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Radical Circles

The contribution of *small groups of individuals* challenging the dominant visions and transforming entire industries

Abstract: The rising cost of R&D activities and the increasing complexity of technologies and markets have led to the widespread diffusion of collaborative and open innovation processes. As a consequence, different open innovation paradigms have become the protagonists of many innovation strategies. Although this type of approach is an optimal strategy to identify solutions to specific problems and introduce functional innovations (Verganti, 2017), it is less useful when a company wants to develop new visions. This study shows that Radical Circles, i.e., small groups of radical individuals, can support the development of new visions. This work is based on the examination of two Radical Circles that created two significant cultural movements: Memphis and Slow Food. Radical Circles have particular characteristics, such as a yearning for rebellion, voluntary and closed participation, and peer criticism. We discuss the implications for companies seeking to introduce new visions.

Keywords: Radical Circle, Vision, Innovation of Meaning

1 INTRODUCTION

The rising cost of R&D activities and the increasing complexity of technologies and markets have led to the widespread diffusion of collaborative and open innovation processes (e.g., Shan et al., 1994, Chesbrough, 2003, Huston and Sakkab, 2006; Laursen and Salter, 2006; Pisano and Verganti, 2008). In addition to the value of dyadic collaborations between two firms, the value of these open collaborations for innovation has been highlighted for networks and alliances (e.g., Mowery et al., 1996; Hagedoorn and Schakenraad, 1994; Sala et al., 2011), collaborations with universities and public research centres (Salter and Martin, 2001; Leten et al., 2014), and collaborations with large groups of individuals and users - crowdsourcing (e.g., Howe, 2006b; Chesbrough, 2006). The importance of collaborative innovation has been especially highlighted for the initial phases of the development process. Indeed, the integration of different perspectives and inputs is considered pivotal to developing radical innovations (e.g., Leifer et al., 2000; McDermott and O'Connor, 2002).

As Verganti (2017) argues, outside-in approaches, such as open innovation or user-centred innovation, better support the creative problem-solving approach with superior ideas to solve established problems and mainly working on a new 'how', a novel way to address the challenges considered relevant in a marketplace. A novel solution may introduce incremental or even radical improvements (Christensen, 1997), but always in the same direction: these are "more of the same" innovations. In situations involving a high degree of uncertainty, such as when the aim is to foster a new vision, traditional problem-solving methods taught in business schools tend to be ineffective, even if managers make use of these types of new organizational arrangements (Madsberg and Rasmussen, 2014). Traditional open innovation practices are not considered to be the best approach when companies and/or innovation managers seeks to go beyond finding new ideas and solutions to existing problems (how) (Verganti, 2009 and 2017; Sinek, 2011). When a company seeks to discover new reasons to use (why) products and services (Dell'Era and Verganti, 2007; Dell'Era et al, 2008b; Dell'Era and Bellini, 2009; Verganti, 2009; Dell'Era et al., 2011; Dell'Era and Verganti, 2011), small groups of radical individuals can be more apt (Verganti, 2009; Verganti and Shani, 2016). In other words, this type of innovation concerns a novel vision that redefines the problems worth addressing and takes innovation to a higher level - not only a new "how" but especially a new "why", proposing a new reason why people use things, a new value proposition, i.e., a novel interpretation of what is relevant and meaningful in a market, a new direction (Verganti, 2017).

For example, although now developed through an open source process, the Linux operating system was initially conceived by a small group of people. A Radical Circle is a small group of radical individuals who collaborate beyond formal organizational structures to develop innovation of meanings (Verganti, 2009; Verganti and Shani, 2016; Altuna et al., 2017).

To understand the contribution of these small groups to the development of new visions, we studied two Italian Radical Circles that disruptively influenced the industrial design and food industries in the '80s: Memphis and Slow Food. Given that not all small groups of Radical Circles lead to new visions, we aimed to investigate and identify the particular features of Radical Circles to highlight the differences and similarities with other open innovation paradigms. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we present the relevant literature on open innovation and Radical Circles. In the third section, we introduce our methodology and research framework. Thereafter, we present the two case studies. Finally, we discuss the results and some implications.

2   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical background is organized in two sections: the first explores the rich and consolidated open innovation literature, while the second introduces emergent reflections on Radical Circles.

2.1   *Open Innovation*

Open innovation is defined as a distributed innovation process that rests on managing the flow of knowledge across firm boundaries (Chesbrough and Bogers, 2014). These inflows and outflows are in turn able to accelerate the internal development process and the external exploitation process (Chesbrough, 2006). The OI approach is based on the classic innovation funnel consisting of numerous ideas selected to develop just a few innovations. This approach enriches the funnel by removing a traditional barrier: the organizational boundaries become permeable rather than closed. Ideas, technologies, and solutions from external environments are incorporated in the funnel and the resulting innovations may also be exploited outside the firm (Chesbrough and Crowther, 2006; Enkel et al., 2009; West and Bogers, 2014).

