LUNDS UNIVERSITET

CPS: International Master's Program in Human Ecology

Human Ecology Division

Department of Human Geography

Faculty of Social Sciences

Lund University

Communication as transformative praxis

–

A critical exploration of *tension-based work* to strengthen cooperative communication within the movement of Community Supported Agriculture

Author: Anne Lisbeth Jessen

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Eric Clark

Degree of Master of Science (Two Years) in Human Ecology:

Culture Power and Sustainability

30 ECTS

Spring 2024

Department:	Department of Human Geography
Address:	Sölvegatan 10, 223 62 Lund, Sweden
Telephone:	+46 462221759

Supervisor:	Prof. Dr. Eric Clark

Title and Subtitle:	Communication as transformative praxis: A critical exploration of tension-based work to strengthen cooperative communication within the movement of Community Supported Agriculture
Author:	Anne Lisbeth Jessen
Examination:	Master's thesis (two year)

Term:	Spring Term 2024

Abstract:

Behind the background of the increasing self-destructive nature of capitalism, this thesis investigates Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) as a promising movement opposing corporate industrial food systems. Given that major difficulties appear to be of internal nature and arise from misunderstanding and a lack of trust, the focus lies on internal communication as a leverage point for the movement's development. To generate a practical and applicable contribution for CSAs, the research explores a communication method from radical self-organized organizations, *tension-based work*, regarding its potential impact on fostering cooperation within communities. Grounded in a critical research framework, findings reveal how capitalist rationality hampers open communication within CSAs, provoking subliminal tensions and conflicts. Through interviews and observations, tension-based work emerges as a catalyst for cooperative and reflective communication, enabling individuals to articulate needs and emotions, thereby fostering mutual understanding and equal work relations. However, such potentials hinge on preconditions such as trust, non-hierarchical structures, professional moderation, and regularity, with particularly the latter requiring resources typically scarce in CSAs. This may lead to instrumentalizing tension-based work for efficiency, thereby perpetuating capitalist communication patterns. To mitigate this risk, the study emphasizes a process orientation that acknowledges contradictions. This allows individual motivations to be channeled into a collective energy that effectively challenges corporate industrial food systems.

Keywords: *Community-supported-agriculture (CSA), Critical research framework, communication, tension-based work, cooperation, transformative praxis, processuality*

Preface

I want to start by positioning myself and explain how I came to this topic, which is admittedly very specific and 'niche'. I am a 'CSA kid', as they say in our village. To me, 'shopping' meant going to the small storage under the village's bakery and packing a basket full of fresh vegetables from the field next door. In other words: I had the privilege of growing into the concept of *community-supported agriculture* (CSA) from the very beginning and my passion for it has never completely left. Over the years, I have been able to gain insights into various CSAs and got to know the most inspiring people and ideas, but also the great burdens of such 'alternative projects' – probably an idea of what Adorno (1951) already meant by 'there is no right life in the wrong'.

 With this thesis, I now want to contribute to this movement that I am convinced is crucial for the transformation we need. At a conference last fall I talked to CSA members about my ambition and received clear feedback: "Write something *for*, not just *about* us". At the same time, I was completing an internship with the organization *iniciato GbR*, where I was involved in the planning of the *SOFA* project (*Solidary Facilitation*). This initiative aims to enhance internal communication within CSAs, using a particular communication method called *tension-based work* – for me, a first hopeful indication of what such a contribution could look like. The *SOFA* project is scheduled to start later in 2024 and by delving into the tension-based work, this research serves as a prelude to the project's launch.

 Consequently, this thesis is an attempt to create an enriching input *for* CSAs and uses the method of tension-based work as a starting point to do so. Being a CSA-child and a student, I am both an *insider* and an *outsider*, which has given me great advantages throughout the process, yet I want to emphasize my positionality by using the first-person perspective throughout.

Acknowledgements

With this in mind, my deep gratitude first goes to those who showed me from the very start how to actually live out community: My parents and siblings for an unconditional home with open doors that allowed me to leave courageously and always return, as well as the whole 'CSA family', which was naturally part from the very beginning – *'it takes a village to raise a child'*[1].

To all the other places and people who have inspired me over the last years and thereby shaped the path to this thesis, especially to the whole team of *iniciato*, without whom this work would not have been possible. For your natural understanding of 'intern' as an equal team member, your trust and openness – I rarely learned so much within a few months. To Sophie, Basti, and the whole team for an unforgettable time at the *Welterhof*; To Julia and Flo for co-creative *SOFA* planning sessions and empowering support; To my interviewees and participants - I hope this work can give you back at least a fraction of what you have given me.

To my supervisor Eric for constant availability, inspiring literature suggestions and attentive feedback; To the LSG crew and the arctic crabs for long co-working sessions and repeatedly recharging my energy; To Malte, for encouraging words in between and most and foremost to Hannah, for being there, for patiently listening, and always helping to sort out the chaos in my head. Finally, a big thanks to the whole CPS-batch for wonderful two years!

---

[1] Proverb with origins in several African cultures and languages, e.g. Swahili and Lunyoro.

List of Figures

List of Appendices

Acronyms

CSA – Community Supported Agriculture

E1, 2, 3 – Expert 1, 2, 3

FG – Focus Group

P1, 2, 3, 4 – Participant 1, 2, 3, 4

RTA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SOFA – Project of *Solidary Facilitation*

Table of contents

Introduction

In the past few years, the inability of capitalism to provide effective responses to the challenges of our time has become increasingly apparent. Rather than offering solutions, the system itself has proven to be the root cause for the exploitation and exhaustion of human and non-human nature (Federici, 2019; Fuchs, 2020; Graefe, 2017; Magdoff, 2015; Marcuse, 1991; Rosa, 2013). As a result, fear, frustration and despair about the current situation are spreading in societies, provoking a growing right-wing movement, protesting anxiously against progressive reforms (Malm and The Zetkin Collective, 2021; Niranjan, 2024). On the other hand, a smaller but growing number is looking for alternatives to the existing system: a new movement of community-based projects that reject a capitalist mode of production (CSX Netzwerk e.V., 2024; Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023; Rommel *et al.*, 2024).

