FARMING for FOOD?

Local ways to enhance global food supply - and *beyond*

An ethnographic case study from a biodynamic community-supported farm in El Bolsón, Argentina

Theres Konrad

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LUCSUS
Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies

LUND UNIVERSITY

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Submitted May 13, 2015

Supervisor: Ellinor Isgren, LUCSUS, Lund University

Abstract

A growing world population confronts humanity and the planet with several challenges due to its increased demand for *food*, space and energy, implying changes in land use. While agriculture currently provides enough food, it is destroying biodiversity and hence aggravates the planet´s vulnerability to climate change. A *paradigm shift* might therefore be needed. Applying a political ecology lens, complemented with thoughts of the concept of deep democracy, the purpose of this research was to explore the potential of alternative forms of agriculture in guaranteeing local food supply and preserving the environment. Furthermore, the role of a farm community for a transformation to a more sustainable paradigm at and beyond the local level was explored. Inspired by action research and Social and Cultural Anthropology, an ethnographic case study, combining participant observation with interviews at a biodynamic community-supported farm in El Bolsón, Argentina was conducted. The investigation reveals that this farm significantly contributes to the community´s local food supply while treating the environment respectfully. Furthermore, this research highlights that the farm delivers *food for thought*, while strengthening social faculties. Moreover, in the case of this Argentinian farm a belief in bottom-up grass-root movements was detected to overcome the dominant capitalistic paradigm. However, literature underlines the importance of the political level. This thesis therefore suggests that community-supported farms, such as the one studied here, can be seen as spaces of empowerment and potential generators of a paradigm shift – provided that a vision of change rather than a market orientation is their foundation and an agrarian citizenship is practiced.

Keywords: Argentina, community-supported agriculture (CSA), global food supply, power dynamics, sustainability science

Word count: 13 356

Note to the reader

In deep respect for the community in Argentina where I performed my fieldwork and for the safety of people involved in this change-oriented research, I kept the interview partners anonymous.

If not stated differently, translations from Spanish to English are by the author.

In recognition of people loyal towards themselves and their values, and the direction of this thesis towards a non-academic audience as well, I ask the scientific community understanding if present paper depicts occasionally a potential personal touch – keyword: authenticity. Moreover, this paper puts into question current paradigm(s). What better place than here, what better time than now – to start *changing*?

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As the chef of this menu I would like to thank the valuable ingredients that make it tasty, the cookware that made it possible and the kitchen staff that made the cooking an interesting, joyful and an unforgettable process. The decision to apply for LUMES is the point of departure – and would not have been that easy without the honest and loving support of Simon. While improvising in an Argentinian kitchen in the year 2013 I received my letter of acceptance. Thanks to the Buenos Aires kitchen staff for giving me the feeling of coming home.

Tack så mycket to all the cool people I got to know resulting from being an active student in Lund. Again and again I am fascinated by the pro-active environment I encounter here. People – you are a steady inspiration, and a source of energy and motivation. What was enriching was the time spent *together with you* – studying, laughing, cooking, improvising, working, gardening, discussing, eating, hiking, exploring, living and being in Lund. Therefore, I am also grateful to LUCSUS that brought me here. Thanks go to Elina, Mine and Vasna who supported me on the way to the application to the Right Livelihood College. Thanks to Amanda and Cecilia for always bringing light into the bureaucratic "darkness" of study related issues and lastly for the help in handling the scholarship I was granted – for which I am very grateful. Related to that: special thanks are directed towards the Right Livelihood Laureate 2013, Hans R. Herren – for the belief in and the support of this thesis. Throughout the process you provided me with some very valuable inputs, links and *food for thought*. In this regard also a huge thank you to my supervisor Ellinor Isgren who gave me constructive feedback and kept me highly motivated. I also owe thanks to my precise peer reviewers for their dedication when going through this paper. Your feedback involved work but had smiles as a consequence.

Even if it might have been only one of your jokes, you shall be the first one mentioned here among the great people I had the chance to meet on the farm. Thanks for picking me up from El Bolsón bus terminal the night of my arrival and bringing me to the *granja* that was consequently my home for the next couple of months. *Gracias a toda la gente que encontré allá. Hicieron mi tiempo en El Bolsón inolvidable y realmente un enriquecimiento*. I have learned a lot from you and I laughed a lot with you. You and the mental and emotional nutrition you provided empowered me in my undertaking of writing this thesis and will further be part of the course of my life. Thanks to the farmer who gave me the chance to learn on the farm in every respect and thanks to all the *asociados* who took the time for an interview with me. A special *gracias* to the ones who shared the beauty of their country and culture with me in taking me on excursions and inviting me to their private homes.

This present meal would be missing something essential without mentioning my family. Thanks to Mamsch, Dad, Gausi, Miss Sophie, Franzi, Tofu, Oma, Opa and Herta and the extended family and *family of friends* for making the time in Austria so smooth and comfortable for me to work – and if it was in some cases the understanding to just let me sit and write by myself. I want to express a DANKE full of love, respect and appreciation for two wonderful people whom I can call my parents. You supported me always and in every situation and in every respect. You support me along *my* way - and for that I am thankful. I know I am a lucky person. Also because I can find homes in different places – the last ones in Argentina and Sweden. It is you, people whom I was allowed to meet here and there, who define wellbeing and giving the word home a meaning. Dearest friends all over – thanks for keeping our friendship alive despite the often geographical distance. Ihr seid genial! Vous êtes magnifiques! Son genios! You are great!

Lastly, this piece of writing shall be dedicated to all those people who are not afraid of the word change and transition, but following their hearts and dreams, despite strong adverse winds. *¡Mandále fruta, gente!*

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List of abbreviations

CSA	Community-Supported Agriculture
EJOLT	Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GM	Genetically modified
GMOs	Genetically modified organisms
IICTA	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
RQ	Research question
SOCLA	Sociedad Científica Latinoamericana de Agroecología

List of figures and tables

Preface

“For most people, for most families, this fundamental dependency on farming seems remote. There has always been an abundance of food, it seems, and there is no need to expend time thinking about it, other than to draw up a shopping list for the next trip to the supermarket.” (Groh & McFadden, 2000, p. 73)

May this piece of writing at least help us to begin to think twice – not only when it comes to grocery shopping.

¡Buen provecho!

1 Starter: Introduction

This thesis explores the role that a community-supported farm can play in guaranteeing local food supply. Furthermore, this thesis investigates such a farm's capability beyond farming for food, specifically regarding its potential influence on current prevalent paradigms. In the first chapter the reader is given a global framing and a short introduction to the local context of present investigation in order to situate underlying research. Research motivations and objectives are outlined and the guiding research questions are introduced. A statement concerning the importance of this thesis within sustainability science is given before an outlook of the thesis concludes this chapter.

1.1 Crisis of the global food system

Today growing food is a political and ethical issue (Altieri, 2015; Foley et al., 2011; Jarosz, 2011; Sjöström, 2015; Terry, 2014). Considering a growing world population, we face several challenges (Carlson & Chappell, 2015; Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Foley et al., 2011; Jerneck et al., 2011; Robbins, 2012; Sjöström, 2015; UNCTAD, 2013). One amongst these many is how to "nourish 9 billion"[1] without further destroying the planet that sees already more than 38 per cent of its terrestrial land surface dedicated to agriculture (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Foley, 2014; Holt Giménez & Altieri, 2013).

Biodiversity is an integral part of agriculture (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Jerneck et al., 2011). Agriculture, however, is currently one of biodiversity´s biggest enemies (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009). On the one hand in terms of *land use change*, with the destruction of natural habitat to gain more arable land. On the other, current conventional agricultural practices such as the application of pesticides and fertilizers cause contamination of soil, water and thus whole ecosystems (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009). Biodiversity is one of the nine planetary boundaries suggested by Rockström et al. (2009), and one of three that has already been surpassed by far. Biological diversity is moreover recognized as the foundation of the planet´s resilience (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009). Due to anthropogenic global warming we are confronted with more extreme weather conditions and natural hazards, and should therefore be calling for the protection and empowerment of biodiversity as a first priority, having our own survival in mind.

[1] Nourish9billion.org is a joint initiative of the Biovision Foundation and Millenium Institute, presided by Right Livelihood Laureate Hans Rudolf Herren. Website: http://www.nourish9billion.org [19.04.15].

Neoliberal agribusinesses from "Northern countries" (which will not be the focus of present paper but inevitably appear touching upon power structures) claim to have the solution as to how to increase global food supply without further demanding new land and destroying the richness of the biosphere: *intensification* of genetically modified crops (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; McMichael, 2009; Sjöström, 2015). Some critics argue, however, that the "threat of food insecurity is the direct result of the industrial model of agriculture characterized by large-scale monocultures of transgenic crops" (Altieri & Toledo, 2011, p. 590). The slogan agribusinesses use is *biotechnology against climate change*[2], presenting themselves as the overall solution for the (socio-environmental-economic) problems of our century.

1.2 Conflicting ideas how to address this crisis

Soil erosion, contamination of surface and groundwater, release of greenhouse gases, increased pest resistance, and loss of biodiversity were and are the ecological consequences of the green revolution and now industrial agriculture. These go hand in hand with socially and economically detrimental effects (Altieri et al., 2015; Àvila, 2005; Badgley et al., 2006; Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Groh & McFadden, 2000; Holt Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; Nardi, 2011; Robbins, 2012; Sjöström, 2015) such as growing slums around cities due to moving peasants turned unemployed because of the "mechanization of formerly labor-intensive activities" (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011, p. 110).

Today, the *transgenic* or *gene* revolution in Argentina, for instance, brings about similar dangers (Newell, 2009). Where genetically modified soybeans are grown there are illnesses seldom seen before, higher rates of cancer and birth defects as well as an increased number of people suffering from chronic respiratory illnesses (Avila-Vazquez, 2015; Warren & Pisarenko, 2015).

Notwithstanding, alternative ways of farming have not been convincing so far, despite their potential to feed the current and future human population while preserving the soil fertility (Badgley et al., 2006; Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Eisenstein, 2015; Köchlin, 2014; Nardi, 2007; Sjöström, 2015). Critics of alternative production, as adherents of agribusinesses, claim that an agriculture without the application of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides and nowadays genetically modified organisms (GMOs),

[2] In the sense that crops are genetically modified to become more heat resistant, for instance. Tackling symptoms instead of the root causes of a problem, however, we are talking of a weak sustainability approach (Köchlin, 2014; see also Newell, 2009).

is neither as efficient nor resistant to pests as what shall here be called *conventional* agriculture (Altieri et al., 2015; Badgley et al., 2006).

