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**Opening up food sovereignty and Community Supported
Agriculture with organizational perspectives:
zooming into the diversity of economic actors that are
striving for food sovereignty**

INAUGURAL DISSERTATION
for the acquisition of the academic degree of
Doctor of Agriculture (Dr. agr.)
of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Nutritional Sciences,
and Environmental Management

submitted by
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Doctoral Dissertation (Cumulative Dissertation) Matthias Middendorf

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Declaration of Originality

I declare that I have prepared the submitted dissertation independently and without any unauthorized third-party assistance, and solely with the resources and support indicated in the dissertation. All text passages quoted literally or in substance from other published sources, as well as all information based on verbal statements, are identified as such. In the research I conducted and described in this dissertation, I complied with the principles of good scientific practice as laid down in the *Statutes of Justus Liebig University Giessen for Ensuring Good Scientific Practice*, at my former institution, the University of Kassel, as well as the *Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice* of the German Research Foundation when carrying out the analyses of my research presented here.

Berlin, November 2025

Matthias Middendorf

Summary

Agri-food systems face multiple interlinked crises, including accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss, entrenched social inequalities, and pressures on democratic institutions. Food sovereignty has emerged as a prominent pathway for transforming agri-food systems toward greater justice and sustainability, understood as peoples' right to healthy, culturally appropriate food produced sustainably and to define their own agri-food systems. It is articulated as both a social movement and an alternative food concept and is addressed in movement strategies, policy debates, and research at international, national, and regional levels. Yet most analyses remain concentrated at the macro-/system-level, while actors and organizational phenomena receive limited analytical attention. In particular, actors engaged in economic activities (e.g., production, processing, distribution) are not consistently named in the food sovereignty discourse as 'economic actors' and are often overlooked. This stands in tension with the movement's explicit calls to build an alternative economic model. Shaped by critiques of the corporate agri-food system, such terminological caution fosters generalization and limits differentiation among actors, thereby sidelining analysis at the organizational level. As a result, the organizational configurations through which economic actors operate (understood as combinations of organizational characteristics such as decision-making, property, and labor) are seldom examined. This conceptual flattening marginalizes organizational perspectives in the food sovereignty discourse and underrepresents the diversity of economic actors, their configurations, and challenges, thereby limiting opportunities for their support. The functioning and stability of economic actors are essential for shaping transformations. Accordingly, organizational configurations must be analyzed alongside economic activities. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organizations, often cited as an expression of food sovereignty, illustrate this gap, as they are rarely differentiated or subjected to organizational analysis.

The overall aim of this dissertation is to open up, broaden, and deepen the discourse on food sovereignty and CSA by approaching food sovereignty not only as a movement and concept but also as an organizational phenomenon. It uses organizational perspectives as a heuristic lens to render the organizational configurations of economic actors analytically visible. Adopting an actor-centered perspective at the organizational level, the dissertation conceptualizes the diversity of economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) and differentiates their organizational configurations in general and for CSAs in particular. The first paper develops a conceptual framework based on an integrative literature review and thematic analysis of 108 publications on food sovereignty, including gray literature. It conceptualizes organizational diversity within EAFS by identifying general patterns across Global North and Global South contexts and differentiates EAFS at the organizational level. The second transdisciplinary paper develops a CSA Framework in partnership with the German CSA Network and applies a mixed-methods design to CSAs in Germany. It uses a

survey of 70 CSAs to test the framework, documents organizational heterogeneity, demonstrates that configurations differ by governance type (producer-led, consumer-led, integrated), and confirms the diversity and complexity of CSA organizations.

Synthesizing the findings of both studies yields the Synthesized EAFS Framework, which provides a more differentiated organizational perspective on EAFS. This framework distinguishes three domains comprising 12 characteristics: *Conditions that shape EAFS* (Motives, Transformative approach, Intersectionality), *Organizational-related characteristics* (Organizational governance types, Founding impulse and establishing paths, Ownership/Property and legal forms, Work/Labor, Participation, Non-economic partnerships and cooperation), and *Economic-related characteristics* (Production practices and services, Scope of supply chains, Economic partnerships and cooperation). The framework defines *Size* as a cross-cutting structural factor. Conditions guide configuration choices across these characteristics. The framework also embeds the governance typology from the second study as a key lever for allocating decision rights. In doing so, the framework provides an actor-centered language for systematic comparison that moves beyond overly abstract descriptions.

Finally, the dissertation aligns the Synthesized EAFS Framework with the six food sovereignty pillars established at the 1st Global Nyéléni Forum. This alignment makes configurations of EAFS at the organizational level analytically visible and grounds the framework in widely recognized movement principles. This supports the view that food sovereignty is also an organizational phenomenon and frames EAFS as a configuration space in which mixed forms are common.

Accordingly, the findings reject simplistic binaries and show the prevalence of mixed forms: depending on the configuration, EAFS can combine conventional logics (e.g., market participation, revenue generation) with alternative approaches (e.g., solidarity-based practices, community ownership, collective governance, shared economic risk). This perspective centers on differentiated organizational configurations rather than generalized forms.

Taken together, the dissertation makes several key contributions. Conceptually, it first makes the diversity of EAFS along the agri-food supply chain visible. Second, it develops an integrative, actor-centered organizational language and a novel framework that links food sovereignty goals to organizational phenomena and enables application across contexts as well as the analysis of EAFS configurations. Empirically, it documents organizational heterogeneity among CSAs in Germany, a prominent EAFS case, and shows how governance types and characteristics are distributed. Methodologically, it offers an analytical lens for comparing EAFS in different settings by making organizational configurations analytically visible. In practice, it guides context-sensitive configurations for practitioners and movement educators and supports alliance-building among EAFS. It enables the identification of organizational challenges (e.g., unclear decision rights and roles,

resource constraints, power asymmetries) that provide a basis for strengthening organizational stability and adaptability. For policy and support systems, it points to the importance of aligning instruments with actual configuration options and addressing organizational challenges where relevant.

Future research should refine and extend the Synthesized EAFS Framework beyond CSA to other EAFS (e.g., food hubs or food processing actors) and apply it across contexts, including in the Global South. It should examine decision-making, participation, and power within governance types to determine who benefits and who is excluded. It should also analyze how organizational stability and adaptability relate to governance and ownership/property under operational constraints. Overall, these directions shift the discourse from whether EAFS matter to how specific configurations function, for whom, and under what conditions, while supporting practice-research transfer within the contemporary food sovereignty discourse.

Zusammenfassung

Agrar- und Ernährungssysteme stehen vor multiplen, miteinander verschränkten Krisen, darunter sich beschleunigender Klimawandel, Biodiversitätsverlust, verfestigte soziale Ungleichheiten und wachsende Belastungen demokratischer Institutionen. Ernährungssouveränität (food sovereignty) hat sich als ein zentraler Transformationspfad etabliert, um Agrar- und Ernährungssysteme in Richtung größerer Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit zu verändern, verstanden als das Recht der Menschen auf gesunde, kulturell angemessene Nahrung, die nachhaltig produziert wird, sowie als das Recht, die eigenen Agrar- und Ernährungssysteme selbst zu gestalten. Ernährungssouveränität wird sowohl als soziale Bewegung als auch als alternatives Ernährungskonzept artikuliert und in Bewegungsstrategien, politischen Debatten und der Forschung auf internationaler, nationaler und regionaler Ebene aufgegriffen. Die meisten Analysen konzentrieren sich jedoch weiterhin auf die Makro-/System-Ebene, während Akteure und organisationale Phänomene nur begrenzte analytische Aufmerksamkeit erhalten. Insbesondere Akteure, die wirtschaftlich tätig sind, zum Beispiel in Produktion, Verarbeitung oder Verteilung, werden im Ernährungssouveränitäts-Diskurs nicht konsistent als „economic actors“ benannt und häufig übersehen. Dies steht in Spannung zu den expliziten Forderungen der Bewegung, ein alternatives Wirtschaftsmodell aufzubauen. Geprägt durch die Kritik am konzerngeprägten Agrar- und Ernährungssystem (corporate agri-food system) fördert diese terminologische Zurückhaltung Verallgemeinerungen, begrenzt die Differenzierung zwischen Akteuren und drängt Analysen auf organisationaler Ebene zurück. Infolgedessen werden die organisationalen Konfigurationen, in denen wirtschaftlich handelnde Akteure agieren, verstanden als Kombinationen organisationaler Merkmale wie Entscheidungsstrukturen, Eigentum und Arbeit, nur selten untersucht. Diese konzeptionelle Verflachung marginalisiert organisationale Perspektiven im Ernährungssouveränitäts-Diskurs und unterrepräsentiert die Vielfalt wirtschaftlich handelnder Akteure, ihrer Konfigurationen und ihrer Herausforderungen, wodurch Möglichkeiten zu ihrer Unterstützung eingeschränkt werden. Die Funktionsfähigkeit und Stabilität wirtschaftlich handelnder Akteure sind zentral für die Gestaltung von Transformationen. Entsprechend müssen organisationale Konfigurationen neben wirtschaftlichen Aktivitäten analysiert werden. Organisationen der Solidarischen Landwirtschaft (Community Supported Agriculture, CSA), die häufig als Ausdruck von Ernährungssouveränität angeführt werden, verdeutlichen diese Lücke, da sie selten differenziert oder einer organisationalen Analyse unterzogen werden.

Das übergreifende Ziel dieser Dissertation ist es, den Diskurs zu Ernährungssouveränität und CSA zu öffnen, zu erweitern und zu vertiefen, indem Ernährungssouveränität nicht nur als Bewegung und Konzept, sondern auch als organisationales Phänomen untersucht wird. Organisationale Perspektiven werden als heuristische analytische Linse genutzt, um die organisationalen Konfigurationen wirtschaftlich handelnder Akteure analytisch sichtbar zu machen. Mit einer

akteurszentrierten Perspektive auf organisationaler Ebene konzeptualisiert die Dissertation die Vielfalt wirtschaftlich handelnder Akteure, die nach Ernährungssouveränität streben (economic actors striving for food sovereignty, EAFS) und differenziert ihre organisationalen Konfigurationen allgemein und im Besonderen für CSAs. Der erste Artikel entwickelt ein konzeptionelles Framework auf Basis einer integrativen Literaturübersicht und einer thematischen Analyse von 108 Publikationen zur Ernährungssouveränität, einschließlich grauer Literatur. Im ersten Artikel wird organisationale Vielfalt innerhalb von EAFS konzeptualisiert, indem allgemeine Muster über Kontexte des Globalen Nordens und Südens hinweg identifiziert und EAFS auf organisationaler Ebene differenziert werden. Der zweite transdisziplinäre Artikel entwickelt in Partnerschaft mit dem deutschen Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft ein CSA Framework und wendet ein Mixed-Methods-Design auf CSAs in Deutschland an. Im zweiten Artikel wird eine Befragung von 70 CSAs genutzt, um das Framework zu prüfen. Der Artikel dokumentiert organisationale Heterogenität, zeigt, dass sich Konfigurationen nach Governance-Typen unterscheiden (produzent:innen-geführte, verbraucher:innen-geführte, integrierte CSA) und bestätigt die Vielfalt und Komplexität von CSA-Organisationen.

Die Synthese der Ergebnisse beider Studien führt zum Synthetisierten EAFS Framework, das eine stärker differenzierte organisationale Perspektive auf EAFS bietet. Dieses Framework unterscheidet drei Domains mit insgesamt zwölf Merkmalen: Bedingungen, die EAFS prägen (Motive, transformativer Ansatz, Intersektionalität), organisational-bezogene Merkmale (organisationale Governance-Typen, Gründungsimpuls und Etablierungspfade, Eigentum und Rechtsformen, Arbeit/Arbeitsverhältnisse, Partizipation, nicht-ökonomische Partnerschaften und Kooperationen) sowie wirtschaftsbezogene Merkmale (Produktionspraktiken und Dienstleistungen, Bereich von Wertschöpfungsketten, ökonomische Partnerschaften und Kooperationen). Das Framework definiert Größe als querliegenden strukturellen Faktor. Bedingungen beeinflussen Entscheidungen über diese Merkmale hinweg. Das Framework integriert zudem die Governance-Typologie aus der zweiten Studie als zentralen Hebel zur Zuweisung von Entscheidungsrechten. Auf diese Weise stellt das Framework eine akteurszentrierte Sprache für systematische Vergleiche bereit, die übermäßig abstrakte Beschreibungen hinter sich lässt.

Abschließend gleicht die Dissertation das Synthetisierte EAFS Framework mit den sechs Säulen der Ernährungssouveränität (food sovereignty pillars) ab, die auf dem Ersten Globalen Nyéléni-Forum etabliert wurden. Dieser Abgleich macht Konfigurationen von EAFS auf organisationaler Ebene analytisch sichtbar und bettet das Framework in weithin anerkannten Prinzipien der Bewegung ein. Dies stützt die Auffassung, dass Ernährungssouveränität auch ein organisationales Phänomen ist und rahmt EAFS als einen Konfigurationsraum, in dem Mischformen häufig sind.

Entsprechend weisen die Ergebnisse einfache Dichotomien zurück und zeigen die Verbreitung gemischter Formen: Abhängig von der jeweiligen Konfiguration können EAFS konventionelle Logiken (zum Beispiel Marktteilnahme, Einnahmengenerierung) mit alternativen Ansätzen (zum Beispiel solidarische Praktiken, gemeinschaftliches Eigentum, kollektive Governance, geteiltes wirtschaftliches Risiko) verbinden. Diese Perspektive rückt differenzierte organisationale Konfigurationen anstelle verallgemeinerter Formen in den Mittelpunkt.

Insgesamt leistet die Dissertation mehrere zentrale Beiträge. Konzeptionell macht die Dissertation erstens die Vielfalt von EAFS entlang der agrar- und ernährungsbezogenen Wertschöpfungskette sichtbar. Zweitens entwickelt die Dissertation eine integrative, akteurszentrierte organisationale Sprache und ein neuartiges Framework, das Ziele der Ernährungssouveränität mit organisationalen Phänomenen verknüpft und sowohl kontextübergreifende Anwendungen als auch die Analyse von EAFS-Konfigurationen ermöglicht. Empirisch dokumentiert die Dissertation organisationale Heterogenität unter CSAs in Deutschland als prominenten EAFS-Fall und zeigt, wie Governance-Typen und Merkmale verteilt sind. Methodologisch bietet die Dissertation eine analytische Linse für den Vergleich von EAFS in unterschiedlichen Kontexten, indem organisationale Konfigurationen analytisch sichtbar gemacht werden. Für die Praxis bietet die Dissertation Orientierung zu kontextsensitiven Konfigurationen für Praktiker:innen und Akteure der Bildungsarbeit und unterstützt Allianzenbildung unter EAFS. Zudem ermöglicht die Dissertation die Identifikation organisationaler Herausforderungen (zum Beispiel unklarer Entscheidungsrechte und Rollen, Ressourcenbeschränkungen, Machtasymmetrien), die eine Grundlage für die Stärkung organisationaler Stabilität und Anpassungsfähigkeit bieten. Für politische und institutionelle Unterstützungssysteme verweist die Dissertation auf die Bedeutung, Instrumente an realen Konfigurationsoptionen auszurichten und organisationale Herausforderungen gezielt zu adressieren.

Zukünftige Forschung könnte das Synthetisierte EAFS Framework über CSA hinaus verfeinern und erweitern, zum Beispiel auf Food Hubs oder Akteure der Lebensmittelverarbeitung, und es über Kontexte hinweg anwenden, einschließlich im Globalen Süden. Die Forschung könnte Entscheidungsfindung, Partizipation und Macht innerhalb der Governance-Typen untersuchen, um zu bestimmen, wer profitiert und wer ausgeschlossen wird. Zukünftige Forschung sollte zudem analysieren, wie organisationale Stabilität und Anpassungsfähigkeit in Relation zu Governance und Eigentum unter operationalen Restriktionen stehen.

Insgesamt verschieben diese Richtungen den Diskurs von der Frage, ob EAFS relevant sind, hin zu der Frage, wie spezifische Konfigurationen funktionieren, für wen und unter welchen Bedingungen. Zugleich unterstützen sie den Praxis-Forschungs-Transfer im zeitgenössischen Ernährungssouveränitäts-Diskurs.

Acknowledgements

First, thanks go to Christian Herzig and Franz-Theo Gottwald for their guidance and support throughout this process, including demanding review phases. Christian supervised this dissertation at the University of Kassel and later at Justus Liebig University Giessen. I am grateful for his support and for the freedom and flexibility he granted in developing my research projects. I also thank him for creating an enabling working and learning environment in northern Hesse, in Witzenhausen, which became an important place of academic exchange, learning, and orientation.

Beyond the university context, Witzenhausen also became a broader place of learning. I am thankful for what I encountered and learned there, including through relationships with people, animals, and landscapes, from horses, birds, and bees to shared herbal teas and forms of resistance that shaped how I think about agriculture and organization.

Theo has been a mentor along my academic path well beyond this dissertation. Our collaboration began with his role as co-supervisor of my diploma thesis and continued through my work at the Schweisfurth Foundation, where, from 2015 onward, he placed considerable trust in me, opened doors, and provided space for responsibility and conceptual development. He later supported this dissertation again as a supervisor. I am grateful for the different, complementary ways in which Christian and Theo supported this work.

I am deeply grateful to my co-author, Marius Rommel, for the close collaboration that shaped Paper 2 and related practice-oriented outputs. Our work provided an intensive space for conceptual development, methodological learning, and careful translation between organizational perspectives and practice-based concerns. The exchanges with Marius were central to refining both the empirical focus and the organizational framing of this dissertation. Through our collaboration, he also enabled important connections, including my closer involvement with the research project cluster “nascent transformative”, which became a key setting for developing the CSA-related parts of this work. I also thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of the journal articles included in this dissertation for their engagement and feedback, which significantly improved the published manuscripts.

A central part of this dissertation developed through transdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge co-production at the interface of practice and inquiry. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this process, including the many Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives, experts, and participants of focus groups and interviews who shared their time, experiences, and perspectives. I am grateful to the wider environment of Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft e.V. (German CSA Network) for enabling long-term exchange, trust, and collaboration, as well as for creating spaces in which organizational questions around CSA could be explored. I also thank the members of the Network’s working groups, as well as Jocelyn Parot and the international CSA Network URGENCI, for exchanges that helped situate the German CSA context within broader conversations.

The contributions of practitioners and network actors were not peripheral to this work, but constitutive of the questions and analytical directions developed in this dissertation.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support that made this dissertation possible. I thank the Heinrich Böll Foundation for the doctoral scholarship that supported substantial parts of the dissertation period, and the Schweisfurth Foundation for supporting an earlier phase. I also acknowledge the Open Access Funds of Justus Liebig University Giessen and the University of Kassel for supporting publication processes and helping to make this work openly accessible.

I would also like to thank colleagues and friends at the University of Kassel who accompanied this dissertation through ongoing exchange, feedback, and shared spaces of reflection. I am grateful to Maren Busch, Tanja Matheis, and Nora Schütze for sustaining exchanges during different phases of the doctoral process. Discussions with them and other colleagues in Witzenhausen provided important spaces for developing and revising ideas, and for situating this work within broader organizational and transformation-related debates.

I further thank Sinje Grenzdörffer, Josef Kaiser, and Friederike Mainz for the close collaboration within our interdisciplinary “property group”. We first met as scholarship holders of the Heinrich Böll Foundation and developed this constellation into a self-organized peer group that became an important space for thinking and writing together. Our exchanges included writing retreats at the Kiel Fjord, a GAIA publication on interdisciplinary perspectives on property, as well as the organization of a research seminar.

I am also grateful for shared writing weeks in Schönborn and to the group around Helene Bukowski and Marina Schwabe for their open door in Brandenburg. These stays provided a valuable setting for writing and for everyday practices around cooking, gardening, and swimming, which supported focused writing processes.

This work was shaped not only by visible academic contributions but also by forms of support that often remain in the background of academic writing. I therefore wish to thank the many people who sustain the everyday infrastructures of research and teaching, including administrative staff, technical support, and library teams. In particular, I am grateful to the staff and resources of major research libraries, including the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin as well as the university libraries in Kassel and Witzenhausen. Their work enabled access to literature, supported focused writing phases, and sustained the material conditions under which this dissertation could be developed.

I thank my family for their long-term support and for enabling my educational path. I grew up in a non-academic household on a family-run poultry farm that faced the structural pressures affecting many agricultural enterprises and chose a trajectory of growing rather than giving way. The shifts in perspective between large and small, and between conventional and alternative forms of agriculture, shaped my path and sensitized me to engage with the broad spectrum of practices and positions beyond simple binaries. These

experiences continue to inform the way I approach questions of agriculture, economy, and organization in my academic work.

Finally, I would also like to thank my friends who accompanied me through the emotional ups and downs of the past years. Many of you provided support in ways that are difficult to formalize, through listening, encouragement, and simply being present when things were demanding, uncertain, or exhausting. I am grateful for open ears, shared walks and conversations, and for the many small gestures of care, including coffee, cake, and ice cream, that helped create moments of grounding and lightness alongside the work on this dissertation.

Taken together, these relationships, spaces, and contexts did not merely accompany this dissertation; they made it possible. I am grateful for the continued exchanges that extend across projects, institutions, and life contexts, and for the paths that have already intersected and those that will continue to unfold. Any contribution this work makes to opening up food sovereignty and CSA through organizational perspectives and to zooming into the diversity of economic actors striving for food sovereignty rests on the many people and infrastructures that shaped the conditions under which it could be developed.

Preface

This cumulative dissertation was written by Matthias Middendorf from 2018 to 2025 during his time as a research assistant and research fellow at the University of Kassel (2018–2025), visiting scholar at Humboldt University of Berlin (2022–2025), and doctoral candidate at Justus Liebig University Giessen (2023–2025), where this dissertation was formally submitted. The title of this dissertation is “Opening up food sovereignty and Community Supported Agriculture with organizational perspectives: zooming into the diversity of economic actors that are striving for food sovereignty”. According to the guidelines for cumulative dissertations at Faculty 09, Justus Liebig University Giessen¹, this dissertation consists of two peer-reviewed journal articles, presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

This dissertation was supported by a doctoral scholarship from the Heinrich Böll Foundation (10/2019–12/2023), funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), within the foundation’s thematic cluster on transformation research. An earlier phase (01/2019–09/2019) was supported by the Schweisfurth Foundation.

Paper 2 (Chapter 3) included in this cumulative dissertation was developed in close collaboration with Marius Rommel (University of Siegen) as part of a broader transdisciplinary research project. This project involved knowledge co-production with the German CSA Network and was part of the BMBF-funded project “nascent – New opportunities for a sustainable food system through transformative business models” (01UT1928). A follow-up project, “SolaRegio – Community Supported Agriculture in the context of innovation ecosystems” (01UY2212), is ongoing; I am currently an Associate Member of the “nascent transformative” research project cluster. The collaboration with Marius Rommel has also led to additional practice-oriented outputs: a practical handbook for CSAs in cooperation with the German CSA Network (2nd, revised edition published in 2025) and a co-authored book chapter on CSAs in Germany as part of the World CSA Census by URGENCI² (see Gastinger et al. 2025). The research project’s final report also references the developed CSA Framework. These outputs reflect the practice- and movement-oriented transfer of insights developed in this dissertation (see, in the food sovereignty and CSA context, Middendorf and Scholl 2025; see Further publications).

¹ See Doctoral Dissertation Guidelines for Cumulative Dissertations, Faculty 09: “It is not to be structured the way it would be in a conventional dissertation, i.e., introduction, methods, and so on, but all methods which are important for the dissertation (not the standard methods) must be documented in detail and an easy access to source references has to be provided - possibly in an appendix that is designed as an overview.”

² URGENCI is an acronym standing for An Urban-Rural networks: GEnerating New forms of exchanges between CIizens. URGENCI is the international grassroots network of all forms of regional and Local Solidarity-based Partnerships for Agroecology (LSPAs), of which Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is the best-known iteration (URGENCI 2025a). However, URGENCI is often described as the international CSA Network.

Included articles

Peer-reviewed articles included in the dissertation:

The two scientific publications are peer-reviewed and published in a journal listed in the online catalog Web of Science (WoS) database.

Paper 1: Chapter 2:

Middendorf, M., Herzig, C. 2025. Food sovereignty at the organizational level: A framework for characterizing the diversity of economic actors. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*. 9:1258633. DOI: 10.3389/fsufs.2025.1258633.³

Citable as: Middendorf and Herzig (2025)

Number of words: 12.930

Number of figures and tables: 7 (2 figures and 5 tables)

Additionally: Supplementary material (including additional 1 table)

Paper 2: Chapter 3:

Middendorf, M., Rommel, M. 2024. Understanding the diversity of Community Supported Agriculture: a transdisciplinary framework with empirical evidence from Germany. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*. 8:1205809. DOI: 10.3389/fsufs.2024.1205809.⁴

Citable as: Middendorf and Rommel (2024)

Number of words: 12.930

Number of figures and tables: 6 (2 figures and 4 tables)

Additionally: Supplementary material (including additional 4 tables)

³ Author contribution note: The author of this dissertation is the sole first author (for author contribution details of the two publications included in this dissertation, see Chapter 1.4). Publication citable as Middendorf and Herzig (2025).

⁴ Author contribution note: The author of this dissertation is a co-first author. Both authors contributed equally and share first authorship (authors listed in alphabetical order). Publication citable as Middendorf and Rommel (2024).

Further publications (not included in the dissertation)

Peer-reviewed article emerged out of the dissertation (not included in the dissertation):

Grenzdörffer, S., Kaiser, J., Mainz, F., **Middendorf**, M. 2022. Interdisciplinary perspectives on the diversity of property: potentials for a social-ecological transformation. *GAIA - Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society*. 31/2: 77 – 81.

DOI: 10.14512/gaia.31.2.3.^{5 6}

Citable as: Grenzdörffer et al. (2022)

This scientific publication is peer-reviewed and published in a journal listed in the online catalog WoS database.

Practice- and CSA movement-oriented publications (in English) that emerged out of the dissertation (not included in the dissertation)⁷:

Middendorf, M., Scholl, S. 2025. Organizational resilience as movement practice: Lessons from the German CSA Network. *Rooted Magazine*, Issue 3 “Weaving Resilience and Resistance” published in conjunction with the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum in Sri Lanka: https://rooted-magazine.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Organisational-resilience-as-movement-practice_corr.pdf.

Citable as: Middendorf and Scholl (2025)

Gastinger, M. M., Kraiß, K., Meißner, S., Rommel, M., **Middendorf**, M., Egli, L. 2025. Country Report GERMANY in: *World CSA Census*, International Handbook on Community Supported Agriculture. URGENCI: <https://cloud.urgenci.net/index.php/s/SZMzBw3dM93CiTw>.

Citable as: Gastinger et al. (2025)

⁵ Author contribution note: All authors contributed equally to this article (authors listed in alphabetical order). Publication citable as Grenzdörffer et al. (2022).

⁶ This publication was the basis for the two-day research seminar “Mine? Yours? Ours? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Importance of Property for the Socio-Ecological Transformation”. The four authors initiated and co-organized this format together for the theme cluster Transformation Research in cooperation with the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation and members of the Collaborative Research Centre "Structural Change of Property" (University of Jena and the University of Erfurt). The event took place in 2022 at the University of Jena.

⁷ The following five (English and German) publications are intended as results transfer to the German and international CSA movement, including CSA Network associations, and CSA practice, and research.

Practice- and CSA movement-oriented publication (in German) that emerged out of the dissertation (not included in the dissertation):

nascent & Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft. 2025 (ed.): Handbuch Solidarische Landwirtschaft. Solawis erfolgreich gründen & gestalten (Version 2.1) (Scientific collaboration of **Middendorf, M.**).^{8 9}

nascent & Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft. 2023 (ed.): Handbuch Solidarische Landwirtschaft. Solawis erfolgreich gründen & gestalten (Version 1.0) (Scientific collaboration of **Middendorf, M.**).¹⁰

Rommel, M.; Paech, N.; Antoni-Komar, I., Posse, D., Wittkamp, M., **Middendorf, M.** (2022): Organisationale Vielfalt. Ein Versuch der Typisierung. Chapter, in: Nascent 2 – Beiträge Solidarischer Landwirtschaftsbetriebe zur Entwicklung transformativer Wertschöpfungsräume. Teil II: Schlussbericht. DOI: 10.2314/KXP:1856531872.¹¹

Other article emerged in the context of the dissertation (not included in the dissertation):

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⁸ Translated title in English: Handbook Community Supported Agriculture. Successfully founding and shaping CSAs, published by the research project ‘nascent’ and the German CSA Network. Publication citable as nascent & Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft (2025).

⁹ This is the most recent version of the handbook (Version 2.1). An editable version (Google Docs format) is available on the website of the German CSA Network, where interested individuals are invited to comment, contribute, and suggest changes. Updated versions are compiled and published at regular intervals. See: https://docs.google.com/document/d/10ipQfPcd2L-b9lhbqNQaM-0p_v4V1fCRYhSLchM_8JY/edit?usp=sharing (accessed November 8, 2025)

¹⁰ Translated title in English: Handbook Community Supported Agriculture. Successfully founding and shaping CSAs, published by the research project ‘nascent’ and the German CSA Network. Publication citable as nascent & Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft (2023).

¹¹ Chapter „2.1.3 Organisationale Vielfalt | Ein Versuch der Typisierung“ was developed with the collaboration of Matthias Middendorf. Publication citable as Rommel et al. (2022a). The full study underlying this chapter is published in Paper 2.

Online publications (selection):

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¹² Publication citable as Middendorf et al. (2023).

¹³ Publication citable as Middendorf (2021).

¹⁴ This report from the research workshop of the transdisciplinary research project nascent (1.0) was written by Matthias Middendorf as a representative of the Schweisfurth Foundation, which served as an advisory partner in the ‘nascent’ research project. Publication citable as Middendorf (2016).

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Table of Contents

Declaration of Originality.....	iv
Summary	v
Zusammenfassung	viii
Acknowledgements	xi
Preface	xiv
Included articles.....	xv
Further publications (not included in the dissertation).....	xvi
Copyright notice	xix
Table of Contents	xx
List of Figures.....	xxiv
List of Tables.....	xxv
List of Abbreviations.....	xxvi
Prologue: Research context, motivation, and development	xxviii
Chapter 1 General Introduction	1
1.1 Problem statement	1
1.2 Background and conceptual foundations.....	4
1.2.1 Food Sovereignty as a movement and alternative food concept	4
1.2.2 Related alternative food concepts: food democracy and food justice	12
1.2.3 Food sovereignty actors as transition actors.....	14
1.2.4 Community Supported Agriculture as an expression of food sovereignty.....	19
1.2.5 Organizational perspectives for the food sovereignty discourse	24
1.3 Research aims and dissertation structure.....	28
1.3.1 Overall research assumptions	28
1.3.2 Overall aims.....	29
1.3.3 Research question(s) and dissertation structure	31
1.3.4 Scope, delimitations, and comparative overview of study designs	34
1.4 Author contributions.....	36
Chapter 2 Food sovereignty at the organizational level: a framework for characterizing the diversity of economic actors	37
Abstract.....	39
2.1 Introduction	40
2.2 Conceptual and theoretical background	43
2.2.1 Food sovereignty as a movement and concept	43
2.2.2 Incorporating the organizational level into food sovereignty research.....	44

2.3 Research methods	45
2.3.1 Method selection.....	45
2.3.2 Data selection process for the integrative literature review.....	46
2.3.3 Thematic analysis method: data analysis and framework building	48
2.4. Integrative literature review: conceptualization of diverse Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS)	49
2.4.1 Theme 1: conditions that shape EAFS.....	49
2.4.2 Theme 2: economic-related characteristics.....	53
2.4.3 Theme 3: organizational-related characteristics	56
2.5 Discussion.....	62
2.5.1 Incorporation of different generations of EAFS along the agri-food supply chain	62
2.5.2 Motives of striving for food sovereignty with varying strengths and conflicting goals	63
2.5.3 Need for connecting themes instead of isolating alterity.....	64
2.5.4 Organizational level to incorporate challenges of and within EAFS.....	65
2.5.5 Limitations and implications for further research.....	66
2.6 Conclusion.....	68
Chapter 3 Understanding the diversity of Community Supported Agriculture: a transdisciplinary framework with empirical evidence from Germany	71
Abstract.....	73
3.1 Introduction.....	74
3.2 Methodology and transdisciplinary mixed-methods research design.....	76
3.2.1 Research partnership with the German CSA Network	76
3.2.2 Two-stage knowledge co-production process and used data material.....	77
3.2.2.1 Stage (I) Iterative development of framework and survey	77
3.2.2.2 Stage (II) Framework application and survey conduction.....	79
3.2.2.3 Visualization of the knowledge co-production process and used data material ..	80
3.3 Findings	80
3.3.1 CSA Framework	80
3.3.1.1 Framework domain A: defining characteristic community financing	81
3.3.1.2 Framework Domain B: differentiation characteristics.....	82
3.3.2 Domain B1: CSA governance as predominant characteristic.....	82
3.3.3 Domain B2: varying characteristics.....	84
3.3.4 CSA Framework visualization.....	89
3.3.5 Diversity of CSAs in Germany	91
3.4 Discussion.....	92

3.4.1 CSA organization perspective along the framework domains.....	93
3.4.2 Members’ perspective: more differentiation to choose their "suitable" CSA.....	95
3.4.3 CSA in AFNs and food sovereignty discourses: more differentiation instead of overgeneralization.....	97
3.4.4 Limits and implications	98
3.5 Conclusion	100
Chapter 4 Overall Discussion	105
4.1 Synthesis of main findings	107
4.2 Synthesized EAFS Framework.....	110
4.2.1 Development of a Synthesized EAFS Framework.....	111
4.2.2 Synthesized EAFS Framework discussed with food sovereignty pillars	115
4.3 Conceptual reflections, overall contributions and implications	121
4.3.1 Food sovereignty-related aspects	121
4.3.1.1 Conceptual reflections	121
4.3.1.2 Overall contributions	124
4.3.1.3 Overall implications	125
4.3.2 Alternative food concepts-related aspects	126
4.3.2.1 Conceptual reflections	127
4.3.2.2 Overall contributions	129
4.3.2.3 Overall implications	130
4.3.3 Organization and management-related aspects	131
4.3.3.1 Conceptual reflections	131
4.3.3.2 Overall contributions	135
4.3.3.3 Overall Implications	136
4.4 Methodological reflections and general limitations	138
4.5 Directions for future research	140
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	145
Chapter 6 References	149
Chapter 7 Annex.....	181
7.1 Supplementary material (Paper 1)	181
7.1.1. Literature sample	181
7.1.2. Main analytical questions of the thematic analysis	189
7.1.3. Table 16: Diversity of Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS) identified from the literature sample	190
7.2 Supplementary material (Paper 2)	194

7.2.1 Duration of project period.....	194
7.2.2 Overview of the data material used	194
7.2.3 Literature sample: List of the 60 CSA publications for Chapter 3.1 (in alphabetical order).....	195
7.2.4 Qualitative data (overview).....	200
7.2.5 Literature: CSA governance types developed during knowledge-co-production with related names and descriptions identified in the literature with references	203
7.2.6 Literature and qualitative data: Differentiation characteristics identified during knowledge-co-production through literature research and qualitative data with used literature	204
7.2.7 Quantitative data (overview).....	205

List of Figures

Figure 1: Structure of the dissertation	30
Figure 2: Research approach and overview of the papers included in this dissertation	33
Figure 3: Selection process of the publications for review	47
Figure 4: Framework: Characterizing the diversity of Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS)	61
Figure 5: Two-stage knowledge co-production and used data material:.....	80
Figure 6: CSA Framework	90

List of Tables

Table 1: Six pillars of food sovereignty based on the report of Nyéléni 2007	7
Table 2: Overview of research approach and design in Paper 1 and Paper 2, highlighting covered aspects and differences	35
Table 3: Author contributions to publications featured in this dissertation	36
Table 4: Search clusters and keyword combinations that generated the publications included in the integrative literature review. Date of Search: First search March 12th, 2021, Second search (as an update) August 10th, 2021.	46
Table 5: A six-phase framework, based on Braun and Clarke (2006) and Maguire and Delahunt (2016), was used and applied for the thematic analysis in this paper (illustration by the authors).	49
Table 6: Theme 1: Conditions that shape EAFS	52
Table 7: Theme 2: Economic-related characteristics	56
Table 8: Theme 3: Organizational-related characteristics	60
Table 9: Combination of three different data materials during the two-stage knowledge co-production process.....	77
Table 10: Community financing as defining characteristic of the CSA model and its elements.....	82
Table 11: CSA governance types	84
Table 12: Formulation in the survey of the German CSA Network with result for distinguishing CSA governance types.....	91
Table 13: Comparison of terminologies across the different frameworks	111
Table 14: Synthesized EAFS Framework	112
Table 15: Alignment of Nyéléni Food Sovereignty Pillars to the Synthesized EAFS Framework (Concise quotations)	117
Table 16: Diversity of Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS) identified from the literature sample.....	190
Table 17: Combination of three different data materials during the two-stage knowledge co-production process.....	194
Table 18 is part of the supplementary material of Paper 1 and identical with Table 9 in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.	194
Table 19: CSA governance types developed during knowledge-co-production process with related names and descriptions identified from the literature with references	203
Table 20: Differentiation characteristics identified during the knowledge-co-production through literature research and qualitative data.....	204
Table 21: Detailed Information of the Survey.....	206

List of Abbreviations

AbL	Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (German Association for Peasant Agriculture)
ACCs	Alternative consumer cooperatives
AFMs	Alternative food movements
AFNs	Alternative food networks
AoA	Agreement on Agriculture
BMBF	German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (renamed in 2025 to Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR))
CSA	Community supported agriculture
CSAs	Community Supported Agriculture organizations
CSO	Civil society organization
EAFS	Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty
ECVC	European Coordination Via Campesina
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FNDI	First Nations Development Institute
FPC	Food Policy Council
FSO	Food sovereignty organizations
ILR	Integrative Literature Review
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JOAA	Japan Organic Agriculture Association
LSPAs	Local Solidarity-based Partnerships for Agroecology
LVC	La Via Campesina
MLP	Multi-level perspective
MSC	Multi-stakeholder cooperative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PGS	Participatory Guarantee Systems
RQ	Research question
SFSC	Short Food Supply Chains
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy
UN	United Nations
URGENCI	Acronym for Urban-Rural networks: GEnerating New forms of exchanges between CItizens.
USA	United States of America
WoS	Web of Science
WTO	World Trade Organization

Prologue: Research context, motivation, and development

This cumulative dissertation (2018–2025) has emerged at the interface of practice and inquiry, and activism and analysis. It reflects a sustained attempt to bridge boundaries, conceptually and methodologically, in the context of food sovereignty and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) by adopting an actor-centered organizational perspective. Consistent with the overall design, food sovereignty is considered as an organizational phenomenon. My engagement started in practice and gradually evolved into a research program focused on the organizational level of economic actors and on how organizational configurations shape agri-food transformations toward greater justice and sustainability.

In late 2015, while working at the Schweisfurth Foundation (Munich), I became involved in the German, BMBF-funded transdisciplinary research project “nascent – New opportunities for a sustainable food system through transformative business models.” This was my entry point into transdisciplinary research and into organizational questions of agri-food transformations. The project’s focus on transformative enterprise models drew my attention to how actors organize, govern, and structure work and labor in practice. This experience informed the actor-centered organizational perspective applied throughout this dissertation.



Picture: Participation of Matthias Middendorf at the network meeting of the (junge) Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (AbL) from 23 to 25 June 2016 at the Organic farm Jacobi, Borgentreich, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, under the topic “Food Sovereignty”. The AbL is one of the founding members of the global peasant movement La Via Campesina (LVC) and its member organization in Germany.¹⁵ © Fred Dott

¹⁵ See picture: <https://www.abl-ev.de/ueber-uns/buendnispartner> (accessed November 8, 2025)

In June 2016, I attended the national youth meeting of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (AbL)¹⁶, a member of La Vía Campesina (LVC) in Germany. Encountering food sovereignty through people, practices, and debates in this space made it clear that food sovereignty is not only a political project but a plural field of action. I observed a wide diversity of actors, from grassroots networks and cooperatives to farms and small- and medium-sized enterprises, including the CSA movement, engaging with food sovereignty principles in different ways. At the same time, economically active actors were often under-specified in academic discourse, a gap that became a motivation for this dissertation. This motivated the dissertation’s focus on economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) at the organizational level.



Picture: Participation in the *Basic Course on Community Supported Agriculture*, an education and training program by the German CSA Network, 12–14 July 2016, CSA farm *Hof Tangsehl*, Nahrendorf, (Lower Saxony), Germany.¹⁷ © Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft

Soon after, I joined the Basic Course on CSA organized by the German CSA Network.¹⁸ Prior encounters (e.g., with the CSA cooperative *Kartoffelkombinat* in Munich) evolved into long-term involvement with CSA practitioners and the Network’s working groups. Within

¹⁶ AbL in German: Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft. Its youth association, the jAbL, organized in 2016 the network meeting title “Young farmers need the country - shaping food sovereignty together” (translated by the author based on the German title: “Junge Bäuerinnen und Bauern braucht das Land – Ernährungssouveränität gemeinsam gestalten”). AbL is one of the founding members of the global peasant movement La Via Campesina (LVC).

¹⁷ At that time, 107 CSAs and 105 founding initiatives existed in Germany, whereas today there are over 477 CSAs and over 90 founding initiatives (as of June 4, 2024).

¹⁸ In German „Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft“

the BMBF-funded “nascent” project, I co-developed research with the Network; the transdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge co-production later informed Paper 2. From early on, I worked in a dual role as practitioner-researcher and scholar. Access and trust enabled depth of insight, while boundary-work and reflexivity were essential (see Chapter 4.4 for methodological reflections).

These experiences shaped the dissertation’s aim: to open up and reframe food sovereignty and CSA at the organizational level by using organizational perspectives, highlighting the diversity of actors and the range of possible organizational configurations. Following the third Nyéléni Global Forum (held in September 2025 in Sri Lanka), the practice-research transfer around organizational perspectives, including reflections on organizational resilience in CSA (see Chapters 4.3.3.3, 4.5 and 5), has underscored the timeliness and relevance of this work within the contemporary food sovereignty debates. This prologue positions the dissertation within a practice-informed, transdisciplinary approach that places organizations (particularly EAFS) and their configurations as the core unit of analysis.

Chapter 1 General Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

Globally, agri-food systems face multiple interlinked crises, including accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss, entrenched social inequalities, and increasing pressures on democratic institutions (e.g., Pimbert 2018; IPCC 2021; Battilana et al. 2022; Mirzabaev et al. 2023; Rahmstorf 2024). At the same time, agri-food systems contribute substantially to the transgression of planetary boundaries and hinder progress toward global sustainability targets, including the Paris Agreement and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, environmental burdens and responsibilities are unevenly shared, with the diets of the richest 30% accounting for approximately 70% of food-system pressures (Rockström et al. 2025). Against this backdrop, calls for socially and ecologically sustainable agri-food systems that are less extractive of people and nature have increased (e.g., Hinrichs 2000; Mars 2015; Campbell et al. 2017).

Among the proposed responses, food sovereignty has emerged as a prominent pathway for transforming agri-food systems toward greater justice and sustainability (e.g., Anderson et al. 2019; Sampson et al. 2021; Anderson 2023; Benavides-Frias et al. 2023; Rivera et al. 2024). Originating in the Global South and first introduced to a broader audience by the international peasant organization La Via Campesina (LVC) at the 1996 World Food Summit, food sovereignty received formal expression in the 2007 Nyéléni Declaration (Nyéléni 2007). In this dissertation, I¹⁹ follow the movement's widely cited definition of food sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Nyéléni 2007). Since establishing the concept, food sovereignty has informed social movement strategies, policy debates, and research at multiple scales (e.g., Ortega-Cerdà and Rivera-Ferre 2010; Giunta 2014; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019). For instance, at the international level, debates have unfolded in and around UN processes (e.g., Canfield et al. 2021; Claeys et al. 2021; Anderl and Hißen 2024). In the field, the concept appears at major trade fairs and conferences such as BIOFACH (BIOFACH 2023). Locally, it is taken up by food policy councils (FPC), for example the Munich FPC (Münchner Ernährungsrat 2025). The Nyéléni process of the global food sovereignty movement remains ongoing and affirms its continued relevance for actors in agri-food systems, with the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum convened in Sri Lanka in September 2025 (Nyéléni Global Forum 2025a).²⁰

¹⁹ For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the first-person perspective. However, where I use “I” or “my” in relation to my two papers (Paper 1 in Chapter 2 and Paper 2 in Chapter 3) I explicitly acknowledge the work and contributions of my co-authors.

²⁰ At the time of submission (November 2025), official Forum outcomes and reports were not yet publicly available; references herein therefore note the event without assessing its resolutions.

While the food sovereignty movement explicitly calls for “the establishment of another economic model” (Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008, 43), the food sovereignty discourse rarely names or analyzes actors engaged in economic activities (e.g., production, processing, distribution) as ‘economic actors’. In this dissertation, I use ‘food sovereignty discourse’ to refer to the debates across social movements, policy, and research. This gap is inconsistent with that call because shaping an alternative economic model depends on such actors. Movement documents and research frequently reference peasants, local farms, agroecological practitioners, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives, and local food processing actors (e.g., Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008; Borras et al. 2015; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; van der Ploeg 2020). However, these actors, who are engaged in diverse economic activities, are rarely explicitly named as ‘economic actors’ or analyzed in terms of their underlying ‘economic activities’, creating blind spots in the food sovereignty discourse. Such terminological caution fosters generalization and limits differentiation at the organizational level. This may limit deeper engagement with economic actors and reduce the visibility of their specific organizational needs and challenges (see Chapter 1.2.3 and 1.2.5). These blind spots are notable because related debates in sustainability transitions research similarly call for more precise attention to actors at the organizational level (e.g., Genus and Coles 2008; Fischer and Newig 2016; Haan and Rotmans 2018; Moilanen and Alasoini 2023). This suggests the need to center actors in analysis.

Several factors may explain this limited attention in the discourse. To date, research has focused predominantly on the macro-/system level, often in national (state) analyses (e.g., Reardon et al. 2010; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018) and global (international) analyses (e.g., Oteros-Rozas et al. 2019; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019), which can sideline analysis at the organizational level and conceptually flatten differences among economic actors.²¹ Furthermore, where food sovereignty actors are mentioned, they are often portrayed descriptively. For example, actors are presented as conducive to or positive for food sovereignty or as being driven by or in line with food sovereignty principles (e.g., Dekeyser et al. 2018; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Dentoni et al. 2018; Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020; Pascucci et al. 2021), without specifying their organizational configurations. In this dissertation, I use ‘organizational configurations’ to refer to combinations of organizational characteristics that commonly occur together, through which economic actors operate (e.g., Meyer et al. 1993; Fiss 2009; see also Chapter 1.2.5). Another factor is the long-standing skepticism within parts of the food sovereignty discourse toward market- and enterprise-based actors, including concerns about commodification and depoliticization (e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018; Desa and Jia 2020). Such concerns may discourage

Accordingly, citations in this dissertation draw on pre-Forum materials and the Nyéléni documents available up to September 2025.

²¹ For the use and distinction of the term ‘level’, see Chapter 1.2.1.

explicit organizational analysis of economic actors. This tendency toward terminological caution is also reflected in organizational research, as Safri (2015, 931) observes: “[O]rganizations were engaged in economic activity, very few thought of themselves in these terms”. This tendency is likewise observable in the food sovereignty discourse.

Taken together, these factors limit the identification and differentiation of economic actors and constrain analyses of organizational configurations. Accordingly, this dissertation examines the organizational configurations through which these actors operate. In the following, I use the literature formulation ‘actors striving for food sovereignty’ (e.g., Carney 2012; Ajates 2020; Mestmacher and Braun 2021) and adapt it to an organizational focus, as ‘economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS)’ (see Paper 1 in Chapter 2). These EAFS and their organizational configurations constitute the primary unit of analysis.

This dissertation responds to these gaps by adopting an actor-centered organizational perspective to render organizational configurations of EAFS analytically visible. In this context, ‘actors’ include both individual agents (e.g., farmers, workers, cooperative members) and organizational entities (e.g., farms, enterprises, cooperatives, networks). The latter are treated as decision-making entities that are held responsible for their actions and pursue organizational goals (King et al. 2010). This definition aligns with actor discussions in sustainability transitions (Avelino and Wittmayer 2016). Individuals are considered insofar as they act within organizational configurations (see Chapters 1.2.3 and 1.2.5). Throughout, I refer to these organizationally defined actors as EAFS.

CSA is widely cited as an expression of food sovereignty, and it is endorsed in both movement and academic discourses for forging direct producer–consumer partnerships and advancing agroecological practices (e.g., Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008; McMichael 2014; Stapleton 2019b; Plank et al. 2020; Parot et al. 2024a). As a prominent EAFS case, CSA serves as a focal empirical field and is particularly suitable for organizational analysis (see Chapter 1.2.5 for definition) because organizational characteristics including decision-making, governance, property relations, and forms of labor, vary widely across contexts (e.g., Adam 2006; Bashford et al. 2013; European CSA Research Group 2016; Hvitsand 2016; Grenzdörffer et al. 2022). While several studies acknowledge CSA as a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon (e.g., Blättel-Mink et al. 2017; Baronov 2018) and document diverse configurations (e.g., Carlson and Bitsch 2019; Espelt 2020; Koretskaya and Feola 2020), an overarching conceptualization of the diversity of CSAs as organizational actors remains limited. This makes CSA well suited to the actor-centered organizational perspective adopted in this dissertation.

Against this background, I focus on organizations as the primary unit of analysis, with particular attention to EAFS and to CSA. Accordingly, the dissertation adopts an actor-centered organizational perspective. The dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 1.2 introduces the conceptual background. Chapter 1.3 outlines the research aims and overall structure. Chapter 1.4 presents the author’s contributions.

1.2 Background and conceptual foundations

Building on the problem framing in Chapter 1.1, this section provides the conceptual and thematic foundation for this dissertation, introducing the core concepts and debates. Although several topics are explored in depth in Chapters 2 and 3, this section establishes the broader conceptual and, where necessary, historical context for key terms, concepts, actors, and perspectives. Building on this foundation, Chapter 1.3 derives the dissertation's specific aims, working assumptions, and research questions, which guide the subsequent investigations. To support orientation, Chapters 1.2.1 to 1.2.5 each section introduces its specific focus at the beginning.

1.2.1 Food Sovereignty as a movement and alternative food concept

This section introduces food sovereignty, motivates its analytical relevance, and situates it historically and politically before distinguishing it from food security.

In doing so, this dissertation follows Claeys et al. (2021, 240) in viewing food sovereignty as “complex because it is multi-dimensional, multi-sited and multi-scale”. Food sovereignty is both a producer-driven movement and an alternative food concept oriented toward an ecologically grounded transformation of agri-food systems involving multiple spheres and actors (e.g., Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008; Renting et al. 2012; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Anderson 2023). To situate this understanding, this section first defines food sovereignty, then outlines its historical and political context, and only afterwards contrasts it with food security, so that the concept is clearly defined on its own terms before the comparison. In addition to its historical and political origins, food sovereignty has also been taken up in diverse strands of academic research, ranging from normative debates to empirical studies that attempt to operationalize its principles (e.g., Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019; Sampson et al. 2021).

Historical origins and political context

As McMichael (2014) points out, it is essential to situate the discourse of food sovereignty within the global agri-food crisis of recent decades. This perspective highlights how the concept emerged not only in reaction to dominant trade and development policies but also from broader structural contradictions in the world agri-food system.

