



## OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY  
Andreas Mayer,  
University of Natural Resources and Life  
Sciences, Austria

REVIEWED BY  
Alice Dal Gobbo,  
University of Trento, Italy  
Dirk Raith,  
University of Graz, Austria

\*CORRESPONDENCE  
Philipp Degens  
✉ philipp.degens@uni-hamburg.de  
Lukas Lapschieß  
✉ lukas.lapschiess@uni-hamburg.de

SPECIALTY SECTION  
This article was submitted to  
Social Movements, Institutions and  
Governance,  
a section of the journal  
Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems

RECEIVED 26 October 2022  
ACCEPTED 17 January 2023  
PUBLISHED 16 March 2023

CITATION  
Degens P and Lapschieß L (2023)  
Community-supported agriculture as food  
democratic experimentalism: Insights from  
Germany. *Front. Sustain. Food Syst.* 7:1081125.  
doi: 10.3389/fsufs.2023.1081125

COPYRIGHT  
© 2023 Degens and Lapschieß. This is an  
open-access article distributed under the terms  
of the [Creative Commons Attribution License  
\(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction  
in other forums is permitted, provided the  
original author(s) and the copyright owner(s)  
are credited and that the original publication in  
this journal is cited, in accordance with  
accepted academic practice. No use,  
distribution or reproduction is permitted which  
does not comply with these terms.

# Community-supported agriculture as food democratic experimentalism: Insights from Germany

Philipp Degens<sup>1\*</sup> and Lukas Lapschieß<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies "Futures of Sustainability", University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany, <sup>2</sup>Department for Socioeconomics, Dynamics and Regulation of Economy and Society, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

This paper analyzes community-supported agriculture (CSA) as a particular form of democratic experimentalism in food systems. Specifically, we explore both primary and secondary CSA initiatives in Germany, based on participatory observation on meetings and workshops, and on qualitative interviews. Opposing the industrial food system and market-based food distribution, CSA activists envision transformative change toward a sustainable, regionalized, and more democratic food system. A key feature of CSA as a specific form of alternative food organizations is its underlying collaborative effort among farmers and households: consumers take over production risks, make investments in their CSA and share crops, whereby they decouple producers' income from harvest yield and market prices. Employing a perspective that is informed by John Dewey's notion of democratic publics and experimentalism, we show that both on the primary and secondary levels as well as in collaboration with other political, economic, or civic actors, CSA is a manifestation of civil society's ongoing and never-ending inquiry to find joint solutions for their shared problems. We explore CSAs as democratic forms, in terms of their diverse internal structures and practices within the primary initiatives and also the secondary network. Furthermore, we reflect on their overall potential to democratize food systems. On all levels, we find the modus of experimentalism as the essential form of democratic inquiry. We show how the varying kinds of democracy that are embodied by primary initiatives differ from one another, and what kind of boundaries exist. These boundaries, *inter alia*, limit CSA's potential to achieve food democracy on a societal level, if democracy means giving everyone the opportunity to have a say whenever they are affected.

## KEYWORDS

community-supported agriculture (CSA), democratic organizations, alternative food organizations, networks, food democracy, John Dewey, experimentalism, transformation

## 1. Introduction

The design of current food systems is part and parcel of contemporary capitalist societies in their unsustainable drive for over-exploiting natural and social resources. For example, carbon emissions from food systems account for up to 30% of total anthropogenic emissions (Vermeulen et al., 2012, p. 198). Monoculture farming and pesticide usage are key drivers of habitat and biodiversity loss (Benton et al., 2021, p. 6). Overall, agricultural production is a major stressor that contributes heavily to crossing planetary boundaries (Campbell et al., 2017). This is mirrored in the everyday experience of farmers all over the world: droughts, heavy rainfall, and changing local environments all hint at the unsustainability of current food system structures—as do the poor working conditions of laborers in the field or meat and dairy industries as well as the malnutrition of consumers. Therefore, the mainstream food system not only has a negative impact on the environment, but also on health

conditions, and it contributes to “inequalities among consumers, workers and citizens more generally” (Lorenzini, 2022, p. 2).

Yet food systems are highly contested, therefore alternatives are being explored, and social movements all over the world strive for another way of organizing, producing, distributing, and consuming food. Such alternative food organizations, aiming at transformation as a trajectory toward sustainability (Adloff and Neckel, 2019), have been invigorated in recent years, predominantly in urban settings, aiming to transform local food systems to make them more sustainable, inclusive, and democratic (cf. Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2013; Alkon and Guthman, 2017a; Kropp et al., 2021; Zoll et al., 2021). Huber and Lorenzini (2022, p. 2) define alternative food organizations (AFOs) “as non-profit organizations or social enterprises, which contest, counter or reduce one or several of the mainstream food system’s negative externalities or question the overall mainstream food system.” However, even if these movements constitute a field (ibid.), they are rather heterogeneous in terms of their visions, practices, and organizational structures. According to Huber and Lorenzini, only few of these movements engage in political action or embrace transformative goals for the broader society (ibid., 16). Instead, they rather try to establish small-scale solutions for their members and often rely on market-based modes of action, building on the individual consumption choices that participants make in order to create alternatives (Lorenzini, 2019). Consequently, in their conclusion on new alternative food movements, Alkon and Guthman (2017b) are rather skeptical about their potential to actually change food systems for the better. They use the case of farmers’ markets to illustrate that these movements—despite their underlying strong visions of alternative, healthy and sustainable food supply—foster rather “apolitical” responses to the harmful structures within the global food systems. Alkon and Guthman identify only “little effort to build coalitions, pressure regulators, change policy and enforcement, or remake political institutions illustrates the strong vision for social change” (Alkon and Guthman, 2017b, p. 317). Yet this kind of individualistic “political consumerism” (Lorenzini, 2022) does not resemble every single kind of alternative food organizations. Some organizations, indeed, constitute “food collectives” that do not focus on individuals and consumption, but on communities and the relation between consumers and producers (Lorenzini, 2022, p. 221f.). They raise the issue of food democracy that aims at enabling civic participation in decision-making processes on how food shall be produced, distributed and consumed (Hassanein, 2003; Renting et al., 2012; Fladvad, 2018; Lorenzini, 2019; Sampson et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, this explorative paper focuses on the issue of democracy, its meanings and the way it is institutionalized, specifically by analyzing the case of community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives in Germany. By analyzing CSA as a particular and collective action form of alternative food movements, we intend to highlight the political dimension that hints at the very idea of democratic self-governance of society itself. Thus, we focus on the issue of democracy in economic action from within civil society initiatives and organizations (Blome-Drees et al., 2021; Chen and Chen, 2021; Degens and Lapschieß, 2021). Often, a particular form of democratic governance – representative democracy, entailing a political sphere comprised of parliaments, presidency and other institutional forms – is equated with democracy *per se*. In such a conception, democracy belongs to the public political sphere with its formal institutions, and not to the economy. Yet opposed to such a notion – and also widely shared – is the idea that democracy is about

collective decision-making in various social spheres or arenas. In a juxtaposition, the former is linked, by and large, to the expression and accumulation of political decisions based on individual preferences, and the latter is linked to deliberative processes that establish, form, and alter political preferences in the first place (cf. Bonvin et al., 2018).

In this paper, we turn our attention to community-supported agriculture as collective food movements that are engaged in the local production, distribution, and consumption of food. CSA is an umbrella term for different models in which consumers and producers join forces in order to maintain an organic local food system on the basis of decent compensation for agricultural work (e.g., Cone and Myhre, 2000; O’Hara and Stagl, 2001; Schnell, 2007; European CSA Research Group, 2016; Hvitsand, 2016). Economically, the key mechanism is that consumers take over production risks, make investments in their CSA and share crops—meaning that producers’ income is decoupled from harvest yield and market prices. Yet, the collaboration between consumers and producers and the democratic modes of governance suggest there is a political dimension to this phenomenon. This type of food movement is less about mobilization of resources to gain political power, and more about prefiguring sustainable food production and consumption on a small scale (Mert-Cakal and Miele, 2020 on CSA; on prefiguration see Yates, 2015; Schiller-Merkens, 2020; Monticelli, 2021).

Our aim is twofold: We want to explore to what extent CSA is democratic in terms of a) structures and practices within the field, given its diversity, and b) their overall potential to democratize food systems. We assess both specific visions and the ways CSA initiatives are governed democratically. The contribution is based on empirical insights from a qualitative study of CSA in Germany, assessing primary and secondary organizations as well as collaborating actors. It rests on data collected using participatory observation mainly in meetings and workshops hosted by the Network CSA (“Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft”) – the major secondary actor in the field of CSA in Germany –, and semi-standardized interviews with members of single CSAs, the network, consultants and further experts in the field. To explore the role of democracy, we take a perspective that is informed by John Dewey’s conception of the public and of democratic experimentalism. For Dewey, a public emerges when people share experiences, identify common problems that jointly affect them, and together aim to create solutions. Such solutions are specific to the particular context and might be realized on a small and temporary scale only. We aim to show that CSAs can be understood as economic democratic experiments and entail an element of democratic transformation of the food system – albeit with limited capacities. By comparing different types of CSA, our aim is not to assess what type resembles democracy more deeply than others, but to reflect on the “kind of democracy” and its underlying imaginaries (Fladvad, 2021, p. 9f.).

We assess both internal and external dimensions of democratic practices in the field of CSA. The internal dimension refers to the organizational level, i.e., the practices and internal governance of CSA and members’ opportunities to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. In a sense, we aim to assess if and how CSA can be labeled “collectivist democratic organizations” (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Rothschild, 2016; Chen and Chen, 2021). In particular, we show that different overall aims and visions have an impact on the way democracy is realized, resulting in different types of CSA. The

external dimension refers to the level of the broader society and to the overall potential impact of CSA regarding the democratization of food systems. This perspective raises questions on how inclusive CSA is, and what boundaries and limits exist. A Deweyan perspective on democracy allows us to highlight how shared problems are collaboratively identified and solutions based on joint action and newly generated knowledge and experience are tested.

The narrative in this article does not follow the research process itself. It serves to clarify the theoretical perspective, which, however, emerged only during the empirical research. The paper therefore offers a brief overview of the methodological approach and the underlying relation of theory and empirical findings (Section 2) as well as a conceptual discussion of the perspective of democratic experimentalism on diverse economies (Section 3). We then explain basic principles of CSA (Section 4) to firstly show that CSA can be understood as an expression of food democratic experimentalism in itself, by offering viable alternatives for joint decision-making of consumers and producers. Secondly, we explore internal governance modes and democratic practices within the CSA movement on micro and meso levels, highlighting difficulties, complexities and contradictions with regard to democracy. We also briefly reflect on the limits of food democracy as an outcome of CSA, focusing on broader social inequality that systematically hinders some groups (e.g., poorer households) to participate (Section 5). In the conclusion (Section 6), we reflect on insights gained as well as on both strengths and limitations of the approach. Overall, the contribution has an exploratory character.