However, creating genuine alternatives to capitalism proves difficult. Despite aspirations for change, the pervasive influence of capitalist values and structures permeates all dimensions of our lives, including not only modes of labor and production, but also social relationships, our relation to nature, and even our own thoughts and feelings (Graefe, 2017; Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017; Welzer, 2011). It is therefore necessary to adopt practices that clearly promote oppositional values and build communities grounded in principles of democracy, solidarity, and cooperation.

A critical perspective reveals how capitalist ideologies influence societal structures and institutions, human interaction and personal values (Fuchs, 2020; Habermas, 1984; Marcuse, 1991; Rosa, 2016). This perspective further highlights communication as a key element for transformative action that is capable of overcoming capitalist patterns (Fuchs, 2016, 2020; Williams, 1976, 2005). Drawing on insights of critical theory, in particular Christian Fuchs's *Critical Theory of Communication*, I argue that only truly democratic and cooperative modes of communicating can constitute a real alternative that levels the ground for a world beyond capitalism.

In the light of contemporary global challenges such as climate warming, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, together with rising social inequalities, food systems are of particular interest in this respect (Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023; Magdoff, 2015; Selwyn, 2021). Industrial corporate agriculture, embedded in a global network of interdependencies, finds itself in a paradoxical position where it plays the role of both driver and victim of such harmful developments (Magdoff, 2015; Selwyn, 2021). Recent crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Europe-wide farmers' protests in January 2024 have finally brought a new awareness to also Western Europe: Corporate industrial agriculture not only depletes vital resources, but also survives only because of government subsidies and corporate interests that prioritize economic growth over human needs (Magdoff, 2015; Niranjan, 2024). A rethinking towards alternatives is thus pressingly urgent in this sector.

This study focuses on one of the most established alternatives to the corporate industrial food system that is recently experiencing a 'renaissance' in Western European countries: *Community Supported Agriculture* (CSA). Through upfront payments and long-term commitment, harvest products and related risks are collectively shared among producers and consumers, thereby providing synergies between ecological, economic, and social aspects (Cone and Myhre, 2000; Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023; Furness *et al.*, 2022). In Germany, the movement is experiencing a renewed interest and CSAs have increased fifty-fold within the last two decades (NSL, 2024). Now, against the backdrop of the environmental and social crises such as the recent farmer protests, the concept again gains ground.

But while the CSA concept promotes cooperation and solidarity, achieving strong internal communities is often challenging. Research proves internal communication as a major obstacle in resisting the various pressures CSAs are facing (Antoni-Komar *et al.*, 2021; Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017; Schäffler, 2023). Scholars as well as CSA consultants advocate structured communication methods that facilitate reflection on contradictious worldviews, existing power dynamics and personal constraints (Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017; Schäffler, 2023; Strüber *et al.*, 2023).

It is against the background of this problem that the idea of '*Solidary Facilitation*' (*SOFA*) was born, an initiative of the organization *iniciato GbR*, which for years has been working with future-oriented organizations and collectives. Through the application of a certain method, called *tension-based work* (German: *Spannungsbasiertes Arbeiten*)[2], its aim is to support CSA communities on their transformational pathways, a potential that will be explored within this work.

Aim, purpose, and research questions

Given the urgency of countering destructive global trends, especially in the agricultural sector, this thesis emphasizes the importance of creating genuine alternatives to the capitalist system. It focuses on CSA as a hopeful movement in this regard and pays special attention to their internal constraints. Critical theories of communication support the focus on communication and highlight the necessity of truly cooperative and democratic communication structures to authentically challenge the capitalist system. Therefore, this work examines *tension-based work,* a specific communication method within the *SOFA* initiative*,* developed to address internal challenges of CSAs and strengthen their communities.

The purpose of the present work is thus to explore the method's influence on the communication within CSA communities in regard to its potential to promote a communication culture that strengthens CSA communities and thereby the movement in general. Thies leads to the following research questions:

1. *How does the method of tension-based work influences communication patterns in CSA communities?*
2. *What conditions facilitate the method's potential to strengthen cooperative communication within CSA communities?*

---

[2] As there is no official English translation yet and a more suitable translation could not be found, the term 'work' is used here despite awareness of its limitations. It should thus not be associated with 'labor' but rather reflect the active process of communicating collaboratively.

The aim is to develop practical and accessible knowledge so that findings are applicable and enriching for CSAs. The study further aims to be transferrable beyond the agricultural sector, with particular relevance for similar alternative communities and activist groups that believe in a different world beyond capitalism.

Structure of the thesis

The first chapter provides a short introduction of the historical development of CSA and outlines existing research in this field, particularly in relation to internal communication, as well as a short background of *tension-based work*. The second chapter introduces the methodological approach. A critical research framework according to Alvesson and Deetz (2021) and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2007) is applied, structured around the main steps of *insight*, *critique*, and *re-definition*. This provides the frame for my analysis. As this framework indicates, this chapter further delves into critical theories of communication and introduces their main concepts, including *capitalist communication* as opposed to *cooperative communication*. Subsequently, the research design is introduced, including a multimethod approach for collecting data and *Reflexive Thematic Analysis* (RTA) for its interpretation. In the final chapter, findings are synthesized and contextualized within the methodological framework, thereby linked to theoretical ideas and discussed in relation to the research questions. Finally, implications for CSAs are derived from conclusions.