According to the food sovereignty movement, it has its origin in global grassroots movements involving marginalized (rural) actors in the agri-food system, such as small- and medium-scale producers (i.e., peasants), agricultural workers, and Indigenous communities, especially from the ‘Global South’ (Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Desmarais 2015; Borras 2016; Powell and Wittman 2018; Dunford 2020). As argued by Wittman (2023), food sovereignty emerged from mobilizations of such actors, who resisted the structural adjustment programs and neoliberal trade policies that liberalized global agricultural markets with adverse impacts on their livelihoods (for food sovereignty actors in detail, see Chapter 1.2.3).

The term ‘food sovereignty’ first appeared in Mexico²² and gained international attention in November 1996, when the international peasant organization La Via Campesina (LVC) introduced it parallel to the UN World Food Summit of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) at the Rome Civil Society Organization Forum (Edelman 2014). A first LVC definition is as follows: “Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security” (La Via Campesina 1996).

By its own account, LVC currently includes about 180 national and local organizations in 81 countries. The movement organization represents approximately 200 million peasants, rural and migrant workers, Indigenous people, small and medium-sized producers, pastoralists, fishers, rural women, and peasant youth (La Via Campesina 2025). This trajectory underscores the political character of food sovereignty as an anti-capitalist vision and movement for just and sustainable agri-food system transformations (e.g., McMichael 2014; Claeys et al. 2021).

An important context for the emergence of the food sovereignty movement was the institutionalization of global trade governance in the early 1990s. The creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and the implementation of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) introduced binding international trade rules in the food and agriculture sectors (Borras 2023). As Wittman (2023) points out, these developments were interpreted by many grassroots movements as contributing to the erosion of national policy space and marked a shift where food became treated less as a human right or commons, and more as a tradable commodity (critique on the increasing commodification of agri-food systems).

Clarifying the relation to food security

Food security, as defined by FAO in 1996, is a condition in which “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 1996). This FAO definition remains a central point of reference in international policy debates. However, it does not specify the conditions under which food is produced, nor does it address the structural dimensions of power in agri-food systems (e.g., Walsh-Dilley et al. 2016; Levkoe et al. 2019; Claeys et al. 2021). Food sovereignty, as articulated by social movements, was a direct response and critique of the FAO Declaration on World Food Security and has emerged as an alternative concept for achieving food security (e.g., Leventon and Laudan 2017; Cruz and van de Fliert 2023).

²² The origins of the terminology ‘food sovereignty’ are much debated. For different, possibly parallel developments and origins, see Edelman (2014). As I refer to the food sovereignty concept in this dissertation, in particular the origins, emergence and understanding of the movement, I follow the latter.

While food security emphasizes access and availability, food sovereignty centers questions of rights, power, and self-determination. Evidence suggests that rights-based approaches such as food sovereignty can strengthen food security and nutrition outcomes (for details regarding similarities and differences between the two concepts, see the literature review by Sampson et al. 2021). At the same time, ethnographic evidence from Honduras shows that the term ‘sovereignty’ did not always resonate semantically with rural actors in the same way as ‘security’ (*seguridad* in Spanish), which carried deeper cultural salience (Boyer 2010). In this context, sovereignty was often perceived as state-centric and less proximate to everyday concerns, underscoring the need for context-specific articulation across contexts (the aspect of ‘food sovereignty language’ is addressed several times in Paper 1, Chapters 2.4 and 2.5). At the transnational scale, agrarian movements have also strategically translated sovereignty claims into the more institutionally recognized ‘right to food’, suggesting that the traction of sovereignty claims remains context-dependent (Claeys et al. 2021). Consequently, a key distinction in the discourse on food sovereignty lies in its relationship to the concept of food security (Sampson et al. 2021).

Foundational definitions: Nyéléni Declaration and six food sovereignty pillars

Food sovereignty is commonly defined as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Nyéléni 2007). This widely accepted definition of the concept, used by numerous scholars (e.g., Schiavoni et al. 2018, Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021, Santafe-Troncoso and Loring 2021), was articulated in the Declaration of Nyéléni, developed in 2007 during the 1st Global Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Sélingué, Mali. At this landmark event, over 500 representatives from more than 80 countries jointly crafted the cited definition (Nyéléni Global Forum 2025a). The Declaration was developed in 2007 through a collective, participatory co-creation process involving transnational social movements, often described in the literature as the global food sovereignty movement. According to the movement's own statement, the Nyéléni Forum is named after Nyéléni²³, a Malian peasant woman who represents resilience and resistance, and celebrates her struggle against patriarchy and her role in sustaining her community through farming.

As a result of the Forum, six foundational so-called ‘pillars’ of food sovereignty were established and published in the detailed documentation of the Forum, but not in the Declaration itself (Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2007; Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008). This distinction is often blurred in the literature. The six pillars (also referred to as Nyéléni pillars) include: (I) “Focuses on Food for People, (II) Values Food Providers, (III) Localises Food Systems, (IV) Puts Control Locally, (V) Builds

²³ The close connection to the name Nyéléni can be seen to this day, for example, in the name of the movement's newsletter: “Nyéléni is the voice of this international movement.” In addition, the German movement for food sovereignty, for example, has also named itself “Nyéléni Germany”.

Knowledge and Skills, and (VI) Works with Nature” (see Table 1 for the definition, based on the final page of the report of the Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008).²⁴

Table 1: Six pillars of food sovereignty based on the report of Nyéléni 2007

No.	Name	Definition
(I)	Focuses on Food for People	Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.
(II)	Values Food Providers	Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food; and rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
(III)	Localises Food Systems	Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms; and resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.
(IV)	Puts Control Locally	Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities; and rejects the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.
(V)	Builds Knowledge and Skills	Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations; and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g., genetic engineering.
(VI)	Works with Nature	Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and, rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

Following its articulation in 2007, food sovereignty and its pillars have become a globally diffused concept and political framework, continuously shaped by social movements and transnational forums. By the late 2000s, the food sovereignty movement had grown to include hundreds of organizations in over 80 countries. Furthermore, at the state level, numerous countries in the Global South have adopted laws, regulations, or constitutional amendments that incorporate the term or concept of food sovereignty. This includes, for example, Brazil, Nepal, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Indonesia (Wittman 2023).

Over the past two decades, the international food sovereignty movement has also been instrumental in shaping global debates on collective rights, building on sustained advocacy since the early 2000s, culminating in a six-year negotiation process (between 2012

²⁴ I am using the original British English form here.

and 2018) led by LVC in the UN Human Rights Council. This process resulted in the UN General Assembly's (2018) adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), which formally recognizes the right to food sovereignty and identifies agroecology, re-localized markets, and participatory decision-making as central pathways for realizing these rights (e.g., Canfield et al. 2021; Claeys et al. 2021).

Agroecology as practice, science, and movement within food sovereignty

Not only the UN but also many social movements, scientists, and governments closely link agroecology to food sovereignty. Agroecology is widely recognized as a transdisciplinary science, a set of on-the-ground practices, and a social movement, each dimension reinforcing the others in pursuit of sustainable, equitable agri-food systems (e.g., Wezel et al. 2009; Rivera-Ferre 2018; Anderson et al. 2021). Based on an FAO definition, agroecology “is an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system” (FAO 2018, 1). The FAO named ten interlinked and interdependent elements of agroecology which are: diversity; synergies; efficiency; resilience; recycling; co-creation and sharing of knowledge (describing common characteristics of agroecological systems, foundational practices and innovation approaches); human and social values; culture and food traditions (context features); as well as responsible governance; circular and solidarity economy (enabling environment) (see also Barrios et al. 2020 with worldwide applications of agroecology). From a scientific perspective, agroecology integrates ecology, agronomy, sociology, and economics to analyze agroecosystem interactions and develop context-specific strategies (Altieri et al. 2018). As a practice, agroecology encompasses diversified cropping systems, agroforestry, soil conservation, and participatory plant breeding, methods formalized globally to enhance biodiversity and resilience (e.g., Nyéléni 2015a; Parot et al. 2019; Christiansen et al. 2023). As a movement, agroecology is championed by peasant, Indigenous, and solidarity-economy organizations that advocate the right to food, the rights of peasants and their cultures, and the central role of food producers and citizens in shaping food practice and policy (e.g., Nyéléni 2015a; Anderson et al. 2021). According to URGENCI, the international CSA Network²⁵, agroecology sits at the crossroads of ecology and agriculture yet transcends mere environmentally friendly farming techniques to embody a holistic philosophy and way of life, opposing capitalist accumulation and the exploitation

²⁵ URGENCI is an acronym standing for An Urban-Rural networks: GEnerating New forms of exchanges between CItizens. URGENCI is the international grassroot network of all forms of regional and Local Solidarity-based Partnerships for Agroecology (LSPAs), of which Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is the best-known iteration (URGENCI 2025a).

of people and nature, and offering instead an alternative model of production, consumption, and social organization (Parot et al. 2019).

The Nyéléni process has been pivotal in situating agroecology within food sovereignty. Although the 2007 Nyéléni Declaration did not explicitly include ‘agroecology’ as a terminology (see Nyéléni 2007), its Pillar (VI) “Works with Nature” foreshadowed ecological approaches (Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2007; Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008). However, the term was not further elaborated in that document and appeared primarily as a keyword. That changed with the 2nd Nyéléni Global Forum in 2015 (also in Mali), where agroecology had become the Forum’s explicit thematic focus, with participants aiming “to come to a common understanding of Agroecology as a key element in the construction of Food Sovereignty” (Nyéléni 2015a). The Declaration of the 2nd Nyéléni Global Forum elevated agroecology to the political core of food sovereignty by affirming producers’ rights to steward biodiversity, in particular saving, using, and exchanging local seeds, and by positioning actors like smallholder farmers, pastoralists, and fishers as primary architects of climate-resilient food systems while rejecting corporate “climate-smart” techno-fixes. Furthermore, the Declaration defines agroecology “as a key form of resistance to an economic system that puts profit before life” (Nyéléni 2015a).

Diffusion of food sovereignty into academic discourse

Based on the Nyéléni Declaration and the introduced food sovereignty pillars, the concept “both challenged the corporate dominated, market driven model of globalized food production and distribution, as well as offering a new paradigm to fight hunger and poverty by developing and strengthening local economies” (Nyéléni 2013, 1). Following this understanding, the food sovereignty concept offers a “different way of thinking about how the world food system could be organized” (Akram-Lodhi 2013, 4). Building on these principles, scholars have argued that the concept of food sovereignty challenges existing structures of corporate power and control and aims to shift power and resources in the global agri-food system toward new systems of production and consumption (Wittman 2015).

In academic research, food sovereignty has been widely taken up in disciplines such as geography, sociology, rural studies, political economy, and critical agrarian studies (e.g., Binimelis et al. 2014; Anderson 2018; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Stapleton 2019a; Pimbert 2018; Abdoellah et al. 2020; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021). Particularly over the past two decades, an increasing number of food sovereignty assessments and frameworks have been developed to analyze and operationalize the concept across contexts and scales. Thereby, food sovereignty was conceptualized into various research frameworks with a set of pillars, categories, and/or indicators, to facilitate its analysis in the context of sustainability of agri-food systems (e.g., Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021; Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2022). These studies and frameworks seek to develop, describe, measure,

and assess food sovereignty and its impacts at several levels (Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019; Sampson et al. 2021).

Examples include studies from the Global North and Global South with different analytical contexts such as local and regional (e.g., Badal et al. 2011; Binimelis et al. 2014; Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2016; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Daye 2020), national (i.e., state) (e.g., Reardon et al. 2010; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018) as well as global (i.e., international) (e.g., Oteros-Rozas et al. 2019; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019). In these studies, food sovereignty, its objectives, and principles are often described with respect to the 2007 Nyéléni Declaration and/or the developed food sovereignty pillars (e.g., Schiavoni et al. 2018; Abdoellah et al. 2020; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021; Santafe-Troncoso and Loring 2021).

At the same time, theoretical engagements in this body of literature remain heterogeneous and often implicit, spanning political ecology, agrarian political economy, critical sociology, and related traditions (see for details, Chapter 2.3.1 of Paper 1). While such plurality illustrates the richness of the field, it has so far rarely translated into systematic engagement with organizational perspectives (see Chapter 1.2.5). Most of these food sovereignty approaches appear to remain anchored at the macro-/system-level, addressing national or transnational dynamics (see Chapter 2). This observation is consistent with the findings of Sampson et al. (2021), who, in their systematic literature review, summarize that food sovereignty is often conceptualized as a high-level concept rather than specific practices. While these approaches have emphasized production models such as agroecology and system-level assessments, there are grounds to consider food sovereignty as also enacted through organizational configurations, including structures, governance, and decision-making within economic actors (see 1.2.5).

Different meanings of ‘level’ across literature

Finally, to avoid ambiguity in subsequent chapters, it is necessary to clarify how the term ‘level’ is used across different literatures. In this section, food sovereignty scholarship was introduced, among other things, with assessments that operate at international, national (i.e., state), and local or regional levels. That usage treats ‘level’ as a jurisdictional or measurement scale for evaluating agri-food systems through indicators and frameworks (see above).

The integrative systematic literature review by Rivera et al. (2024) about drivers of the food system based on different food sovereignty domains includes a set of levels that extends beyond the triad above. The review includes the following *scale levels*: individual and household levels, community and neighborhood, and a sequence of governance scales that includes municipal/city, territorial or regional, subnational or state, national, transnational or regional, and international.

A second and distinct meaning of ‘level’ comes from economic policy analysis, where ‘level’ refers to positions in a macro-meso-micro architecture of the economy. In the

FAO (2003) handbook, the macro-level denotes the economy-wide sphere and the principal policy and aggregate indicators (e.g., exchange and interest rates, tariff and tax policy, gross domestic product). The meso level concerns sectoral arenas and the mediating organizations, institutions, and infrastructures through which policy signals travel (e.g., markets, transport, communications, education, health systems). The micro-level refers to producers and consumers, including individual producer enterprises and farm households. The intent of this architecture is to identify where policies originate and through which sectoral channels they shape firm and household behavior; effective, efficient, and sustainable agricultural policy is explicitly said to rest on understanding the macro significance of agriculture, the meso structures and rules that transmit incentives, and the micro realities of agricultural households and enterprises.

A third interpretation of 'levels' arises in sustainability transitions research, where the concept is conceptualized in socio-technical rather than administrative terms. Within this field, the multi-level perspective (MLP) frames 'level' as an analytical perspective on socio-technical change. In the MLP, niches at the micro-level are protected spaces for experimentation and learning; regimes at the meso-level are semi-coherent rule sets and networks that reproduce and stabilize dominant practices; and the landscape at the macro-level refers to exogenous, slow-moving socio-technical contexts as well as to abrupt exogenous shocks or pressures ('landscape shocks') (Geels 2002; Geels and Schot 2007; Upham et al. 2020). Numerous agri-food studies have adopted the MLP to explore how transitions emerge from interactions within and across these three levels (e.g., Hörisch 2018; El Bilali 2019b; Gaitán-Cremaschi et al. 2019). A recent systematic review finds that agri-food applications of the MLP predominantly focus on niches, emphasizing social innovation rather than technological innovation. The review also identifies a dynamic 'in-between' space, an intermediary space (see also Kivimaa et al. 2019), where niche and regime actors collaborate and exert transformative agency (Elsner et al. 2023; on power relations in sustainability transitions, see also Avelino and Wittmayer 2016). However, Elsner et al. (2023) also highlight persistent ambiguities in how the regime and especially the landscape levels are conceptualized. The landscape level, in particular, receives the least attention and is often treated in immaterial terms. The review further recommends, among other things, the use of more quantitative or mixed-methods designs to test claims derived from qualitative research.

Finally, organizational studies use 'level' in an actor's sense. Following King et al. (2010), organizations are considered as social actors with attributed agency and goal-directedness. Organizational actors possess identities, pursue their own goals, and can be held responsible for choices (for details, see Chapter 1.2.3 for food sovereignty actors as transition actors at the micro-level). This warrants analyzing their properties and decision-making at the organizational level (i.e., micro-level), rather than reducing them to aggregates

of individuals or to mere imprints of markets or communities (see also Chapter 1.2.5 for organizational perspectives for the food sovereignty discourse)

Based on this stance, the term ‘level’ is used in four distinct ways: scale, economic analysis, socio-technical, and actor/organizational. Where ambiguity is possible, I state the intended sense explicitly. This framing provides the definitional anchors referenced in later chapters and is complemented by the organizational perspectives defined in Chapter 1.2.5.

1.2.2 Related alternative food concepts: food democracy and food justice

This section introduces food democracy and food justice to contextualize food sovereignty within the broader landscape of alternative food discourses. It uses these concepts as comparative reference points rather than primary lenses.

To situate food sovereignty within related discourses, this section briefly engages with food democracy and food justice (see Chapter 4.3.2 for further discussion). Alternative food concepts emerged in the 1990s in response to corporate concentration and control of the agri-food system, environmental degradation, and social inequities (e.g., Bornemann and Weiland 2019; López Cifuentes and Gugereil 2021; Anderson 2023). Scholars note significant overlaps and alliances among the alternative food concepts, namely food sovereignty, food democracy, and food justice (e.g., Gimenez and Shattuck 2011; Alkon and Mares 2012; Renting et al. 2012; Candel 2022; Behringer and Feindt 2023), even as they diverge in the elements of current agri-food systems they problematize, as well as their goals and strategies for transformation, based on different histories, geographic contexts, and relations to the state and capital (e.g., Clendenning et al. 2016; Bornemann and Weiland 2019; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021).

Food democracy as a movement and concept

The food democracy movement and concept critique corporate control and envision citizens playing a central and active role in shaping food-related policies and practices. Coined in the late 1990s by Tim Lang, food democracy “refer[s] to the demand for greater access and collective benefit from the food system. [...] From the political perspective, it makes sense to see the dynamics of the food system as a titanic struggle between the forces of control and the pressure to democratize” (Lang 1999). The concept broadly refers to expanding citizen participation in food-related decision-making, often encompassing deliberative forums. In their systematic literature review, Behringer and Feindt (2023) identify empirical examples of food democracy in the literature such as FPCs, citizens’ juries, food cooperatives, farm-to-table restaurants, farmers markets, urban agriculture, and civic agriculture. They introduce the concept “based on the claim that the development of food systems should not be understood as a purely economic matter but as a political question involving issues of power and control” (Behringer and Feindt 2023). However, in the U.S. context, Anderson (2023) stresses that true food democracy must confront capitalist concentration in the food

system; otherwise, local-level democratic efforts risk being undermined by corporate interests or superficial civic engagement.

Food justice as a movement and concept

The food justice movement and concept were first described by Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) and aim to end inequities in the agri-food system, especially those based on class and race. The authors trace historical inequities within agri-food systems and describe contemporary initiatives aimed at rectifying these problems in the U.S. context. Their work details various community-led interventions, including urban gardens, farmer-training programs, youth-empowerment endeavors, and nationwide surge of farm-to-school programs, as well as one example of a school district's decision to remove sugary soft drinks from cafeteria menus. Food justice focuses on structural inequities in the food system, from racialized so-called food deserts, where access to affordable and nutritious food is limited, to exploitative labor conditions. They “characterize food justice as ensuring that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly” (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). This viewpoint is intimately linked to grassroots activism and to bridging community-led campaigns with policy interventions to address power asymmetries (e.g., Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Hoinle and Klosterkamp 2023). Food justice scholars thus emphasize intersectionality, recognizing how race, income, gender, and immigration status shape who bears the system's burdens or reaps its rewards. Thus, the food justice concept explicitly centers structural inequalities, particularly racial, class, and gender-based, and calls for realigning labor rights, health outcomes, and resource distribution so that marginalized groups receive equitable access (e.g., Hoinle and Klosterkamp 2023; Parot et al. 2024a).

Common goals by diverging emphases

While both food democracy and food justice share food sovereignty's critique of industrial agri-food systems, they diverge in emphasis: food democracy emphasizes participatory forms of governance (e.g., FPCs, citizens' juries, cooperatives) as vehicles for collective benefit, whereas food justice explicitly interrogates structural inequities (particularly race, class, gender, and immigration status) that determine who bears the burdens and reaps the rewards of agri-food systems, with close attention to hidden labor exploitation and systemic racism often obscured even in nominally so-called 'alternative' agri-food initiatives (Behringer and Feindt 2023; see also Chapter 1.2.4).

Daye (2020, 10) identifies food democracy as “a core component of food sovereignty”, while Anderson (2023, 4) contends that food sovereignty “has a wider scope than food democracy, moving well beyond participation to encompass production, what kinds of food are consumed, and human rights”. Together, these perspectives position food sovereignty as the broader, overarching concept within which democratic and justice-

oriented strategies can operate. Given this broader scope, its historical trajectory, and its producer-oriented focus, this dissertation centers on food sovereignty.

Throughout these debates, a diverse cast of actors, from grassroots initiatives and producer networks to policy councils and social justice advocates, emerges as the driving force behind each concept's development and implementation. In Chapter 1.2.3, I turn to an actor-centered perspective and bring food sovereignty actors as transition actors into focus. This brief positioning prevents conceptual slippage and supports precise use of terms in subsequent chapters (see, for instance, Chapter 4.3.2 for extended discussion).

1.2.3 Food sovereignty actors as transition actors

This section delineates the actors engaged in and striving for food sovereignty and motivates an actor-centered approach as a bridge between high-level frameworks and food sovereignty practice. It specifies how 'actors' are understood in this dissertation, covering individuals and organizations, and relates these choices to transition studies classifications.

The food sovereignty concept originated from a global grassroots movement driven by small-scale and local peasants and farmers, rural workers, and other marginalized actors in agri-food systems (e.g., Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Desmarais 2015; Borras 2016; Powell and Wittman 2018; see Chapter 1.2.1). Building on the historical and conceptual foundation of food sovereignty and related alternative food concepts, this section shifts focus to the actors who are engaged in and striving for food sovereignty (hereafter food sovereignty actors). The wording 'striving for food sovereignty' is used in this dissertation, drawing on its usage by scholars (e.g., Carney 2012; Ajates 2020; Mestmacher and Braun 2021), as well as in a similar manner as 'striving for sustainability' (e.g., Schaltegger et al. 2003; Böhm et al. 2020). As outlined in Chapter 1.2.1, much of the existing literature approaches food sovereignty primarily as a high-level framework. In contrast, adopting an actor-centered perspective brings attention to the individuals, groups, networks, and organizations that actively shape and implement alternative food system practices on the ground. In keeping with this dissertation's organizational perspectives, the focus in what follows is on how such actors are constituted and configured as organizations (see Chapter 1.2.5).

The involvement of numerous actors in the Nyéléni Forums illustrates the global character of the food sovereignty movement and its plural constitution. With roots in both the Global South and the Global North, these forums highlight the multiplicity of food sovereignty actors. Although the movement and the Nyéléni Declaration are often attributed to LVC alone (see, for instance, Sandoval and Wathne 2013), the 1st Nyéléni Forum in 2007 was organized by an 'International Steering Committee' composed of a variety of food sovereignty actors²⁶, working in collaboration with a local organizing committee in Mali,

²⁶ Members of the Committee of the 1st Global Nyéléni Forum in 2007 included LVC, the World Women's March, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), Friends of the Earth International, International Planning Committee for Food

both before and during the Forum (e.g., Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2007; Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008). The 2nd Global Nyéléni Forum in 2015 further broadened participation by actors, underscoring that food sovereignty is co-created by a wide range of grassroots constituencies (Nyéléni 2015b).²⁷ As such, the exclusive emphasis on LVC in much of the literature does not adequately reflect the diverse landscape of actors engaged in food sovereignty processes.

Empirical insights on food sovereignty actors

Despite the predominant focus on high-level frameworks, a growing body of empirical research has examined different food sovereignty actors, sometimes also named food sovereignty organizations or initiatives. This includes unions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), network organizations, non-profit organizations, as well as individual producers such as gardeners and farmers. For example, Calvario et al. (2020) analyzed a Basque farmer's union within the international food sovereignty movement; Bowness and Wittman (2023) examined a Brazilian NGO involved in food sovereignty mobilization; Heckelman et al. (2022) studied a grassroots farmer-led network organization in the Philippines; and more recently, Brice (2025) assessed, in a recent dissertation, non-profit food sovereignty organizations (FSOs) in the northeastern United States of America (USA) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other studies have examined individuals as actors: Figueroa (2015) shifted the lens of analysis from food to the people by using a 'people-centered' approach in the context of a food hub; Larder et al. (2014) studied the understandings associated with the practices and politics of domestic food production of individual actors in the case of backyard gardeners in Australia; and Beingessner and Fletcher (2020) documented individual farmers' perspectives on local Canadian food systems.

Research gaps: neglect of economic actors in food sovereignty research

While this body of research has yielded valuable insights, it has predominantly focused on grassroots networks, social movements, and non-profit actors. Despite the broad scope of food sovereignty scholarship, the role of specific organizational actors, particularly those engaged in economic activities, has received comparatively little analytical attention. This represents a significant research gap, as steering sustainability transitions requires a clear understanding of the actors operating at the micro-level who are driving such changes (e.g.,

Sovereignty Rome (IPC), the Food Sovereignty Network (represented by the Development Fund, Norway and Food & Water Watch, USA), the Network of Peasants and Farmers of West Africa (ROPPA) and the Coordination National des Organisations Paysannes, Mali (CNOP) (e.g., Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2007; Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008).

²⁷ The 2nd Global Nyéléni Forum in 2015, chaired by CNOP Mali, likewise brought together LVC, Movimiento Agroecológico de América Latina y el Caribe (MAELA), Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA), World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP), and More and Better (MaB) (Nyéléni 2015b).

Fischer and Newig 2016; Avelino and Wittmayer 2016; Moilanen and Alasoini 2023), which is also relevant in the context of food sovereignty actors. Parallel lines of inquiry of transition research, especially those employing the MLP (see the end of Chapter 1.2.1), have likewise been criticized for their limited engagement with actors and agency at the micro-level. Key critiques highlight unclear distinctions between actor categories and insufficient clarity about how these relate to levels of analysis (e.g., Genus and Coles 2008; Haan and Rotmans 2018; Groot Kormelinck 2022).

Conceptual perspectives on actors in transition research

A few studies point in the needed direction. Lutz and Schachinger (2013) examined the Austrian local food network ‘SpeiseLokal’ to show how food sovereignty ideas are operationalized. Plank et al. (2020) analyzed CSA organizations, as one popular group of actors within the food sovereignty movement, as value-driven actors within alternative food systems.

Drawing on King et al. (2010) and the above-mentioned studies, the category food sovereignty actors can include both individual actors (e.g., persons as ‘independent’ players such as farmers, peasants, workers; or members of an organization, for instance, of a cooperative) as well as individual organizational actors (e.g., organizational entities such as farms, firms, cooperatives, networks, NGOs, non-profit organizations, trade unions) that possess collective agency. The diversity of actor types referenced in the literature, however, reflects an underlying ambiguity in the use of the term “actor” within food sovereignty discourse. Similar challenges are discussed in transition studies (Avelino and Wittmayer 2016), where scholars have developed classifications to differentiate actors.

Based on the review by Groot Kormelinck (2022), transition literature distinguishes between three main actor perspectives: First, business perspective actors (e.g., pioneers, start-ups, incumbent firms, large incumbent corporations); second, grassroots perspective actors (broader view including networks of individuals or organizations, such as informal community groups, producer–consumer cooperatives, or sustainability movements); and, third, intermediary actor perspective (e.g., single organizations, groups or networks of organizations, with varied forms of ownership, governance structures, and funding models). This classification can be briefly applied to the area of food sovereignty in this introduction. Following this conceptualization, ‘food sovereignty actors’ encompass an even wider spectrum. The threefold distinction presented by Groot Kormelinck (2022) opens up perspectives on transition actors that have so far been only rarely addressed within the food sovereignty discourse. It broadens the analytical scope to actors who engage in economic activities (i.e., production, processing, and distribution) and who simultaneously strive for food sovereignty.

Economic actors as overlooked drivers of food sovereignty

These observations highlight that economic actors have so far received little explicit attention in food sovereignty research. Their diversity has rarely been examined or conceptually explored. This underrepresentation is particularly striking given that the food sovereignty movement explicitly advocates for the establishment of “another economic model” (Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008, 43) and emphasizes the building and practicing of economic alternatives. While several examples of such actors are mentioned in the literature, both by researchers and movement participants, as positive for food sovereignty (Dekeyser et al. 2018), food sovereignty-conducive (Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019), driven by (Dentoni et al. 2018; Pascucci et al. 2021), in line with food sovereignty principles (Fairbairn 2012; Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020), or striving for food sovereignty (Carney 2012; Ajates 2020; Mestmacher and Braun 2021), they are rarely discussed in terms of economic actors. The documentation of the Nyéléni Forum in Mali (full report), published by the Nyéléni International Steering Committee (2008), explicitly refers to examples such as peasants, local farms, practitioners of agroecology, CSA initiatives, and local food processing activities. These examples are echoed in academic food sovereignty literature (e.g., Borrás et al. 2015; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; van der Ploeg 2020). However, despite their prominence, such actors and their diverse economic practices are seldom framed or analyzed explicitly as economic actors within the food sovereignty discourse, revealing important analytical blind spots.

Explanations for the lack of visibility of economic actors

The phenomenon described above, of not explicitly naming economic actors and thereby rendering them invisible, is not isolated. Several factors may help explain why economically active food sovereignty actors have received comparatively little attention as a distinct group in academic research.

First, the dominant focus in the literature on social movements and policy frameworks at the macro-/system-level can obscure the meso- and micro-level practices of small- and medium-sized producers and other actors who operationalize food sovereignty principles in daily practice. As noted in Chapter 1.2.1, relatively few studies investigate the specific activities and practices of such actors in depth.

Second, the food sovereignty discourse is frequently framed as a critique of the WTO and large corporations that operate in agri-food systems (e.g., Portman 2018; Pahnke 2021). Such critique often produces broad generalizations that portray economic actors negatively (Ayres and Bosia 2011), question their transformative potential in providing market-based solutions (Fairbairn 2012), or cast food sovereignty as inherently anti-business (Desa and Jia 2020). Consequently, even small and medium-sized initiatives that might be considered firms, companies, enterprises, corporations, or businesses and that align with food sovereignty principles are frequently overlooked. This neglect is partly understandable, given that the label ‘food sovereignty’ has increasingly been appropriated for marketing

purposes by corporations, appearing on supermarket products in ways scholars and movement actors criticize as greenwashing and co-optation (e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018).²⁸

Third, some producers deliberately avoid such business-related labels and instead emphasize collective or identity-based terms, such as cooperative, association, or peasant, as a way to signal distance from conventional market logics. Research on the social and solidarity economy (SSE) similarly shows that although “organizations were engaged in economic activity, very few thought of themselves in these terms” (Safri 2015, 931). Moreover, the illustrative examples used in the literature (e.g., peasants, local farms, agroecological practitioners, food cooperatives, CSA initiatives, local processors) constitute a heterogeneous mix of actor types, organizational forms, and activities that are often conflated rather than systematically differentiated. These confluences compound the conceptual invisibility of economic actors as a category. Work on diverse economies emphasizes precisely the existence of a diversity of economic actors engaged in the implementation of non-harmful economic processes (e.g., Gibson-Graham 2006²⁹; Blue et al. 2021).

Finally, current research on food sovereignty primarily focuses on agri-food-related production activities (Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2022), yielding limited insight into the diversity of economic actors, especially along the supply chain. This narrow empirical focus stands in contrast to transitions of agri-food systems that emphasize the importance of actors across the entire agri-food supply chain. As Anderson et al. (2021, 186) observe, “part of building an agroecological system involves developing territorial and interterritorial markets, distribution mechanisms and processing facilities, from mills and local abattoirs to community-owned food-processing units, because foodstuffs produced via agroecological methods are often ill-suited for undifferentiated export markets”.

Towards an actor-centered understanding of food sovereignty transitions

The combined lack of visibility, naming, differentiation, and conceptualization of economic actors reveals significant analytical blind spots. Based on these observations, I summarize below the specific gaps in discourse and empirical research that this dissertation will address. In short, when the diversity of economic actors is viewed explicitly through the lens of ‘economic actors’ that is, organizations engaged in economic activity but aligned with, or embedded in, food sovereignty principles, the research base appears much thinner than existing reviews suggest. Recognizing and analyzing these actors is therefore essential for developing an actor-centered understanding of how food sovereignty transitions unfold in

²⁸ A current example is the label “80% better for food sovereignty” printed on milk packages in Austria by HOFER, which is the operating name of the supermarket retail group ALDI, which reduces the concept to a single number (Fehlinger and Rail 2018).

²⁹ Gibson-Graham is the pen name shared by the feminist economic geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham.

practice. As Larder et al. (2014, 71) ask, “how else can we understand the concept of food sovereignty in action if not through the casting of everyday actors as creators and re-creators of their own version of food sovereignty?”. This dissertation therefore moves beyond a narrow focus on NGOs, non-profit organizations, and movement networks to incorporate the diversity of economic actors as ‘everyday actors’ and to recognize them as integral to food sovereignty transitions. This constrained visibility has limited analytical depth and curtailed critical discussion of how these actors operate internally and contribute to just and sustainable agri-food transformations. Treating food sovereignty actors as organizational actors brings the organizational level into focus. This makes internal challenges, organizational tensions, and configurations visible and prepares the ground for the synthesis of this dissertation in Chapter 4. This specification establishes the actor baseline for organizational perspectives (see Chapter 1.2.5).

1.2.4 Community Supported Agriculture as an expression of food sovereignty

This section introduces Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) as a frequently cited practical expression of food sovereignty and motivates its use as a focal empirical field. It summarizes CSA’s polycentric origins, networked diffusion, and embedding within food sovereignty debates, and highlights organizational heterogeneity that warrants systematic differentiation.

Recent years have seen growing academic interest in CSA within the food sovereignty discourse. The model and its actors are widely recognized, by scholars (e.g., Ayres and Bosia 2011; McMichael 2014; Paul 2019; Matakana and Corvo 2020; Plank et al. 2020; Mumenthaler et al. 2020), and movement participants alike, as a practical example of food sovereignty. For instance, CSA is cited by the food sovereignty movement (e.g., Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008; Duncan et al. 2019; Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia 2020) and the CSA movement explicitly cites food sovereignty (e.g., Hitchman 2019; Stapleton 2019b; Parot et al. 2024a) as an example, owing to its capacity to forge direct economic partnerships between producers and consumers and to promote agroecological practices (for definitions of agroecology, see Chapter 1.2.1).

In short, the CSA model is often described as a partnership between producers and a community of consumers who become members, cover farm production costs, share risks, and receive a food share of the harvest throughout the season in return (Parot et al. 2024a). Under the umbrella of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), the CSA model has emerged as one of the most-cited expressions of food sovereignty, noted for its potential to “reshape dominant capitalist producer-consumer relations” (Plank et al. 2020, 51) and to advance just and sustainable transitions in agri-food systems (e.g., McMichael 2014; Galt et al. 2019; Plank et al. 2020).

Building on the actor-centered lens on food sovereignty in Chapter 1.2.3, this section introduces CSA based on the historical origins and motivations, the expressions within the international CSA movement, the embedding of CSA in the food sovereignty movement, as

well as CSA as organizational actors. Based on this, I then summarize identified gaps in the discourse and research that this dissertation will address.

Historical origins and motivations

Although often presented monolithically, CSA's origins are polycentric, arising in parallel (at least) in Japan, North America, and Europe amid post-World War II agrarian crises, driven by farmers' need for economic stability and growing consumer concerns about industrial food systems, including consumers' demand for safe, locally produced food. For these reasons, the CSA movement traces its origins to parallel farmer-consumer partnerships in Japan, the United States (U.S.), and Europe during the late 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Henderson and van En 2007; Kondoh 2015; Hitchman 2019; Rossi and Anstreicher 2025). However, the precise birthplace and inception date of CSA remain subjects of debate, reflecting the model's polycentric emergence during periods of agrarian and social upheaval.

In Japan, *teikei* (also called *sansho-teikei*) emerged in the late 1960s and was institutionalized within the Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA), which in 1978 formalized the movement's ten principles to guide producer-consumer partnerships. These ten principles, including reciprocity, decommodification of food, equal partnership, fair prices, democratic management, and continuous learning, positioned *teikei* as a cooperative, solidarity-oriented response to farmers' income insecurity and consumers' concerns about pesticide residues (e.g., Kondoh 2015; Kondoh 2024). The URGENCI country report documents *teikei*'s scale and influence (around 300 consumer groups, 1,000 to 1,200 farmers, and 48,900 eaters by 2020) (Kondoh 2024). While *teikei* is often cited as an inspiration for Western CSA initiatives, recent scholarship cautions against a direct equation: *teikei* originated as a cooperative-oriented social movement that emphasized decommodified, collective and ethical producer-consumer relations, and over time has diversified and transformed in ways that complicate simple analogies to market-oriented CSA models (Kondo et al. 2024; see Misleh 2022 for AFN debates regarding the tension between often-polarized conceptualizations as either market-based arrangements or as social movements).

In North America, the narrative has often centered on two prominent CSA farms, which are *Indian Line CSA* in Massachusetts and *Temple-Wilton Community Farm* in New Hampshire. Both established in 1986, these farms were inspired in part by Rudolf Steiner's early-twentieth-century lectures on anthroposophy, non-chemical agriculture, and so-called associative economics (McFadden 2004; Henderson and van En 2007).³⁰ However, these

³⁰ Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was an Austrian philosopher and social reformer, best known as the founder of anthroposophy. He also initiated the concept of so-called 'biodynamic agriculture' or 'biodynamic farming', an approach integrating spiritual and ecological principles into farming practices. For a critical perspective on Rudolf Steiner's 'Doctrine of Racial Development and Decline', see, for example, Koren (2022). For a critical discussion of the so-called biodynamic agriculture and the biodynamic movement and Nazi Germany, see, for instance, Staudenmaier (2013).

attributions overlook earlier conceptual work by Booker T. Whatley, a Black author, horticulturist, and professor at Tuskegee University. In the 1960s-1970s, Whatley pioneered a ‘Clientele Membership Club’ combining up-front payments with Pick-Your-Own harvests, mechanisms that underpin the financial and risk sharing logic of many CSAs today, as the U.S. CSA Network honors today (Rossi and Anstreicher 2025). While Whatley proposed the ‘Clientele Membership Club’, CSA-like models were adopted, for instance, in Japan and Germany (see above and below). However, there is no doubt that *Indian Line CSA* and *Temple-Wilton Community Farm* subsequently refined and popularized the approach, catalyzing widespread adoption of the CSA model across the U.S. Today around 1,800 farms and 250,000 eaters are involved (Rossi and Anstreicher 2025).

Meanwhile, in Germany, the first CSA was founded in 1988 at *Buschberghof*, a ‘biodynamic’ farm, on a rented 1.2 ha plot, combining financing by members with shared workdays and harvest distributions. Thus, Germany’s CSA model, known today locally as ‘Solidarische Landwirtschaft (Solawi)’ (directly translated from German into English as ‘solidarity agriculture’ or ‘solidarity farming’), traces roots to the late eighties. But only three additional CSAs appeared over the next fifteen years (Gastinger et al. 2025). The first nine CSAs in Germany emerged from the ‘biodynamic’ movement (Guerrero Lara et al. 2024). With the institutionalized formation of the German CSA Network (in German ‘Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft’) as a registered association in 2011, the number of CSAs increased continuously. By May 2023, 471 CSAs operated nationwide, averaging between 150,000 and 200,000 eaters involved (Gastinger et al. 2025).

Taken together, these origins illustrate that CSA cannot be reduced to a single breakthrough. Rather, CSA emerged in multiple contexts as a response to farmer precarity and consumer demands for safe, transparent, and/or community-anchored food. A critical appraisal of these origins therefore reveals both the shared principles that unite CSA today as a global practice and the context-specific trajectories that contribute to its rich heterogeneity.³¹

The international CSA movement

This heterogeneity is also considered at the network level. URGENCI, the international grassroots network for Local Solidarity-based Partnerships for Agroecology (LSPAs), with CSA as the best-known iteration, takes its name from ‘Urban-Rural: GEnerating New forms of Exchanges between Citizens’, and brings together citizens, small-scale producers, consumers, activists, and researchers in over forty countries (URGENCI 2025a). According to URGENCI, LSPAs “are based on direct relationships between consumers and producers. They enable consumers to have direct access to locally produced, healthy, often organically certified food. These partnerships also aim to help producers to make a decent dignified living, sustain themselves and their families and care for the landscapes, preserve the quality

³¹ The results of the URGENCI international CSA census are currently under peer-review.

of their produce” (Parot et al. 2019, 7).³² URGENCI represents LSPA networks and initiatives in over forty countries, reflecting the global diversity of the approach.

In addition to CSA, LSPAs encompass a variety of other solidarity-based partnership models. Examples include social inclusion gardens, Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGSs), solidarity farmers markets, and REKO (Swedish abbreviation for Fair Consumption) rings, each grounded in community trust, risk-sharing, and agroecology (Féodoroff et al. 2021). More examples, drawn from URGENCI’s 2019 Mediterranean booklet, include Italy’s GAS network and Spain’s Mercats Socials, which pool member subscriptions to source diverse local produce at fair prices; Tunisian Jardin Partagé collectives and Morocco’s garden-to-school programs, which embed food production within neighborhoods to supply fresh, organic vegetables to participants; and farmer–consumer cooperatives such as Italy’s Arvaia and France’s Alter Conso, which formalize shared land ownership and democratic governance between producers and eaters (Parot et al. 2019).

As in Germany, different countries use different terms for CSA, depending on their history and context. In France, for instance, the French iteration of CSA is embodied by AMAP (Association pour le maintien d’une Agriculture paysanne, literally Association for maintaining small-scale family farming), whose first CSA was founded in 2001 (Féodoroff et al. 2021). By contrast, the Italian movement, coordinated through the Rete Italiana delle CSA since 2018, remains in its infancy: as of 2022 only fifteen initiatives, all established since 2011, are listed nationally. This chronological gap highlights Italy’s comparatively recent adoption (Guerrero Lara et al. 2024).

Embedding of CSA in the food sovereignty movement

URGENCI explicitly commits to “promoting food sovereignty through local, solidarity-based partnerships” (URGENCI 2025b) and sits on the Steering Committee of the 3rd Global Nyéléni Forum which will take place in Sri Lanka in September 2025 (Nyéléni Global Forum 2025a). This bilateral endorsement manifests institutionally (e.g., shared steering committees and conference panels; see Nyéléni process), literarily (jointly signed policy briefs, publications), and at the actor level, where various CSAs self-identify with food sovereignty principles (see website of individual CSAs, for example, German CSA Hof Basta 2025). At the national level, in the study on CSA network associations in Germany and Italy, Guerrero Lara et al. (2024) point out that both are inspired ideologically, among other things, by food sovereignty. The German CSA Network explicitly references in its vision food sovereignty and, to be more precise, that CSA makes a valuable contribution to food sovereignty (German CSA Network 2025). The German CSA Network’s publications, distributed through the magazine publisher of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche

³² Jocelyn Parot has been the General Secretary at URGENCI since 2008. In addition, he is currently a Scientific Collaborator at the Chair of Organic Farming at Justus Liebig University Giessen, Germany. Therefore, when referring to Parot’s publications, it should be noted that some of them are URGENCI publications, while others are peer-reviewed scientific publications.

Landwirtschaft (AbL), itself a LVC member (for LVC, see Chapter 1.2.1; for AbL, see Prologue of this dissertation), further institutionalize this overlap with other food sovereignty actors. In addition, such dual affiliations illustrate how CSA actors reinforce the shared principles of both movements.

CSA as a spectrum of diverse organizational actors

The CSA model and CSAs as actors have been described multiple times by scholars and movements as a practical example for being in-line with food sovereignty principles (e.g., McMichael 2014; Paul 2019; Stapleton 2019b). However, both the CSA model and individual organizational actors can be developed and configured in very different ways. On the one hand, various scholars and the movements themselves highlight the similarities between CSA and food sovereignty. Thus, both approaches are engaged for just and sustainable agri-food system transformations in local and regional economies, and the empowerment of people and actors involved in production, distribution, and consumption (e.g., Matacena and Corvo 2020; Plank et al. 2020). On the other hand, areas of tension also appear. For instance, Clendenning et al. (2016) indicate contexts in the U.S. urban food movement where CSAs did not make explicit links to food sovereignty, pointing to a gap between their vision, rhetoric, and (organizational) practice.

Furthermore, CSAs are often described in the literature in a generalized way, for example as collectively managed by a community; although in practice CSAs are very often organized by single farmers or farming families, who do not involve their members in decision-making processes (e.g., Adam 2006; European CSA Research Group 2016; Bashford et al. 2013; Hvitsand 2016; Espelt 2020; Plank et al. 2020; Grenzdörffer et al. 2022). This aspect can be illustrated also within the food sovereignty movement, as the positioning of CSA actors within the movement has sometimes shifted. The European food sovereignty movement grouped CSA participants at their networking events in 2011 under the list of “food producers”, whereas in 2016 they appeared as “organized consumers” (see Duncan et al. 2019). I argue that both positions are plausible, depending on organizational structure and organizational governance. By taking a closer look, it becomes apparent that both the scientific literature as well as movement literature describes CSAs as ranging on a spectrum from more producer-led to more consumer-led, with forms in between. This positioning aligns with the working assumptions developed in Chapter 1.3.1.

Although some scholars acknowledge CSA’s multifaceted nature and the wide array of farm- and community-driven models “shaped to their own needs and expectations” (Samoggia et al. 2019, 1), even though some studies see CSA as a highly complex, diverse, and multi-faceted phenomenon (e.g., Blättel-Mink et al. 2017; Baronov 2018) with diverse configurations (e.g., Carlson and Bitsch 2019; Espelt 2020; Koretskaya and Feola 2020) an overarching conceptualization of the diversity of CSAs as organizational actors is lacking. One reason could be that most CSA research centers on the role of consumers/members and their motivations (e.g., Feagan and Henderson 2009; Pole and Kumar 2015; Blättel-Mink et

al. 2017; Zoll et al. 2018; Gruber 2020; Fomina et al. 2022) or on the network and movement level (e.g., Stapleton 2019b; Guerrero Lara et al. 2024; Pixová et al. 2024; Guerrero Lara et al. 2025), rather than on internal organizational configurations of CSAs. Studies frequently treat CSA as a homogeneous category, overlooking how diverse organizational configurations give rise to distinct social, ecological, and economic outcomes (see Galt et al. 2019 for USA, Dong et al. 2019 for China). Consequently, important variations, such as uneven labor practices that can lead to producer (self-)exploitation (e.g., Hinrichs 2000; Carlson and Bitsch 2019; Galt et al. 2019; Ajates 2020; Böhm et al. 2020; van Oers et al. 2023), and differing levels of member participation and low-income inclusion (e.g., Pole and Gray 2013; Watson 2019; Jilcott Pitts et al. 2022), remain under-examined (see Chapter 1.2.5).

Based on this derivation, I argue that a more differentiated organizational consideration of CSAs could help to reveal existing generalizations about CSA both in general and in food sovereignty contexts. Particularly because a high degree of participation or forms of collective property are often assessed in a generalized way as being “positive” for food sovereignty (Dekeyser et al. 2018). Against generalized portrayals, an differentiated organizational view is required to avoid oversimplification and to capture how distinct configurations yield different social, ecological and economic outcomes (see 1.2.5).

In the context of CSA, it is essential to define some terms related to the CSA terminology at this stage: (i) ‘CSA model’ refers to a specific AFN form, the alternative production-distribution approach; (ii) ‘CSA organization’ (hereinafter abbreviated as CSA) relates to the entire organization of producers and members; (iii) ‘CSA farm’ is an agricultural or horticultural farm that operates using the CSA model. These distinctions are essential, as among other things, several CSA farms can establish partnerships with other CSA farms to form so-called multi-farm CSAs³³ (e.g., Adam 2006; Woods et al. 2017). This positioning prepares the ground for the CSA Framework and the empirical analysis in Chapter 3.

1.2.5 Organizational perspectives for the food sovereignty discourse

This section introduces the rationale for examining food sovereignty at the organizational level, clarifies how ‘organizational perspectives’ are used here heuristically as an operational guide to structuring observation and comparison, and outlines how this complements the macro-/system-level approaches in Chapter 1.2.1. Earlier sections in Chapter 1.2 set out system-level aims and practices associated with food sovereignty, frequently illustrated at the organizational level through actors adopting agroecology or the CSA model. Chapter 1.2.3 provides the operational definition of economic actors used throughout. Against this backdrop, organizations and their organizational configurations are defined as the primary unit of analysis, and the added value of organizational perspectives is clarified.

³³ For details, see framework characteristic “single / multi-farm” in Chapter 3.3.1.

The organizational level of economic actors

As Vallejo-Rojas et al. (2022, 15) conclude in their study on agri-food system (re)configurations, “ensuring food sovereignty means not only implementing agroecological solutions but also dealing with power relationships in the productive system and specifically on gender roles, rights and involvement in decision-making”. This conclusion draws attention to organizational configurations. In this dissertation, organizational configurations denote combinations of conceptually distinct organizational characteristics that commonly occur together (Meyer et al. 1993; Fiss 2009). In short, organizational perspectives make differences across organizational characteristics visible and help identify configuration options. Despite this call by Vallejo-Rojas et al. (2022), internal structures and organizational activities regarding economically active actors striving for food sovereignty remain underexplored, and organizational knowledge therefore remains underdeveloped. In this dissertation, the term ‘economic actors’ refers both to individual actors (persons as ‘independent’ players or members of an organization) and to organizational actors (e.g., firms, groups, networks, CSA organizations) who are considered as actors that can be held responsible and act with intention toward organizational goals (e.g., King et al. 2010; Avelino and Wittmayer 2016). Following this understanding, organizations can be designed by individuals to achieve purposeful collective actions that single individuals could not attain alone (King et al. 2010). Building on the previous chapters, organizational perspectives are proposed to broaden the food sovereignty discourse. For instance, there is limited understanding of how economic actors engaged in food sovereignty are structured and organized. This gap constrains more nuanced critical examinations of organizational challenges and thus the development of solutions to strengthen and scale this group of actors. By incorporating organizational perspectives into the food sovereignty discourse, this dissertation draws attention to organizational structures and activities, with a focus on the characteristics of organizations (King et al. 2010), and thereby enables a more targeted response to the (organizational) challenges faced by such actors.

Explanations for limited organizational attention

Several factors may help to explain why organizational perspectives have received comparatively little attention in the food sovereignty literature. One possible explanation is that analytical orientations have tended to emphasize macro-/system-level perspectives, such as normative debates, policy frameworks, or multi-level approaches, rather than examining organizational configurations in detail (see Chapters 1.2.1 and 1.2.3). A further consideration is that, as discussed in Chapter 1.2.1, theoretical engagements across disciplines remain heterogeneous and often implicit, which has limited systematic engagement with organizations as units of analysis (see also methods section of Paper 1 in Chapter 2.3.1). Another explanation may lie in the historical positioning of food sovereignty against neoliberal market regimes, which has fostered skepticism toward economic actors and organizational formalization and has often rendered them conceptually or politically

problematic (see Chapters 1.2.1 and 1.2.3). In addition, practical constraints also play a role: many food sovereignty actors operate under precarious conditions, embedded in dominant agri-food systems while simultaneously occupying marginal positions within them, so that limited resources, insecure tenure, and high operational pressures restrict possibilities for organizational development. As practitioners themselves note, “it’s hard to be strategic when your hair is on fire” (Hoey and Sponseller 2018, 606; see also discussion of Paper 1 in Chapter 2.5.4). Finally, another explanation is that food sovereignty has also been taken up in organization and management studies, but primarily as a high-level concept describing social movements, associations, or network organizations (e.g., Moser et al. 2021; Heckelman et al. 2022), rather than as organizational phenomena in their own right. Taken together, these explanations suggest why organizational perspectives have received comparatively little attention and underline the need for the inductive, organizationally focused analysis of the food sovereignty discourse advanced in this dissertation (see Paper 1 in Chapter 2).