Other voices agree "that the current agricultural system already provides sufficient food on a worldwide basis, but in doing so methodically undermines the capacity of agroecosystems to preserve biodiversity" (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009, p. 1) and therefore question if there is even a need for an intensified and increased production (see e.g. Chappell & Lavalle, 2009). Malnutrition, food insecurity and hunger are existent realities of the 21st century, effecting more than 800 million people (Altieri et al., 2015; Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Herren, 2015; Sjöström, 2015). Nevertheless, these problems do not occur due to an absolute scarcity and a growing world population (Koning & van Ittersum, 2009). In contrast, more than a third of the total global food supply for direct human consumption is lost or wasted on the way from field to *fork*[3] (Gustavsson et al., 2011; Sjöström, 2015). Access to and distribution of food are other decisive factors, as well as by whom, how and where it is grown (Altieri et al., 2015; Badgley et al., 2006; Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013). Increased production might therefore not be the key to solve the problem of how to *nourish 9 billion*.

1.3 Situation in Argentina

Argentina, the second biggest country of Latin America and the second largest cultivator and significant exporter of GMOs worldwide (Newell, 2009), gives foundation to underlying case study, conducted at a biodynamic community-supported farm in El Bolsón, Rio Negro, Argentina. The country´s economy is strongly based on its production and exportation, which is in the hands of a few leaders of the transnational agroindustry (Nardi, 2011; Newell, 2009) – a circumstance that is widespread globally (Sjöström, 2015).

Argentina´s production chain is controlled by subsidized international corporations which are executing conventional farming methods with its detrimental effects in environmental and, in the end, also socio-economic respects putting profit maximization as a first priority (Nardi, 2011; Sjöström, 2015; see 1.2)[4]. This has lead, for instance, to the "reduction of food production for

[3] The author declares that the expression "from field to fork" has to be understood as a metaphor and not in eurocentric respects.

[4] Not-country specific, see also Chappell & Lavalle (2009, p. 19): "a single agriculturalist can work far more land using conventional methods. Conventional methods' use of synthetic inputs also externalizes a number of societal and environmental costs, meaning that society subsidizes lower

domestic markets, the displacement of peasants from the countryside, massive use of highly poisonous agrotoxins spread by aerial spraying and widespread deforestation" (EJOLT, 2014; see also Nardi, 2011). Several Latin American countries have been and currently are witnessing the rise of civil mobilizations due to the dissatisfaction with prevalent paradigm and its manifold consequences (Nardi, 2011). This paper concentrates on the local level in exploring an Argentinian community-supported farm with special attention paid to how it may shape and is shaped by processes at the national and global level.

1.4 Problem statement

"In the end, nor in our times the existence of rich centers of capitalism can be explained without the existence of the poor and subordinated peripheries:
The one and the other together constitute one system."
(Galeano, 2003, p. 49)[5]

The overall problem that I am addressing with this thesis is *global food supply*. That there is already enough food to feed the current world population is widely unrecognized but a proven fact (Badgley et al., 2006; Chappell & Lavalle, 2009; Sjöström, 2015). Distribution and unequal power dynamics within Argentina as well as beyond are the issues in need of addressing. Today´s neoliberally organized *global society* manifests "increasingly evident inequalities between global North and South" (Tarrow, 2011, p. 43). *How can food be provided locally and what does or can this globally imply*, considering the existing discrepancies as "part and parcel of the global food system as it functions today" (Sjöström, 2015, p. 19)? Food can be attributed with manifold meanings, as outlined by sustainability scientist Cheryl Sjöström (2015). What it inherently incorporates since colonial times when global trade and globalization had its beginning: a question of *power* (McMichael, 2009; Sjöström, 2015; Wolf, 1997).

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apparent production costs through decreased health, biodiversity and environmental quality. Direct monetary subsidies can also dramatically favor large farms over small ones".

[5] "Al fin y al cabo, tampoco en nuestro tiempo la existencia de los centros ricos del capitalismo puede explicarse sin la existencia de las periferias pobres y sometidas: unos y otras integran el mismo sistema."

1.5 Research motivations and objectives

As indicated with the quote by community-supported agriculture (CSA) pioneer in the U.S.A., Trauger Groh and journalist Steve McFadden (2000; see preface p. 8) for most people food production is something that is not reflected upon, taken for granted, if thought of at all. Over the years people got used to grocery shopping in apparently convenient supermarket chains, a process referred to as "supermarketization" (see for instance Sjöström, 2015, p. 31). As a so-called *prosumer*[6], action researcher and sustainability scientist, I see it as a duty to contribute to the discussion of how and by whom food needs to be produced in order to be able to live on a healthy planet now and in the future. In line with participatory action researcher Brydon-Miller et al. (2003, p. 20) I stress that, "[w]e all can, and must, do our part to contribute to the goal of achieving greater social justice".

Agroecology is an uprising transdiscipline that is considered a science, a social movement as well as a set of socially oriented and environmentally respectful (agricultural) practices (Chappell, 2014; Nardi, 2011). It was discussed at the international symposium held by the FAO in autumn 2014 in Rome and is in the focus of a congress organized by the *Sociedad Científica Latinoamericana de Agroecología* (SOCLA) in La Plata, Argentina in autumn 2015. Thus, academically the importance of small-scale farmers becomes more and more acknowledged (see for instance Ahmed, 2014; Altieri & Toledo, 2011), however without extensively exploring other dimensions than the one of *farming for food* in order to *nourish 9 billion*.

Research on CSA and in the field of voluntary work tourism, in contrast, often has behavioral change in focus, while often lacking a further discussion of its implications. Therefore, in applying a political ecology lens, I aim to address these gaps. This paper contributes with an analysis of a small-scale community-supported farm, investigating not only its potential to feed people while preserving the environment but at the same time questioning its role as a potential generator of change on the local level and beyond.

In asking for the opportunities, challenges and other functions the CSA under research encounters and fulfills, we gain empirical knowledge of how a complex sustainability challenge, namely the one of global food supply, is approached on a local level. Furthermore, a theoretical understanding of what can happen *beyond* farming for food is generated, theorizing about its potentially broader implications for the global level.

[6] The word appeared in an interview with the farmer and refers to an actively solution-oriented and engaged consumer, in short.

This CSA in Argentina is of particular interest not least because of the country's past; the military dictatorship made any social organization difficult and although over since 1983, it left traces in the form of "incapacity to work in any associative form" (IICA, 2012). As a country where agribusinesses are prevalent (Newell, 2009), another motivation was to establish a platform for the voices of small-scale farmers and their contributors, bringing the attention to other, maybe still evolving, discourses.

Apart from that, small-scale farmers have already gotten together, either in CSAs or in social movements, such as *La Via Campesina*, in order to achieve a more integral and just type of agriculture. With this thesis I hope to encourage also you, the reader, in a lot of cases a non-farmer, to take an active part in an issue that concerns and affects us all: food and how it is grown.

1.6 Research questions

Guided by the aim of understanding the role of CSA at the local level and beyond, given the context of Argentina's current dominant biotechnological paradigm, the underlying thesis is committed to answering the following questions:

RQ 1. *What are the challenges and opportunities related to the farm´s ability to nourish people at and beyond the local level?*

Regarding mentioned "supermarketization" with the first research question I want to explore if the farm of this case study is able to present an alternative to supermarkets, at least when it comes to foodstuffs. People who are part of this community farm took the active decision to be part, so in contrast to Groh & McFadden´s statement those people must already have thought about food and the issues around it.

RQ 2. *What other "functions" does the asociativa (the community-supported farm of this case study) fulfill apart from delivering food, and what does this imply?*

I want to investigate if there might be motivations other than food behind joining a CSA. This is why the third research question goes to the origins, so to say:

RQ 3. *What are the motivations of the asociados (the members of this farm) to take part in the asociativa and how did they become aware of it?*

Apart from finding out the potential to *nourish 9 billion*, this present investigation shall also reveal why alternative agriculture is demanded. Is it because people are not only fed by but also *fed up* with the current food system, part of the current capitalistic paradigm?

1.7 Importance for and contribution to sustainability science

"The field of sustainability science aims to address (…) complex sustainability challenges and meeting human needs while preserving the life support systems of the earth."
(Kates et al., 2001)

I consider my thesis ambition as relevant not only for sustainability science but also beyond because I am dealing with an issue with a high impact on our planet, namely agriculture, touching upon Rockström et al.´s (2009) formulated planetary boundaries of change of land use and biodiversity loss. The topic of global food supply connects environmental, social and economic sphere, inextricably interwoven what makes it to a highly complex problem (see figure 1).

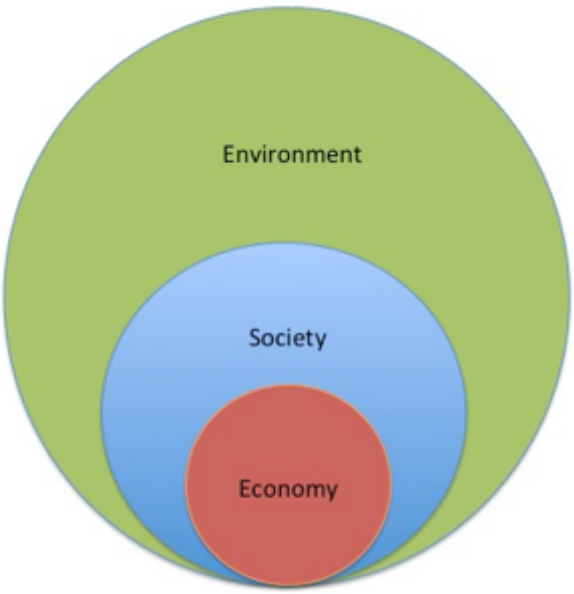

Figure 1. Nested sustainability model (Source: author; inspired by Waas et al., 2011). Presented figure shows that the economy is embedded within society, which, in turn, is embedded within the environment, of which we are a part, often however considered as *apart*. In harming the environment, currently with our profit-oriented agricultural practices, we are at the same time harming ourselves, society. While the environment can exist out of itself, society and economy are dependent on it for their survival. Therefore, sustainable ways for global food supply have to be found.