Background and context

Community-Supported Agriculture

Sharing the harvest, the basic idea behind CSA, is actually not a new phenomenon but a practice that has been securing livelihoods for thousands of years in times of pressing social, economic and ecological problems (Bietau et al., 2013). After having been pushed into the background due to rural emigration during industrialization, collective agricultural projects have returned independently in various places around the world since the 1970s (Bietau *et al.*, 2013). Thus, one of the most prominent first CSA movements emerged in Japan, known as *Teikei* (English: 'cooperation' or 'eating with the farmer's face'), while 'Les Jardins de Cocagne', a farmer's cooperative, was founded in Geneva 1978, inspired by the Chilean commons (Bietau *et al.*, 2013; NSL, 2021). This paper centers on CSA development in Europe, which has experienced a significant renaissance within the last two decades, led by France, Austria, Switzerland and Germany (Bietau *et al.*, 2013; Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023; NSL, 2024). The German CSA-network, founded in 2011, reports a growth from ten to almost five hundred CSAs within the 21st century, with a major upswing during the COVID pandemic , an indication of CSA's great potential resulting from its relative independence from global crisis (NSL, 2021). The core of CSAs lies in a joint commitment wherein consumers and producers collectively finance agricultural endeavors, thereby enable a secure income for the farmers and share financial and crop risks (Furness *et al.*, 2022). In return, members receive agricultural products on a regular basis, usually grown regionally and seasonally according to organic criteria (Antoni-Komar *et al.*, 2021; Bietau *et al.*, 2013; Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023).

In line with the growing movement, research on CSA has increased in recent decades and while studies on the environmental impact have long been predominant, research on the social impact of CSA is currently increasing. CSAs were identified as a "social practice" (Boddenberg et al., 2017, p. 127), often entailing cooperative activities, voluntary participation, and solidary funding (Bietau *et al.*, 2013; Helfrich and Bollier, 2019; Paech *et al.*, 2020;

Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017). Most CSAs, for instance, provide solidary financing mechanisms, such as 'bidding rounds'[3] or 'solidary contributions'[4] (Helfrich and Bollier, 2019; Strüber *et al.*, 2023). Since the focus is on food sovereignty, solidarity and the decommodification of food, CSA is also often defined as an alternative to capitalist modes of production and thus as a form of "modern *commoning*" (Bietau *et al.*, 2013; Helfrich and Bollier, 2019). Some research further transfers the CSA principles to other economic sectors (Löbbering, 2018; Paech *et al.*, 2020; Rommel, 2017; Rößler, 2017; Szuster et al., 2021). Scholars agree on the concept's high transformational potential, emphasizing positive effects both ecologically and socially (Degens and Lapschieß, 2023; Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023). However, only few studies shed light on the still classed and gendered dimension of CSAs, revealing that members are typically "white, well-educated and with higher income" (Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023, p. 7) as well as predominantly female (Cone and Myhre, 2000).

While there is little research that explicitly focuses on such unequal power relations, research on inner-movement conflicts claims ideological disputes and contradictious goal-definition as main internal issues (Barkan, 1986), and reveals 'capitalist mindsets' such as performance pressure as contributing to power hierarchies within communities (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019; Weisser, 2020). This aligns with existing studies on CSAs, arguing that internal conflicts, resulting from poor communication and reflections of power dynamics, significantly contribute to the demise of CSAs (Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017; Schäffler, 2023). CSAs face exceptional challenges of balancing economic viability, social cohesion, and transformative goals, and a strong community is essential to withstand these pressures (Paech *et al.*, 2020; Rommel *et al.*, 2024). Fostering mutual understanding through targeted communication strategies is held crucial to

---

[3] A common procedure in CSAs for determining monthly financial contributions: Members submit a bid anonymously as often as necessary until the total amount required for one season is reached. In this way, production can be financed jointly without people with different financial capacities having to pay the same amount (for more details, see: Helfrich and Bollier, 2019, p. 166).

[4] Members who are able to do so voluntarily pay a higher contribution so that those with fewer financial resources can pay less, a procedure I got to know in different CSAs in Germany.

this endeavor (Antoni-Komar *et al.*, 2021; Cox *et al.*, 2008; Furness *et al.*, 2022; Schäffler, 2023). Accordingly, the German CSA network proposes different strategies to facilitate internal communication and strengthen the communities, one of which is the tension-based work (Strüber *et al.*, 2023). Most concrete approaches for practical communication strategies therefore originate from the CSA context itself, and usually draw on methods of radically self-organized organizational approaches. However, these methods have hardly been studied scientifically and, as far as I know, have not been examined within the framework of critical theory.

Origins of the tension-based work: Organizational communication and the idea of Solidary Facilitation

The *tension-based work* is a method that aims to facilitate collaboration and conflict management and can be classified in the field of organizational communication of 'radically self-organized organizations' (Breit, 2023). While the method is derived from the *Holacracy* approach[5], it is also used in other forms of self-organization (Breit, 2023; Robertson, 2015). The German CSA network for instance assigns the method in the realm of *Sociocracy*[6] (Breit, 2023; Solawi Genossenschaften, 2024). The method was further revised and published in the magazine *New Narratives* (German: *Neue Narrative*)[7], which is ultimately the version used for the *Solidary Facilitation (SOFA)* project and to which I refer in this work (Neue Narrative, 2024).

Tension-based work makes use of a clear structure and simple questions to guide groups through a conversation on tensions. Tensions are thereby understood as 'energy potential' and therefore as a driving force for change, within this understanding, tensions can thus also represent something

---

[5] *Holacracy* is an organizational structure of radical decentralization and self-organization through explicit rules and roles, thereby eliminating formal hierarchies, developed by Brian Robertson on the basis of *sociocracy*.

[6] Developed in the 20th century in the Netherlands, *sociocracy* is a forerunner of *holacracy* and uses the circular model and consensus decision-making to break down hierarchical structures and ensure equality of all participants.