Organizational challenges and value of organizational perspectives

As noted in Chapter 1.2.3, research on diverse economies has highlighted the existence of a diversity of economic actors engaged in non-harmful economic processes (e.g., Gibson-Graham 2006). Such actors are sometimes portrayed in critical organization studies as alternative organizations or even idealized as actors contesting neoliberal structures and oppressive work management (Vásquez and Del Fa 2019). Previous studies have often treated cooperatives, worker-led firms, or CSA organizations as inherently ‘positive’ or ‘alternative’ without sufficiently acknowledging their internal characteristics and challenges (e.g., Schiller-Merkens 2022; see also Chapter 1.2.3). Both individual and organizational actors are embedded in broader socio-ecological systems and in relations of dependency with existing agri-food systems (Muñoz and Cohen 2017), so they are not exempt from tensions arising from wider system dynamics. Research at the organizational level on post-growth and alternative economies shows that so-called alternative actors are also susceptible to market pressures that can reproduce inequalities (Banerjee et al. 2021). Accordingly, organizations framed as alternative are not necessarily free of power hierarchies, and their labor relations are not necessarily better (e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Parker 2017; Böhm et al. 2020). In this context, organizational perspectives have the potential to make these challenges visible, enabling organizations to “face or overcome different organizational challenges” (Miralles et al. 2017, 834) on that basis. Such internal organizational challenges are likely to shape organizational stability and continuity and may condition the capacity of actors to diffuse and scale food sovereignty practices. If we want to know whether food sovereignty principles are realized in practice, we must consider the organizational structures and activities that enable or impede them. As Lutz and Schachinger (2013, 4791) observe, food sovereignty actors struggle “to perform in accordance with the principles and aims of food sovereignty” and “to organize themselves in ways that are

sustainable [...], and which avoid assimilation into the dominant global food system” (Lutz and Schachinger 2013, 4780).

Organizational diversity of actors

This orientation aligns with calls in organizational research to investigate the organizational diversity of actors in agri-food systems; analyses at the organizational level remain underrepresented but are equally necessary for agri-food sustainability transitions (e.g., Watson 2019; Böhm et al. 2020; Michel 2020; Moser et al. 2021; see also Chapter 1.2.3). It also resonates with a growing body of literature in transition studies that highlights the limited attention to organizational complexity and diversity (see Chapter 1.2.3). This is also visible in relation to CSA organizations. As discussed in Chapter 1.2.4, there is also a paucity of organizational perspectives in the CSA discourse. For instance, some scholars highlight that not all CSAs are the same and can take a wide diversity of organizational forms “as farmers and members shape it to their own needs and expectations” (Samoggia et al. 2019, 1) which underscores the importance of organizational differentiation. Given the lack of a nuanced understanding of economic actors in the food sovereignty discourse, it is useful to follow King et al.’s (2010) suggestion that organizational perspectives should include and focus on the structures and activities of organizations, which can be configured in various ways. Following Ménard (2013), organizational arrangements can be characterized by a formal structure (e.g., legal forms), property and decision rights (e.g., via contracts), and governance for decision-making (see also Ménard 2017 for an overview of the diversity of organizational arrangements in the agri-food sector). In this view, organizations provide the structure and rights, while governance refers to how decision-making is organized.

In sum, there appears to be little consideration of economic actors as a diverse organizational phenomenon in the food sovereignty literature. Incorporating organizational perspectives is not an alternative to macro-/system-level debates or to movement-level activities; it is a complementary and necessary step. For the purposes of this dissertation, the term ‘organizational perspectives’ is used heuristically as an operational guide to structuring observation and comparison. Across chapters, organizational perspectives function as a cross-cutting lens: they inform the literature-based framework development for EAFS in Chapter 2 and the CSA Framework development in Chapter 3, and culminate in the Synthesized EAFS Framework in Chapter 4.

1.3 Research aims and dissertation structure

This dissertation aims to open up, broaden, and deepen the discourse on food sovereignty and CSA by incorporating organizational perspectives. Food sovereignty is approached not only as a macro-/system-level vision but also as an organizational phenomenon enacted through organizational structures, governance, and decision-making within economic actors (i.e., organizations).

As outlined in Chapter 1.2, much of the literature emphasizes macro-/system-level approaches operating at local, national, and international scales. At the same time, organizational configurations of economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) have often received limited attention, while CSAs, frequently cited as a practical expression of food sovereignty, exhibit substantial organizational variety that warrants systematic differentiation. Against this background, this dissertation adopts an actor-centered perspective at the organizational level that integrates organizational perspectives to provide a more nuanced understanding of EAFS and CSAs, thereby addressing the gaps identified in Chapter 1.2. Accordingly, to maintain terminological clarity regarding ‘level’, organizations and their configurations constitute the primary unit of analysis, while individuals appear only insofar as they act within organizational configurations (see Chapters 1.2.3 and 1.2.5).

In the following, I present the overall research assumptions, aims, research questions, and the structure of this cumulative dissertation.

1.3.1 Overall research assumptions

This dissertation builds on the following assumptions:

Limited organizational attention in the literature: The literature predominantly focuses on macro-/system-level perspectives, with comparatively little attention to organizational configurations. This reflects disciplinary orientations, heterogeneous and often implicit theoretical engagements, skepticism toward economically active actors, and practical constraints faced by organizations (see Chapters 1.2.1, 1.2.5, and 2.3.1).

Visibility and differentiation of economic actors: Economic actors are treated here as organizations engaged in economic activities, and are central to how food sovereignty is enacted in practice. However, their visibility, naming, differentiation, and conceptualization at the organizational level have received limited attention in food sovereignty research (see Chapter 1.2.3).

Food sovereignty as an organizational phenomenon: It is analytically meaningful to treat food sovereignty also as an organizational phenomenon; its principles and enactment are enabled or constrained by organizational characteristics within EAFS (see Chapter 1.2.5).

Organizational challenges as a critical but underexplored dimension: EAFS face internal organizational challenges that have been underexplored in the literature; these

challenges likely influence organizational stability and continuity, and may shape their capacity to diffuse and scale their practices (see Chapters 1.2.3 and 1.2.5).

CSA as a frequently cited but diverse example: CSA is widely referenced as a practical expression of food sovereignty yet exhibits substantial organizational variety that warrants systematic differentiation. Accordingly, organizational variety is also expected among other EAFS (see Chapters 1.2.3, 1.2.4, and 1.2.5).

Analytical value of organizational perspectives: Organizational perspectives are used heuristically as a heuristic lens, rather than to advance a single organizational theory, to examine organizational configurations and activities (see Chapter 1.2.5).

1.3.2 Overall aims

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to open up, broaden, and deepen the discourse on food sovereignty and CSA by approaching food sovereignty as an organizational phenomenon and by incorporating organizational perspectives, thereby enabling a more nuanced understanding of the diversity of EAFS.

The analytical approach of this dissertation comprises three interrelated components:

(a) Actor-centered perspective: The dissertation adopts an actor-centered perspective with a particular focus on actors striving for food sovereignty. Organizations and their configurations constitute the primary unit of analysis, while individuals are considered only insofar as they act within organizational configurations (see Chapter 1.2.3).

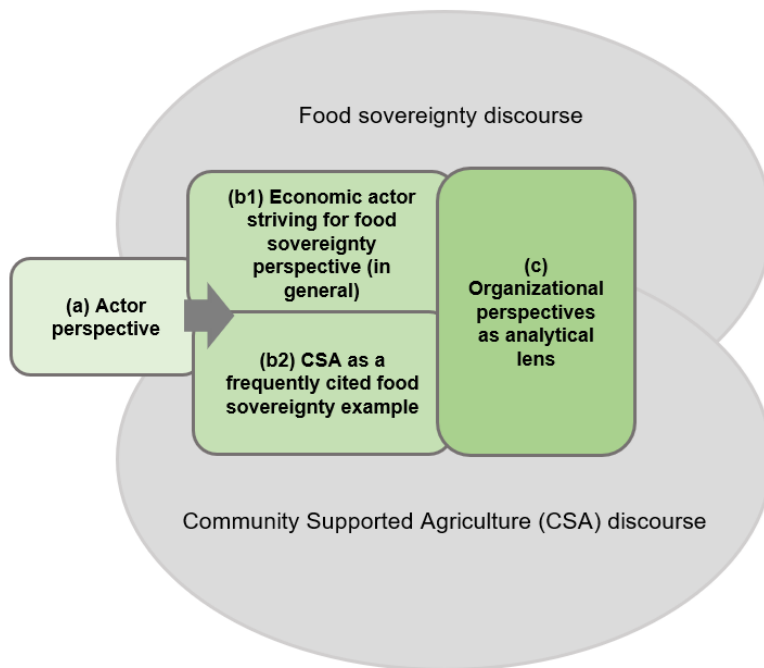
(b1) Economic actors striving for food sovereignty (general): The first line of inquiry conceptualizes and differentiates EAFS along the agri-food supply chain, focusing on organizational configurations to move beyond general portrayals.

(b2) CSA as a frequently cited food sovereignty example: The second, parallel line of inquiry deepens the analysis by examining CSA as a widely cited expression of food sovereignty, with particular attention to organizational variety and key differentiating characteristics.

(c) Organizational perspectives as an analytical lens: Across (b1) and (b2), organizational perspectives are employed heuristically to examine organizational configurations and activities (see Chapter 1.2.5).

The structure of the dissertation is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structure of the dissertation



In line with this design, the dissertation pursues four objectives:

Identify how economic actors engaged in food sovereignty-related economic activities are treated in the literature and make visible the diversity of such actors across the agri-food supply chain.

Develop an organizationally informed characterization of EAFS.

Propose and apply a framework for differentiating CSA organizations.

Document organizational variety among CSAs in Germany and illustrate how organizational perspectives add analytical value.

The contribution of the dissertation is primarily conceptual, by providing an organizationally informed characterization and differentiation of EAFS, and empirical, by researching and illustrating organizational diversity among CSAs in Germany, a prominent EAFS case. A central step in the discussion is to align the food sovereignty pillars with the developed framework (see Chapter 4.2.2). This alignment links normative claims of the food sovereignty concept with specific organizational configuration options of EAFS and provides the basis for further discussions in Chapter 4. In this context, practical implications for supporting actors in transitions are also discussed.

1.3.3 Research question(s) and dissertation structure

Against this background, the dissertation is structured around one main research question and four study-specific questions.

Based on the research objectives, the main research question (RQ) of this dissertation is:

How can the diversity of actors engaged in economic activities (economic actors) striving for food sovereignty in general, and Community Supported Agriculture organizations (CSAs) as a frequently cited expression of food sovereignty in particular, be conceptualized and differentiated by integrating organizational perspectives?

The overarching research objectives and question relate to the two peer-reviewed and published papers included in this cumulative dissertation as follows:

Paper 1 (Chapter 2) addresses the following questions:

RQ 1: Which patterns regarding economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) can be identified in the food sovereignty literature?

RQ 2: How can the diversity of EAFS be conceptualized?

Paper 2 (Chapter 3) addresses the following questions:

RQ 3: According to which characteristics discussed in literature and based on practice-based knowledge co-production can CSAs be differentiated?

RQ 4: What is the variety of CSAs in Germany?

Building on the framing developed in Chapter 1, both studies are framework-building. Paper 1 (Chapter 2) conducts a literature-based thematic analysis of food sovereignty publications. It synthesizes patterns related to economic actors and develops a conceptual, organizational characterization of EAFS. In parallel, Paper 2 (Chapter 3) adopts a transdisciplinary mixed-methods design in partnership with the German CSA Network. It develops a framework to differentiate CSA organizations by organizational characteristics and applies it empirically to demonstrate organizational diversity among CSAs in Germany. The choice of Germany is appropriate given the documented scale and heterogeneity of CSA initiatives and the explicit references to food sovereignty within the German CSA Network and related actor configurations as introduced in Chapter 1.2.

This dissertation is structured as follows. The subsequent chapters develop the two lines of inquiry outlined above. Chapters 2 and 3 contain the individual articles, both published in peer-reviewed journals indexed in Web of Science (WoS).

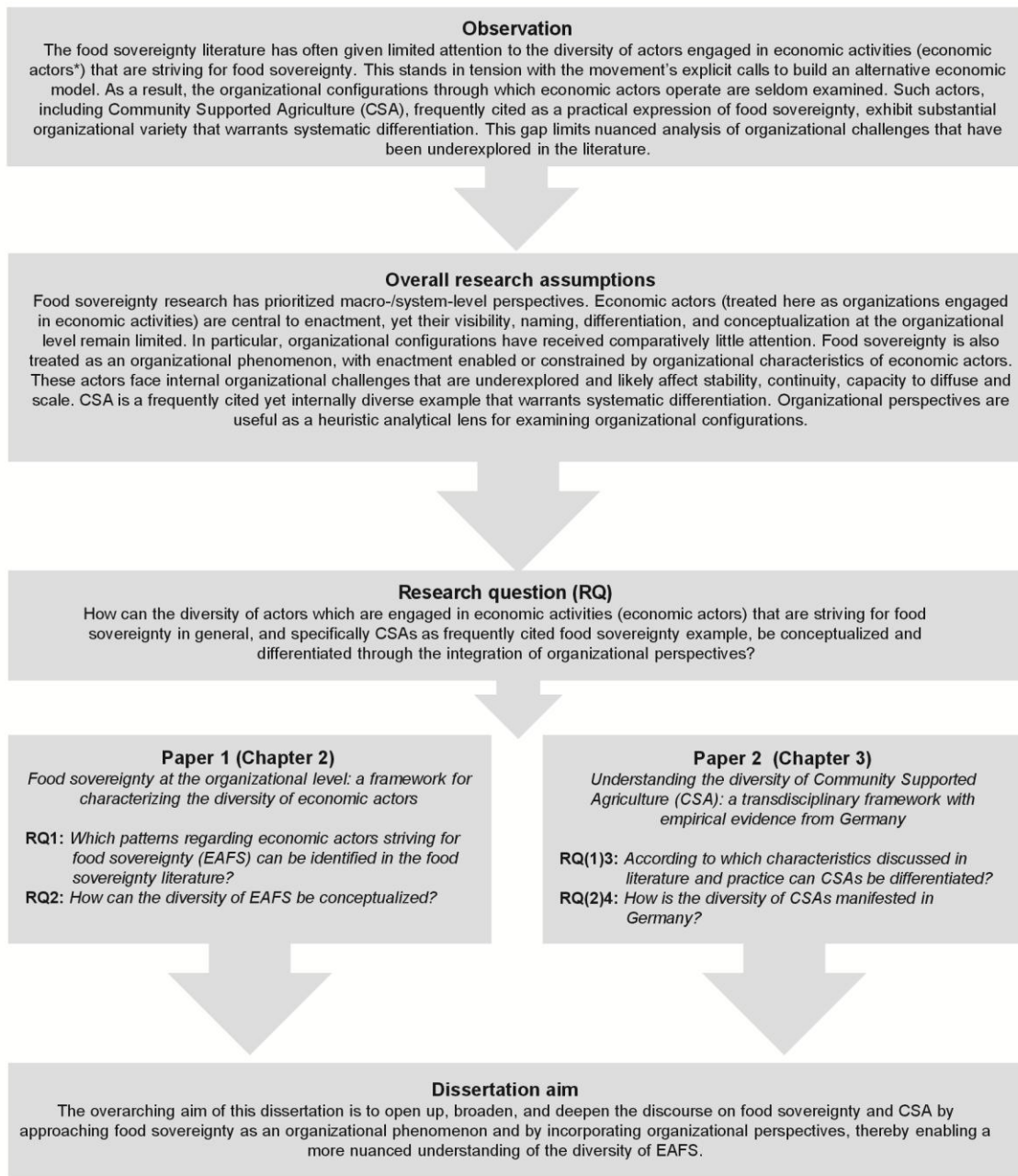
Chapter 2 (Paper 1) is titled “Food sovereignty at the organizational level: A framework for characterizing the diversity of economic actors”. Chapter 3 (Paper 2) is titled “Understanding the diversity of Community Supported Agriculture: a transdisciplinary

framework with empirical evidence from Germany”. In both studies, organizational perspectives are used as the analytical lens. While the term ‘organizational perspectives’ is not explicitly named in the title or in the research questions of Paper 2, this background is addressed in the introduction (Chapter 3.1) and in the discussion (Chapter 3.4).

After these two individual studies, Chapter 4 synthesizes the findings, relates the Synthesized EAFS Framework to the food sovereignty pillars, and sets out conceptual reflections, overall contributions, and implications. First, the section synthesizes the findings, harmonizes terminology, and aligns the developed Synthesized EAFS Framework with the food sovereignty pillars in a heuristic way. Second, in Chapter 4.2.2, the pillars are aligned with the level of organizational configuration options within the framework. This allows normative claims to be considered via organizational configuration options and is then discussed in the context of EAFS. The discussion section also includes methodological reflections and limitations, offers practitioner recommendations for supporting actors in transitions, and outlines future research avenues. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions. Taken together, this cumulative design aims to develop a synthesized, actor-centered language that systematizes the visibility, naming, and differentiation of EAFS and provides a basis for comparative analysis across contexts.

Figure 2 consolidates the research design of this dissertation, linking observations, assumptions, the main research question, and the two studies with their specific RQs and aims. Chapter 1.4 outlines the author's contributions from these chapters, which are based on published articles. The research design presented in Paper 1 can be found in Chapter 2.3, while the design for Paper 2 is detailed in Chapter 3.2.

Figure 2: Research approach and overview of the papers included in this dissertation



* "Economic actors are used in this dissertation to refer to individuals and organizations engaged in economic activities that are striving for food sovereignty (EAFS).

1.3.4 Scope, delimitations, and comparative overview of study designs

This dissertation does not elaborate transition pathways, theorizes such transitions, or conduct a policy evaluation. Nor does it seek to advance a single organizational theory. Rather, it approaches food sovereignty as an organizational phenomenon and conceptualizes and differentiates economic actors, generally and in the specific case of CSA organizations, using organizational perspectives heuristically as an operational guide to structure observation and comparison (see Chapter 1.2.5).

Paper 1 (Chapter 2) is literature-based and therefore cannot establish how organizations operate in practice; instead, it structures patterns identified in food sovereignty publications and proposes an EAFS Framework that merits further investigation. Paper 2 (Chapter 3) examines organizational variety among CSAs in Germany and employs a transdisciplinary mixed-methods approach. The developed CSA Framework is applied empirically. Chapter 4 provides a synthesis and discussion of both studies and presents the Synthesized EAFS Framework, developed on the basis of Papers 1 and 2.

To support a systematic comparison between the two studies, Table 2 presents a side-by-side overview of their respective research approach and design. It indicates for each paper the research purpose, unit of analysis, analytical perspective, materials and data sources, key design features, and main outputs. The overview clarifies where Paper 1 and Paper 2 align and where they differ in focus and methodological orientation.

Table 2: Overview of research approach and design in Paper 1 and Paper 2, highlighting covered aspects and differences

Research approach and design dimension	Paper 1	Explanation with example	Paper 2	Explanation with example
Conceptual background: organizational perspectives (used heuristically as an operational guide)	✓	Applied to economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) in general	✓	Applied to CSA organizations as a specific case of EAFS
Positioning within alternative food concept discourses	✓	Food sovereignty situated among alternative food concepts; focus on EAFS	✓	CSA treated as a frequently cited food sovereignty practice
Focus and unit of analysis	✓	EAFS across the agri-food supply chain; organizations as primary unit of analysis	✓	CSA organizations as one form of EAFS; organizations as primary unit of analysis
Literature base	✓	Integrative literature review (ILR) and (theoretical) thematic analysis (TTA)	✓	Literature review as one element among others
Geographical focus		Not geographically bounded; literature spans Global North and South	✓	Empirical focus on Germany; literature draws on multiple regions
Transdisciplinary approach			✓	Mixed-methods (literature, qualitative, quantitative) with co-production in partnership with the German CSA Network
Framework development	✓	EAFS Framework: conceptual development from the literature synthesis	✓	CSA Framework: Transdisciplinary framework development
Empirical application / testing			✓	Framework applied empirically via a survey of German CSAs*
Main outputs	✓	Organizational characterization and actor-centered organizational language for differentiating EAFS	✓	Empirical mapping of CSA organizational variety in Germany; governance typology

Symbol description: ✓ = Covered in the paper/study

* The typology informs ongoing research by URGENCI (see discussion in Chapter 4).

1.4 Author contributions

Table 3 provides a structured overview of the author’s contributions to the two publications featured in this dissertation³⁴. The author holds sole first authorship for the first paper and shared first authorship for the second paper.³⁵

Table 3: Author contributions to publications featured in this dissertation

Published Paper 1: Food sovereignty at the organizational level: A framework for characterizing the diversity of economic actors (Chapter 2)	
<i>Journal: Frontiers of Sustainable Food Systems</i>	
Author contributions	Authors
First authorship	Matthias Middendorf
Conceptualization	Matthias Middendorf, Christian Herzig, Franz-Theo Gottwald
Research design and methods	Matthias Middendorf
Empirical research, data analysis	Matthias Middendorf
Original draft preparation	Matthias Middendorf
Review and editing	Matthias Middendorf, Christian Herzig, Franz-Theo Gottwald ³⁶
Visualization	Matthias Middendorf
Supervision	Christian Herzig, Franz-Theo Gottwald
Project administration	Matthias Middendorf
Grants acquisition (scholarships)	Matthias Middendorf
Published Paper 2: Understanding the diversity of Community Supported Agriculture: a transdisciplinary framework with empirical evidence from Germany (Chapter 3)	
<i>Journal: Frontiers of Sustainable Food Systems</i>	
Author contributions	Authors
First authorship	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel ³⁷
Conceptualization	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel
Research design and methods	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel
Empirical research, data analysis	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel
Original draft preparation	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel
Review and editing	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel
Visualization	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel
Supervision	Christian Herzig, Franz-Theo Gottwald
Project administration	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel
Grants acquisition (scholarships, project funding)	Matthias Middendorf, Marius Rommel

Beyond the two peer-reviewed articles, the overall discussion in Chapter 4 constitutes the author’s integrative contribution to this cumulative dissertation.

³⁴ According to § 15(3) of the Doctorate Regulations of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Nutritional Sciences, and Environmental Management of the Justus-Liebig-University Giessen (issue dated May 29, 2019). See also “Doctoral Dissertation Guidelines for Cumulative Dissertations”.

³⁵ According to § 4 Authorship of scientific publications (see Statutes of Justus Liebig University Giessen on securing good scientific practice, edition dated February 26, 2024)

³⁶ See also acknowledgements at the end of Chapter 2.

³⁷ These authors have contributed equally to this work.

Chapter 2 Food sovereignty at the organizational level: a framework for characterizing the diversity of economic actors³⁸

Middendorf, M., Herzig, C. (2025)

Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems



Picture: Participation of Matthias Middendorf at the network meeting of the (junge) Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (AbL) from 23 to 25 June 2016 at the Organic farm Jacobi, Borgentreich, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, under the topic "Food Sovereignty". The AbL is one of the founding members of the global peasant movement La Via Campesina (LVC) and its member organization in Germany.³⁹ © Fred Dott

³⁸ This chapter has been published as Middendorf and Herzig (2025). Food sovereignty at the organizational level: a framework for characterizing the diversity of economic actors. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*. 9:1258633. DOI: 10.3389/fsufs.2025.1258633

³⁹ See picture: <https://www.abl-ev.de/ueber-uns/buendnispartner> (accessed November 8, 2025)



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Food sovereignty at the organizational level: a framework for characterizing the diversity of economic actors

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Introduction: The food sovereignty concept intends to transform agri-food systems toward justice and sustainability. While the food sovereignty movement advocates economic alternatives, the actors engaged in economic activities and striving for food sovereignty as actors of change remain overlooked. Food sovereignty scholarship and the movement gives several exemplars such as peasants, local farms and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), as well as activities such as local food processing. However, recognition of these exemplars as 'economic actors' is rarely explicit, nor are their 'economic activities' recognized. Simultaneously, large corporations are criticized for their global market dominance, which has led to generalized negative perceptions of economic actors. This lack of differentiation, along with the absence of a clear conceptualization of Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS), contributes to blind spots. Furthermore, aspects of how EAFS are structured and organized are rarely considered at the organizational level. This has led to limitations, such as in addressing organizational challenges and developing solutions to strengthen and scale EAFS.

Methods: This study aims to conceptualize the diversity of EAFS at the organizational level by identifying patterns in food sovereignty literature. Using thematic analysis within an integrative literature review, we examined 108 publications, including some gray literature.

Results: We propose a framework with three main themes: (i) *conditions that shape EAFS*, including diverse motives, which affect their (ii) *economic-related characteristics* along the agri-food supply chain, and their (iii) *organizational-related characteristics*, such as forms of property and decision-making. This framework includes 12 sub-themes each encompassing a wide spectrum of differentiation and options for distinction.

Discussion: It reveals that EAFS combines alternative and conventional elements that differ in their configurations. The economic actor perspective helps to identify a broad set of EAFS and perceive their potentiality to foster new alliances and obtain mutual support. Moreover, this study underscores that food sovereignty is also a multifaceted organizational phenomenon, emphasizing the need for organizational insights to stabilize and expand EAFS. The findings can be used by researchers, practitioners, food movements, and related alternative food concepts such as food democracy, to better understand and develop such concepts and its involved actors.

KEYWORDS

food sovereignty, food democracy, organizational level, alternative organizations, diverse food economies, food system transformation, literature review, framework

Abstract

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Keywords: Food sovereignty; food democracy; organizational level; alternative organizations, diverse food economies; food system transformation; literature review; framework.

2.1 Introduction

In the face of multiple interlinked crises, such as climate change, environmental destruction, social inequalities, and threats to democracy around the world (e.g., Pimbert 2018; Battilana et al. 2022; Mirzabaev et al. 2023), both socially- and ecologically-sustainable agri-food systems that are less extractive towards nature and people are being called for (e.g., Hinrichs 2000; Mars 2015; Campbell et al. 2017). Against this background, alternative food concepts such as food sovereignty can be seen as a way to transform agri-food systems towards being more just and sustainable (e.g., Anderson et al. 2019; Siegner et al. 2020). A widely cited definition emerged through the Declaration of Nyéléni, developed in 2007 by the global food sovereignty movement at the Nyéléni Forum in Mali: food sovereignty is “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Nyéléni 2007). While the food sovereignty movement itself is striving for “the establishment of another economic model” (Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008, 43), and building and practicing economic alternatives, the actors which are engaged in economic activities and striving for food sovereignty, as actors of change, are overlooked in the food sovereignty discourse. This is somewhat surprising as sustainable transitions require an understanding of who the actors involved in driving such changes are (e.g., Fischer and Newig 2016; Avelino and Wittmayer 2016).

The discourse on food sovereignty is shaped by the contributions of the food sovereignty movement alongside academic scholarship particularly within disciplines such as geography, sociology, rural studies, political economy, and critical agrarian studies (e.g., Binimelis et al. 2014; Anderson 2018; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Stapleton 2019a; Pimbert 2018; Abdoellah et al. 2020; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021). In this context, food sovereignty was conceptualized into various research frameworks, sometimes based on indicators, to assess sustainability of agri-food systems. Examples includes studies from the Global North and Global South with different analytical contexts such as local-regional (e.g., Badal et al. 2011; Binimelis et al. 2014; Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2016; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Daye 2020) and national (e.g., Reardon et al. 2010; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018) as well as global (e.g., Oteros-Rozas et al. 2019; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019). Despite the broad scope of this food sovereignty research, relatively few studies focus on specific food sovereignty actors. For instance, Calvario et al. (2020) analyzed a Basque farmer’s union within the international food sovereignty movement, while Bowness and Wittman (2023) examined a Brazilian non-governmental organization (NGO) involved in food sovereignty mobilization. Other studies have investigated individual actors (Larder et al. 2014; Figueroa 2015) such as farmers’ perspectives on local food systems in Canada (Beingessner and Fletcher 2020) or a local food network in Austria (Lutz and Schachinger 2013). The varied uses of the term ‘actor’ highlight ambiguities in the food sovereignty discourse, a challenge similarly noted in transition studies (Avelino and Wittmayer 2016). Thus, the term 'actors'

can refer to individual actors (persons as ‘independent’ players or members of an organization) as well as individual organizational actors (e.g., organizations such as firms, groups, networks) which are able to act (Avelino and Wittmayer 2016). Following this understanding, organizations can be designed by individuals to achieve purposeful collective actions unattainable by any individual (King et al. 2010). These ambiguities concerning actors become evident with regard to the historical origins of food sovereignty. The concept originated from a global grassroots movement driven by small-scale and local peasants and farmers, rural workers, and other marginalized actors in agri-food systems (e.g., Desmarais and Wittman 2014 ; Desmarais 2015; Borras 2016; Powell and Wittman 2018). Several examples are mentioned in the food sovereignty literature by scientists and by actors from the food sovereignty movement as positive for food sovereignty (Dekeyser et al. 2018), as food sovereignty-conducive (Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019), or as striving for food sovereignty (Carney 2012; Ajates 2020; Mestmacher and Braun 2021). The documentation of the Nyéléni Forum in Mali (full report), published by the Nyéléni International Steering Committee (2008), presents exemplars such as peasants, local farms, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives, and activities like local food processing. These examples are also mentioned by Borras et al. (2015), Stapleton (2019b), Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá (2019), van der Ploeg (2020).

However, these actors and their diverse economic activities are rarely named and considered explicitly as ‘economic actors’ or ‘economic activities’”, creating blind spots in the discourse. This phenomenon of not naming economic actors (and thus making them invisible) aligns with related research in social and solidarity economies (SSE), where organizational research has shown that actors and “organizations were engaged in economic activity, very few thought of themselves in these terms” (Safri 2015, 931). At the same time, the food sovereignty discourse critiques dominant economic actors such as large corporations that operate in agri-food systems (e.g., Portman 2018; Pahnke 2021). This often leads to and supports generalizations in the discourse that portray economic actors negatively (Ayres and Bosia 2011), criticizing their transformative potential in providing market-based solutions (Fairbairn 2012), or frame food sovereignty in general as anti-business (Desa and Jia 2020). In contrast to these negative framings or the lack of consideration of economic actors within the food sovereignty discourse, research about diverse economies has highlighted the existence of a diversity of economic actors engaged in the implementation of non-harmful economic processes (e.g., Gibson-Graham 2006⁴⁰; Blue et al. 2021).

The lack of differentiation, along with the absence of a conceptualization of economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS), reveals significant blind spots in the food sovereignty discourse. Current research on food sovereignty primarily focuses on agri-food-related production activities (Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2022), offering limited insight into

⁴⁰ Gibson-Graham is the pen name shared by the feminist economic geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham.

EAFS at the organizational level. For example, there is little understanding of how EAFS are structured and organized, which restricts more nuance in critical examinations such as addressing organizational challenges, and thus the development of solutions to strengthen and scale EAFS. By incorporating organizational perspectives we draw attention in this study to organizational structures and activities (King et al. 2010) of EAFS thereby enabling a redressing of the (organizational) challenges faced by EAFS. Studies at the organizational level in post-growth economies have already shown that alternative economic organizations are also susceptible to market pressures that can perpetuate inequalities (Banerjee et al. 2021). Additionally, these organizational actors are not necessarily without their power hierarchies and their labor relations are not necessarily better (e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013 Parker 2017; Böhm et al. 2020). Likewise, Rosol (2020) calls for a more critical examination of ‘alternativity’ and of the alternative and non-alternative described practices within agri-food systems. This is in line with the call of organizational research to investigate the organizational diversity of actors in agri-food systems; yet analysis of such at an organizational level is still underrepresented, but equally necessary for agri-food sustainability transitions (e.g., Watson 2019; Böhm et al. 2020; Michel 2020; Moser et al. 2021).

Against these backgrounds, this study investigates the food sovereignty literature (i.e., scientific peer-reviewed publications supplemented by some identified gray literature) to identify patterns that can help conceptualize the diversity of economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) at the organizational level. The wording *striving for food sovereignty* is used here, drawing on its usage by scholars (e.g., Carney 2012; Ajates 2020; Mestmacher and Braun 2021), as well as in a similar manner as *striving for sustainability* (e.g., Schaltegger et al. 2003; Böhm et al. 2020). We introduce the term EAFS here based on related discourses and as an umbrella term to capture their diversity. This term refers to individual organizations and their structures and indirectly includes the individuals involved.

We aim to take one of the first steps toward a deeper understanding of EAFS by identifying recurring patterns in 108 food sovereignty publications from both the Global South and Global North. This is achieved through an integrative literature review and thematic analysis. Based on these patterns and themes, we propose an EAFS Framework to guide future research. The following research questions guided our literature review:

- 1 Which patterns regarding EAFS can be identified in the food sovereignty literature?
- 2 How can the diversity of EAFS be conceptualized?

Current organizational knowledge on EAFS in the food sovereignty literature is underdeveloped, so our review cannot conclude how these organizations actually operate. However, this study provides the first attempts to structure those patterns that have been identified in relevant publications in a comprehensive way and that merit further investigation. A second limitation of this study relates to organizational theory. One deficit

of the food sovereignty literature, the body of research that we analyze, is the insufficient theorization of EAFS, as theoretical approaches from organizational studies are rarely applied (see Chapter 2.3.1). Our study aims to encourage and facilitate both theorization and in-depth empirical research on the organizational level by identifying relevant themes (i.e., related to patterns in the food sovereignty literature) that are relevant for EAFS demanding further theoretical analysis.

To answer the research questions, the article is structured as follows: Chapter 2.2 introduces the conceptual and theoretical background in more detail. Chapter 2.3 follows with research methodology for the integrative literature review, including our thematic analysis approach. Chapter 2.4 provides a detailed literature analysis and presents our EAFS Framework based upon three main themes and 12 sub-themes regarding corresponding EAFS characteristics. After the discussion (Chapter 2.5), we conclude by discussing limitations further research paths, as well as outlining the potential of the presented perspectives and framework for researchers, practitioners, food movement associations and related alternative food concepts.

2.2 Conceptual and theoretical background

This chapter explains food sovereignty both as a movement and as a concept, and argues for a deeper engagement with economic actors at the organizational level in debates on a food sovereignty-informed agri-food system transformation.

2.2.1 Food sovereignty as a movement and concept

To better understand the need for a better consideration of the organizational level of economic actors in the discourse on food sovereignty, it is essential to contextualize food sovereignty with its historical origins. Food sovereignty emerged from social struggles and peasant-based fights connected with the global agricultural and food crisis of the last decades, particularly the rural movements of the Global South (e.g., McMichael 2014; Figueroa 2015). The term ‘food sovereignty’ apparently first appeared in Mexico. The international peasant movement association La Via Campesina (LVC)⁴¹ then launched the concept at the Rome Civil Society Organization Forum in 1996 (Edelman 2014; see Chapter 2.1). The food sovereignty concept offers a “different way of thinking about how the world food system could be organized” (Akram-Lodhi 2013, 4), challenging existing structures of corporate power and control in the global agri-food system, and aims to shift power and resources to a new system of production and consumption (Wittman 2015).

As mentioned in the introduction, food sovereignty is widely cited in the literature and conceptualized into research frameworks in studies both in the Global South and the Global North. In this context, the definition developed by the global food sovereignty

⁴¹ According to its own statement, LVC comprises today about 182 national and local organizations in 81 countries. The movement organization represents altogether about 200 million peasants, rural and migrant workers, Indigenous people, small and medium-sized producers, pastoralists, fishers, rural women, and peasant youth (La Via Campesina 2022).

movement in the Nyéléni Declaration is used by several scholars (e.g., Schiavoni et al. 2018; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021; Santafe-Troncoso and Loring 2021). The Declaration presents six often-cited pillars of food sovereignty: (I) focus on food for people, (II) value food providers, (III) localize food systems, (IV) put control locally, (V) build knowledge and skills, and (VI) works with nature (Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008). However, the term ‘food sovereignty’ is now increasingly used as a marketing instrument by corporations, appearing on food packages sold in conventional supermarkets, which is criticized as greenwashing and co-optation by scholars and the movement (e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018).⁴²

2.2.2 Incorporating the organizational level into food sovereignty research

EAFS may not always be negatively described in the food sovereignty discourse. In critical organization studies, they are sometimes portrayed as alternative organizations and fighters against neoliberal structures and oppressive work management (Vásquez and Del Fa 2019; see also introduction), while also being embedded in current agri-food systems through relations of dependency. Thus EAFS are struggling “to perform in accordance with the principles and aims of food sovereignty” (Lutz and Schachinger 2013, 4791) and “to organize themselves in ways that are sustainable [...], and which avoid assimilation into the dominant global food system” (Lutz and Schachinger 2013, 4780). Given the lack of a nuanced understanding of EAFS at the organizational level, it is helpful to adopt King et al.’s (2010) suggestion that organizational perspectives should include and focus on the structures and activities of organizations. Accordingly, Ménard (2013) describes organizations as complex arrangements consisting of formal structures (e.g., legal forms), the allocation of property and decision-making rights (e.g., by contracts), and forms of governance (regulating how decisions are being taken) (see also Rosol and Barbosa 2021 as well as Poças Ribeiro et al. 2021 which specifically address the role of founders, leaders and managers in alternative food networks (AFNs)). However, there is little consideration of what we name EAFS as a diverse organizational phenomenon (see Ménard 2017 for an overview of the diversity of organizational arrangements in the agri-food sector). In this sense, we aim to build initial bridges between food sovereignty as a movement and as a concept at the organizational level by focusing on EAFS themselves through the inclusion of organizational perspectives. Such perspectives have the potential to “face or overcome different organizational challenges” (Miralles et al. 2017, 834) of these actors, which strategically limit struggles for food sovereignty since individual and organizational actors are always embedded in overarching socio-ecological systems (Muñoz and Cohen 2017).

⁴² A current example is the label “80% better for food sovereignty” printed on milk packages in Austria by HOFER, which is the operating name of the supermarket retail group ALDI, that reduces the concept to a single number (Fehlinger and Rail 2018).

2.3 Research methods

This chapter explains the method selection, data selection process for the integrative literature review, and thematic analysis method used for data analysis and framework building.

2.3.1 Method selection

We conducted an integrative literature review of food sovereignty studies to circumscribe, differentiate and better understand EAFS diversity, being “a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic [...] such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (Torraco 2005, 356). The goal of it is to summarize what is currently known by identifying patterns, themes, and research gaps, thus helping to guide further research (Snyder 2019). Corresponding to the character of our field of research, we are following an interdisciplinary research approach for a deeper engagement of the organizational level in food sovereignty debates. We are, therefore, articulating different research areas and moving across topics and disciplines of food sovereignty research such as geography, sociology, rural studies, political economy, and critical agrarian studies (see Chapter 2.1). We do so “in order to increase the chances of cross-fertilization of ideas and theories and unexpected discoveries” (Alvesson and Gabriel 2013, 254). We chose the thematic analysis method by Braun and Clarke (2006) because this method is a widely used qualitative analytic method and is usually adopted when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon, such as EAFS, is limited. The method provides a detailed analysis of specific aspects of the literature sample (see Chapter 2.3.2) being guided by our specific research questions (see Chapter 2.1), rather than a comprehensive description of the entire data sample as, for example, a systematic literature review would have done (Braun and Clarke 2006; for an overview of review methods see Snyder 2019). In contrast to methodologies such as Grounded Theory, the used thematic analysis method is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and therefore the method can be used within different theoretical frameworks (for differences to other methods see Braun and Clarke 2021). Our approach, therefore, is akin to and takes certain inspiration from Grounded Theory by acknowledging theorizations that inform existing studies, in order to generate an original conceptual framework. The thematic analysis approach has the advantage of being able to stimulate theoretical progress in the highly heterogenous field of food sovereignty studies by building on important insights gained through sometimes meticulous empirical work, often being informed (often implicitly, or without sufficiently elaboration) by the use of a diverse and broad range of theories.⁴³ It is difficult to integrate these theories in a way

⁴³ Although it was not the focus of the thematic analysis, the broad range of theories from our literature data sample (see Chapter 2.3.2) includes, for example: ecology and political ecology (Blesh and Wittman 2015; Calvário 2017), Marxist perspectives (Pye 2021), economic theory (Madsen 2021), organization theory to study international network organizations, not EAFS (Duncan and Pascucci 2017), radical democracy (Pahnke 2021), transition (Lutz and Schachinger 2013),

that allows for a better understanding of the potential and limitations of EAFS in agri-food system transformations. Further limitations related to the selection and analysis process are discussed in Chapter 2.5.5.

2.3.2 Data selection process for the integrative literature review

For all searches we used “food sovereign*” to select relevant scientific peer-reviewed publications, which includes both the adjective and the noun “food sovereignty”. Keywords guiding searches within this corpus can be divided into three clusters (see Table 4):

- (1) Framework perspective: food sovereignty is conceptualized in terms of various frameworks to assess sustainability of agri-food systems including pillars, categories, and indicators in (empirical) studies to facilitate analysis. Examples of this include the Global North and Global South with different analytical contexts such as local-regional, national, and global, and involving different scientific disciplines (see Chapters 2.1 and 2.3.1). Frameworks often indirectly mentioned a wide range of economic actors, modes of production, and forms of organization, from which keywords were drawn for (2).
- (2) Examples of EAFS: this cluster of keywords includes initiatives along the agri-food supply chain, for example, food processors and forms such as CSA (see examples in Chapter 2.1).
- (3) Business and management: within the organization, management, and business literature relevant publications were rarely found. For this reason, we additionally crosschecked the noun “food sovereignty” in the Web of Science database categories “Business” and “Management”.

Table 4: Search clusters and keyword combinations that generated the publications included in the integrative literature review. Date of Search: First search March 12th, 2021, Second search (as an update) August 10th, 2021.

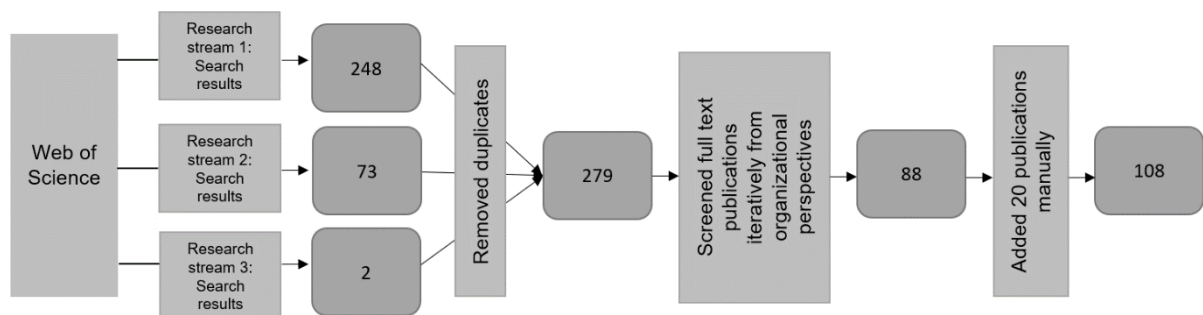
Search stream	Search terms searched for in titles, abstracts, and keywords (with number)	Total number
Cluster 1	"food sovereign*" AND: "framework*" (174); "indicator*" (38); "empiric*" (36)	248
Cluster 2	"food sovereign*" AND: "organizational" (17); "organisational" (1); "initiative*" (8); organi*" (1); "CSA*" (3); "community supported agriculture*" (7); "processed" (14); "processing" (11); "processor*" (4); "supportive" (2) "conductive" (3)	73
Cluster 3	"food sovereign*" in the WoS Categories Business (1) and Management (1)	2
Sample after removing duplicated publications		279

Final searches in the online Web of Science database were performed on August 10th, 2021, with the three search streams of the clusters previously explained. This process identified a total of 299 publications. In the final sample, 108 publications published between 2010 and

transformation (McCune and Sanchez 2019), social innovation (Alberio and Moralli 2021), ecological feminism (Portman 2018), postcolonial feminist theory (Deepak 2014).

2021 were included in the analysis after the selection process (Figure 3).⁴⁴ The first step required the removal of duplicates, which left 279 peer-reviewed publications belonging to several research disciplines (n = 279 documents, August 10th, 2021, updated review). Titles, abstracts, and full text were scrutinized with an emphasis on organizational information guided by our research questions (see Chapter 2.1). After having read the full text of all publications, 190 were excluded because they did not match the following criteria: Publications were excluded if they used the food sovereignty term and concept (1) without context (e.g., definition, framework, concrete food sovereignty principles, e.g., references to the Nyéléni Declaration); (2) only as a keyword without being integrated in the text; (3) only as part of the reference list without being integrated in the text. Indigenous⁴⁵ food sovereignty perspectives were included when publications made explicit links to the food sovereignty concept. During the full-text analysis, an additional 16 publications were identified through reviewing the references listed in the scholarly publications. After having derived the final publication list, we manually added four publications that were already known from previous research and data collection prior to this study. Among these 20 additional publications some are gray literature, such as project reports or documents published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which are not indexed in the Web of Science database.⁴⁶

Figure 3: Selection process of the publications for review



⁴⁴ For a complete list of the 108 publications included please see Supplementary material in Chapter 7.1.1.

⁴⁵ The United Nations broadly defines Indigenous peoples as communities with longstanding connections to specific lands who have faced displacement, industrial encroachment, and settlement by others. This definition includes Native Americans, First Nations, Aboriginal peoples of Australia, and other communities with ancestral ties to pre-colonial societies. In this article, *Indigenous* and *Black* are capitalized to emphasize their significance as socially constructed identities rather than simply referring to characteristics such as skin colour. This practice acknowledges shared histories, cultural identities, and shared experiences of systemic oppression and resistance among Black and Indigenous communities (Laws 2020; Weeber 2020).

⁴⁶ Further gray literature case studies on the impact of food sovereignty by key movement organizations are included in the systematic literature review by Sampson et al. (2021).

2.3.3 Thematic analysis method: data analysis and framework building

We followed Braun and Clarke's (2013) and Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) recommendations and applied the thematic analysis method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in the form of themes in the data, which were identified as being important to answer our research questions in Chapter 2.1 and the conceptual-theoretical background regarding the organizational level explained in Chapter 2.2. This qualitative method combines flexibility and rigor, which is particularly useful for investigating such an under-researched area. Rigor is achieved by a structured step-by-step approach (see the six steps below, summarized in Table 5). Flexibility is achieved by extending the analysis beyond explicit meanings to include the interpretation of latent meanings. For the in-depth review, we reduced the material in several loops and identified patterns (themes and sub-themes) that can help to characterize EAFS. We only considered the 108 publications of the literature sample described above. Other food sovereignty publications were excluded from the analysis in order to keep the literature selection transparent. The process of the thematic analysis is described by the use of six interrelated steps (see Table 5). Themes and sub-themes (i.e., themes within themes) emerged from the data along these steps.

To begin with, we familiarized ourselves with the data by reading the publications, taking notes on possible themes and sub-themes using a review matrix created with Microsoft Excel (step 1).

The 108 publications were sorted by publication year for investigating the historical evolution of the research topic. When reading and screening the full publications, relevant sections were extracted, transferred to the matrix and categorized by initial codes (step 2).

For the next step, Excel and MAXQDA Version 2020 were used to assist with data management and coding. Results of the coding process were deliberated and agreed upon by both authors. Coding proceeded on two levels: Semantic coding referred to what is explicitly stated in a text, while latent coding was used for capturing implied meanings such as (non-explicit) intentions or assumptions underlying explicit meanings. We developed analytical questions starting from the research questions (see Supplementary material) and searched for broader themes in the review matrix by identifying respective quotes and examples (step 3).

We reviewed, modified, and developed these quotes and examples into preliminary themes and sub-themes according to different levels of abstraction guided by verification questions suggested for the thematic analysis method (for examples, see Braun and Clarke 2013; Maguire and Delahunt 2017) (step 4). In the next step, we named the (main) themes and sub-themes. Furthermore, we analyzed in this step how themes and sub-themes interrelated with each other (i.e., interaction and relation between themes and sub-themes) and sorted the sub-themes into the (main) themes. We constructed as a theme (1) *conditions that shape EAFS* that have three sub-themes (see Chapter 2.4.1 and Table 6). It reflects generic aspects that affect the other two themes. These are *economic-related characteristics*

of EAFS (theme 2, see Chapter 2.4.2 and Table 7) and *organizational-related characteristics* (theme 3, see Chapter 2.4.3 and Table 8). Theme 2 has three, whereas theme 3 includes six sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes are based on the predominantly descriptive method that we used, condense the aggregated content of the literature, which means that the themes describe patterns in the data that are relevant to the research questions in a synthetic fashion. Following the thematic analysis method, we thus did not address the question of which theoretical perspectives authors had used, not least because of the broad range of relevant EAFS aspects relate in many ways to heterogeneous theories from different disciplines (see Chapter 2.3.1) (step 5).

We identified a wide spectrum of various patterns that capture EAFS diversity. In total, the information from our sample relevant to answering our research questions was synthesized into 12 sub-themes and three main themes, resulting in a novel framework that may guide future investigations of EAFS (see visualization Figure 4 in Chapter 2.4). We present the results in Chapter 2.4 and discuss them in Chapter 2.5 (step 6).

Table 5: A six-phase framework, based on Braun and Clarke (2006) and Maguire and Delahunt (2016), was used and applied for the thematic analysis in this paper (illustration by the authors).

Step 1	Data familiarization: Retrieve data, screen, and structure items by reading and taking notes.
Step 2	Generate initial codes: Organize reading material and data in Microsoft EXCEL in a systematic way to address the research question and perspective.
Step 3	Search for broader themes: Identify quotes and examples by developing and using analytical questions starting from the research questions and organize them into broader themes.
Step 4	Review themes and build sub-themes: Review, modify, and develop the preliminary themes by developing and using analytical questions from the research questions.
Step 5	Define and name themes and sub-themes: Consideration of the interaction and relation between identified patterns.
Step 6	Write-up: Present the results (Chapter 2.4) and discuss them (Chapter 2.5).

2.4. Integrative literature review: conceptualization of diverse Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS)

In the following, we present EAFS diversity according to patterns we identified in the literature. Each sub-theme encompasses a spectrum of differentiation and options for distinction which illustrate the diversity of EAFS. As mentioned in Chapter 2.3, it is possible that themes and sub-themes can interrelate with each other.

2.4.1 Theme 1: conditions that shape EAFS

The literature addresses three *basic conditions that shape EAFS* in terms of *motives*, the *perspective of transformation*, and *intersectionality* (also see Table 6). Theme 1 therefore reflects generic aspects that affect Theme 2 and also Theme 3.