In the inbound or outside-in process, the firm enriches its own knowledge through external stimuli by monitoring the external environment (Laursen and Salter, 2006; Lettl et al., 2006; Piller and Walcher, 2006; West and Bogers, 2014). The outside is rife with ideas, technologies, and solutions that can usefully enrich internal innovations or resolve internal innovation problems. Firms can improve their capacity to absorb external stimuli through enhanced networking activities, more collaborations with external actors, or the greater use of other organisations' intellectual property (Parida et al., 2012).

Users, suppliers, and competitors are the main sources of inbound OI. Engaging the right partners is fundamental to appropriately applying the OI approach and requires leveraging the right incentives (Füller et al., 2008; Frey et al., 2011; Pellizzoni et al., 2015). Moreover, managing manifold sources of knowledge implies the greater relevance of networks (Dittrich and Duysters, 2007; Chesbrough and Prencipe, 2008), innovation intermediaries (Sawhney et al., 2005; Piller and Walcher, 2006; Jeppesen and Lakhani, 2010), and innovative means of involving end users (Fredberg and Piller, 2011).

Crowdsourcing is currently one of the most popular keywords in the (open) innovation community, and the main question in both academia and business is how to tap and exploit the considerable potential of the crowd (or "collective brain" in the words of Ebner et al., 2008). Howe published the very first definition of crowdsourcing in a blogpost for Wired magazine

in June 2006 (Howe, 2006a). The work titled "The Rise of Crowdsourcing" defined the concept as the act of outsourcing work to a group of people (the so-called "crowd") rather than a specific agent/contractor (an organization, informal or formal team, or individual) or solving the task internally. Outsourcing takes the form of an open call through which the focal organization engages online communities to solve problems (Howe, 2006a). Two years later, Brabham (2008) published the first scientific work using the word crowdsourcing, defining it as "a distributed problem-solving model" and evidently supporting Howe's view. Moreover, he added that crowdsourcing cannot be considered an open-source practice, since "problems solved and products designed by the crowd become the property of companies, who turn large profits off from this crowd labor" (Brabham, 2008). The crowd is often an undefined (and generally large) network of people who work collaboratively or individually (Howe, 2006b). Although crowdsourcing can entail different populations, most studies examine customers or users. Crowdsourcing is now widely used in a number of domains (e.g., automotive, see Audi[1], fashion, see Threadless, photography, see iStockphoto, fast food, see McDonalds[2]). Moreover, the very specific purpose can vary across cases, the most common objectives being idea generation (e.g., Audi or Threadless) and engineering issues (e.g., Linux). Regardless of the application domain and the nature of the task, central to crowdsourcing is an easily identifiable and transmittable task/problem (Afuah and Tucci, 2012).

2.2   *Radical Circles*

When a firm's willingness to change extends beyond finding new solutions to existing problems and is aimed at developing new visions, innovation of meaning can be a valuable new way of thinking (Verganti, 2009; Verganti and Shani, 2016). The focus here is on why a product is used, i.e., its purpose, rather than how it is used, or the product (what) per se. For instance, in the case of McDonald's, a new burger with a different combination of ingredients would not be an innovation of meaning, since the reason for buying the new burger remains the same: to refuel. Instead, to innovate the meaning of its burger (or food in general), McDonald's would have to stop thinking of eating as refuelling and develop a new interpretation and reason to eat (why).

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[1] For further information, see: http://www.michaelbartl.com/article/audi/
[2] For further information, see:
http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-09-15/mcdonald-s-is-crowdsourcing-its-next-hit-burger

The development of new meanings requires collaborating with external networks to expose companies to different views (Dell'Era et al., 2008a; Dell'Era and Verganti, 2009; Verganti, 2009; Dell'Era and Verganti; 2010; Dell'Era and Verganti, 2013; Brode et al., 2014; Verganti and Dell'Era, 2014; Morillo et al., 2015). The notion of external input is not new, especially in the case of radical innovation (Buchanan and Margolin, 1995; Cooper and Press, 1995; Petrowski 1996; Leifer et al., 2000; McDermott and O'Connor, 2002; Karjalainen, 2003; Friedman, 2003; Lloyd and Snelders, 2003; Bayazit, 2004; Norman, 2004; O'Connor and Ayers, 2005; Redstrom, 2006; Capaldo, 2007). In the case of innovation of meaning, external people are the 'interpreters' belonging to either the world of cultural production (e.g., sociologists, anthropologists, or artists) or the world of technology (e.g., retailers, suppliers of technology, designers, or users). To drive innovation of meaning, firms must enter into dialogue with this external network, which enables taking a step back from their own view of the industry and facilitates a more holistic interpretation of the surrounding sociocultural arena.

Inspired by earlier research on democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 1992) and collaborative circles (Farrell, 2001), Verganti (2009) argues that behind any good vision is a "Radical Circle". Tightly collaborating in such a closely knit primary group, outside formal organizational schemes or what is conventional, individuals facilitate and promote each other's creativity and innovation, coevolving and emerging with a radical vision. Some of the most intriguing and value-creative events in innovation derive from heterodox interpretation and envisioning (Verganti and Öberg, 2013). The outcomes of integrated envisioning, ideation, and collaboration through reflection encourages the small group to collectively engender a new vision that radically differs from the pre-existing vision, shaping the vision of the larger societies the members are part of (Verganti and Shani, 2016).