[7] "Neue Narrative" is a magazine and online platform within the *new work movement* that advocates just and future-oriented transformation of work.

negative or positive (see *Figure 1*). The method aims to release this energy through a clear structure and targeted questions. To this end, the participants are first asked to collect and 'localize' their own tensions in silence, to, on the one hand, to better understand what could contribute to resolving the tension, and, on the other hand, ensure to only take responsibility for their own tensions instead of speaking for others through 'proxy tensions'. To help with this, the method differentiates into 'four spaces of the organization' (see *Figure 2*). Even if these are usually not clearly separable, the aim is to help people better understand where potential changes need to take place in order to resolve their tension. The subsequent discussion, led by a facilitator, is circular, with each participant sharing in turn. The method offers the individual five progressively structured categories for proceeding with their tensions - ranging from simply exchanging information to a structural change, depending on where the tension is 'located' and what the respective person needs in order to deal with it. The question 'What do you need?' is thus at the center throughout the whole process. The complete procedure of the method is shown *in Figure 3* in the appendix.
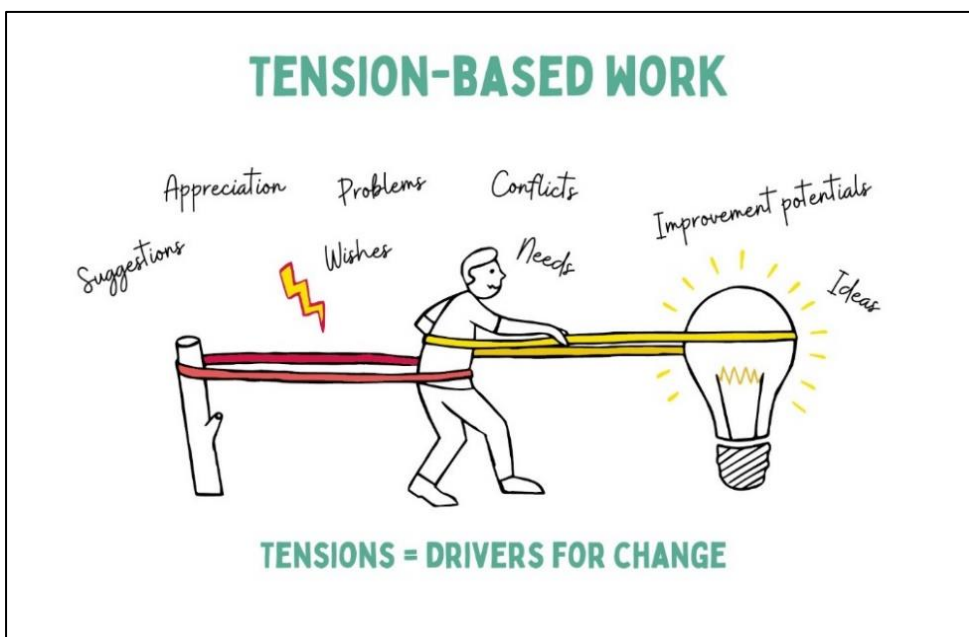
Figure 1: Tensions as 'drivers for change', illustration by iniciato Gbr, own translation
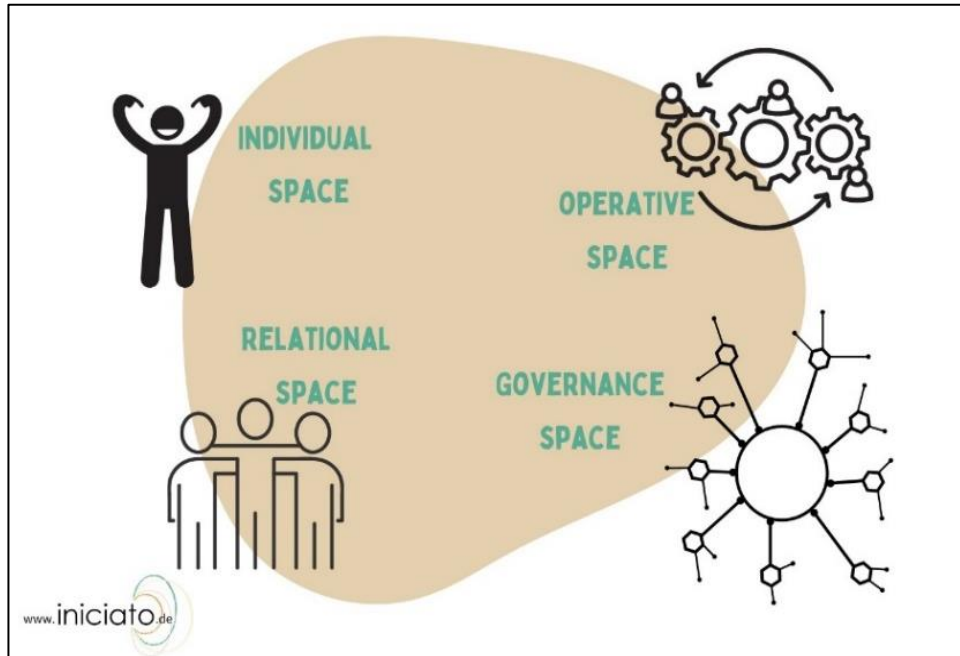
Figure 2: The four spaces of organizations: the different levels of tensions

In this thesis, tension-based work is explored in the context of the SOFA project, which was developed by the organization *iniciato* on the basis of extensive experience in working with various groups, especially in the agricultural sector. The idea of the initiative is to familiarize CSAs with the tension-based work and enable them to subsequently implement it themselves, thereby providing a tool that can facilitate internal communication and strengthen the communities. The project is still in development and supposed to be started in autumn 2024.