4.1.1 Motives: Several studies highlight that activities of EAFS are inspired by a wide range of underlying motives (e.g., Larder et al. 2014; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; McClintock

and Simpson 2018). James et al. (2021, 13–14) found that the struggle against “neoliberal racial capitalism (such as privatization, competition, rationalization, etc.)” unites the motives of both individual organizational actors (EAFS seen as an organization) as well as individual actors (e.g., founders and leaders of organizations) in order to establish, manage, and operate EAFS. Other motives identified are concerns over problematic policies, negative effects of the industrial, corporate food system, or a limited public awareness of such aspects (Hoey and Sponseller 2018). According to one study, food sovereignty related motives “were found in the bigger ideas of why actors supported and initiated” (Clendenning et al. 2016, 10) their organization. A single EAFS may often determine food sovereignty as an abstract goal without detailing its meaning or how it should be implemented (see Alberio and Moralli 2021). However, Di Masso et al. (2014) point out that individual motives, viewpoints, and strategies of EAFS can differ depending on local interpretations of food sovereignty principles, as well as geographical and historical context, such as colonialism. Thereby, the motives of EAFS can be explicitly or implicitly linked to the food sovereignty concept. By explicit motives, EAFS speak the language of food sovereignty and include the term “food sovereignty”, often referencing the Nyéléni Declaration or engage in movements that explicitly refer to food sovereignty. Besides those EAFS that are aware of the concept, there are others that do not explicitly know and use food sovereignty language. Yet many EAFS “might not be using the language of food sovereignty but are in fact engaged in initiatives that fit within a food sovereignty framework” (Desmarais and Wittman 2014, 5). These apparently implicit EAFS, that are often ‘invisible’ in the food sovereignty discourse, have been studied by various scholars (e.g., Abdoellah et al. 2020; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Ertor-Akyazi 2020; Robinson 2021; Santafe-Troncoso and Loring 2021). These EAFS do not necessarily “talk the talk” of food sovereignty in terms of words, but Figueroa (2015, 5) argues that they “walked the walk” practically. Naylor (2019, 715) describes these EAFS as “outsiders” that “might (or not) advocate or ally with groups working toward food sovereignty”. Although these EAFS do not refer to the term as such, their principles, values, related motives, and corresponding practices are characterized by scholars as being aligned with food sovereignty principles (e.g., Clendenning et al. 2016; Stapleton 2019a). EAFS can adopt the food sovereignty concept “as a kind of ‘leitmotif’ and try to comply with its basic principles” (Lutz and Schachinger 2013, 4781). Motives and goals of EAFS may remain implicit in organizational discourse, or be formalized in mission statements (e.g., Kato 2013; Siegner et al. 2020).

4.1.2 Perspective of transformation: EAFS are often described as following transformative approaches that change agri-food systems on a spectrum that ranges from progressive to radical (see Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011 cited by e.g., Alkon and Mares 2012, Di Masso et al. 2014, Schiavoni 2016; see also Pimbert 2018). A transformational perspective implies the reorganization of production and the reduction of dependency on the market through a range of market- and non-market-based approaches (Larder et al. 2014;

Calvário 2017; Madsen 2021; Sippel and Larder 2021). Progressive approaches predominantly focus on practical alternatives, such as initiating local organizations and reforms. In contrast, radical perspectives of transformation aim at destroying the capitalist power structure of the current economic system. Examples in the literature are acts of disobedience, such as circumventing legal constraints or land occupations (e.g., Ayres and Bosia 2011; Roman-Alcalá 2015; Calvário 2017; Pahnke 2021). Clendenning et al. (2016) provide some context regarding different perspectives on transformation in the U.S. urban food movement where CSAs, urban gardens, and farmers markets do not make explicit links to food sovereignty, but structural similarities to food sovereignty principles are evident. Therefore, Ayres and Bosia (2011, 60) interpret the CSA approach in the U.S. context as “microresistance to global agribusiness”. Conceptions of time required for transformative change differ among EAFS as being described in the literature. Duncan and Pascucci (2017) understand agri-food system transition as a longer-term process across two to three generations, whereas radical approaches favor short-term change, in contrast to long-term perspectives connected with progressive approaches (Di Masso and Zografos 2015). Scholars note that food sovereignty actors are embedded in the current economic system and operate within a neoliberal, growth-orientated environment of a corporate food regime, which affects their perspectives and strategies of transformation (Alkon and Mares 2012; Larder et al. 2014; Clendenning et al. 2016). They need access to and control over resources (land, water, knowledge, seeds, and other inputs), and enter into various relationships with producers and service providers for credit, implements, tractors, manure and compost fertilizers, fuel, digital technology, etc. (e.g., Ortega-Cerdà and Rivera-Ferre 2010; Badal et al. 2011; Calix de Dios et al. 2014; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Pimbert 2018; Carolan 2018 Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019). Due to being embedded in the current system, scholars warn that EAFS runs the risk of also reproducing conventional, capitalist, neoliberal structures and mechanisms that may include racism and other forms of social exclusion thereby limiting their transformative potency (e.g., Alkon and Mares 2012; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018).

4.1.3 Intersectionality: This is emphasized as another condition shaping EAFS. To integrate bundles of identities and possible forms of discrimination in the context of EAFS, several scholars are using an intersectional lens in their food sovereignty studies (e.g., Kato 2013; Kerr 2013; Collins 2019; Calvario et al. 2020) or refer to intersectional approaches (e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Moragues-Faus and Marsden 2017). The historical origins of many such organizations indicate multiple, intersecting connections with food sovereignty through the struggles of marginalized and discriminated actors (e.g., peasants, rural and migrant workers, Indigenous people, small and medium-sized producers, pastoralists, fishers, rural women, and peasant youth). Commonly cited examples include forms of intersectional injustice linked to historical and contemporary colonialism (such as slavery, dispossession, and racism) and interconnected categories of discrimination (like class, race, gender, age,

and religion) within a neoliberal system (e.g., Alkon and Mares 2012; Kerr 2013; Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2016; Portman 2018; Tramel 2018; Collins 2019 McCune and Sanchez 2019; Turner et al. 2020; Sippel and Larder 2021; Pahnke 2021). In this context, anti-discrimination rules, expanded education and empowerment activities, and formal monitoring systems are identified as necessary for EAFS to reduce the risk of power abuse and to address intersectional power relations and structures of domination, such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of inequality (Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015). With regard to structural inequality in the forms of racism and class power, Fairbairn (2012) argues for the promotion of intersectional perspectives, particularly so in EAFS in urban areas. As referenced by Kato (2013), many EAFS have yet to address the intersectional nature of power relations, especially regarding whiteness and the positionalities of the middle class, which are particularly relevant for EAFS in the Global North. The integration of Indigenous and Black food sovereignty perspectives in EAFS activities, struggles, and self-reflection are examples of a counter-strategy (e.g., First Nations Development Institute 2014; Taylor 2018; Santafe-Troncoso and Loring 2021). Further examples are the interlinking of food sovereignty activism and scholarship with a critique of gender inequalities and of violence against women, and a corresponding strategy to ensure equal decision-making power by empowering and advancing women to resist both the patriarchy and neoliberalism, as well as promoting agrarian reform policies that contribute to gender equality (Kerr 2013; Calix de Dios et al. 2014; Deepak 2014; Marco Larrairo et al. 2016; Plahe et al. 2017; Portman 2018). Although food sovereignty is interpreted by Collins (2019) as a feminist concept in principle, she calls for more attention to further inequalities intersecting with gender relations in control over property in agricultural land.

Table 6: Theme 1: Conditions that shape EAFS

Sub-themes	Identified patterns in the literature
Motives	Struggles against the current (neoliberal, capitalist, etc.) agri-food system; Depending on local interpretations of food sovereignty and its principles (i.e., geographical, historical, and founding background/context); explicit and implicit links to the food sovereignty concept; food sovereignty as “leitmotif” implicit or be formalized in mission statements
Perspective of transformation	From progressive (e.g., focus on practical alternatives, reforms) to radical approaches (destroying the current capitalist economic system); embeddedness in the current system with risk of reproduction of conventional structures and mechanisms; time aspect of transformation as a long-term process or radical shift
Intersectionality	Integrating bundles of identities and forms of (structural) discrimination, injustice, and inequality based on class, race, gender, age, religion, etc.; establishment of anti-discrimination rules, expanded education and empowerment activities, and formal monitoring systems; counter-strategies such as integration of indigenous and black food sovereignty perspectives in EAFS activities, struggles, and self-reflection

2.4.2 Theme 2: economic-related characteristics

The conditions that shape EAFS (theme 1) affect the second theme *economic-related characteristics* leads to three sub-themes, *production forms, mode, practices, and services*, *the scope of supply chains*, as well as *forms of partnerships and cooperations* (also see Table 7).

4.2.1 Production forms, mode, practices, and services: The literature contains a diversity of production forms which relate to land and agriculture in terms of agroecology informing the production of seeds, crops, and how to process products, thus being a key building block for food sovereignty (e.g., Reardon et al. 2010; Anderson 2018; Gliessman et al. 2019; McCune and Sanchez 2019; Siegner et al. 2020; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021). Some scholars describe peasant agriculture as being close to agroecology, whereas others distinguish between agroecology and a more general peasant mode of production (Soper 2020; van der Ploeg 2020). Other publications refer to agroforestry (Moreno-Calles et al. 2016; Santafe-Troncoso and Loring 2021), organic agriculture (Alberio and Moralli 2021), the integration of aquatic resources by artisanal fishing, as well as hunting and gathering as production forms, often by Indigenous peoples, rural workers, and migrants (Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Sonnino et al. 2016; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Mills 2018; Ertor-Akyazi 2020; Soper 2020). The mentioned examples can be ascribed to a so-called first generation of food sovereignty actors. In most publications, these small-scale producers, and especially peasants, are described as key actors of a first food sovereignty generation (e.g., Dunford 2015; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Soper 2020). This includes peasant farming, gardening, pastoralism, forest-based production, and activities of members of rural landless movements, as well as of other small-scale users of natural resources that are producing food (e.g., Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Pimbert 2018; Pollans 2018). The spectrum contains LVC member associations from the Global South and North, such as landless workers' movements (e.g., Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST) (Blesh and Wittman 2015; Calvario et al. 2020; Sippel and Larder 2021) as well as peasants, farms with up to 1,200 acres, with employed workers, or fully mechanized farms, and various peasant and movement associations that sometimes pursue conflicting ideologies, identities, and production practices (Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Bhattacharya 2017; Fladvad et al. 2020). The spectrum of forms of production identified in the food sovereignty literature ranges from self-production (e.g., honoring food sovereignty as an everyday practice, especially the contributions of women; see Turner et al. 2020) to production for external use by providing goods and/or services, for example, "organic products for sale" (Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018, 73). Food processing is often reduced in the discourse to a critique of capitalist food processing. A recurring argument is that conventional food processing leads to more salty, fatty food (Paddock and Smith 2018) and is sometimes connected in the literature with food regime terminology such as in "industrially processed 'food from nowhere'" (Schiavoni 2016, 19). For these reasons,

several researchers call for more food infrastructure perspectives in the food sovereignty discourse that can include private, decentralized, or collaborative distribution and processing activities or possibilities that interlink with other EAFS along the supply chain (e.g., Kato 2013; Borrás et al. 2015; Pollans 2018; Courtheyn 2018; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Anderson 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Maticena and Corvo 2020). Food infrastructure enables the flow of goods and services (e.g., purchase, transport, processing, storage, cooling of food; or flows of related equipment) along the supply chain from farms to consumers. For this reason, it is described as a powerful element of food sovereignty and scholars call for more attention to these activities (Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Binimelis et al. 2014; Campbell and Veteto 2015; Leitgeb et al. 2016; Schiavoni et al. 2018; Seminar et al. 2018; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; van der Ploeg 2020; Keske 2021; Levkoe et al. 2021). In some studies, the number of slaughterhouses, businesses milling flour, food hubs, and dairy and non-dairy products are used as indicators for food infrastructures supporting food sovereignty (Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2016; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018). In the context of food production, some EAFS aim to reduce capitalist market dependencies through integration of activities of further types of producers, workers, consumers, and of civil society organizations (e.g., Dekeyser et al. 2018; Mills 2018). The production activities of these actors, for example, short food supply chain (SFSC) initiatives such as AFNs and CSAs, as well as urban agriculture, community gardening, and artisan food production, have been introduced by De Schutter (2013) as the so-called second food sovereignty generation (e.g., Borrás et al. 2015; Gupta 2015; Clendenning et al. 2016; Al Shamsi et al. 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Maticena and Corvo 2020; Siegner et al. 2020; Alberio and Moralli 2021; Sippel and Larder 2021). A critically mentioned example in the context of production is that some corporations are using the term food sovereignty as a marketing tool to sell food products. Fairbairn (2012) characterizes this as a dilution and cooptation of food sovereignty (see also Alkon and Mares 2012; Clendenning et al. 2016; Loyer and Knight 2018; Daye 2020). One example refers to a corporation that applies an indicator-based food product label that includes a sub-indicator called “food sovereignty” (Jawtusich et al. 2013).

4.2.2 Scope of supply chains: Supply chains cover different sectors which are linked to each other, which is why Lubbock (2020) argues for the inclusion of forward and backward linkages of EAFS along the supply chain. This includes production, various forms of food infrastructure, trade, processing and distribution facilities, as well as the out-of-home consumption sector (e.g., restaurants, catering, farm-to-school, farm-to-cafeteria programs), which can include activities of a variety of organizational members (e.g., farmers, workers, technicians, civil society activists) (e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Borrás et al. 2015; Clendenning et al. 2016; Powell and Wittman 2018; Al Shamsi et al. 2018; Calvario et al. 2020; van der Ploeg 2020; Sippel and Larder 2021; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Pye 2021). The

spectrum contains a diversity of supply chain activities in different contexts such as local-regional, national, and global (e.g., Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015; Roman-Alcalá 2015; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018; Oteros-Rozas et al. 2019; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019). A frequently cited example are SFSCs like forms of direct trade, for instance, farmers markets and food hubs (e.g., Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Laidlaw and Magee 2016; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Alberio and Moralli 2021; Keske 2021; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021) as well as other SFSC initiatives such as AFNs and CSAs (e.g., Borrás et al. 2015; Gupta 2015; Clendenning et al. 2016; Al Shamsi et al. 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Maticena and Corvo 2020; Siegner et al. 2020; Alberio and Moralli 2021; Sippel and Larder 2021). Another example are ‘closed’ supply chains that build, for instance, distinct Black agri-food supply chains for Black farmers and other Black supply chain organizations that founded vertical enterprises (Taylor 2018). In contrast to this, some studies indicate a wide range of spatial relations of food sovereignty initiatives. For example, Soper (2020) analyzed Indigenous peasant producers in Ecuador that organized as a producer cooperative to cultivate cash crops for export and trade them on the world market with consumers in the Global North.

4.2.3 Forms of partnerships and cooperations: Several scholars highlight different cooperation forms of EAFS in view of how to achieve food sovereignty that incorporates different actors. One example is networks of cooperatives which organize alternative markets and coordinate direct purchasing groups based on solidarity and cooperation rather than competition (Koensler 2020). Another example is the co- and redesign of agri-food systems through new forms of cooperation such as CSA models (as one often cited type of AFNs), where consumers are recurrently referred to as co-producers in respective studies (e.g., Duncan and Pascucci 2017; Alberio and Moralli 2021) and the integration of actors traditionally or conventionally being considered “outsiders” to food production and distribution activities (Naylor 2019). Food infrastructure, which is often organized across the supply chain as networks as a form of cooperation between producers, processors, and consumers, is another example of partnerships and cooperatives (Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Borrás et al. 2015; Figueroa 2015; Moragues-Faus 2016; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Pollans 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Maticena and Corvo 2020). The case of new rural-urban alliances between different actors, for example, producers and consumers, shows that cooperation can correspond with new organizational structures (Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Sippel and Larder 2021). In speaking about patterns of intersectional approaches to agri-food system transformation, (Taylor (2018) it is important to describe a specific economic form as a collective action and thus a vehicle for self-empowerment. For example, Black farmers and other Black supply chain organizations that founded vertical enterprises and have thereby built distinct Black agri-food supply chains. The previous examples show that sub-themes can be interrelated. Sometimes, EAFS cooperate with industrialized farmers of the Global North or with supermarkets to increase

their impact and to unlock the transformational potential that some food sovereignty actors identify in such unusual arrangements (Claeys 2012; Larder et al. 2014). Scholars highlight that in building and managing such partnerships between different actors, approaches, interests and goals and tensions between can occur (Alkon and Mares 2012; Moragues-Faus 2016; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018).

Table 7: Theme 2: Economic-related characteristics

Sub-themes	Identified patterns in the literature
Production forms, mode, practices, and services	Agroecology, peasant agriculture, gardening, agroforestry, organic farming, fishing, hunting, gathering, pastoralism etc.; spectrum from self-production to external production (goods/services); food infrastructure: flows of goods, services, and equipment (e.g., purchase, transport, processing, storage cooling of raw materials and food) by a first- and second generation of food sovereignty actors including SFSCs (e.g., direct trade, AFNs, CSAs); term food sovereignty used as marketing tool to sell food products
Scope of supply chains	Forward and backward linkages in different sectors: production, food infrastructure, trade, processing, distribution, out-of-home consumption; context of supply chain activities (e.g., local-regional, national, global); spectrum from short supply chains through activities of SFSCs (e.g., direct trade, farmers markets, food hubs, AFNs and CSAs) and 'closed' supply chains (e.g., distinct Black agri-food supply chains), to globalized supply chains (e.g., producing cash crops for export)
Forms of partnerships and cooperations	Networks of cooperatives (e.g., alternative markets, direct purchasing groups based on solidarity, cooperation); co- and redesign of agri-food systems with consumers as co-producers (e.g., CSA models, forms of AFNs); networks and alliances between different actors (e.g., producers, processors, food infrastructure actors, consumers); vertical enterprises for self-empowerment (e.g., Black farmers); unconventional alliances (e.g., with industrial farmers or supermarkets)

2.4.3 Theme 3: organizational-related characteristics

The conditions that shape EAFS (theme 1) affect also the third theme *organizational-related characteristics* leads to six sub-themes, *organizational forms, size, property forms, governance, management, and organization, and labor*, as well as *knowledge sharing* (also see Table 8).

4.3.1 Organizational forms: Blue et al. (2021) identify diverse organizational forms using Gibson-Graham's (2006) concept of diverse economies, highlighting a range of different economic rationalities and ways of engaging in economic activities (as referred to by Moragues-Faus 2016 and Wittman et al. 2017). Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá (2019) see small-scale, worker-owned food businesses as so-called homologues to the organizational form of peasant and family farms, indicating that these also belong to EAFS (since peasant and family farms are often understood as paradigmatic cases of EAFS, see e.g., Wittman et al. 2017, Sippel and Larder 2021). Organizations are established by either producers, consumers or workers, or by a set of different actors (e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019). Studies distinguish EAFS using notions such as

collectives and cooperatives, in general, or, more specifically, producer cooperatives, producer networks, co-ops and buying groups, as well as community enterprises and community-owned enterprises (Gordon 2016; Soper 2020; Keske 2021; Pahnke 2021). Others include social enterprises that are described as hybrid organizational forms without the aim of profit maximization (e.g., Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Figueroa 2015; Laidlaw and Magee 2016; Alberio and Moralli 2021; Machín et al. 2020). McClintock and Simpson (2018) point out that these different forms of organizations may operate quite differently with regard to agri-food system transformation. In addition, scholars highlight that “the six founding principles of [food sovereignty] portray a focus on agrarian rights and food production” and the challenge that “its lack of clarity and contradictions, specifically in terms of its organizational structure and its values, has led to critiques and debates” (Dekeyser et al. 2018, 231).

4.3.2 Size: The debate on size is usually focusing on small- to medium-sized local or regional producers like peasants and farmers or food processors. These EAFS are often framed as being alternative, small, positive, good, or locally-embedded as opposed to conventional, big, negative, bad, global, not locally embedded, centralized organizations, such as multinational companies in food processing, distribution, and retailing, as well as large-scale farms (e.g., Alkon and Mares 2012; Campbell and Veteto 2015; Moragues-Faus 2016; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Calvario et al. 2020; Daye 2020; Alberio and Moralli 2021; Blue et al. 2021; James et al. 2021). Finding the optimal size for organizations corresponding with diverse and vague food sovereignty principles is mentioned in the food sovereignty literature as a challenge for upscaling and growth (Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Noll and Murdock 2020).

4.3.3 Forms of property: Many scholars such as Blesh and Wittman (2015), Borrás et al. (2015), Roman-Alcalá (2015), Shattuck et al. (2015), Leitgeb et al. (2016), Wittman et al. (2017), Taylor (2018), James et al. (2021), and Pahnke (2021) analyze EAFS’ property forms with a focus on land (e.g., land access, governance, use, sovereignty, rights, reforms, and occupations). Land is thereby often related to the historical origins of food sovereignty and related struggles. Some scholars also refer to access to and use of resources in general (Miheuah 2017), or seeds, patents, etc. in particular (Kerr 2013; Campbell and Veteto 2015). Additionally, Carolan (2018) relates food sovereignty and property aspects to digital technology and data control. Blue et al. (2021) advocate for the inclusion of a property perspective along the supply chain in discussions on food sovereignty studies, and Calvário (2017) further extends this to the organizational level of EAFS, stating that most farm-holdings are privately owned. With regard to forms of property in the means of production, some forms identified in the literature go beyond traditional or conventional private forms of property (García-Sempere et al. 2019). Examples include land cooperatives, community-owned farms, and land trust organizations that are interpreted as having the potential to challenge private property regimes by replacing them with a community-based mechanism

more conducive to food sovereignty and any respective agri-food system change (Wittman et al. 2017). Alternatives that support democratization of agri-food systems, and thus food sovereignty (see discussion above), according to the literature, include producer-owned processing facilities and suitable forms, such as the cooperative, whether created by (family) farmers or (farm) workers (e.g., Taylor 2018; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Soper 2020; Pahnke 2021). Hoey and Sponseller (2018) argue that creating new business models and establishing new EAFS could potentially undermine the general property concentration in agri-food systems. Questions relevant for the assessment of these issues are included in the practical toolkit of the First Nations Development Institute (2014).⁴⁷

4.3.4 Governance, management, and organization: Food sovereignty is grounded in concepts of self-determination and self-governance (Ertor-Akyazi 2020; Noll and Murdock 2020). Regarding economic decision-making, the aspect of democratic control is often emphasized in the discourse in opposition to traditional hierarchical understandings of how to organize food production and distribution (e.g., Alberio and Moralli 2021). Pahnke (2021, 381) highlights the aspect of control in and over the organization in general and that it is often “unclear if claiming ownership is the same as taking control. Moreover, what kind of ownership, or control, is being encouraged? Collective, individual, or perhaps both?” (see also Taylor 2018). Food sovereignty literature concerning decision-making and organizational governance often ignores internal organization and its actors (e.g., Reardon et al. 2010; Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Santafe-Troncoso and Loring 2021; Pye 2021). Actors within an EAFS can be a board of directors or specific types of organizational members, such as workers (e.g., Kato 2013; Wittman et al. 2017; Stapleton 2019a; Machín et al. 2020). Governing for food sovereignty at the organizational level includes, for Resler and Hagolani-Albov (2021), a respectful management approach practicing autonomy and democracy (Villalba-Eguiluz et al. 2020). Some EAFS provide and foster opportunities for such self-organization and participation by organizing collective spaces for members to engage in discussion and exchange (Calvário 2017; Porcuna-Ferrer et al. 2020). Moragues-Faus (2016) mentioned decentralization, participatory, and non-hierarchical organization as characteristics of food co-ops and buying groups distinguishing them from traditional and conventional organizations operating in food distribution. Some EAFS use specific decision-making techniques such as radical democracy and consensus-oriented forms of deliberation (e.g., Roman-Alcalá 2015; Moragues-Faus 2016; Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2016; Duncan and Pascucci 2017; Gallegos-Riofrio et al. 2021). According to Porcuna-Ferrer et al. (2020), the appropriate organizational and leadership skills of organizational members and their positive effects can promote organizational stability.

⁴⁷ Examples are: “How many food and farm businesses (such as groceries, farmers’ markets, roadside stands, restaurants, co-ops, implement dealers, and others) operate in your community? What number of these are owned/operated by: Tribal members (or other Natives), The tribe, Non-Natives” (FNDI 2014). “Take a map of your community and draw out ownership lines. Who owns what? Who controls what?” (FNDI 2014 p. 88).

4.3.5 Labor: This sub-theme includes a spectrum of diverse forms of labor across agri-food supply chains done by peasants and farmers (e.g., preparation of agricultural inputs, post-harvesting, food processing, distribution) (e.g., Seminar et al. 2018; Pye 2021), by workers (e.g., rural, landless, migrant, undocumented) in production on farms, in horticulture, plantations, or aquaculture, as well as in food transportation, storage, processing, manufacturing, service, wholesale, and cooking (Borras et al. 2015; Laidlaw and Magee 2016; Moragues-Faus and Marsden 2017; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018; Stapleton 2019a; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; van der Ploeg 2020; Pye 2021). In the context of labor, research addresses how to connect EAFS with unions and the need for critical approaches to labor relations within EAFS (Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Calvario et al. 2020; Korsunsky 2020). Some food sovereignty researchers investigating, for example, EAFS labor relations consider historical and current forms of feudal, slave, and child labor (Deepak 2014; Larder et al. 2014). A recurrent point is that predominantly white, affluent food movements pay less attention to labor and migration relations than non-white social ones (Korsunsky 2020; Sunam and Adhikari 2016). In addition, literature also includes discussions about wage labor in general, addressing topic such as working conditions, income, and pensions (e.g., (Alkon and Mares 2012; Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Deepak 2014; Scialabba 2014; Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015; Gliessman et al. 2019; Korsunsky 2020; Pye 2021), as well as policy proposals, including minimum income, the fair sharing of jobs, and disparities in free time between men and women (Calix de Dios et al. 2014; Pimbert 2018).

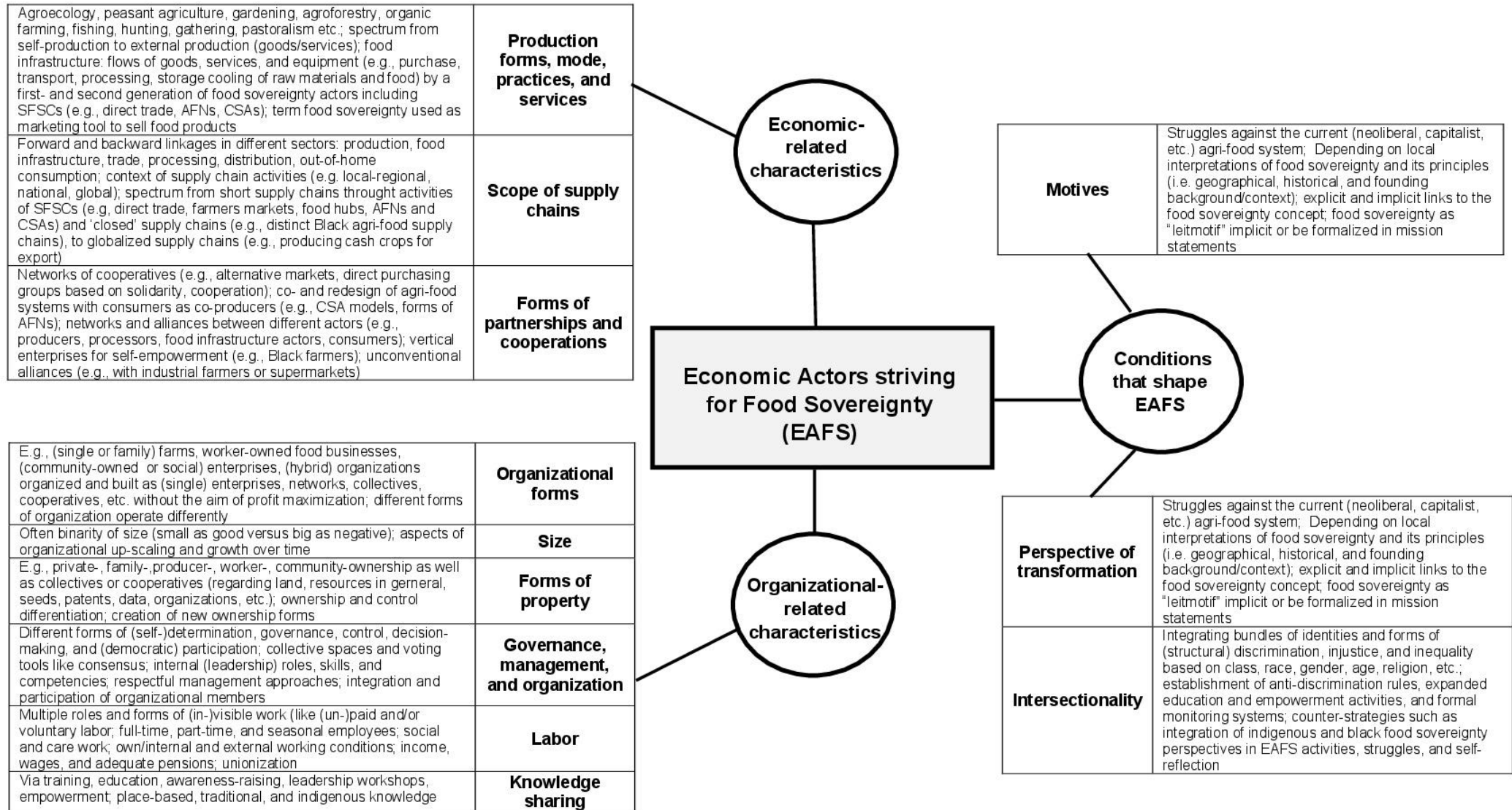
4.3.6 Knowledge sharing: This can occur through training, education, awareness-raising, and leadership workshops, particularly through empowerment of women. It is frequently highlighted in the food sovereignty literature as an important factor in making the transformation of agri-food systems relevant for qualified work in food production and distribution of EAFS (Deepak 2014; Campbell and Veteto 2015; McCune and Sanchez 2019). According to Fairbairn (2012), food sovereignty should not be reduced to educating individuals since this could depoliticize actors, potentially weakening the food sovereignty movement (Clendenning et al. 2016). Place-based, traditional, and indigenous knowledge of seeds, agricultural processes, preparation and preservation of foods, healthy nutrition, hygiene aspects, and decision-making are mentioned by a number of authors as being supportive of food sovereignty and of empowering both individuals and organizations (Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Calix de Dios et al. 2014; Gupta 2015; Plahe et al. 2017; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Machín et al. 2020).

Table 8: Theme 3: Organizational-related characteristics

Sub-themes	Identified patterns in the literature
Organizational forms	E.g., (single or family) farms, worker-owned food businesses, (community-owned or social) enterprises, (hybrid) organizations organized and built as (single) enterprises, networks, collectives, cooperatives, etc. without the aim of profit maximization; different forms of organization operate differently
Size	Often binarity of size (small as good versus big as negative); aspects of organizational up-scaling and growth over time
Forms of property	E.g., private-, family-, producer-, worker-, community-ownership as well as collectives or cooperatives (regarding land, resources in general, seeds, patents, data, organizations, etc.); ownership and control differentiation; creation of new ownership forms
Governance, management, and organization	Different forms of (self-)determination, governance, control, decision-making, and (democratic) participation; collective spaces and voting tools like consensus; internal (leadership) roles, skills, and competencies; respectful management approaches; integration and participation of organizational members
Labor	Multiple roles and forms of (in-)visible work (like (un-)paid and/or voluntary labor; full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees; social and care work; own/internal and external working conditions; income, wages, and adequate pensions; unionization
Knowledge sharing	Via training, education, awareness-raising, leadership workshops, empowerment; place-based, traditional, and indigenous knowledge

Our findings regarding the three themes and 12 sub-themes of EAFS are a first step towards building a more comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the diversity of EAFS at the organizational level. Our primary focus here is on thematic analysis, acknowledging a generic theoretical underpinning as explained in Chapter 2.2, without delving into proper theory building or conceptualization. Thus, Figure 4 provides an overview of the themes and sub-themes. Theme 1 represents overarching aspects that affect both theme 2 and theme 3, thereby laying the basis for the discussion of our findings in the following chapter. In addition, see Supplementary material Table 16 for illustrating the diversity of EAFS in descriptive terms.

Figure 4: Framework: Characterizing the diversity of Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS)
 Visualization of the three main themes (i) *conditions that shape EAFS* (Chapter 2.4.1), (ii) *economic-related characteristics* (Chapter 2.4.2), and (iii) *organizational-related characteristics* (Chapter 2.4.3) (see circles) with 12 related sub-themes and identified patterns (see tables) from the literature sample



2.5 Discussion

Despite the character of our investigation of the food sovereignty literature, some analytical conclusions and hypotheses can be drawn from our initial framework. We discuss the findings below and conclude this chapter with limitations and implications for further research.

2.5.1 Incorporation of different generations of EAFS along the agri-food supply chain

Incorporating organizational perspectives in this study is understood to mean paying attention to what we conceptualize as economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) which are able to act. This study confirms that attributes of EAFS are mentioned explicitly and implicitly in the food sovereignty literature, but a comprehensive overview and conceptualization of those organizational actors is thus far missing. This is somewhat surprising given that the food sovereignty movement itself presented an action agenda for an alternative economic model which is outlined, for instance, in the documentation of the Nyéléni Forum in Mali by the Nyéléni International Steering Committee (2008). This documentation (full report of the Forum) includes various economic actors that are covered by our presented EAFS conceptualization, however, this publication is rarely cited in the discourse (exceptions are, for instance, Blue et al. 2021 and Seminar et al. 2018). The food sovereignty concept aims to transform agri-food systems towards justice and sustainability, yet the literature often overlooks an economic actor perspective of the role of EAFS as actors of change who are engaged in enacting, driving, or contesting transitions. This oversight may be due to the critical stance towards economic actors prevalent in the food sovereignty discourse. In contrast, related discourses on themes such as diverse economies and SSE highlight the importance of recognizing and understanding these actors' diversity and provides more differentiated perspectives (Gibson-Graham 2008; Zanoni et al. 2017).

In this study, this oversight is contrasted with a developed EAFS Framework that offers a conceptual language for EAFS, illustrating the existence and the diversity of this group of actors. Our findings indicate that the diversity of EAFS originates from two different food sovereignty generations. One explanation for the under-representation of EAFS, in particular regarding the scope of agri-food supply chains, might be the historical origins of the movement that focused on primary producers of the first food sovereignty generation (i.e., peasants, farmers, rural workers). Consequently, supply chain actors, for example food processors, have often been overlooked in the discourse, despite the food sovereignty movement's stated aim of transforming agri-food systems. The focus on primary sector actors and related production activities, and the omission of an explicitly addressed supply chain perspective may stem from associations with corporations in general or with food processing, both often negatively generalized. This aligns with research gaps identified in agri-food sustainability transitions, where food processing and distribution (see framework theme 2 in Chapter 2.4.2) are underrepresented in research (see El Bilali 2019a and suggestions for further research). Making

visible the diversity of EAFS along the supply chain has the potential to foster (new) forms of partnerships and cooperations between EAFS.

2.5.2 Motives of striving for food sovereignty with varying strengths and conflicting goals

Most EAFS share a general motive to transform agri-food systems towards justice and sustainability (see framework theme 1 in Chapter 2.4.1). Our findings show that what can be termed ‘explicit EAFS’, familiar with the term and concept of food sovereignty, and ‘implicit EAFS’, not directly using the terminology, both exist and contribute to this diversity. This finding supports Shattuck et al. (2015) and Figueroa (2015), who argue that food sovereignty is “happening” and “walking” even if the actors do not directly “talk” the food sovereignty language in terms of words. Their motives include raising awareness of societal and environmental issues, and making practical changes in food production and distribution (see theme 2). Additionally, the conditions that shape EAFS can not only affect economic-related characteristics along the agri-food supply chain, but can also involve the reconfiguration of organizational aspects, such as organizational structures and ways of organizing (see organizational-related characteristics in theme 3 in Chapter 2.4.3). In contrast to other discourses, organizational perspectives are more prominent in, for example, SSE research than in the food sovereignty literature analyzed in this study (see, for example, Calvario et al. 2020, Villalba-Eguiluz et al. 2020, Alberio and Moralli 2021). Each sub-theme of the developed EAFS Framework contains a broad spectrum of possibilities for differentiation and options for distinction. Therefore, the framework illustrates that the food sovereignty concept suffers from some inconsistencies and generalizations. For example, some EAFS oppose capitalist food system structures or try to reduce their involvement in them by, for instance, establishing direct (trade) relations (sub-theme forms of partnerships and cooperations), while others remain embedded in the (international) capitalist market and build alliances (at least partially) with capitalist and other conventional agri-food system actors (see example of EAFS, more precisely small farmers which are part of the MST movement, selling in order to survive economically organic products to a French multinational company, by Böhm et al. 2016, as well as Soper 2020 in framework theme 2).

Another example where the food sovereignty concept suffers from some inconsistencies and generalizations is, that the support for family peasant farming, gender equality and collective rights often does not critically question the traditional model of family farms and property relations (Collins 2019). The food sovereignty discourse frequently addresses gender in binary terms of “men and women” (see Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019), neglecting not only the distinction between sex, gender and sexuality, but also the diversity within these constructions. Further food sovereignty studies could shift the attention from the production of (traditional) gender roles to the making and unmaking of binary gender (see Pfammatter and Jongerden 2023 for de- and re-constructions of gender and farming identities by queer farmers). Thus, it seems that some of the identified examples contradict principles of food sovereignty. Including intersectional perspectives (see theme 1) can provide a more nuanced analysis of how

diverse EAFS are structured, organized, and operated (see, e.g., the study of Redecker and Herzig 2020 for the inclusion of intersectional and queer-feminist perspectives in the context of LVC). Our study thus facilitates to balance the investigation of sometimes conflicting food sovereignty goals and principles regarding economic-related activities, organizational-related characteristics, etc.

2.5.3 Need for connecting themes instead of isolating alterity

By incorporating organizational perspectives, we draw attention not only to economic-related characteristics, but also to organizational-related characteristics that can be also very diverse and cover a broad spectrum. The findings of this study indicate that food sovereignty literature so far rarely connects with or shows differentiation of *economic-related* (framework theme 2) and *organizational-related characteristics* (theme 3) (also see Table 6, Table 7, Table 8, and framework in Figure 4). These themes are often viewed through one of two lenses; “alternative” (and then associated with normative or generalized analytical claims, e.g., good, positive, small, local, non-capitalist, non-market-based, democratic, non-hierarchical), against “conventional” or “mainstream” (associated in opposite ways with e.g., being bad, negative, big, global, capitalist, market-based, non-democratic, hierarchical). These lenses do not always prove analytically useful (e.g., Renting et al. 2012; Larder et al. 2014; Cruz and van de Fliert 2023). For instance, an EAFS might have non-capitalist economic-related characteristics, but maintain hierarchical organizational forms. The diverse configuration options of CSAs illustrate this point. The alternative production-distribution model of a CSA (see theme 2) can be organized and owned as a community farm with democratic management (see sub-theme *property forms* in theme 3), or organized and owned by a single farmer (Grenzdörffer et al. 2022; see also Wittman et al. 2017 about cooperative land ownership as pathway towards food sovereignty).

Such differences may impact transformative potentials and the ability of EAFS to reproduce under market conditions, which is why generalizations about so called “alternative” production systems (e.g., small-scale peasant agriculture, agroecological production, CSA model), alternative organizational forms (e.g., cooperative ownership), or alternative organizational governance (e.g., collective decision-making) which are often associated with food sovereignty and its principles, may often impede the differentiation in views (e.g., Beingssner and Fletcher 2020; Korsunsky 2020; Soper 2020; Pye 2021). Research has shown that organizations being labelled “alternative” can also engage in social exclusion or prioritize profit over sustainability, similar to “conventional” organizations (e.g., Slocum 2007; Nesterova 2021). Therefore, food sovereignty scholars (e.g., Clendenning et al. 2016; Moragues-Faus 2016; Korsunsky 2020) as well as AFNs research (e.g., Rosol 2020) advocate for critical views on alterity. This is consistent with organizational research that supports nuanced views, recognizing that hierarchical structures within EAFS can sometimes be useful or necessary, depending on the context (Parker 2021). Although EAFS are often framed as being alternative organizations, they may combine different features in very specific ways that defy a precise location on a single gradient of a degree of alterity. To properly analyze and

assess alterity, it seems useful to look at each theme and sub-theme individually. We thus agree with Parker et al. (2014) that the interrelations of various aspects of EAFS must be analyzed (see, for example, MST farmers mentioned above). Future studies should avoid viewing alterity in isolation and instead understand EAFS as products of multiple, often hybrid or contradictory practices.

2.5.4 Organizational level to incorporate challenges of and within EAFS

Our analysis revealed dilemmas of EAFS that can lead to challenges regarding agri-food system transformation. For instance, EAFS are embedded in socio-economic structures intersecting various power relations, shaping their operations, obstacles, and solutions. While food sovereignty literature focuses on different analytical contexts (local-regional, national, global), it often overlooks EAFS, crucial for driving change, at the organizational level. This overlooking of organizational challenges can thwart food sovereignty activism and undermine its goals. This bias also undermines goals of social inclusion and empowerment, since EAFS are often established, managed, and operated by severely marginalized groups (see framework theme 1). They have a hard time even keeping their organizations functional, with few resources left for strategic thinking or developing replicable solutions for the challenges that might help support other EAFS by strengthening their transformative impact. This challenge is poignantly expressed by alternative food movement research in which a cited practitioner describes it as follows: “It’s hard to be strategic when your hair is on fire” (Hoey and Sponseller 2018, 606).

If EAFS are unstable and cannot sustain, scale, or multiply in the long term, agri-food system transformation is unlikely to happen. Research has a responsibility to support resource-limited EAFS in developing solutions to their challenges. Including organizational perspectives from related fields can help better analyze EAFS and develop counterstrategies to the challenges that question their reproduction and promotion. Based on this, we argue that detailed investigations of concrete organizational practices, including management approaches, are needed to ensure and increase their organizational stability (see framework theme 3). However, there is so far a notable gap between food sovereignty literature and critical management and critical organization studies, despite both approaches challenging capitalist, neoliberal, and patriarchal systems as well as advocating for alternatives to them (e.g., Alvesson et al. 2009; Grey and Willmott 2010).

As our study has shown, property aspects and relations are rarely explicitly addressed and are not a focus in the food sovereignty literature. Where mentioned, it is typically limited to land issues. Therefore, we argue that more attention be paid to examining property relations at the organizational level of EAFS, particularly in relation to who is actually in control of the means of production within economic actors in general, but also of EAFS in particular. In this context, we call for overcoming simplistic claims that being “alternative” is, for instance, inherently transformative, gender sensitive, and socially inclusive (see Chapter 2.5.3 above). Furthermore, property relations that partly deviate from or are in conflict with (Western) private property should be explicitly investigated. EAFS might provide an interesting case for

organizational studies, reflecting the assertion made by Peredo et al. (2022) that the problems of our time should not be addressed solely through so-called Western knowledge and that scholarship, especially in management and organization studies, should adopt decolonial perspectives. Considering the diversity of property relations identified in the food sovereignty literature on EAFS (see theme 3), the complexity of these relations should be analyzed in view of social-ecological transformations (Grenzdörffer et al. 2022). Bencherki and Bourgoin (2019), for example, highlight that property is at the heart of organizations and labor relations, but even organizational scholars rarely discuss these issues. Our findings also indicate that labor relations in EAFS are underdeveloped, despite the “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas” considering peasant farmers and rural workers as equals (van der Ploeg 2020).

Following Parker’s (2021) assertion that we do not know which forms of organization work best in particular contexts, we conclude that the food sovereignty movement should focus more on the diversity of EAFS from organizational perspectives. This could be achieved by integrating relevant organizational knowledge, for example, into the curricula of existing “Agroecology Schools” that follow food sovereignty principles (for such schools, see McCune and Sanchez 2019; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018; for “Schools for Organizing“ see Parker 2021). This is especially so because small and medium-sized organizations often need external support for organizational learning (Braun et al. 2022). We, as authors of this study, collaborated in previous projects with various food sovereignty movement associations, as well as EAFS. Therefore, we have tried to align our research with the awareness of research by Nyéléni Germany, which states that research should contribute to more food sovereignty⁴⁸. We argue that our approach has the potential to facilitate this.

2.5.5 Limitations and implications for further research

Our thematic analysis of an integrative literature review offers a detailed examination of specific aspects of food sovereignty literature rather than a comprehensive description of the entire data sample, as it would be in a systematic literature review. The inclusion of additional keywords could lead, for example, to the identification of further publications. Since the literature search was conducted in August 2021 more recent publications are not included in the sample, although current literature is referenced in other chapters. Thematic analysis is chosen for its suitability where existing theories or research on a phenomenon are limited, and is used without relying on a pre-existing theoretical framework. We do not tackle these theoretical backgrounds due to their implicit nature, varying contexts (local-regional, national, global), and insufficient elaboration, particularly concerning EAFS, which requires a separate theoretical project with uncertain outcomes. Another limitation is that our study does not

⁴⁸ “It’s important to me to be mindful of the perspective in the discussion that it’s not about what we can research about the food sovereignty movement, but how we can contribute to more food sovereignty through our research as part of that movement” (Henrik Maaß, Nyéléni Germany, email from 01-19-2021; own translation from German; authorized for citation from the cited person).

provide insights into how EAFS operates due to the limited knowledge about these actors (see also limitations mentioned at the beginning in Chapter 2.1).

While we focus on food sovereignty, related alternative food concepts, such as food democracy, which overlap with the food sovereignty discourse (e.g., Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2021; Anderson 2023), could also benefit from incorporating actor and organizational perspectives. In this context, it should be noted that our conceptualization of EAFS does not encompass all types of organizations and their forms mentioned in alternative food concept discourses. Examples are pure network or movement organizations (see Heckelman et al. 2022 for a farmer-led network organization) and food policy councils (see Candel 2022 in the context of the food democracy concept), which are not economically active itself.

There are several areas for further research that emerge from our study:

First, the developed framework might guide future studies, which more closely interlink existing theoretical perspectives with those aspects of EAFS that have been identified in the literature. This will require further consideration of possible interrelations of our conceptualization approach (i.e., (main) themes and sub-themes), such as through investigating the concrete organizational practices of EAFS. For example, a Grounded Theory approach could develop mid-range theories based on empirical work, focusing on specific research questions about how EAFS relate to different analytical contexts, rather than aiming for a unified theory of EAFS within food sovereignty contexts (for Grounded Theory, see Bitsh 2005 with reference to Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Second, an in-depth examination of the food sovereignty pillars (see Chapter 2.1) could provide a fruitful starting point for further research. A recent literature review by Benavides-Frias et al. (2023) explored the “Works with Nature” pillar of the Nyéléni Declaration (see Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008) which emphasizes food-nature relationships, and its representation in academic literature. The review identified two main topics: ‘practices and use of resources’ and ‘ecological conditions’. While our study addresses the first topic which includes the spectrum of ecological agriculture forms, wild-life hunting, harvesting and fishing, as well as intensive-industrial agriculture (see *economic-related characteristics* in theme 2, the second, various human-nature relationships, is not explored in depth. Further research could consider not only the commonly cited Nyéléni Declaration (cf. Nyéléni 2007) and the six food sovereignty pillars, but also the comprehensive documentation of the Nyéléni Forum in Mali, which offers broader insights but is rarely cited (see full report by Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008).

Third, a more nuanced analysis of EAFS within a particular group of actors is needed, moving beyond generalized views of alterity. As became clear in the discussion, we do not yet know which forms of organization work best in particular places. Research could investigate different CSA organizations to determine which configuration(s) are more conducive to achieving food sovereignty.

Fourth, further food sovereignty research could explore the widely overlooked field of food infrastructure and the role of individual sectors such as food processing. This analysis could support the hypothesis that food infrastructure, often represented by implicit economic actors such as mills or small and medium-sized food processors, plays a crucial role in striving for food sovereignty. These actors' connections to primary producers and labor can have a stabilizing effect on them.

2.6 Conclusion

This study finds that while food sovereignty has received substantial scientific attention as an alternative food concept and a global movement, a differentiated actor perspective at the organizational level, particularly of the economic actors as actors of change, is often neglected. Therefore, our aim is to conceptualize the diversity of economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) at the organizational level by identifying patterns in food sovereignty literature. To achieve this, the literature is synthesized into a EAFS Framework with 12 sub-themes, grouped into three main themes: i) *conditions that shape EAFS*, e.g., motives, which affect (ii) their various *economic-related characteristics*, e.g., diversity of production forms, mode, practices, and services, scope of supply chains, forms of partnerships and cooperations, as well as their (iii) *organizational-related characteristics*, e.g., diversity of property forms, governance and management approaches, labor, knowledge sharing. Each of the 12 sub-themes encompasses a wide spectrum of diversity with different options for distinction that illustrate the diversity of EAFS.

By focusing on the organizational level of EAFS, the findings of this study offer a conceptual language for this group of actors, enabling a more detailed consideration of their diversity. The economic actor perspective helps to identify a broad set of EAFS of different food sovereignty generations along the agri-food supply chain, and perceive their potentiality to foster new alliances and obtain mutual support. Overall, the results of this study indicate that food sovereignty is also a diverse organizational phenomenon, which can help address challenges faced by EAFS and develop solutions to strengthen them. Furthermore, the results of this investigation show that EAFS often combine alternative and conventional elements that differ in their specific configurations, which is why we argue to consider the different framework themes instead of isolating alterity. In this way, our framework allows for more nuanced critical discourses. It serves as a preliminary step for the inclusion of the organizational level and the role of EAFS more systematically in food sovereignty studies and research on agri-food system transformation. In this line, our integrative perspective can help make organizational patterns of food sovereignty more visible and may serve as a guideline for future, theoretically more elaborate studies that further enhance our understanding of these groups of actors. Additionally, researchers, practitioners, and food movements can also use the findings, as well as in the context of related alternative food concepts such as food democracy, to better understand and develop such concepts and its involved actors.

Author contributions

MM: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Funding acquisition. CH: Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Resources.

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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.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2025.1258633/full#supplementary-material>

Chapter 3 Understanding the diversity of Community Supported Agriculture: a transdisciplinary framework with empirical evidence from Germany⁴⁹

Middendorf, M., Rommel, M. (2024)

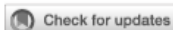
Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems



Picture: Participation in the *Basic Course on Community Supported Agriculture*, an education and training program by the German CSA Network, 12–14 July 2016, CSA farm *Hof Tangsehl*, Nahrendorf, (Lower Saxony), Germany.⁵⁰
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⁴⁹ This chapter has been published as Middendorf and Rommel (2024). Understanding the diversity of Community Supported Agriculture: a transdisciplinary framework with empirical evidence from Germany. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*. 8:1205809. DOI: 10.3389/fsufs.2024.1205809

⁵⁰ At that time, 107 CSAs and 105 founding initiatives existed in Germany, whereas today there are over 477 CSAs and over 90 founding initiatives (as of June 4, 2024).



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Understanding the diversity of Community Supported Agriculture: a transdisciplinary framework with empirical evidence from Germany

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Introduction: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an emerging model within alternative food networks (AFNs). It shapes close relationships between food producers and consumers, thereby contributing to food sovereignty and agri-food system transformations. Despite rapid growth from about 10 to over 500 CSAs in just over a decade, the model in Germany still remains niche. We argue that further and faster scaling up requires better understanding of its diversity, yet a comprehensive conceptualization of CSA types is lacking, with insufficient differentiation in research and practice.

Methods: This study employs a transdisciplinary mixed-methods approach (literature, qualitative, and quantitative data) in cooperation with the German CSA Network. By integrating organizational perspectives, we found that CSAs are highly complex and diverse organizations. Therefore, we firstly aimed at identifying characteristics that we summarized in a CSA framework. In a second stage, we used this framework as guiding structure for co-developing a survey with the Network covering 70 participating CSAs.

Results: As the defining characteristic within the CSA framework, community financing (domain A) clarifies the uniqueness of the CSA model, thus enables delimitation from other AFN forms. Then differentiation characteristics (domain B) encompass the diversity of CSA configurations. CSA governance (domain B1), regarding the predominant characteristic of organizational governance, distinguish between Producer-led, Consumer-led, and Integrated (all-in-one) CSA types. Varying characteristics (domain B2) specify CSA configurations and enable additional distinction between CSAs. Based on the developed CSA framework, the survey results verify the applicability of governance types in particular, while confirming a high level of diversity of differentiating characteristics in general.