These conversations and discussions are eased if the interpreters have certain abilities beyond knowledge. In other words, knowledge per se is not sufficient for the interpretation process. Through listening to interpreters, firms can tap into different (and maybe contrasting) insights and knowledge that they can exploit to address new visions and propose new meanings (Verganti, 2009).

3   RESEARCH PROCESS

This paper explores the potential of small groups of people (named *Radical Circles*) to propose new visions that can significantly influence entire industries (Verganti and Shani, 2016). More precisely, we aim to identify the particular features of Radical Circles in comparison to more

traditional open innovation paradigms. For this reason, we selected two Italian Radical Circles that disruptively influenced the industrial design and food industries in the '80s: Memphis and Slow Food.

3.1   *Research Methodology*

Due to the complex system of variables that characterize the problem from a methodological perspective, we adopted a case study approach that enabled us to develop a holistic and contextualized analysis. We considered this method as suitable to the exploratory nature of our study as it allows not only exploring the phenomenon in its complexity, but also identifying the variables we deem critical (Yin, 2003; Voss et al., 2002). While our study is not inductive, it aims to exploit the insights from both case studies to illustrate the particularities of radical circles (Siggelkow, 2007). This approach enables close correspondence between the theory and the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The paper relies on multiple and varied sources of information in developing the illustrative case studies. Specifically, data were collected from interviews, company websites and other secondary sources, such as business reports, presentations, press releases, and magazine articles between 2013 and 2015. We analysed the data using an iterative process, moving back and forth between the data and the theory. More specifically, we analysed the documents gathered, and transcribed the interviews using an iterative process consisting of three main phases: reading, coding, and interpreting (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). To ensure the integrity of our data, we triangulated the multiple sources, independently read the data and information, and discussed our interpretations in face-to-face meetings to resolve potential misunderstandings and divergent views. As previously mentioned, the exploratory study analyses two Italian Radical Circles selected based on the theoretical sampling logic (Siggelkow, 2007).

First, we operationalized the definition of Radical Circles and searched for small groups of people who proposed new visions even if they did not necessarily belong to the same organization. Accordingly, we selected Radical Circles that satisfied the following two criteria: (i) a group of a few members, i.e., a *circle*; (ii) a group of people able to propose new visions that influence entire industries, i.e., *radicals*. This theoretical sampling technique allowed an experimental study of the phenomenon of interest under particularly insightful circumstances (Siggelkow, 2007).

From a practical point of view, we identified a preliminary list of six potential Radical Circles for the analysis: Memphis, Slow Food, Zboys[3], Street Food[4], Reggio Children[5] and Free Software Foundation[6]. The selection of the two cases relies on the basic principles of theoretical sampling (Mason, 2002; Pettigrew, 1990). A handful of important reasons have driven us to study Slow Food and Memphis. First, both case studies are paradigmatic examples of radical circles which have deeply influenced the development of industries such as industrial design and furniture (Memphis) and food (Slow Food). Second, we selected the two radical circles because of data access. In particular, three of the authors have had a long research collaboration with key informants involved in the activities of these radical circles, and this was a key factor to enable data access. The existence of significant amounts of information provides a unique opportunity to dig deeper in the understanding of the role of radical circles in conceiving new visions. The final sample comprises two Radical Circles that met the aforementioned criteria.

We used multiple data sources: semi-structured interviews with key players and archival data, including business reports, presentations, press releases, and magazine articles (see Table 1).

Table 1. Data Collection

Source	Data
Face-to-face Interview (about 10h)	- Alberto Arossa, Communication officer at Slow Food and Member of the Slow Food team that is running Nutrire Milano, Mercato della Terra and Slow Food Editore (17th July 2014) - Silvia Barbero, Founder of Slow Food and Vice-President of the University of Gastronomic Sciences (18th July 2014) - Paolo Bolzacchini and Alessandro Cecchini, Co-Founders of Mi.Cibo (Members of the Slow Food teams that are running the projects Nutrire Milano and Mercato della Terra) (19th March 2014) - Michele De Lucchi, Founder of Amdl and member of Memphis (23rd March 2016) - Sebastiano Sardo, Former Slow Food employee and Member of the team that consulted on Eataly and current Eataly employee (19th July 2014) - Matteo Thun, Founder of Matteo Thun & Partners and member of Memphis (25th February 2016)
Web Interview and Speech	- Aldo Cibic: www.educational.rai.it/lezionicididesign/designers/CIBICA.htm - Carlo Petrini (Global Food Movement): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Flqg1-o_pZY - Ettore Sottsass: www.educational.rai.it/lezionididesign/designers/SOTTSASSJR.E.htm - Matteo Thun: www.educational.rai.it/lezionididesign/designers/THUNM.htm
Book	- Buck A and Vogt M (1993). *Matteo Thun - Designer Monograph*

[3] A collective of twelve Californian men from Santa Monica and Venice who revolutionized the world of skating in the mid-1970s.

[4] This is an Italian movement that was institutionalized in 2008 and initiated by six people wanting to re-evaluate the concept of street food.

