit their opinions on the analysis in order to cross check interpretation.

The aim of the process was to gain understanding of the interviewees’ world that contributes to development of theory (Goulding 2005). My aim was to get an idea of different parts of the whole Cleaning Day experience. Simply, I first read through several times all of the transcriptions in order to grasp a holistic view and then moved on to hermeneutic model of analysis, recognizing common patterns between separate interviews (Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson 1997;). Thompson et al. (1989) call these commonalities or common patterns as global themes that are found across the interviews. I paid attention to a fact that there was enough support for each theme in individual interviews. However, themes don’t represent as an exhaustive description of the phenomenon, rather they’re figural aspects of experiences (Thompson et al. 1989).

I used coding in identifying themes across the interviews. Furthermore, the aim of the coding process was to identify emergent feelings, situations, motivations and other similarities between described experiences and to get an idea of meanings linked to alternative marketplaces. I highlighted some key words and sentences some I thought to be relevant for

the phenomenon under study. Then I organized them into an excel sheet to see whether they were repetitive and there was enough evidence to back my interpretations.

# 4 Findings

In this chapter I go through findings gained from the empirical study. I introduce the common themes derived from the interviews and discuss the variety of meanings the participants attach to their lived experiences in alternative marketplaces. Netnography was used to enhance understanding of the participants of the recycling event and how the community operates.

## 4.1 Meanings of experiences

By using Thompson's (1997) hermeneutic approach I was able to recognize six underlying themes from the consumers' narratives of their consumption experiences of Cleaning Day and alternative marketplaces. These themes are 1) construct of "good deals" 2) escape from everyday life, 3) control, 4) authenticity, 5) trust and 6) social connections. These themes will be further elaborated in this chapter.

### 4.1.1 Construct of "good deals"

Alternative marketplaces fulfill undoubtedly both utilitarian and hedonistic needs of consumers. One dominant factor in consumer narratives was being able to find "a good deal" that couldn't be explained by utility factors or hedonistic factors alone. More it's a mix of these and resembles a balanced experience introduced earlier (Addis and Holbrook's 2001). A concept of utility occurred multiple times in consumers' narratives. For all informants alternative marketplaces are channels to access secondhand products. Consumers are looking for "good deals" that stand for affordable quality products. "Good deals" are either products that are actually needed or those purchased more out of impulse. Some informants mentioned they use recycling events for acquiring something they need as some were more prone to buy items they were appealed to and more impulsively. Thus for other consumers alternative marketplaces offer utility benefits for others hedonistic aspects and emotional stimulus of purchasing is more relevant.

"Price" appears throughout the narratives and thus is an important element of alternative marketplace experience. Price of the product is a *functional*, product-related attribute. All the informants indicated that they go to flea markets particularly to get things at a low price. This

isn't a surprising result. Rather it confirms what other flea markets studies have found (e.g. Sherry 1990; Stone et al 1996; Roux & Guiot 2008; Petrescu & Bathli 2013). "Saving money" and accessing products at a reasonable price is one of the primary drivers of participation. Therefore going to flea market is partly a rational activity where the primary objective is to save money. The following excerpt shows how flea markets are rationalized and what is the role of price in the experience.

**Tiina:** *My family is very content that I don't use 400€ on clothes but instead 40€ and I get two sacks of clothes, I use each about five times and then I resell them and get my money back. So what would be smarter than that...*

It seems important for Tiina that her mode of consumption is socially approved and it influences her rationale of buying somewhere else than from the stores. This supports the point made by William and Windebank (2006) that social approval is important for those who engage in alternative consumption. They noticed that consumers consider how others perceive them if using second-hand items such as clothes. Consumers of their study avoided buying second hand clothes since clothes were seen to communicate their social status. Contrarily the informants of this study made regular clothing purchases from flea markets. However, all indicated that they only buy clothes that are in good condition and avoided buying worn out clothes assumedly because of the social message it conveys. Thus condition of the item is constantly evaluated in alternative marketplaces. Poor condition of product and asking price that exceeds consumer's reference price are two factors that arouse negative feelings.

**Eeva:** *It makes me happy if it's (product) in a good condition and I save money, but I get upset if I see that they're in a poor condition. I wonder why somebody is trying to sell something like this with such a high price.*

Despite some negative experiences related to quality and high prices, many informants mentioned the offering of Cleaning Day to be better than normally in flea markets. One reason seemed to be that Cleaning Day draws also people who don't normally attend flea markets. Thus Cleaning Day was considered as "*a great place for good deals*". Value from utilitarian perspective is the product's transaction utility, in other words the difference between products' selling price and consumer's own reference price but hedonic perspective

relates to bargains extend beyond a measure of transaction utility (Babin et al. 1994). It's been noted that price negotiation makes consumer satisfied thinking he/she got a good deal (Petrescu and Badhli 2013). Finding a good deal brings joy and is something that is reminisced later. Arguably the experience of finding a good deal includes both utilitarian and hedonic value as the next excerpts illustrate.

**Tiina:** *The best feeling is when you have looked at the piece of clothing before at the store and you have decided not to get it because it's expensive or you think you don't have use for it and then you get it with two euros from the flea market later, it's an awesome feeling and my boyfriend said that it always seems to happen to me, that I was looking something in the store and then after three weeks I come home with it "Hey, look what I've found"!*

**Enni:** *...when we were in New York in the fall 2013 we visited Club Monaco store and I fell in love with those clothes, but they were too expensive and I couldn't afford to buy them. Then I came back to Finland and I found this unused or maybe once used Club Monaco shirt. It was a lovely moment.*

Flea market represents a greater choice, variation and ability to try that is made possible by the markets' low prices. Tiina seemed to enjoy the fact that rather than buying the shirt for 50 euros in the store, she could spend five euros in the flea market and get her money back when reselling it. In other words, flea market provides her a way to play with different lifestyles and identities and if not pleased, get rid of it easily. In addition, as we can see from Enni's latter narrative, she was able to get in touch with her aspired self, one she thought is out of reach due to economical constrains. It's been represented that due to its adaptability and flexibility alternative consumption indeed supports the consumers' liquid identity projects that alter according to what is valued in a given time (Bardhi & Eckhardt 2012).