Discussion: This study can be used to reveal existing generalizations about CSAs, providing a starting point for more nuanced and critical views in research and practice. When seen against the background of AFN and food sovereignty discourses in particular, CSA is an alternative production-distribution model, but not every CSA is governed or structured in alternative ways. CSAs can simultaneously contain both more conventional, traditional elements, as well as more alternative elements. Moreover, the framework provides easy-to-access differentiation criteria for matching members with their most suitable CSAs and vice versa. Overall, this study illustrates that CSA cannot be considered as homogeneous AFN type but be rather marked as a diverse field of its own.

KEYWORDS

community supported agriculture (CSA), typology, CSA types, organizational governance, alternative food network, food sovereignty, transformation

Abstract

Introduction: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an emerging model within alternative food networks (AFNs). It shapes close relationships between food producers and consumers, thereby contributing to food sovereignty and agri-food system transformations. Despite rapid growth from about 10 to over 500 CSAs in just over a decade, the model in Germany still remains niche. We argue that further and faster scaling up requires better understanding of its diversity, yet a comprehensive conceptualization of CSA types is lacking, with insufficient differentiation in research and practice.

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Keywords (5-8): Community Supported Agriculture · CSA · Typology · CSA types · Organizational governance · Alternative Food Network · Food sovereignty · Transformation

3.1 Introduction

The current provision of food, systematically aligned with industrialization and growth, faces multiple interlinked crises such as climate change, environmental destruction, social inequalities, and threats to democracy around the world (e.g., Battilana et al. 2022; Mirzabaev et al. 2023). Against this backdrop, both socially and ecologically-sustainable food systems are being called for (e.g., Hinrichs 2000; Mars 2015; Campbell et al. 2017). Under the umbrella term Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), a diversity of approaches and involved actors are subsumed, whereby Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is widely mentioned as an impactful model within the AFN movement (e.g., Mount et al. 2013; Chiffolleau et al. 2019; Poças Ribeiro et al. 2021). The CSA model is described briefly as being a partnership between producers and a community of members which cover the cost of production of the farm, wherein the members receive a food share of the harvest throughout the season in return (Parot et al. 2024a). According to this, the CSA model aims to “reshape dominant capitalist producer-consumer relations” (Plank et al. 2020, 51) and is ascribed as having significant potential in achieving food sovereignty, and also in contributing to the sustainable transformation of agri-food systems (e.g., McMichael 2014; Galt et al. 2019; Plank et al. 2020).

Although various conceptions of CSAs have evolved internationally, given geographical and historical contexts (e.g., Whatmore et al. 2003; Goodman 2004; Watts et al. 2005; Bashford et al. 2013; Si et al. 2015), most studies that consider CSAs as a homogenous phenomenon among others in AFN typologies tend to lump together different organizations that are using the CSA model (e.g., Si et al. 2015; Poças Ribeiro et al. 2021). For instance, CSAs are often described in a generalized way as collectively managed by a community, although in practice CSAs are very often organized just by single farmers or farming families, that do not involve their members in decision-making processes (e.g., Adam 2006; European CSA Research Group 2016; Bashford et al. 2013; Hvitsand 2016; Espelt 2020; Plank et al. 2020; Grenzdörffer et al. 2022). It is therefore essential to define some terms related to the CSA terminology in this paper: (i) “CSA model” refers to a specific AFN form; (ii) “CSA organization” (hereinafter abbreviated as “CSA”) relates to the entire organization of producers and members; (iii) “CSA farm” is an agricultural or horticultural farm that operates using the CSA model. These distinctions are essential, as among other things, several CSA farms can establish partnerships with other CSA farms to form so-called “multi-farm CSAs”⁵¹ (e.g., Adam 2006; Woods et al. 2017).

Due to the generalizations mentioned, studies often make neither sufficient distinctions between different CSA configurations nor state the multifarious effects or individual challenges they have (see Galt et al. 2019 for USA, Dong et al. 2019 for China). For instance, good labor and employment practices may not be employed by each CSA, as there have been incidents of (self-)exploitation of producers (e.g., Hinrichs 2000; Carlson and Bitsch 2019; Galt et al. 2019; Ajates 2020; Böhm et al. 2020; van Oers et al. 2023). This can be explained by the fact that

⁵¹ For details, see framework characteristic “single / multi-farm” in Chapter 3.3.1.

CSAs are strongly embedded within their environments and socio-ecological and economic systems (Muñoz and Cohen 2017). Another example is that, depending on the individual CSA configuration, they may often have different degrees of participation and may struggle with a lack of participation by its members or inadequately integrate low-income individuals (e.g., Pole and Gray 2013; Watson 2019; Jilcott Pitts et al. 2022). In strong contrast to the mentioned generalizations and studies that lump CSAs together, some scholars do highlight that not all CSAs are the same and can take a wide diversity of organizational forms “as farmers and members shape it to their own needs and expectations” (Samoggia et al. 2019, 1). Yet, even though some studies see CSA as a highly complex, diverse, and multi-faceted phenomenon (e.g., Blättel-Mink et al. 2017; Baronov 2018) with diverse configurations (e.g., Carlson and Bitsch 2019; Espelt 2020; Koretskaya and Feola 2020) an overarching conceptualization of the diversity of CSAs is missing. One explanation for this could be that existing research on the CSA model is concentrated on the membership perspective, such as the motives of consumers for joining and participating in CSAs (e.g., Feagan and Henderson 2009; Pole and Kumar 2015; Blättel-Mink et al. 2017; Zoll et al. 2018; Gruber 2020; Fomina et al. 2022). While this research and existing typologies offer valuable insights, they are limited in terms of research perspective and scientific disciplines, often sidelining the crucial viewpoint of CSAs as diverse organizations. This has meant there is a paucity of organizational perspectives in the CSA discourse. It is therefore helpful to adopt King et al.’s (2010) suggestion that organizational perspectives should focus on the unique features and practices of organizations. Accordingly, CSAs can be considered as complex arrangements wherein organizational perspectives are considered and combined in formal structures (e.g., as a legal entity) with various forms of organizational governance, as well as property and decision rights. Examples of these characteristics include different forms of contracts, coordination mechanisms, and the (non-)formalization of decision-making (see Ménard 2013).

. A focus on the CSA organization itself through the inclusion of organizational perspectives also has the potential to address challenges of CSAs, again depending on their respective configuration.

For a better understanding of the diverse configurations of CSAs, the first aim of this paper is the development of a differentiating framework. The second aim is to use and apply the framework to show the diversity of CSAs in Germany. This study is based on a mixed method approach including literature, qualitative, and quantitative data and is conducted in a transdisciplinary research partnership based on knowledge co-production with the German CSA Network and its actors. The specific two research questions that guided our research are:

(1) According to which characteristics discussed in literature and practice can CSAs be differentiated?

(2) How is the diversity of CSAs manifested in Germany?

To answer these questions, we first introduce the research methodology and design of this mixed-methods study (Chapter 3.2). Accordingly, we present our results (Chapter 3.3) and discuss the potential and limitations, as well as the implications of our framework for practice and future research (Chapter 3.4). A conclusion summarizes all results of our paper (Chapter 3.5).

3.2 Methodology and transdisciplinary mixed-methods research design

This study was conducted by a transdisciplinary research partnership based on knowledge co-production (Jahn et al. 2012; Lang et al. 2012; Weber et al. 2014; Schuttenberg and Guth 2015; Schöpke et al. 2018; Hilger et al. 2021) with the German CSA Network⁵² between January 2020 and December 2023, and was embedded in the research projects “nascent” and “SolaRegio”⁵³. We first describe this transdisciplinary research partnership (Chapter 3.2.1), and then describe the used data material within the two-stage-process of knowledge co-production that contains the development of the CSA Framework as well as the survey (Chapter 3.2.2).

3.2.1 Research partnership with the German CSA Network

Knowledge co-production is defined as "an inclusive, iterative approach to creating new information; [...] distinguished by its focus on facilitating interactions between stakeholders to develop an integrated or transformational understanding of a sustainability problem" (Schuttenberg and Guth 2015, 1). Transparent research therefore requires awareness of the different roles combined with overcoming the researcher-practitioner dichotomy in the collaboration between researchers and non-scientific actors (see Hilger et al. 2021). As researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds, including alternative and critical organization, as well as social and sustainability science and sustainability economics perspectives, we combine research areas and are able to move across different fields and disciplines. The authors' preliminary work in the field being studied build necessary trust with the Network and eased the entry of the object of study. Involved actors in this study are people working and engaged in the Network, for instance, experts from their internal working groups (e.g., "Research", "Consulting", "Cooperatives"), practitioners such as individual CSAs, and various participants in events, workshops, and meetings of the Network. In this sense, the Network cannot be classified exclusively as a non-scientific actor. More specifically, a particular “Research Working Group” bundles and coordinates research and scientific work around the topic of CSA, collects practice-relevant questions, tries to avoid duplicate surveys, and is involved in several research projects. By being actively involved in such collaborative processes, research can be managed in order to meet the needs of the CSAs. The Network has formulated, for example, research ethics recommendations for good cooperation (German CSA Network n.d.) that the authors of this study followed.

⁵² Hereinafter abbreviated as "Network".

⁵³ Website of “nascent” and “SolaRegio”: www.nascent-transformativ.de (accessed November 8, 2025)

3.2.2 Two-stage knowledge co-production process and used data material

To answer the two research questions, the entangled nature of the used transdisciplinary mixed-methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018) unfolds in this study by combining three different data materials (literature research, qualitative data and quantitative survey, displayed in Table 9).

Table 9: Combination of three different data materials during the two-stage knowledge co-production process

Type of data	Method	Data source	Sample size
Literature	Literature research	Scientific and gray literature	n = 60
Qualitative	Focus groups and Interviews	Researchers, experts, consultants, practitioners	4 focus groups with overall 25 participants; 6 interviews with 5 participants overall; Various feedback loops/discussions with 16 participants overall
	Participant observations	Non-scientific conferences with CSA experts, consultants, practitioners, policymakers, researchers	10 non-scientific conferences
Quantitative	Survey	Member-CSAs and CSA farms of the German CSA Network	n = 70 CSAs with 81 CSA farms

The knowledge co-production is divided into two stages. Stage I is the parallel development of the CSA Framework and the survey using an iterative approach. Stage II is the framework application and survey conduction.

3.2.2.1 Stage (I) Iterative development of framework and survey

The first stage is divided into the framework development (stage Ia) and the parallel survey development (stage Ib). The whole development of this paper is embedded in the process of planning, conducting, and then analyzing an extensive quantitative survey in 2022 as a joint project between research⁵⁴ and the Network. The survey development is therefore connected to the parallel framework development. For this development process, an iterative approach is applied which involves numerous steps through analyzing CSA literature (literature research) and by including discussions with the Network and its actors (qualitative research). These steps are described in the following in a chronological order.

This study was initiated by both a focus group meeting between the Network and researchers as well as a participatory observation at a Network's one-day conference (qualitative research). Both took place in January 2020 in order to specify research demands (for a chronological list of used qualitative data material and question categories, see

⁵⁴ Besides the authors, Laura Carlson was involved.

Supplementary material). After this first step, we inaugurated a sample of CSA literature (n = 35 publications) to identify characteristics and types from the current discourse (literature research). Due to terminological heterogeneity, as well as the fact that characteristics for differentiation and CSA types are often only a by-product and are not explicitly mentioned in titles, abstracts, or keywords, we took an exploratory approach. For this, we started with recently published peer-reviewed articles from 2019 and 2020 to look at the current research discourse. We identified literature with the keyword “Community Supported Agriculture*” used to search the online catalog Web of Science (WoS) database. Furthermore, we added frequently cited scientific literature, as well as suitable articles based on our own knowledge. This included, for example, key publications by or in collaboration with CSA Network associations from different countries and the international CSA Network association, URGENCI. This starting literature sample intentionally included gray literature (e.g., not peer-reviewed book chapters, project reports, in-house publications of institutions and Networks) as they were cited several times in the identified peer-reviewed articles and often served as the starting points for these publications.

In the next step, we analyzed this literature sample with regard to their extent characteristics and types. We extracted the designations and terminologies of identified characteristics and types (e.g., forms, models, schemes), and, if available, also the descriptions, definitions, and distinguishing criteria (literature research). As part of the iterative approach, we discussed first drafts of identified characteristics and types with the Network and its actors (qualitative research). To include their practice-based knowledge, we conducted in total four focus groups with twenty-five participants overall, six individual interviews, and used participant observations (Kawulich 2005) at ten non-scientific Network conferences (e.g., biannual meetings of the Network). In addition, various discussions with 16 participants in total also comprise part of this iterative approach (for data details see Table 9 above). In doing so, we used audio recordings, as well as research diaries, and MAXQDA-Software for transcription, data management, and analysis. Many events and interviews were conducted online due to COVID-19 restrictions. The involved actors in qualitative data collection included people working and engaged in the Network as well as CSAs (see Chapter 3.2.1). Furthermore, several persons of the Network brought in their knowledge and contacts as field experts and participated, partly with other researchers.

As part of the iterative approach, we discussed the prototypes of the framework and the survey as interim results several times with actors of the Network (qualitative research) leading to recommendations for additional characteristics as well as the modification of existing ones.

In the next step, we actively searched for these identified aspects in the literature sample. Wherever necessary, we also expanded the sample (literature research). To carry out the literature research, we followed a simplified snowball approach (Wohlin 2014) including suitable articles. Our research for the framework development snowballed until saturation

occurred so that no other or new CSA characteristic or type could be named or differentiated. Using this literature identification process, a further 25 publications were identified. In sum, 60 publications made up the final literature research data sample and were used for the iterative development of the final framework and final survey.

Regarding research question 1, we identify various characteristics for differentiation of CSAs in stage (Ia) (Chapter 3.3.1). We provide therein a CSA definition of this study in the German context with the *defining characteristic* of the CSA model, which is *community financing* (framework domain A). We identified various *differentiation characteristics* (domain B), whereby organizational governance has been identified as the predominant one. This predominant nature of *CSA governance* (domain B1) could be confirmed by both literature and practitioners. According to this, we provide a CSA governance typology based on three *CSA governance types*. In accordance with Doty and Glick (1994), typologies provide a reduction in complexity by providing a set of identified types. In this context, we considered organizational governance literature. During the iterative development of the framework, we identify further *varying characteristics* (domain B2) that express even greater diversity of CSAs within these characteristics. The result of the final CSA Framework is visualized in Chapter 3.3.4.

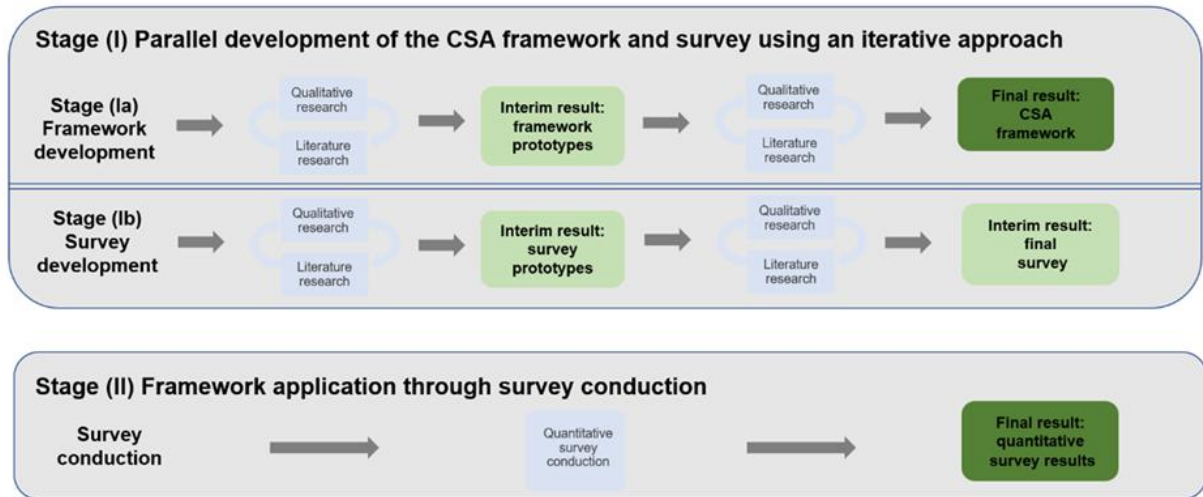
3.2.2.2 Stage (II) Framework application and survey conduction

In the second stage of this study, regarding research question 2, the finalized survey was conducted between the end of 2021 and the end of 2023. The survey is designed as an internal database of the Network, aimed at providing well-founded data over time. The Network intends to update the data at regular intervals (for details see Supplementary material). The survey follows a discursive methodological approach in which, for example, the CSAs were asked to assign themselves according to specific characteristics. The survey and the data collection process itself (e.g., invitation, mailing) was coordinated by the Network. The technical implementation was carried out by their “IT Working Group”. At the time the survey was sent out, there were about 400 CSAs in Germany. As defined in the introduction, a distinction can be made between the entire CSA organization and the individual CSA farms (see Chapter 3.1 and characteristic *Single/Multi-farm* in Chapter 3.3.1). Consequently, some questions are answered at the level of the CSA organization and others at the level of the individual CSA farm. The Network contacted all CSAs who were official members within their association at that time (in total 164 CSA farms) via email and newsletter and send out several reminders. The survey was open to respondents from November 2021. This paper considers all records up to and including December 18, 2023. Until this date, a total of 81 out of 164 CSA farms (51% of the Network members at that time) responded to the questionnaire and generated quantitative results on CSA in Germany (Chapter 3.3.5). In total, 81 farms that are part of 70 CSA organizations responded to the survey. However, each question (relating to a specific framework characteristic) had a different respondent rate (i.e., not all participants answered every single question of the survey).

3.2.2.3 Visualization of the knowledge co-production process and used data material

Regarding the visualization of Figure 5, the methods and used data material are illustrated in blue (literature research, qualitative data, quantitative survey conduction. For details see Table 9). The interim results (prototypes and final survey) are presented in light green, and of the final results (CSA Framework, quantitative survey results) in dark green.

Figure 5: Two-stage knowledge co-production and used data material: (Stage I) Parallel development of the CSA Framework (Stage Ia) and the survey (Stage Ib) using an iterative approach; (Stage II) Framework application and survey conduction



3.3 Findings

This section is divided into two sub-chapters. Firstly, the framework development (Chapter 3.3.1), and secondly, its application to the field of investigation in Germany using the survey (Chapter 3.3.5).

3.3.1 CSA Framework

Elaborating from research question 1, the characteristics of the CSA Framework are explained in detail along two intertwined domains which build on each other. These domains relate to (A) *defining characteristic*, that can be found in every single CSA, and then (B) *differentiation characteristics*, that delineate the diversity of CSAs. Domain (A) *community financing* is the central *defining characteristic* and is mandatory to be considered a CSA. In this sense, domain (A) is mandatory, clarifies the uniqueness of the CSA model, and delimits it from other AFN forms. After this clarification and delimitation, then domain (B) encompasses the diversity of CSA configurations through *differentiation characteristics*. These characteristics can vary from one CSA to another. The key distinction lies in the mandatory presence of domain (A) for all CSAs, whereas domain (B) varies depending on the individual CSA configuration.

More specifically, *differentiation characteristics* (domain B) comprise two sub-domains. The individual configuration of CSAs depends upon the respective organizational

governance as the CSA model can change the way organizations are governed. Domain (B1) proposes three *CSA governance types* as a *predominant characteristic* to differentiate CSAs as their governance approaches vary. Domain (B1) is intertwined with domain (A) since *CSA governance* specifies the how of *community financing* through a particular type of governance. These types can be specified by further *varying characteristics* (domain B2) to express even greater diversity of CSAs, and which enable an individual CSA configuration within these characteristics depending on the governance type.

The domains are intertwined as they build on each other. *Differentiation characteristics* (domain B) shed further light on the distinct expression of *community financing* (domain A), while *varying characteristics* (domain B2) specify CSA configurations, whereby the configuration depends on the respective *CSA governance type* (domain B1). In the following all domains are outlined in detail, summarized at the end, by the introduction of the framework-visualization (see Chapter 3.3.4).

3.3.1.1 Framework domain A: defining characteristic community financing

We define the CSA model as a system of risk sharing and transparent co-financing by membership fees of the entire CSA operations in exchange for a food share for the CSA members. Thus, we wrap the uniqueness of the CSA model into the characteristic *community financing* which is mandatory to be considered a CSA (framework domain A). This *defining characteristic* is based on fee financing, cost coverage/full financing, risk sharing, transparency, and direct relations which can be shaped in different ways by CSAs (see description of the elements and their diversity in Table 10). *Community financing* describes the collaborative investment of the farm's operating costs that comprise fee financing, true cost coverage of the production, risk sharing, transparency, and direct relations between the food production and consumption side (e.g., Groh and McFadden 2000; Ostrom 2007; Cox et al. 2008; Bloemmen et al. 2015; Carlson and Bitsch 2019; Fomina et al. 2022; Rommel et al. 2022b). Consumers jointly become members of a CSA and help cover the farm's total budget over a particular growing season. This will have been done through regular, usually monthly, contributions (e.g., Haney et al. 2015; Galt et al. 2019). The members share the risks and benefits associated with weather dependent and seasonal farming and in return receive a proportional harvest share, typically on a weekly basis (e.g., O'Hara and Stagl 2001; Brehm and Eisenhauer 2008; Opitz et al. 2019).

Table 10: Community financing as defining characteristic of the CSA model and its elements

Elements of community financing	Description of the community financing elements
Fee financing	Collaborative financing via fees by the individual CSA members (membership fees) which is financing the entire CSA operations for an annual membership (often for one particular growing season). In return, the members receive a proportional food/harvest share, typically on a weekly basis. Some CSAs take a break in winter or only provide a food share every two weeks. Members often pay the fees for their food/harvest shares monthly, although there are also annual advance payments.
Cost coverage / Full financing	Consumers who become members of a CSA, jointly cover the CSA budget of a particular growing season through regular, usually monthly, contributions. The membership fees cover all costs (full financing) of the CSA operations. This requires a cost calculation in advance by the CSA. The goal is to cover the true costs of production that includes the entire CSA operations.
Risk sharing	The members share via their membership fees the risks and benefits of the CSA operation with the food producers by adjusting their consumption to the farm produce available. The food/harvest share may be subject to seasonal and weather-related fluctuations (i.e., crop failures).
Transparency	CSA makes the cost structure and annual budget (costs of agricultural production, including wages, investments and savings), production standards and cultivation methods, as well as (if exists) the bidding rounds transparent for members.
Direct relations	Members receive the food/harvest share directly from the CSA farm(s). Direct connection between the food producers (those who grow food/work at the CSA) and the members (those who receive the food) without intermediaries, wholesalers or retailers in between. The model, therefore, seeks to reshape the nature of buying and selling agricultural goods.

3.3.1.2 Framework Domain B: differentiation characteristics

The diversity of CSA becomes visible through *differentiation characteristics* (Domain B). Literature research as well as our empirical results attribute *CSA governance* a *predominant characteristic* as the other *varying characteristics* are often shaped and formed according to it. On this basis, three different *CSA governance types* can be distinguished (Domain B1), whereby organizational governance affects and interacts with the *varying characteristics* (Domain B2).

3.3.2 Domain B1: CSA governance as predominant characteristic

The aspect of how and by whom an individual CSA is governed, organized, and managed is ascribed a central and predominant characteristic in CSA and AFNs literature and by CSA practice (e.g., Krcilkova et al. 2019; Rosol and Barbosa 2021; see also examples below). A CSA can be managed by an individual or a core group, which ranges between being solely led by the producer (i.e., single farm or farmer) to being led by a community with a corresponding decision-making process taking on most managerial responsibilities. The focus of this characteristic lies in the responsibility for higher level “management decisions” (Adam 2006, 2), particularly the managerial “ownership of the operation” (Harmon 2014, 2), which addresses who organizes and operates the CSA and who “makes most of the management decisions” (Adam 2006, 2). An example from the CSA literature is the managerial decisions by the directors or growers that run the CSA. Mert-Cakal and Miele (2020, 11) distinguish between

lower and higher decision-making levels, whereby the core question being addressed is, "Who makes the [(managerial)] "decisions" in CSA organizations?". The predominant characteristic of governance is also consistent with organizational governance literature. To understand the organization requires knowledge of its governance concerning direction and control (Cadbury 1992). Organizational governance includes how decision-making processes and thus the distribution of power between the involved actors (e.g., managers, shareholders, employees, volunteers etc.) is attributed. Establishing and running an organization in general requires defined rules about who is in charge, who is involved in taking vital decisions, how potential profits are distributed, and who bears risk. Establishing the rules that shape organizational action creates the governance structure of an organization (e.g., Cadbury 1992; Klein et al. 2019). Thereby, governance is not static but also evolves from social norms and beliefs (Wiersema and Koo 2022), which is why different governance types exist.

By reviewing the CSA literature, various typologies and a diversity of type-terminologies can be identified (for details, see Supplementary material Table 18). What these identified typologies have in common is that they are neither literature- or theory-based, described in their development, defined in detail by CSA actors, nor differentiated in empirical studies. For example, the often cited report by Wilkinson (2001) uses a classification based on who organizes a CSA. The only sizable two-sided practical report distinguishes between four types: farmer managed, shareholder/subscriber, farmer cooperative and farmer-shareholder cooperative. Here, the type "farmer cooperative" correlates, for instance, with another differentiation characteristic which is multi-farm CSA (see below). In contrast, the often cited peer-reviewed case study by Ostrom (2007) summarized the management strategies of CSAs into three types: farmer-founded-and-driven-CSAs, CSAs initiated as a non-profit with a board of directors and supported by community financing, and a business-oriented and farmer-directed entrepreneurial approach, however, different characteristics, such as governance, management, foundation background, legal form and/or labor, are included and mixed together in these type-terminologies. Another example cited is the four distinct approaches to CSA by the CSA Network in the United Kingdom (UK) cited by Espelt (2020): producer-led, consumer-led, producer-community partnerships, and community-owned farms (see CSA Network UK 2022). Even in this typology, there is no clearly recognizable distinguishing criterion. Governance, management, founding background, ownership and legal forms, as well as the aspect of labor, blur and partly overlap making difficult a clear distinguishing between the UK "consumer-led type" and "community-owned farm type".

Our literature research as well as qualitative data that take into account insights of key CSA-experts in Germany shows that it could be helpful to subsume CSAs into CSA governance types by asking how or by whom the CSA is governed (Krcilkova et al. 2019), *(self-)organized* (Bashford et al. 2013; Zoll et al. 2018 Opitz et al. 2019), *driven* (Adam 2006; Bashford et al. 2013; European CSA Research Group 2016; Hvitsand 2016; Tang et al. 2019), *led* (European CSA Research Group 2016; Espelt 2020; Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020), *run by* (Ostrom 2007;

Feagan and Henderson 2009; Bashford et al. 2013; Hvitsand 2016; Espelt 2020; Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020; Plank et al. 2020), *operated by* (Adam 2006; Bashford et al. 2013; Ouahab and Maclouf 2019; Koretskaya and Feola 2020), *or (self-)managed* (Wilkinson 2001; Ostrom 2007; European CSA Research Group 2016; Krcilkova et al. 2019; Espelt 2020; Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020; Plank et al. 2020). The examples cited show that the aspect of governance is often used. As we have shown, no common use of terms satisfactorily distinguishes the identified various CSA types, used descriptions and terminologies. Using the predominant characteristic of organizational governance, three *CSA governance types* can be distinguished by asking how or by whom the CSA is governed: Producer-led CSA (Type 1), Consumer-led CSA (Type 2), Integrated (all-in-one) CSA (Type 3). For definitions, see Table 11.

Table 11: CSA governance types

CSA governance type	Description of the CSA governance type
Producer-led CSA (Type 1)	The farm, farmer or farmers decide alone whether, how, and for how long the farm operation will be managed along the CSA model. The production of agricultural goods is carried out by one or several independent farm/farmer/farmers, whereby co-workers and volunteers can also be employed. The agricultural and/or horticultural farm is supported by consumers that are a format/informal community of members. Although the members have different opportunities to participate, most of the management decisions remain with the producer(s).
Consumer-led CSA (Type 2)	A group of consumers build a formal and legal organization (e.g., an association). This community organization has paid staff or is managed by volunteers. The production is carried out in a partnership with one or several existing partner farm/farmer/farmers, whereas the CSA organization is managed and led by the group of consumers. They decide with which farm(s) they want to partner. This also includes the aspect of whether the duration of the cooperation is to be continued after the end of the agreement, or whether a new farm/farmer/farmers are to be selected as partners for the CSA model. Likewise, the farm/farmer/farmers can also terminate the cooperation.
Integrated (all-in-one) CSA (Type 3)	People create a CSA organization as single legal entity which integrates and carries out (all-in-one) the production, management, administration, and ownership of the entire CSA farm. People are hired to manage, organize, farm and cultivate. All production and CSA-management related decisions are made by a board or delegated by general assemblies with workers and members. Type 3 differs from Types 1 and 2 (each with a partnership between producer and consumers - or vice versa) by its integrated approach as one organization.

According to a consultant from the German Network, the differentiation into these three CSA governance types within the framework is useful and has potential to remove uncertainty: In the same sense the consultant points out: "In the past I saw only two types, namely the producer-led CSAs [(type 1)] and the others. But especially in the development of the last years, I actually see type 2 and type 3 as independent groups".

3.3.3 Domain B2: varying characteristics

The individual configuration of CSAs depends upon the respective organizational governance. The *CSA governance types* unfold their specific nature through the interplay between various additional characteristics. These further *varying characteristics* express even greater diversity

of CSAs within these characteristics and are presented in the following. The characteristics are summarized in the framework-visualization in Chapter 3.3.4 (see also Supplementary material Table 20).

Degree of co-decision by members/workers: It relates to both *workers* and/or *members* in terms of their integration within decision-making processes. Besides multifarious existing methods and approaches towards co-decision-making, it varies considerably in a spectrum from relatively low to medium to high (e.g., Koretskaya and Feola 2020; Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020). The lower level includes, for example, online polls or annual shareholder meeting. Daily decision-making belongs to the producers or a core group, whereby members have only informal participation. The medium level includes, for example, majority member decision-making during the year in addition to the shareholder meeting or working groups possibly with voting rights. The higher level of co-decisions-making includes members' participation that is done, for example, by voting at the annual general meeting of the CSA (e.g., basic democratic decision-making structures, sociocratic form of organization, consensus, or consent decisions).

Founding impulse: Several studies differentiate CSAs by asking by whom the CSA was founded (e.g., Hvitsand 2016; Carlson and Bitsch 2019). Ostrom (2007) recognized that every CSA is organized uniquely based on its history, geographical, and founding context. For example, Carlson and Bitsch (2019) do not distinguish between different CSA governance types, but on whether it was initiated and founded by producers (farmers) or consumers. Existing farms may be owned by farmers who are searching for a community in order to become CSA members, or a core community group may look out for one or several farms with which to cooperate and establish a new CSA model (see also *single or multi-farm* characteristic below). Another possibility is that a community may establish its own CSA which will include its own farm (Bashford et al. 2013). A combination of both, farm/farmers and consumers, is another possibility. In addition to this, researchers name a third-party founding impulse, such as a government or a restaurant (see Chinese CSA study by Tang et al. 2019). Vlasov et al. (2021) show that CSAs can be founded by people with non-agrarian backgrounds.

Establishing paths: There are several paths towards establishing a CSA. One path is a full or partial conversion of an existing agricultural farm to the CSA model (see also characteristic *scope of CSA operation*). In addition, a CSA can be founded by establishing a new agricultural start-up. Other establishing paths include the handover of an existing CSA, for example as part of a generational succession process (e.g., inheritance) as well as a spin-off from an existing CSA (e.g., Bashford et al. 2013; Carlson and Bitsch 2019).

Legal form: CSAs are designed in a wide spectrum between individual and independent privately-run farms where the business is under sole proprietorship, to non-profit forms like a association, or CSAs legally registered as a cooperative. Others exist in mixed forms, such as the combination of non-profit and for-profit legal forms. Examples are non-profit associations

registered as clubs and non-profit organizations organized as cooperatives where only the workers are stockholders (e.g., Cameron and Wright 2014; Bloemmen et al. 2015; Carlson and Bitsch 2019).

Ownership and property for land / operation: Some CSAs are existing farms that are owned by the producer or more precisely by the farmer(s) (Bashford et al. 2013). The commonly-known subscription CSA is initiated by the farmer, who maintains ownership of the operation (Harmon 2014; Espelt 2020). Other producer-led types may be joint owned by a couple of growers (Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020), wherein both examples can lead to CSA governance type 1. Another possibility is that CSAs are “jointly owned by both producer and consumer members” (Bashford et al. 2013, 21) or even people starting a new CSA in the form of a legal cooperative, whereby the community of members owns the farm (Espelt 2020) (can lead to type 3). *Ownership and property* are mentioned as important, but are rarely empirically investigated in CSA studies (e.g., Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020). Few researchers, such as Koretskaya and Feola (2020, 306), ask questions like, “How is access to property structured?”. *Ownership and property* is predominantly discussed with a focus on land or other resources, which are owned, rented or (temporarily) occupied by CSAs (European CSA Research Group 2016). Thus, it seems important to also consider the ownership and property structure of the CSA itself. In the literature, it is touched upon in only a few cases and named as “collective property” (European CSA Research Group 2016, 77), “shared ownership” (Bashford et al. 2013, 21), “co-operatively owned” and “non-farm owned” (Woods et al. 2017, 4) initiatives, where almost no distinction is made between land and CSA operation.

Labor and work: This characteristic includes diverse forms from paid to voluntary labor, full- or part-time work, as well as seasonal employment contracts, also including aspects of fair working conditions. Due to labor-intensive agricultural production, such as with vegetables, most CSAs have different forms of work. Examples are the individual self-employed farmer or gardener as well as employed or volunteer family members. Other CSAs hired full-time additional workers, seasonally or on an hourly basis. CSAs can also have trainees, interns or unpaid volunteers (e.g., Harmon 2014; European CSA Research Group 2016; Carlson and Bitsch 2019; Krcilkova et al. 2019; Espelt 2020; Koretskaya and Feola 2020; Watson 2019). Labor and work can be differentiated by quantification. For example, in relation to the number of workers (full-time and part-time) and the number of seasonal workers. A further differentiation can be made if CSA members work as volunteers in the CSA. Thus, the co-production by the CSA members can be of differing degrees: voluntary or mandatory, unpaid, serving as a discount on the share, or a paid position. Some CSAs limit the mandatory labor of their members to the main summer harvest season in order to provide support for peak workloads, such as during vegetable harvests, and by organizing ‘working party days’ (Watson 2019). Other CSAs offer work-share memberships for its members. In this case, members can do work shifts to pay less for a share. Members can work a certain number of hours per week,

month or season in the CSA (e.g., planting, harvest, sorting, and cleaning from the harvest, packing shares, or share distribution) and receive in return a partial or full discount on the share price (Cone and Kakaliouras 1995; Goland 2002; Cox et al. 2008; Shi et al. 2011; Watson 2019).⁵⁵ There are also CSAs that limit volunteering by members to only a few work activities per year, since instructing and teaching new members in rotation is a time-consuming process for the employed team.

Farming method: Various methods can be identified depending on the country and are either conventional (not organic), organic (not certified) or organic (certified). The CSA movement is often closely linked to organic farming practices as the majority of CSAs seem to be certified organic or at least use organic practices without official certification (e.g., Bashford et al. 2013; European CSA Research Group 2016; Carlson and Bitsch 2019). In some regions, there are also Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) or third party (organic) certifications with more adaptive possibilities as specified by the CSAs (European CSA Research Group 2016). Reasons not to seek official certification include a lack of credibility of the certification (for China, see Tang et al. 2019), financial reasons due to the cost of certification, or the sufficiency of trust between producers and members that make certification unnecessary for some CSAs.

Single or multi-farm: CSAs can be established as a single farm CSA or in a partnership with multiple farms (e.g., Adam 2006; Woods et al. 2017). In the latter, two or more producers cooperate in a formal partnership with each other and with one group of members. Through this cooperation, the CSA is able to offer a greater variety of products and allow the specialization of individual farms, for example, in vegetable and fruit cultivation or in arable farming (Bashford et al. 2013). This CSA could then provide full supply cooperation for a broad range of food products (European CSA Research Group 2016). The multi-farm approach can also permit risk sharing between involved farms (European CSA Research Group 2016). Aside from this close formal partnership, more informal co-operations also exist. These benefits described are reduced competition between CSAs in the same region, which mean the “benefits could also include sharing marketing efforts, customer and delivery logistics, and the use of farm equipment” (Galt et al. 2019, 18).

Product variety: This relates to products offered by the CSA, ranging from CSAs which exclusively provide vegetables and fruit (Blättel-Mink et al. 2017), to full supply CSAs that integrate processed food, such as milk, yogurt, meat, bread, etc. Some CSAs offer animal products only as an additional option for their members (e.g., Bashford et al. 2013; European CSA Research Group 2016).

⁵⁵ In literature, there are also examples of members harvesting their own vegetables (Chen 2013; Koretskaya and Feola 2020). In these cases, however, we speak of self-harvesting projects.

Degree of self-production: The food share may not include goods produced only by the CSA farms but may also be enhanced by external purchases. Additional purchases can be market-based, based on cooperative structures such as binding contracts, or even be organized as a community-supported cooperation with corresponding risk sharing in which external farms are not paid for a guaranteed amount of products but for the farming of a specific and fixed cultivation area (Rommel et al. 2022b). The respective degree (e.g., own production, additional purchases with or without risk sharing, market-based purchase) can be indicated as a percentage and thus made more transparent.

Share distribution channels: The food share can be carried out and organized by the individual farmer, the CSA organization, or the members themselves. Home delivery, self pick-up by the members from the farm or at collection points (so-called depots) are share distribution channels according to which CSAs can be differentiated. Such depots are often established in cooperation with the members in their neighborhoods at restaurants, cafés, schools, workplaces, markets or in basements and garages of private households. This depends on the possibilities, the composition of the share (for example, because of perishable products and the necessity of cold chain logistics), and the creativity of the members. In addition, self-harvesting, although rare, is sometimes available, or can be provided in a supportive way as the need arises. If multiple CSAs are in the same region, they sometimes collaborate in the packing, grading, storing, cooling, and delivery with other CSAs, as well as AFN initiatives such as food hub concepts or food co-ops. Such cooperation in logistics or in operating a depot help in the sharing of infrastructure resources and thereby reduce costs (e.g., European CSA Research Group 2016; Woods et al. 2017; Zoll et al. 2021).

Share distribution area: CSA members are more likely to be in urban, suburban, or peri-urban settings and tend to be rather educated, middle-class people who know about the concept and can afford the financial contributions as well as the additional effort required to engage, organize pick-ups, cook etc. (e.g., Golland 2002; Bloemmen et al. 2015; Plank et al. 2020; Si et al. 2020). In contrast, CSA farms and the farmland are often located in rural or in the urban hinterland near to one or between several cities (Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020).

Share payment options: The prices of the food share can be determined by CSA operators as a fixed amount. In most cases this is arranged in cooperation with members (Sanneh et al. 2001). With a diversity of different payment options (combination of fixed amount and a solidarity pot as well as graded contributions), CSAs aim to respond to differing economic conditions as well as to the needs of their (potential) members. Barriers related to financial access for membership are often reduced through so-called financing or bidding rounds (e.g., Carlson and Bitsch 2019; Krcilkova et al. 2019). This special pricing mechanism encourages members to decide individually on the amount of their contribution and takes into consideration their own needs as well as their willingness and ability to pay (Blätzel-Mink et al. 2017). Individuals or

households with higher incomes are invited to ease the burden on financially-disadvantaged members by paying more.

Scope of CSA operation: Refers to whether the farm is fully or partially operated with the CSA model. For example, some farms still have traditional distribution channels in addition to the CSA. They use direct sales or other distribution approaches, such as farmers markets or self-harvest gardens, that are not part of the CSA (Chen 2013; European CSA Research Group 2016; Carlson and Bitsch 2019). This allows an existing farm to continue with its other forms of distribution or for the entire farm to graduate step-by-step to the CSA model (see also *establishing paths*).

Size: It is possible to differentiate CSAs according to size, using number of members and households, number of food/harvest shares, as well as the productive land for CSA (e.g., in hectares), or the total revenue of the CSA (e.g., Bashford et al. 2013; Krcilkova et al. 2019; Paech et al. 2021).

3.3.4 CSA Framework visualization

When the various characteristics are considered together, then a CSA Framework is reached, which was the first result of this study. Visualized as a framework (Figure 6), it supports a more differentiated view of an individual CSA organization. In this, *community financing* is the *defining characteristic* of the CSA model and is mandatory to be considered a CSA (domain A). It comprises fee financing, cost coverage/full financing, risk sharing, transparency, and direct relations. Furthermore, various *differentiation characteristics* (domain B) illustrate the complexity and diversity of CSAs. By taking the *predominant characteristic* of organizational governance into account, *CSA governance types* (domain B1) enable the distinction according to the question, “who organizes and manages the CSA?”. CSAs with different constellations of actors can be classified as Producer-led CSA (type 1), Consumer-led CSA (type 2), and Integrated (all-in-one) CSA (type 3). The typology contains a definition of each type (see Table 11). *CSA governance* affects the additional *varying characteristics* (domain B2), which are: *Degree of co-decision by members / workers; Founding impulse; Establishing paths; Legal form; Ownership and property for land / operation ; Labor and work; Farming methods; Single- or multi-farm; Product variety; Degree of self-production; Share distribution channels; Share distribution area; Share payment options; Scope of CSA operation; Size* (see Figure 6). In sum, there are various differentiation options within each *differentiation characteristic*. For some characteristics, it is possible to choose one out of many options (e.g., one type of the *CSA governance types* at domain B1 or one of the *farming methods* at domain B2). For other characteristics, multiple options are possible (e.g., *product variety* at domain B2) or a number could be specified to quantify the diversity (e.g., *Number of members (persons)* at domain B2). This selection of options makes the framework usable for research and practice (see survey results in the next chapter as well as discussion in Chapter 3.3.5).

Figure 6: CSA Framework

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) framework

Framework Domain A	Defining characteristic (mandatory and found in every CSA)								
	Community financing	Fee financing	Cost coverage / Full financing	Risk sharing	Transparency	Direct relations			
Domain B	Differentiation characteristics (shed further light on the CSA diversity)								
Domain B1	Predominant characteristic (every CSA can be assigned to a specific governance type)								
	CSA governance	Producer-led CSA (Type 1)	Consumer-led CSA (Type 2)	Integrated (all-in-one) CSA (Type 3)					
Domain B2	Varying characteristics (specify CSA configurations and vary from CSA to CSA)								
	Degree of co-decision by members/ workers	Relatively low (e.g., online polls, annual shareholder meeting)		Medium (e.g., majority member decisions during the year in addition to the shareholder meeting; working groups possibly with voting rights)		High (e.g., basic democratic decision-making structures, sociocratic form of organization, consensus or consent decisions)			
	Founding impulse	Farm(ers)	Consumer(s)	Both	Through third party				
	Establishing paths	(Partial) conversion of an existing farm to CSA	Establishment of a CSA with new agricultural start-up	Handover of an existing CSA	Spin-off from an existing CSA				
	Legal form	Sole proprietorship (e.g., independent private-run farm)	Non-profit form (e.g., association)	Cooperative form	Mixed form (e.g., combination of non-profit and for-profit forms)				
	Ownership and property for land / operation	Farm(ers)	Member shareholdings	Community (e.g., cooperative)	Other				
	Labor and work	Number of workers full-time	Number of workers part-time	Number of seasonal workers	Members as volunteers	Degree of co-production/ co-work of members (low, medium, high)			
	Farming methods	Conventional (not organic)		Organic (not certified)	Organic (certified)				
	Single- or multi-farm	Single-farm CSA			Multi-farm CSA				
	Product variety	Vegetables	Fruits	Dairy products	Meat products	Eggs	Honey	Processed products	Other
	Degree of self-production	Own production (in %)		Binding additional purchases with risk sharing (in %)	Binding purchases without risk sharing (in %)	Marked-based purchase (in %)			
	Share distribution channels	Home delivery		Farm self pick-up by members	Pick-up point (depot)	Self-harvest			
	Share distribution area	CSA members in urban settings		CSA members in suburban settings	CSA members in peri-urban settings	CSA members in more rural settings			
	Share payment options	Fixed amount		Fixed amount and solidarity pot	Graded contributions	Financing round / Bidding round			
	Scope of CSA-operation	The entire farm is part of the CSA			A part of the farm is part of the CSA				
	Size	Number of members (persons)		Number of food shares	Productive land for CSA (e.g., in hectares)	Revenue of the CSA (e.g., in EUR)			

3.3.5 Diversity of CSAs in Germany

Regarding the characteristics of the CSA Framework, the results of the survey elucidate a diversity of CSA configurations in Germany. Beforehand, we need to point out that some survey questions were answered at the level of the CSA organization (CSA) and others at the level of the individual CSA farm (see definition in Chapter 3.1 and differentiation characteristic *Single/Multi-farm* in Chapter 3.3.1). Overall, 70 CSAs (n = 70 CSAs) and in total 81 individual CSA farms (n = 81 CSA farms) participated. However, each question (relating to a specific framework characteristic) had a different respondent rate.

The main result is that 55 out of 70 CSAs assigned themselves to one of the three *CSA governance types* (for the distribution of the types see Table 12). This validates our proposal of governance types with a broad distribution in the German context.

Table 12: Formulation in the survey of the German CSA Network with result for distinguishing CSA governance types

Type	Definition used in the survey for the CSAs	Total (n = 55)
Producer-led CSA (Type 1)	“In our case, the farm (or farms) takes over the management of the members, the communication to the members, and the recruitment of members. Acceptance is done through formal or informal individual contracts.”	23
Consumer-led CSA (Type 2)	“We have a self-organized member community, which takes care of the administration of, communication to, and recruitment of member(s). The member community bears the acceptance risk through a cooperation agreement. The farm(s) undertake(s) mainly agricultural activities.”	9
Integrated (all-in-one) CSA (Type 3)	“We are a formal organization in which consumers are shareholders. The organization operates the farm and is responsible for managing, communicating with, and recruiting member(s).”	23

Moreover, the survey confirms the existence of diverse ways of *co-decision* in CSAs. 28 out of 41 CSAs integrates forms of consensus and consent, which could be a criterion for both employees and members to help choose a CSA that is right for them. This interrelates with the *founding impulse* of CSAs. For example, 20 out of 57 CSAs were founded by members. In 15 cases, an existing farm initiated the CSA, and in 7 cases, members searched for an existing farm for a partnership. A current German trend is the growth of horticultural farms with only vegetables and/or fruits being founded as new ventures (24 between 2016-2022) in relation to farms with livestock being converted (18) (see characteristic *product variety*). In the German context, there is also a diversity of *legal forms* such as sole proprietorship (11 out of 43 CSA farms), non-profit forms like associations (18), and those legally registered as a cooperative (3). As each country has its own legal system with country-specific legal forms, naming and comparing such forms is difficult, however, it should be emphasized that hybrid forms of organizations can exist simultaneously as combinations of different non-profit and for-profit legal forms. Concerning *ownership and property forms*, Blättel-Mink et al. (2017) noted that only a few CSAs used collective ownership forms at the time of their study. Our empirical

findings confirm this assumption, yet indicate a continuous growth of CSAs with communitized property (15 out of 39 CSAs between 2016 and 2022). Regarding *labor and work*, for example, only seven out of 70 CSAs have requirements for co-production by members using a certain daily or hourly contingent per year. Concerning the *farming methods* most CSA farms produce organically. 26 out of 41 CSA farms are certified and 15 are organic but not officially certified, thereby preventing access to government organic subsidies. Another interesting finding is that 13 out of 81 CSA farms are organized within *multi-farm CSAs* (i.e., CSAs with multiple farms). In terms of *product variety*, the majority integrate vegetable products (67 out of 80 CSA farms) into their food share. A little less than half produce fruits (31) and animal products (36), some produce beverages (34), grain products such as flour, semolina, pasta (11), others bread and bakery products (7). Producing plant-based foods offers great potential to expand product range by the diversification of crop farming or food processing (e.g., European CSA Research Group 2016). Concerning the *degree of self-production* 14 out of 70 CSAs executed marked-based purchases, 8 CSAs went further and integrated binding trading relationships, and 6 CSAs went even further by incorporating risk sharing within their trading partnerships. Regarding *share payment options*, so-called financing or bidding rounds are possible ways to address low-income members in Germany. 39 of 51 CSAs indicate that they use this approach in order to determine share costs. 10 CSAs add the option of a so-called “solidarity pot” to organize their fixed-contribution scheme in a more inclusive way. In terms of *size variations*, the average share size is 141 shares (31 responding CSAs). The size of agricultural land (30 responding CSA farms) ranges from 1-58 hectares (mean 5,4), however, there are also farms of up to 200 hectares, although only a percentage of the entire farm is part of the CSA (see *scope of CSA operation*).

An additional empirical result of the survey is linked to various characteristics such as *CSA governance types, founding impulse* and *establishing paths* of CSAs. The survey shows that generational succession processes are not yet widely present in German CSAs. 29 out of 81 CSA farms answered in general to the answer options concerning whether or not the succession and handover processes of a CSA operation has been arranged. For example, for 19 CSA farms, succession processes are not yet an issue as most CSAs had only recently started. This could indicate that the question of succession will arise sooner or later, depending on the configuration of the CSA. A further additional result of the survey, without a direct reference to one of the framework characteristics, is that 53 out of 59 CSAs who took part in the survey advise other CSAs that exist or are in the process of being founded. We will discuss this and the other results in more detail in the following chapter.

3.4 Discussion

This study found that farms using the CSA model are complex organizations whose diversity can be differentiated with the help of the CSA Framework. The results show both, a diversity of different characteristics, as well as the variety within each characteristic. This CSA diversity is synthesized and presented in a visualized framework and illustrated with empirical results

from Germany. In the following we discuss the findings within the framework domains from both an organizational (Chapter 3.4.1) as well as member (Chapter 3.4.2) and AFN and food sovereignty discourse perspective (Chapter 3.4.3). We conclude with some limitations and include implications for further research (Chapter 3.4.4).

3.4.1 CSA organization perspective along the framework domains

Based on domain (A), by **clarifying the uniqueness of the CSA model**, CSAs can be **delimited through the *defining characteristic community financing*** from non-CSAs such as other AFNs, especially those that call themselves a “CSA” but do not realize its *defining characteristic*. This mandatory domain, therefore, has benefits for this discourse, since in practice and in literature, inaccuracies occur. For instance, the CSA definition from Si et al. (2020, 68) does “not include a requirement that the consumers (members) share the production risk (i.e., crop failures) with the farmer”. Another example is, that in numerous “CSAs” in the USA, consumers can book and cancel food on a weekly basis without comprehensive risk sharing (*community financing*), that lies at the heart of the CSA model. These “CSAs” rather correspond to a box-subscription approach with month-to-month subscriptions (see Smith et al. 2019 for various examples). Our presented definition of CSA in the German context likely goes much beyond the CSA reality in North America as indicated by Rosol and Barbosa (2021). We do see the necessity to define the core of the CSA model to prevent dilution, especially since similar developments are taking place in Germany, where for instance a so-called “solidarity subscription box” is officially promoted as a mixture of CSA along with a monthly cancelable subscription box. In the end these self-labeled “CSAs” do not follow the *defining characteristic community financing*. To prevent confusion and a dilution of the CSA model in Germany, the term “Solidarische Landwirtschaft” (literally translated “solidarity agriculture” or “solidarity farming”) has been legally protected as a trademark.