## 2. Methods

As stated in the introduction, we assess CSA from the perspective of democratic experimentalism. However, as is usual in qualitative research, the process of research did not proceed in a linear fashion. On the contrary, empirical and theoretical research have always influenced each other. In fact, the relationship between theory and empirics can be conceived with Kalthoff as a “conversation in which empirics and theories mutually inform each other” (Kalthoff, 2008, p. 10, our translation). In our case, the first empirical findings exposed that many CSA activists perceived CSA initiatives as experiments or “Reallabore” (real labs) that aim to collectively find ways to establish a better, more sustainable and more inclusive form of agriculture (this issue was later also raised by Int4 and Int9). Some discussants suggested CSA is a tool for a larger societal transformation, others pressed the need to stabilize and support small-scale farming (see also Int3, Int4). Regardless of their differences, they agreed, *inter alia*, on the experimental character of CSA. They also stressed that those who are affected by any decision should have a meaningful voice (this was also raised by Int6). While not everyone raised the issue of CSA as democratic endeavors, the need to build non-exclusive communities that jointly have a say in the way food is produced and distributed has widely been expressed (also in Int2, Int7, and Int10). This initial insight lead us as researchers to deeper explore the notion of democratic experimentalism and to explicitly connect it to CSA. However, notwithstanding this reciprocal and dynamic relation between empirical and theoretical insights, the structure of this paper follows a rather conventional approach: in this section, we inform about the methods we employed for gathering data; in the following Section 3, we shed light on the conceptual issues that Dewey’s idea of democratic experimentalism

raises, before we report and discuss findings on democracy in CSA from a Deweyan perspective.

The research conducted for this contribution is part of a wider project called “Teilgabe”<sup>1</sup> that offers a comparative empirical study of civic economic action in Germany, with a focus on understanding the needs for support infrastructure in different sectors. The project “Teilgabe” investigates the capacity of networks, associations, and secondary cooperatives to provide such infrastructure. It specifically explores civil society initiatives in sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy production, seniors’ social services, and digital platforms. So, the overarching research interest of the project is on the emergence of collaborative structures and the question to what extent secondary organizations can provide support services for primary organizations.

Our analysis of the field of CSA in Germany combines empirical research on various primary and secondary organizations. The empirical focus of our analysis of CSA is not on single local initiatives, but on their collaboration within the CSA network as the key actor on the secondary level. Accordingly, network activities and specifically network meetings comprise one of our main sources of information. Besides analyzing existing literature, documents and webpages of CSA organizations, we used participatory observation and expert interviews as the main sources of information. Table 1 comprises a list of both interviews conducted and events we attended as participatory observants.

In order to be able to capture ongoing dynamics and processes, we have continuously been observing the network since the fall of 2020. Participant observation was carried out in every semi-annual conference of the network since fall of 2020, and in various other network meetings and workshops. Due to the pandemic, most of the events have been held online. While this entails limitations for participatory observation, it also enabled us to gather data continually, as we were able to attend much more events than we would have been, had they been held in presence at different places in Germany. At least one of us attended, for example, a workshop on the creation of CSA in the cooperative legal form, on legal issues for CSA initiatives, an assembly of a primary CSA as well as their spring festival, and a bidding circle of another primary CSA. We have been participating in nine of the regular online meetings of the working group on cooperatives within the CSA network, and in the first meetings of the recently created working group on CSA and societal transformation.

We have been co-hosts of some of the events where we gathered data. During the 2022 fall meeting of the CSA network, for example, we conducted a so-called “open space” (see Section 5.2) to jointly discuss need for support infrastructures. In the summer of 2021, we co-organized a broader online workshop on opportunities and potentials for cooperation between CSA initiatives, municipalities, NGOs, networks and enterprises<sup>2</sup> Such collaborative efforts between researchers and practitioners illustrate our aim to not only conduct scientific research on distanced objects, but to also jointly generate

1 The German word “Teilgabe” is a neologism that entails “Teilgabe” (participation) and “Gabe” (gift). For more information see [www.teilgabe.net](http://www.teilgabe.net).

2 The workshop was jointly organized by the Nascent project, the CSA network, and the Teilgabe project. For further information see <https://www.nascent-transformativ.de/online-workshop-region-kooperation-transformation/>.

TABLE 1 List of interviews (Int) and participatory observations (PO).

#	Type of organization	Position of interviewee/specification of event
Int1	Network on civic engagement	Executive director
Int2	Land purchasing collective	Member, co-founder
Int3	Nonprofit consultancy	Consultant on co-operatives
Int4	CSA working group	Member, co-founder
Int5	Primary CSA	Co-founder, gardener
Int6	Secondary CSA	Founder, director
Int7	Independent/collaborating with CSA network	Legal consultant
Int8	Secondary CSA	Founding member and CSA consultant
Int9	CSA network	CSA network representative; founder of a primary CSA
Int10	CSA network	Member of the Board; founder of a primary CSA
PO1	Working group of CSA cooperatives	Online conference, Nov 2020
PO2	CSA network	3-day-Fall Conference (online), Nov 2020
PO3	Research Institute	Workshop on Creating CSA in the legal form of a cooperative (online), Nov 2020
PO4	CSA network	3-day-Spring Conference (online), Feb 2021
PO5	Teilgabe, Nascent, CSA network	2-day-Online workshop on collaboration between CSA and allies (July and October 2021)
PO6	CSA network (co-organizer)	Workshop on legal and tax issues for CSA (online), Sep 2021
PO7	CSA network	3-day-Fall Conference 2021, November (online)
PO8	Competence and advice center for agriculture and horticulture (Hamburg)	Introduction to CSA (in presence)
PO9	CSA network	Members meeting (online), Nov 2021
PO10	Primary CSA	Bidding Circle for business year 2022, Feb 2022 (online)
PO11	Primary CSA	General Assembly, March 2022 (online)
PO12	CSA network	3-days-Spring Conference (online), March 2022
PO13	Primary CSA	Spring festival (in presence), May 2022
PO14	Working Group on CCSA and Transformation	2 initiation meetings (online), May, June 2022
PO15	CSA network	3-days-Fall conference (online), Nov 2022
PO16	Working group on CSA cooperatives	9 meetings since October 2021 (online)

All semi-structured interviews were conducted between August 2021 and December 2022; they ranged from 60 to 120 min.

knowledge that is rendered valuable by the practitioners themselves. In a sense, this approach is also part of a pragmatic research approach (see Section 3).

In addition to participatory observation, we have been conducting several semi-standardized interviews with members of single CSAs, network representatives, consultants, and further experts in the field. The interviews lasted between 60 and 120 min, with some exceptions of shorter interviews. They were used to gather additional background information, to dig deeper into particular issues that have been identified as relevant during participatory observation, and they also provided ideas and issues for further investigation.

### 3. Dewey's democratic experimentalism in diverse economies

The concept of democratic experimentalism, found in many recent conceptions of transitional change, has prominently been

reinvigorated by Wright's (2010) notion of "real utopias." Such real utopias may pave the way for interstitial change to overcome capitalist structures, or the emerging discourse on prefigurative politics (Monticelli, 2021) and organization (Reinecke, 2018; Schiller-Merkens, 2020; Chen and Chen, 2021). Initiatives that aim to decentralize, democratize, and socially embed the economy are seen as opportunities to repoliticize the economy (Deriu, 2012; Asara et al., 2015). This repoliticization in turn might contribute to large-scale transformation processes toward degrowth and sustainability (ibid). The "diverse economies" framework (Gibson-Graham, 2008) is also nested in democratic experimentalism. Its proponents demand to overcome the capitalocentric view of the economy that, according to Gibson-Graham, disables us to even perceive non-capitalist economic forms that do not rely on the growth paradigm, private property, and the market. In fact, many community economies – broadly understood as "economic spaces or networks in which relations of interdependence are democratically negotiated by participating individuals and organizations" (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 627) – might best be described as initiatives



in which “people are experimenting with other ways forward” (Gibson-Graham, 2014, p. 151). Diverse economies allow to “explore the choices we make to perform the economy and its future as either a singular inevitability or a field with a variety of potentials that is open to experimentation” (Roelvink et al., 2015, p. 1).

It is this notion of experimentation that combines democracy with economic action that can be found in the field of CSA. In the following, we outline key insights that the pragmatist philosopher and social reformer John Dewey has to offer for the understanding of democracy and democratic experimentalism. With Dewey, democracy is not to be perceived as something to be ever achieved but as an ongoing process of building communities around alternative economic practices and organizations. Dewey conceives of democracy not as a concept of institutionalized state governance; for him, democracy refers to the “idea of community life itself” (Dewey, 1927, p. 148) and even more generally to a “way of life” (Dewey, 2021 [1939], p. 63). In this sense, democracy is found in everyday life and in various associational forms. Dewey asserts a natural human desire to cooperate, and he perceives it not simply a mechanism to collaboratively coordinate action, but, to him, it also entails a deep moral dimension as it enables everyone to participate in their community (Adloff, 2016, p. 79–81). In fact, a democratic community is not a given, but only emerges from “joint activity” (Dewey, 1927, p. 150) in favor of problem-solving processes of common interest or future concern. For Dewey, democracy is the process of jointly sharing experiences, identifying problems and creating solutions. It is this process from which concerned publics emerge in the first place. I.e., when people realize that they are affected by actions and decisions beyond their individual control, and they come together to do something about it, they form a public (cf. Fladvad, 2021). For Dewey, “indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behavior call a public into existence [...]” (Dewey, 1927, p. 126).

Because problems cannot be deduced on an abstract level but only be observed “from a perspective someone actually inhabits” (Hildebrand, 2011, p. 591), the observation of any problem is closely tied to real-life experience. It inevitably depends on a particular standpoint. In democratic societies, the public as a social sphere allows people that are “naturally interdependent and gregarious, to reflect deliberately on its spontaneous exchanges and, channeling these in the interest of all, to become a self-aware community” (Sabel, 2012, p. 38). Publics establish “a communicatively mediated, collective self-government as a principle of social order” (Adloff, 2016, p. 82) that depends on the values of democracy and their interpretations in a community. This view rejects the conventional notion that solely formal political institutions constitute the locus of democratic participation. Dewey’s notion of democracy is a normative one, ingrained “by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action” (Dewey, 2021 [1939], p. 63) within democratically mediated forms of collaboration. To come close to this, ideal democracy “demands liberation of the potentialities” (Dewey, 1927, p. 147) of as many community members as possible. To maintain that “all members are able to participate as freely as possible” (Honneth, 2018, p. 61), free communication and participation in deliberative discourses have to be guaranteed for everyone. For Dewey, it is only then that a large variety of ideas and concerns can be publicly discussed

and creative solutions for common problems might jointly be discovered—ultimately to build desirable future social conditions in an act of joint effort (Dewey, 2021 [1939], p. 65). In brief, a democratic community comprises a form of social association in which members share a specific value system and solve problems collectively by self-government through deliberative discourse and free participation. This is necessarily an ongoing social process with an uncertain outcome.