Research within sustainability science is a problem-driven and at the same time solution-oriented field "critically questioning conditions that created problems of un-sustainability" (Jerneck et al., 2011, p. 78). In interacting with local stakeholders, I am applying a participatory, transdisciplinary approach. In drawing on my background in Cultural and Social Anthropology I am contributing methodologically to the interdisciplinary field of sustainability science. There is primary data collection and close engagement with local stakeholders, bringing their first-hand-experiences and voices into this paper. I am delivering a cohesive story from the field with the help of a field diary striving for what famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz called a *thick description*[7].

1.8 Outlook: What the reader can expect

In the following section the reader is introduced to the theoretical framework of this thesis, which is led by political ecology, accompanied by some concepts and theories. Chapter three outlines the justification of the fieldwork site and gives an insight into the specific case study, presenting the community-supported farm *granja asociativa Valle Pintado*. In chapter four the methodology of underlying ethnographic research is portrayed. Results from the conducted fieldwork are presented and discussed with current academic literature in chapter five, before a synopsis embraces the whole paper. Thereafter an outlook for further investigation is given.

[7] For an explanation see for instance Barnard & Spencer (2002/2007), Sieder (2008) or Clifford Geertz (1983) himself.

2 Intermediate course: Theoretical framework

> "**Political ecology** (…) explores these social and environmental changes with an understanding that there are better, less coercive, less exploitative, and more sustainable ways of doing things."
> (Robbins, 2012, p. 20; accentuation by author)

By "critically explaining what is wrong with dominant accounts of environmental change, while at the same time exploring alternatives, adaptations, and creative human action in the face of mismanagement and exploitation" (Robbins, 2012, p. 20), I utilize the field and ideas of political ecology in my thesis, and also because I hold the opinion that *power* plays a key role in social processes (Kaijser, 2014; Robbins, 2012; Sjöström, 2015). Current hegemonic relationships between agribusinesses situated in "Northern" countries with producing countries in the "Global South" are reminiscent of colonial times. The use of the terms "Global South" and "Global North" once more demonstrates what anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss meant when talking about *binary oppositions*[8]. Humans tend to think either *black* or *white*. Maybe, as a solution-oriented field, a new *color* has to be made up for the challenges we are facing in the 21st century?

Deep democracy assists in the analysis and discussion of the results and in the search for this new *color*. It can be defined as a "participatory approach that values diversity of viewpoints, equality among participants, and elevating the minority voice in facilitated dialogue to help formulate sustainable decisions and policies for any and all areas of life" (Carlson & Chappell, 2015, p. 20). There is a call for the "involvement of all those in the food system, especially those that are disregarded and oppressed by our current corporate, globalized food system" (Carlson & Chappell, 2015, p. 14). What makes this concept suitable for its application within the political ecology framework is the sensibility towards power, for instance. Carlson & Chappell (2015) point out that for a deep democracy to be successful it is necessary to overcome certain *barriers*. Who has what kind of *power* and why in Argentina and in how far this is responsible for current circumstances within the country shall be discussed below.

In asking for people´s motivation to join the *asociativa* of the underlying case study, it becomes clear that "local decisions [are] influenced by regional polices, which are in turn directed by global politics and economics" (Robbins, 2012, p. 20). In line with a strong sustainability approach, political ecology strives to detect the root causes, "identifying broader systems rather than blaming proximate and

[8] For further information on Lévi-Strauss and structuralism consult for instance Barnard & Spencer (2002/2007).

local forces", overseeing global power structures. The focus on the interconnection and complex interdependencies of global and local level is a characteristic of political ecology (Jerneck et al., 2011; Krause, 2013; Sjöström, 2015). I am investigating the connection between nature, politics and economics. Characteristically for this theory, my emphasis is on the "condition of the environment and the people who live and work within it", trying to combat the primacy of economy, which is, nevertheless, an integral part when it comes to the problem (Robbins, 2012, p. 13). Although mostly a descriptive analysis, I also strive to suggest a possible solution; leaving a seed, as Robbins (2012, p. 20) calls it, "to grow into new socio-ecologies".

Political ecology, as well as ethnohistory, highlights the importance of a deep understanding of the past and the root causes of a problem, being therefore particularly historically aware (Wernhart & Zips, 2008). Due to that approach, deeply rooted before-mentioned barriers could be identified in the case of Argentina. In wanting to know how something came about, questioning contemporary institutions and power relations, this thesis is also situated within critical theory (Easton, 2010; Jerneck et al., 2011). Only in taking into account Argentina´s past let me fully understand present circumstances, what is the base for any possibility of change. The diffusion of innovations theory, as a theory of change, is briefly drawn upon for discussing parts of the results (Eyben et al., 2008).

Reviewing the literature revealed that there are already extensive studies on CSA, but their foci differ and they are mostly situated in the "Global North". Bougheraraa et al. (2009) concentrate on the motivations on the consumer side in asking *What drives households to join a community-supported farm*, while Lucy Jarosz (2011) had a look at the motivations of farmers. Eric Nost (2014) investigated both consumer and farmer motivations, for instance. Hayden & Buck (2012) are focusing on "affect and effects of membership" of CSA. MacMillan Uribe et al. (2012) analyze behaviors. Maggie Melin (2012) sheds light on the potential of being a volunteer, exploring *Active Learning as a Tool for Behavior Change*. Also William Terry (2014) identified the potential of building capacity in sustainable agriculture through volunteer tourism.

Although also asking for motivations on all sides (see research question 3), there are fewer papers analyzing "CSA arrangements as a possible response to concerns related to global food markets" (Bougheraraa et al., 2009, p. 1491). Political ecology, with its awareness of the inter-linkages between local and global level as well as of the spheres of sustainability (see figure 1, p. 15), its notion of power and its historically aware approach, constitutes the framework of my analysis, complemented by the concept of deep democracy. In applying this theoretical lens and looking beyond the local *Argentinian* farm level is where this paper situates its contribution.

3 Aperitif: Case study

This chapter provides the justification for why I selected the country and the location for the single case study. Then El Bolsón is briefly introduced before I take the reader figuratively on to the farm, presenting the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado*.[9]

3.1 Why Argentina?

Argentina was chosen for several reasons as the country for my fieldwork. My familiarity with the country, its culture, people, language and habits was a deciding factor. Furthermore, the country´s history makes this case study a particularly interesting one. The military dictatorship ended 32 years ago. As a rule, it destroyed social networks and prepared furthermore the entrance of transnational enterprises in the country, which are now leading the national economy. Another such relic of the past is a media landscape dominated by only a few owners (Newell, 2009). This is what makes Argentina a particularly interesting case to observe social organizations evolve, especially a community-supported farm, striving for a systematic change.

3.2 Why El Bolsón?

El Bolsón was chosen after a multi-step selection process. The network WWOOF, standing for *World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms*, resulted to be a good entry point to the organic agriculture scene of Argentina. After having paid an annual membership fee the national network of WWOOF Argentina provided me with a list of organic farms all over the country. While going through the list the first time, I selected the farms according to some keywords I was particularly interested in at this stage of the research. These were, for instance: seed production, family farm, CSA, agroecology and self-sustainability. Out of the 155 listed farms I selected 52.

In a second step, I identified a concentration of farms in and around El Bolsón. Due to a limited time in the field and the original idea to do a multiple case study, I took the decision to focus on this geographical area, having in mind to choose around three farms.

[9] For getting the feeling of *having been there* with a description of the weekly farm routine, please consult the annex.

In November 2014 I started to contact the seven selected farms in and around El Bolsón via e-mail with a request to stay on each farm from one to three weeks. After consultation with colleagues and reflection I decided to modify my research plans to a single case study. It allowed me to really dive deeply into one ethnographic field, and getting an emic view is part of the objective of doing participant observation, which will further be discussed in the methodology section. Before that, though, the town and case of El Bolsón is introduced.

El Bolsón

> "this Andean region where the alternative becomes many times the commonplace"[10]
> (Àvila et al., 2005, p. 11)

The Patagonian town of El Bolsón, 1,700 kilometers southwest from the capital Buenos Aires and close to the border to Chile, is celebrating its 89th anniversary of city foundation this year. It is lying in the province Río Negro, right next to the border of the province Chubut, and is part of what is called *la Comarca Andina del Paralelo 42°*, what is the name of this cross-provincial geographical region (IICA, 2012; see figure 2 below).

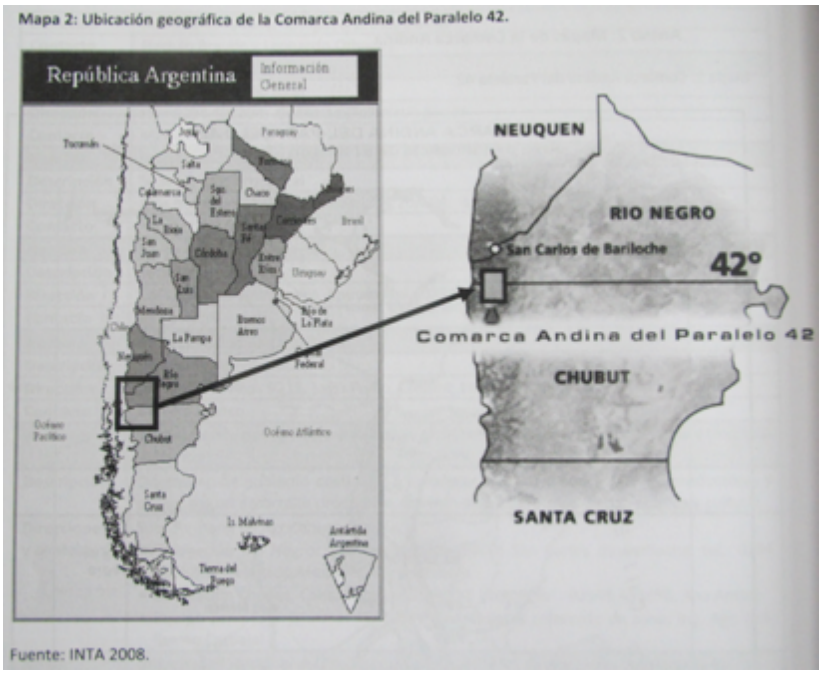

Figure 2. Map of Argentina and *la comarca* (photo by author; source: IICA, 2012, p. 82).

[10] "esta comarca andina donde lo alternativo se convierte muchas veces en lo cotidiano"

El Bolsón gained reputation for being a hippie exile, having attracted these people in the 1970s (field diary). Today students come to El Bolsón to study agroecology. El Bolsón is the biggest urban concentration within the *comarca* and has grown significantly during the last decades, consisting now of around 25.000 of 37.700 people inhabiting this region (IIICA, 2012). El Hoyo and Lago Puelo, smaller urban areas within *la comarca*, were victims of potentially intentional forest fires (field diary). The *comarca´*s favorable physical particularities make the region suitable for agricultural purposes (IICA, 2012). Logging of virgin forests is prohibited. Natural hazards, such as forest fires, however, can convert formerly untouchable land into arable land or real estate what makes the *comarca* and also other parts of Patagonia prone to land conflicts (field diary).