The informants describe their experiences of purchasing a product from Cleaning Day event that they otherwise couldn't afford. Undoubtedly alternative marketplaces enable to buy products that are usually unavailable due to economic reasons and thus serve utility. Yet, what we can also see is that "these individuals appear to derive their gratification from immediate hedonic pleasure" (Fischer & Arnold 1990). Bargains seemingly increase sensory involvement and excitement among consumers. This is similar to findings of Babin et al.

(1994). There is also perceivable social aspect in construct of “good deals”. Some informants saw good deals to be those which origin they knew or if they had a meaningful encounter with the seller. When talking about the “good deals” they have made, they included the seller into their stories. So they not only described the product but also the seller.

#### 4.1.2 Escape from everyday life

Similar to studies that have concentrated on consumption experiences of leisure activities (e.g. Celsi et al. 1993; Ladwein in Carù & Cova 2007, p. 100), the results of the present study indicate that the consumers participate in alternative marketplaces to take a break from their everyday lives. Many informants include flea markets in their hobbies and flea markets are usually visited alone or with likeminded people. Going to the flea market is an adventure and the possibility that you can find something valuable is source of the excitement. Earlier flea market studies have called this process as a treasure hunting and found it to be one of the recreational motives (Stone et al. 1996; Roux & Guiot 2008). In Sherry’s study (1990) one informant explained: *You have to roll up your sleeves and get into it. You have to go through the stuff and ask yourself. “Am I going to find it today?”*. Similarly searching and exploring were seen as appealing in the present study.

**Aino:** *I might have something in mind that I’m looking for, and then I try to find it from the pile of stuff...it brings me a lot of joy if I’m able to find what I’m looking for. Because there’s so much stuff nowadays. It’s something fun to do, it’s also a hobby. And it’s different than in the stores.*

Participating in alternative marketplaces is often highly conscious activity since both shopping and selling include a set of routines and strategies that people who visit flea markets frequently are familiar with. The process of shopping involves wandering around, careful mapping of the sellers, going through the offering and bargaining. The preparation begins already in the morning and many informants mentioned that they wake up early to go to the flea market as they thought that best deals could be done before official opening time.

**Tiina:** *Actually the flow of thought starts already in the morning when I wake up. I’m usually not a morning person and when I go to work I always snooze but when I’m going to the flea market I wake up straight away when the alarm*

*clock rings and I leave my house quickly. And what I think at the flea market is that I need to be very fast. You need to have a skilled eye and you can't stay too long in one place. This might be sound stressful but this is how it goes. If you want to find good deals you need to be able to move around fast and map the table and if there's anything, and then you move on to the next table. And often I make the round again and again...sometimes there are tables from which you find something nice and then you return back to your "crime scene" and then you find more, something you didn't notice earlier. You put a lot of thought into who are the sellers that are the same size and have same style than you.*

In general, the informants perceived selling own preused items also as enjoyable even though some described it as "hard work". Selling own items includes activities such as choosing the items for sale, sorting items, cleaning, ironing, pricing and selling. According to Rucker et al. (1995) the consumers who choose to resell own preused items invest more personal effort than the ones who choose another methods of disposal such as donation to charity. Selling was also seen as purifying act when "de-cluttering" or getting rid of items that were no longer used. In this sense, aside escaping their everyday lives, alternative marketplaces offer a place where the consumers can rearrange their lives by disposing goods that no longer fit with their current life stages. This supports Albinsson and Perera's (2009) finding that alternative marketplaces are used especially between transitions in life.

On the contrary, the participants might get so involved with the flea market experience that they forget the rest of the world. Many experiential studies have described this kind of flow state that appears especially when high-risk is involved. For example, the skydivers noted that "nothing else exists in their world but that moment itself" after jumping from the plane (Celsi et al. 1993). When wondering around the participants might lose the sense of time and place and focus on feeling with their senses and enjoy the atmospheric elements. According to Celsi et al. (1993) the flow experience occurs when the individual is totally involved in a situation, forming a state where sense-of-self, behavior and context take a unified form. In the "flow" state "one moment "flows" holistically into the next without "conscious intervention" (Csikszentmihalyi 1974, p. 58; Celsi et al. 1993). The state that in some parts reminds of "flow" experience is illustrated in the next excerpt.

**Marja:** *...I'm the kind of person who likes to look around. It's brings lots of enjoy for me. Even if I don't go to rummage or I don't look for anything, I just like the atmosphere. I like it because I see people and everything, and I don't even need to participate, only if I'm being active myself and I'm going to buy something. Otherwise I can be there to look around, to wonder and to walk past because you can easily walk through it without seeing anything or see what you want.*

What can be argued is that the informant in the latter narrative described a sense of self and experience that is highly satisfying and self-fulfilling (Celsi et al. 1993). From this we can see that the unconscious state might be obtained when wandering around. The participant can become absorbed in the moment that stimulates all of her senses. The informant also indicates that she can either choose to engage in conscious experience by “seeing what you want” or pursue more unconscious state. Csikszentmihalyi (1988) sees that flow experience can be so powerful that when experienced once the person is ought to re-experience it over and over again. Celsi et al. (1993) also confirms this who notes that flow state is spell-like and has addictive elements that make people want to relive the moments. These kinds of extreme experiences however might be rare in flea market context as they require a significant amount of stimulus. Yet, addictive elements were not totally absent in informants’ narratives. The following excerpt shows how the shopper can get hooked on the feeling of finding a bargain and hedonic pleasure it arouses.