Central to Dewey’s understanding of democracy is the awareness of a fundamental uncertainty of the modern world that can only be overcome by shared experience which generates knowledge. Fundamental uncertainty provokes human “creativity and sociability” (Sabel, 2012, p. 44) and demands to gain experiences and share them with each other, on the basis of “free interaction of individual human beings with surrounding conditions, especially the human surroundings, which develops and satisfies need and desire by increasing knowledge of things as they are” (Dewey, 2021 [1939], p. 65). The term ‘knowledge’ in this sense is not narrowly restricted to scientific expertise, but it refers more broadly to the insight mentioned above that “mutual learning and joint problem-solving give rise to a democratic community” (Sabel, 2012, p. 43). In fact, Dewey not only emphasizes that “knowledge is the function of association and communication” (Dewey, 1927, p. 158), he also claims that generating novel “knowledge and insight” is a “prime condition” (Dewey, 1927, p. 166) for a democratic public. It is the strive for knowledge that enables publics to find, create, and test solutions for shared problems. In order to generate knowledge in a systematic manner, science shows, experiments have to be conducted.

Dewey takes this notion of scientific experiments to the idea of democracy itself, which can be conceived as “an always-incomplete and cooperative process of experimental problem-solving” (Fladvad, 2021, p. 17). It is precisely this kind of democratic experimentalism that connects the democratic values of community life and the deliberative public with the scientific method of experimentation. For Dewey, “applying the idea of experimentation to democratic society is about deepening the ability of citizens to engage in open inquiry, both individually and collectively” (Ansell, 2012, p. 168). Democratic experimentalism refers to (often local) democratic communities with specific values that deal with public problems in a systematic and empirical way. In this sense, an experiment is an empirical method to solve problems and an epistemic practice. Both the identified problem as well as the problem-solving process with its particular social conditions are subject to experience of the community members. This social process of inquiry is dynamic, provisional, and self-correcting, meaning that “techniques and assumptions of any inquiry must remain open to correction, modification, or deletion” (Hildebrand, 2011, p. 592–593). For Dewey, the concept of inquiry is not limited to scientific experimentation, but it is deeply social and already grounded in the idea of a democratic public itself. Inquiry in this sense always “involves collaboration and communication among people navigating a problematic situation together” (Hildebrand, 2011, p. 593). The purpose of inquiry is by no means to find absolute ‘truth’, but it constitutes “the experimental search for the most comprehensive answer to a socially problematic situation” (Honneth, 2018, p. 60; cf. Adloff, 2016, p. 81f). Democracy, then, is a never-ending collective search for a good life for as many people as possible, without the false promises of everlasting satisfaction or one-best-way solutions.

## 4. Community-supported agriculture as food democratic experimentalism

Before turning to our analysis of democracy in CSA initiatives and networks (see Section 5), we describe the main principles of CSA and its emergence in Germany. Since the 1990s, CSA has been increasingly become subject of academic debates on sustainable agriculture or “civic agriculture” (Lyson, 2012) in various disciplines (cf. Farnsworth et al., 1996; Cooley and Lass, 1998). CSA aims to create localized food systems that are opposed to industrial agricultural production and market-based distribution. In our view, they comprise a specific manifestation of civil society’s inquiry for alternative and sustainable agricultural forms. One of the core features of CSA is that production and distribution are partially decoupled from the market. Producers and consumers form a community that jointly shares the costs and risks of agricultural production. Produce in the CSA circuit is usually distributed on a weekly basis. Typically, it comprises vegetables and fruit, yet meat, dairy, and processed food are also distributed in many CSA initiatives. The consumers as a group bear the production costs for a certain period (usually 1 year) and receive a share of the produce in return, without any market price attached to it. The produce is thus not treated as a commodity that is bought by consumers. In a sense, CSA is a means to decommodify agri-food production (Blätzel-Mink et al., 2017). The German CSA network accordingly claims that “The food loses its price—and gains value” (SoLawi-Netzwerk, 2021, p. 4)<sup>3</sup>. Consumers express solidarity with producers by taking over production risks; members commit to paying their contribution independent from the actual amount and quality of produce. Farmers income is at least partially decoupled from production outcomes.

Some CSA initiatives even institutionalize solidarity among consumers, by introducing the so-called “bidding circle” (*Bieterunde*) as a funding mechanism, allowing for different monetary contributions for equal shares according to the individuals’ willingness to pay and ability to afford. In a bidding circle, members indicate what monetary contribution they are willing to make to receive their share regularly; bids of the whole group are accumulated, and if these are insufficient to cover costs, higher bids are given in a subsequent round – until accumulated bids do finally cover expected expenses for the production period. By letting the members decide what amount they will contribute, the bidding circle constitutes a tool aiming to ensure a needs-oriented, solidary financing mechanism on a voluntary basis (cf. Wellner and Theuvsen, 2017, p. 238). Although monetary payments are involved, participants do not necessarily regard this as a “price” to be paid, but as a solidarity gift that will be reciprocated when they receive a share of the harvest. Both amount and quality of this counter-gift are not determined in advance<sup>4</sup>. The vision is that wealthier members might offer higher contributions in order to enable others to spend less. In most cases, bids and outcomes of the bidding circle are held

anonymously. For many members, this instrument is an emblematic element of CSA, highlighting a categoric difference between food sharing within a CSA and trading food on the market. However, not all members share this perception. Others rather perceive their bids as a price and the produce they receive as a good that they purchase on the food market. There is variation among members, and there is variation between different CSA initiatives. Some envision radical alternatives (Rommel et al., 2019); others might best be described as “service oriented” (Gruber, 2020) because they focus on the high quality of products and their distribution over offering alternatives to markets. Accordingly, some use the tool of a bidding circle; others simply ask for equal, standardized contributions. The latter finance agricultural production in solidarity with the producers, without necessarily having solidarity mechanisms within the group of consumers. One reason seems to be that bidding circles are rather demanding in terms of organizational capacities, and they also rely on trust among members. In rare cases, some members even claim they fear others might cheat so they wish to have more transparent price systems (field note, PO9).

Another characteristic of CSA schemes is that engaged/dedicated members actively participate in the agricultural production and/or the administration. They become prosumers (Blätzel-Mink et al., 2017, p. 418) by working in the field, distributing products, or helping with accounting. Here, too, individual CSA schemes differ from one another. Some feature regular participatory days in which all members are expected to participate, whereas in others, only a few members are actively involved on an even more voluntary basis. A further characteristic that we aim to highlight is the commitment to regional and sustainable agriculture which is expressed in pursuing organic farming (notwithstanding the fact that while some CSA initiatives are certified as organic farms, others are not). Some members even explicitly mention that relations to animals and to nature are or should be based on the principle of solidarity (field note, PO12). Nevertheless, the aim to contribute to a sustainable transition of the whole agricultural sector might be understood as a signal for a commitment to the common good, as opposed solely to the well-being of the CSA members (cf. Blome-Drees et al., 2021).

CSA has been established in Germany since the late 1990s, after this specific form of small-scale agriculture had been experimented with in the USA (Paul, 2019). Its idea of small-scale agriculture based on local and personal cooperation among farmers and consumers is still older and emerged in Japan in the 1960s (Schnell, 2007, p. 552). In Germany, CSA first started in the late 1980s with the Buschberghof, a farm 40 kilometers west of Hamburg. The movement has been growing since. The creation of a nationwide network (“*Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft*”) in 2011 represented a key moment in the expansion of CSA as a social movement in Germany. The main rationale for establishing the network was for existing farmers and interested actors to join forces to elevate CSA’s alternative economic principles and its normative foundations (Int10; see also von Elsen and Kraiß, 2012, p. 62f.). Since the early 2010s, CSA has flourished and by now the network *Solidarische Landwirtschaft e.V.* lists more than 400 local CSA initiatives in Germany.<sup>5</sup> The network “conceives of itself as a movement, grassroots democratic organization and federation alike” (SoLawi-Netzwerk, 2021, p. 10, our translation).

<sup>3</sup> If not stated otherwise, German quotes from interviews and literature are translated by the authors.

<sup>4</sup> This is one reason why crop sharing in CSA is not to be conflated with market exchange. According to Adloff (2016, p. 25), the gift differs categorically from equivalent exchange, inter alia because it is uncertain, if, how, and when it is reciprocated. On money usage in gift relations, see Degens (2016, 2018); on a gift perspective on economic practices, see Exner (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Current status from October 2022; <https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/solawis-finden/auflistung/solawis>.

In our view, it is an expression of the principle of democratic experimentalism: whereas individual CSA initiatives aim to find solutions to offer non-market sustainable food and to support small-scale farming, the network is part of the ongoing inquiry on a meso-level. It allows to share experience, to identify potential solutions to problems that are beyond the scope of single initiatives, as several of our interviewees highlight explicitly (Int 3, Int4, Int10).

## 5. Democracy within and beyond the field of CSA in Germany

In the following sections, we discuss the role of democracy and its varying forms in the field of CSA in Germany. The field most notably comprises a variety of local initiatives on the primary level and the nation-wide network on the secondary level. Hence, our focus is on democratic processes and different modes of institutionalization both at the primary and secondary levels. We intend to show that primary CSA initiatives on the ground constitute diverse food democratic experiments in themselves (Section 5.1)—yet, crucially, we show how the idea of democratic experimentalism comes to the fore also in meso-level collaboration among primary initiatives (Section 5.2). It can also be found in cooperation with other actors engaged in alternative food movements, while it is limited regarding its scope (Section 5.3).

### 5.1. Varieties of democracy in primary CSA initiatives

In the following section, we show how CSA can be characterized as a very heterogeneous field of food democratic experimentalism. The different initiatives share the idea of CSA as an alternative, sustainable and community-based economy, yet they show some remarkable differences. In fact, literature on CSA grasps this diversity by offering different approaches to classify distinct types of CSA (e.g., [Boddenberg et al., 2017](#), p. 263–266; [Gruber, 2020](#), p. 109–121; [Paech et al., 2020](#), p. 52). For our purpose, it is sufficient to stress that relations between consumers and producers are institutionalized differently. In this line, three types of CSA organizations are discussed in practical guidebooks from within the field ([Heintz, 2018](#)). This typology has been quite influential, and, for example, the working group<sup>6</sup> of CSA cooperatives refer to it. The three types relate to different visions and structures as to how food democracy is to be realized in CSA.