Based on domain (B1), CSAs can be **classified into the CSA governance typology** and thereby **distinguished among each other through the three *CSA governance types*** by using the predominant aspect of organizational governance. This typification appears to make sense from both a practitioner and a research perspective and is proven to be useful and coherent even for complex CSAs, as our results show. For example, at a first glance it appears difficult to assign the Australian “Food Connect Brisbane CSA” into our typology. Cameron (2015) describes this organization as registered not-for-profit company that operates as a cooperative. A particular rather unusual detail, however, is that the cooperative shares are not held by the consumers (CSA members), but rather exclusively by the CSA workers. That means, that the workers – and in this understanding the employed producers, farmers, gardeners, and organizers of the CSA cooperative – are simultaneously the managerial decision-makers and responsible people in this organization. Asking the predominant organizational governance related question of our typology, by whom the CSA is governed, (self-)organized, and (self-)managed, leads us finally to classify this CSA as type 1. The Brisbane CSA seems to be a producer-led CSA, here in the sense of a worker-led CSA cooperative. In addition, this example illustrates the relevance

of taking additionally *varying characteristics* into consideration when classifying CSAs into the typology (see also discussion domain (B2) below).

Based on domain (B2), CSAs can be differentiated **through *varying characteristics and the diversity within them***. Even though our empirical survey covers just a sample of CSAs in Germany, the results are significant enough to confirm the diversity of CSAs, both, in terms of *CSA governance types* as well as various ways of configuring the further characteristics. For some *varying characteristics*, it is now possible to choose one out of multiple options. For other *varying characteristics*, a number could be specified to quantify the diversity (see Chapter 3.3.1 with the CSA Framework visualization). This selection of options can prevent binary understandings and generalizations and makes the framework usable for further research and practice. Based on the study results, we highlight that each CSA is a unique combination of different characteristics and that each can be positioned on a spectrum of different expressions and selection options. Hence, the framework has the potential to open up tensions within discourses inside the German Network, for example, between peasant farms (mostly type 1 producer-led CSA) and on the other hand a significantly larger type 3 CSA (for coexisting discourses within the Network see Guerrero Lara et al. 2024). Our findings, moreover, show that the framework has, for example, the potential to support the matching of (potential) founders and workers towards finding their best fitting CSA configuration if based on the framework characteristics. In the meantime, our transdisciplinary research partnership with the Network has already encouraged thinking, talking, and working with different CSA types and their configurations in the context of the Network, and the presented types have been integrated in their consulting activities (see also result transfer by handbook publication in Chapter 3.4.4). In this way, we argue that the framework can be useful for peer consulting among existing CSAs as well as with founding initiatives. This could potentially support organizational development and, as a result, help to maintain and stabilize CSAs over the long term. Thereby, establishing the perspective of CSA organizers as important. For Adam (2006, 3), the success of a CSA depends on the “highly-developed organizational and communication skills” of the organizers. In this context, training courses and the aspect of learning, for example, in managerial, communication, multicultural, leadership, and business running skills, are mentioned (Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020).

More comprehensively, the framework can be used to avoid generalizations. Our findings show that, first and foremost, a CSA, in its narrowest sense, with its *defining characteristic community financing*, can be seen as an alternative production-distribution approach. By incorporating organizational perspectives, we show that CSA can be seen also as an organizational approach. CSAs are complex organizations but not every CSA is also an alternative organization governed, managed, organized, and structured in alternative ways (see diverse expressions within these characteristics). For instance, Grenzdörffer et al. (2022, 79) reveal that a CSA “can be still owned and managed in a conventional, traditional way by a single individual not sharing any decision-making or property rights”. This could indicate that

family farms using the CSA model could correspond in particular with the type 1 producer-led CSA, even if they are otherwise organized and structured in traditional ways. In addition to this, it is possible that a family farm exists only to some extent as a CSA (see characteristic *scope of CSA operation*). In this case, the CSA model functions as an independent operation of the farm while there are also parallel farm operations, such as direct sales, that are not part of the CSA model. This may encourage existing (family) farms to change, establishing and expanding their CSA configuration step-by-step over time. In this regard, besides advancing and promoting “alternative” organizational forms, the CSA model proves to also have distinct potential for the preservation of (family) farms, that are organized in “traditional” structures. Interestingly, the CSA model opens up a development space in which both worlds mutually fertilize each other.

In connection with possible changes over time, our findings prove the possibility of dynamic development within CSAs as changeable organizations, especially in times of succession processes, where a window of opportunity can open up for CSAs to change their governance type. Of course, this is possible at any time, for example when a type 1 CSA decides to communitize their entire property in order to set in stone the ecological and social structures of the farm for future generations to come. This perspective is also confirmed by a consultant who states that these “type 1 CSAs most likely won’t remain such, at the latest during the generation succession.” He argues that “a high level of trust is necessary for a member-community, that had financed a privately inherited farm for decades in a process of handing it over to people who might not even want to continue this farm [as an CSA]”. In these cases it seems possible that the CSA can be transformed into a type 3 by founding their own organization and entering into their own agricultural production (see, for example, Carlson and Bitsch 2019). This option is consistent with organization research by Wiersema and Koo (2022) which shows that organizational governance is not static. The dynamic development of and changes in characteristics is also confirmed by CSA studies, such as van Oers et al. (2023), that examine the aspect of unlearning in CSAs based on solidarity and, in particular, the CSA farm conversion process towards solidarity payments (see characteristic *share payment option*). The researchers demonstrate the added value of this unlearning approach to transitions in sustainability. Based on this cited study, we emphasize that, depending on the CSA configuration, the members of a CSA could, for example in producer-led CSAs (type 1), be the initiators of such an unlearning process for farmers and the designers of modified characteristics. This last example illustrates the interrelations between the perspectives of CSA organization and CSA members, which we will discuss next.

3.4.2 Members’ perspective: more differentiation to choose their "suitable" CSA

Employing a broad understanding, it can be seen that CSA members can be both the holders of a food share as well as the co-owners of community-owned farms, founders and organizers of a CSA, or co-producers and volunteers in CSAs depending on the specific CSA configuration and governance type (e.g., Matzembacher and Meira 2019; Rosol and Barbosa 2021). In the following, we focus the narrow understanding of CSA members as co-financiers that exchange

membership fees for a food share. Currently, it is hard for (potential) CSA members to distinguish between different CSAs in a low-threshold way, especially considering the individual needs and life circumstances of the members (e.g., time aspects related to wage and care work). Currently, joining a CSA is often a random occurrence due to a lack of choice. The reasons for this could be, for instance, that the respective CSA's pick-up location (see characteristic *share distribution channels*) is close to them, or recommended by a known person who is already a member, or simply because it is the only CSA where free membership shares are available. Based on the results of this study, we argue that public and an easy-to-access differentiation criteria for members could have the added benefit of enhanced commitment stay rates, which can positively impact the long-term stability of CSAs. The diversity within the characteristics of the framework suggests that some CSA configurations can enhance the exclusion of certain kinds of members, whereas others can be a better match. The requirements and unfulfilled expectations of the composition of the products (e.g., wrong or too much food; see characteristic *product variety*) or forms of co-decision-making (see *degree of co-decision*) can lead to dissatisfaction of the members. Other reasons for members leaving a CSA are time constraints and scheduling conflicts (e.g., additional time for picking up the products as well as for cooking food) (Ostrom 2007; Zoll et al. 2021). These reasons can result in the cancellation of membership, or in the leaving of one CSA for another. It should be noted, however, that for some members, activities such as meetings, events, or educational activities and, in general, having a close connection to a farm are all important aspects of membership. Other members prefer that a CSA be not privately inherited, and that they can become co-owners of a CSA farm (see type 3 and characteristic *ownership and property*). In contrast, Cone and Kakaliouras (1995, 30) observed already in the 1990s that “from the average member's perspective, the demands of membership may begin and end with the bag of vegetables”. To prevent any exclusion effects of CSAs, it seems especially necessary that members find a CSA configuration that most suits them. But the results of this study show that so far it is hardly possible for (potential) members to compare CSAs in detail. The presented framework characteristics with its diversity within the characteristics can help to make the diversity of CSAs more visible for members. The findings reported here suggest that in regions with many CSAs, there seems to be a great potential for a digital matching platform (e.g., website, app, quiz) with some selection questions that could support (potential) members to find a CSA that matches their needs, life realities, and values. This platform could indirectly increase the creation of new CSAs. In addition, if members do not find the best CSA configuration in a given region and the potential membership of the demand group reaches a certain number, the respective CSA Network association could support establishing a new CSA. The founding of new CSAs in this way could also be supported through institutional support by policymakers.

3.4.3 CSA in AFNs and food sovereignty discourses: more differentiation instead of overgeneralization

Besides these discussed CSA-related findings, this study has implications for a more differentiated view and analysis of other AFNs in revealing generalizations. By including organizational perspectives, the results of our study confirm the impression that there are currently multiple ways to position CSA into existing AFN typologies. Overall, AFN research in general, and typologies in particular, are often based on a trimmed CSA definition that leads to an incomplete classification of this diverse phenomena. Poças Ribeiro et al. (2021, 500), for instance, define CSAs in their AFN typology as a separate type (alongside five others) as “groups of people who have a joint commitment with a farmer, who is paid in advance (for a year or a season), for the produce” (Poças Ribeiro et al. 2021 p. 500). This excludes, for example, the existence of type 3 CSAs (see definition in Table 11). In general, AFNs are associated with shorter distances between producers and consumers as well as small farm size and scale instead of large scale production (Jarosz 2008). This often underlines a deterministic opposition between alternatives (such as good, small, local, embedded) on the one side, and conventional (such as bad, big, global, dis-embedded) on the other (e.g., Hinrichs 2000; Moragues-Faus 2016). Nevertheless, this binary conception is challenged because of the fluid relationship between alternative and conventional systems and its involved actors, such as AFNs. Alternatives, like CSAs, are embedded in existing economic systems, which can lead to multiple organizational challenges and has implications for the organization itself. The presented framework of this study offers opportunities for a more differentiated view and consideration of these challenges. It shows, for example, that within one CSA conventional, traditional elements are even preserved and deliberately strengthened, whereas at the same time alternative structures are developed showing that alternative and traditional elements may fruitfully complement each other. In addition, the framework enables more differentiation within AFNs. Watts et al. (2005) delimit AFNs based on the two pillars (alternative) food products and (alternative) distribution systems. Accordingly, alternative food can be described as production processes, such as sustainable, organic, or holistic farming and production methods can instead be considered industrial agribusiness (Jarosz 2008; Forssell and Lankoski 2015). These aspects can be gathered in our presented framework within *varying characteristics* in domain (B2). According to the second pillar, alternative distribution systems are described as distribution networks that have a producer-consumer relationship within the food sector and a minimal number of intermediaries (Forssell and Lankoski 2015). This pillar can be connected to the *defining characteristic community financing* in domain (A) of our framework. In favor of a complementing consideration of AFNs, Rosol (2020) argued it does not only include the two pillars of food products and distribution systems, but also their (alternative) economic practices. This third pillar includes (un-)paid work of members, equal pay for all employees regardless of rank, and different forms of economic organization under which cooperatives and collectives are subsumed. This pillar can be incorporated into *varying characteristics* in domain

(B2). In studying AFN and CSA discourses, it becomes evident that these are often focused on challenges in sustainable transformations of agri-food systems at the macro-/system-level. In parallel, and in contrast with this level, researchers and food movements rarely integrate internal perspectives of organizations and challenges at the organizational level of AFNs like CSAs, as the additional pillar of Rosol (2020) illustrates. We conclude that a CSA should not be generalized and regarded as a homogeneous AFN type, but be rather marked as a diverse field of its own.

Finally, the findings of this study suggest that a more differentiated consideration of the diversity of CSA characteristics could also help in revealing existing generalizations about CSA, for example, in the food sovereignty discourse. CSA has been described multiple times, both by researchers as well as the CSA movement and the food sovereignty movement, as a practical example of being in line with food sovereignty (e.g., McMichael 2014; Duncan et al. 2019; Paul 2019; Stapleton 2019b; Matacena and Corvo 2020; Plank et al. 2020; Parot et al. 2024a). Both, CSA and food sovereignty, therefore, are ascribed in the literature as engaged for just and sustainable agri-food system transformations in local and regional economies and the empowerment of people and actors involved in food production, distribution, and consumption. A high degree of participation or forms of collective property in organizations can also be often assessed in a generalized way as being “positive” for food sovereignty (Dekeyser et al. 2018), but our study shows that these aspects are not highly implemented in every CSA as the results regarding the diversity in Germany illustrates (see *degree of co-decision by members/workers and ownership and property*).

3.4.4 Limits and implications

In the following, we point out limitations, give implications for further research, and further development of the framework. We have deliberately chosen a narrow CSA definition, excluding other AFN forms like self-harvesting gardens, that could lead to confusion since these are subsumed under the umbrella term CSA (e.g., Chen 2013). We are aware that our focus on German CSAs has limited significance and could be criticized, as some researchers have made the point that European and North American research perspectives are prioritized in the study of AFNs (Zollet 2022) although we have included CSA literature with an international scope. A shortcoming regarding the survey is that the limited response rate of CSAs which meant that the responses (i.e., number n) varied, depending on the question and linked framework characteristic. We made this transparent and provided (n) for each question. In addition, some questions were queried at individual CSA farm level, others at CSA organization-level in order to take account of their complexity. Moreover, keeping the effort for CSAs and farms within practicable range, the Network decided upon the final survey questions. For this reason, not all framework characteristics include empirical data. Overall, we want to highlight, that the framework and terminology of the *CSA governance types* already affects the international CSA discourse through active exchange, for example, through the adaptation of the typology by

research and practice (e.g., URGENCI Network)⁵⁶. We emphasize, however, that CSA configurations can vary widely related to the existing diversity within the characteristics, particularly in other geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts, and others may exist. The framework, therefore, needs to be further discussed and adjusted by both researchers and practitioners.

These limitations lead us to further research. Firstly, the framework could be used as a starting point to better understand CSAs worldwide. Research could conduct analyses that are more type-specific in order to avoid generalizations. In addition, there is room to explore the potential in other countries for further or new CSA types and configurations (both from a member and organization perspective). National and international surveys could query the proposed existence of yet unknown types and configurations based on further or differently-expressed characteristics. Secondly, another option to avoid generalizations in CSA and AFN discourses could be to study the individual transformative potential of specific CSA configurations, respectively regarding their social and ecological effects. Even though the aim of this study was not to develop a tool for evaluating such aspects, the framework provides starting points. For instance, it could be studied if CSAs using bidding rounds (see *share payment option*) contribute to the inclusivity of social groups (see matching potential above). Overall, the “differences in consumers’ characteristics, preferences, and attitudes” (Pisarn et al. 2020, 15) should be taken more into account from the perspective of CSA organizers and managers in order to include broader social groups. Further research could, for example, analyze the potential of online tools for enhancing the inclusivity of CSA (see Bos and Owen 2016). Thirdly, the framework could be adjusted and extended in order to be more context dependent, particularly in other geographical areas where CSA and AFN research is underrepresented, for example, when studying the diversity of food hubs by incorporating organizational perspectives (see Horst et al. 2011) as part of a study that includes various countries. This could involve analyzing drivers and barriers to increase organizational stability and sustain AFNs over the long term (e.g., generational succession). The integration of organizational perspectives and internal challenges, therefore, could enhance agri-food systems-related research.

Considering the previous remarks, the question of future institutional support by policymakers arises. A challenge in policymaking for rural development arises, when assuming that all AFNs or CSAs are equal. In this sense, Grashuis and Su (2019) argue that considering differences (like analyses that are more type-specific) helps to provide a better understanding of the factors that determine their performance, as well as their constraints, by making comparisons among such organizations and across locations. For example, a less-discussed aspect is that policy could promote CSAs that use or establish memberships for low-income people through so-called subsidized or “cost-offset” CSA (CO-CSA) (Jilcott Pitts et al. 2022).

⁵⁶ URGENCI conducted 2023-2024 a “Worldwide CSA census” (forthcoming). There, the results are presented along our typology. Simultaneously, a scientific publication is being prepared on this basis.

To consider differences rather than make generalizations corresponds to the aim of this study. The advantage of our framework is that it helps researchers, policymakers as well as practitioners to identify and in particular appreciate diversity and complexity of and within CSAs based on their various possible configurations. As this study was conducted in a transdisciplinary research partnership with the German CSA Network, the results have already been implemented by CSA practice, for example through integration of the framework characteristics and typology into a practical handbook of the German Network, into consulting activities of the Network, as well as currently into a worldwide CSA census by URGENCI, of which both publications are linked collaboratively with the authors of this study. This makes it more practical to use the results of this study, for example, in future CSA consulting activities.

3.5 Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of the diverse CSA phenomenon at the organizational level through the development and application of a CSA Framework. Based on literature research and qualitative data, this transdisciplinary study found that CSAs can be differentiated by various characteristics. The framework provides a description of CSAs, considering various characteristics and the diversity of its possible configurations. The multiple selection options make the framework applicable both for research and practice. In this way, the framework contributes to clarifying the uniqueness of the CSA model based on the *defining characteristic of community financing* expressed by fee financing, cost coverage/full financing, risk sharing, transparency, and direct relations (see framework domain A). This *defining characteristic* enables the delimitation of the CSA model from non-CSAs such as other AFNs. Furthermore, the question of how an individual CSA is governed is ascribed as a *predominant characteristic* by literature and practice. Organizational governance is therefore highly suitable for classification and allows the identification of three *CSA governance types* (domain B1): Producer-led (type 1), Consumer-led (type 2), and Integrated (all-in-one) CSAs (type 3). This typology, in combination and interrelation with *varying characteristics* (domain B2), reveals a diverse landscape of CSA configurations, as evidenced by our quantitative survey with German CSAs. Our results prove that each CSA is unique, exists as a complex arrangement, and is even more multifaceted than previously considered (i.e., combination of different characteristics that each can be positioned in various ways with different expressions and selection options). We emphasize that every CSA configuration has its own legitimacy since the coexistence of different CSA types as well as various AFN forms is necessary to cover different needs, life realities, and the values of the people that support them.

Moreover, our findings suggest the potential for dynamic development within CSAs over time, indicating changes in characteristics and governance types. The framework can be used for the matching of (potential) members as well as founders and workers, providing guidance for organizational configurations based on the various characteristics. The implications of our framework therefore extend to supporting the organizational development of existing and new CSAs, contributing to their overall stability and long-term survival.

Although CSA is still a niche in agri-food systems limited to a minority of people, our findings offer the potential to better address broader social groups. The framework enhances visibility into the diversity of CSAs, which could benefit scaling up and replicating them.

Finally, our results challenge prevailing overgeneralizations within the discourse on AFNs. We argue that the CSA model is an alternative production model, but not every CSA can be generally categorized as alternative organization, emphasizing the existence of CSAs across a spectrum of both alternative as well as conventional configuration options. Our results even prove that oftentimes elements which are described as rather conservative or traditional are preserved and deliberately strengthened in CSAs, while at the same time alternative forms and structures are developed showing that alternative elements and more traditional elements may fruitfully complement each other. This nuanced consideration of CSAs encourages a more informed dialogue, for instance, within the food sovereignty discourse, as well as with traditional farmers' associations that are often critical about CSA. In conclusion, the CSA Framework has the potential to avoid generalizations within CSA, AFN and food sovereignty discourses and beyond.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Author contributions

MM and MR designed the research project, structured the paper, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscript equally together. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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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.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can also be found online at:

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2024.1205809/full#supplementary-material>

Chapter 4 Overall Discussion

Throughout this dissertation and its four research questions (RQs) (see Chapter 1.3.3), the overarching aim has been to open up, broaden, and deepen the food sovereignty and CSA discourses by incorporating organizational perspectives. This approach has facilitated a more nuanced conceptualization of the diversity of economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) in general, and of CSA as a frequently cited expression of food sovereignty, thereby countering oversimplified and overgeneralized views. Consistent with the analytical structure in Chapter 1.3.2, this discussion (a) adopts an actor-centered perspective; (b) addresses the two lines of inquiry, (b1) for EAFS (Paper 1 in Chapter 2) and (b2) for CSA (Paper 2 in Chapter 3); and (c) employs organizational perspectives as a research lens across both studies. The discussion synthesizes the findings from both papers, develops the Synthesized EAFS Framework, and derives conceptual, methodological, and practice-oriented implications beyond the scope of the individual studies.

A range of research emphasizes the importance of food sovereignty as an alternative food concept for systemic transformations toward just and sustainable agri-food systems (see Chapter 1.1 and 1.2.1). However, the role of economic actors in realizing food sovereignty (and its pillars and principles) has rarely been discussed from this perspective, has not been consistently conceptualized, and remains underexplored. There are parallels here with the often neglected study of actors in transition studies, where it is important to understand who the actors involved in driving transitions are (see Chapter 1.2.3, for instance, Fischer and Newig 2016 and Avelino and Wittmayer 2016). This directly addresses the limited organizational attention and its causes identified in Chapter 1.2, namely dominant macro-/system-level orientations, heterogeneous and often implicit theoretical engagements, skepticism toward actors engaged in economic activities, and binary simplifications. By making organizational configurations of EAFS visible, the synthesis offers a specific lever to reduce this blind spot. Taken together, the results of both studies surface these causes at the organizational level and indicate why organizational characteristics have been underexplored to date.

While CSAs and other economic actors are frequently cited as examples of food sovereignty in practice (see Chapter 1.2.3 and Chapter 1.2.4), they are rarely examined as diverse organizations with specific internal structures, decision-making processes, and forms of organizational governance. This lack of organizational perspectives in the food sovereignty and CSA discourses has led to overgeneralized and binary views of these actors, constraining critical analysis and limiting their potential as actors of just and sustainable agri-food systems at the organizational level (see Chapter 1.2.5). Assuming that organizational configurations of economic actors are both important to understand and central to stability and adaptive capacity, this dissertation seeks to advance food sovereignty by examining how such configurations relate to the activities of these actors. It therefore aims to better understand their diversity by identifying characteristics for further differentiation, and thus to provide frameworks that can

be used to incorporate organizational configurations, for instance, to examine characteristics that shape their stability, diffusion, and transformative potential.

I started from the observation that the lack of visibility of what I conceptualize in this dissertation in Paper 1 (see Chapter 2) as EAFS hinders critical discourse and analysis. EAFS appear in diverse forms in the food sovereignty discourse (for my understanding and definition of the food sovereignty discourse, see Chapter 1.2.1), although this phenomenon is rarely actively addressed or directly named with respect to actors engaged in economic activities and in the struggles for “actualizing food sovereignty” (Roman-Alcalá 2025 p. 15). This setting opened the possibility, as formulated in my working assumptions (Chapter 1.3.1), to observe how EAFS conceptualize and enact food sovereignty in organizational ways, for instance, in their organizational practices (i.e., how and in which organizational characteristics food sovereignty principles are (or could be) implemented). Along these lines, I formulated the assumption that food sovereignty, as an alternative food concept (see Chapters 1.2.1 and 1.2.2), is also an organizational phenomenon (Chapter 1.3.1). In line with Chapter 1.3.2, organizations and their configurations constitute the primary unit of analysis, while individuals are considered insofar as they act within organizational configurations. My aim of understanding the economic and organizational diversity of EAFS fed into four RQs, addressed through two complementary studies: first, an integrative literature review conceptualizing EAFS diversity in general (Middendorf and Herzig 2025, see Paper 1 in Chapter 2), and second, a transdisciplinary mixed-methods study, in partnership with the German CSA Network, conceptualizing CSA diversity, in which CSA organizations are examined because CSA is widely recognized as an expression of food sovereignty and thus EAFS (Middendorf and Rommel 2024, see Paper 2 in Chapter 3).

The specific objectives of this dissertation were to analyze and conceptualize the diversity of EAFS, highlight their economic and organizational diversity, and examine their role in the current discourse and for achieving (more) food sovereignty. These objectives are structured through four RQs: (RQ1) *Which patterns regarding economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) can be identified in the food sovereignty literature?*, (RQ2) *How can the diversity of EAFS be conceptualized?*, (RQ3) *According to which characteristics discussed in literature and practice can CSAs be differentiated?*, and (RQ4) *How is the diversity of CSAs manifested in Germany?*. Addressing these questions, Chapter 4.1 provides a synthesis of the findings from both studies. Together, the answers to all four RQs substantiate the overall aim stated in Chapter 1.3.2: opening up, broadening, and deepening the discourse by approaching food sovereignty as an organizational phenomenon and by incorporating organizational perspectives.

This discussion connects the conceptual background (Chapter 1.2) and assumptions, aims, and RQs (Chapter 1.3) with the published peer-reviewed studies. I first synthesize the main findings (Chapter 4.1) and consolidate them into the Synthesized EAFS Framework (Chapter 4.2). I then discuss the alignment with the six food sovereignty pillars (Chapter 4.2.2)

and develop implications (Chapter 4.3), followed by methodological reflections and general limitations (Chapter 4.4). Finally, I present suggestions for future research (Chapter 4.5).

4.1 Synthesis of main findings

In this section, I synthesize the principal findings from Paper 1 and Paper 2. The overarching aim of this dissertation was to open up food sovereignty and CSA discourses through the explicit incorporation of organizational perspectives. Guided by the overall assumptions, aims, and RQs (Chapter 1.3), this discussion synthesizes conceptual and empirical findings from both studies. I examined organizational diversity in two different contexts by developing two frameworks, both employing organizational perspectives. The first study provided a broader, literature-based conceptualization of the diversity of EAFS in general, while the second study offered a transdisciplinary developed and empirically grounded conceptualization addressing the diversity of CSAs (for a comparative overview of study designs, see Chapter 1.3.4). This section addresses the historically limited organizational attention in the literature, makes the diversity of EAFS analytically visible along the agri-food supply chain, substantiates food sovereignty as an organizational phenomenon, confirms CSA as a frequently cited expression of food sovereignty, and supports treating organizational perspectives as a heuristic lens (see assumptions in Chapter 1.3.1).

Incorporating organizational perspectives contributes to both food sovereignty and CSA discourses by illuminating aspects that have often remained implicit or underexplored in previous literature. This approach challenges, first, overly simplistic views of economic actors prevalent in alternative food concept discourses such as food sovereignty (see Chapters 1.2.1 and 1.2.2). Second, it highlights the critical role that internal organizational configurations (e.g., organizational governance types such as producer-led, consumer-led, integrated; property relations; forms of labor) play in shaping food sovereignty efforts. Thus, my dissertation positions the food sovereignty concept not merely as a grassroots movement (e.g., Patel 2009; McMichael 2014; James et al. 2021) or a primarily political concept (e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Oteros-Rozas et al. 2019), but also as an organizational phenomenon characterized by diverse practices and structures in organizational and economic aspects. Both studies share the insight that organizational characteristics are crucial determinants of just and sustainable transformations in agri-food systems, although each framework highlights distinct aspects due to their differing methodological approaches (for methodological reflections and general limitations of this dissertation, see Chapter 4.4).

In response to RQ1 and RQ2, the EAFS Framework, derived from an ILR, offers a broad conceptualization of organizational diversity by identifying general patterns in the food sovereignty literature from Global North and Global South contexts. Paper 1 focuses on conceptualizing the diversity of EAFS at the organizational level, examining how organizational and economic arrangements shape their wide-ranging diversity of these actors along the agri-food supply chain. In doing so, the developed framework is grouped into three main themes with 12 sub-themes: (i) *conditions that shape EAFS* (e.g., motives), which affect

both (ii) their various *economic-related characteristics* (e.g., diversity of production forms, mode, practices, and services, scope of supply chains, partnerships and cooperations), as well as their (iii) *organizational-related characteristics* (e.g., diversity of property forms, governance and management approaches, labor, knowledge sharing). Each of the 12 sub-themes covers a broad spectrum of diversity with different distinction options which illustrate the diversity of EAFS. The framework's main themes and sub-themes illustrate the variety among EAFS. The study identifies a series of conditions, economic as well as organizational domains that influence how different EAFS emerge, evolve, and interact with broader agri-food contexts. This actor-centered perspective explicitly names and positions EAFS across the entire agri-food supply chain, as identified in the food sovereignty literature, thereby addressing previous omissions of actors, including processing and distribution (see Supplementary Material, Table 16, for descriptive illustrations). The EAFS Framework (Figure 4) therefore provides a language for visibility and differentiation, clarifying where and how economic actors operate across the chain.

In contrast to the EAFS Framework, the CSA Framework (Figure 6) was developed through a transdisciplinary, mixed-methods approach in partnership with the German CSA Network. Addressing RQ3 and RQ4, the research delivers nuanced and empirically validated insights specifically tailored to CSA as a diverse alternative-production model and reveals how CSAs themselves are diverse organizations, differing significantly based on their governance type. Although CSA models are often presented in scientific literature as uniform examples of AFNs, the findings of this study show that CSAs are diverse and complex organizations. The CSA Framework is grouped into two intertwined domains, which build on each other. Domain (A) the *defining characteristic*, which is *community financing*, that can be found in every single CSA, and domain (B) *differentiation characteristics*, that delineate the diversity of CSAs. Domain (A) *community financing* is the central *defining characteristic* and is mandatory to be considered a CSA. Thereby, the study explicitly identified community financing as the defining characteristic shared across all CSA organizations. Domain (B) captures the diversity of CSA configurations through *differentiation characteristics*. These characteristics can vary from one CSA to another. More specifically, domain (B) comprises two sub-domains. The individual configuration of CSAs depends upon the respective organizational governance as the CSA model can change the way organizations are governed. Domain (B1) proposes three *CSA governance types* as a *predominant characteristic* to differentiate CSAs, and domain (B1) is intertwined with domain (A) since *CSA governance* specifies the how of *community financing* through a particular type of governance. These governance types can be specified by 15 *varying characteristics* (domain B2), enabling an individual CSA configuration within these characteristics depending on the governance type. In response to RQ4, the empirical testing of the CSA Framework within the German context confirms its practical relevance, making explicit the often-implicit diversity that exists even within commonly cited examples of food sovereignty practice. The second study's transdisciplinary and empirical grounding in Germany

provides context-specific empirical insights into CSA configurations while simultaneously holding broader international relevance. Although the empirical data were collected in a German context, the underlying principles of CSA organization and governance types identified in this research resonate with international CSA experiences and debates. Thus, the empirically tested CSA Framework not only confirms internal variations within a national case but also serves as a reference point for future global CSA research (Parot et al. 2024b)⁵⁷. This dual relevance underscores the framework's broader applicability beyond the original context.

Importantly, both frameworks reject simplistic binary views, understandings, and classifications of economic actors as exclusively 'alternative' or 'conventional'. Instead, findings from both studies affirm the prevalence of mixed forms. Depending on the individual configuration, an EAFS can combine organizational structures that explicitly integrate conventional economic logics, such as market participation and revenue generation, with alternative-framed approaches such as solidarity-based practices, community ownership, collective governance, and shared economic risk. This nuanced perspective encourages a context-sensitive understanding of economic actors in food sovereignty discourses, advocating for attention to specific organizational configurations rather than generalized categories. It thereby makes economic actors and their differentiation visible and validates the analytical value of organizational perspectives as lens (see Chapters 1.2.5 and 1.3.1).

A comparative view, enabled by the parallel development of these frameworks, offers added value. The findings show that both the literature-based EAFS Framework (Paper 1) and the transdisciplinary developed CSA Framework (Paper 2), reveal the critical interplay between external contextual factors (e.g., cultural norms, historical backgrounds, political environments, economic conditions) and internal organizational governance in shaping EAFS. This synergy between broad conceptual insights from the EAFS Framework and context-specific empirical insights from the CSA Framework enables a deeper understanding of how organizational structures mediate both organizational- and economic-related diversity. In line with the assumptions in Chapter 1.3.1, the findings address the previous lack of organizational attention, establish a differentiated language for naming and comparing economic actors across the agri-food supply chain, substantiate food sovereignty as an organizational phenomenon, demonstrate the analytical value of organizational perspectives, and empirically confirm CSA as a frequently cited yet internally diverse example.

In summary, this dissertation advances conceptual-theoretical understandings by substantiating the working assumption (see Chapter 1.3.1) that food sovereignty must be

⁵⁷ For example, in their presentation at the 17th Scientific Conference on Organic Agriculture in 2024 at Justus-Liebig University Giessen, Parot et al. cited the then under-review paper Middendorf and Rommel (2024). Jocelyn Parot is both a researcher at the University of Giessen and also General Secretary of the international CSA movement association URGENCI. In the context of my research on CSA with Marius Rommel, we were in contact. He already had access to our paper (which was under review then). A detailed peer-reviewed publication about a worldwide CSA census is currently under review (and is available to me in its current state). Thus, CSA typology developed in Paper 2 is used there as a starting point. See also discussion Chapters 4.3.3 and 4.5.

recognized explicitly as an organizational phenomenon, encompassing a variety of 'mixed' configurations (see above). The broader conceptual lens offered by the EAFS Framework, combined with the precise, empirically tested insights of the CSA Framework, demonstrates that striving for food sovereignty is contingent upon specific configurations of EAFS, in addition to external contextual factors. Ultimately, the integration and mutual enhancement of these frameworks provide a foundation for further studies, application, and theoretical refinement of food sovereignty in general, and EAFS in particular, as a dynamic organizational phenomenon across the entire agri-food supply chain (see Chapter 4.2 for the Synthesized EAFS Framework, Chapter 4.3 for the ensuing implications, and Chapter 4.5 for further research).

To conclude this section, the integration and mutual enhancement of both frameworks into a new, synthesized one will be discussed in the next chapter. Building on this synthesis, the next section explicitly aligns the Synthesized EAFS Framework with the food sovereignty pillars to assess its normative alignment.

4.2 Synthesized EAFS Framework

Building on the synthesis of main findings (Chapter 4.1), in this section I develop, introduce, and propose a Synthesized EAFS Framework. The term 'synthesized' indicates that the framework is based on the foundational EAFS Framework developed in Paper 1, and refined by integrating empirical insights from the CSA Framework elaborated in Paper 2. As the CSA Framework represents a specific expression of EAFS, it provides specific, empirically grounded insights. Particularly, elements such as the detailed typology of organizational governance, distinguishing producer-led (type 1), consumer-led (type 2), and integrated (type 3) governance types, offer nuanced lenses through which organizational diversity can be more precisely conceptualized. The Synthesized EAFS Framework presented here is not merely an extension of the original EAFS Framework; rather, it represents a coherent integration of both conceptual and empirical perspectives. This synthesis provides a conceptual language to address the diverse economic and organizational logics of EAFS and articulates explicitly how these logics manifest through distinct configurations.

By retaining 'EAFS' in the new framework title, I maintain a clear connection to the central research focus of this dissertation, while simultaneously acknowledging the enriched perspective derived from the CSA case. However, using the term 'EAFS' could lead readers to assume a narrower applicability limited exclusively to food sovereignty contexts. In fact, the insights generated by the Synthesized EAFS Framework may also be applicable to broader alternative food initiatives and concepts beyond food sovereignty alone (for further discussions on this broader applicability, see conceptual reflections, overall contributions, and implications of the dissertation in the context of alternative food concepts-related aspects in Chapter 4.3.2).

4.2.1 Development of a Synthesized EAFS Framework

To develop the synthesized framework clearly and coherently, I first align and harmonize the terminologies employed in the two foundational frameworks. While the original EAFS Framework (Paper 1) uses thematic analysis method terminology, referring to themes and sub-themes, the CSA Framework (Paper 2) uses the terminology of domains and differentiation characteristics. For clarity and consistency, the Synthesized EAFS Framework adopts the terms ‘domains’ for overarching distinctions, ‘characteristics’ for further differentiation, and ‘options’ for specifying how characteristics are expressed in individual EAFS configurations. This choice harmonizes the terminology across the two foundational frameworks and retains the wording established in the CSA Framework. In this way, the wording remains consistent across the dissertation and applicable to both research and practice. An overview of the terminologies across the frameworks is illustrated in Table 13.

Table 13: Comparison of terminologies across the different frameworks

EAFS Framework (Paper 1)	CSA Framework (Paper 2)	Synthesized EAFS Framework
Themes	Domains	Domains (for overarching distinctions)
Sub-themes	Differentiation characteristics (including varying characteristics)	Characteristics (for further differentiation)
Identified patterns in the literature	Additional options to specify individual CSA configurations	Options (for specifying how characteristics are expressed in individual EAFS configurations)

In what follows, I synthesize the CSA Framework with its specific domains and characteristics into the broader EAFS Framework, thus extending, refining, and specifying it into a synthesized framework for characterizing the diversity of EAFS.

The Synthesized EAFS Framework distinguishes three domains: Conditions that shape EAFS, which affect Organizational-related characteristics and Economic-related characteristics. Beyond these domains, Size is defined as a cross-cutting structural factor, shaping both organizational and economic characteristics. Each domain comprises multiple characteristics (12 in total), which can be further differentiated through related options that denote the specific ways in which characteristics are expressed in individual EAFS configurations. Table 14 consolidates the Synthesized EAFS Framework.

Table 14: Synthesized EAFS Framework

Domain: *Conditions that shape EAFS*

Characteristics:	Options (ways characteristics can be expressed)
Motives	Positioning toward the dominant agri-food system (e.g., neoliberal, capitalist structures and approaches) with explicit and/or implicit food sovereignty concept linkages. If explicit: context dependent interpretations (i.e., geographical, historical); Explicit, speak the food sovereignty language, often referencing the term “food sovereignty”, Nyéléni Declaration with pillars and principles, or engaging in movements that referring to food sovereignty
Transformative approach	Spectrum from (long-term) progressive (e.g., focus on practical alternatives, reforms) to (short-term) radical shift (destroying the current capitalist economic system)
Intersectionality	Spectrum from inclusive (e.g., anti-discrimination strategies, mechanisms such as subsidized memberships (cost-offset CSA), monitoring systems) to exclusive (e.g., models that cater primarily to urban, middle-class participants; right-wing co-optation)

Domain: *Organizational-related characteristics*

Characteristics:	Options (ways characteristics can be expressed)
Organizational governance types	Types: Producer-led (Type 1), Consumer-led (Type 2), Integrated (all-in-one) (Type 3), by asking by whom the EAFS is governed, (self-)organized, and (self-)managed; includes how decision-making (processes) and thus the distribution of power between involved actors (e.g., managers, shareholders, employees, volunteers etc.) is attributed
Founding impulse and establishing paths	Spectrum from founded by producers, consumers, third-party initiators (e.g., government, restaurant) or a mix of different actors
Ownership / Property and legal forms	Spectrum from private (e.g., single person, family), via mixed (hybrid) forms, to community ownership/property forms (regarding land, resources in general, seeds, patents, data, organizations etc.); ownership and control differentiation; creation of new ownership forms
Work / Labor	Spectrum of multiple roles and forms: e.g., (in-)visible work like (un-)paid and/or voluntary labor; full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees; social and care work; own/internal and external working conditions; income, wages, and adequate pensions; unionization
Participation	Spectrum of (e.g., none or from low, to moderate, to high) involvement of workers and (if available) members (and other stakeholders)
Non-economic partnerships and cooperation	Knowledge sharing and education with a spectrum from formal or informal (e.g., via training, education, awareness-raising, leadership workshops, empowerment; place-based, traditional, and indigenous knowledge)

Domain: *Economic-related characteristics*

Characteristics:	Options (ways characteristics can be expressed)
Production practices and services	Spectrum from self-production to external production, with a variety of goods and/or services. Practices include agroecology, peasant agriculture, gardening, agroforestry, organic farming, fishing, hunting, gathering, and pastoralism. May also offering varieties of services to others, and food infrastructure including the flows of goods, services, and/or equipment (e.g., purchase, transport/logistics, processing, storage cooling of raw materials and food)
Scope of supply chains	Spectrum of (forward and backward) linkages across various sectors (e.g., production, food infrastructure, trade, processing, distribution, out-of-home consumption) with supply chain activities based on scale (e.g., local-regional, national, global) with a spectrum from short supply chains with minimal intermediaries (e.g., through activities of SFSCs (e.g, direct trade, farmers’ markets, food hubs, AFNs and CSAs)) to globalized supply chains (e.g., producing cash crops for export) as well as ‘closed’ supply chains (e.g., distinct black agri-food supply chains), with various distribution channels and distribution areas
Economic partnerships and cooperation	Spectrum from partnership with multiple farms, via networks (e.g., markets, direct purchasing groups based on solidarity, cooperation), and the co- and redesign of agri-food systems with consumers as co-producers (e.g., CSA models, forms of AFNs), via alliances between different actors (e.g., producers, processors, food infrastructure actors, consumers), vertical enterprises for self-empowerment (e.g., black farmers), to unconventional alliances (e.g., with industrial farmers or supermarkets), as well as approaches which includes form of risk sharing between the involved partners

Cross-cutting structural factor

Factor	Explanation
Size	Spectrum from small, via medium-scale, to large (measurable factors such as land area, number of employees, revenue, partner organizations, members, aspects of (organizational) up-scaling and growth over time etc.)

The framework unifies the broad conceptual insights from the EAFS Framework with the empirically grounded CSA Framework. In so doing, it operationalizes organizational perspectives introduced in the conceptual background (see Chapter 1.2.5) and directly addresses the overarching aims and assumptions set out in Chapter 1.3. As a result, the framework provides comprehensive conceptual language and a tool that enables researchers and practitioners to characterize and distinguish individual EAFS at the organizational level, while remaining sensitive to context (see Chapter 1.2.3). Specifically, insights from the CSA Framework, most notably the organizational governance typology (producer-led, consumer-led, integrated), are integrated into the domain *Organizational-related characteristics*, thereby increasing the specificity, comparability, and practical relevance of the Synthesized EAFS Framework.

The three domains of the framework should be read in relation to one another, with *Size* defined as a cross-cutting structural factor. The domain *Conditions that shape EAFS* influences

how organizational-related and economic-related characteristics are configured. In line with Paper 1, conditions such as *Motives*, *Transformative approach* and *Intersectionality* can affect which characteristics are emphasized and how they are combined. Conditions influence configurations, but this is context dependent and varies across cases (see Chapter 4.5).

Domain *Conditions that shape EAFS* captures context-dependent drivers that influence how EAFS emerge and operate. They include motives (whether actors explicitly reference food sovereignty or implicitly align with its principles), context-dependent interpretations shaped by geographical and historical factors. Additionally, this domain addresses the transformative approach of the actors, spanning from progressive or incremental efforts, focusing on practical alternatives, to radical or disruptive shifts aimed at fundamentally restructuring or even dismantling existing agri-food systems. Intersectionality further specifies whether and how organizations explicitly engage marginalized groups through inclusive practices, or conversely, implicitly or explicitly exclude certain social groups. Taken together, these elements link the discourse-level foundations (Chapter 1.2.1) and the actor focus (Chapter 1.2.3) with organizational perspectives (Chapter 1.2.5), clarifying why similar organizational options may carry different meanings and implications across places.

Domain *Organizational-related characteristics* delves into internal organizational structures, which include governance types adopted from the CSA Framework (producer-led, consumer-led, or integrated), founding impulses and pathways (who initiates these organizations and how), ownership/property forms (ranging from private or mixed (hybrid) models to community-controlled ownership), labor practices (considering paid/unpaid labor, visibility of social and care work, conditions of employment, and unionization), and levels of participation of workers, members, or other involved stakeholders. In addition, this domain includes the characteristic non-economic partnerships and cooperation, notably knowledge-sharing and capacity-building partnerships. Here, the framework particularly emphasizes educational mechanisms and traditional, indigenous, and locally embedded forms of knowledge transfer, recognizing these as crucial elements for sustaining organizational stability and fostering transformative impact (see Table 14). Furthermore, the integrated CSA governance typology notably sharpens the framework's ability to consider how specific governance approaches influence, for example, decision-making and power relations (i.e., who controls the EAFS) within EAFS (see Chapter 1.2.5).

Domain *Economic-related characteristics* addresses operational aspects. It includes the diversity of production practices and services (e.g., agroecological methods, pastoralism, hunting/gathering), supply chain configurations (from short supply chains with minimal intermediaries to more globalized or specialized networks, including "closed" supply chains), and economic partnerships and cooperation. The domain recognizes the broad diversity in economic operations among EAFS, ranging from local informal networks, formalized cooperatives, multi-farm collaborations, and solidarity-based arrangements (e.g., risk sharing

approaches, see CSA Framework), to unconventional alliances involving various actors, including conventional market participants.

In addition to these three domains, *Size* (e.g., land area, revenue, number of employees, members, etc.) is defined as a cross-cutting structural factor that can influence both organizational-related and economic-related characteristics (see Table 14).

While each domain and its related options facilitate systematic differentiation among EAFS, potential overlaps and intersections between domains and characteristics remain. For example, *Size* (Cross-cutting structural factor) may significantly intersect with organizational governance types and structures (Domain *Organizational-related characteristics*), as well as economic operations such as supply chain length and complexity (Domain *Economic-related characteristics*). These overlaps suggest a need for careful application of the framework's terminology across studies to maintain conceptual clarity and operational rigor.

By synthesizing conceptual (Paper 1 and Paper 2) and empirical (Paper 2) insights, the Synthesized EAFS Framework makes the visibility, naming, and differentiation of EAFS more systematic (Chapter 1.3.1), thereby broadening and deepening food sovereignty scholarship beyond system-level generalizations (Chapters 1.2.1 and 1.2.5). Building on this, the integrated CSA governance typology can be used to consider how governance choices shape, for instance, decision-making and power relations within EAFS, clarifying, in particular, who holds control within different EAFS configurations.

Crucially, in Chapter 4.2.2 I examine the synthesized domains with regard to the food sovereignty pillars, to assess their normative alignment and to clarify where specific organizational configurations could be supportive of, extend, or potentially strain the pillars' contents. For practitioners, the framework renders specific organizational choices (e.g., governance type) legible in relation to pillar-aligned intentions; for researchers, it provides an actor-centered basis for comparison across cases at the organizational level using shared domains and characteristics.

4.2.2 Synthesized EAFS Framework discussed with food sovereignty pillars

Because of the study focus and space constraints in Paper 1 and Paper 2, an explicit and in-depth engagement with the food sovereignty pillars (also referred to as Nyéléni pillars) at the organizational level of EAFS was beyond the scope of those publications. This section addresses that gap by aligning the Synthesized EAFS Framework with concise quotations from the pillars (see Table 1 in Chapter 1.2.1). As a result of the Nyéléni Forum in 2007, six foundational pillars were established: “(I) Focuses on Food for People; (II) Values Food Providers; (III) Localises Food Systems; (IV) Puts Control Locally; (V) Builds Knowledge and Skills; (VI) Works with Nature” (cited from the last page of the report by the Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2008). Numerous contributions explicitly refer to these pillars (e.g., Binimelis et al. 2014; Schiavoni et al. 2018; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019). Following Schiavoni et al. (2018, 8), I treat the pillars as “designed to translate food sovereignty from a broad vision for [agri-]food system transformation into specific, actionable proposals”.

For clarity, I retain an actor-centered perspective (see Chapter 1.3.2) while interpreting the pillars at the organizational level, treating EAFS as diverse organizations (Chapter 1.2.5).

Building on Table 14, which specifies the three domains and their characteristics (with *Size* as a cross-cutting structural factor), Table 15 (below) aligns these organizational levers with concise quotations from the Nyéléni pillars. This alignment is a heuristic guide comparison. To aid interpretation, the column “Direct Quotations from Nyéléni Pillars (pillar no.)” reproduces short, verbatim phrases from the pillars (UK spelling retained; ellipses shown as “[...]”); “pillar no.” refers to Pillars (I) to (VI). For illustration, the characteristic Organizational governance types lists the quotation “puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues” ((III) Localises Food Systems); in the discussion below, this wording is interpreted at the organizational level as pointing to the governance typology (producer-led, consumer-led, integrated), as specified in Table 14 (above), depending on the individual configuration of EAFS.

Table 15: Alignment of Nyéléni Food Sovereignty Pillars to the Synthesized EAFS Framework (Concise quotations)⁵⁸

Framework domain	Framework characteristic	Direct Quotations from Nyéléni Pillars (pillar no.)
Conditions that shape EAFS	Motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “puts the right to [...] food [...] at the centre of [...] policies” ((I) Focuses on Food for People) - “rejects [...] food is just another commodity” ((I) Focuses on Food for People) - “values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights [...]” ((II) Values Food Providers) - “rejects those policies [...] that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them” ((II) Values Food Providers) - “brings food providers and consumers closer together” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “resists governance structures, agreements and practices that [...] promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade [...]” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “rejects the privatisation of natural resources” ((IV) Puts Control Locally) - “rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g., genetic engineering” ((V) Builds Knowledge and Skills) - “rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions [...]” ((VI) Works with Nature) - “seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us” ((VI) Works with Nature)
	Transformative approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “resists governance structures, agreements and practices [...]” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “rejects the privatisation of natural resources” ((IV) Puts Control Locally) - “rejects technologies that undermine [...] e.g., genetic engineering” ((V) Builds Knowledge and Skills) - “rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions [...] industrialised production methods [...]” ((VI) Works with Nature)
	Intersectionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “[...] for all [...] including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised” ((I) Focuses on Food for People) - “women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples [...] including migrants” ((II) Values Food Providers) - “recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders” ((IV) Puts Control Locally)
Organizational-related characteristics	Organizational governance types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories” ((IV) Puts Control Locally) - “promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories [...]” ((IV) Puts Control Locally)
	Founding impulse and establishing paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers [...]” ((V) Builds Knowledge and Skills) - “developing appropriate research systems [...] and passing on this wisdom to future generations” ((V) Builds Knowledge and Skills)
	Ownership / Property and legal forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers [...]” ((IV) Puts Control Locally) - “rejects the privatisation of natural resources” ((IV) Puts Control Locally) - “use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity” ((IV) Puts Control Locally)

⁵⁸ Direct quotations are reproduced verbatim from the Nyéléni pillars (UK spelling retained; ellipses shown as “[...]”). “Pillar no.” refers to Pillars (I) to (VI). Limited overlap across characteristics reflects pillar texts that combine aims (normative ends) and means (such as activities and practices).

		- “recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders” ((IV) Puts Control Locally)
	Work / Labor	- “values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights [...]” ((II) Values Food Providers) - “rejects those policies [...] that [...] threaten their livelihoods [...]” ((II) Values Food Providers)
	Participation	- “brings food providers and consumers closer together” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making [...]” ((III) Localises Food Systems)
	Non-economic partnerships and cooperation	- “builds on the skills and local knowledge [...]” ((V) Builds Knowledge and Skills) - “passing on this wisdom to future generations” ((V) Builds Knowledge and Skills) - “developing appropriate research systems” ((V) Builds Knowledge and Skills)
Economic-related characteristics	Production practices and services	- “Use and share [resources] in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity” ((IV) Puts Control Locally) - “rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g., genetic engineering” ((V) Builds Knowledge and Skills) - “uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods [...]” ((VI) Works with Nature) - “rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions [...]” ((VI) Works with Nature) - “diverse, low external input agroecological production” ((VI) Works with Nature)
	Scope of supply chains	- “localises food systems” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “brings food providers and consumers closer together” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food [...] tainted with genetically modified organisms” ((III) Localises Food Systems) - “recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders” ((IV) Puts Control Locally)
	Economic partnerships and cooperation	- “promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories [...]” ((IV) Puts Control Locally)
Cross-cutting structural factor	Size	- “small scale family farmers” ((II) Values Food Providers)

As summarized in Table 15, the quotations collectively indicate a people-centered (i.e., actor-centered) orientation (Pillars (I) and (II)), localization and direct relations between food providers and consumers (Pillar (III)), commitments to local control and criticism of privatization (Pillar (IV)), an emphasis on knowledge building and appropriate research (Pillar (V)), and a commitment to working with nature (Pillar (VI)). Read in conjunction with Table 14, this alignment situates EAFS configuration options at the organizational level and provides a shared language for the subsequent discussion. Because several pillar formulations combine aims and means, a limited overlap across characteristics is methodologically appropriate. I interpret the characteristics through organizational perspectives and discuss implications in Chapter 4.3. This organizational level interpretation follows the Synthesized EAFS Framework presented in Chapter 4.2.1.