3.3 The farm *Valle Pintado*

The farm I have been working on as a volunteer in the Argentinian summer months January, February and the beginning of March, lies around six kilometers outside of the city center of El Bolsón and can be reached via a gravel road.

Figure 3. El Bolsón and its surrounding (photo by author, 2015). The first asphalt street reaching El Bolsón, connecting it with the bigger and more touristic Bariloche further North, was finished in 1995 (field diary). Only the white line in the map is a tarmac road such as some streets in the city center. Indicated yellow lines are gravel roads, leading to the surrounding farms and outer districts of El Bolsón.

In the information sheet for volunteers and interns, the farm described itself as follows:

> *"We cultivate the land mainly by hand, using various sources of inspiration of agroecological farming (…) starting from a vision of agriculture as an inner journey towards healing the Earth. The organism of the farm, today, has a responsibility to (...) social renewal, not only as an economic and productive nexus, but also as a cultural, educational and therapeutic space to the extent that it is an entity that manifests and connects us with the active forces and processes of nature (…). We seek to unite the ancient wisdom to the needs and contributions of modern context (...). We produce some of our seed, and belong to a group of local seed keepers dedicated to the preservation and multiplication of seeds.*[11]

The farm is strongly oriented towards biodynamic practices. Since a biodynamic farm perceives itself as an organism, there is a focus on the internal forces of that organism. This implies, as stated in the description, that we cultivated the land mostly manually without tractors or other fossil-fuel-based machines, and using water from a nearby waterfall.

Figure 4. Wednesday morning procedure: Washing the freshly harvested beetroots for the *"entrega the verduras"* – the vegetable pick-up in town (photo by a volunteer, 2015).

[11] "Cultivamos la tierra principalmente en forma manual, utilizando diversas fuentes de inspiración de cultivo agroecológico (…) partiendo desde una visión de la agricultura como un camino interior hacia la sanación de la Tierra. El organismo de la granja, hoy en día, tiene una responsabilidad para (…) la renovación social, no sólo como un nexo económico y productivo, sino también, como un espacio cultural, educativo y terapéutico en la medida en que es una entidad que se manifiesta y nos conecta con las fuerzas activas y los procesos de la naturaleza (…). Buscamos unir la antigua sabiduría a las necesidades y las contribuciones del contexto moderno (…). Producimos una parte de nuestra semilla, y pertenecemos a un grupo de cuidadores de semillas comarcal que se dedica a la preservación y multiplicación de semillas."

The role of the farmer

> "An appreciation that in reality it is nature that produces on the farm, not the farmer, and that natural production on the farm is not an input-output equation, but rather a cooperative venture with the forces of the earth and the cosmos."
> (Groh & McFadden, 2000, p. 8)

It became clear that the head farmer, in this case a man in his thirties, carries the main responsibility when it comes to the accomplishment of the farm work. However, as he stated in our second interview "*we as farmers (…) are facilitators (…), our objective is to awaken the intelligence of nature*" which still implies a lot of work and dedication. About the term he says:

> *"I think the word farmer in English is very appropriate (…). We are not just producers. Our purpose in life isn´t the product (…) we are not just thinking about the money we´re gonna make this year. We are thinking about healing this farm organism, forming and evolving it. Then we are really stewards of the land, farmers, and not just producers".*

Despite the responsibility inherent in the role of the farmer he clarifies that most importantly we need to see the farm organism as a totality with each single part as essential (see also Groh & McFadden, 2000). The *asociativa*, this CSA, like any social organization:

> *"is also an organism and every organism has a head, has a heart, and has feet and toes. Somebody might be a toe. But a toe is just as important as an ear or an eye or heart. It completes the organism (…) the important thing is that whenever any organ is out of place or stops to functioning or (…) functions too much then it´s out of balance."*

To keep this balance, it needs some kind of coordination though – which the *head* is in charge of:

> *"The head is able to perceive and coordinate. But the head also needs to be able to delegate because the head cannot act. (…) That´s why it needs hands and toes and arms and legs. But* ***the head that thinks that it can walk is dangerous****" (accentuation by author).*

What the last sentence adumbrates is the relation to the word *leader* in this context, which was mostly avoided.

3.4 La granja *asociativa* Valle Pintado – a Community-Supported Farm

"Because we can be responsible for how it is produced."
(farmer of Valle Pintado)

There are several definitions for community-supported agriculture, in short CSA. The farmer of this case study gave a very illustrative explanation:

> *"Well, here is an image to help understand. This farm organism has a rhythm that is related to the rhythms of nature. So does our organization ´cause that organization is connected to this organism. They are two elements that breathe in tandem. (…) So, we begin working on the land and I, as farmer, also begin to know 'okay well, who is on the boat this season?' Because (…) season finishes and we arrive to winter, it´s like this boat. This ship that has navigated through the season, comes back to port. (…) And there, you know, anybody who wants to get off the ship is welcome to get off the ship. Anybody who wants to join gets on the boat. And then we set out to sail again and* ***we are on the boat together****. So we are all responsible for what happens and you know, the farming season means that when there is abundance, we are all sharing the abundance. And when there is scarcity, we all share in this scarcity. (…) When we set out in the beginning in the season we are on that boat and we are all responsible for what (…) happens to the season and to (…) get the ship back to port in the following winter" (accentuation by author).*[12]

CSA is a model, he believes, that can save small-scale farmers from the intrusion of a growing agro-industry. It is stressed that it is not enough to only transform production methods towards organic, but also to transform the socio-economic model that sustains it. This implies a more locally and community focused type of economy with a type of agriculture freed from the harmful effects that goes today hand in hand with the current market system (Galeano, 2003; Volunteer´s information sheet).

[12] For those among the readership who prefer it less illustrative, the farmer also gave a shorter definition: A CSA is a "sort of self-governed organization that brings together farmers or growers and consumers in a shared risk enterprise" where the main objective is not to produce money.

4 Intermediate course: Methodology

"**Critical realists** (…) construe rather than construct the world."
(Easton, 2010, p. 122; accentuation by author)

*

"Conventional researchers worry about objectivity, distance, and controls. **Action researchers** worry about relevance, social change, and validity tested in action by the most at-risk stakeholders."
(Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p. 25; accentuation by author)

As common within action research, the methodological core of this paper represents a single case study[13]. It allowed the intensive, in depth study of the ethnographic field, but excludes a statistical representativeness. However, in line with geographer and CSA researcher Eric Nost (2014, p. 155):

> *"The goal of a case study approach is not to achieve some sense of representativeness but to write narratives that link the particular operation of each farm enterprise to broader trends and forces in local food production. The purpose is to develop themes that resonate".*

Through an iterative research process a holistic, *thick* description could be gained (Easton, 2010). Having applied a socially engaged, participatory approach, bringing together action and (self-) reflection, indicates again action research. Apart from describing and analyzing my findings, balancing emic and etic view, the provocation of change is desired (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Laycock, 2013).

As a critical realist I assume that there is "a real world out there", that the "world exists independently of our knowledge of it" and that reality is socially constructed (Easton, 2010, p. 119). My ethnographic *reality* was a community-supported farm in Argentina, as introduced before. It possessed all the characteristics of a community described by the anthropologist Robert Redfield to a certain point: "a smallness of social scale; a homogeneity of activities and states of mind of members; a consciousness of distinctiveness; and a self-sufficiency across a broad range of needs and through time" (Konrad, 2012, p. 3; Rapport 2002/2007, p. 114). Against the common concern that ethnographic research is not representative, I claim nevertheless that case studies can be seen as a kind of "microcosm of a bigger social picture" (Rapport 2002/2007, p. 115), having "causal powers and liabilities" inherent (Easton, 2010, p. 120). The variety of methods I used to explore this *microcosm* of which I was part of are discussed in the following.

[13] As a case study role model served Whyte (1996) – The Street Corner Society.

4.1 Applied research methods

The research that underpins this Master thesis is strongly based on my cultural and socio-anthropological background. As situated within action research as well, I applied a participatory approach, conducting participant observation, for instance. However, since underlying investigation is guided along a qualitative method triangulation, as common in research on CSA (Nost, 2014), further methods were applied.

4.1.1 Participant observation, field diary and field notes

A standard method and core activity of ethnographic fieldwork is participant observation (see, for instance, Hauser-Schäublin, 2008). Famous founder of this method is the British functionalist Bronislaw Malinowski. Much like during the time he spent on the Trobriand Islands, participant observation also filled my daily field diary with insights into the day-to-day routine and happenings of my field site. I was facing a common problem of ethnographic fieldwork: "seeing data everywhere and nowhere, gathering everything and nothing. The studied world seems so interesting (and probably is) that an ethnographer tries to master knowing it all" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2007, p. 161). Participant observation means that the researcher herself, in my case, features a kind of "information pool" (Dabringer, 2004, p. 21). The person of the researcher has two roles inherent: the *participant*, who is experiencing the microcosm from within, and the *observer*, who should be able to analyze it from the outside (Rock, 2007). A common challenge represents the balance between emic and etic view that need to be found.

My field diaries also tell the narrations of the uncountable *informal talks* I had. Content of these conversations were noted down as soon as possible after the talk took place. Working together on a farm offered plenty of opportunities for discussions. These happened while weeding, (trans-) planting, seeding, harvesting and processing the vegetables. Also the community *kitchen* turned out to be a common place for chats. Not to neglect the traditional *Mate*[14] breaks, happening in between morning and afternoon shifts on the farm. Quick *field notes* were transferred in the hand written field diary at a later point and served as a "memory hook" to facilitate the later written reconstruction of the situation.

[14] I dare to compare a mate break with Swedish *fika* – a good excuse to stop working and have a chat around a hot beverage.

4.1.2 Interviews

This paper also draws upon 16 recorded, partially transcribed and for further analysis coded qualitative interviews. The group of interview partners consists of the farmer (F), some volunteers (V) and *asociados* (A), members of the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado*. In agreement with other scientists, conducting interviews in the native language of the interview partner is an advantage (Krause, 2013; Schlehe, 2008). Accordingly, interviews were held either in English, Spanish or German.