The first type is labeled producer-led CSA (cf. [Paech et al., 2020](#), p. 52) and can be regarded as a way to strengthen a pre-existing small-scale farm that offers organic products by securing income, and for consumers to obtain local organic produce. Broadly speaking, the fading of small-scale farms is recognized as a problem of common interest out of which a public emerges and takes the form of a mobilized CSA community. The producers might also generate other income beyond the CSA, typically by selling goods on the market. Agricultural work is done exclusively by the producers,

but the consumers individually guarantee to take the harvest for one year. Consumers form a group somewhat loosely, without any legal relationship among them (cf. [Heintz, 2018](#), p. 27). Decisions are taken by the farmers, if in voluntary collaboration with consumers. This type is typically established when farmers search for an alternative way of running their farms and consider CSA as a suitable path to guarantee their future by building ties to the local community of consumers that join the CSA. Typically, the farm, the farmland, and other operating resources remain the property of the farmers.

The second type of CSA organizations refers to initiatives that are led by critical consumers who identify a problem in food consumption and production. They aim to do something about the unsustainable food industries and long supply chains by searching for opportunities to be jointly engaged in horticulture and farming for their own consumption. This second type is described as a consumer-led (cf. [Paech et al., 2020](#), p. 52) collaborative form of CSA. Consumers create a CSA organization that collaborates with one or more local farms. The consumer-led CSA organization manages the processes of distributing the harvest and member administration; it represents the interests of the consumers. Typically, the community is formally structured in a democratic way and constitutes a public to find ways to improve the food system because it is regarded as a matter of common interest.

The third type of CSA organization emerged mainly in 2017 and is often labeled as co-entrepreneurship CSA or self-organized CSA (cf. [Gruber, 2020](#), p. 112). In this case, a community of consumers establishes a CSA organization, usually an association or a co-operative, that combines a production facility and a membership organization as a whole. The means of production are in the collective ownership of the members. Given that such CSAs do not emerge from or in collaboration with already existing farms, a first task is typically to gain access to agricultural land and to employ skilled gardeners. The issue of democratic participation (cf. [Blome-Drees et al., 2021](#)) is particularly emphasized by its proponents (Int4, Int8, and PO16). They tend to regard the legal form of co-operatives as the best possible way to guarantee democratic procedures in CSA, because it offers a formal framework that guarantees each member has one vote. At the same time, legal requirements, e.g., to elect a board that has decision-making power, are regarded as a potential obstacle to meaningful democratic participation (Int10). So, while formal democratic structures are inherent to this type of CSA, there are some particular issues regarding the way democracy is realized, both in terms of structure, and in terms of actual practices.

In the following, we reflect on selected perplexities of democratic governance. While most of these issues apply to all types of CSA, they become particularly apparent, once the genuine democratic ambition that is aspired in CSA forms of type 3 is considered. One issue refers to the problem of actual participation, since formal democratic structures are not sufficient to actually enable active participation by members ([Rothschild and Whitt, 1986](#); [Hettlage, 1990](#); [Rothschild, 2016](#)). Accordingly, one of our interviewees points out that in general this commitment to the principle of democracy has to be actively promoted (Int4). They highlight the importance of democratic participation for CSA, yet at the same time acknowledge there are various ways to translate a formal democratic structure to actual practice. It may even become obscure what democracy might mean precisely.

6 See <https://solawi-genossenschaften.net/solidarische-landwirtschaft/#Typen>.



*It always depends on the community how they move within this legal construct, how they interpret it. Basically, I think this democratic approach is extremely important yet at the same time I ask myself what does it actually mean? (Int4)*

The interview partner emphasizes both the importance of the community and the experimental character of democratic organization. The interviewee reflects on a lack of participation in representative democratic systems and how important it is for CSA organizations to “give their members a real voice.” To them, a CSA co-operative has to embrace democratic decision-making processes, and “to have ...confidence in such democratic decisions and also put decisions to the vote, especially important decisions.” (Int4)

Another issue is what group actually constitutes the *demos* in democracy and who is able to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. Therefore, any assessment of democratic decision-making processes inevitably raises the issue of to what extent the various groups of stakeholders are represented. Here, we like to highlight an issue of such CSA schemes in which consumers and producers – having conflicting interests qua positions – are both members of the organization. Here, it is crucial to reflect on “the way and the level in which stakeholders – members and non-members – are involved” (Borzaga and Depedri, 2015, p. 111). We shed light on two relevant groups of stakeholders: consumer-members and employed worker-members. Arguably, consumer-members are the primary group of stakeholders in a CSA cooperative, and they might either more passively just receive the CSA’s products or more actively be engaged in different tasks in the organization. Yet as these members, even if they actively participate, lack agricultural and horticultural skills and training, these CSA co-operatives also hire qualified workers. These constitute another important group of stakeholders, whose interests regularly diverge from that of the consumers.

One point of contention is the appropriate salary for employees. This is debated regularly within and between different CSA initiatives, and most members agree that the salaries are considerably low. However, they are partly not willing to pay more for CSA memberships and produce. Therefore, a conflict can be identified between the CSA’s normative ideals of showing solidarity with producers and the interests of (some) members not to pay exorbitantly more for the agrifood they receive than in organic supermarkets. To mitigate such conflicts, some CSA organizations establish specific governance structures to increase employees’ influence on decisions, especially when they are most affected by the consequences. To guarantee their employees’ influence, some co-operatives include specific rights for their employees in the formal statutes. One interviewee explains:

*It was a little bit about the imbalance of influence between employees and members and what we have formally regulated in the Articles of Association, so to speak, that only employees can become members of the Board of Management in order to ensure that the steering wheel for operational decisions, which is 90, 95, 99 percent of all decisions, really lies with those who really have to bear the consequences of the decision. (Int6)*

The basic conviction is that decisions should be made by those who are most affected by them. In this case, employees are rather in a particularly strong position within the governance structure because it is guaranteed that they are mostly able to decide for themselves how they perform their work. They are even able to approve their salaries. In Dewey’s sense, this can be seen as a space of experience within the organization, where not only decisions are made, but also the actual effects of actions can be experienced for further deliberation. In this case, the cooperative not only has statutes that pay special attention to the rights of employees, but also uses a detailed manual for many of the most important aspects of running a CSA cooperative. This manual itself encourages employees to experiment with different ways to improve working processes. They comprise some elements of sociocratic governance (Endenburg, 1998), promoting the principle of consent (Int4, Int10). According to this principle, a participative decision needs not to be taken consensually, yet it can only be rejected through constructive counterproposals. This procedure is reflected upon in regular meetings. It therefore represents a deliberative form of decision-making that enables the experimental testing of new ways of acting as well as regular reflections and discussions of the experiences that have been made (Int4, Int8, Int10; cf. WirGarten e.V., 2021). While sociocratic forms are practiced in a few CSA schemes, other CSA organizations use, for example, consensus-based grassroots democratic procedures. Yet in most cases, rules on decision making are rather informal, and, for example, relevant decisions on farming are made by the employees. One interviewee explains that the small team of four gardeners agreed to “try to reach consensus decisions” (Int5), albeit without establishing a formal mode of procedures.

Our interview partners share the conviction that, in order to include as many stakeholders as possible, transparency on organizational issues is most important, as is to make information available to the whole community. Therefore, it seems possible to create a feeling of a deliberate public that identifies and discusses problems of common interest:

*As far as the active participation of the members is concerned, I can say that we make the core element of the business, which we develop in advance for the next financial year, available transparently down to the last decimal point for all those who want to have a look. And we hand over an easy-to-understand, slimmed-down version to every member directly via a link in advance of a meeting [...] So not only that they can have a look, but there can also be questions, criticisms or anything else that members wish to be reported. (Int5)*

The information that is shared with the whole community is prepared and disseminated in a way that is universally understandable. This helps to identify common problems and allows deliberation for everyone involved. Limitations here might lie in the number of members, because it may become difficult to let everyone have a say in larger organizations with several hundreds of members. Problems often arise when appropriate structures have never been established to channel and moderate democratic discourse. Responsibilities may not be clear and decisions may be blocked. Some interviewees (Int4, Int6, and Int10) raise another point, by claiming that the efficiency of decisions is no longer given if too many people are to have a say. It might even become “paralyzing”



(Int10) to allow everyone to raise concerns when they are not willing to collaborate on solutions. If too many different opinions and expectations come together, the aim to generate consensus can distract from pressing problems and inhibit the organizations in their processes. Accordingly, there is often debate about the optimal member size for a CSA organization that is both economically viable and allows for the active participation of the community.

Overall, while CSA initiatives share many basic principles, they differ in the way they envision democracy and to what quality and quantity of participation they evoke. Some rely on more informal rules, others on legal requirements (like the Co-operative Act that makes representative democracy obligatory). Any particular form of institutional design influences which group of stakeholders has what degree of say in the organization. The modus of experimentation can be found within single CSAs but also in the comparison of different CSA. Moreover, a thorough analysis of the secondary level does not only account for varieties, but for collaboration. We now turn to this idea of democratic experimentalism on the meso level of the field of CSA.

## 5.2. Meso-level cooperation and collaborative learning

As mentioned above, the network of CSAs is a central organization on the national level. Since its creation in 2011, it has contributed significantly to the growth and coordination of the entire democratic food movement. The network in fact has been an important prerequisite for the emergence of a broader CSA community at the national level. It constitutes an extended public form for jointly identifying common problems and facilitates collective problem-solving processes that cannot be dealt with by single communities or organizations. The network as a grassroots democratic organization is in the legal form of a non-profit association. According to its self-description, “[i]ts goals are to preserve and promote solidary, sustainable and small-scale agriculture, in which producers and consumers work together in a collaborative manner and regard agriculture as a common social responsibility.” (SoLawi-Netzwerk, 2021, p. 10; our translation)

Dewey’s understanding of democratic experimentalism highlights “an open model of inquiry” (Ansell, 2012, p. 168), which reaches beyond scientific insights and does not depend on individual experience solely. Instead, its “obvious requirement is freedom of social inquiry and of distribution of its conclusions” (Dewey, 1927, p. 16) which, for Dewey, ultimately generates new knowledge on social and political organization. In this regard, an important feature of the network is to function as “a platform that provides information and competencies” (SoLawi-Netzwerk, 2021, p. 10; our translation). Additionally, the network offers a wide range of specific consulting, guidance and information materials to support primary CSA organizations and local communities. One valuable service offered by the network is the provision of a website<sup>7</sup> which offers a central source of information for the CSA movement in Germany. On this platform, events are announced, the latest developments of the movement are shared and general information on individual CSA organizations or regional collaboration as well as

on working groups (WGs) are published. Altogether, it is the main platform to bring people involved or interested in CSA together and for coordination of collective action.