**Tiina:** *I kind of have an obsession to get to go to the flea market...I think that if I don't go now what will I miss. And that's why I can go and be like “ok, nothing's here” so I get that piece of mind, because otherwise I would have thought what could have been and if I missed my dream purse or my dream coat.*

This finding is similar to Roux and Guiot’s (2010) study in which one informant described “*Antique shops, garage sales, they've become a habit, almost a drug. You never know what you're going to find. It's the pleasure of discovery.*” For Tiina, who has visited flea markets already in her childhood, going to a flea market is a hobby. She doesn't regard them only as marketplaces but places that serve her identity construction and define who she is. She refers to “dream” products that have the highest position in the hierarchy of “deals”. Through her



dream purse or coat she could obtain a deeper sense of self and the idea of losing the opportunity to find her true self drives her to visit flea markets. Hence, the addictive element is not driven by a willingness to lose oneself in the moment but relive the moment when she's closer to gain stronger sense of self.

#### 4.1.3 Control

There is political ideology in Cleaning Day event that is claiming public spaces for the use of citizens from the commercialization. Thus participants practice their citizenship outside the marketplace and resist the market's domination over public space (Bardhi & Eckhardt 2012). Cleaning Day was repeatedly linked to food carnival Restaurant Day where anyone can become a restaurant owner for one day and similarly occupies public space and exists in multiple locations. Cleaning Day spreads throughout the cities what makes it a unique marketplace and the informants described the magical feeling that comes from seeing the central space used for Cleaning Day.

***Eeva:** I was going to Espoo for a visit and I happened to walk through Bulevardi street and it was packed with people, the central space that is used for other purposes normally, for example for picnics, and it was something totally different to see that area used for flea markets...*

Alternative marketplaces allow consumer collectives to become empowered in a world where the power is in hands of small amount of powerful multinational companies (Shaw et al. 2006; Papaikonomou et al. 2012). The informants are willing to obtain control over their consumption practices that is done in three different ways. They reduce their consumption levels, oppose traditional retailers and are extremely involved in the creation of their own consumption experiences.

Consumers are increasingly seeking to affect the suppliers through their actions at the marketplace (Shaw et al. 2006). However, only a couple of informants implied that they choose environmentally friendly alternatives such as clothes made out of organic fabric in traditional stores. So indeed the control is obtained principally through anticonsumption and voluntary simplicity practices not primarily through purchasing. The participants acknowledged that shopping second hand items reduces waste and contributes to recycling of

products that still have utility value. Moreover, they feel that by participating in Cleaning Day they're part of larger consumer movement that promotes green ideology and opposes overconsumption.

***Aino:** It's so great that these kinds of events are organized, people need something like this. People learn to value the goods, so that people wouldn't practice throwaway consumption. And maybe you start to see things from different perspective, maybe you start to think that when you see the amount of stuff people have, people have so much, so maybe you learn to think in a different way, hopefully the values of people change so that they don't need to constantly buy something new to replace the old. You don't need so much.*

Cleaning Day community's values were considered important to oneself. However, to what extent varied between the participants. Moreover, some emphasized the preservation of environment and some regarded more important to oppose overconsumption. Further, all of the informants expressed anticonsumption values even though in varying degrees. Alternative marketplaces offer less commercialized option for exchanging goods and many seemed to avoid buying items such as furniture and clothes from traditional stores. In contrast to Sherry's (1990) research in which one flea market enthusiast states "*It's a place you can go to after you've looked everywhere else*" the informants of this study seemed to use alternative marketplaces as a primary outlet for accessing goods. For instance, Enni told during the informal conversations that when she was decorating her new apartment, she was looking for furniture first from secondhand markets such as online auction Huuto.net and online marketplace Tori.fi and only if she couldn't find what she wanted she settled with formal retail outlets. Even if this might have been partly due to the fact that she's a first-time homebuyer and was eager to save money for the payment of loan, it can also imply that frequenters of alternative marketplaces aim to resist formal marketplaces.

All of the informants seemed to restrict and reduce their consumption. For instance, Aino told that she considers every time whether she actually needs the product before purchasing even if the price is really low and Eeva stated that she tries to avoid purchasing in the first place. All of the informants referred to the amount of "stuff" they and everybody else have. They also noted that flea markets are full of unused "stuff" and unused clothes still with price tags on. Yet, the participants wished to find items in good condition and alternative marketplaces

allowed them to take advantage of people's short usage cycle. Generally, however, the amount of stuff was perceived negatively and created feelings of anxiety and hopefulness. In some cases, it was even seen to affect the willingness to go to a flea market. The feeling of anxiety towards stuff and shopping mania applied to both flea market and traditional retail contexts.

*Aino: I feel anxious about it. Sometimes I can't go to the flea market because of it, because there's so much, I get anxious when people have so much stuff and I almost feel exactly the same when I go to Hullut Päivät (shopping carnival at Stockmann department store). I can't take all this amount of stuff and buying, I won't buy. Still I know I'm also a consumer and I also buy but the amount of people buy I cannot understand. But I guess people will become wiser...*

This informant acknowledges that despite the fact she tries to avoid consumption-oriented places she is also consumer herself and cannot flee the market completely. Instead, she interacts with the market and aims to choose spaces that are less commercial (Cova & Rémy in Carù & Cova 2007, p. 62). Eeva implied that she avoids hypermarkets because they're hard to control and favored smaller stores. In this sense, joining alternative marketplaces was for her gaining control in life. Moreover, she enjoyed festivities and local flea markets in her neighborhood. When consuming in these spaces she feels part of larger consumer collective and is able to build relationships that normally wouldn't be possible in traditional markets. As Cova and Rémy (2007, p. 54) suggest the consumption experience is moving away from the dichotomy of social and commercial spheres to a relationship between people and things.