[5] After the Second World War, a group of people in Reggio Emilia (Italy) worked hard to develop a new concept of education that considered the child as an active, competent, and capable subject. The model is named Reggio Children, and is renowned worldwide.

[6] This is a collective that started in the 1970s and advocates the free use and sharing of software.

	- Cibic A (2010). *Rethinking happiness. Fai agli altri quello che vorresti fosse fatto a te*
	- De Lucchi M (1983). *Sofisticazione a sofisticazione*
	- De Lucchi M (2015). *I Miei Orribili e Meravigliosi Clienti*
	- Doveil F (2003). *Aldo Cibic*
	- Memphis (2001). *Memphis*
	- Petrini C (2004). *Buono, pulito e giusto: principi di una nuova gastronomia*
	- Petrini C and Padovani G (2006). *Slow Food Revolution. A new culture for eating and living*
	- Petrini C (2010). *Terra Madre – Come non farci mangiare dal cibo*
	- Petrini C (2013). *Cibo e Libertà – Slow Food: storie di gastronomia per la liberazione*
	- Petrini C (2014). *La coscienza del cibo*
	- Radice B (1985). *Memphis – Research, Experiences, Result, Failures and Successes of New Design*
	- Thun M (2013). *The Index Book*
	- Video Documentary *The Story of Slow Food*
Web	- www.fondazioneslowfood.com
	- www.fsf.org
	- www.raiscuola.rai.it/articoli/memphis-lezioni-di-design/7109/default.aspx (Memphis, Lezioni di Design)
	- www.slowfood.it
	- www.slowfood.com
	- www.slowfoodeditore.it
	- www.terramadre.info

We conducted six interviews between 2014 and 2016: 2 on Memphis and 4 on Slow Food. We returned to one interviewee to further discuss issues that we had not addressed initially but later emerged from the conversations with interviewees. The interviews lasted 90-120 minutes. Furthermore, at least two researchers were present during each interview, which were recorded and transcribed. Throughout the data analysis, we took steps to minimize biases. The authors individually conducted the interview content analysis, coding the principal phases of the innovative vision generation (Miles and Huberman, 1999). At least two researchers analysed each interview. Concerning the data analysis, the collected information was manipulated before the analysis by applying data categorization and contextualization techniques (Miles and Huberman, 1999). We then followed a structured data analysis process consisting of a preliminary within-case study and an explanation-building investigation, followed by a cross-case comparison. We used different categorizations to search for the similarities and differences between the cases by creating several partially ordered matrices (Miles and Huberman, 1999). The data analysis investigated three main dimensions: (i) *motivations* that convince individuals to join Radical Circles (Füller et al., 2008; Frey et al., 2011; Pellizzoni et al., 2015); (ii) *participation* modalities adopted by Radical Circles (Huston and Sakkab, 2006; Laursen and Salter, 2006; Pisano and Verganti, 2008); (iii) *governance* supporting the decision-making process in the Radical Circles (Pisano and Verganti, 2008; Felin and Zenger, 2014).

3.2   Case studies

Memphis was an Italian design and architecture group that Ettore Sottsass founded in Milan in 1981. The group designed postmodern furniture, fabrics, ceramics, glass, and metal objects from 1981 to 1988. The group's work often incorporated plastic laminate and was characterized by ephemeral designs featuring colourful decorations and asymmetrical shapes, sometimes arbitrarily alluding to exotic or earlier styles. They positioned themselves against the Modern Movement deeming that the quality of an environment or object is based on equilibrium between form, structure, and functionality. They introduced several innovations based on the unusual combination of common and simple materials with refined materials and the use of colours in furniture. After an intensive period of collaboration, Ettore Sottsass left the group in 1985, and the group dissolved in 1988 (Radice, 1984). The members collaborated with several leading companies, such as Alessi, Artemide, Olivetti, and Swatch. Some collaborations continued over time, whereas others lasted only until the realization of the project. These collaborations led to new products, some of which continue to enjoy great success because they extended beyond merely performing a function and redefined the meaning of the object itself. Some members established their own studios (e.g., Michele De Lucchi, Aldo Cibic, Matteo Thun). Matteo Thun's collaboration with Swatch in the early 90s is a great example of effectively infusing new visions. Between 1990 and 1993, Matteo Thun worked as the Creative Director at Swatch. Nicolas Hayek, the Swatch Group co-founder, had been thinking of using plastic materials for quite some time, and thanks to Thun's support, this idea was successful. During the collaboration, he designed a number of collections (table clocks and automatic wristwatches, amongst others), but the Christmas special wristwatches collection was by far the most successful.