Following my fieldwork plan, I started to record interviews only in the second half of my stay, after I had familiarized myself with the field, its people and dynamics. Concerning volunteers and the farmer, this gave us time to establish a personal, mutually respectful relationship with a shared interest in my research project (Heyl, 2007). However, one cannot be familiarized enough to not experience surprises and learn something new:

> *"[T]he traveler metaphor sees the interviewer as on a journey from which he or she will return with stories to tell, having engaged in conversations with the encountered along the way. (...) The route may be planned ahead of time, but will lead to unexpected twists and turns as interviewer-travelers follow their particular interests and adjust their paths according to what those met along the way choose to share. As it is true with any traveler today, what one receives in new knowledge and experiences is influenced by just how one manages to connect to people one meets along the way and how long one stays to talk, learn and build a relationship with them. Both the traveler and those met are changed by those relationships involving meaningful dialogue". (Heyl 2007, p. 371)*

4.1.3 Literature review

Apart from rich primary data I collected myself, before leaving for the fieldwork site an academic literature review had already taken place. This secondary data review was then complemented on the farm and furthermore continued during the writing process of this paper, what is usually the time to do so within grounded theory on which I partially oriented myself.

My literature review concentrated on studies about CSA, agriculture and Latin America. Apart from academic literature, *grey literature* such as information documents, for instance, was considered. Furthermore, the farmer provided me with a book that played a key role in the evolution of the

foundation of the association: *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited* by Groh & McFadden (2000). It also served as a useful entry point for interviews.

An Internet research was conducted and media sources were consulted only after having left the field due to the lack of access on the farm and also poor and unreliable Internet connection in town (see figure 5 below). Thanks to the collection of primary data and the consultation of secondary data this thesis claims to be empirically-grounded, methodologically-sound as well as theoretically-informed.

Figure 5. A sign detected in El Bolsón. The local population knows what to do without Internet: *talking to each other* (photo by author, 2015).

4.2 Data analysis

In the style of grounded theory the rich data I *harvested* each day was analyzed in parallel with its collection (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2007; Konrad, 2012). Furthermore, the fieldwork process saw new questions arise which wanted to be followed up. Each day I was not only putting my hands literally in the earth – to seed, dig, plant, weed etc. – once done with that I wrote, coded, transcribed, took notes and got new ideas from interesting informal talks and observations. Open coding was applied and codes were noted down at the margins in my field diaries. Resulted categories facilitated later on the analysis and writing process. The results shall be presented in the following chapter.

4.3 Limitations

As already indicated earlier, a single case study does not account for a general representativeness. However, for the aim of underlying investigation it was considered as an appropriate approach, complemented by common ethnographic methods. Inherent in this research design is the difficulty to find the right balance between emic and etic view that I was steadily confronted with.

Regarding the selection of my interview partners, I refused the offer of suggestions of what people to speak with. Instead, I asked my *gate-keeper*, the farmer, for an announcement about my presence and aim in the book brought to town in order to keep the *asociados* updated (see figure 6 below).

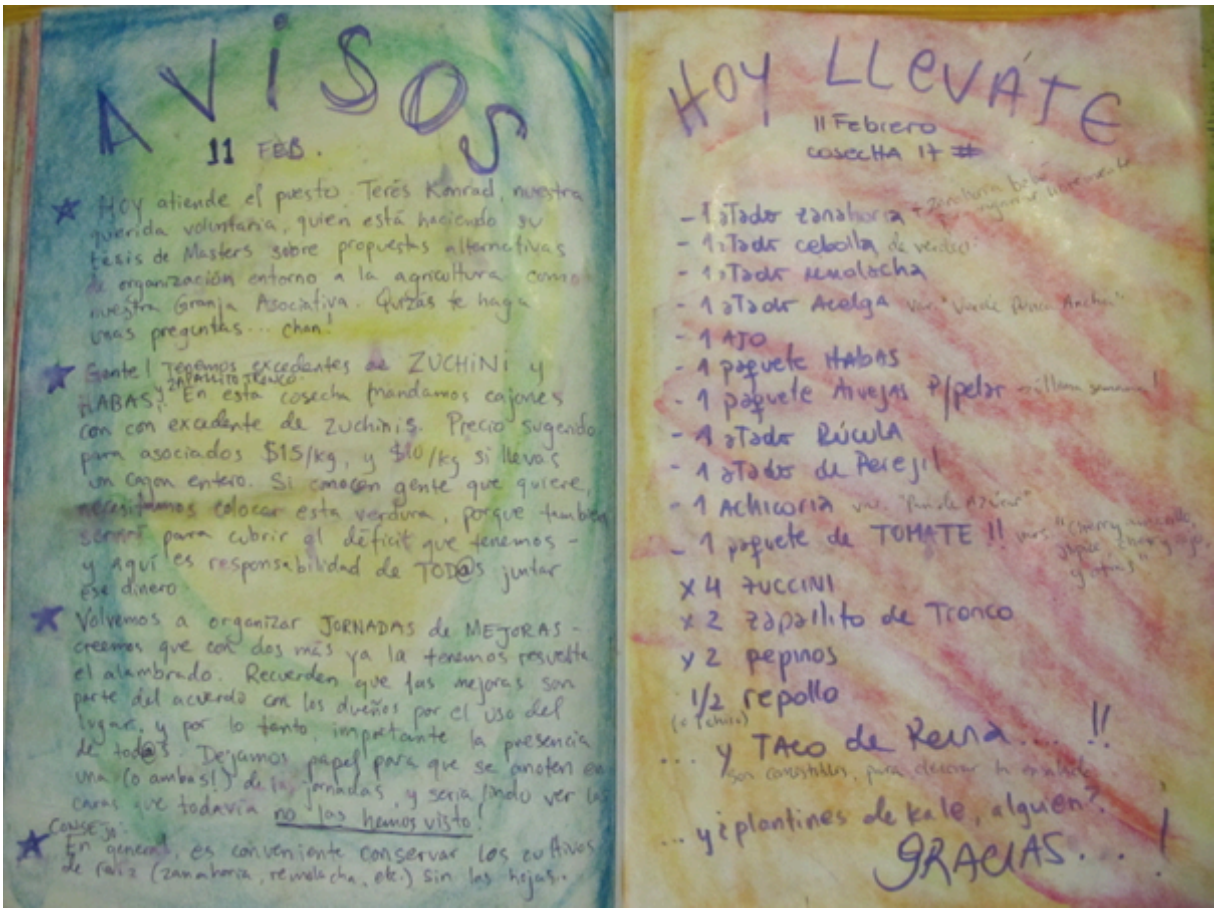

Figure 6. The book – each Wednesday brought to town (together with the vegetables) in order to inform the *asociados* about the week´s harvest (see right page) and what is going on at the farm and within the community, called *avisos* (see left page). My *gate-keeper*, the principle farmer, announced my presence at the stand (see first star on the left page) what resulted helpful in connecting to the *asociados* who did not know me until then since I was primarily occupied at the farm. I was asked to remind the *asociados* to read the *avisos* what in some cases was necessary, in others it seemed to be a common practice. (photo by author, 2015)

Reactions regarding the announcement were varied. Some *asociados* skimmed over it without any further comments. Others showed interest and started to chat with me, some of those willing to have an interview. I am aware that science and the production of knowledge as such is a kind of social practice in which social relations and outer circumstances and conditions interfere, impacting the content (Easton, 2010).

Concerning the literature review, given more time it could have been extended, for example in diving deeper into current agroecology literature or theories of change. Also in respect of Argentina, given a broader spectrum of this paper I could have elaborated more on this country´s specific history.

5 Main course: Results & discussion

In this chapter the research questions stated under 1.6 are answered and discussed one after the other. Emerging issues from the field have already been integrated.

5.1 Research question 1 – challenges and opportunities

"I think projects like this attract people of good nature (…) really with a lot of potential to change the world and the future"
(V4)

I tried to find out **what the challenges and opportunities related to the farm´s ability to nourish people at and beyond the local level are**. In the field, *to nourish* experienced a variety of meanings. The probably first association for most readers, and the first doubt of the majority, is if such a farm can *feed* the human population. According to the farmer, understanding this term only in that sense is to narrow, but his answer would, nevertheless, be: "Yes (…) I believe so". In reducing the word to the nourishment with kilocalories, the farmer says, would put the farm at the same level agribusinesses are working:

> *"I don´t think it´s enough to nourish just the body. And I don´t think it´s enough to nourish the soul. I think you have to nourish both (…). Otherwise you fall on the same slogans as Monsanto, the same argumentation. Monsanto´s argument is the perfectly fine argument. If you are working on their level (…) that they are feeding the world."*

Therefore, in this thesis, the word *nourish* experiences a wider understanding.

5.1.1 Opportunities

"We get people together, that have like minds, there is a lot of potential, you can finish and do a lot more you have ever thought of is possible"
(V4)

*

"*Society changes through the development and adoption of new beliefs, ideas, and values and Society changes through purposive individual and collective action*."
(Eyben et al., 2008, p. 208; italic in primary source)

La granja asociativa Valle Pintado, as it is now, namely cultivating an area of around 1,5 hectares with the help of a horse, some tools, the work force of four to six people and a community of around 30 families behind it, delivers enough vegetables to satisfy this need for all the *asociados*, volunteers and the farmer (field diary). Moreover, with the abundance I experienced in the summer months in 2015, far more families could have been fed with these vegetables. Surplus was taken to the town for further community internal distribution, but most importantly so that the food makes it to the people´s table. Vegetables not picked up by the *asociados* were gifted. Preserving the surplus for the less harvest-intensive winter months could guarantee a supply throughout the year and was already in practice in previous years, when one *asociado* took over the *dulcería* where jams, chutneys and the like were produced (A6; field diary). Thirty families source the majority of their vegetarian diet from this farm, without the need to go to the supermarket (A1; A3; A6; A7). This means, on the local level, this CSA fulfills what agribusinesses promise when they say they feed the people: this farm provides enough food, in the form of vegetables.