Cleaning Day serves as a social space where individuals take control in the creation of their own consumption experience. Sellers are responsible for bringing their own sales stands and cleaning their trash. Sellers market their selling points by self-made signs and other decorations such as balloons. Signs "Petra's and Mia's spring cleaning", "Ex-boyfriend's jackets 5 euros (or cheaper)" and "Try It, Buy It, Love It" indicate the sellers' own personality to others reducing social barrier between the strangers. They place their selling location on the event's virtual map and describe what they have for sale. Sellers can even choose to have their flea market in their own home instead of gathering in the park or a play court. Some sellers offer also an option for credit card and mobile payment. Hence, sellers

operate as small entrepreneurs who take care of all aspects of the purchase experience. They're collectively in charge of creating the experience for those who participate as buyers.

How aware and to what extent are consumers of their own co-creative role remains unclear. There has been some criticism lately towards community events that are organized by the citizens. Criticism especially towards Cleaning Day regards unsold goods that are sometimes discarded and left to the sales spots and untidiness of public spaces such as parks after the events. The informants also addressed some of these problems in their narratives.

**Eeva:** *The idea that you're responsible yourself is unnoticed by many. Maybe they think that this event is organized by some entity even though it's not. And that's why the places are messy after the event...it's not the fault of Cleaning Day but a fault of people.*

To overcome these challenges Cleaning Day community in Facebook aims to encourage participants to clean after themselves and either donate unsold items or take them to recycling point. It has also conducted a set of guidelines that they hope the participants to follow.

#### 4.1.4 Authenticity

It could be argued whether flea market full of materialized, mass mediated "stuff" is truly an authentic environment. However, as mentioned earlier what appeared many times in interviews is that the informants like to "wander around", "observe" and "relax" and alternative marketplaces serve a temporary escape from hectic lives. They expect from the experience, in a sense, "an immediate encounter with being" (Arnould & Price 1993). Authenticity in alternative marketplaces is tied to objects, sense of self and relationship that is formed when items are exchanged. Simply put authenticity derived is object-driven and both intrapersonal and interpersonal.

Object-related authenticity refers to originality of the items (Leigh et al. 2006). Originality is based on the nostalgia of the products. Some showed more interest towards old objects than new. Nostalgia is defined as a preference towards objects that were common or present when the individual was young (Belk 1991). The older informants had collectibles, such as furniture from the 1950's that they had acquired from the flea markets. They described that

these kind of furniture had been present in their childhood. Thus, flea markets are places where they can reconnect with their past. New objects can also hinder authenticity of the experience. Aino, for instance, avoided one self-service flea market due to the fact that it sold completely new things and couldn't understand "what kind of people go there". Hence flea market businesses that sell new stuff aside pre-owned items might be considered inauthentic, sterile and less "real" as they in this case resemble a traditional retail store.

Flea markets offer an experience in which a person can gain contact with his/her true self. As found by Papaoikonomou et al. (2011) on their study of ethical consumption, participating in alternative marketplace is similarly a process of constructing one's self-identity. Phrases such as "I'm a flea market girl" and "I'm a flea market hobbyists" reveal that flea markets are a great part of their self-identity. For the informants flea markets are places where they can also express their identities to others. The informants who were looking to buy especially secondhand clothes mentioned that when going around the market they constantly browse the sellers and make judgements based on their appearance. The items notably communicate the sellers' individual and affiliative identities (Schau & Gilly 2003). Individual identity reflects personal taste and affiliative identity situates the self socially and communicates the identity to the peers (Schau & Gilly 2003). Assessing the sellers' items is important process in treasure hunting and backs up the argument that disposition occurs more easily if two parties share a common identity (Lastovicka & Fernandez 2005). The next excerpt explains the meanings of possessions reflecting one's identity and how items symbolize "life stories" of the sellers.

**Enni:** *I first try to browse who's behind the sales tables. The tables sort of tell the sellers' life stories. And sometimes I've seen some people who I know and I've thought that maybe I can't go there because the table is private. I might even past the people I have a nodding acquaintance with because I don't want to be obtrusive.*

The informants often recount memories of their childhood and young adulthood when elaborating their flea market experiences. Memories relate to the first flea market experiences, bargains made and specific situations. Moreover, the influence of family socialization on the informants' consumption patterns and disposition behaviors is apparent.

**Tiina:** *I feel that my flea market hobby has started already when I was a child. I went a lot with my mother to wander around to flea markets and I remember that we went to UFF to buy some winter coats, and when VR makasiinit still existed I was there with my mother selling our stuff and I remember that already many days beforehand I was ironing my mother's clothes and organizing my toys...It was really fun already back then, I don't know if it was the flea market or selling or what but it was something I looked into with great enthusiasm.*

This shows that nostalgia is also present when the informants recount their memories of childhood experiences in alternative marketplaces. They're not only retro products that enable them to relive the past but also the whole act of participation. Flea markets remind the participants on their childhood and how things used to be. They also bring back the time when they had enjoyable experience with the person they share a strong bond with. Thus there are significant personal meanings related to the experience.

Alternative marketplaces offer consumers an experience of time before mass commercialization and when goods were exchanged in local markets. An idealist vision of the past is notably a factor influencing a birth of consumer communities and tribes (Cova 1996; Papaoikonomou et al. 2012).

Bargaining is a process that brings people closer to one another and the seller resembles "a producer" who is more easily approachable than clinical retailer. The process of bargaining can also offer a playful experience when the price is being negotiated. Bargaining is peculiar to shopping experience in flea markets and is a tool that enables the participants to form a dialogue. Sellers sometimes perceive bargaining negatively because it leads to decreased profits but there are some exceptions.

**Enni:** *...of course I always aim to get the highest price, but when you see that someone really gets excited about it (product) and it goes to his own use... I feel great and then the price doesn't matter so much anymore. But if you see really aggressive behavior and some men who try to buy women's shoes for example and you know they're not for their own use, it starts to irritate and I raise the price immediately.*

Here, it's noticeable that the lower price is more acceptable if the buyer gets the product for his own use. However, if the product is purposively acquired for resell, the reaction of the seller is to increase the price so that buyer's willingness to acquire the product reduces. This highlights the fact the possessions hold multiple meanings important for the owner and thus they want to be passed on to someone who understands their "real worth".