In what follows we focus on another essential service provided by the network, namely the organization and conduction of semiannual conferences<sup>8</sup> for members and those who are interested in CSA. These 3-day meetings are held on weekends every spring and autumn. During the Coronavirus pandemic, when it was not possible to hold the conferences in presence, they took place online. These online events show a high level of organization, preparation, and inclusiveness. Typically, they last a weekend, starting on Friday afternoon with a pre-conference beginner’s workshop. The latter is aimed at an external public, to attract new people and provide insights into CSA principles, aims, and values. In the evening, the meeting starts, usually with rounds of introductions in small groups to get to know each other better, and with a talk in which, for example, new research results on CSA are presented and discussed. In this way, a deepened sense of community is created that supports free discourse and opportunities to share experiences. On the second and third days, several workshops and so-called “open spaces” take place. In these, a wide variety of relevant topics are debated, such as management methods, communication methods to build up a community, or how to run a crowdfunding campaign. Also, more controversial issues are discussed, such as the constant underlying dispute between more growth-oriented urban CSAs, which are often suspected of being too commercial, and small-scale rural CSAs (see Degens and Lapschieß, 2023). The workshops are participatory by nature and all attendees are invited to share and discuss their experiences on the given topic. Later, impressions from the different workshops are reflected upon in a plenary session. *Open spaces* are a method to organize conferences more interactively; they can be established spontaneously and they strongly illustrate the deliberative democratic spirit of the event. Typically, one participant shares a concern or a project to be launched and proposes to set up an open space with others who might share some experience or are generally interested in joining a discussion group. Everyone is welcome to participate in any *open space* to take part in the deliberative process of identifying and articulating common problems in order to communally search for solutions. Sometimes, long-lasting working groups emerge from open spaces. In Deweyan terms, these conferences illustrate on a small scale how common problems are identified and particular publics to address these problems collaboratively are created. In this sense, the open spaces function as laboratories of democratic experimentalism. They form temporary communities that establish particular publics around deliberative problem-solving processes through sharing and discussing experiences from a practical perspective. In fact, many participants enjoy this part of the conferences where they share their own experiences and learn about those of others. At the conferences, further, ongoing exchange among groups is encouraged, in order to help identify and/or solve common problems or improve regional cooperation. This illustrates how, according to Sabel, problem-solving processes go “hand in hand with the search for new potential collaborators” (2012, p. 43). Overall, these conferences conducted by

7 See [www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org](http://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org).

8 <https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/aktuelles/termine/netzwerktreffen>. Our observations were made on online meetings during the corona pandemic in 2021/22.

the network illustrate how CSA activists aim to embody and establish a democratic way of life that is sensitive for the concerns of those affected and that encourages active participation. Voluntary and thoughtful moderators constantly encourage everyone to participate, while accounting for different levels of technical capacities to engage in an online discussion. They also care to balance speaking time, trying to prevent individual participants from taking up too much space while seeking to lecture others.

Within the network, CSA members jointly identified and articulated a shared vision and fundamental principles of CSA in Germany. These principles were shaped in a participatory process that lasted several months and in which members of the network as well as from several working groups were free to be involved to share, discuss and evaluate ideas about the main characteristics of CSA<sup>9</sup>. The declaration of these principles shall create a specific CSA identity within the wide variety of food movements in Germany and beyond. The list of principles includes many aspects that are inherent to democratic experiments and conceives of CSA as “community-based, diverse, needs-based, ecological, and regional agriculture in which people take direct responsibility for their local basic needs”<sup>10</sup>. The successful operation and management of CSA organizations depends on “[...] personal cooperation based on mutual trust. This creates mutual appreciation, respect, and various opportunities for consumers to participate. Based on the main principles, CSA farms organize themselves independently, according to the interests and needs of their participants. This results in lively and dynamic learning processes that help to shape a sustainable and future-oriented social togetherness” (see footnote 10). This quote highlights the insight that CSA relies heavily on communities that are actively experimenting, both at the local level in local initiatives and even more broadly as a highly collaborative movement at the meso level. It seeks to achieve not only sustainable agriculture and free spaces for self-organized small-scale economies, but also novel democratic ways of living in considerate interaction with nature. In Deweyan terms, the vision and fundamental principles can be understood as the subject-related values of CSA, which supplement the basic democratic values that embrace communities and deliberative publics. Mutual recognition and measures to maintain inclusiveness are fundamental for such a kind of collaboration. The notion of recognition and meaningful voice is weighed over democratic voting principles that entail the problematic potential to establish a “tyranny of the majority” (Int10; our translation). Some practitioners feel the very kind of social relations and practices to maintain them entail an element of transformation in themselves: CSA, then, is not necessarily solely about agriculture, but it enables to practice ways of interacting that prefigure a better future (Int4, Int10). Such prefiguration is ascribed to the principle of solidarity in economic endeavors, and to establishing meaningful social ties among members, as well as to the ways how conflicts and clashes of interests are mediated.

Regarding the vision of democracy and society, the CSA network strictly distinguishes itself from exclusionary worldviews such as

far-right political ideologies. This relates to the question of who constitutes the *demos* in democratic governance. Germany has been experiencing a re-invigoration of rightwing thought, and rightwing movements constitute a growing phenomenon. There are, for example, settlement projects that are driven by blood and soil ideology (Pates and Leser, 2021; Röpke and Speit, 2021); also, the right-wing esoteric sect and deeply antidemocratic Anastasia movement has been quite successful in gaining influence (Schenderlein, 2020). Antidemocratic and *völkische* views were closely linked to the environmental movement from its very beginning in Germany (Abrahams, 2021, p. 91f). To counter tendencies to establish sorts of localized Germanic blood-and-soil agricultural communities, the CSA movement vehemently distances itself from such initiatives and aims to preserve its pluralistic and democratic foundations. The network excludes individuals who adhere to such political ideologies or are members of organizations that represent them. The statutes of the network here are very strict: “The association does not tolerate any racist, xenophobic or other discriminatory or inhuman endeavors.” (SoLawi-Netzwerk, 2019, p. 2; our translation) This reproduces a fundamental belief of what Dewey called the “faith in the potentialities of human nature as that nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth.” (Dewey, 2021 [1939], p. 62) As a symbolic act, the CSA movement and the network express their rejection by showing a banner against rightwing positions on its website. In 2016 the working group (WG) “Right Tendencies” (see footnote 10) was established and has since become a fix part of the network. This WG collects information and educates about right-wing initiatives in alternative food movements. It also aims to encourage CSA organizations to take a political stance against far-right and antidemocratic positions. According to the WG, such developments are still too unknown in the CSA movement, despite the growing prevalence of right-wing initiatives and their appropriation attempts in general. Hence, the demand for a clear demarcation was recently reiterated at the network’s Spring-Conference in 2022. In particular, the WG “Right Tendencies” aims at establishing a structured participatory process in the upcoming one and a half years to define elaborated demarcation criteria. In a sense, this WG aims to act as a self-monitoring regulator for the CSA movement to keep democratic values high and cultivate inclusive practices.

The WG against right-wing tendencies is just one of several examples of WGs that are established on the regional level or with respect to specific topics. Another WG, for example, emerged in 2022 out of a shared conviction of its members that the relation between CSA and a broader societal transformation needs to be explored. Its long-term aim is to increase CSA’s impact on transforming large-scale structures (PO7, PO11, and PO14). The initial step, however, is to use the WG as a space to jointly reflect on the meaning of transformation and on how CSA relates to it. All WGs resemble independent and self-organized entities and at the same time are small ramifications of the network. These WGs help to create particular publics around specific problems, e.g., legal hindrances or the compatibility of different legal forms with CSA. This WG modus ultimately means negotiating democratic practice. While many WGs are less formalized, the WG of the CSA cooperatives that was founded in 2019 serves as an illustrative case for more formalized and well-organized groups. It aims to evoke permanent collaboration among those CSAs that chose the specific legal form according to the German co-operative Act.

9 This participative process was established to avoid any kind of top-down pressure. Acknowledging the diversity of CSA forms, norms are not enforced from the top, but jointly agreed upon bottom-up, thus avoiding quasi-coercive isomorphistic pressure from meta-level organizations (cf. Young, 2021).

10 <https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/das-konzept/vision-und-grundprinzipien> (accessed October 14, 2022; our translation).

Meanwhile, it comprises many of the 20 existing CSA co-operatives. On its own website the WG describes its mission:

“The Cooperatives WG thrives above all on exchanges, the sharing of experience and information, and a cooperative, collegial attitude. It exploits potential synergies and builds sustainable partnerships with cooperative auditing associations and other system service providers. The Cooperatives WG develops solutions to issues that may arise in day-to-day operations or in collaboration with authorities and agencies”<sup>11</sup>.

As the quote illustrates, the WG creates a community and establishes a particular public that especially addresses the problems of CSA cooperatives. In practice, this is attempted through monthly online meetings and a dedicated digital communication platform. Even researchers who collaborate with the WG are invited to participate. The meetings offer a forum to discuss recent issues or to get to know other co-operatives and people involved. As one member explains, the WG also seeks to strengthen the compatibility of the legal form of the co-operative which is by definition democratic with the CSA principles (PO16). This is an example of experimentalism in terms of diversifying the existing organizational models in CSA by practicing and experimenting with them.

### 5.3. Coalitions and boundaries in food democratic experimentalism

Having illustrated how collaboration within the field of CSA is an expression of meso-level food democratic experimentalism, we now turn to what we label the external dimension of CSA food democracy. We highlight collaborative efforts with other actors and initiatives beyond the narrower field of CSA. We also aim to reflect on the limitations of CSA as a tool for striving for food democracy by pointing out some of its boundaries. The prosperity of CSA as a movement as well as of single CSA initiatives does not only depend on the respective communities themselves, but also on the wider framework that enables or restricts the development of CSA initiatives and structures. In the previous Section 5.2, we discussed meso-level collaboration within the CSA network, showing how mutual support and cooperation allow for solving problems beyond the reach of individual CSA. However, there are many issues that cannot be tackled within the network or the broader field of CSA. This is recognized by many actors in the field who make efforts to collaborate with like-minded initiatives and other potential allies for making the food system more democratic and more sustainable (cf. Bonfert, 2022). This especially holds for individuals who conceive CSA as a transformative movement that is not necessarily bound to a local niche level in the future.

One arena of collaboration refers to building broader political networks (cf. Bonfert, 2022; Huber and Lorenzini, 2022). To link a CSA initiative with other local food movements, CSA members seek to cooperate with strategic network actors. For example, local food councils serve as an interface between various stakeholders, including municipal politics, civil society and businesses. They use cross-sector approaches to increase communities' control over

the design of their food systems. The long-term goal is to raise awareness in municipalities for the need to actively foster localized sustainable agricultural production and strengthen non-market forms of distribution. Some CSA protagonists are also actively engaged in other movements, such as the CSX movement (Rommel and Knorr, 2021), the “regional movement” (Regionalbewegung), or, on an international level, the CSA network URGENCI. Some organic farming associations in Germany and beyond are also seen as valuable partners for CSA. In the following, we want to illustrate the specific modus of collaborative democratic experimentalism by focusing on the case of collaboration in order to improve access to land.