Furthermore, the farm delivers *food for thought* – mental nutrition. The opportunity the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado* has on the local level of El Bolsón is to set an example and so to nourish more people in future. It has an inspirational effect. In touching upon the diffusion-of-innovations theory: It explains how an innovation – and the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado* is the first CSA in Argentina – or "a certain behavior (…) is communicated over time within a social system. This explanation is centred on individual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour" (Eyben et al., 2008, p. 202). Interviews with *asociados* revealed that in personal conversations interest and knowledge about the principles of CSA were spread and consequently led to an increase in members. In bringing the vegetables each Wednesday to town, in the geographical center of the *social system* El Bolsón, offered the possibility for third parties to observe the behavior of the *asociados* – coming to pick up their box of vegetables. Furthermore, drawing on my double role of an ethnographic field worker and active volunteer of the farm, I observed passers-by stopping to inquire about the *asociativa*. A committed *asociado* sometimes working at the central vegetable pick-up stand in town, did what in his eyes is most efficient on a local level: spreading the word face-to-face (A3; field diary). In sharing our "[d]ifferent and/or new beliefs and values about what we do and what we know (culture) shape and change social behavior", according to the feminist social anthropologist Eyben et al. (2008, p. 205).

Summarized, one CSA can certainly not nourish the world. But, as shown with the presented case study, one farm can support a community and vice versa on a local level. Literature supports this, as examples show in other countries such as in the U.S.A. and in France (see for instance Bougheraraa

et al., 2009; Groh & McFadden, 2000; Hayden & Buck, 2012; MacMillan Uribe et al., 2012). Alternative agriculture makes, both locally and globally, a significant contribution to the feeding of people. Therefore, what literature as well as interview partners of this research suggest is a rise in numbers of *asociativas* and the cooperation among them (A6; Badgley et al., 2006; Groh & McFadden, 2000). In the "Global North" a trend in this direction is already visible according to Hayden & Buck (2012) and others (see for instance as well MacMillan Uribe et al., 2012).

Also the United Nations state that what needs to increase is the number of small farms that are actually already now feeding the world. 70% of our consumption stems from smallholder farms (Ahmed, 2014). These are furthermore "two to four times more energy efficient than large conventional farms" (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009, p. 7) with higher output levels per unit area due to practices such as multiple cropping, for instance (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009). This makes the idea of (conventional) agricultural intensification obsolete (Chappell & Lavalle, 2009).

Points of critiques: Neo-colonial traits & unsustainability due to voluntary workers

Though primarily questioning whether a community-supported farm can nourish people, this thesis also takes a critical look at how such a farm attempts to do so. As stated earlier, there is already enough food produced but there is "a geographical and distributional imbalance in who is consuming and producing" (Ahmed, 2014), not to mention under what circumstances. Holt Giménez & Altieri (2013) classify the prevalent neoliberal trend as hegemonic. Sjöström (2015, p. 30) found out that in the year 2004 ten transnational corporations "within the agro-input industry, all based in Northern countries, controlled 84 percent of the global agro-chemical market". This market reaches out globally. However, Europe is not known as a producer of primary goods. Argentina, however, is *producing* – and that mostly for export.

Hegemonic, neo-colonial, paternalistic aspects might also be discovered by critics of this and other community-supported farms, though: Apart from the farmer *volunteers* are producing, or better said, working the land, one of them being *me* – Austrian, female, with a university degree. Coming to the "Global South" to do something *good*[15]; "unwittingly fostering ongoing forms of neo-colonialism" (Terry, 2014, p. 98). However, it results that there was an equal amount of national and international volunteers during my time on the farm (field diary). And in contrast to a neoliberal imbalance of social entities, *collaboration* instead of competition was prevalent at the farm (field diary), resulting

[15] A highly discussed topic in development studies and theories.

in equal partners rather than in a hegemonic relationship as currently the case between the stereotypical "rich North" and "poor South" – rich and poor, as *accustomed* to, to be understood in monetary terms.

Also, it can be argued against the farm´s sustainability, depending on volunteers. This is a valid critique. However, there are studies suggesting the positive effects of having voluntary workers (Terry, 2014). Economic geographer William Terry (2014) found out that volunteers are normally a lot more motivated than paid workers what could stimulate whole another discussion about work, remuneration and the conception of paid and unpaid work. This, however, shall not be the focus of present discussion.

The farm *Valle Pintado* is in its sixth season, having been working for years with the help of volunteers. They play an integral part and as it is now the farm could not do without, due to something that will be discussed below: a lack of participation from the community members (A2; A6; A8; field diary; V1).

In questioning the viability of such small-scale farms, people seem to forget that industrial agriculture and large agribusinesses receive subsidies[16] (Ahmed, 2014). Apart from their environmental and social unsustainability, hence also their economic sustainability can be put into question. Why this is rarely done shall be illuminated in section 5.1.3.

5.1.2 Farm internal challenges – participation and communication

> "A challenge is the food of social organization (…). For any challenge is the opportunity for that organization to grow."
> (F)

What *asociados, volunteers,* the *farmer* and I could observe at the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado* is that the level of participation of community members could be higher (A2; A6; field diary; V1; V3; V4). Groh & McFadden (2000), though, mention that this is a common issue, also observed at their case studies within the U.S.A.

[16] According to the investigative journalist and book author Nafeez Ahmed (2014) about 80% of subsidies and 90% of research funding from the European Union go to support conventional industrial agriculture.

Little participation from the side of the *asociados* did not have a negative impact on the harvest, therefore does not directly influence what the question was primarily about: to nourish people. However, different levels of participation might lead to community internal arguments that could in the future impact the farm organism in a less-favorable way. Therefore, solutions for such circumstances need to be found, claimed some of the interviewed *asociados*.

Within *Valle Pintado* there are several reasons for the low level of participation. One is that there are different motivations for being a member that lead to different commitments. Therefore, several interview partners declared the importance of having one or more persons to keep people actively engaged *on the boat*, because:

> *"then during the daily grind we tend to forget and so those visionaries are supposed to always bring us back to the core, the meaning of why we got together in first place" (V4).*

Although having meetings frequently and bringing a *book* at the stand in town each Wednesday that informs of current happenings on the farm (see figure 6, p. 30), communication was also identified as a challenging issue (A2). Bringing a community of thirty families to a point where everybody is on the same page demands a high level of commitment. Obviously, the communication problem is interlinked with the variety of participation levels. At times at the community-supported farm *Valle Pintado* occurred what has already been observed at other CSAs by other researchers as well: "Without an active community at its core the significant burden of running the CSA often falls on the farmer(s), which in turn can overwhelm small-scale operations and lead to an unsustainable system" (Hayden & Buck, 2012, p. 333).

5.1.3 External challenges impacting la granja asociativa Valle Pintado

Aside from internal challenges, external ones were identified. While the first difficulty might be encountered globally, the second one is more bound to the national context, although observable in other countries as well.

5.1.3.1 Keyword: Comfort zone

What hinders change in general is a barrier called *comfort zone*. One of my interview partners (A3) stated that he and other *asociados* transcend this barrier. He also experiences moments where it would be easier to go to a supermarket. Nevertheless, he is convinced of the idea and quality of the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado* and therefore supports it.

Some of his mentioned points of inconvenience, like not deciding himself on the amount of vegetables he receives from the farm each week for instance, was also indicated by the reviewed literature and complemented with issues such as the payment of the year´s harvest in advance, a lack of variety as an issue of seasonality, or the inconvenience to pick up the vegetables at either the farm or a drop-off point somewhere in town at an inconvenient time (Groh & McFadden, 2000; MacMillan Uribe et al., 2012; Nost, 2014).

The for this research conducted interviews manifested that being part of a CSA demands more commitment than simply going to a store, and time is another central issue today. Everything needs to be fast and efficient. A volunteer (V4) holds the opinion that it still needs to get a bit worse before people start to reflect:

> *"Unfortunately, humans learn from hitting their head against the wall too many times and we learn (…) when tragedy happens. I think that it´s a sad fact but as we get more illnesses, and we get more economic decline (…), that´s when people gonna start looking to change."*

National and international media play a decisive role in the establishment of comfort zone. It represents a main site for the creation of consumption desires and furthermore offers a platform "for the crafting of hegemony in modern societies" (Van Bommel & Spicer, 2011, p. 1723) and is in focus in the next point.

5.1.3.2 Media and mainstream – "culture as a conditioning force"[17]

> "Culture can be understood as an instrument of power by which the knowledge, tastes, skills, values, and habits that are acquired in the course of growing up can be used to maintain and demonstrate differences in status that are seen as 'natural'."
> (Eyben et al., 2008, p. 205)

Argentina has a tumultuous past. The military dictatorship left traces; not only in the social sphere in making the formation of social organizations potentially more difficult than somewhere else, for instance (IICA 2012), also the media landscape has been affected.

In the case of Argentina there is a complex interwoven relation between the media, the state and the economy as already mentioned earlier. The mass media helps on the one hand to ensure that

[17] Eyben et al., 2008, p. 205.

biotechnology is either not a topic at all or, if mentioned, in a way that is promotional. On the other hand, it creates needs by fostering consumerism (Newell, 2009; Van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). In Argentina the discursive power lies in the hands of a few, just as the institutional and material power (Newell, 2009). Moreover, Peter Newell reveals that "key agricultural producers help to ensure that the mainstream media remains responsive to their concerns", which leads to a lack of space for counter-narratives (Newell, 2009, p. 55). Therefore, in interviews I interrogated about the interviewees´ sources of information. Although Internet access can be problematic in Patagonia, facebook and online sources where mentioned as their sources of reference, because the informants were mostly conscious about the situation of the Argentinian media landscape (A1; A2; A3; A6; F).

An *asociado* (A3) said about the wide apparent acceptance of biotechnology that it is a *"cultural question because the majority of the population is living watching television and it´s television that teaches you the contrast to what I am telling you".* None of the people I spoke to had the ambition to fight against this system on a large level. Changing the collective representation of the topic in the mass media might be effective according to Van Bommel & Spicer (2011) but is felt to be out of reach and question by the interviewee A3. The opinion is held that:

> *"Change happens here (...). So we have to stop fighting (…) because, really, we will not fight them. There is no way how. It is* ***an unequal struggle****. The government is on their side, not on ours. So there is no way how to win against them. Because we won´t."*[18] (A3; accentuation by author)

"[H]ere" refers to the local level of El Bolsón, where alternatives already exist and germinate – in the form of *la granja asociativa Valle Pintado*, according to the interviewed *asociado* (A3). Furthermore, what the last quote reveals is the trust in grass-root, bottom-up movements.

[18] "Cambiando es acá (…). Entonces hay que dejar de pelear (…) porque de verdad nosotros no vamos a pelear con ellos. No hay como. **Es desigual la lucha**. El gobierno está del lado de ellos, no está del lado nuestro. Entonces no hay como vencerlos. Porque no vamos conseguirlo."