Transactions at flea markets remind a meeting between friends and might have a feeling of relationship rather than transaction and could be called as "boundary open" (Arnould & Price 1993). According to Arnould and Price (1993) in boundary open transactions service providers are actively involved and share their feelings. Sellers at flea markets often openly share stories of their belongings and thus, items acquired from the flea market can become cherished or even sacred so that they're treasured independent of their exchange value (Curasi et al. 2004).

**Aino:** *...I think it makes me happier if I know who have had it before, so that my happiness multiplies, whatever the thing is. The feeling multiplies and makes me feel that the thing is valuable even though it's not (monetarily).*

*I think it's very nice that I can talk with a person who owns the good. And he can tell me something about what I'm going to perhaps buy. Even though he's trying to sell it and he gets money from it but it's a kind of a shared joy. Both are happy. And it's not the same thing as you go to the store because there's the seller who works for a company and he's not selling goods of his own. It's a little bit different situation.*

As we can perceive, the story of the item can be meaningful to both parties. Aside legitimizing object's authenticity, storytelling can symbolize a rite of passage in which the seller gives up the object that characterizes his/her former life. Storytelling is important for establishing and sustaining inalienable wealth that is usually a case with the family heirlooms for instance (Curasi et al. 2004). Even though the sellers have decided to give up on the product they aim to preserve its legacy by storytelling. The object can entail many meanings and be kept as sacred, more significant and extraordinary than self (Belk et al. 1989; Curasi

2004). These meanings are then passed on from the seller to the buyer and form unique and authentic relationship between both parties.

#### 4.1.5 Trust

Alternative marketplaces offer a genuine shopping experience in which trust seems to play an important part. Trust is unquestionably a prerequisite of any sales transaction. For example, consumers rely on suppliers of products that they obey laws and follow regulations in production and that companies deliver quality they promise. According to this study participants see sellers of alternative marketplaces more trustworthy than retailers. Moreover, they actively look for signs of honesty and sincerity by evaluating the appearance of the sellers and stories they tell. Alternative marketplaces build trust that enables development of a bond between strangers.

In general, trust is declining in society. People don't trust each other more than they did in the past and consumers trust companies less today than in the past (PwC 2015). In this study, the informants regarded vendors of the flea markets who trade their own pre-used items more reliable than salespersons of traditional retailers who earn their income by selling their employers' products. Consumers recognize that they're often being manipulated by companies who try to make maximum profit for their stakeholders and by those whose paychecks depend on good sales results. Therefore, they're in the search of open and transparent connections.

**Enni:** *...I went there and tried one dress on. There was not a lot of people and I think I was the only one and the lady was like "try it on, try it on" and was totally concentrated only on me, and she said "that fits you very well" and "you should try this other one as well" ...It was a great feeling, because I knew I got much honest opinion than in stores. She was selling them (clothes) with ridiculously low price so I knew that she wasn't really earning anything and she still said it all.*

**Marja:** *I bought these huge pillows from one woman once. We were going down the hill and I bought them on the way. There were lots of people and I asked her if it's okay if I pick them up when I return. "I pay them already and*



*grab them when we come back”...! I would have never remembered that woman if she wouldn’t have recognized me and said “Oh you came now to pick these”...I think she recognized because I had my dog with me. She said she didn’t have any trouble recognizing me and I was like “So nice that you remembered”.*

These excerpts imply the openness towards trusting strangers. The setting in alternative marketplace differs already significantly from the stores. The participants purchase items that have been used by others and buying from the person who is a stranger requires trust. A peer is not as legitimized party as a retailer who has its reputation in stake if acting unreliably towards the customer. This is why the fact that peers are considered more reliable than retailers is an interesting finding. The explanation however could be found from the nature of Cleaning Day event. Informants addressed that people participate in Cleaning Day to organize and make room for their closets but also to see other people and enjoy the atmosphere. Enni’s comment reveals this: *“I think there’s less pressure to buy and sell in Cleaning Day. It’s more an outdoor event than place where you’re obliged to sell”*. Thus, not all sellers are chasing profits but rather they’re looking to form meaningful connections. In the former excerpt, the informant greatly appreciates sincerity of the seller who assisted her in making purchase decision. In the latter excerpt the informant was delighted by the honesty of the seller who recognized her still after few hours from their first encounter and reminded her of the items she had already paid. These acts gave to the informants a sense of security and a feeling that they’re among caring and trustworthy people.

Still, as in retail environment, some sellers in alternative marketplaces might use selling methods to pursue the other to buy. Sometimes the buyers were reserved towards sellers’ stories. This was apparent in occasions when the deal felt “too good to be true”.

**Tiina:** *Last fall I participated in Cleaning Day and I was pregnant and I needed to buy myself a winter coat because I knew that none of my coats would fit me in December. So I remember that I found a coat from this Asian woman who told me that she used to be a housekeeper in a rich family in Espoo and the lady, her boss, gave her this Joutsen Tessa coat, filled with down. She was selling the coat because it was too big for her. She sold it to me with 15 euros.*

*It's something that I can still recall. The coat saved my winter, and I'll save it for the future. I'm not sure whether the story of the coat's origin was true.*

**Enni:** *Once I found this cheap Tara Jarmon coat and I immediately started to speculate why she had sold it. Maybe she had financial troubles or what is this thing, did she have a hidden agenda...*

Professional sellers are seen in negative light as they resell products they have acquired with minimum price as possible or in extreme cases stolen and counterfeit items. Professional sellers are often perceived as unethical and to play against the rules of flea markets. These sellers practice trading through alternative channels and thus don't pay any tax. Many flea markets organizers have noted professionals' negative influence on flea market atmosphere aside their tax exploitation and have conducted guidelines trying to prevent professionalism. These include setting yearly limits to the amount of table rents and checking identification before entrance. Yet, professionalism seems to be one factor that reduces trust between individuals and make them doubtful towards each other. However, those who visit flea markets frequently learn usually to recognize the professionals and avoid them. Additionally, professionalism creates boundaries within the marketplace as there are two larger groups of participants, hobbyists and professionals. However, a sense of community is deepened when the hobbyists collectively take a stand against professionals.