Critical Research Methodology and theoretical framework

To build a bridge between theory and practice, a critical research methodology is applied that combines critical and post-structuralist ideas with qualitative research (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). While critical theory pays special attention to power relations and their material impacts, constructivist approaches emphasize their constructed nature. Their combination thus allows a deeper understanding of the societal constructions without denying their material impact (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, 2021; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This approach adopts an *ontologically realist* perspective, thus acknowledges the existence of a 'real' world shaped by the material conditions of society, while recognizing e*pistemological constructivism*, i.e. that our knowledge of this world is constrained, subjective, and continuously shaping the material conditions (Bhaskar and Hartwig, 2010; Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2016). In its methodology, critical research seeks to enhance our understanding of the world by theoretically grounding empirical research (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2016). However, it is often criticized for being 'hypercritical' while failing to point out alternatives (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2018; Clark et al. 2021).

Responding to such accusations, Alvesson and Deetz (2021) have developed a critical research framework that is located on the "critical edge of poststructuralism" (Alvesson and Deetz 2021, p. 10) and directly integrates a practical orientation. Thus, next to *insight* and *critique*, *transformative redefinition* becomes an essential component (Alvesson and Deetz 2021, 127 pp.). Acknowledging *positionality* and *reflexivity* throughout the whole process is essential and holds all components together (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018; Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007). Rather than providing clear methods, the framework is to be understood as an "overall strategy for conceptualizing and conducting an inquiry" in an iterative, co-creative and reflective research process (Cecez-Kecmanovic 2007, p. 1448).

Figure 3 shows the key components of this 'strategy' that guided my whole research process. As the illustration suggests, my research process has been

iterative, constantly evolving through going back and forth between the individual steps, reflection, and adaptation. This to and fro between theory and empiricism resembles Peirce's concept of *abduction*. Peirce sees abduction as a form of 'discovery' that attempts to find the most plausible interpretation for specific phenomena in order to then investigate whether this explanation can be transferred to other cases. The formulation of the research questions, hypotheses and empirical investigation are thus closely interwoven and constantly refined (Gustafsson and Hagström, 2017).
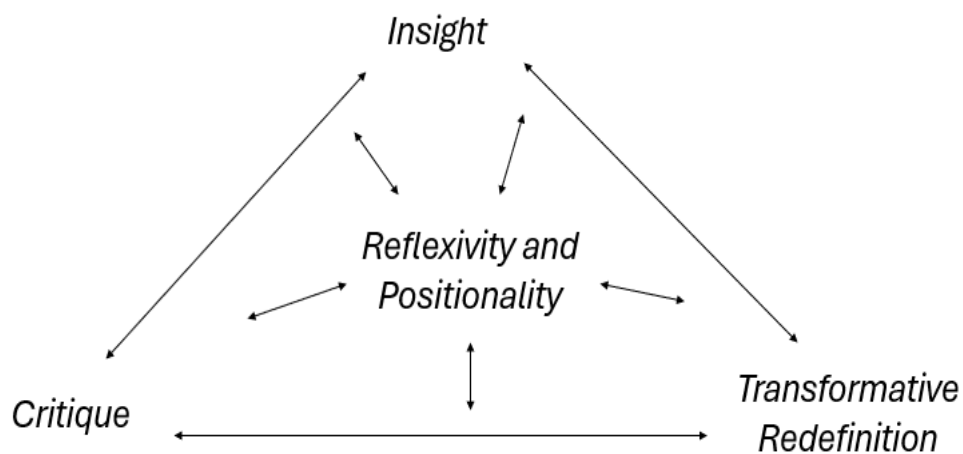
Figure 3: A critical research methodology framework inspired by Alvesson and Deetz (2021) and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2007, p. 1452), own illustration

Insight refers to the in-depth examination of individual experiences on the local level and the prioritization of "powerful exemplars" over a mass of data (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021, p. 128; Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007). Close interaction with individuals from both CSA and SOFA contexts along with my own experience within communication structures in CSAs have provided valuable insight for this research.

    Critique "adds political meaning to insight" by critically explaining and re-contextualizing local phenomena within broader power structures with the aim to uncover deeper meanings and patterns beyond initial impressions (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021, p. 137). To achieve this, I ground my empirical research within critical theories of communication, which help identify

crucial topics for data collection and provide a broader perspective for interpreting my findings.

Using insight and critique as a driver for change, *transformative redefinition* complements both by developing new ways of operating, it thereby adds a notion of 'positive action' to critical research (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021; Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007). An open discourse, the co-creation of knowledge and the recognition of different perspectives as a driving force for change are the prerequisites for this process (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021; Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007). As the focus of my research lies on critiquing and 'redefining' current communication structures, transformative redefinition is at the core of this research project.

Additionally, this research adopts a *reflexive-dialectic* approach, i.e. awareness of biases and values, as well as recurrent dialogue with the research subjects, that allows for continuous learning and 'unlearning', are emphasized throughout the whole process (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021; Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007). Given my engagement in the research topic, a reflection on my own positionality is crucial and will follow presenting theoretical background and research methods.

Critical Theories of Communication

As the methodological framework indicates, the subsequent section delves into critical communication theories to offer a comprehensive foundation for data collection and analysis. Applying Marx's perspective of *dialectical materialism* is appropriate in several ways here as it emphasizes the interconnectedness of all aspects of society and highlights communication as shaping all these elements, whether of material or immaterial nature (Fuchs, 2020; Williams, 1976). In line with my research objective, it therefore helps to understand concrete communication phenomena within the broader systems they are embedded and supports the focus on communication by highlighting its inseparability from societal structures. Additionally, Marxist theories have proven to be an important tool in leftist movements for emancipation and liberation so that an analysis of 'anti-capitalist' spaces such as CSAs can benefit from their critical inputs (Federici 2019; Fuchs 2020). Given the increasing global exploitation and the resurgence of fascism in multiple countries worldwide, there's thus a renewed urgency to revisit Marx's fundamental concepts (Malm and The Zetkin Collective, 2021).