5.2 Research question 2 – *beyond* farming for food

”Food weaves the people-environment web”
(Hayden & Buck, 2012, p. 332)

In the second research question I wanted to understand other services a CSA can fulfill, apart from delivering fresh food, and what this might imply for society as a whole. *La granja asociativa Valle Pintado* provided “mental” and “emotional” nutrition and represents an active learning space, not only when it comes to biodynamic agricultural practices, but also within the *asociativa* a lot can be learned from each other (field diary; V1; V4). At this particular farm, a lot of different and on the other hand like-minded people came together sharing their life stories. Sharing experiences and making some together, namely on the farm, does not only enrich somebody personally but also enhances the community spirit (field diary; V1; V4).

One of the volunteers (V4), a natural doctor by profession, brought the health benefit to the point in saying that it is:

> *“about being in contact with the earth and taking your shoes off and getting your hands in the earth. It helps us to de-stress basically, and revitalizes us. So, there are so many benefits, healing benefits to being, eating in this way and being on a farm and actually doing some of the work and doing it with a friend (laughter).”*

When it comes to the volunteers, everybody was doing the same job according to their capability which transmitted a feeling of equality and mutual respect (field diary). The people I talked to on the farm agreed that a lot of values currently lacking in our society were principles of the daily life at *Valle Pintado*.

Democracy is practiced by the *asociados*, who are metaphorically sitting in the same boat for a year, as well as by the farm workers, spending from a few days to a couple of months together on the farm, or even longer. Decisions are made by consensus (field diary). *La granja asociativa* is not only based and dependent on the contribution of everybody it also gives everybody the chance to include him- or herself with his or her individual quality, towards the same vision. The farmer stated that the recognition that *“each person has something to give, just as each organism, each plant does in the farm”* is a vital part of the *asociativa*.

The "wealth of benefits" – beyond the fresh food the community-supported farm *Valle Pintado* delivers each week – is constituted of personal and social development, the strengthening of solidarity, health improvements due to a more conscious diet as well as physical work on the farm, and an improved life satisfaction due to the social web the community offers, by one *asociado* even referred to as a kind of family (A6; field diary). Hayden & Buck (2012) and Laycock (2013) support these arguments.

This suggests that what is happening on a local level translates to the global one in the form of a more awake, informed and active citizenship, and seeing the world more holistically.[19] This might be valid for those community-supported farms with a deeper holistic community vision[20], such as the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado* has. The farmer said in our second interview about the farm:

> *"It´s also a therapeutic place, it´s also a cultural place and this, if we are doing our job well, it should overflow into society and I think the farm organism has an important role in the direction of humanity".*

5.3 Research question 3 – about motivations

The reviewed literature outlined that motivation for farming can be manifold. One can be the wish to grow food and feed people, another one to become economically self-sufficient and more independent from the current paradigm. Furthermore someone might want to make a political and social commitment to a sustainable food system and educate moreover the close surrounding about food and farming (Jarosz, 2011). All that culminates in the person of the farmer of *la granja asociativa Valle Pintado*.

Although an attempt was made, I did not manage to ask all current *asociados* **what their motivations are to take part in the *asociativa* and how they became aware of it**. Therefore, this section reveals an extract of responses I got[21] – I, the European female young volunteer working on the farm, and researcher.

[19] A further benefit, not mentioned above since it is beyond this case study, even if mentioned by one *asociado*, is the potential of the alleviation of rural unemployment since unconventional farming requires more workers (Badgley et al., 2006, p. 94).
[20] Hayden & Buck (2012, p. 333) are differentiating between these and the ones that became "more strictly market oriented, running the business internally and requiring only payment from members".
[21] The four examples were chosen randomly among the interviewed *asociados*.

5.3.1 Contra supermarketization – pro education

A3, a young father, got to know the farm as a volunteer and was later on the farmer´s assistant before he became an *asociado* himself. What he likes is that he is paying the production directly and supporting something he believes in. He prefers to support two committed hard-working farmers than seeing his money going to the owner of a supermarket chain.

However, the local supermarket chain is still frequented by some *asociados*. Not only to buy what they do not receive from the farm like shampoo, rice and the like, but also other vegetables that do not grow on the farm, in the region or in the season. An *asociado* reasoned that this is due to different motivations among the community members. Some might have ordered this weekly vegetable-*service* because it seems to be trendy at the moment, because they are looking for high-quality, natural food and others because they are convinced of the idea of CSA or are searching for a community experience (A2).

Groh & McFadden (2000) identified a similar variety of motivations among the U.S. American members of community-supported farms. Education represents one of the issues a lot of CSAs are confronted with. In respects of the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado*, which sees education as a duty, the farmer said that he is aware that some might not know what to do with certain vegetables but:

> *"You can´t live on lettuce alone. So, you know, I need to plant for all their different tastes and sometimes I present new vegetables too, Daikon, for example. (…) I have people say 'I don´t really know what to do with this Daikon' (…). I say 'Look, okay, I understand'. I am conscious when I send it some people will be uncomfortable but it´s one of those things where we are saying, you know, if you join we are trying to change our trends and habits. We are trying to create something new and it means that* ***we have to re-educate ourselves****, on all friends, how do we relate to one another. And how we relate to our food, we´re gonna eat local. It means that we need to also learn how to eat local. We need to learn what in our region grows well." (accentuation by author)*

The source of this problem lies in the *"market culture"* that *"sort of homogenizes people´s consciousness and awareness of the diversity that there is"*, as stated by the farmer of the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado.* Just as the agroindustrial model does with plant diversity, according to Altieri et al. (2015): stressing uniformity "and standardised technologies for large-scale high-input and mechanised systems, aimed at maximising yields of commercial crops, to fuel a global food system". This and other farmers´ objective is *"to promote the opposite"*, though (F).

5.3.2 Voices from the field

A6, an elderly couple, heard the farmer speaking about *la granja asociativa* on a local radio channel two years ago. Consequently, they got in contact with the association and became members. Firstly, organic vegetables attracted their interest. Soon it became clear that there is a lot more behind what they agree with and since then actively support.

A1, a recent member of the *asociativa*, became aware of it by hearing people talk. Her first motivation was to eat healthy and varied food. However, once a member she discovered all that existed *beyond* that. Thanks to the social part, she is even more content than she thought she would be. She does not perceive the *asociativa* as something economic, but as an *eye-opener*. She also has a greenhouse herself but lacks basic farming knowledge. The *granja*, for her, is a place to learn such things and furthermore explore new tastes and exchange and share knowledge with others. The ideal would be having more "*granjas asociativas asociadas*" – more associated community-supported farms in order to overcome current dominance by agribusinesses.

A7 heard about the *asociativa* but first became member when a friend asked her to share the weekly vegetables with her three years ago. She had been to a meeting before but was afraid she would not have enough time to get engaged. Now she is part of one of the committees of the *asociativa*, again sharing the vegetables with another person. She appreciates the social aspect, "*la parte humana"*, of the farm. For her, *organic*[22] is important for her own health, for the environment and the protection of the soil. Since she is aware of the negative effects of commercial industrial cultivations she tries to differentiate herself from that type of agriculture as much as possible, in fostering alternative agriculture, being a member of the *asociativa*. In times when the food from the farm might not be enough she still tries to avoid going to the supermarket and goes to a small shop. The *asociativa*, in her eyes, contributes to a broader movement and there needs to be more such groups. Although for some people in the area the crucial point – the amount of monetary contribution – she said that she would even pay more since she values what is around it.

[22] In El Bolsón I encountered a confusion of terms. Alternative, biodynamic, agroecological and organic agriculture are often used synonymously, despite their partially big differences for which explanation here comes to short.

5.3.3 From spaces of empowerment to agrarian citizenship?

What the mentioned examples reveal is a belief in structural change by doing small steps on a local level. Literature supports that CSA members consider themselves as being more politically aware and active (Bougheraraa et al., 2009). The *granja asociativa Valle Pintado* and other community-supported farms can therefore be considered as spaces of *empowerment*, as part of a grass-root bottom-up movement.

What is needed, according to Carlson & Chappell (2015) from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, is a *deep democracy*[23], with the practice of an "agrarian citizenship (…) a *practice* of providing food for your community, region, and nation while challenging conventional notions of what it means to be modern or peasant, urban or rural, a subject or a citizen" (Carlson & Chappell, 2015, p. 6). What the *granja asociativa* already fulfills is providing food for the community. An *asociado* expressed the vision of reaching a point where the *comarca* could sustain itself without outer intervention. The reality is that there is still a long way to go. Holt Giménez & Altieri (2013, p. 98) are convinced that a "strong countermovement could generate considerable political will for the transformative reform of our food systems". For that, however, the *granja asociativa* would not only need to continue what it is already doing now – nourishing body and soul – but also take a more active stake on a political level.

Given the national context of hegemonic power dynamics due to a close relationship of media, government and economy; considering the regional context of conflicts of interest regarding land use (see figure 7 below); and finally being confronted with local barriers (see 5.1.2 & 5.1.3) show that is not an easy undertaking to provoke a real paradigm shift.

[23] See also Chappell & Lavalle (2009, p. 5): "democratization [is] required to provide universal food security and preserve biodiversity".

Figure 7. Land use in the *comarca* (photo by author, 2015). (Intentional) forest fires convert protected virgin forests into real estate.

In any case, Holt Giménez & Altieri (2013, p. 98) claim that the "livelihoods of smallholders, the elimination of hunger, the restoration of the planet's agrobiodiversity and agroecosystem resilience would all be better served" if the currently dominant neoliberal paradigm could be overcome. To conclude this chapter with a voice from the field – the farmer quoting anthropologist Margaret Mead: *"There is nothing more powerful than a group of people with a shared vision to change the course of history".* CSAs like the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado* can therefore be seen as a point of departure.

6 Dessert: Synopsis

> "[T]he primary need is not for the farm to be supported by the community, but rather for the community to support itself through farming"
> (Groh & McFadden, 2000, p. xv)

What I tried to communicate with this thesis and what Paul Raskin, director of the Great Transition Initiative, stated:

> *"Global change is accelerating and contradictions are deepening. New ways of thinking, acting and being are urgently needed. But as surely as necessity is the spur for a Great Transition, the historic opportunity to shape an equitable world of peace, freedom and sustainability is the magnet. This is the promise and lure of the twenty-first century" (Raskin et al., 2002, p. x).*

The beginning of this thesis illustrated some problems we are confronted with today. A growing demand for food puts pressure on land and other finite natural resources while endangering biodiversity, essential for the earth´s resilience especially since we are facing climate change. As stressed by scientists, current conventional agricultural practices are incapable of feeding the world in a sustainable manner as they are causing socio-environmental crises while contributing to global food supply (Ahmed, 2014; Chappell & Lavalle, 2009). Therefore, this paper followed the ambition to explore the potential of alternative agricultural practices – when it comes to *nourish 9 billion* as well as regarding their power to contribute to a paradigm shift.