Motives: When interpreted at the organizational level, the quotations point to a rights-based mission and the recognition of food providers (Pillars (I) and (II)), direct relations to consumers (Pillar (III)), and principled positions concerning privatization, technology choices, and ecological effects (Pillars (IV), (V), and (VI)). Within the Synthesized EAFS Framework, such value commitments shape option choices across Transformative approach and Intersectionality (Table 14) and inform baseline organizational rules, for example criteria for membership, principles guiding the sourcing of inputs and products, and expectations for everyday practice.

Transformative approach: The recurring ‘resists’ and ‘rejects’ language (Pillars (III), (IV), (V), and (VI)) indicates a spectrum from incremental alignment to more structural change. At the organizational level of EAFS, this spectrum is operationalized through governance types and Ownership/Property forms (Table 14), which support different organizational configurations (how EAFS balance feasibility and normative ambition is discussed in Chapter 4.3).

Intersectionality: The emphasis on inclusion (Pillars (I) and (II)) and the recognition that local territories may cross geopolitical borders (Pillar (IV)) imply procedures at the organizational level that account for diverse identities and lived contexts. In the framework, this is operationalized via different forms of participation within EAFS (Table 14), consistent with the actor-centered approach of the dissertation.

Organizational governance types: Centering food providers and consumers in decision-making (Pillar (III)) and anchoring authority locally while enabling interaction across territories (Pillar (IV)), aligns with different governance types (i.e., producer-led, consumer-led, and integrated) as options for expressing characteristics in EAFS (Table 14). These choices condition how responsibilities and accountabilities are distributed.

Founding impulse and establishing paths: References to local skills and appropriate research systems (Pillar (V)) align with producer-, consumer-, or third party-initiated trajectories (Table 14). Such paths shape early capacity building and knowledge ties that support organizational learning and adaptation.

Ownership/Property and legal forms: Local control, use-and-share provisions, and cross-border recognition (Pillar (IV)) align with the ownership/property spectrum of EAFS (Table 14). The choice of legal form influence the conditions of access and the scope of cooperation and thus constitutes a central site of organizational differentiation.

Work/Labor: Valuing the rights and contributions of food providers (Pillar (II)) makes paid/unpaid and voluntary work, social/care work, conditions/wages, and unionization visible as organizational configurations within EAFS (Table 14). These decisions affect internal fairness, staff retention, and the organization's ability to achieve its stated goals.

Participation: Direct relations and co-decision (Pillar (III)) are operationalized via low, moderate, and high participation formats for workers, members, and other stakeholders (Table 14). The format is shaped by governance type and Size of the EAFS.

Non-economic partnerships and cooperation: Knowledge sharing, appropriate research systems, and passing on knowledge across generations (Pillar (V)) align with both formal and informal education as well as capacity-building options. Such ties enable EAFS to exchange know-how (i.e., to support organizational learning) and embed activities in local contexts (see Table 14).

Production practices and services: Use-and-share rules (Pillar (IV)), technology exclusions (Pillar (V)), agroecology and low external input (Pillar (VI)) define an ecological baseline for everyday operation in the EAFS context. Within the framework, this baseline orients choices across the production and service options listed in Table 14 and situates operational diversity in relation to pillar language.

Scope of supply chains: Localization, provider-consumer relations, anti-dumping and consumer protection (Pillar (III)), together with possible cross-border realities (Pillar (IV)), indicate how supply-chain scope is configured. Accordingly, choices about intermediaries, standards, and communication practices interact with governance and Ownership/Property (Table 14).

Economic partnerships and cooperation: Positive interaction between providers across regions and territories (Pillar (IV)) legitimizes multi-farm collaborations, solidarity networks, and other alliances as organizationally salient options (Table 14). Such arrangements can strengthen capacity, mutual support, and learning.

Size (cross-cutting structural factor): The reference to small scale (Pillar (II)) invites consideration of growth across different scales (i.e., small, medium, and large options, see Table 14). As a cross-cutting factor, Size shapes both organizational-related and economic-related characteristics, for example by conditioning participation formats and supply-chain scope. In the EAFS context, Size can also be indicated by land area, number of staff, revenue, number of partner organizations, or members (in the CSA context). This interaction is discussed in Chapter 4.3.

In summary, the alignment shows how the Nyéléni food sovereignty pillars can be interpreted and translated at the organizational level of EAFS (see the quotation of Schiavoni et al. 2018 above at the beginning of this sub-chapter). In doing so, it supports the dissertation's core assumption that food sovereignty is not only a social movement and alternative food concept, but is also a diverse organizational phenomenon (Chapter 1.3.1). It strengthens the stated aims and the actor-centered design of the dissertation (Chapter 1.3.2) by linking the literature-based patterns of EAFS with the governance-differentiated configurations to a coherent organizational language. This selective interpretation makes EAFS configurations analytically visible and surfaces key tensions (e.g., localization versus scaling; technology exclusions versus practical feasibility and accessibility), by translating the Nyéléni pillars into organizational-level configuration language. I develop these implications further in Chapter 4.3, and in Chapter 4.5 I outline how future research could deepen this organizational interpretation of EAFS.

4.3 Conceptual reflections, overall contributions and implications

In this chapter, I revisit the conceptual foundations of my research, synthesize the overall contributions to related debates, and outline the broader implications arising from the findings of this dissertation. Building on the synthesis presented in Chapter 4.1 and the developed Synthesized EAFS Framework in Chapter 4.2, I discuss aspects related to food sovereignty (Chapter 4.3.1), alternative food concepts (Chapter 4.3.2), and organization- and management-related aspects (Chapter 4.3.3). The objective is to demonstrate how incorporating organizational perspectives at the organizational level of EAFS (see Chapter 1.2.5) connects the conceptual background (see Chapter 1.2), the findings (Chapters 2, 3, and 4.2), and the aims and assumptions (Chapter 1.3). Viewed through the lens of the Synthesized EAFS Framework, the analysis strengthens the case for treating food sovereignty as an organizational phenomenon and makes the diversity of EAFS along the agri-food supply chain and their configurations more visible. In summary, this section lays the groundwork for methodological reflections and general limitations (Chapter 4.4) as well as directions for future research (Chapter 4.5).

4.3.1 Food sovereignty-related aspects

4.3.1.1 Conceptual reflections

Food sovereignty has often been characterized as a socio-political movement centered on rights-based discourses, agrarian social mobilizations, and peasant and worker struggles (e.g., Sampson et al. 2021; Bowness and Wittman 2023). As demonstrated by the actor-level alignment in Chapter 4.2.2, neither a differentiated economic actor perspective along the whole agri-food supply chain nor a differentiated organizational perspective of such actors has been prominent in the food sovereignty discourse. By aligning the food sovereignty pillars with the Synthesized EAFS Framework (Chapter 4.2.2), this dissertation operationalizes organizational perspectives of EAFS at the organizational level and makes organizational configurations within food sovereignty more visible. This directly supports the assumptions and aims set out in Chapter 1.3 (e.g., visibility, naming, and differentiation of EAFS; analytical value of organizational perspectives).

The findings indicate that the food sovereignty discourse and the concept, as articulated in the Nyéléni Declaration, must also be understood as an organizational phenomenon. In concrete terms, organizational configurations of EAFS (e.g., governance types, decision-making arrangements, and ownership models etc.) affect whether and how food sovereignty pillars and principles are translated into practice. When read through the Synthesized EAFS Framework (Chapter 4.2.1), the analysis shows substantial areas of alignment with the pillars while also surfacing points of tension that require careful consideration at the organizational level.

The alignment exercise in Chapter 4.2.2 provides an initial lens to assess conceptual clarity, internal coherence, and practical relevance of the framework relative to the pillars. By incorporating organizational perspectives, the framework offers both conceptual and practical guidance for EAFS. It highlights that while EAFS may share broad commitments to justice and

sustainability in agri-food systems, internal organizational structures, such as governance types, ownership models, and forms of labor, are also crucial for determining whether, which, and how food sovereignty pillars and principles can be translated into practice, so that descriptive phrases such as ‘positive for’ or ‘in line with food sovereignty’ are avoided (see Chapter 1.1.).

Nonetheless, tensions and potential contradictions in the food sovereignty concept warrant closer attention. For example, food sovereignty Pillar (III) highlights localized food systems and short supply chains, whereas Pillar (IV) acknowledges that territories and ecosystems often extend beyond geopolitical borders (in some cases as a result of colonialism), implying the need for cross-territorial cooperation. This underscores a balancing requirement between aspirations of local control and the practical need for broader alliance-building among EAFS.

Another tension lies in Pillar (II)’s strong emphasis on small-scale family farms, which can sit uneasily with the concept’s critical stance on private property. For instance, in the United States, over 98 percent of farms are officially categorized as ‘family farms’ (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2025). These are often idealized as a counterpoint to industrial agriculture and seen as aligned with agroecological and food sovereignty aims. Yet it remains difficult to determine when a privately owned family farm is, for example, ‘in line with food sovereignty principles’ (Fairbairn 2012; Mert-Cakal and Miele 2020). Context-specific definitions of farm size and the broad spectrum of “peasants” complicate a clear alignment (see Chapter 2.5.2). Recent scholarship (e.g., Leslie et al. 2024) further suggests that family farm institutionalization may intertwine with the U.S context’s settler-colonial property regimes and heteropatriarchal inheritance structures, potentially limiting access for marginalized groups (see Synthesized EAFS Framework characteristic Founding impulse and establishing paths in Chapter 4.2.1; see also the discussion of family farms in the CSA context in Chapter 3.4.1).

Against this backdrop, the synthesized framework’s governance typology and ownership spectrum (Chapter 4.2.1) help distinguish family-led from community-led approaches, and they provide organizational pathways that can support more equitable access. This dual role complicates their alignment with the food sovereignty concept and highlights the need to distinguish, for instance, family-led from community-led approaches (see typology of organizational governance), as well as to explore alternative models that support more equitable transitions in land and resource access. Therefore, this dissertation facilitates balancing the analysis of sometimes conflicting food sovereignty goals regarding economic-related activities, organizational-related characteristics, and their interaction.

By emphasizing the diversity and fluidity of organizational forms and economic activities of EAFS, especially with regard to the history of the movement and the concept’s origins in the Global South, this dissertation challenges the binary depiction of this group of actors as purely ‘alternative’ or ‘conventional’. In practice, many EAFS blend market-based strategies (e.g., revenue models, cost management) with solidarity-based elements (e.g., community ownership, participatory decision-making, or risk sharing approaches, for example

community financing of CSAs and related models). A more differentiated approach, as presented in this dissertation, which considers economic-related aspects and organizational-related aspects together, reveals oversimplifications about agri-food initiatives as mere ‘actors engaged in economic activities’, which are often described in a generalized negative way or as opponents. For example, Paper 2 shows that while CSA is broadly defined by community financing, not every CSA is automatically also an ‘alternative organization’ as a whole. A high degree of member participation may align well with Pillars (III) and (IV) (e.g., collective property that opposes privatization of natural resources), but such elements are not uniformly adopted in every CSA, as has been empirically confirmed in this dissertation (see Chapter 3.3.3 on the varying degrees of co-decision, forms of ownership, etc.).

Hence, a more nuanced and self-critical use of terms such as ‘alternative’ and ‘conventional’, with differentiations in relation to economic- and organizational-related characteristics, and their interaction is appropriate. Conversely, a ‘conventional’ or ‘traditional’ framed CSA that is organized and managed in a producer-led way (Type 1) can still engage actively in just and sustainable agri-food transformation, even if it lacks typical ‘alternative’ organizational configuration options (see also Chapter 4.3.2 with relations to the food justice discourse). Although a community-led CSA (Type 3) seems to embody a broader range of food sovereignty pillars, this does not negate the importance or legitimacy of producer-led EAFS (i.e., Type 1, traditional family farm, owner-managed SME, and so on). As the case in Germany illustrated, multiple CSA forms can coexist, respecting differing actor preferences and consumer needs. In other words, not all people must (or can) participate in community-based agri-food initiatives, for example, due to life circumstances or health reasons (see Paper 2 in Chapter 3.4).

Conceptually, this more differentiated view aligns with the call for greater attention to actor-centered analyses in sustainable transition contexts (Fischer and Newig 2016; Avelino and Wittmayer 2016). The empirical findings of Paper 2 reveal a wide spectrum of EAFS configurations, from small, family-led setups and SMEs to larger cooperative structures, illustrating that local control and agency at the organizational level do not follow a universal blueprint but depend on each EAFS’s unique organizational configurations. This supports the view that food sovereignty’s multidimensional nature is expressed through diverse organizational configurations of EAFS and that organizational perspectives can enrich theoretical debates, for example regarding organizational stability and adaptive capacity (see Chapter 4.5). Accordingly, this dissertation underscores the central role of the organizational configurations of EAFS in shaping the capacity for transformation in agri-food systems.

While the Synthesized EAFS Framework aligns with key normative elements of the pillars, translating food sovereignty at the organizational level requires navigating balanced choices across governance models, ownership forms, and Size. The alignment in Chapter 4.2.2 provides the basis for identifying such tensions and for showing how system-level formulations intersect with organizational realities of EAFS, thus highlighting potential inconsistencies

between normative visions and their practical application by those on the ground, “on the frontlines of food sovereignty” (Desmarais 2015, 158). This flexibility can generate conceptual ambiguities that warrant further theoretical refinement (see Chapter 4.5). Moreover, the pillar-based definition (see Chapter 1.2.1) does not in itself address issues of organizational stability and adaptive capacity, which are crucial for long-term viability of EAFS (see Chapter 4.3.3) and are developed further in Chapter 4.5. Further contributions and implications that follow from this differentiated reading are elaborated in Chapter 4.3.2 (alternative food concepts) and Chapter 4.3.3 (organization- and management-related aspects).

4.3.1.2 Overall contributions

Building on these conceptual discussions, this dissertation makes three overarching contributions to the food sovereignty discourse. First, it emphasizes the heterogeneity of EAFS along the entire agri-food supply chain. The conceptualization of and the term ‘EAFS’ do not denote a uniform approach; rather, EAFS draw on distinct mixes of economic and organizational configurations. This dissertation thus challenges oversimplified portrayals of ‘alternative’ versus ‘conventional’, underscoring a spectrum of organizational logics and the existence of mixed forms. In doing so, it extends debates on diverse economies (Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson-Graham 2008; Gibson-Graham et al. 2013; cited in the food sovereignty context by, for example, Blue et al. 2021, see Paper 1) by offering organizational insights into how EAFS are conceptualized and vary in practice. By directing attention to organizational configurations (see Chapter 4.3.3), this dissertation deepens understandings of how the normative food sovereignty pillars are (or are not, depending on the configuration) translated into organizational practice in EAFS.

Second, this dissertation affirms that food sovereignty is not only a social movement or alternative food concept focused on the macro-/system-level but is also deeply shaped by organizational choices at the micro-level (see different levels in Chapter 1.2.1). Organizational governance mechanisms, ownership structures, and labor relations within EAFS may be overlooked when research or advocacy focuses predominantly on state-centered policy reform at the national level, on the ‘opposing party’ (i.e., large, transnational agri-food corporations, agribusinesses), or broad social mobilization.

Third, this dissertation introduces a conceptual lens that places EAFS at the center of food sovereignty analyses. Indeed, these actors are partly organized in movement associations (see the dissertation’s Prologue, footnotes in Chapters 1.2.2 and 2.4.2) and are struggling and striving for food sovereignty. Rather than seeing them merely as vehicles of a larger movement, it positions them as individual organizational actors whose internal practices, constraints, and possibilities need to be actively considered to better understand and strengthen them (see also organizational resilience and adaptive capacity developed further in Chapter 4.3.3.1 and further research in Chapter 4.5).

4.3.1.3 Overall implications

These insights carry notable implications for the food sovereignty discourse, especially in light of the global Nyéléni process. A recent event was the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum held in September 2025 in Sri Lanka, which aimed to catalyze systemic changes toward food sovereignty.⁵⁹ As part of the broader Nyéléni process, which led to the 2025 Forum and continues toward further movement processes, the official communications for the Forum framed systemic transformation as urgent and called for the convergence of diverse social movements, spanning climate justice, anti-racist struggles, labor and feminist groups, and the SSE, to foster transformative alliances at both global and local levels (Nyéléni Global Forum 2025a). This urgency was coupled with an emphasis on alliance-building across parallel movements (e.g., climate justice, degrowth, SSE), an imperative that remains central in the ongoing Nyéléni process and aligns with this dissertation's findings on bridging diverse organizational logics of EAFS.

Nevertheless, one critical question is how the Nyéléni process engages with the diversity of EAFS. While the official 3rd Nyéléni process documents stressed urgent systemic change, they also outlined movement-level pathways to support EAFS' financial sustainability without replicating conventional, market-driven structures, for example through the integration of the SSE movement. The two movements are intertwined, with overlapping actor engagement. From this perspective, systemic transformation in one domain is linked to change in the other: food sovereignty benefits from the integration of SSE principles, just as SSE efforts benefit from being grounded in sustainable and just agri-food systems (Nyéléni Global Forum 2025b). However, to date, food sovereignty debates have often centered on higher-level political claims (e.g., national agrarian policies, international trade frameworks) or movement-level discourses (see historical origins in Chapter 1.2.1).

This dissertation shows that organizational configurations mediate whether food sovereignty pillars are realized by EAFS, which pillars are realized, and how they are realized in practice. A growing line of inquiry explicitly links food sovereignty and the SSE. Against this backdrop, Claeys et al. (2025) advance this discourse by identifying organizational routes that are consistent with SSE orientations. In their studied multi-stakeholder cooperatives (MSCs) (see Chapter 4.3.1.3), statute-based safeguards protect low-power stakeholders and clarify who ultimately decides. Examples include producer vetoes in the general assembly, autonomous producer bodies, and quota-based representation. These choices connect normative food sovereignty claims to actionable cooperative practice and illustrate how mixed configurations can sustain both participation and decision-making capacity (for more details, see also Chapter 4.3.3.1). I argue that integrating organizational perspectives on EAFS, for example into the Nyéléni process, could enrich the food sovereignty discourse. This is timely, as LVC member organizations such as AbL (for Germany) and the international CSA

⁵⁹ For the 1st and 2nd Nyéléni Global Forum, see Chapter 1.2.1.

movement URGENCY were involved in the planning process of the 3rd Global Forum (International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty 2024).

Moreover, while the Forum advocated intersectional collaboration, specific mechanisms to embed organizational perspectives of EAFS (e.g., strategies for organizational stability and adaptive capacity) were not explicitly articulated in the calls and preparatory documents. This gap mirrors a broader tendency in certain food sovereignty debates to prioritize high-level political claims or mass mobilizations, while giving less attention to the nuanced economic and organizational practices that ensure the longevity of local agri-food initiatives engaged in economic activities. On this point, there are similarities between discourses on food sovereignty and degrowth. For instance, Pixová et al. (2024) refer to various initiatives and projects that can be understood as actors at the organizational level that are engaged in economic activities. Examples include “family farms or farm enterprises implementing various approaches to ecologically beneficial agriculture; projects producing goods through solidarity-based business models and initiatives with local, non-industrial food, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA) operations”. However, these actors, consistent with my EAFS conceptualization, are not systematically considered as distinct economic actors with underlying market interactions and embeddedness. As a result, although these initiatives clearly engage in economic activities, their underlying organizational dynamics receive limited or only indirect attention. Based on this, I hypothesize that there is still underused potential to learn from different geographical and historical contexts of EAFS at the organizational level as well as from related concepts and discourses such as degrowth and the SSE.

To conclude this section, integrating analysis of economic actors and organizational perspectives could strengthen the organizational stability and adaptive capacity of EAFS (see further research in Chapter 4.5). This integration could also foster alliances with related discourses that address the tangible challenges these actors face in translating normative visions into practice. In line with the Nyéléni 2025 process, where ‘resilience’ is framed at the societal level, I use the term ‘organizational resilience’ to denote the stability and adaptive capacity of EAFS at the organizational level. At this point, I introduce the term as a working lens; it will be more fully defined in Chapter 4.3.3.1, and subsequently used to sketch related research needs in Chapter 4.5 (see also Brice 2025; Middendorf and Scholl 2025).

4.3.2 Alternative food concepts-related aspects

Building on the preceding chapter’s discussion on food sovereignty-related aspects and EAFS, the following section discusses the findings of this dissertation in relation to two frequently cited and discussed alternative food concepts and their involved actors, food democracy and food justice, even though there are many conceptual overlaps. In line with Chapter 1.2.2, I do not re-define these concepts here; rather, I apply organizational perspectives to the organizational level and point to complementarities and limits.

4.3.2.1 Conceptual reflections

As introduced in Chapter 1.2.2, food democracy critiques corporate control and envisions citizens actively shaping food-related policies and practices (Lang 1999). To avoid repetition, I refer the reader to Chapter 1.2.2 for definitions and scope and focus here on organizational implications. A notable and highly cited example of food democracy actors is the rise of FPCs. These serve as urban or regional platforms for civic engagement and policy coordination, whereby food democracy is often their procedural guiding principle as research has shown (Michel et al. 2022). However, there are overlaps with food sovereignty, as FPCs are also mentioned in the literature as food sovereignty actors (e.g., Gliessman et al. 2019, Moragues-Faus 2016, and Schiavoni 2016 as part of the ILR literature sample in Paper 2). FPCs can be defined as civil society organizations (CSOs) which “aim to bring together citizens and other food system actors to identify food system issues, coordinate and support initiatives, educate on sustainable, healthy and just food systems, and stimulate linkages between civil society (citizens and citizen initiatives) and government to influence food policy making” (Boer et al. 2023). Following this definition, FPCs can be founded and constituted as CSOs by the interaction of different agri-food system actors and organized within different working groups. Some of the actors involved in FPCs are engaged in economic activities, some are not. Mentioned examples are, among others, farmers, food chain actors other than primary producers such as local businesses or retailers, government officials or politicians, NGOs and other CSOs, schools and educational institutes, healthcare and public health actors, labor unions, and consumers (Candel 2022). Against this background, organizational perspectives illustrate that FPCs can include heterogeneous actors, ranging from non-economic advocacy groups to economic actors with specific governance, ownership, and labor configurations.

This heterogeneity matters analytically because organizational configurations shape what food democracy can mean in practice (including who participates, who is excluded, who decides, and how accountability is organized). In this context, Anderson (2023) warns that FPCs efforts risk remaining superficial if they do not address the deeper capitalist market concentrations and ensure genuine inclusion of underrepresented communities and food system actors. Following the more differentiated EAFS perspective of this dissertation shows that actors engaged in economic activities are also frequently named as food democracy actors, for example actors that my champion direct producer–consumer relationships or shorter supply chains. Examples include food cooperatives, buying groups, farm-to-table restaurants, farmers’ markets, urban agriculture, and civic agriculture (see Moragues-Faus 2016, part of the ILR literature sample, and the food democracy literature review of Behringer and Feindt 2023), which overlap with the conceptualized EAFS of this dissertation. Rather than treating these initiatives as a conceptual shorthand, the Synthesized EAFS Framework differentiates them at the organizational level by governance types, participation formats, ownership/property, and work/labor, thereby avoiding generalized claims about their contribution to the food democracy concept without examining organizational configurations.

Although food democracy and food justice have different origins, they have interconnected agendas (see Chapter 1.2.2; Hoinle and Klosterkamp 2023). Food justice focuses explicitly on inequities embedded in the agri-food system, particularly racialized or class-based injustices (see Gottlieb and Joshi 2010 for details). While food justice-oriented actors may adopt alternative supply chains, they typically place greater emphasis on how structural discrimination shapes everyday realities of agri-food system actors. Taylor (2018, 50) argues that food justice and food sovereignty movements are both minority-led movements that “address inequalities in the food system by blending demands for human rights and sovereignty with the quest for social justice”. In contrast, Parot et al. (2024a, 2 and 3) position the CSA movement, and thus CSAs (following Paper 1’s conceptualization of CSAs as EAFS), clearly in the food sovereignty field and argue that the focus lies on “just income for [CSA] farmers”. When interpreted through the CSA governance typology (producer-led, consumer-led, integrated), this focus varies at the organizational level. It follows that there is no single pathway toward justice in CSAs, since different governance, ownership, and participation configurations may realize it in different settings.

Based on the more differentiated perspective on EAFS suggested in this dissertation, the focus on farmers and their income is an abbreviation of the food sovereignty concept (where people are central, including farmers, workers, and consumers; see definition in Chapter 1.2.1), and of CSA as a diverse organizational phenomenon (see the typology with three CSA governance types). At the same time, I argue that the integration of food justice perspectives into the CSA discourse can help “include a more diverse range of members” (Parot et al. 2024a) (2024a, 3). Historically in Germany, the CSA movement prioritized supporting peasant family farms (aligning especially with producer-led Type 1). Like most social movements, the German Network is heterogeneous (see Guerrero Lara et al. 2024 for studying internal heterogeneity within CSA networks). As Paper 2 shows, in Germany, however, this has increasingly shifted. On the one hand, consumers (members) have taken on more organizational governance roles (e.g., through the development and spread of CSA Types 2 and 3; see diversity of CSA in Germany in Chapter 3.3.5). On the other hand, bidding rounds developed in Germany (see *Share payment options* in Chapter 3.3.3) have been used as one way to address low-income members. These bidding rounds are also mentioned by Parot et al. (2024a) as actions that support a shift from food sovereignty to food justice. Nevertheless, as mentioned in Paper 2, further research should examine to what extent CSAs using bidding rounds improve inclusion for social groups. Other approaches to improve access for low-income members include subsidized or so-called cost-offset CSA shares (see Sitaker et al. 2020 and Jilcott Pitts et al. 2022 for studying the potential of cost-offset CSA to improve access to healthy foods among low-income households in the U.S. context). More broadly, “differences in consumers’ characteristics, preferences, and attitudes” (Pisarn et al. 2020, 15) should inform the perspective of CSA organizers and managers to include broader social groups (see Chapter 3.4.2 on matching members with a suitable CSA configuration). Overall, this supports the dissertation’s

actor-centered claim: organizational configurations, rather than concept labels, condition inclusion and access.

The earlier mentioned greater emphasis of (only) food justice-oriented actors on how structural discrimination shapes everyday realities of food system actors is nuanced in this dissertation by the fact that the Synthesized EAFS Framework integrates various elements which are central in the food justice concept, for instance, through the characteristic *Intersectionality*. This characteristic suggests that the food sovereignty discourse has evolved in recent years and has taken up criticism raised in response (Clendenning et al. 2016). For example, Portman (2018) argues in her study on food sovereignty and gender justice (which is part of the ILR literature sample in Paper 1 and thus the EAFS Framework development) that food sovereignty “is explicitly concerned with enabling the conceptualization and enactment of justice and sustainability”. Another example is Taylor’s (2018, 50) study on Black farmers in the USA (also part of the ILR literature sample in Paper 1) which used both alternative food concepts largely synonymously: “Food justice and food sovereignty discourses combine interest in sustainability and consumption of healthy foods with concerns about social justice, equitable access to healthy foods, and control over the production of said food”. What both concepts have in common is according to Clendenning et al. (2016), that many agri-food system actors do not explicitly use the vocabulary (i.e., the concept names and terms), although the motives behind their activities are similar across the movements and concepts. This aspect is covered by the *Motives* characteristic in the Synthesized EAFS Framework. Other scholars, like Borrás et al. (2015), assign ‘food justice activists’ as one of several groups of food sovereignty actors, which also illustrates overlaps between the concepts. In short, organizational perspectives clarify where EAFS practices converge with, or diverge from, justice-oriented aims without re-drawing conceptual boundaries. The contribution here is an application of the Synthesized EAFS Framework (see Chapter 4.2) to the actor spaces outlined in Chapter 1.2.2, thereby providing organizational level differentiation without duplicating earlier concept definitions. One potential implication relates to matching. By making organizational configurations visible, the framework can support, for example, consumers (in CSA context members) and founders of EAFS in identifying configurations that fit their needs and capacities. Simple tools such as a short questionnaire can improve the matching in regions with, for instance, several CSAs and may indirectly stimulate new founding processes where demand remains unmet (see Chapter 3.4).

4.3.2.2 Overall contributions

First, taking organizational perspectives prevents generalized attributions of ‘democratic’ or ‘just’ to initiatives solely because they are associated with food democracy or food justice. The Synthesized EAFS Framework differentiates at the organizational level (e.g., by governance type, participation formats, ownership/property, work/labor, and supply-chain scope), so that claims about inclusion and accountability are anchored in organizational configurations rather than in concept labels.

Second, inclusion and access are conditioned by configuration. In other words, whether and how an initiative advances justice-oriented aims depends on specific organizational configurations, not merely on the umbrella concept with which it is associated. The developed framework helps identify where a given configuration facilitates or constrains inclusion and accountability (e.g., who participates, who decides, and how responsibilities and benefits are distributed).

Third, the contribution here is a first application of the Synthesized EAFS Framework (Chapter 4.2) to the actor spaces outlined in Chapter 1.2.2. This provides organizational level differentiation without duplicating the earlier concept definitions, while preserving the actor-centered focus of the dissertation. Hence, the food democracy discourse can benefit from integrating an economic-actor lens as well as organizational perspectives, on the one hand for a general understanding of their function, and on the other hand to reflect the diversity of economic actors within FPCs, both along the entire agri-food supply chain and across ‘conventional’ as well as ‘alternative’ configurations.

Fourth, the CSA case underlines that not all CSAs automatically address injustices if their configuration remains exclusionary. This confirms the need to analyze how actors support or undermine justice ambitions based on their individual configuration (see Chapter 3.3.3). In the CSA model, the defining characteristic is community financing (see Chapter 3), embedded in existing socio-economic systems, and accompanied by tensions between solidarity principles and financial viability.

Across all three alternative food concepts, there is a rejection of corporate-led industrial models that exacerbate inequality and ecological harm. While all three concepts broadly strive for more just and sustainable agri-food systems, each lens emphasizes various actors, power relations, and pathways of transformation. Food democracy highlights citizens (i.e., consumers), often via local governance bodies like FPCs, yet risks superficial engagement if capitalist structures remain unaddressed. Against this backdrop, the findings of the dissertation, and especially the conceptualization of EAFS, should not be assumed to transfer one-to-one into food democracy or food justice settings. Nevertheless, the Synthesized EAFS Framework can shed light, via organizational level differentiation, on the diversity of economic actors striving for food democracy and food justice and on their different options for ways in which characteristics are expressed in individual actor configurations. Building on these contributions, the next subsection formulates corresponding implications for research, practice and policy.

4.3.2.3 Overall implications

While food democracy and food justice may be implicitly present, this dissertation shows that alternative food concept discourses have rarely examined economic actors in detail at the organizational level. Although FPCs have received attention, much less is known about the organizational perspectives of initiatives that identify with these concepts. Bridging them with the Synthesized EAFS Framework (Chapter 4.2) can clarify how (and whether) normative

principles are realized within the economic and organizational constraints of actors engaged with such concepts.

The Synthesized EAFS Framework provides a first, practical step for showing how specific actors configure organizational governance, ownership/property, forms of labor, and decision-making processes in ways that align or do not align with food democracy and food justice aims. For actors such as CSA leaders, agri-food cooperative managers, and small-scale food processing firms, the framework underscores how organizational configurations embed inclusion and accountability. Specifically, actors aiming to be aligned with food democracy or food justice should examine who participates, who decides, how fees, wages, or shares are set, whether leadership is concentrated or distributed, the extent to which workers are represented, how unpaid and voluntary work is recognized or compensated, and how risks and benefits are distributed.

For policy and support systems, the implication is to complement programmatic goals with organizational criteria. Examples include supporting governance and participation formats, community-oriented ownership/property models, and self-assessment against the EAFS domains. FPCs and local food strategies can strengthen their roles by offering organization-focused diagnostics and by enabling diverse configuration pathways rather than prescribing a single model. This orientation also sets up the organizational level perspective on organizational resilience taken in Chapter 4.3.3.1.

Overall, recognizing food democracy and food justice as complementary to and interdependent with food sovereignty affirms that ‘alternative’ food concepts must move beyond high-level critique to consider the organizational constraints and possibilities of the actors involved. By showing how membership rules, property relations, and labor structures shape feasibility, this dissertation contributes to a more differentiated and practice-oriented understanding of how to build more just and democratic agri-food systems. Building on this, Chapter 4.3.3 develops the organization- and management-related aspects further, and Chapter 4.5 outlines directions for future research.

4.3.3 Organization and management-related aspects

While organizational perspectives can enrich the discourse on alternative food concepts and related actors, it is also relevant to discuss the organization- and management-related aspects of this dissertation.

4.3.3.1 Conceptual reflections

First, it is essential to clarify terminology. Parker (2021) distinguishes between ‘management’ as hierarchical, supervisor-led practices rooted in nineteenth-century industrial contexts in Northern Europe, and ‘organization’, a broader concept encompassing a range of collective structures that may explicitly resist conventional managerialism. He warns against the common slippage of equating opposition to managerialism (i.e., being against management) with being against all forms of organization. In anti-business food sovereignty discourse (see Chapters

1.2.3 and 2.1), ‘organization’ appears more fitting than ‘management’, even though both terms risk being conflated with grassroots community organizing (e.g., unions, neighborhood associations; Christens et al. 2021). In line with this distinction, and to maintain terminological clarity, this dissertation uses ‘organization and management’ as an umbrella term to analytically capture the full spectrum of forms, structures, and activities shaping EAFS, thereby bridging research that emphasizes formal governance and research that emphasizes collective, non-hierarchical processes.

Second, organization and management studies have largely framed food sovereignty actors as non-economic entities, either as a social movement concept (Moser et al. 2021), as social movement associations, or network organizations (e.g., Heckelman et al. 2022). Brice’s (2025) research on non-profit FSOs confirms that organizational analysis has so far paid little attention to economic aspects. By contrast, EAFS such as CSAs or agri-food cooperatives deliberately combine economic activities with food sovereignty goals. This dissertation addresses this gap by conceptualizing food sovereignty actors through organizational perspectives and by developing the Synthesized EAFS Framework (Chapter 4.2.1) as a structured lens to make organizational diversity among EAFS visible.

Third, while the notions of organizational stability and adaptive capacity are introduced in Chapter 1.2, this section reframes them under the concept of ‘organizational resilience’ defined here as an organization’s capacity to maintain or regain function under stress, and to adapt or transform (e.g., Pettit et al. 2010; International Standards Office 2017; Beuren et al. 2022; Brice 2025). Building on Farjoun’s (2010) conceptualization of stability and change as a duality rather than a dualism, this discussion frames organizational resilience as a dynamic interplay between continuity of mission, identity, and core functions (‘stability’) and the ability to adjust and re-organize activities (‘adaptive capacity’). In this view, stability and change are analytically distinct but mutually enabling dimensions of organizational resilience. The Synthesized EAFS Framework provides a structured basis for relating organizational diversity to resilience debates without itself constituting a resilience framework. This conceptual framing, together with the Synthesized EAFS Framework, can be further situated within broader resilience debates. At the system-level, resilience is typically defined in terms of robustness, adaptability, and transformability, with sustainability as the overarching target (e.g., Meuwissen et al. 2020; Arndt and Helming 2025).

Recent research on CSAs has mainly emphasized economic and diversification strategies as key resilience mechanisms (e.g., Rosman et al. 2024; Arndt and Helming 2025). However, this body of literature has so far largely neglected how organizational governance, different forms of participation, and internal power relations shape resilience at the organizational level of these EAFS. Paper 1 and Paper 2 demonstrate that intersecting power relations within socio-economic systems influence the strategies, challenges, and adaptive responses of EAFS (Muñoz and Cohen 2017). Although EAFS negotiate both capitalist and non-capitalist approaches, their stability and adaptive capacity depend on each organization’s

unique configuration. As Blesh and Wittman (2015) emphasize, agri-food system resilience is socio-ecological, not merely ecological. For instance, Pillar (VI) Works with Nature highlights agroecological practices that can enhance adaptive capacity (Chapter 1.2.1). Yet much of the resilience research remains focused at the system or environmental level. This overlooks how EAFS develop organizational-level capacities that enable them to maintain function under stress, adjust economic approaches, and integrate stakeholder feedback. Rosman et al. (2024) on CSA in Germany provide empirical evidence for this point: farmers perceive their CSAs as robust, adaptable, and transformable, pointing to mechanisms such as income security, risk protection, market independence, and social exchange. However, these studies remain primarily focused on perceived resilience outcomes and economic effects, rather than unpacking the organizational configurations through which such capacities are built. More importantly, they do not conceptualize CSAs as complex organizations with specific governance, participation, and decision-making configurations. Different types of CSAs, with varying organizational governance, forms of participation, and internal power relations, are not considered in this body of work, further limiting conceptual and empirical understanding of how organizational diversity shapes resilience at the organizational level. In this regard, the Synthesized EAFS Framework adds analytical traction by distinguishing governance types according to who ultimately decides.

Recent evidence from MSCs in the context of food sovereignty and SSE by Claeys et al. (2025) shows that in these organizations, statute-based safeguards can secure final decision rights, for example producer vetoes in the general assembly, autonomous farmers assemblies, or quota-based representation. In conceptual terms, power is inherent in these governance choices because final decision rights determine whose preferences prevail; participation does not by itself guarantee influence (see also Gray et al. 2022). These mechanisms reveal why mixed configurations are common in practice and show how assemblies and vetoes are linked to organizational governance. Against this background, the organizational governance typology helps to interpret the MSC cases analyzed by Claeys et al. (2025) as producer-led (Type 1), due to producer vetoes, or mixed forms, without presuming ideal types, and it clarifies how governance configurations shape participation and decision-making (but without addressing the question of whether food sovereignty is also an organizational phenomenon). The findings of Paper 2 show that organizational domains are crucial in shaping the stability and adaptive capacity of CSAs (as one expression of EAFS). This contrasts not only with perception-based approaches (Rosman et al. 2024), but also with the broader food sovereignty discourse, which typically focus on macro-/system-level transformations of agri-food systems (Chapter 1.2.1) while giving less attention to micro-level organizational dynamics (Chapters 1.2.3 and 1.2.5). Taken together, this third conceptual reflection highlights a research need to further conceptualize and empirically assess organizational resilience in EAFS (see Chapter 4.5).

Fourth, by using the Synthesized EAFS Framework, this dissertation shows how key characteristics (e.g., Founding Impulse and Establishing Paths, Organizational Governance

Types, Ownership/Property, Participation, and Work/Labor) mediate the translation of normative food sovereignty pillars (e.g., Pillar (III) Localized Food Systems; Pillar (IV) Puts Control Locally; Pillar (VI) Works with Nature) into specific organizational practices. For instance, organization scholars Oba and Özsoy (2023d) analyze so-called Alternative Consumer Cooperatives (ACCs) in Turkey, describing them as committed to food sovereignty, but do not specify which pillars they implement or how their governance aligns with those principles.⁶⁰ Even though ACCs align themselves with food sovereignty network associations such as with movement associations like European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), their organizational translation of food sovereignty pillars remains vague, both in self-attribution and in researchers' interpretations. The authors do not specify which pillars are being implemented, how this implementation takes place organizationally, or how these cooperatives interpret the broader goals of food sovereignty. When viewed through the lens of this dissertation's Synthesized EAFS Framework, their analysis reveals distinctions between ACCs and traditional consumer cooperatives in Turkey (Ownership/Property and legal forms). Traditional cooperatives are instigated by the state (Founding impulse and establishing paths), managed with a top-down approach (Organizational Governance types), act as distribution centers to overcome supply shortages and price increases (Production practices and services), and serve only their members (sub-characteristic Motives). In contrast, ACCs are described as experimental spaces for alternative organizing. They employ consensus-based decision-making and practice zero-hierarchy (relates to both characteristics Participation and Organizational governance types) and implement work-sharing mechanisms such as rotation and buddy systems (Work/Labor), reflecting elements of Pillars (III) and (IV) of food sovereignty (see Chapter 4.2.2).

Fifth, as an illustration, and building on Brice's (2025) framing, this discussion specifies organizational resilience in more specific terms. In Chapter 4.3.3.1, this notion is treated as organizational stability and adaptive capacity, while directions for future research are outlined in Chapter 4.5. In this discussion, organizational resilience is used to deepen the organizational perspective rather than to introduce a new analytical assumption. Regarding EAFS, this includes, for instance, market adaptability, financial viability, and the ability to further evolve under conditions of stress. Whereas non-profit FSOs may stabilize operations via volunteers and donor networks, EAFS must additionally buffer supply-chain disruptions and revenue volatility (see also the review by Florez-Jimenez et al. 2025). As shown in Chapter 3, CSAs can use, for instance, sliding-scale member fees and 'bidding rounds' to maintain membership diversity and economic stability when input costs rise or demand fluctuates. In addition, a recent practice-transfer article documents how embedding organizational learning as a movement

⁶⁰ Examples are ACCs "founded by food activists committed to the principles" (Oba and Özsoy 2023b), "[i]n line with the principles" (Oba and Özsoy 2023a), having "a commitment to the premises" (Oba and Özsoy 2023b), „adhering to the values and premises" (Oba and Özsoy 2023c), are "positioned in" (Oba and Özsoy 2023b), or "have positioned themselves as the active advocates of the food sovereignty movement" (Oba and Özsoy 2023b).

practice can support such stability and adaptive capacity in food sovereignty contexts (see Middendorf and Scholl 2025; see also Chapter 4.5).

Sixth, this discussion is mindful of critiques of ‘Western management’ approaches. Following Parker (2021), I distinguish management from organization and do not advocate managerialism; rather, I argue for making organizational configurations visible across contexts. In line with work on diverse economies (Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson-Graham 2008; Gibson-Graham et al. 2013), the perspective taken here resists capital-centric and managerialist defaults and instead treats organizational characteristics as situated configuration options of organizations. To avoid duplication, detailed examples of movement-based learning infrastructures (i.e., support systems) are discussed in Chapter 4.3.3.3. Likewise, research on cooperatives warns against romanticizing ‘alternative’ forms as inherently democratic and highlights the tensions they navigate (e.g., Hartz et al. 2024). In this sense, the organizational perspective adopted here is a call for contextualized visibility and learning, not for uncritically transferring a narrow ‘Western management’ template.

4.3.3.2 Overall contributions

First, the Synthesized EAFS Framework demonstrates that EAFS along the agri-food supply chain, ranging from farms and community-led CSAs to mission-driven food enterprises and agri-food cooperatives, face unique governance dilemmas, internal contradictions, and survival imperatives that extend beyond political narratives or macro-/system-level perspectives. By introducing organizational perspectives and situating organizational resilience (as organizational stability and adaptive capacity, see Chapter 4.3.3.1) as a lens in this discussion (not focus of Papers 1 and 2), this dissertation shifts attention from abstract systemic transformation narratives to the specific conditions under which EAFS operate.

Second, by explicitly aligning food sovereignty’s normative pillars with organizational characteristics, this dissertation bridges the gap between normative ideals and organizational practice. For example, Paper 1 illustrates how certain cooperatives combine traditional production methods with local supply-chain partnerships (Economic partnerships and cooperation) to advance Pillar (III) Localises Food Systems. By contrast, Paper 2 shows that German CSAs relying on a strict producer-led model (Producer-led Governance; Type 1) may struggle to incorporate Pillar (IV)’s call for broader stakeholder participation (see Chapter 4.2.2). Consequently, the framework can operate as a practical diagnostic for how EAFS configurations navigate normative tensions.

Third, this dissertation provides a nuanced examination of food sovereignty as a multifaceted, and at times internally contradictory, concept. Chapters 2.5.2 and 4.2.2 document how food sovereignty pillars can interact in ways that shape, or impede, organizational decision-making and resource allocation. For instance, while Pillar (II) emphasizes small-scale farming ideals, some privately owned family farms in Chapter 3 must balance agroecological commitments with legitimate concerns about financial viability (Ownership/Property and Motives). Such insights reveal that treating food sovereignty as merely rhetorical overlooks real

conflicts that occur when normative values encounter economic realities (see, for example, EAFS embedded in existing systems in Chapters 2.5.2 and 2.5.4).

The brief application of the Synthesized EAFS Framework as shown throughout this discussion enables a more nuanced analysis of organizational configurations and counters the tendency to romanticize cooperatives as alternatives to capitalist enterprises (i.e., democratic or emancipatory). Hartz et al. (2024, 1112) caution against such assumptions, framing cooperatives instead as “a prime example of a paradoxical organization” navigating tensions between democracy and hierarchy. Their typology illustrates the diversity of participatory models within cooperative forms, ranging from grassroots democracy to autocracy (see their typology with four different participation types: project-based, value-oriented, customer-oriented participation, and participation controlled by management). Taken together, these findings strengthen the links between alternative food concept discourses and organization and management studies.

Finally, by reframing EAFS as economic actors embedded in both market and solidarity networks, this work broadens the analytical horizon of organization and management scholarship. Rather than viewing food sovereignty solely as a social movement or alternative food concept, it becomes crucial to examine how EAFS configure their organizations to reconcile normative commitments with pragmatic demands, making the role of the organizational level in realizing food sovereignty explicit and analytically tractable.

4.3.3.3 Overall Implications

First, organization and management scholarship has to move beyond treating food sovereignty as an abstract concept or solely as social movement. Instead, scholars can adopt organizational conceptualizations such as the Synthesized EAFS Framework that help specify how normative commitments (i.e., food sovereignty pillars) translate into governance structures, ownership models, and forms of labor. Organization scholars investigating ACCs or solidarity-based agri-food initiatives can use this groundwork to uncover how EAFS configurations shape their capacity to advance their goals. Moreover, actor-centered transition studies suggest examining power dynamics within EAFS, such as tensions between producer-led hierarchies and community participation, to understand their transformative potential more deeply.

Second, by elevating organizational resilience as a critical yet underexplored aspect in the food sovereignty discourse, this dissertation reframes resilience as a pivotal organizational attribute for EAFS. For practitioners and movement educators, this implies targeted efforts to strengthen internal capacities. Fostering organizational resilience requires recognizing organizational complexity and designing appropriate learning and support systems. The German CSA Network, for example, has developed several tools: a ‘Basic Course’ for new CSA founders; working groups on consulting, cooperatives, and research; a transdisciplinary co-developed practical handbook for starting and shaping CSAs; and a workshop program for resilient organizational development. The adapted ‘Stable School’ model (Antoni-Komar et al. 2021), peer-learning cohorts inspired by so-called ‘Farmer Field Schools’ in Uganda and

adapted in Denmark for animal welfare (Vaarst 2007), create recurring spaces for collective reflection on challenges such as co-production, transparency, and communication. These formats illustrate how organizational learning can build adaptive capacity. A practice-research contribution underscores this point for food sovereignty contexts (Middendorf and Scholl 2025).

Furthermore, this dissertation affirms the need to strengthen organizational learning across the broader system of actors engaged in economic activities, whether grounded in food sovereignty, food democracy, or food justice. If diverse organizational forms are to be sustained and scaled under real-world constraints, they require practical capacities for reflexive adaptation. As Parker (2021) notes, there is still limited evidence on which organizational approaches work best in specific contexts. Therefore, fostering pluralism and mutual learning between economic actors could be a valuable step forward. Embedding organizational knowledge into movement-based educational spaces (as signposted in 4.3.3.1), for example, ‘Agroecology Schools’ that already combine political formation with agroecological practices (McCune and Sanchez 2019; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018; see also Paper 1, Chapter 2), could significantly strengthen EAFS from within. These spaces should integrate modules on democratic governance, collective decision-making, and strategic development of EAFS, aligned with Parker’s (2021) vision of ‘Schools for Organizing’. Integrating these themes could help EAFS navigate internal tensions and external pressures. The food sovereignty movement can also draw on insights from the SSE movement to inform these curricula. In doing so, perspectives beyond dominant ‘Western knowledge paradigms’ can be taken seriously (Peredo et al. 2022).

Third, small and medium-sized EAFS often lack resources to invest in formal governance redesign or training (Braun et al. 2022). Policymakers and funders should therefore design and support programs that explicitly support organizational learning, for instance, grants for peer-learning cohorts. A current example is the “Resilient Organizational Development in CSAs” seminar (FiBL 2025)⁶¹, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, which aims to equip CSA practitioners with knowledge and tools to balance idealistic ambitions with economic stability. Initial feedback from participants from the FiBL seminar⁶² suggested positive effects on practice (as reported in Middendorf and Scholl 2025). Nevertheless, systematic longitudinal evaluation of such education and learning formats, also in other contexts, would be desirable (see also Chapter 4.5). The attention that the German CSA Network has intensified on organizational configurations was already evident in the practical handbook of the Network⁶³, which I was able to contribute to as a researcher. For example, the CSA typology published later under Middendorf and Rommel (2024) (which is Paper 2 in

⁶¹ In German „Resiliente Organisationsentwicklung in Solawis“

⁶² FiBL stands for The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture. In this context, it refers to the German branch, FiBL Germany.

⁶³ For the handbook, see nascent & Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft 2023; see also the updated version: nascent & Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft 2025

Chapter 3 of this dissertation) was included in this handbook, although the differentiation criteria are more extensive in the scientific publication.

To (re-)build and enhance resilience in our agri-food systems, we must first foster resilient organizations. Organizational resilience is not merely an internal concern; it also functions as a collective practice that enables actors to persist, adapt, and shape the struggle for food sovereignty together. In this light, the Synthesized EAFS Framework provides a structured entry point, particularly for researchers and practitioners who are less familiar with organizational perspectives, to analyze and compare how different organizational configurations shape stability and adaptive capacities across contexts. Achieving this requires establishing more spaces where organizations can learn from one another, across movements, practices, and traditions, while engaging with knowledge beyond dominant Western paradigms (Peredo et al. 2022). By embracing organizational perspectives, actors may unlock new potential for mutual learning and strategic transformation within, across, and beyond food sovereignty actors.

4.4 Methodological reflections and general limitations

This section synthesizes the methodological choices of the research design and reflects on implications for coherence and transferability. The two papers complement each other: the ILR (Paper 1) developed the EAFS Framework, while the transdisciplinary mixed-methods study on German CSAs (Paper 2) developed the CSA Framework with a governance typology, which is verified in the German context. Journal conventions require each paper to present methods and delimitations separately (see Chapter 2.5.5 for Paper 1 and Chapter 3.4.4 for Paper 2). Chapters 4.1 and 4.2 therefore offer a structured synthesis and develop the Synthesized EAFS Framework that links the findings at the organizational level. Both articles underwent an intensive peer-review process (three reviewers each). In the process, my co-authors and I observed that the academic discourse surrounding food sovereignty shows little engagement with organizational perspectives in general, and with the explicit conceptualization of economic actors as EAFS at the organizational level, reflecting, for instance, the dominant conceptual level and disciplinary backgrounds.

An organizational perspective is consistently applied across both studies, treating EAFS as organizational actors and making organizational configuration options visible (Chapters 1.2.5 and 1.3). This actor-centered organizational level focus is intended as a complement to macro-/system-level, analyses and policies, not a replacement. Future work should connect organizational insights with agri-food supply chain and policy perspectives to trace multi-scalar interactions (see Chapter 4.5).

The choice to use organizational perspectives as a heuristic lens supports broad inductive synthesis across the heterogeneous body of literature and cases and provides a coherent language for organizational configurations. This approach reflects the interdisciplinary character of the field under study and moves across different areas of food sovereignty research to enable cross-fertilization of ideas and concepts (cf. Alvesson and

Gabriel 2013, referenced in Paper 1 and Paper 2). In this way, the dissertation remains open to diverse insights while providing a structured organizational language that holds together the conceptual and empirical contributions. The ILR proceeded inductively to preserve conceptual scope (Chapter 2.3.1). Although not the focus of the thematic analysis, the literature sample encompassed a wide range of theoretical traditions (see Chapter 2.3.1).