#### 4.1.6 Social connections

Socializing with other people was strongly present throughout the informants' narratives and recycling event's contribution to community building was recognizable. The participants enjoy interacting with other partakers. In this sense, they don't only go to alternative marketplaces to purchase products but to socialize with their peers. Alternative consumption seems to foster social interaction and this has been well acknowledged in other studies as well (Belk 2010; Ozanne & Ballantine 2010; Albinsson & Perera 2012). Naturally, being able to buy secondhand item from the flea market requires some amount interaction between two parties. According to Belk (2010) sharing creates a bond and feelings of social solidarity but yet, not everyone wishes that kind of bonding. This is similar to view of Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) who regard that consumers are more in search of lower costs and convenience than establishing relationships with other consumers. Still, participants of the present study held as

important that the event brings people together and creates a sense of community. Cleaning Day was seen as an event where they can meet new people as well as see their friends.

Cleaning Day unites people living in the same neighborhoods and builds community. For instance, Marja told that before she was familiar with Cleaning Day she was surprised by a neighbor who wished her “Happy Cleaning Day” in the apartment building’s hall. Additionally, Enni compared Cleaning Day to yard sales that are popular especially in the suburban neighborhoods in the United States. The participants’ narratives indicate clearly that Cleaning Day is primarily a communal outdoor event. Marja explains: “*It (Cleaning Day) is so much more. Someone makes pancakes and sells coffee. It’s a place where you spend time.*” The informants recalled the groups of friends and families they have seen in the event. They also recounted the easiness of participation and the fact that they can only take a few bags of clothes with them and spend a day in a park with their friends. Some indicated that selling was actually secondary and that the primary purpose was to “spend time” as seen in the latter excerpt. They also associated sunny weather with the event that likely signals their favorable feelings towards the event and the atmosphere.

**Enni:** *Every time I’ve been to Cleaning Day it’s been sunny. I have very sunny memories of Cleaning Day.*

**Eeva:** *One time I was selling stuff with my boyfriend in small city in Finland...and there was hardly any people...but it was sunny at least and fun. This was in the summer two years ago. Sun was shining and it was really fun.*

Socializing also occurs many times within individuals’ own networks and Cleaning Day is a place where individuals meet their friends and families. They can either go to sell or wander around with a group of friends.

**Tiina:** *It’s a uniting event, there can never be enough of these kinds of events, and usually you go as a group of friends to sell, or wander around and after that you go to have a bite. It’s an excellent way to see your friends rather than just go to have a coffee like you normally do. I think it’s a very positive thing and I think there should be even more of these (events) that get people moving.*

What participants appreciate in Cleaning Day is that “ordinary people start organizing events and go out”. In this way the informants acknowledged their own and collective co-creative role in the experience. Mostly, they felt that the participants of the event have similar consumption values and interests as theirs even though the participants are different age and come from different places. For instance, the informants considered the participants to be the ones who are interested in recycling but still being part of mass and not distinct from other people. What was perceivable is that the informants felt close mentally with their local peers, and people who lived further away felt more distant. They inscribed that they couldn’t picture “what is the Cleaning Day like elsewhere”.

Factor that seems to reduce a sense of community and enjoyment of alternative marketplaces is the growing popularity of second hand consumption that has exploded during the recent years. Seemingly, the financial crisis has lead to the increased amount of shoppers at alternative marketplaces that cause side effects such as crowdedness and long lines that again cause feelings of frustration and stress for the participants. Enni and Tiina tell about their experiences when visiting a flea market in Helsinki, organized in Kaapelintehdas.

**Enni:** *...There was also a blogger flea market and first I waited to get in, there was almost 100 meter line, and then I went upstairs where the bloggers were and then there was another 20 meter line and a doorman who was letting people in. There was about 15 bloggers, I bought a pair of jeans but it was an experience that got me to think that this is too much. The flea market kind of lost its meaning when people were waiting in the line, it shouldn't be that way.*

**Tiina:** *...so I'm thinking if there's any sense to wait in the 800 meter line just to go to flea market, because obviously you think in the back of the 800 meter line whether there's going to be anything left to buy when you get in.*

When the group of flea market hobbyists is growing and new people join the community, it might arouse contradictory feelings among those who have visited flea markets already since they were little. Of course more participants mean better offering but at the same time competition between the participants increases when there's now more people trying to find the best possible bargain. Moreover, the participants who have obtained a feeling that flea markets belong to only marginality of consumers is diminishing and this might have an

unfavorable effect on their sense of community. Development of the community can have a pessimistic welcoming by the members as showed by Jonsson (2006, Belk 2010) who studied one Swedish car-sharing organization. With nearly 340 members some of the original members were worried that the community was getting too large since they couldn't personally know each other anymore and this made it more difficult to sustain feelings of community and enjoy the experience fully.