Having applied a political ecology lens, in the case of Argentina dominant hegemonic power dynamics were disclosed. There is a conjunction of media, government and economy, being responsible of how the dominant paradigm looks like and what worldview is most commonly held within the country. One motivation for this thesis was to provide a platform for voices otherwise neglected by those who hold the power and therefore defining whose knowledge is the most legitimate and the *official*. At the local level of El Bolsón, at the biodynamic community-supported farm *Valle Pintado*, the wish for and belief in a different discourse was detected.

The mass media communicates so-called *values*, such as the accumulation of material possessions, following consumerism and the growth paradigm, and was not in line with the understanding of value I encountered neither at the farm nor amongst the *asociados*. However, growth is a, if not *the* central term in the capitalistic, neoliberal dominant paradigm. A planet with finite resources cannot

be exploited forever, though, only up to a certain limit. It does not have to be necessarily the ultimate *tipping* point, but what the farmer suggested and can be called the point of *self-sufficiency*:

> *"we [Valle Pintado] are still in the growth phase. But you can think that this organism eventually gets to a point where you know, myself is a farmer, the land, we have our number of families. We don´t need to grow, maybe we can´t even grow anymore. So we say 'okay, well, these are the people we maintain'".*

The presented case study has shown that a small-scale community-supported farm can significantly contribute to local food supply. Moreover, it identified that there is even something *beyond farming for food*. Within *Valle Pintado* social faculties are cultivated. What is still needed is that these come to flower in more political regards in order to have an impact beyond the local level.

Asking for people´s motivations demonstrated that there is a growing dissatisfaction with the current paradigm and that there is a belief in a bottom-up approach to change. However, for a countermovement to be successful, literature suggests that more political action needs to be undertaken (see for instance Holt Giménez & Altieri, 2013). And although some obstacles could be identified, such as lack of participation and communication within the community, *Valle Pintado* can be seen as a place of empowerment, delivering food for thought, representing an active learning space where deep democracy might become an inspiration for the creation of the new *color* this thesis was looking for.

Retrospectively in asking what the challenges and opportunities are, the fact was neglected that for some people challenges *are* opportunities to learn, to improve, to *grow* – as perceived by the farmer of the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado*. This case study does not represent a *perfect* or a *successful* example; there is no single truth. The *granja asociativa Valle Pintado* is one example of what is possible, together with a community on a local level, now and in the future.

Identifying weaknesses offers the possibility for improvements. As one *asociado* declared: the *granja asociativa Valle Pintado*, just as similar projects, is still in the **embryo** phase. May there be more *mothers* – and less birth defects caused by an unsustainable dominant paradigm.

Figure 8. Clash of paradigm(s)? Argentina is in many regards a paradoxical country. If the co-existence of transnational neo-liberal corporations (linked to the national media and government) and small-scale (and) community farms continues in future is dependent on how deep democracy´s agrarian citizenship is employed; what each *asociado* does with the empowerment he or she experiences; and how society decides to act witnessing injustice and socio-environmental tragedies on local and global level. (photo by author, 2015)

Understanding the world, in biodynamic terms, as an organism, we shall see more clearly that everything that occurs naturally on this planet has an essential role to keep the organism alive. Losing a "toe" might not stop a person immediately from walking, but the more we lose, the more difficult it becomes.

This thesis argued that there is not necessarily a need for an increased production, but rather a need for a paradigm shift towards different socio-political arrangements surrounding food: how it is grown, distributed and consumed, and how it can foster alternative agricultural practices able to tackle food supply issues while at the same time respecting the planetary boundaries proposed by Rockström et al. (2009).

7 Digestif: Possibilities for continuation

Using political ecology as an overarching framework implied the inclusion of other concepts like power and hegemony. Analysis could have gone more into depth, referring for example to Foucault who meant that we start to study power by studying resistance. Talking more about resistance someone could draw on Andrea Nardi, Argentinian herself and dealing for instance with agroecology – another key word which could be further elaborated on, such as food sovereignty as well. By mentioning hegemony and maintaining a dominant discourse and ideological power Antonio Gramsci would be a possibility for further illustration. Moreover, this thesis could be extended with theories of change and concepts of action and social learning.

The paper discovered a belief in grass-root-movements. Research within sustainability science regarding this topic could be deepened. Furthermore, links can be drawn to related fields, such as *degrowth*, focused on the rejection of "growth fetishism of contemporary economies" and directed towards constructing "alternative forms of society, based on resilience, participation, and social justice" (D'Alisa et al., 2013, p. 213). Apart from that, especially due to given context of this study, the Latin American concept of *Buen Vivir* would offer another concept to embed this thesis. Particularly since Argentina´s first *Buen Vivir* meeting in Epuyen, in the *comarca*, took place this year, looking for a "distinctive (…) pathway towards global socio-environmental sustainability" (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014, p. 59).

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Annex

A supplement of chapter 3: A day on the farm

> "I love the fact that everybody eats together (…). That family gathering is really, really it helps us get through the times when we are doing some tasks that we don´t like, you know. ´Cause you remember you have some kind of good conversation and laughs and everything is more relaxed and it helps you in tough moments."
> (V4)

A typical day at the farm starts in the community kitchen at 8:30 am where everybody is supposed to be ready for the morning meeting where we talk about the tasks and their distribution for the day. Very often a task is ascribed to more than one person unless no more work force is needed for that kind of work. At 12:30 pm it is lunch and we meet again all in the community kitchen in the volunteer cabin. Normally, during the morning meeting, a person offers him- or herself to cook that day for the whole crew and therefore stops the work in the field when he or she considers it is time to start to prepare the chosen meal. Rice, flour, beans, buckwheat and the like serve as an accompaniment of the vegetables the farm provides.

The cook is invited to say an *agradecimiento* – a thank you – before we start to eat. It is a moment where we collectively take the time to value with full consciousness what is on the table and how it got there. The *agradecimiento* can be a few words up to a short thought journey (field diary; V4). *Siesta* is held, in hot summer times, until four of five pm, depending on each day´s tasks and temperatures. Then, we restart all together and work a couple to three more hours.

Mondays features the so-called *caminata del campo* – a collective, around 1,5 hour walk through the farm. This is when the tasks for the week are noted down or the list of tasks is completed, since often tasks from the old week needed to be taken over to the new one as well.

Tuesdays preparations for Wednesdays´ *entrega de verduras* start. This is when the members pick up their vegetables from a stand in town. The only day of the week when work starts at 7:15 am, Wednesday, includes a shared breakfast after everything for the *asociados* is harvested.

In high season, like in February when I was there, there were two days of harvest thanks to the abundance of especially zucchini and tomatoes, latter ones grown in the thirty meters long *invernadero*, the greenhouse.

Saturday stands under the motto *OLE*. It is the day of *orden, limpieza y embellezimiento* – the day of cleaning, general maintenance and beautification of the farm. The afternoon and Sundays were theoretically free of work. However, the greenhouse still needs to be opened and closed and the animals need to be taken care of by someone.

A solution-oriented idea – *what goes around comes around*

”experience is the foundation for learning”
(Altieri, 2002, p. 2)

A farm like *Valle Pintado* delivers food for thought, inspiration and motivation – for doing the same, spreading the word, for *change*. We are living in a time where in some regions most children “cannot experience that the critical difference between industry and agriculture lies in the fact that nature can produce out of its harmony and variety without major input, while industry cannot” (Groh & McFadden, 2000, p. 9). What therefore needs to be done from a political ecology standpoint is to bridge the gap between nature and society. According to Eyben et al. (2008, p. 205) “transformational learning (…) liberates people from acquiescing in oppression and poverty. It asserts that if we think differently, we will find the ‘power within’ to act differently”. And although already a person with an obvious interest in food, accordingly appreciating it, having been a volunteer myself increased its appraisal once more. As a volunteer said *“it just made me realize that agriculture is a lot of work”*. As detected in several discussions on and outside the farm, there is a lack of appreciation and valuation, a general lack of *values* in society (F; field diary; V4). Action learning might be a remedy.

Coming from Austria, a country where it is still a duty for young men to do military service or alternatively a kind of civil service that can take place in an elderly center, for instance, it would be a start to implement a “farm service” – mandatory not only for men but, if at all, for everybody. This would on the one hand foster local agriculture, and oftentimes farmers, and on the other one strengthen certain values, leading to greater appreciation (see 5.1.1; Hayden & Buck, 2012)[24]. Knowing – through personal experience – what it means to grow leek, for example, let somebody think twice how to deal with it (field diary; see figure 9 below).

[24] Furthermore it would be gender neutral.

Figure 9. Victory - The leek & I (photo by a farmer, 2015). Preparing the soil and planting the small seedlings manually under sweat, caring for them consequently, hoping for rain and that the irrigation system works as it is supposed to – all this makes leek and other vegetables actually priceless and almost not affordable. In a CSA not the product itself is paid – but the sustainability of the community, of the farm organism, to reproduce itself, with the contribution of everybody.

Food waste might experience a decrease and a different (consumption) behavior might arise. "[H]ow learning occurs (…) shapes our total experience and our lives" (Altieri, 2002, p. 2). Action learning, based on the principle that acting equals learning, might represent a remedy (Altieri, 2002; see also Arjen et al., 2009; Melin, 2012).

Countries like Austria could make a start and promote action learning in the form of the supplementary option for young adults to do a farm instead of a military service[25]. I share the opinion of William Terry that finally "in the most diffuse sense, volunteers who return transformed from their time on farms act as proselytizers for local sustainable agriculture. Thus we can see how personal transformation can contribute to larger societal transformations" (Terry, 2014, p. 105).

[25] Alternatives to the military service do already exist and are known under the term *voluntary ecological year* (FÖJ – Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr), offering work in NGOs and farms. However, it is still about a niche rather than a widely acknowledged alternative.

Figure 10. Humane? (photo by Simon Käfer, 2008)

"Deep democracy takes 'We the People' seriously, understanding that democracy is something that can always be improved, not somewhere we've already arrived" (Carlson & Chappell, 2015, p. 3). In this sense, let us not stop questioning. **This here is not the end.**