Slow Food is a global, grassroots movement founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteracting the faster pace of life, and combating people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it came from, and how food choices affect the surrounding world[7]. Since its beginnings, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving millions of people in over 150 countries. Slow Food works around the world to protect food biodiversity, building links between producers and consumers, and raising awareness of some of the most pressing topics affecting our food system. These initiatives range from community activities organized by local 'convivia' to larger projects,

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[7] Source: www.slowfood.com/about-us

campaigns, and events coordinated by Slow Food's national offices and international headquarters[8]. A number of companies have directly or indirectly shared and further developed Slow Food's innovative vision. For instance, Eataly (www.eataly.net) is a high-end Italian food market/chain mall comprising a variety of restaurants, food and beverage stations, bakeries, and retail items. Eataly was founded by Oscar Farinetti, who wanted to develop a food store and restaurant chain rooted in the quality of food. Slow Food was a fundamental inspiration for Eataly that collaborated with Farinetti in designing the Eataly concept. Farinetti and Petrini had been friends since adolescence[9]. *"Petrini taught me to explore a different relationship with food. He was the first to make me understand that behind food, there's a patrimony of culture and values. I've simply tried to put these ideas into practice by creating the Eataly business model"*[10].

4   EMPIRICAL RESULTS

In this section, we describe the development of the new Memphis and Slow Food visions by investigating the origins of their Radical Circles and their evolution, focusing on the three dimensions previously introduced: motivation, participation, and governance.

4.1   Memphis: colourful and sinuous design

After the Second World War, the modern design movement known as "Functionalism" gained international recognition due to the constant search for practicality, rationality, and simplicity. According to functionalist theory, the functions of the object must be immediately apparent and translated into the forms, characterized by a high degree of geometric order according to the principle "form follows function". This movement was based on the principle that the fundamental quality of an environment or object is its instrumental accuracy and its equilibrium between form, structure, and functionality. From here, linguistic expressiveness and the social value derive in a direct and mechanical way. This principle has distant origins: the Renaissance, Christian morality, and the Industrial Revolution. A decisive impetus was given by the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which held international conferences and elaborated principles that were later applied across various disciplines. The basic principles of the movement resulted from these meetings.

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[8] Source: www.slowfood.com/what-we-do
[9] Source: Interview by the authors with Sebastiano Sardo (18 July 2014).
[10] Source: http://www.wuz.it/intervista-libro/2642/oscar-farinetti-eataly-mercante-utopie.html

Motivation

In this contest, different views prevailed amongst Ettore Sottsass, Aldo Cibic, Matteo Thun, Marco Zanini and Marco Marabelli. They worked together under a horizontal structure coordinated by Ettore Sottsass (Radice, 1984) and interpreted "design" as a communication tool, thus redefined the concept of function. According to Ettore Sottsass, the function was variable:

> *"When someone tries to define the function, it escapes from the hands. Because it is life itself. The function is the final chance of the relationship between an object and the life."*
>
> Ettore Sottsass (Radice, 1984)

One of the most important innovations was the use of plastic laminate (Radice, 1984). The use of some new materials resulted not only in new structural possibilities, but also new semantic and metaphorical possibilities, i.e., new languages. Plastic laminate was not new; indeed, it became part of the mass urban landscape and the symbol of suburbia, in other words, the anonymous hinterland, a bit naive and desperate. Across time, plastic laminate was diffused into the home environment, moving from bathrooms, kitchens, children's rooms to living rooms. At the same time, plastic laminate was still synonymous with vulgarity, poverty, and bad taste. Memphis reversed this perception, placing plastic laminate in living rooms and studying the potential of decorating it. Materials began to be selected and used not only as tools and support, but also as active protagonists and as a means of communication. Previous to this, colour had not been present in furniture. European furniture was made of matter, and colour was a detail. In the Memphis perspective, colour was never an ideological but a linguistic fact, an active element of complex communication. In 1981, Memphis found interests in Ernesto Gismondi[11], President of Artemide, a leading Italian company operating in the lighting

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[11] Ernesto Gismondi is the founder of Artemide Group. He was also the main shareholder of the Memphis Group.

industry.

> *"The inauguration, on September 1981, was wonderful, all the road in Corso Europa in Milan was full, even the police came, there were more than 2000 young people, who had stopped all traffic to see this phenomenon. My friends were reluctant about Memphis. They thought this new design was going to kill Artemide identity, but I knew what I was going to do."*
>
> Ernesto Gismondi (Radice, 1984)

> *"Memphis was a revolution. Something had to change in furniture. Where were the colours? Where were the sinuous forms? No one had the courage to venture. We did it, and we were rewarded."*
>
> Ernesto Gismondi (Radice, 1984)

Colour was never added. Rather, it came from within with the project and was an integral part of the structure. It was always a pigment, not paint. As Michele De Lucchi explained,

> *"For these reasons, in Memphis, dominant and background colors do not exist."*
>
> Michele De Lucchi (Radice, 1984)

Regarding the industrial products, Ettore Sottsass was always interested in the sociological implications and the possibility of changing cultural perceptions. He became famous worldwide for his Valentine design, a bright red portable typewriter. With this design, he won the prestigious Compasso d'Oro design award in 1970 (although the design was not a commercial success). When Adriano Olivetti asked Sottsass to design a low-cost PC, he designing a plastic structure that was rather pop and red. Valentine moved the idea of the beautiful from the bourgeois arena to the popular arena. In 1980, Ettore Sottsass, Aldo Cibic, Matteo Thun, Marco Zanini, and Marco Marabelli established *Sottsass Associates*. After an initial stage concentrating on industrial design and interior planning, the studio broadened its activities to include architecture, graphic design, and company image studies.