For methodological consistency, these theories were not directly integrated into the inductive coding process, distinguishing the thematic analysis approach used from review methods that take theory into account (see also Chapter 2.3.1 for a distinction from other literature review approaches). Notably, while Brice (2025) demonstrates growing organizational analysis in food sovereignty contexts, the set of cases examined in that study focus predominantly on non-profit FSOs rather than economic actors as conceptualized in this dissertation. This supports the relevance of the present organizational focus and the conceptualization of EAFS for ongoing discourses (see also Chapter 4.3.3; Middendorf and Scholl 2025). The transdisciplinary partnership with the German CSA Network strengthened practical relevance (e.g., survey co-design and framework iteration; Chapter 3.2.2.1) and supported translation into handbooks and training formats, while also requiring attention to potential co-production biases. Embedding the CSA study within the “nascent” CSA research project also entailed scope constraints (e.g., no direct food sovereignty questions due to the extent of the already comprehensive survey to avoid additional respondent burden).

Two cross-cutting limitations warrant emphasis. First, no single organizational theory was adopted as the primary lens. This choice improves applicability across heterogeneous EAFS but limits theory-specific depth. This is consistent with using organizational perspectives heuristically as an operational guide to structuring observation and comparison rather than as a basis for theory testing (see Chapter 1.2.5 and assumptions in Chapter 1.3.1). In short, Paper 1 structures patterns reported in the food sovereignty literature; it does not adjudicate between organizational theories or estimate theory-driven effects. Second, the ILR sampling frame closed in August 2021 (n = 108 publications). Later publications are included in the conceptual background of this dissertation (Chapter 1.2) and are cited in this discussion section, yet were not coded during the ILR, which constrains the completeness of the inductive approach. Generalizability of the findings is further bounded by the empirical focus on German CSAs, even though international literature was used for the CSA Framework development (n = 60 publications).

COVID-19 contingencies shifted planned in-person interactions to digital formats in the context of Paper 2, preserving continuity but introducing selection effects (access, time pressure). This aligns with concerns that pandemic dynamics can exacerbate digital divides (Peredo et al. 2022). The ILR corpus reflects pandemic-era publication dynamics illustrated by van der Ploeg (2020), James et al. (2021), and Levkoe et al. (2021).

Positionality at the practice-research interface (see Prologue of this dissertation) facilitated access and co-design while necessitating transparency about role dualities. This is

addressed through explicit reporting of steps and a separation of findings and normative discussion. The COVID-19 pandemic period also fostered new scholarly collaboration while writing this dissertation (e.g., an interdisciplinary peer-group that resulted in a peer-reviewed publication (Grenzdörffer et al. 2022) and inspired an interdisciplinary research workshop that my co-authors and I organized⁶⁴). This illustrates how crisis conditions can catalyze academic exchange.

Overall, the design emphasizes inductive synthesis rather than theory testing, and leverages co-production while managing biases. These choices affect transferability. They prioritize comparability across heterogeneous EAFS configurations because organizational perspectives enable inductive synthesis and a coherent organizational language (Chapter 2.3.1). They limit theory-testing claims given the absence of a single guiding organizational theory and the heuristic use of organizational perspectives (Chapters 2.1 and 2.5.5). They support practice relevance through co-production via the partnership with the German CSA Network and translation into practice. They also require transparency about potential selection and collaboration effects due to co-production biases, COVID-19-related selection effects, and role dualities, which are made transparent through explicit reporting of methodological steps and researcher positionality.

The following Chapter 4.5 outlines a corresponding research agenda. Further methodological detail (e.g., analytical questions, category lists, and additional tables) is available in the journal-hosted supplementary files of Papers 1 and 2 and is included in the annex of this dissertation.

4.5 Directions for future research

Building on the synthesis (Chapter 4.1), the developed Synthesized EAFS Framework (Chapter 4.2), and conceptual reflections (Chapter 4.3), this section outlines a future research agenda with particular attention to comparative applications and analyses of organizational governance. This agenda is organized around several complementary lines of inquiry that are not exhaustive and may partly overlap. The aim is to extend the actor perspective and the organizational level lens established in this dissertation while staying complementary to macro-/system-level discourses and analyses.

First, further research should examine the *Conditions that shape EAFS* domain of the framework, including the extent and mechanisms by which conditions shape other characteristics of EAFS. While this dissertation treated conditions as a directional influence (see Chapter 4.2.1), its determinative influence may vary across contexts and cases. Investigating these dynamics could clarify the circumstances under which this domain frames EAFS configurations and when it acts as a stronger determinant.

⁶⁴ See report by Middendorf et al. (2023) on the research workshop in cooperation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Collaborative Research Centre TRR 294 "Structural Change of Property" at the University of Jena and University of Erfurt.

Second, future research should apply and compare the Synthesized EAFS Framework as a basis for further inquiry, while remaining attentive to the framework's scope and limitations documented in Chapter 4.4. Future work could deploy the framework beyond the CSA case to other EAFS (e.g., agri-food cooperatives, processing SMEs, food hubs, farmers markets, box schemes). Comparative designs across regions and time would enable systematic examination of patterns identified in this dissertation and help assess transferability (see Chapter 4.4). The added value is a clearer, organizational level differentiation that moves debates from abstract concept labels toward specific organizational configurations and their effects. Importantly, analyses should avoid assuming a uniformly 'alternative' organizational configuration. EAFS may prioritize changes in production (e.g., agroecology) while maintaining conventional ownership or governance (e.g., family farms). Future work should examine such mixed configurations and their implications for alignment with the food sovereignty pillars (see Chapter 4.3.1 and 4.3.2). In addition, the development and testing of matching tools (as mentioned in the CSA context in Paper 2) can be a promising step toward strengthening EAFS in general and CSA in particular, and may support additional EAFS configurations beyond the CSA case. Such tools could strengthen consulting activities, improve accessibility for diverse member groups, and help identify new opportunities for founding EAFS.

Third, further research should investigate participation and power across governance types. The governance typology offers a basis to study how decision rights, accountability, and the distribution of costs and benefits are organized in practice (see Chapter 4.3.2). Further research could examine how organizational governance shapes other characteristics of EAFS. In CSA, governance types were found to influence participation, ownership, and labor. Comparative investigations across these interrelations could clarify the extent to which organizational governance functions as a structuring characteristic beyond the CSA context. This would contribute to understanding not only governance types in isolation but also their role in shaping broader organizational configurations. Future research could trace how power dynamics interact with specific voting rules and safeguards in EAFS to produce durable changes in decision-making. Considering factors such as membership composition, resource dependencies, and institutional expectations may help explain why governance choices work differently in different settings. In addition, future studies could examine labor relations (paid/voluntary work, representation) and outcomes for different groups. The contribution would be evidence on what works, for whom, and under which organizational conditions.

Fourth, future research should specify organizational resilience as set of capabilities and a potential movement practice. This dissertation emphasizes organizational stability and adaptive capacity as central to the long-term viability of EAFS (Chapters 4.3.1 and 4.3.3). Future research should specify which capabilities matter under which conditions, how they relate to governance types, and how they can be connected to existing research, for example to perception-based approaches (i.e., farmer- or member-reported assessments of robustness, adaptive capacity, and transformability; see cited studies in Chapter 4.3.3.1) to resilience in the

context of CSAs. Practice-based experience, such as formats from the German CSA Network and initial participant feedback on the seminar “Resilient Organizational Development in CSAs” (Chapter 4.3.3; Middendorf and Scholl 2025), points to promising directions, but systematic evaluations are needed (e.g., across multiple EAFS and regions). This line of inquiry should avoid one-size-fits-all solutions (Chapter 4.3.3.1). The expected benefit could be practice-oriented guidance on how EAFS can strengthen stability and adaptive capacity without diluting their normative aims.

Fifth, future work should strengthen context sensitivity, knowledge plurality, and transdisciplinary collaboration. Future work should do so by purposefully including Global South settings and Indigenous food sovereignty perspectives, examining how transdisciplinary process conditions influence outcomes, and implementing principles for respectful engagement with Indigenous peoples and local communities (cf. Newing et al. 2024; Tolksdorf et al. 2025). This complements the call in Chapter 4.3.3.1 to take perspectives beyond dominant Western knowledge paradigms seriously and strengthens the practical relevance of organizational perspectives for the food sovereignty movement. The value is a broader and more representative evidence base and ethically sound co-production pathways.

Sixth, future research should analyze support systems for EAFS, including how public policy instruments and social movement- and network-based support systems shape organizational configurations and stability (Chapters 4.3.1.3 and 4.3.2.3). Relevant movement-based formats already discussed in this dissertation include ‘Agroecology Schools’ and ‘Schools for Organizing’, founder training, thematic working groups, a co-developed practical handbook, an organizational resilience seminar, and peer-learning cohorts such as ‘Stable School’ models (see Chapters 2.5.4 and 4.3.3.3). Future research could deploy this focus to assess which instruments (e.g., land access programs, public procurement, SSE-aligned finance, or local policy bodies) most effectively enable inclusive participation formats, community-oriented ownership/property models, and learning architectures. This includes identifying unintended consequences and distributional effects, and clarifying how alliances (e.g., between alternative food concepts, SSE, degrowth) can be designed to support diverse configurations of economic actors over time. Policies and support systems should recognize that production-focused change can be a meaningful step even when organizational configurations remain ‘conventional’ and should enable such pathways without mandating uniform organizational redesigns (cf. Chapter 4.3.1.3). The practical implication is a more design-sensitive policy and support landscape that enables diversity rather than enforcing convergence on a single model.

In sum, these lines of inquiry complement macro-/system-level food sovereignty research by grounding analysis at the organizational level. Taken together, these lines of inquiry would shift the discourse from whether EAFS matter to how specific organizational configurations function, for whom, and under what conditions, and how they contribute to justice, long-term viability, organizational stability and adaptability, while supporting practice-research transfer. In the near term, comparative applications of the Synthesized EAFS

Framework and organizational governance analyses appear most feasible and empirically grounded, while research on conditions, organizational resilience, knowledge plurality, and support systems outline longer-term trajectories for advancing the field.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This dissertation opens up, broadens, and deepens the discourse on food sovereignty and CSA by using an actor-centered organizational perspective as a heuristic lens to render organizational configurations analytically visible. Food sovereignty is articulated in the literature and movement discourse as a social movement and an alternative food concept. Because the functioning and stability of economic actors shape transformations, organizational configurations must be analyzed alongside economic activities. In line with the findings of this dissertation, food sovereignty is also an organizational phenomenon. The dissertation combines an integrative literature review (ILR) that conceptualizes economic actors striving for food sovereignty (EAFS) (Paper 1) with a transdisciplinary mixed-methods study of CSA organizations (Paper 2). These lines of inquiry are synthesized into an integrative, actor-centered organizational language for EAFS. This synthesis enables systematic identification, naming, and comparison of EAFS configurations. These organizational perspectives provide a consistent analytical lens throughout the dissertation.

The Synthesized EAFS Framework (Chapter 4.2.1) is the central contribution of this dissertation. It integrates the literature-based EAFS Framework (Paper 1) with the empirically grounded CSA Framework, developed through a transdisciplinary study (Paper 2). It harmonizes terminology and embeds the governance typology (producer-led, consumer-led, integrated) as a key lever for allocating decision rights. The framework distinguishes EAFS across three domains: *Conditions that shape EAFS*, *Organizational-related characteristics*, and *Economic-related characteristics*, and defines *Size* as a cross-cutting structural factor (e.g., land area, number of employees, number of partner organizations). Comprising 12 characteristics plus *Size*, the Synthesized EAFS Framework moves the discussion beyond abstract descriptions toward differentiated organizational analysis and provides an actor-centered language for consistent visibility, naming, and comparison across cases. Conditions guide configuration choices across these characteristics.

By aligning the Synthesized EAFS Framework with the widely cited six food sovereignty pillars, established at the 1st Global Nyéléni Forum (Chapter 4.2.2; introduced in Chapter 1.2.1), the dissertation provides an initial interpretation at the organizational level. The alignment indicates where specific configurations may support, extend, or challenge aspects of the pillars and grounds the framework in the food sovereignty movement principles. The alignment supports the view that food sovereignty is also an organizational phenomenon and frames EAFS as a configuration space in which mixed forms are prevalent. Accordingly, the findings reject simplistic binaries and, depending on the configuration, EAFS can combine conventional logics (e.g., market participation, revenue generation) with alternative approaches (e.g., solidarity-based practices, community ownership, collective governance, shared economic risk). At the same time, the analysis raises awareness of tensions between aims and

operational constraints, participation and decision rights, and organizational stability and adaptability.

Taken together, this dissertation bridges normative discourse and organizational analysis and makes four contributions: Conceptually, it first makes the diversity of EAFS along the agri-food supply chain visible and shifts debates beyond generalized descriptions. Second, it develops an integrative, actor-centered organizational language and a novel framework that links food sovereignty goals to organizational phenomena and enables application across contexts as well as the analysis of EAFS configurations. Empirically, the dissertation documents organizational heterogeneity among CSAs in Germany, based on a survey of 70 CSAs, and shows how governance types and characteristics are distributed. Methodologically, it offers an analytical lens for comparing EAFS across contexts by making organizational configurations analytically visible. In practice, the Synthesized EAFS Framework offers orientation for context-sensitive configuration for practitioners and movement educators, and supports alliance-building among EAFS and enables the identification of organizational challenges (e.g., unclear decision rights and roles, resource constraints, power asymmetries) that provide a basis for strengthening organizational stability and adaptability. For policy and support systems, it underscores the need to align instruments with actual configuration options and to address organizational challenges where relevant. Overall, organizational configurations are pivotal to agri-food transformations, shifting discussions beyond generalizations and toward differentiated organizational configurations across EAFS characteristics.

As outlined in Chapter 4.4, these conclusions are framed by a defined ILR sampling window, a German CSA focus, and a heuristic alignment to the food sovereignty pillars of the food sovereignty movement. These limitations delimit the scope and motivate extension and assessment. The core contribution is to open up the food sovereignty discourse at the organizational level by rendering organizational configurations of EAFS analytically visible and comparable.

Future research should refine and extend the Synthesized EAFS Framework beyond the CSA illustrations to date, to other EAFS (e.g., food hubs or SMEs in food processing) and across diverse contexts, including those in the Global South. It should examine decision-making, participation, and power within governance types to determine who benefits and who is excluded, and analyze how organizational stability and adaptability relate to governance and ownership/property under operational constraints. Taken together, these directions shift the field beyond asking whether EAFS matter toward understanding how specific configurations function, for whom, and under what conditions. The timeliness of this contribution is reflected in ongoing developments within the food sovereignty movement, including the Nyéléni Global Forum process that engages a broader constellation of actors across and beyond agri-food. It is also evident in practice-research transfer (e.g., Middendorf and Scholl 2025), which translates core findings of this dissertation into contemporary food sovereignty discourse. This underscores the importance and potential benefits of the EAFS conceptualization and actor-

centered organizational perspective for context-sensitive configuration, alliance-building, and organizational stability and adaptability.

Chapter 6 References

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Chapter 7 Annex

Note: These additional materials are identical to the electronic materials hyperlinked in the articles (Paper 1 and Paper 2). They can be downloaded individually as PDF documents via the website of the journal. This material has not officially been peer reviewed.

7.1 Supplementary material (Paper 1)

Overview:

1. Literature sample
2. Main analytical questions of the theoretical thematic analysis
3. Table 16: Diversity of Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS) identified from the literature sample

7.1.1. Literature sample

List of the 108 reviewed publications chosen for thematic analysis during the integrative literature review (in alphabetical order).

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7.1.2. Main analytical questions of the thematic analysis

For the thematic analysis (outlined in Chapter 3.3), we used analytic questions starting from the two overarching research questions (see Chapter 1). These are:

- 1 Which patterns regarding EAFS can be identified in the food sovereignty literature?
- 2 How can the diversity of EAFS be conceptualized?

The aim of the study was to extract the data aligned with the research questions and the Conceptual and theoretical background (organizational perspectives see Chapter 2) for an understanding of how the topic under research (conceptualization of EAFS; term definition, see Chapter 1) has evolved in the food sovereignty literature (literature data sample see Chapter 3.2). Starting from the two overarching research questions, the main analytical questions during the thematic analysis are:

What do the food sovereignty data sample reveal about

- individual organizations (along the agri-food supply chain) which are engaged in economic activity (e.g., CSA),
- individual actors which are engaged in economic activity,
- examples that are covered by the understanding of EAFS,
- existing self-definitions and/or understandings of food sovereignty by the identified individual organizations and individual actors,
- used and cited food sovereignty definitions,
- food sovereignty practices,
- production related patterns (along the agri-food supply chain (e.g., processing, processors, CSA),
- organization(al) related patterns,
- food sovereignty generation,
- food sovereignty frameworks with links to the above questions/aspects,
- food sovereignty indicators with links to the above questions/aspects?

7.1.3. Table 16: Diversity of Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS) identified from the literature sample

Table 16: Diversity of Economic Actors striving for Food Sovereignty (EAFS) identified from the literature sample

The diversity of EAFS was identified from the literature sample. Economic actors are grouped along the agri-food supply chain (grouping and illustration by the authors).

Agri-food supply chain view with various positions, stages, and sectors:	Identified EAFS (selection). This includes both individual organizations engaged in economic activity and their individual actors (organizational members including founders, organizers, workers, volunteers, etc.)	Mentioned in the following references from the literature sample (selection):
Pre-production activities and agricultural inputs sector	Producers, manufactures, agricultural supply stores, agricultural input stores, agro-input stores and service providers for credit, implements, tractors, manure and compost fertilizers, fuel, digital technology.	e.g., Ortega-Cerdà and Rivera-Ferre 2010; Badal et al. 2011; Kerr 2013; Calix de Dios et al. 2014; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Pimbert 2018; Carolan 2018; Pollans 2018; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019; Soper 2020.
	Seed and seedlings production, peasant own-seed production, on-farm seed production, seed storage and treatment, open source licenses for seed development.	e.g., Kerr 2013; Binimelis et al. 2014; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Porcuna-Ferrer et al 2019.
	Providing land by land cooperatives and land trust organizations.	e.g., Wittman et al. 2017.
Primary production sector	Primary production and small-scale producers, especially peasants as key players of a first food sovereignty generation with different types of farming, fishing and livestock keeping.	e.g., Dunford 2015; Borrás et al. 2015; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Soper 2020.
	Peasants, peasant farmers, peasant farms, peasant agriculture, peasant producers, peasant-driven agriculture, poor peasants, rich peasants.	e.g., Figueroa 2015; Pimbert 2018; Calvário et al. 2019; Paddock and Smith 2017; Soper 2020; Gliessman et al. 2019; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Madsen 2021; van der Ploeg 2021; Seminar et al. 2018; Borrás et al. 2015.
	Farms, small farmers, smallholder farmers, local farmers, part-time farmers.	e.g., Ayres and Bosia 2011; Fairbairn 2011; Kerr 2013; Borrás et al. 2015; Blesh and Wittman 2015; Beingassner and Fletcher 2019; Gliessman et al. 2019; Naylor 2019; Blue et al. 2021.
	Family farm, family farms, family farming, family-farmer driven agriculture.	e.g., Fairbairn 2011; Blesh and Wittman 2015; Pimbert 2018; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Gliessman et al. 2019; Sippel and Larder 2019.
	Immigrant farmers.	e.g., Alkon and Mares 2012; Korsunsky 2020.
	Indigenous peasants, indigenous peasant producers, indigenous peasants producer cooperative.	e.g., Soper 2020.
	Black farming, black farmers, black urban farmers, black family farms, black farming communities.	e.g., Alkon and Mares 2011; Figueroa 2015; Taylor 2018.
	Urban farmers, black urban farmers, urban farming, urban agriculture, urban agricultural practitioners; urban agriculture organization, urban agriculture organizations and businesses, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) urban farm, CSA urban farm organization.	e.g., Reardon and Pérez 2010; Kato 2013; Clendenning et al. 2015; Leitgeb et al. 2015; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; McClintock 2018; Powell and Wittman 2018; Taylor

		2018; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2019 ; Sieger et al. 2019.
	Urban gardens, urban gardeners, community gardens, urban community gardens, homegardens, guerilla gardening, community and school gardens and backyard food, food gardening in practices (urban, peri-urban, rural).	e.g., Alkon and Mares 2011; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Borrás et al. 2015; Desmarais and Wittman 2015 ; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018; Naylor 2019; Resler and Hagolani-Albov 2019; Abdoellah et al. 2020; Sippel and Larder 2021.
	Small- to medium, small- to medium-scale, small and medium-sized farms, small- and medium-scale farmers, small-to-medium-sized farms, small-to-medium-size family farms, small and medium-sized producers, small and medium scale abattoirs and processors, small-scale, small-scale peasant agriculture, peasant, family, and collective production.	e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Desmarais and Wittman 2015 ; Roman-Alcalá 2015; Calvário 2017; Powell and Wittman 2018; Pimpert 2018; Taylor 2018; Lubbock 2019; Pye 2019; James et al. 2021.
	Agroecological producers; producers using agroecological production practices, diversified agroecological system, agroecological model, agroecological production models.	e.g., Blesh_Wittman_2015; Vallejo-Rojas et al. 2016; Calvário 2017; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Garcia-Sempere_Garcia_Sempere_et al 2018; Gliessman et al. 2019.
	Organic farming, organic practices, organic products.	e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Di Masso et al. 2014; Gordon 2016; Al Shamsi et al. 2018; Alberio and Moralli 2021; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018.
Other producers	Peasants and farmers various work roles such as preparation of agricultural inputs, food processing, post-harvesting, and distribution.	e.g., Seminar et al. 2018; Pye 2021.
	Food producers, small producers, food and small and marginal producers, marginalized small-scale producers, small-scale producers, domestic producers, local producers, greater producer autonomy, diverse food providers.	e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Larder et al. 2014; Borrás et al. 2015; Dunford 2015; Plahe et al. 2017; Anderson 2018; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Pimbert 2018; Portman 2018; Powell and Wittman 2018; Tramel 2018; Naylor 2019; Ruiz-Almeida and Rivera-Ferre 2019; Blue et al. 2021.
	Food businesses, small-scale food businesses, worker-owned food businesses, organic food businesses, food businesses that implement sustainable sourcing and/or fair remuneration.	e.g., First Nations Development Institute 2014; Pimbert 2018; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Koensler 2020.
	Small food enterprises, local food enterprises. Local food entrepreneurs, cooperative food enterprises, peasants network with small or mid-sized food enterprises to distribute products.	e.g., Alkon and Mares 2012; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Clendenning et al. 2016; Pimbert 2018; Seminar et al. 2018.
Postproduction activities with need for food infrastructure	Food infrastructure, local food infrastructure, aggregation hubs and distribution infrastructure; Connection, flows, and links of goods and services (e.g., purchase, transport, processing, storage, cooling, related equipment) between producing farms and final consumption.	e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Binimelis et al. 2014; Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Campbell and Veteto 2015; Leitgeb et al. 2016; Sonnino et al. 2016; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018; Pollans 2018; Schiavoni et al. 2018; Seminar et al. 2018; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Siegner et al. 2020; van der Ploeg 2020; Keske 2021; Levkoe et al. 2021.
Food processing	Food processors, food processing facilities, food processing, processed food, local food processing, local processing, locally-based food processing facilities, less industrialized food processing chains, seafood processing, local processed food, 'food sovereign' channels of food processing.	e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Kato 2013; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Larder et al. 2014; Borrás et al. 2015; Schiavoni 2016; Pollans 2018; Courtheyn 2018; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Anderson 2018; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018; Paddock and Smith 2018; Pimpert 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019;

		Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Ertor-Akyazi 2020; Maticena and Corvo 2020; Keske 2021; Robinson 2021.
	Small-scale processors, small-scale food processors, small-scale processing, small scale food supply and processing, small food processing laboratories, small regional processors, decentralized processing, re-establish small- and medium-scale abattoirs and processors.	e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Koensler 2020; James et al. 2021.
	Abattoirs, re-establish small- and medium-scale abattoir, culturally appropriate butcher shop, meat processing, slaughterhouses.	e.g., Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018; van der Ploeg 2020; James et al. 2021.
	Mill, businesses milling flour.	e.g., Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018
Distribution	Distribution, food distribution, food distributor, distributor, distributors, local distribution, different modes of distribution, means of distribution, decentralized distribution, 'food sovereign' channels of food distribution, distribution of resources, critique of existing systems of food distribution.	e.g., Kato 2013; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Larder et al. 2014; Borrás et al. 2015; Plahe et al. 2017; Anderson 2018; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Pollans 2018; Courtheyn 2018; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Taylor 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Maticena and Corvo 2020; Blue et al. 2021; Sippel and Larder 2021.
	Farmers' markets, local farmers markets, black farmers' markets.	e.g., Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Alkon and Mares 2012; Fairbairn 2012; Larder et al. 2014; Clendenning et al. 2016; Pollans 2018; Taylor 2018.
	Direct producer–consumer markets and other direct trade links such as food coops, food co-op, community-run co-ops, collective-purchasing groups, purchasing groups, collectively purchasing direct from the farmers, and other organizations of consumers (see also AFNs); bypassing merchants, peddlers and vendors to promote direct producer–consumer markets.	e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Borrás et al. 2015; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Maticena and Corvo 2020.
Retail	Wholesalers, supermarkets, local commerce and supermarkets, family-run stores, small family stores, grocery stores, cooperative-supermarket, cooperatively owned grocery stores, community-led grocery stores, local stores, food store keepers, health food shops and supermarkets, farmers store.	e.g., Alkon and Mares 2012; Lutz and Schachinger 2013; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Borrás et al. 2015; Clendenning et al. 2016; Calvário 2017; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018; Loyer and Knight 2018; Paddock and Smith 2018; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Alberio and Moralli 2021.
Cross-sector forms / interactions	Alternative food networks (AFNs) – see also local food networks, CSA, food hubs etc. In addition, see the conceptualization of civic food networks (CFNs) by Renting et al. (2012).	e.g., Di Masso and Zografos 2015; Moragues-Faus 2016; Moragues-Faus and Marsden 2017; Maticena and Corvo 2020; Blue et al. 2021.
	Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), CSA model, CSA farm, CSA initiatives, CSAs, local CSA farm, local marketing arrangements like CSA, direct producer–consumer markets and other forms of CSA, forms of CSAs, food sovereignty 'from below' by reinforcing the link with consumers through CSA.	e.g., Ayres and Bosia 2011; Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Alkon and Mares 2012; Claeys 2012; Fairbairn 2012; Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Larder et al. 2014; Borrás et al. 2015; Wittman et al. 2017; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2018; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018; Pimbert 2018; Gliessman et al. 2019; Naylor 2019; Stapleton

		2019a; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Maticena and Corvo 2020; Sippel and Larder 2021.
	Short food-supply chains	e.g., Al Shamsi et al. 2018; Maticena and Corvo 2020; Alberio and Moralli 2021.
	Food hub, food hub models, local food hubs, regional food hubs, regional distribution infrastructure such as food hubs, food hub.	e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Figueroa 2015; Laidlaw and Magee 2016; Moragues-Faus and Marsden 2017; Hoey and Sponseller 2018; Levkoe and Blay-Palmer 2018; Pollans 2018; Siegner et al. 2020.
Vertical forms	Active vertical network building by food initiatives, construction of (vertical) cooperatives, vertical enterprises to build their own (black) agri-food supply chains, other (black) supply chain organizations.	e.g., Sonnino et al. 2016; Taylor 2018; van der Ploeg 2020.
	Cooperation, networks, alliances across the supply chain as between producers, processors, and consumers; networks involving farmers, retailers, consumers, and food processors; new alliances that can be developed between producers and consumers in new rural-urban alliances.	e.g., Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Borrás et al. 2015; Figueroa 2015; Moragues-Faus 2016; Dekeyser et al. 2018; Pollans 2018; Garcia-Sempere et al. 2019; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Maticena and Corvo 2020.
Out-of-home consumption	Restaurants, local restaurants, non-fast food restaurants, community-supported restaurant, participating restaurants, restaurant with direct producers/sales, supplying nearby restaurants, intermediate buyers such as small restaurants and catering businesses, canteens, schools, public schools, farm to school movement, farm-to-school programs, farm to school non-profit organization, farm-to-cafeteria.	e.g., Ayres and Bosia 2011; Alkon and Mares 2012; Fairbairn 2012; First Nations Development Institute 2014; Clendenning et al. 2016; Al Shamsi et al. 2018; McClintock and Simpson 2018; Powell and Wittman 2018; Taylor 2018; Stapleton 2019a; Thiemann and Roman-Alcalá 2019; Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; van der Ploeg 2020.

7.2 Supplementary material (Paper 2)

Structure by type of data (in detail):

7.2.1 Duration of project period

7.2.2 Overview of the data material used

7.2.3 Literature sample: List of the 60 CSA publications for Chapter 3.1

7.2.4 Qualitative data (overview)

7.2.5 Literature: CSA governance types developed during knowledge-co-production with related names and descriptions identified in the literature with references (including Table 19)

7.2.6 Literature and qualitative data: Differentiation characteristics identified during the knowledge-co-production through literature research and qualitative data with all used literature (including Table 16)

7.2.7 Quantitative data (overview) (including Table 7)

7.2.1 Duration of project period

October 2020 – December 2023

7.2.2 Overview of the data material used

Table 17: Combination of three different data materials during the two-stage knowledge co-production process

Type of data	Method	Data source	Sample size
Literature	Literature research	Scientific and gray literature	n = 60
Qualitative	Focus groups and Interviews	Researchers, experts, consultants, practitioners	4 focus groups with overall 25 participants; 6 interviews with 5 participants overall; Various feedback loops/discussions with 16 participants overall
	Participant observations	Non-scientific conferences with CSA experts, consultants, practitioners, policymakers, researchers	10 non-scientific conferences
Quantitative	Survey	Member-CSAs and CSA farms of the German CSA Network	n = 70 CSAs with 81 CSA farms

Table 18 is part of the supplementary material of Paper 1 and is identical to Table 9 in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

7.2.3 Literature sample: List of the 60 CSA publications for Chapter 3.1 (in alphabetical order)

- 1.) Adam, Katherine L. (2006): Community Supported Agriculture. In ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service 2006.
- 2.) Bashford, Jade; Cross, Kathleen; Eichinger, Wolfgang; Georgakakis, Andreas; Iserte, Morgane; Kern, Fabian et al. (2013): European Handbook on Community Supported Agriculture. Sharing experiences: Published by Community Supported Agriculture for Europe project.
- 3.) Blättel-Mink, Birgit; Boddenberg, Moritz; Gunkel, Lenard; Schmitz, Sarah; Vaessen, Franziska (2017): Beyond the market-New practices of supply in times of crisis: The example community-supported agriculture. In *Int J Consum Stud* 41 (4), pp. 415–421. DOI: 10.1111/ijcs.12351.
- 4.) Bloemmen, Marjolijn; Bobulescu, Roxana; Le, Nhu Tuyen; Vitari, Claudio (2015): Microeconomic degrowth: The case of Community Supported Agriculture. In *Ecological Economics* 112, pp. 110–115. DOI: 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2015.02.013.
- 5.) Cameron, Jenny; Wright, Sarah (2014): Researching diverse food initiatives: from backyard and community gardens to international markets. In *Local Environment* 19 (1), pp. 1–9. DOI: 10.1080/13549839.2013.835096.
- 6.) Carlson, Laura A.; Bitsch, Vera (2019): Applicability of Transaction Cost Economics to Understanding Organizational Structures in Solidarity-Based Food Systems in Germany. In *Sustainability* 11 (4), p. 1095. DOI: 10.3390/su11041095.
- 7.) Chen, Weiping (2013): Perceived value of a community supported agriculture (CSA) working share. The construct and its dimensions. In *Appetite* 62, pp. 37–49. DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2012.11.014.
- 8.) Chiffolleau, Yuna; Dourian, Tara (2020): Sustainable Food Supply Chains: Is Shortening the Answer? A Literature Review for a Research and Innovation Agenda. In *Sustainability* 12 (23), p. 9831. DOI: 10.3390/su12239831.
- 9.) Cicia, Gianni; Colantuoni, Francesca; Del Teresa, Giudice; Pascucci, Stefano (2011): Community Supported Agriculture in the Urban Fringe: Empirical Evidence for Project Feasibility in the Metropolitan Area of Naples (Italy). 326 - 339 Pages / *International Journal on Food System Dynamics*, Vol 2, No 3 (2011): Special issue on sustainability in the food sector. DOI: 10.18461/ijfsd.v2i3.2310.
- 10.) Cone, Cynthia Abbott; Kakaliouras, Ann (1995): Community Supported Agriculture: Building Moral Community or an Alternative Consumer Choice. In *Culture & Agriculture* 15 (51-52), pp. 28–31. DOI: 10.1525/cuag.1995.15.51-52.28.
- 11.) Cox, Rosie; Holloway, Lewis; Venn, Laura; Dowler, Liz; Hein, Jane Ricketts; Kneafsey, Moya; Tuomainen, Helen (2008): Common ground? Motivations for participation in a community-supported agriculture scheme. In *Local Environment* 13 (3), pp. 203–218. DOI: 10.1080/13549830701669153.
- 12.) CSA Network UK (2022): What is CSA? Available online at <https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/what-is-csa/>, updated on 6/25/2022, checked on 12/14/2022.
- 13.) Diekmann, Marie; Theuvsen, Ludwig (2019): Value structures determining community supported agriculture: insights from Germany. In *Agric Hum Values* 36 (4), pp. 733–746. DOI: 10.1007/s10460-019-09950-1.

- 14.) Dong, Huan; Campbell, Benjamin; Rabinowitz, Adam N. (2019): Factors impacting producer marketing through community supported agriculture. In *PloS one* 14 (7), e0219498. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0219498.
- 15.) Espelt, Ricard (2020): Agroecology prosumption: The role of CSA networks. In *Journal of Rural Studies* 79 (1), pp. 269–275. DOI: 10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.08.032.
- 16.) European CSA Research Group (2016): *Overview of Community Supported Agriculture in Europe*.
- 17.) Feagan, Robert; Henderson, Amanda (2009): Devon Acres CSA: local struggles in a global food system. In *Agric Hum Values* 26 (3), pp. 203–217. DOI: 10.1007/s10460-008-9154-9.
- 18.) Galt, E. Ryan; O’Sullivan, Libby; Beckett, Jessica; Myles, Colleen (2012): Community Supported Agriculture is thriving in the Central Valley. In *California Agriculture* (66), pp. 8–14.
- 19.) Galt, Ryan E.; van Soelen Kim, Julia; Munden-Dixon, Kate; Christensen, Libby O.; Bradley, Katharine (2019): Retaining Members of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in California for Economic Sustainability: What Characteristics Affect Retention Rates? In *Sustainability* 11 (9). DOI: 10.3390/su11092489.
- 20.) Goland, Carol (2002): Community Supported Agriculture, Food Consumption Patterns, and Member Commitment. In *Culture & Agriculture* 24 (1), pp. 14–25. DOI: 10.1525/cag.2002.24.1.14.
- 21.) Groh, Trauger; McFadden, Steven (2000): *Farms of tomorrow revisited. Community supported farms, farm supported communities*. 1. ed. Kimberton, Pa.: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association.
- 22.) Harmon, Alison H. (2014): Community Supported Agriculture: A Conceptual Model of Health Implications. In *Austin Journal of Nutrition and Food Science* 2 (4).
- 23.) Heintz, Veikko (2018): *Betriebsgründung, Rechtsformen und Organisationsstrukturen in der Solidarischen Landwirtschaft*. 2nd ed. Hamm: ABL-Verlag.
- 24.) Hinrichs, C. Clare (2000): Embeddedness and local food systems: notes on two types of direct agricultural market. In *Journal of Rural Studies* 16 (3), pp. 295–303. DOI: 10.1016/S0743-0167(99)00063-7.
- 25.) Hvitsand, Christine (2016): Community supported agriculture (CSA) as a transformational act—distinct values and multiple motivations among farmers and consumers. In *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 40 (4), pp. 333–351. DOI: 10.1080/21683565.2015.1136720.
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7.2.4 Qualitative data (overview)

a) Focus groups and interviews:

Participants: Researchers, experts, consultants, practitioners

Focus groups:

- 1.) January 2020: 5 participants
- 2.) April 2020: 12 participants
- 3.) August 2020: 6 participants
- 4.) September 2020: 2 participants

Interviews:

- 1.) April 2020
- 2.) April 2020
- 3.) June 2020
- 4.) August 2020
- 5.) August 2020
- 6.) December 2020

Feedback loops:

In addition, 16 participants were contacted for feedback, discussions, and queries during the iterative process.

Examples for question dimensions in the qualitative data concerning:

- Examination of the research goal and research questions (RQs).
- Presentation of preliminary results from CSA research as a basis for discussion and feedback.

Questions (selection):

What characterizes CSA?

Which elements are mandatory, and which are optional for the CSA model?

How does the CSA model differ from other economic forms?

- Presentation of a first “CSA Framework” draft (prototype) with characteristics (defining characteristic, differentiation characteristics including first draft (prototype) of CSA governance types)

a) Feedback with respect to characteristics and identification of further characteristics (including aspects that constitute the spectrum of each characteristic).

b) Feedback with respect to the CSA governance types for a specification of the types.

Questions (selection):

From a German perspective, can all existing CSAs (CSA operations) be assigned to the presented CSA governance types?

Please give 3-5 examples of each type of the CSAs that you can relate to.

Are the CSA governance types plausible and beneficial?

Where do confusions?

What problems/challenges do you see regarding these CSA governance types?

Which other classification approaches do you find generally useful?

What suggestions do you have for further developing of the CSA Framework?

b) Participant observations at non-scientific conferences with dates:

Participants: CSA experts, consultants, practitioners, policymakers, researchers

1.) January 2020: One-day conference (in presence) on CSA where research questions and content were presented and discussed.

2.) February 2020: Three-day-conference (in presence) on CSA hosting and participating in several other workshops focusing on aspects such as multi-farm concepts.

3.) February 2020: Two-day-conference (in presence) on CSA hosting a presentation and participant observation of several other workshops.

4.) March 2020: Two-day-conference (online) on enterprises using the community supported approach of the CSA model; in general with participant observation of several workshops.

5.) November 2020: Three-day-conference (online) on CSA with own workshops and participant observation of several other workshops focusing on the understanding of the diversity of CSA.

6.) February 2021: Three-day-conference (online) on CSA with participant observation of several workshops focusing among others on cooperative structures and multi-farm concepts.

7.) September 2021: Two-day-conference (in presence) on CSA with CSA consultants discussing the structures and needs of different CSAs.

8.) November 2021: Three-day-conference (online) on CSA with participant observation of several workshops focusing among others the key principles and characteristics of CSA.

9.) January 2023: One-day-conference (in presence) on CSA and the development of sustainable agri-food systems.

10.) February 2023: Three-day-conference (in presence) on CSA (online) with participant observation of several workshops focusing, among others, on the (further) stability of CSAs.

7.2.5 Literature: CSA governance types developed during knowledge-co-production with related names and descriptions identified in the literature with references

Table 19: CSA governance types developed during knowledge-co-production process with related names and descriptions identified from the literature with references

CSA governance types	Related names and descriptions identified in the literature	Related literature references
Producer-led CSA (Type 1)	Farmer-based, farmers-driven, Farmer managed, producer-driven, producer-led, farmers-led CSA initiative. CSA farms in which the farmer makes all the decisions. Producer-driven farms initiated by the farmers. Traditional CSA model; traditional single farm model CSA; A one-farm CSA as traditional, normal farm business; traditional single farm model CSA; traditional CSA model with a farmer and a group of committed consumers which create a local food supply network. Family farms essentially family managed. Standard model. Single contract CSA. A farm and a group of members.	European CSA Research Group (2016); Wilkinson (2001). Sanneh et al. (2001). Hvitsand (2016). Woods et al. (2017); Pisarn et al. (2020); Bashford et al. (2013); Diekmann and Theuvsen (2019); Sitaker et al. (2020).
	Subscription CSA (farmer-driven); Subscription CSAs, initiated by the farmer who maintains ownership of the operation. Agricultural enterprises owned by farmers.	Cicia et al. (2011). McGuirt et al. (2018). Rüter (2015); Heintz (2018). European CSA Research Group (2016). Adam (2006); Harmon (2014); Espelt (2020).
	Farmer-driven and producer run CSA organized by the farmer of an already existing farm that is owned by the producer.	European CSA Research Group (2016). Bashford et al. (2013).
Consumer-led CSA (Type 2)	Consumer-driven initiatives.	European CSA Research Group (2016); Chiffolleau and Dourian (2020).
	Consumer-driven farm; consumer-driven initiative; shareholder CSA which is consumer-driven.	Hvitsand (2016); European CSA Research Group (2016); Adam (2006); European CSA Research Group (2016); Espelt (2020).
	Community-led; community shared farms; community subscriber group as a group of consumers committing to an existing farm. Consumer-led CSA where consumers establish a long-term agreement with a farm or group of farms; CSAs as organized consumers. Shareholder/subscriber.	European CSA Research Group (2016). European CSA Research Group (2016). Wilkinson (2001).
	By independent volunteer members.	Ouahab and Maclouf (2019).
Integrated (all-in-one) CSA (Type 3)	Shareholder CSA formed by a core group of members who make administrative decisions and collectively hire a farmer. A community rents a piece of land and hires a farmer. Organized as a cooperative; established a cooperative; cooperatives mode; Farmer-shareholder cooperative.	Harmon (2014); Espelt (2020). Poças Ribeiro et al. (2021). Blättel-Mink et al. (2017); Zoll et al. (2018); Pisarn et al. (2020); Tang et al. (2019); Wilkinson (2001).
	Community-owned farms; collective property; collective ownership; non-farm owned respectively co-operatively.	Espelt (2020); Bashford et al. (2013); European CSA Research Group (2016); Blättel-Mink et al. (2017); Woods et al. (2017).
	CSA as non-profit organization (NPO) or non-governmental organization (NGO) where decisions are made by a board of directors in collaboration with paid or volunteer staff.	Harmon (2014); Tang et al. (2019); Espelt (2020); Pisarn et al. (2020).

* Table 19 is an additional illustration in this document.

7.2.6 Literature and qualitative data: Differentiation characteristics identified during knowledge-co-production through literature research and qualitative data with used literature

Table 20: Differentiation characteristics identified during the knowledge-co-production through literature research and qualitative data

Differentiation characteristics	Expressions with examples	Used literature references in the discourse
CSA governance types	Responsibility for the (most) management decision-making along the question, "Who organizes and manages the CSA?"; Spectrum in which hands the CSA governance lies (individual, distributed among several people, distributed among different actors (producers, growers, organizers, managers, workers, members, co-owners etc.). CSA governance types: Producer-led CSA (Type 1), Consumer-led CSA (Type 2), Integrated (all-in-one) CSA (Type 3)	e.g., Wilkinson (2001); Adam (2006); Ostrom (2007); Feagan and Henderson (2009); Bashford et al. (2013); Harmon (2014); European CSA Research Group (2016); Hvitsand (2016); Wellner (2018); Zoll et al. (2018); Krcilkova et al. (2019); Opitz et al. (2019); Ouahab and Maclouf (2019); Tang et al. (2019); Espelt (2020); Koretskaya and Feola (2020); Mert-Cakal and Miele (2020); Plank et al. (2020).
Degree of co-decision by members / workers	Differentiation in participation in decision-making according to members and workers from relatively low (e.g., online polls, annual shareholder meeting), to medium (e.g., majority member decisions during the year in addition to the shareholder meeting; Working groups possibly with voting rights), to high (e.g., basic democratic decision-making structures, sociocratic form of organization, consensus or consent decisions)	e.g., Groh and McFadden (2000); Hinrichs (2000); Adam (2006); Venn et al. (2006); Ostrom (2007); European CSA Research Group (2016); Hvitsand (2016); Blättel-Mink et al. (2017); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Krcilkova et al. (2019); Espelt (2020); Koretskaya and Feola (2020); Mert-Cakal and Miele (2020); Plank et al. (2020); Paech et al. (2021); Zoll et al. (2021).
Founding impulse	Founding impulse by farm(ers); consumer(s); both (farm(ers) and consumer(s)); through third party	e.g., Ostrom (2007); Bashford et al. (2013); Harmon (2014); Si et al. (2015); European CSA Research Group (2016); Hvitsand (2016); Krcilkova et al. (2019); Stapleton (2019b); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Tang et al. (2019); Espelt (2020); Koretskaya and Feola (2020); Mert-Cakal and Miele (2020); Plank et al. (2020); Vlasov et al. (2021).
Establishing paths	(Partial) conversion of an existing farm to CSA; establishment of a CSA with new agricultural start-up; handover of an existing CSA; spin-off from an existing CSA	e.g., ; Bashford et al. (2013); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Krcilkova et al. (2019); Espelt (2020); Vlasov et al. (2021).
Legal form	Sole proprietorship (e.g., independent private-run farm); Non-profit form (e.g., association); Cooperative form; Mixed form (e.g., combination of non-profit and for-profit forms)	e.g., Bloemmen et al. (2015); Cameron and Wright (2014); European CSA Research Group (2016); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Krcilkova et al. (2019); Espelt (2020); Koretskaya and Feola (2020); Plank et al. (2020); Paech et al. (2021).
Ownership and property for land / operation	Differentiation according to the CSA organization/operation and land with ownership/property rights by farm(er), member shareholdings, community (e.g., cooperative), other forms	e.g., Bashford et al. (2013); Harmon (2014); Bloemmen et al. (2015); European CSA Research Group (2016); Blättel-Mink et al. (2017); Woods et al. (2017); Zoll et al. (2018); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Dong et al. (2019); Krcilkova et al. (2019); Espelt (2020); Koretskaya and Feola (2020); Mert-Cakal and Miele (2020); Plank et al. (2020).
Labor and work	Number of workers full-time; Number of workers part-time; Number of seasonal workers; Members engagement as volunteers; Degree of co-production/co-work of members from relatively low (e.g., occasional field actions), to medium (e.g., regular, institutionalized co-production actions), to high (co-production as a significant operating factor)	e.g., Cone and Kakaliouras (1995); Goland (2002); Adam (2006); Cox et al. (2008); Shi et al. (2011); Bashford et al. (2013); Harmon (2014); European CSA Research Group (2016); Woods et al. (2017); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Krcilkova et al. (2019); Espelt (2020); Koretskaya and Feola (2020); Watson (2019); Rosol and Barbosa (2021).
Farming methods	Conventional (not organic), organic (not certified), or certified organic agriculture	e.g., Ostrom (2007); Bashford et al. (2013); European CSA Research Group (2016); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Samoggia et al. (2019); Smith et al. (2019); Tang et al. (2019).
Single- or multi-farm	Single farm CSA or multi-Farm CSA	e.g., Wilkinson (2001); Adam (2006); Bashford et al. (2013); Harmon (2014); European CSA Research Group (2016); Woods et al. (2017); Galt et al. (2019).
Product variety	Vegetables, fruits, dairy products, meat products, eggs, honey, other; processed products	e.g., Adam (2006); Ostrom (2007); Bashford et al. (2013); European CSA Research Group (2016); Blättel-Mink et al. (2017); Woods et al. (2017); Galt et al. (2012); McGuirt et al. (2019); Paul (2019); Samoggia et al. (2019).
Degree of self-production	Own production (in %); Binding additional purchases with risk sharing (in %); Binding purchases without risk sharing (in %); Marked-based purchase (in %)	e.g., Rommel et al. (2022b).
Share distribution channels	Home delivery, Farm self-pick up by members, pickup point (depot), or self-harvest	e.g., Feagan and Henderson (2009); Harmon (2014); European CSA Research Group (2016); Woods et al. (2017); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Matzembacher and Meira (2019); Stapleton (2019b) Zoll et al. (2021).
Share distribution area	CSA members in urban, suburban, peri-urban, or more rural settings	e.g., ; Goland (2002); Bloemmen et al. (2015); Mert-Cakal and Miele (2020); Plank et al. (2020); Si et al. (2020).
Share payment options	Fixed amount, fixed amount and solidarity pot, graded contributions, financing/bidding round	e.g., Sanneh et al. (2001); Adam (2006); Blättel-Mink et al. (2017); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Krcilkova et al. (2019).
Scope of CSA-operation	The entire farm is part of the CSA or a part of the farm is part of the CSA model	e.g., Chen 2013; European CSA Research Group 2016; Carlson and Bitsch 2019).
Size	Number of members (persons); Number of food shares; Productive land for CSA (e.g., in hectares); Revenue of the CSA (e.g., in EUR)	e.g., Bashford et al. (2013); European CSA Research Group (2016); Woods et al. (2017); Carlson and Bitsch (2019); Krcilkova et al. (2019); Paech et al. (2021); Zoll et al. (2022).

* Table 20 is an additional illustration in this document.

7.2.7 Quantitative data (overview)

Survey development and conduction

This study follows a transdisciplinary mixed-methods approach in cooperation with the German CSA Network. The whole development of this paper is embedded in a collaborative process of planning, conducting, and analyzing an extensive quantitative survey from 2022 as a joint project between the researchers of this study and the German CSA Network. The survey development process is therefore connected to the iterative framework development process (see Chapter 2 as well as Chapter 3.1). Thereby, the survey is designed as an internal database of the Network, aimed at providing well-founded data over time. The cooperation with the German CSA Network has resulted in the identification of various synergies. In addition, multiple surveying of CSAs has been prevented (see Chapter 2.1).

Survey questions and variables:

The survey contains a total of 80 possible response variables relating to the individual CSA divided into the following three sub-chapters:

a) General: 8 possible response variables

Examples: governance type, founding background, founding year

b) Member community: 23 possible response variables

Examples: work and labor related questions

c) Operating data of the CSA farm: 49 possible response variables

Examples: legal form, ownership and property related questions, share and production related questions

Use of survey results

The survey follows a discursive methodological approach. For example, the CSAs were asked to assign themselves according to the identified characteristics and CSA governance types. However, not all variables of the survey were included in this study, as many questions are broader than the focus of this study. As defined in the introduction (Chapter 1), a distinction can be made between the entire CSA organization and the individual CSA farms (see Chapter 1 and also characteristic *Single/Multi-farm* in Chapter 3.1). Consequently, some questions are answered at the level of the CSA organization and others at the level of the individual CSA farm. The Network contacted all CSAs who were official members within their association at that time (in total 164 CSA farms) via email and newsletter and send out several reminders. The survey was open to respondents from November 2021. This paper considers all records up to and including December 18, 2023. Until this date, a total of 81 out of 164 CSA farms (51% of the Network members at that time) responded to the questionnaire and generated quantitative results on CSA in Germany (Chapter 3.5). In total, 81 farms that are part of 70

CSA organizations responded to the survey. However, each question (relating to a specific framework characteristic) had a different respondent rate (i.e., not all participants answered every single question of the survey). This is highlighted in Chapter 3.5. Overall, 70 CSAs (n = 70 CSAs) and in total 81 individual CSA farms (n = 81 CSA farms) participated. In Table 7 we present more detailed information of the survey.

Table 21: Detailed Information of the Survey

Domain	Explanation
Object of study	All 400 CSAs in Germany (which existed in 2022; today there are around 500 CSAs in Germany)
Sample	All 160 CSAs within the German CSA-Network (which were officially member of the association in 2022)
Response Rate	n = 70 CSAs with overall 81 CSA farms (51% of the CSA organizations that were officially Network members at the time of the survey)
Time period	This paper considers all records of the survey since November 2021 up to and including December, 18, 2023.

* Table 21 is an additional illustration in this document.