One major structural issue is that agricultural land is scarce. A large share is held by corporations either for production or speculative purposes. Land prices and rents have been rising tremendously over the last decades. To some CSA initiatives, this constitutes a major hurdle. While producer-led CSAs tend to be able to farm parcels of land that comprise the private property of the farmers, it is typical for more urban and consumer-led CSAs to struggle to find access to affordable land. All in all, CSA initiatives depend on land in a particular region; they are not able to simply move to regions where land is accessible (although some syndicalist groups do show some degree of flexibility as to where to start their holistic endeavor [field note, PO12]).

For CSA, one opportunity to establish access to land is to collaborate with specialized organizations that facilitate investments in sustainable small-scale farming. One example is the European Network “Access to Land,” which aims to “strengthen practical knowledge – on both problems and solutions – in the field of access to land for agroecological farmers”<sup>12</sup>. This and similar organizations aim to withdraw land from the market and speculation, by purchasing land and renting it to specific farmers only (Kumnnig and Rosol, 2021). This way, the land shall be secured and preserved for regional and socially-embedded farming. In Germany, these initiatives formed a network to secure land (“Netzwerk Flächensicherung”), and they all envision a regionalized, organic, and farmer-driven agriculture. Some specifically support community-supported agricultural initiatives. The *Kulturland eG*, for example, has been creatively establishing set-ups that allow supporters to give low-interest loans or make investments in order to purchase land that in turn is rented (on a low-cost basis) to a particular CSA initiative. This way, *Kulturland eG* specifically supports CSA initiatives by providing access to farmland outside of market conditions. Members hold shares and also provide interest-free loans to the organization. The vision is a *commons 2.0*, and the organization seeks to enable cooperative ownership of land to make it available for organic farming. As one interviewee puts it, “people should feel co-responsible for the land, for the fertility of the land, for the versatility of cultivation, and they should also bear agriculture together, in a community-supported way” (Int2). They argue, implicitly resembling Polanyi's (2001 [1944]) notion of fictitious commodities: “In the case of land, private property makes no sense at all. It must not take the character of a commodity.” (Int2) *Kulturland eG* (and similar initiatives, with *BioBoden eG* being the largest) aims to commonify land that was previously bought and sold on the market.

We argue that CSA collaboration with such supporting actors is an expression of the very kind of democratic experimentalism

11 <https://solawi-genossenschaften.net/solidarische-landwirtschaft/#Genos> [accessed October 14, 2022; our translation].

12 <https://www.accesstoland.eu/-/What-we-do->.



that puts CSA into practice in the first place. Commodification and scarcity of land in various locations are experienced as major problems by activists who, as a response, explore democratic organizational forms as potential solutions. In a sense, these initiatives constitute a public that focuses on problems many CSAs struggle with. They do not solely offer a practical and cost-efficient solution in the form of affordable access to land, but they also share the specific value system of CSA and a vision for a regionalized and sustainable system of agriculture and food supply. In a way, they focus on the difficult relation between democracy and property. If all those who are affected by actions and decisions shall have a say, then the current institution of private property raises serious concerns: Landowners are entitled to make decisions regarding their property, and they do not have to take the interests of the local residents and farmers into account (except for other legal and administrative requirements that have to be met). Then, small-scale farmers and local communities depend on the goodwill of landowners to let them cultivate their land. This is seen as a major threat to democracy and the common good (Int8). *Kulturland eG* and similar initiatives aim to set up a system that restricts the use of farmland for regionalized organic farming only and guarantees long-term access. Together with CSA initiatives and supporters, they offer experiments in economic food democracy and generate experience that might be used in the long run to commonify agricultural land on a larger scale. They try to use existing legal instruments creatively to challenge the kind of dominant land property regimes that hamper transition to small-scale, sustainable agriculture (cf. [Calo et al., 2021](#)).

These cases show how some CSA actors try to establish coalitions beyond the narrow field of CSA and also beyond food movements. Strategically, it seems that only a coalition of different actors, comprising CSA, associated movements, municipal entities, and others (if at all) might be capable of generating transformative effects beyond small niches (cf. [Bonfert, 2022](#); [Huber and Lorenzini, 2022](#)). In our view, this strategy resembles Dewey's emphasis on collaborative learning. It is not about a pre-existing group of people that are entitled to make democratic political decisions, but about the process of constituting publics, identifying shared problems and establishing joint solutions.

So far, we focused on the extension of democracy *via* CSA. Yet there are also severe limitations and boundaries to CSA as a democratic endeavor. The *demos* in CSA food democracy can be defined quite exclusively, because there are certain boundaries that function as markers to distinguish insiders from outsiders. Some of these boundaries are deliberately set by the CSA movement itself; others are rather non-intended consequences of the particular preconditions for becoming a member of a CSA initiative. Both sets of boundaries shall be explored and illustrated in the following. We have already shown that CSA members organize in order to exclude those actors from the field who pose themselves against basic universal democratic norms and values (Section 5.1). This reveals the fields' common understanding of shared goals toward a sustainable and democratic food system. The commitment to specific values demarcates a boundary between those who may belong to the system and those who shall not or do not wish to be part of it. This is an example of intended boundaries; however, there are also non-intended boundaries. One issue of CSA's democratic potential is raised by the question of who actually participates in CSA. It is well-known that membership in CSA is driven by classic socio-economic

factors, with the level of income influencing spending opportunities and thus membership (cf. [Forbes and Harmon, 2008](#); [Lorenzini, 2019](#); [Blome-Drees et al., 2021](#); [Bonfert, 2022](#)). CSA crop sharing tends to be expensive, if compared with food from supermarkets and discounters. Although some members seem to deny that conventional retail stores do offer cheaper food (arguing inter alia that a fair comparison would control for quality and unequal compensation for producers [field note, PO12]), most informants and participants are aware of the fact that crop sharing in CSA is not affordable for everyone. That "economic, social, and cultural capital set important barriers to participation" ([Lorenzini, 2019](#), p. 135) is, we find, substantially reflected by parts of the movement. In fact, a conflict of objectives has been regularly mentioned in WGs and workshops: on the one hand, CSA shall be as inclusive as possible, yet members need to have a certain ability to pay, because costs must be covered and the principle of solidarity with producers (amounting to higher relative costs) shall not be disregarded. One representative of the network reflects that CSA is inclusive and membership heterogeneous in the sense that "all age groups are part of it," yet at the same time they acknowledge that many members come from "an educated middle-class background" and had already been interested in the issue of sustainable food before they joined. "So, we are partly divers, but partly not mixed at all," the interviewee concludes (Int10). All in all beyond awareness and reflection of this sort of exclusivity, there has not been a systematic approach to deal with socio-economic boundaries. The mechanism of the bidding circle (see Section 4) constitutes an exemption as it allows (to a limited extent) for pooling individual contributions and therefore for diversifying membership. Yet its impact on diversity remains limited. Overall, CSA does not offer solutions to the broader structural problems of social inequality. If food democracy means equity and democratic participation for all, CSA offers only limited potential, given the "material and symbolic inequalities" ([Bonvin et al., 2018](#), p. 966) that influence membership status.

## 6. Conclusion

The broader aim of this paper is to explore the meaning of CSA as a form of democratic experimentalism that creates publics for transformative change in the agricultural and food system. The analysis is empirically grounded in the field of CSA in Germany with its various primary and secondary actors. We have taken a perspective informed by John Dewey's idea of democracy and experimentation. Through this lens, CSA initiatives constitute experiments to test alternative agricultural and organizational forms. Practitioners must constantly identify and negotiate which real problems are to be solved and how, along with who can or should have a say in this. Thus, the very idea of democracy comes into focus as its "fundamental core consists of an always-incomplete and cooperative process of experimental problem-solving that derives out of the indirect consequences of human transactions and the manifold practical experiences of people in different situations and places" ([Fladvad, 2021](#), p. 16f.). Democracy, then, means giving everyone the opportunity to have a say whenever they are affected.

This notion of establishing effective voice mechanisms for those who are affected by a decision is widely shared within



the field of CSA. However, only some practitioners do explicitly connect CSA to the broader issue of democracy. This leads us to consider some limitations of our approach, before we reflect on the findings. While the insights we provided in this paper are grounded in empirical findings, we used categories to present and discuss them that do not necessarily resemble the perspective of the practitioners themselves. This is not problematic *per se*, and we consider this paper to rather propose a specific perspective than to give definite answers on the links of CSA to democracy. In this sense, this paper is explorative by nature. Our approach also entails decisions on sampling that need to be reflected. We gathered data predominantly on network conferences and meetings, therefore we explicitly looked at those very events that constitute moments of sharing experience, identifying problems, and trying to deliberatively find solutions to those problems. This focus might lead to overemphasizing such processes and the democratic way of life. After all, we did not directly observe the everyday experiences and practices beyond those events (although, of course, such experiences are shared at the meetings). Also, the experts we interviewed showed a high level of reflection and abstraction on these very issues—so, again, we can only offer first insights and we cannot categorically rule out to have overemphasized the relevance of democracy for CSA. However, we do feel that the approach allows to shed light on issues that are relevant both for the conception of democracy, and for the practices and governance of CSA.

We integrated different levels of analysis: primary CSA organizations with their diverse internal modes of governance; collaboration between CSA initiatives on a secondary level; collaboration with other actors within food movements, and the issue of boundaries. On the primary level, we explored varieties of food democracy in CSA by showing different modes of internal democratic governance. In each case the democratic model embodies a specific understanding of the *demos*, i.e., who is entitled to have a say in a meaningful way. Each type also entails specific limitations on whose voices are heard. This holds even for the co-operative model which, by law, entails democratic governance structures. For example, questions arise to what degree—and with what kind of bargaining power—employed gardeners are allowed to participate in decisions about their working conditions and salaries, or if it is only on the consumers to decide what they are willing to pay for the products so that economic power might undermine democratic processes. In our view, the diversity of forms illustrates the experimental nature of CSA initiatives, which commit to shared principles and values, while each of them builds on the distinct experience of its members and deals with specific problems.

The point is not to evaluate the different organizations in terms of the quality or degree of democracy being realized. The perspective of democratic experimentalism prefers neither CSA organizations that strive to economically stabilize an existing small-scale farm nor those ambitious projects that are dedicated to large-scale socio-ecological transformation. Rather, it conceives the diversity of CSA organizations in itself as different expressions of dealing with contingency. It highlights the creative power of collaborative knowledge production and democratic communities. Diverse configurations of CSA settings

are constantly being negotiated; their status as experiments thus remains open-ended.