Participation

Memphis was founded over three nights: 11 December 1980 in via San Galdino (Sottsass' home), 12 December in a pizzeria near Sottsass' home, and 14 December, again in via San

Galdino. The name "Memphis" first appeared in De Lucchi's notebook around 11 December 1980. On the evening of 11 December 1980, the group was listening to Bob Dylan's music, and Ettore Sottsass stated the following:

> *"Because no one changed the disc, Bob Dylan kept shouting 'the Memphis Blues again', until Sottsass said: "OK let's call it Memphis."*
>
> <div align="right">Ettore Sottsass (Radice, 1984)</div>

In the words of Aldo Cibic summarizing Memphis' foundation:

> *"The interesting thing is how Sottsass succeeded in attracting friends around the world who were thinking and feeling the same thing at the same time. And this was the enormous energy that came out of Memphis. Two years after being formalized, Memphis was widely used as an American slang word, calling for transgression, for something fashionable, special and unique."*
>
> <div align="right">Aldo Cibic (Rai Educational Interview[12])</div>

Governance

The first drawings were presented on 9 February 1981 and the goals were reached in seven months. The group did not know how to accomplish these because none of the members had money or a full-time job. In June of 1981, they found a manager who was willing and ready to found a company and launch Memphis on the market. The manager was Ernesto Gismondi, President of Artemide. Ernesto Gismondi was contacted by Ettore Sottsass, who initially hoped to persuade him to produce some lamps, but eventually became the main shareholder of Memphis. Memphis is detached from postmodernism, that is, a historicist and restorer, concentrating on the present and determining which part of the present is the basis of the future. In addition, Memphis did not only look west, rather, it broadened its references: Bombay, Madras, Merida, Jeddha, Sana'a Jakarta, Wonosobo, Taroudant. In those regions where the language was not yet codified, the signs were born and recycled.

4.2   Slow Food: good, clean, and fair

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[12] http://www.educational.rai.it/lezionididesign/designers/CIBICA.htm

In the late 20th century, extensive social conflicts and acts of terrorism prevailed in Italy. American culture was gaining popularity. The comedy show "*Drive in*" started being broadcast in Italy promoting fast food consumption while in the car or enjoying a film. Subsequently, the arrival of McDonald's restaurants led to "*Americanising*" numerous historical locations in Italy, fostering a style of consumerism (Petrini and Padovani, 2006).

The first McDonald's opened in Rome in the late 80s with the stated aim of serving a complete meal in less than sixty seconds. This was the biggest McDonald's worldwide and its enormous golden arches logo adorned a historic building in the heart of the city. Italian politicians, architect, and the literati considered it disastrous, calling it "*a bomb in the city centre*", and unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the authorities to remove it.

> "*In 1989, McDonald's opened a restaurant in a central square of Rome, provoking the first reaction to fast food. From that moment, the idea of a movement against fast food arose, also in a literal way.*"
>
> Silvio Barbero (Interview, 18th July 2014)

Motivation

In this period, numerous wine producers were accused of diluting wine with methanol, which directly led to the death of 23 people in a town in the province of Cuneo. The Slow Food Association was in part founded in response to this tragic event.

> "*We asked Folco Portinari* (journalist and Arci member) *to write a manifesto, and he proposed a text showing a great vision. We had already had the idea of creating a 'mass association,' not a closed club. The novelty was in delivering a gastronomic culture to a larger public.*"
>
> Silvio Barbero (Interview, 18th July 2014)

This gave birth to political creeds and social activities that a youngster from the province of Cuneo by the name of Carlo Petrini[13] and some followers responded to with some initiatives for the underprivileged that included the *first experience of ecologic recycling* and a *school for the illiterate* (Slow Food Story, 2013[14]) .

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[13] At the start, the followers included two school friends, Azio Citi and Giovanni Ravinal. Piero Sardo, a young political activist, joined shortly thereafter, while Silvio Barbero and Firmino Buttignol joined in the early 80s.
[14] https://www.slowfood.com/slow-food-story/

"Without Petrini, nothing would have happened. He was the aggregator and the puller. He had the most important intuitions. Then, he had the chance to find people who were able to build on his intuitions."

Silvio Barbero (Interview, 18th July 2014)

In 2005, Carlo Petrini and the journalist Carlo Bogliotti wrote a book, titled "Good, clean and fair", which became soon the concise slogan of Slow Food.

"With the concept of 'good, clean and fair' we have gathered several questions already discussed by others. For example, some associations are focused on the valorisation of ethical products and other realities on the sustainability, but nobody is able to consider every factor. We had the successful intuition to debate about a food for everybody that should not destroy the planet."

Alberto Arossa (Interview, 17th July 2014)

Participation

As others joined, the interests of the group turned to more popular social activities. The members founded a cultural club and the *Cooperativa Libraria La Torre* library that is still open to the public today. Carlo Petrini's conviction of taking pleasure in all their undertakings was the ethos he transmitted as the group attracted more followers. Enjoyment and commitment were the cornerstones of their activities and the spirit that guided the movement.