## 4.2 Summary

Six large themes were found to be present in consumers' collective experiences. First, "good deals" define informants' experiences of alternative marketplaces and are the motivators and outcomes of participation. "Good deals" are valued for their utility (e.g. save money) but they also arouse significant amount of pleasure, and thus are valued for their hedonic benefits as well. In addition construct of "good deals" holds a social element. This was apparent when informants were explaining their memories on the possessions they have found from alternative marketplaces. Second, alternative marketplaces serve as an escape from everyday life. The activity treasure hunting is perceived enjoyable and exciting. Moreover, alternative marketplaces offer stimulating experiences where the people can become captured by the atmosphere. Third, informants regard Cleaning Day to promote environmental awareness and recycling and alternative marketplaces provide them a way to gain control over their own consumption habits. They obtain control through resisting traditional marketplaces and reducing their own consumption. Fourth, informants are looking for authentic experiences and forms of object-driven as well as existential authenticity were found. Authenticity is derived from nostalgia, self-authentication and genuine, boundary open transactions. Fifth, trust is present in transactions and in social interaction. People constantly evaluate the trustworthiness of each other. Lastly, people value relationships that are formed and sustained in alternative marketplaces. Formation happens usually through random dialogues with peer participants. Informants also go to alternative marketplaces to spend time and meet friends. They also acknowledge their own co-creative role in production of collective experience.

# 5 Implications

As detailed above, I found that consumption in alternative marketplaces has multiple meanings and these meanings are both personal and social. The aim of this study was particularly gain an in-depth understanding of collective consumption experiences of participants of alternative marketplaces, and I recognized six dimensions (*construct of “good deals”, escape from everyday life, control, authenticity, trust and social connections*). What was perceivable is that consumers are indeed in a search of experiences and appreciate festive elements of the recycling event. However, purchasing hasn't lost its meaning, quite the contrary and people still appreciate utility as much as hedonistic experiences. Still, how consumers access items is changing and the importance of meaningful experiences aside that growing.

## 5.1 Discussion

### 5.1.1 Creating meanings through exchange

Secondhand products are the foundation of the event. Cleaning Day and other alternative marketplaces exist because people buy especially clothes more than ever (Huili 2013). According to the article of Huili (2013) every Finnish person buys 13 kilograms of new clothes and one kilogram of perused clothes per year on average. Seemingly, there's an evident need for alternative channels where items can be exchanged, otherwise the products will end up directly to the landfills. Consumers today can quite easily sell their items that are not in use and buy the items they need as preused. Hence, participants pay attention to the items' price and quality as price reflects affordability and quality longevity of the item. Still, secondhand products' objective qualities are not the only meanings the participants derive. Hedonistic pleasures of the alternative marketplace experience are also vital. People look for experiences that let them forget their everyday lives for a while. Thus, shopping in alternative marketplace can be shopping with a goal or shopping as a goal (Babin et al. 1994).

Sociality doesn't seem to replace utility but is gaining foot in the consumption experience. Social interaction between strangers in alternative marketplaces usually takes place when exchanging products and through random dialogues. Often only socialization occurs when the shopper asks the price from the seller. This might imply that the participants still value

convenience and cost efficiency over social interaction. Yet, social interaction that happens in the exchange is not regarded as disturbing or uncomfortable but rather an important aspect of the experience. Consumers are open to engage in conversation if they happen to come across it.

Belk (2007) argues that that economic exchange might forge economic obligations but hardly creates a social bond and that after the exchange the persons may walk away without needing to ever see each other again. Still, interactions can entail many important meanings to the participants. Sellers use storytelling by means through which meanings attached to products are transferred to the potential new owner. Products acquired from alternative marketplaces can become cherished later in life as often a case with furniture. Usually the seller obtains a great role in these nostalgic memories. Thus products form relationships and hold significant linking value that is common for tribes (Cova & Cova 2002). Still, it's dependent on individual characteristics how much the participants actually value the social linking element and to what extent s/he decides to socialize.

Seemingly, the items develop a dialogue between the participants as different meanings are exchanged. There might be also two forms of sharing that Belk (2010) has recognized. Some participants engage in form of sharing out and practice commodity exchange outside the extended self while sustaining economic boundaries. These individuals regard transaction more monetary and maintain separateness from others. Yet, some participants experience transaction more meaningful if they know the origin of the product and perceive that the item delights the other. They are even willing to give up on monetary compensation at the cost of other person's happiness. In this sense, they may construe a form of sharing in with the persons they become more familiar with during the encounters.

### 5.1.2 Consuming experiences not just products

What could be grasped from the interviews is that the consumers attach variety of meanings to their collective experiences in alternative marketplaces. As represented above, many meanings are created during the exchange. However, there are also meanings that consumer attach to their participation and that doesn't necessarily involve exchange of products or money. They can obtain pleasure by already being present and taking part in the event.

Furthermore, the participants become highly involved in the experience as they're responsible for creating the experience for themselves and for others.

The alternative marketplace experience offers the participants many types of pleasures. Cleaning Day shares common elements with music festivals and art fairs for instance where consumers are absorbers of the experience. As already noted earlier Jordan (2004) has proposed four types of pleasures: physio-pleasure, ideo-pleasure, psycho pleasure and socio-pleasure. Some may experience physio-pleasure through touching and smelling when going through piles of stuff and enjoying the atmosphere. Participating in the recycling event can also be a source of ideo-pleasures since it relates to people's values. They feel contentment when being part of something they truly value, such as an event that supports environmental responsibility. Moreover, they obtain pleasure when doing something they really enjoy, whether it's the adventure the marketplace offers or nostalgic products they're looking to find. Psycho-pleasures are derived from cognitive and emotional reactions to consumption experience in the alternative marketplace. For example, participants can reach experience that is similar to "flow", typical in high-risk activities such as skydiving (Celsi et al. 1993). The participants can totally lose a sense of time and place when wandering around and be led by the atmosphere. However, things such as crowds and long lines are likely to disturb the experience and cause negative responses.

These external harms can also hinder the pleasure that comes from being together, socio-pleasure. Crowdedness causes stress and arouses negative feelings towards others. A sense of community is then disappearing when other participants are seen as a cause of stressful experience. Yet, often participants seem to obtain a sense of belonging even though they many times participate in flea markets alone. This could be because all of the participants have similar routines and rituals and know which practices are suitable (e.g. bargaining) and which not (e.g. stealing). The participants regard negatively those people who play against the rules of flea markets.