We have shown how this modus can also be identified on the meso level of collaboration and cooperation within and beyond the network of CSA. Experiences, problems, solutions, and different kinds of democracy are shared, discussed, and elaborated on. In other words, CSA enlarges and strengthens its own public, or publics. Democratic values are pursued also on the meso level, in voluntary working groups, regional organizations, and in relations with other food initiatives on the municipal level. Decision-making and participation within the German CSA network (“Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft”) are organized in an inclusive way, and network meetings might serve as examples or models for micro-level initiatives of how to practice democratic participation. Establishing a voice for everyone involves a lot of negotiation in practice as is shown, for example, by the efforts made at network meetings to create the conditions for a discourse that is as open as possible and to invite all members to participate. The network and its members also are very keen on excluding nondemocratic local food movements, especially far-right initiatives and racist practices and structures.

Finally, the idea of food democratic experimentalism can also be found in various alliances and collaborations from (primary or secondary) CSA initiatives with other political, economic, or civic actors. We highlighted the case of attempts to commonify land in order to make it available exclusively for small-scale, community-based, non-market forms of organic agriculture as an illustrative case of the kind of expanding cooperation and experimentation. Yet while CSA appears to be a valuable part of a broader movement, its somewhat limited impact on democratizing broader food systems is apparent, as the issue of social inequality and the tendency of CSA to attract mostly white middle-income groups with comparatively high income and/or status shows. Dewey himself is quite euphoric in his belief in the transformative potential of cooperative action, yet his unabated optimism raises questions. Does this perspective adequately account for systemic issues, constraints and interdependencies? For example, given the market power of transnational food corporations and the complexity and intransparency of supply chains, the power of collaborative problem solving from below seems to be restricted. Therefore, while the perspective taken here seems to be fruitful to assess CSAs as food democratic organizations, we are also aware of its limits. Also, while communities are by no means harmonic social forms, this perspective tends, like John Dewey himself did, to “downplay the persistence of conflict” (Rogers, 2016, p. 13). Elsewhere (Degens and Lapschieß, 2023) we explored areas of conflict in the field of CSA; here, we have mentioned boundaries to CSA food democracy that are linked to social inequality. Therefore, a purely harmonious vision of CSA communities does not hold.

## Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because they contain information that could compromise research participant privacy. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to PD, [philipp.degens@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:philipp.degens@uni-hamburg.de).

## Author contributions

PD and LL contributed equally to this work in field work and in writing. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

## Funding

The research for this article was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, funding reference number 01UG2016C) (PD and LL) and by the German Research Foundation (DFG, project number 392769165) (PD).

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank their colleagues from the Teilgabe research project for many fruitful discussions. They are indebted to Carla Young, Benno Fladvad, Sören Altstaedt, and

two reviewers for valuable comments on earlier versions of the paper. They would also like to thank the Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft and its members for their cooperation.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

## References

- Abrahams, F. (2021). Umweltschutz von rechts. *Indes* 9, 91–102. doi: 10.13109/inde.2020.9.4.91
- Adloff, F. (2016). *Gifts of Cooperation, Mauss and Pragmatism*. (London; New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group).
- Adloff, F., and Neckel, S. (2019). Futures of sustainability as modernization, transformation, and control: a conceptual framework. *Sustain. Sci.* 14, 1015–1025. doi: 10.1007/s11625-019-00671-2
- Alkon, A., and Guthman, J. (2017b). "Conclusion: a new food politics," in *The New Food Activism. Opposition, Cooperation, and Collective Action*, eds A. Alkon and J. Guthman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 316–324.
- Alkon, A., and Guthman, J. (Eds.). (2017a). *The new food activism. Opposition, Cooperation, and Collective Action*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).
- Ansell, C. (2012). What is a "democratic experiment"? *Contemp Pragmat* 9, 159–180. doi: 10.1163/18758185-90000235
- Asara, V., Otero, I., Demaria, F., and Corbera, E. (2015). Socially sustainable degrowth as a social–ecological transformation: repoliticizing sustainability. *Sustain. Sci.* 10, 375–384. doi: 10.1007/s11625-015-0321-9
- Benton, T. G., Bieg, C., Harwatt, H., Pudasaini, R., and Wellesley, L. (2021). "Food system impacts on biodiversity loss: Three levers for food system transformation in support of nature," in *Research Paper, Energy, Environment and Resources Programme* (London: Chatham House-The Royal Institute of International Affairs).
- Blätzel-Mink, B., Boddenberg, M., Gunkel, L., Schmitz, S., and Vaessen, F. (2017). Beyond the market – New practices of supply in times of crisis: The example community-supported agriculture. *Int. J. Consum. Stud.* 41, 415–421. doi: 10.1111/ijcs.12351
- Blome-Drees, J., Degens, P., Flieger, B., Lapschieß, L., Lautermann, C., Moldenhauer, J., et al. (2021). Kooperatives Wirtschaften für das Gemeinwohl in der Zivilgesellschaft. *Z'GuG* 44, 455–485. doi: 10.5771/2701-4193-2021-4-455
- Boddenberg, M., Gunkel, L., Schmitz, S., Vaessen, F., and Blätzel-Mink, B. (2017). "Jenseits des Marktes – Neue Praktiken der Versorgung in Zeiten der Krise", in *Kapitalismus als Lebensform? Deutungsmuster, Legitimation und Kritik in der Marktgesellschaft*, eds P. Sachweh and S. Münnich (Wiesbaden: Springer VS), 245–272.
- Bonfert, B. (2022). Community-supported Agriculture Networks in Wales and Central Germany: Scaling Up, Out, and Deep through Local Collaboration. *Sustainability* 14, 7419. doi: 10.3390/su14127419
- Bonvin, J.-M., Laruffa, F., and Rosenstein, E. (2018). Towards a Critical Sociology of Democracy: The Potential of the Capability Approach. *Crit. Sociol.* 44, 953–968. doi: 10.1177/0896920517701273
- Borzaga, C., and Depedri, S. (2015). "Multi-stakeholder governance in civil society organizations. Models and outcomes," in *Civil Society, the Third Sector and Social Enterprise. Governance and Democracy*, eds J.-L. Laville, D. R. Young and P. Eynaud (London; New York, NY: Routledge Frontiers of Political Economy), 109–121.
- Calo, A., McKee, A., Perrin, C., Gasselin, P., McGreevy, S., Sippel, S. R., et al. (2021). Achieving food system resilience requires challenging dominant land property regimes. *Front. Sustain. Food Syst.* 5, 683544. doi: 10.3389/fsufs.2021.683544
- Campbell, B. M., Beare, D. J., Bennett, E. M., Hall-Spencer, J. M., Ingram, J. S. I., Jaramillo, F., et al. (2017). Agriculture production as a major driver of the Earth system exceeding planetary boundaries. *Ecol. Soc.* 22. doi: 10.5751/ES-09595-220408
- Chen, K. K.-N., and Chen, V. T. (Eds.). (2021). "Organizational imaginaries," in *Tempering Capitalism and Tending to Communities Through Cooperatives and Collectivist Democracy* (Bingley, U.K.: Emerald Publishing Limited).
- Cone, C. A., and Myhre, A. (2000). Community-supported agriculture: a sustainable alternative to industrial agriculture? *Hum. Organ.* 59, 187–197. doi: 10.17730/humo.59.2.715203t206g2j153
- Cooley, J. P., and Lass, D. A. (1998). Consumer benefits from community supported agriculture membership. *Rev. Agric. Econ.* 20, 227–237. doi: 10.2307/1349547
- Counihan, C., and Siniscalchi, V. (Eds.). (2013). *Food Activism. Agency, Democracy and Economy*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Degens, P. (2016). Between "market" and "reciprocity". how businesses use local currencies. *Behemoth* 9, 22–36. doi: 10.6094/behemoth.2016.9.2.913
- Degens, P. (2018). *Geld als Gabe. Zur sozialen Bedeutung lokaler Geldformen*. (Bielefeld: transcript).
- Degens, P., and Lapschieß, L. (2021). *Zivilgesellschaftliches Wirtschaften. Ein konzeptioneller Vorschlag. Ein konzeptioneller Vorschlag* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien).
- Degens, P., and Lapschieß, L. (2023). "Kooperationen in der solidarischen Landwirtschaft. Eine feldtheoretische Perspektive", in *Gemeinwohlorientiert–Ökologisch–Sozial. Aushandlungen um alternative Wirtschaftspraktiken in der Zivilgesellschaft*, ed C. Kühn (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).
- Deriu, M. (2012). Democracies with a future: Degrowth and the democratic tradition. *Futures* 44, 553–561. doi: 10.1016/j.futures.2012.03.016
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The Public and its Problems*. Denver: Alan Swallow Press.
- Dewey, J. (2021 [1939]). "Creative democracy—the task before us," in *America's Public Philosopher. Essays on Social Justice, Economics, Education, and the Future of Democracy*, ed E. T. Weber (New York, NY: Columbia University Press), 59–65.
- Endenburg, G. (1998). *Sociocracy as Social Design. Its Characteristics and Course of Development, as Theoretical Design and Practical Project*. Delft: Eburon.
- European CSA Research Group (Eds.) (2016). *Overview of Community Supported Agriculture in Europe*. Available online at: <http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Overview-of-Community-Supported-Agriculture-in-Europe-F.pdf> (accessed October 14, 2022).
- Exner, A. (2021). Ökonomien der Gabe. *Z'GuG* 44, 200–217. doi: 10.5771/2701-4193-2021-2-200