Christian Fuchs's (2020) *Critical Communication Theory* offers this critical perspective by combining Marxist schools of thought with communication theories: *Humanist Marxism, Critical Theory and Critical Political Economy of Communication.* Enriched with a *critical feminist perspective*, each stream highlights different concepts within a theoretical framework for critically analyzing communication. In line with Hegel and Marx, the approach taken emphasizes a dialectical perspective and is enriched by multiple scholars, including David Harvey, Hartmut Rosa, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Maria Mies, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Raymond Williams, and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen.

Humanist Marxism emphasizes humanistic aspects within Marxist theories, focusing on *alienation*, *agency*, *autonomy*, and *individual fulfillment* (Clark *et al.*, 2021; Fuchs, 2020; Marcuse, 1991). Important contributions stem from Herbert Marcuse, who critiques the *one-dimensionality* of the capitalist system (Fuchs, 2020; Marcuse, 1991). Hartmut Rosa further

explores the concept of *alienation* in relation to capitalist society's *acceleration* processes (Rosa, 2013, 2016). *Critical Theory,* rooted in the Frankfurt School of the 20th century, adds a focus on societal relations, culture and politics within Marxist theory, emphasizing *domination*, *power* and *ideology* (Bronner, 2017; Fuchs, 2016). Frankfurt School theorists such as Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas criticize capitalism's *instrumental rationality* and advocate for a shift towards critical, dialectical reasoning through reflection and dialogue (Bronner, 2017; Fuchs, 2020). *Critical Political Economy of Communication* further elaborates on the mutual influence of capitalism and communication systems. As a study field it opposes the uncritical, instrumental logic of 'mainstream academia' and advocates for a dialectical, process-oriented approach to study organizations as "communicative structures of power" (Benson, 1977; Deetz, 1982; Fuchs, 2020; Mumby and Kuhn, 2019, p. 34). A *critical feminist perspective* contributes to this approach with examining the role of social categories such as gender, sex, ethnicity, and ability on power structures (Mies, 1998; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2011). Bauhardt (2013), Federici (2019) and Helfrich and Bollier (2019) contribute to Marxist feminism by deepening the concept of *commoning* as a feminist approach to oppose capitalism.

Dialectical and communicative materialism

While critical theories traditionally adopt a *materialist* perspective, i.e. assume a physical, tangible reality shaped by the material conditions of society such as means of production, technology, and social relations, an *idealist* perspective adopts a different view on reality, claiming that it is fundamentally mental or immaterial rather than physical or material (Fuchs, 2016, 2020; Marcuse, 1991). In the great debate between both *materialism* and *idealism*, which has continued to dominate philosophy until today, Marx argued for *dialectical materialism,* which recognizes both, arguing for a mutual interdependence between ideas about the world and its physical elements (Fuchs, 2020). Aware that Marxist scholars are not unanimous but partly even contradictory in their view on dialectical materialism, including for instance Žižek and Lenin, I build on Fuchs' understanding, which main

thrust is that all aspects of social order - including forms of production and technology, our relationship to each other and to nature, as well as mental concepts - are interdependent, relational and dialectical (Fuchs, 2017, 2020). A dialectical worldview therefore rejects reductionism and one-dimensional thinking, thereby aiming to dissolve dualisms between rationality/emotionality, production/reproduction, body/mind, prevailing in capitalism (Fuchs, 2016). Further, it also stresses the process-like nature of the world, arguing that everything is in constant development and change (Benson, 1977; Fuchs, 2020). A dialectical understanding of materialism recognizes the world as "dynamic, dialectical, a relation, and a process – a form of contradictions that enable change and development" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 27).

Matter, in this regard, is seen as the substance that constitutes the materiality (Fuchs, 2020). Drawing on Aristotle's concept of matter as "dynamic being-in-possibility", a dialectical perspective acknowledges matter as process-like and thus ascribes it transformative potentiality (Fuchs, 2020, p.28). Fuchs sees communication as crucial in realizing this potentiality, which underscores the transformative potential of communication in shaping societal dynamics (Fuchs, 2020).

Within a critical dialectical framework of communication, Fuchs builds upon Raymond Williams's concept of *communicative materialism*, which emphasizes a dialectical relation of communication processes and the material conditions of society, i.e. an interdependence of communication with all aspects of social order (Fuchs, 2017; Williams, 2005). Consequently, Fuchs understands communication as a "material and real process" constantly producing and reproducing society (Fuchs, 2020, p. 38). Society, in turn, is seen as the "totality of complexes of production" including production of commodities, but also of meanings and social relations (Fuchs, 2017, 2020, p. 66; Williams, 2005). Making use of Williams's understanding of *culture* as the totality of meanings that shape human practices, communication becomes an important process in defining culture (Fuchs 2017; Williams 2005). Drawing on Marx's understanding that humans "by producing their means of subsistence, […] indirectly producing their material life", Fuchs claims

communication is one such key "means of human subsistence" (Fuchs 2017, p. 759).

Capitalist ideology and communication

From a Marxist viewpoint, capitalism extends beyond mere economics to become an all-encompassing ideology influencing every aspect of society (Federici, 2019; Fuchs, 2020; Graefe, 2017; Marcuse, 1991). Fuchs (2020, p.119) defines capitalism as a "societal formation" rooted in an ideological mode of production. Acknowledging the diversity of definitions among critical scholars, he describes *ideology* as an "information process" that disseminates specific ideas about the world, thereby shaping people's perceptions and forming a collective consciousness (Fuchs, 2016, p. 222). In capitalism, ideology takes the form of "false consciousness", as it perpetuates a distorted perception of the world, based on the belief in infinite accumulation of capital in a world of finite resources (Fuchs, 2020, p. 151; Malm and The Zetkin Collective, 2021).