Some informants acknowledged the high involvement participation requires. Thus some participants are likely to be more performance oriented and finding "good deals" is reward for them. They get pleasure primarily from enjoyment of treasure hunting and the flea market is a field where they perform different activities. Participants of Cleaning Day are producers of their own experiences. Public and sometimes private space serves "a play scene" where



sellers and buyers are “the actors”. For instance, buyers choose which places they visit by scouting the offering on virtual map and decide which sellers’ tables they look at more closely. Additionally, the participants influence the experience of others as well. Sellers set up the premises for purchasing and their collective activities form the milieu for the event. On top of that their ornaments, signs and offerings are all aspects that influence the atmosphere. The atmosphere is composed of people and a sense of community that come from being together with the peers. The participants are looking to form authentic sense of self as well authentic relationship with other participants. The collective sense of self is composed during the co-creation of experience when a person becomes deeply engaged with self and others, succeeds to break the boundary between “me” and “them” and feels that her peers can be trusted. This supports the previous argument that a collective consciousness rises from acknowledgement of each participant’s role (Hunt et al. 2012)

### 5.1.3 Towards tribal and sharing society

The participants of Cleaning Day share an interest and desire towards secondhand products, familiar to subcultures of consumption such as Harley Davidson motor bikers (Schouten & McAlexander 1995) and skydivers (Celsi et al. 1993). In addition, they oppose big retailers and practice forms of anticonsumption. Cleaning Day is a community with its own values and a strong sustainability ethos. The participants regard that Cleaning Day promotes ethical consumption and hold these values important to themselves as well, though in varying degrees.

Arguably, Cleaning Day is a tribe rather than a subculture of consumption. The participants are heterogenic group of people and a sense of community is rather derived from social interaction enabled by secondhand products than common value base or lifestyles. Flea markets are not similarly part of consumers’ everyday life as is the case with motorbikes and Harley Davidson bikers (Schouten & McAlexander 1995). Rather consumers use alternative marketplaces to escape from their ordinary everyday lives (Goulding et al. 2002). However, they can also regard alternative marketplaces as an easy way to discard their unused items and use it purely because of functionality.

A tribe is temporal and exists when people gather together (Cova & Cova 2002) as already noted earlier in this study. Cleaning Day is a great example of a spatial marketplace that only

comes alive during the one day when people take their pre-used items to streets. The event's online community is active all year round and keeps the tribe alive between the events. Yet, belonging to a tribe doesn't necessarily have to be temporal. Many alternative marketplaces that operate online are active all the time and the consumer can access the items whenever and wherever s/he wants.

Tribal theory and sharing rhetoric imply that consumers are primarily looking for strengthening their social relationships through exchange. Still, there is still very little evidence that consumers would actually start valuing sociality over utility. Rather they exist side by side. Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) in their study of Zipcar stated that companies that are able to emphasize convenience and saving money over fostering social connections will have a competitive advantage in sharing economy industry. Until now consumers have appreciated the products and services that help them to construct identity and communicate it to others and sharing economy serves first and foremost consumers' ever changing identities (Eckhardt & Bardhi 2015). Being able to access easily products without even needing to own them is an ideal for the consumers who want to explore multiple identities. Hence, it seems that there isn't a clear shift from "me" to "we" in consumption just yet.

## **5.2 Theoretical implications**

The study brings new insights to research on collaborative consumption and alternative marketplaces that is still very limited area in consumer studies. This study also introduces a new context for the research of contemporary shopping experiences. Former studies on alternative consumption have concentrated on motivations and behaviors of individuals. This study contributes to the existing literature by focusing on the meanings that the participants attach to their collective experiences in alternative marketplaces. The study was following existential-phenomenological methodology and my purpose was to explain participants' experiences as they're lived (Thompson et al. 1989). The participants of Cleaning Day have selected an alternative mode in consumption, but still operate inside the consumer culture. My aim was not to find results that can be generalized or directly applied to other contexts but try to understand phenomenon and how the individuals perceive it.

The study extends the research of alternative consumption. The focus of previous studies have been more in the individual and the purpose of this study was to form an understanding

of the social aspects of the experience and collective consciousness that arises during the consumption experience without still neglecting experiences' personal aspects as well. This study supports Herrmann's (1991) notion that "the very act of selling used goods, along with their history, at very low prices fosters a generalized sense of community". However, a formation of sense of community in alternative marketplaces requires aside utilitarian factors crossing social boundaries through meaningful encounters, trust between strangers and involvement in co-production of the experience. A sense of community in alternative marketplaces is thus rather complicated construct that needs to be further investigated. Especially role of trust in alternative marketplaces should be studied since it seems to be an important prerequisite in forming relationships and enabler of exchange but yet have remained understudied concept in alternative consumption studies. PwC's (2015) consumer study shows that 89 % percent believe that sharing economy is based on trust between users and providers. So trust is not only essential in forming a relationship between consumers and companies these days but also in peer-to-peer interactions as already this study indicates.

In line with Belk's (2007) findings there's very little evidence that people would completely forget their possessions and begin to value their attachments to people instead. Utility seems to be as desirable as hedonistic benefits. Still, valuing utility and longevity could also mean that consumers are willing to re-evaluate the role of possessions in their life and shift to buy only what they actually need and borrow or rent the goods they only need occasionally.

Lastly, what we can perceive is that social connections are gaining foot in consumption experiences and could even become equal motive with constructing one's identity through possessions. Perhaps possessions in identity construction loose meaning, and social identity becomes more valued and more self-defining. This was already suggested by Albinsson and Perera (2010) who noted that the core of consumer value today not only comprises objects but also social interaction of the participants. Thus, future research should further explore value configurations of the consumers who operate outside traditional marketplaces. Perhaps it's no longer only what is consumed and where but also with whom.

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