- Farnsworth, R. L., Thompson, S. R., Drury, K. A., and Warner, R. E. (1996). Community supported agriculture: filling a niche market. *J. Food Distribut. Res.* 27, 90–98.
- Fladvad, B. (2018). Die Food Movements und ihre Forderungen: zur politischen Dimension alternativer Ernährungsgeographien. *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie* 62, 201–216. doi: 10.1515/zfw-2017-0010
- Fladvad, B. (2021). Rethinking democracy in times of crises: Towards a pragmatist approach to the geographies of emerging publics. *Soc. Sci. Inform.* 60, 230–252. doi: 10.1177/05390184211007107
- Forbes, C. B., and Harmon, A. H. (2008). Buying into community supported agriculture: Strategies for overcoming income barriers. *J. Hunger Environ. Nutr.* 2, 65–79. doi: 10.1080/19320240801891479
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2008). Diverse economies: performative practices for 'other worlds'. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* 32, 613–632. doi: 10.1177/0309132508090821
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2014). Rethinking the Economy with Thick Description and Weak Theory. *Curr. Anthropol.* 55, 147–153. doi: 10.1086/676646
- Gruber, S. (2020). *Bewältigungsstrategien alternativen Wirtschaftens. Wertrationalität und soziale Einbettung am Beispiel solidarischer Landwirtschaft*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH and Co. KG.
- Hassanein, N. (2003). Practicing food democracy: a pragmatic politics of transformation. *J. Rural Stud.* 19, 77–86. doi: 10.1016/S0743-0167(02)0041-4
- Heintz, V. (2018). *Betriebsgründung, Rechtsformen und Organisationsstrukturen in der Solidarischen Landwirtschaft*. Hamm: ABL Verl.
- Hettlage, R. (1990). "'Solidarität' und 'Kooperationsgeist' in genossenschaftlichen Unternehmen," in *Kooperatives Management, Bestandsaufnahmen, Konflikte, Modelle, Zukunftsperspektiven*, in eds Arbeitskreis für Kooperation und Partizipation (Baden-Baden), 123–152.
- Hildebrand, D. L. (2011). Pragmatic democracy: inquiry, objectivity, and experience. *Metaphilosophy* 42, 589–604. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9973.2011.01717.x
- Honneth, A. (2018). *The Idea of Socialism. Towards a Renewal*. Cambridge, Medford, MA: Polity.
- Huber, J., and Lorenzini, J. (2022). "A field of alternative food organizations: a study of discourses, actions and goals toward food system change in Geneva, Switzerland," in *Socio-Economic Review* (Geneva), 1–20. doi: 10.1093/ser/mwac011
- Hvitsand, C. (2016). Community supported agriculture (CSA) as a transformational act—distinct values and multiple motivations among farmers and consumers. *Agroecol. Sustain. Food Syst.* 40, 333–351. doi: 10.1080/21683565.2015.1136720
- Kalthoff, H. (2008). "Einleitung: Zur Dialektik von qualitativer Forschung und soziologischer Theoriebildung," in *Theoretische Empirie: zur Relevanz qualitativer Forschung*, ed H. Kalthoff, S. Hirschauer, G. Lindemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), 8–32.
- Kropp, C., Antoni-Komar, I., and Sage, C. (Eds.). (2021). *Food system transformations. Social Movements, Local Economies, Collaborative Networks* (New York, NY: Routledge).
- Kumnig, S., and Rosol, M. (2021). "Commoning land access: collective purchase and squatting of agricultural lands in Germany and Austria," in *Capitalism and the Commons. Just Commons in the Era of Multiple Crises*, eds A. Exner, S. Kumnig and S. Hochleithner (London: Routledge), 35–49.
- Lorenzini, J. (2019). Food Activism and Citizens' Democratic Engagements: What Can We Learn from Market-Based Political Participation? *PaG* 7, 131–141. doi: 10.17645/pag.v7i4.2072
- Lorenzini, J. (2022). "Political consumerism and food activism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Movements*, eds M. Grasso and M. Giugni (London; New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group), 215–228.
- Lyson, T. A. (2012). *Civic Agriculture. Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*. Lebanon: Tufts University Press (Civil Society).
- Mert-Kakal, T., and Miele, M. (2020). 'Workable utopias' for social change through inclusion and empowerment? Community supported agriculture (CSA) in Wales as social innovation. *Agric. Hum. Values* 1–20. doi: 10.1007/s10460-020-10141-6
- Monticelli, L. (2021). On the necessity of prefigurative politics. *Thesis Eleven* 167, 99–118. doi: 10.1177/07255136211056992
- O'Hara, S. U., and Stagl, S. (2001). Global food markets and their local alternatives: a socio-ecological economic perspective. *Popul. Environ.* 22, 533–554. doi: 10.1023/A:1010795305097
- Paech, N., Rommel, M., Antoni-Komar, I., and Posse, D. (2020). Das Wirtschaftsprinzip der kleinen Einheiten—Resilienz durch gemeinschaftsgetragene Versorgungsstrukturen am Beispiel Solidarischer Landwirtschaftsbetriebe: *HiBiFo* 9, 47–63. doi: 10.3224/hibifo.v9i4.04
- Pates, R., and Leser, J. (2021). *The Wolves are Coming Back. The Politics of Fear in Eastern Germany*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Available online at: <https://www.manchesterhive.com/view/9781526150233/9781526150233.xml>
- Paul, M. (2019). Community-supported agriculture in the United States: social, ecological, and economic benefits to farming. *J. Agrarian Change* 19, 162–180. doi: 10.1111/joac.12280
- Polanyi, K. (2001 [1944]). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Reinecke, J. (2018). Social Movements and Prefigurative Organizing: Confronting entrenched inequalities in Occupy London. *Organ. Stud.* 39, 1299–1321. doi: 10.1177/0170840618759815
- Renting, H., Schermer, M., and Rossi, A. (2012). Building food democracy: Exploring civic food networks and newly emerging forms of food citizenship. *Int. J. Sociol. Agric. Food* 3, 289–307. doi: 10.48416/IJSAF.V19I3.206
- Roelvink, G., St. Martin, K., and Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2015). "Introduction. An Economic Politics for Our Times," in *Making Other Worlds Possible. Performing Diverse Economies*, eds G. Roelvink, K. St. Martin and J. K. Gibson-Graham (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1–25.
- Rogers, M. L. (2016). "Introduction: Revisiting The Public and Its Problems," in *John Dewey: The Public and Its Problems. An Essay in Political Inquiry*, ed M. L. Rogers (Athens, OH: Swallow Press), 1–32.
- Rommel, M., and Knorr, M. (2021). "Wirtschaften ohne Marktpreise? Vom Unternehmensmodell Solidarische Landwirtschaft zu einer gemeinschaftsgetragenen Versorgungsökonomie," in *Der kritische Agrarbericht: Welt im Fieber - Klima and Wandel*, eds AgrarBündnis e.V. (Konstanz; Hamm: ABL Bauernblatt Verlag), 196–200.
- Rommel, M., Stinner, S., Sperling, C., and Lenz, C. (2019). "Eine Typologie transformativer Unternehmen der Ernährungswirtschaft," in *Transformative Unternehmen und die Wende in der Ernährungswirtschaft*, eds I. Antoni-Komar, C. Kropp and N. Paech (Marburg: Metropolis), 51–62.
- Röpke, A., and Speit, A. (2021). *Völkische Landnahme. Alte Sippen, junge Siedler, rechte Ökos*. Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag.
- Rothschild, J. (2016). The Logic of A Co-Operative Economy and Democracy 2.0: Recovering the Possibilities for Autonomy, Creativity, Solidarity, and Common Purpose. *Sociol. Q.* 57, 7–35. doi: 10.1111/tsq.12138
- Rothschild, J., and Whitt, J. A. (1986). "The cooperative workplace. Potentials and dilemmas of organizational democracy and participation" in *The Arnold and Caroline Rose Monograph Series of the American Sociological Association* (Cambridge; New York, NY; Port Chester, NY; Melbourne, VIC; Sydney, NSW: Cambridge University Press).
- Rothschild-Whitt, J. (1979). The collectivist organization: An alternative to rational-bureaucratic models. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* 44, 509–527. doi: 10.2307/2094585
- Sabel, C. (2012). Dewey, Democracy, and Democratic Experimentalism. *Contemp. Pragmat* 9, 35–55. doi: 10.1163/18758185-90000229
- Sampson, D., Cely-Santos, M., Gemmill-Herren, B., Babin, N., Bernhart, A., Kerr, R. B., et al. (2021). Food Sovereignty and Rights-Based Approaches Strengthen Food Security and Nutrition Across the Globe: A Systematic Review. *Front. Sustain. Food Syst.* 5, 686492. doi: 10.3389/fsufs.2021.686492
- Schenderlein, L. (2020). "Demokratiefeindliche Fabelwelten - Die Anastasia-Bewegung im Land Brandenburg zwischen Esoterik und Rechtsextremismus," in *Mitteilungen der Emil Julius Gumbel Forschungsstelle, Moses-Mendelssohn-Zentrum für europäisch-jüdische Studien* 8.
- Schiller-Merkens, S. (2020). Scaling up Alternatives to Capitalism: A Social Movement Approach to Alternative Organizing (in) the Economy. *MPIfG Discussion Paper 20/11*. Cologne: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies.
- Schnell, S. M. (2007). Food With a Farmer's Face: Community-Supported Agriculture in the United States. *Geogr. Rev.* 97, 550–564. doi: 10.1111/j.1931-0846.2007.tb00412.x
- SoLawi-Netzwerk (2019). *Satzung des Vereins Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft*. Available online at: <https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/fileadmin/media/solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/Das-Netzwerk/Ueber-uns/Netzwerk-Solawi-Satzung.pdf> (accessed October 14, 2022).
- SoLawi-Netzwerk (2021). *Selbstdarstellung des Netzwerks Solidarische Landwirtschaft e.V.* Available online at: [https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/fileadmin/media/solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/Das-Netzwerk/Ueber-uns/20201222\\_Selbstdarstellung\\_Netzwerk.pdf](https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/fileadmin/media/solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/Das-Netzwerk/Ueber-uns/20201222_Selbstdarstellung_Netzwerk.pdf) (accessed October 14, 2022).
- Vermeulen, S. J., Campbell, B. M., and Ingram, J. S. I. (2012). Climate Change and Food Systems. *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.* 37, 195–222. doi: 10.1146/annurev-environ-020411-130608
- von Elsen, T., and Kraiß, K. (2012). "Solidarische Landwirtschaft. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in Deutschland," in *Der kritische Agrarbericht 2012: Zusammen arbeiten-für eine andere Landwirtschaft*, eds AgrarBündnis e.V. (Konstanz; Hamm: ABL Bauernblatt), 59–64.
- Wellner, M., and Theuvsen, L. (2017). "Landwirtschaft von unten: Community Supported Agriculture als zivilgesellschaftliche Nachhaltigkeitsinitiative", in *Nonprofit-*

*Organisationen und Nachhaltigkeit*, eds M. Gmür, D. Greiling and R. Andeßner (Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler), 235–244.

WirGarten e.V. (2021). *Handbuch: Ein Praxisleitfaden für die Gründung, den Aufbau und die Führung einer WirGarten-GemüseGenossenschaft (Solawi)*. Available online at: <https://www.wirgarten.com/wirgartenhandbuch/> (accessed October 14, 2022).

Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London: Verso.

Yates, L. (2015). Rethinking prefiguration: Alternatives, micropolitics and goals in social movements. *Soc. Mov. Stud.* 14, 1–21. doi: 10.1080/14742837.2013.870883

Young, C. (2021). “The iron cage has a mezzanine: collectivist-democratic organizations and the selection of isomorphic pressures via meta-organization”, in *Organizational Imaginaries: Tempering Capitalism and Tending to Communities through Cooperatives and Collectivist Democracy (Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Vol. 72)*, eds K. K. Chen and V. T. Chen (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited), 113–139.

Zoll, F., Specht, K., and Siebert, R. (2021). Alternative = transformative? Investigating drivers of transformation in alternative food networks in Germany. *Sociol. Ruralis* 61, 638–659. doi: 10.1111/soru.12350