Instrumental and one-dimensional rationality
Rooted in *technological rationality* and *instrumental reason*, capitalist ideology undermines dialectical thinking and constructs a one-dimensional narrative that contributes to the creation of dualisms between what is valuable and what not. This narrative perpetuates power imbalances, whereby *power* is defined as "the capacity of human actors to influence societal relations" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 65). Capitalist ideology thus legitimizes and perpetuates domination in the sense of economic, political and cultural privileges through labor exploitation and control (Fuchs, 2016). However, Fuchs also suggests that ideology is not solely the consciousness of the dominant group, aligning with David Harvey's perspective that ideology is present in all political movements (Fuchs, 2020; Harvey, 1974, 2000). As capitalist societies are, according to Harvey, characterized by internal contradictions and irrationalities, they can also give rise to alternative ideologies that may challenge the status quo. Fuchs (2020, p.228) denotes these alternative ideologies as "emancipatory knowledge" and Marcuse (1991, p.13) describes

that the rationality of the "new form of control" becomes "true consciousness". Understanding the dialectical relationship between communication and capitalism is therefore crucial in comprehending the vital role of *capitalist communication* in perpetuating capitalist ideologies, which in turn reflect and shape broader social dynamics – "Ideology", as Fuchs (2020, p.225) claims, "is a communication process".

Capitalist communication operates on *instrumental rationality*, strategically designed to "protect, maintain or advance a social order based on minority power" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 294). Fuchs's take on instrumental rationality refers to the tendency to approach decisions and actions based solely on achieving specific goals or outcomes, often at the expense of broader social or ethical considerations (Fuchs, 2020). In capitalism, these goals are directed towards accumulation of capital and power, leading to a prioritization of efficiency and effectiveness while neglecting factors that are not ascribed monetary value such as human wellbeing, emotionality and often nature (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019; Mies, 1998; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2011). This rationality has given rise to the concept of *homo oeconomicus*: a capitalist ideal of a human being as rational, benefit-oriented, and autonomous; an isolated, competitive "ego" that stands in contrast to solidarity and dependency (Helfrich and Bollier, 2019, p. 78). Relating instrumental reasoning to communication, Williams (1976) outlines four forms of communication systems: authoritarian, paternal, commercial and democratic (Williams, 1976). Whereas the first three *instrumentalize* communication as well as humans for political, cultural, or economic power and thereby 'commodify' communication, the latter follows a *cooperative* logic, valuing communication and humans as ends in themselves rather than means for profit (Fuchs, 2016, 2020; Williams, 1976).

Instrumental rationality is related to "one-dimensional communication" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 131). *One-dimensionality* simplifies society into single parts, promoting an ideological worldview in the interest of those in power (Fuchs, 2020; Marcuse, 1991). Marx attributes this reductionism to capitalism, lamenting how mere focus on growth has made humanity "stupid and one-sided" (Sayers, 2011, p. 301). Marcuse, in "One-Dimensional Man" (1991), relates one-dimensionality to modern society, exposing how capitalist

communication systems perpetuate a one-sided worldview that suppresses critical thinking and alternatives for radical social change. In this regard, *one-dimensional* describes the conformity to pre-existing structures and norms, and opposes the ability to challenge the status quo through critical thinking and transformative practice (Fuchs, 2020; Marcuse, 1991; Putnam, Fairhust and Banghart, 2016). Consequently, a one-dimensional human is losing its "powers of being-a-self" (Marcuse, 1991, p. 28): a state of *alienation*.

Alienation

The concept of alienation, central to Marxist critique, denotes a dysfunctional relationship or a profound sense of meaninglessness within capitalism (Petrovic, 1963; Sayers, 2011). Initially focused on labor, it later expanded to encompass various aspects of life (Petrovic, 1963; Sayers, 2011). To overcome the root cause of alienation – capitalism – Marx advocated not just the abolition of wage labor and property, but a profound human and social transformation that encompasses "all human senses and qualities" (Sayers, 2011, p. 301). David Harvey argues that alienation is a universal process in capitalist society, extending beyond production into other aspects of social life, such as consumption, politics, culture, and social relations (Harvey, 2018). Within his critical theory of communication, Fuchs defines alienation as "the conditions under which humans do not collectively control the relations, structures and systems that shape their lives" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 200). As a root cause, he draws on Hartmut Rosa's (2013, 2016) concept of *acceleration* within capitalism, understood as the "accumulation of economic, cultural, and political power in less time than before", which leads to exclusion, insignificance of voice, disrespect and dissatisfaction (Fuchs, 2020, p. 296). The accelerated and competitive nature of capitalism thus leads to a multi-layered form of alienation, manifesting itself in domination and exploitation of workforce as well as a loss of individual autonomy, self-realization, and self-control (Fuchs, 2020; Rosa, 2013, 2016; Schiermer, 2020).

Patriarchal structures

What Fuchs only marginally touches upon but is crucial in Marxist feminism is the gendered and intersectional dimension within capitalism – its patriarchal structures. "Capital", as Fuchs (2020, p.270) writes, "cannot exist without making use of unpaid resources stemming from nature, nonwage/unremunerated labor (such as housework), and the periphery". Marxist feminist theories deepen this understanding, emphasizing how the capitalist system relies heavily on unpaid reproductive labor, including care, housework, emotional and relational work and is therefore inextricably based on exploitation (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019; Federici, 2019; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2011). As reproductive work is still predominantly done by women and other marginalized groups, this goes hand in hand with a gendered and intersectional dimension and reinforces gender and intersectional hierarchies. Within an eco-feminist approach, the exploitation of reproductive work is further related to the exploitation of nature, both undervalued in capitalist markets (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019). An underlying fundamental problem is seen in instrumental rationality that creates norms and values based on dualisms, e.g. human/nature, body/mind, production/reproduction, male/female whereby one side is structurally advantaged to the other, provoking inequal societal structures that are sometimes more, sometimes less visible. Feminist Marxism thus advocates a more holistic and relational thinking, therefore adopts a dialectic perspective in order to break down dichotomous structures and create a society of care, solidary and inclusivity (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019; Federici, 2019; Haug, 2003; Helfrich and Bollier, 2019; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2011).