"If you are not able to enjoy it anymore, it is better if you leave what you are doing."

Carlo Petrini (Slow Food Story, 2013)

"We talk about interesting topics and in an amusing way, with self-criticism and irony. We have always talked with everyone. These things have helped enlarge the network."

Alberto Arossa (Interview, 17 July 2014)

The group continued pursuing their activities in the face of the negative environmental and agricultural issues that were emerging. Farmers began using more chemical fertilizers to increase production and profits, which in turn lead to the deterioration of product selection, biodiversity, and quality. Two conflicting developments ensued: due to the scarce attention

paid to food quality, eating well was deemed contrary to religion or only for the wealthy to enjoy, while exclusive gourmet societies were establishing dedicated to luxury food and wine degustation that many considered elitist.

> *"The idea was to affirm the pleasure of eating quality food against the Catholic assumption of something sinful or the idea that it is a right for only a few people."*
>
> Silvio Barbero (Interview, 17th July 2014)

The *Gambero Rosso* food and wine magazine was founded in 1986 as part of this initiative. Initially an insert in a socialist paper, it rapidly developed into a publishing company in its own right and is still considered a prestigious food and wine guide in Italy today. Petrini also began writing a column for a travel and leisure insert in another popular Italian paper and thus the dissemination of the Slow Food philosophy began, followed by the establishment of two hundred local Slow Food associations. Bonilli and Petrini (2014) stated, *"It represented a 'cultural revolution'; for the first time, it was acknowledged that the working class could also experience gastronomic pleasures."*

Governance

With the aim of internationalising, the *Slow Food Manifesto* subtitled "*Movimento Internazionale per la Tutela e il Diritto al Piacere*" (International Movement to Protect the Right to Pleasure) was published towards the end of 1987 in *Gambero Rosso* and denounced industrialisation, asserting that machines were destroying man:

> *"Slow food is eating slowly and well against the fast food ideology that thinks that fast is the first value of life. [...] While we ate and drank in our osteria, we had the idea of damming that 'barbaric invasion' of fast food with slow food as a defence line."*
>
> Folco Portinari (Slow Food Story, 2013)

According to his book *Cibo e Libertà* (2013), Carlo Petrini considered that over and above defending and promoting the quality of food, Slow Food aimed to preserve biodiversity and ensure the protection of products as well as the territories that produced them. Petrini emphasised that food connoisseurs could not ignore environmental or economic issues:

"In those years, if you discussed the environment, everybody related it to WWF activities. We tried to say that food does not exist merely in a dish but has a long history of attention to and awareness of political, economic, and environmental questions."

Alberto Arossa (Interview, 17th July 2014)

Carlo Petrini together with Carlo Bogliotti, a journalist, published a book in 2005 entitled *Good, Clean and Fair* with the aim of disseminating eco-gastronomy and the Slow Food philosophy. The title became the motto for Slow Food where *good* denotes quality and flavour, *clean* environmental friendliness, and *fair* stands for dignity and equity for producers and affordable prices for consumers.

5   DISCUSSION

In the introduction section, we argue that small groups of radicals can become Radical Circles, which can be one of the optimal environments for the development of new visions. In examining the stories of Memphis and Slow Food, we identify the particular aspects of small groups of radicals that enable them to become Radical Circles. More precisely, we focus on three main features that specifically connote Radical Circles: a yearning for rebellion, voluntary and closed participation, and peer criticism.

5.1   MOTIVATION: Yearning for rebellion

Radical Circles typically explore new avenues without having a precise objective in mind and instead propose a vision (Farrell, 2001). They do not face a challenge to be resolved. Rather, they are on a journey of exploration towards a new scenario rooted in values that the members of the circle believe in and find themselves united by a common "enemy" to battle.

We have observed that the eagerness of Radical Circles to propose new visions often starts with a feeling of discomfort or malaise with regard to the reality surrounding an individual or the industry they operate in. This initial trigger is very personal. In other words, members of Radical Circles share a *yearning for rebellion*. In the Memphis and Slow Food cases, there was no task to be completed. A perfectly defined challenge did not exist. These movements were triggered by a feeling of discomfort and a malaise towards the dominant rules driving their industries: functionalism for the 80s industrial design industry and fast food for the food

industry. In the early stages of a Radical Circle, awareness of these dominant rules is crucial, and actors can leverage these rules to start drafting their visions. Furthermore, the individuals begin exploring a divergent path only after identifying a concrete authority that they oppose and would like to act against (i.e., an enemy). As mentioned above, fast food was the dominant paradigm in the 80s, and McDonalds was the enemy of Slow Food: *"In the second half of the 80s, McDonald's opened its first shop in Italy. This event convinced us to develop a movement that could counteract the values proposed by the fast food movement"*[15].

As previously mentioned, open innovation systems are usually based on specific incentives and/or reward systems to properly engage partners. For instance, crowdsourcing participants, whether amateurs or professional scientists, wish to use their skills, free time, or periods of professional inactivity (Schenk and Guittard, 2011). In most online communities, rewards are absent or small, with reputation systems on the website or small monetary prizes for the best contributions as the only extrinsic incentives. As a consequence, the individuals' willingness to assist with a task or challenge is the main driver of participation (Dahlander and Magnusson, 2005).

5.2   PARTICIPATION: *Voluntary and closed*

In Radical Circles, at first sight, participation seems to be voluntary and open. However, while it is voluntary, it cannot be considered open. By definition, a circle is not open. The Radical Circle is *closed*: for an individual to enter, s/he must receive an invitation from one of the members and the other members must agree with the proposed membership. For example, Slow Food emerged from the collective effort of four friends who worked very closely in the first stage of the movement's foundation. Later, the four friends began *"to think about an association that would address the culture of food pleasure and target mass society. The transition from a closed club to a mass association was in our mind since the beginning"*[16]. Radical Circles can evolve into more open groups in the later stages after they have clearly defined their vision and the aim to spread such vision.

As a consequence, Radical Circles work differently than many open innovation systems. For instance, crowdsourcing is a form of outsourcing that is not directed at other companies but at the crowd by means of an open call aiming to reach a wide network of potential contributors (Howe, 2006a). Therefore, by definition, crowdsourcing implies the voluntary and

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[15] Source: Interview developed by the authors with Silvio Barbero (18th July 2014).
[16] Source: Interview developed by authors with Silvio Barbero (18th July 2014).

open participation of individuals, with no hierarchy or contract-related constraints, and a high degree of autonomy in the achievement of tasks (Schenk and Guittard, 2011).

5.3 GOVERNANCE: Peer criticism

The core attribute of Radical Circles is *peer criticism*. As highlighted in the previous section, Slow Food emerged from the collective effort of four friends rather than through the work of a single genius. Together, the four friends began to explore new avenues for the territory in general and food in particular that were in clear contrast to the prevailing and dominant assumptions in the industry. By challenging one another, these four people developed a new, shared vision that guided their work. A similar story underlies the Memphis case: after three late-night meetings of discussions and sharing thoughts and opinions, the group celebrated its new way of viewing industrial design named "Memphis". When working alone, individuals may be tempted to try something new or even forbidden by the authorities in their field, yet often do not follow through with the impulse (Farrell, 2001). Instead, when the impulse is shared and validated by others, it is more likely to be carried through to fruition, as in the case of both Slow Food and Memphis. As these cases demonstrate, a charismatic leader typically emerges (Farrell, 2001) without formal power (authority) or a special role; rather, s/he is followed due to her/his authoritativeness. The criticism that rules in Radical Circles helps its members first understand their own assumptions and truths, and later challenges them to attempt to open new avenues. Moreover, this critical interchange occurs through experimentation; in other words, circle members try things out (i.e., real actions). Even more importantly, reflecting on the experiment allows the members to take a step forward to conduct reflective and critical discussions.

If Radical Circles are based on peer criticism, some open innovation paradigms, such as crowdsourcing, are based on individual contributions that rely on creativity. While many people may work simultaneously on a given project, the work submitted to crowdsourcing platforms typically belongs to a single individual developing the solution alone.

6   CONCLUSIONS

Among the many collaborative and open innovation processes, Radical Circles can support the development of new visions. On the one hand, Radical Circles embrace the open innovation paradigm: they mitigate the risk linked to being a lonely innovative leader and provide external inputs, diversity, and group validation. On the other hand, such circles protect the members of

the group from excessive noise and allow them to research the meaning and values with real people and real discussions. Furthermore, they allow the individual members to know each other and to delve deeper into the research process. Radical Circles are small enough so that those involved know each other as distinct individuals (Fine and Harrington, 2004). The group members are typically characterized by a malaise for the current situation and the identification of a common "enemy" (*yearning for rebellion*). Participation is *closed and voluntary*: for an individual to enter, s/he must receive an invitation from another member, and the other members must agree the membership. The group's boundaries and membership are fuzzy, but have sufficient permanency to provide a motivating and inspiring context (Fine, 2010). The circle itself acts as a protected laboratory (*peer criticism*) that encourages its members to take their thoughts forward and draft a new vision (Verganti, 2016).

Companies often find proposing new interpretations challenging. Therefore, external lenses and inputs are often helpful. We have shown that interaction within Radical Circles could be an effective strategy for developing new interpretations. Although managerial implications were not the focus of our work, we can derive such implications for companies seeking to interact and leverage creative circles. First, as the cases show, companies can look for radical manifestos and for expressions of malaise and conflict with the dominant cultures and meanings. Manifestos are published and radical individuals typically attempt to be seen and noted in their protests and manifestations. Radicals generally do not publish in mainstream outlets and do not exhibit at established fairs: they can be found in alternative outlets and extra-fair exhibitions (for instance, the "fuori salone" exhibitions that take place in the Milan area in parallel to the official design and furniture fair). To help discern interesting radicals, curious university researchers can help: they normally look for or study new trends and movements, and have experience with failed movements. However, we acknowledge that the question of how companies can find and interact with Radical Circles warrants further research. We have made our argument based on two cases in the industrial design (Memphis) and food (Slow Food) industries. Further research on other industries, countries, and cases would help expand our knowledge of how these Radical Circles work and their limitations.

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