In capitalism, communication thus becomes instrumentalized to justify domination and exploitation for the purpose of accumulating capital and power, thereby maintaining patriarchal structures. It becomes a means of perpetuating a distorted image of the world that is based on false consciousness. This strategically suppresses critical thinking and questioning, which promotes the alienation of the individual from their environment, their fellow human beings and from their own thoughts and feelings.

Cooperative communication

Critical theorists, however, do not only aim to criticize the status quo, but to find and enable new alternative ways of living (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021; Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007; Schiermer, 2020). In opposition to capitalist instrumental thinking, they advocate *cooperative rationality* (Fuchs, 2020; Rosa, 2016; Williams, 1976). According to Fuchs, communication returns to its etymological origin to "share something and make it into common" within such cooperative logic (Fuchs, 2020, p. 293). Referring to Marx, communication thereby regains the "freedom […] of not being a trade" thus becomes de-commodified (Fuchs, 2020, p. 175).

Cooperative reason further forms the basis for "democratic communication", which includes participation and common discussion (Williams, 1976, p. 134). In line with that, Habermas (1984) distinguishes between instrumental and *communicative rationality*, in which the latter is characterized by open, inclusive dialogue and thereby levels the ground for *communicative action*. Following Habermas, "we shall speak of communicative action whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding" (Habermas, 1984, 285 f.). The concept of communicative action is thus based on language as a medium of mutual understanding, which promotes liberating instead of dominating practices.

Dialectical rationality

Unlike one-dimensional thinking, cooperative logic is *dialectical* in the sense that it reflects on and articulate society's antagonisms and acknowledges them as continuous processes (Benson, 1977; Fuchs, 2020; Marcuse, 1991). Drawing on Hegel's understanding of thesis and antithesis, dialectical thinking sees contradictions as 'motors for change', as they evolve into synthesis that represent a modification of the prior state (Benson, 1977). Within this perspective, society's antagonisms are becoming catalysts for change and transformation; prevailing structures are not seen as naturally given, but changeable. *False consciousness* thus becomes replaced by *true consciousness* (Marcuse, 1991).

Appropriation and resonance

Likewise, alienation can be overcome and control over oneself and one's environment re-gained, or, using Marx's words, re-*appropriated*. *Appropriation*, according to Fuchs, means that all "humans collectively seize control of the conditions that shape their lives" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 201). He describes it as a form of *commoning* in the sense that it fosters collective autonomy, self-realization, involvement, mutual understanding and recognition (Fuchs, 2016, 2020). Rosa (2016) alters this concept and claims *resonance* the counterpart to alienation. For him, resonance describes a profound connection to the world; an environment aligned with one's own desires and values, one that enhances *emancipation* (Rosa, 2016; Schiermer, 2020). Emancipation thereby involves not only the ability to change one's own environment, but also a moment of "being touched and transformed by another", which emphasizes the unpredictable and transformative nature of human connection (Rosa, 2016; Schiermer, 2020, p. 5).

Society of the commons

Cooperative rationality, appropriation, and resonance level the ground for a *society of the commons* (Fuchs, 2020). "Marxism", as Fuchs claims, "is not just a critique, but has a vision of a good society – a society of the commons" (Fuchs 2020, p.293). The term *commons* has a long history and a multitude of interpretations, encompassing both natural and social realms. It was formerly often used to describe jointly cultivated meadows, whereas today it often refers to 'new', alternative economic practices, but whose principles were already practiced in the earliest communities (Federici, 2019; Helfrich and Bollier, 2019). Thus, "commons are as old as humanity and as modern as the Internet" (Helfrich, 2012). Fuchs's understanding aligns with contemporary research, defining commons as radically decentralized, collaborative, and nonproprietary forms of communities that contradict the exchange of markets and thereby provide an alternative to the capitalist system (Fuchs, 2020; Helfrich and Bollier, 2019). This is underlined by a feminist perspective, from which commons are of specific interest as they attempt to abolish dualistic thinking. By directly integrating care work, characterized by relationality, emotionality, and time investment, as equally essential they counter capitalism's logic (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019; Wichterich, 2017).

However, a dialectical perspective helps to understand that capitalist societal structures are hampering the flourishing of commons, given that they are neither driven by competitive nor profit motives (Benson, 1977; Fuchs, 2020; Helfrich and Bollier, 2019). Helfrich and Bollier (2019) thus claim market and state as the 'enclosers' (German: *Einheger*) of the commons. Likewise, Hardt and Negri argue that all forms of commons – including ecosystem, cultural, and production commons, as well as common places and services - become subject to extraction within capitalism (Hardt and Negri, 2017, p. 166). As this implies, *commoning* requires new ways of thinking beyond capitalist logics and to overcome forms of alienation and separation, so that people can evolve into new roles and perspectives (Fuchs, 2020; Helfrich and Bollier, 2019).

Understanding the dialectics between societal structures and communication finally leads to the essential role of communication int his regard: "Through everyday communication, humans (re)produce social structures that (re)produce societal structures that enable, condition, and constrain further communication processes in everyday life" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 85). Fuchs differentiates between *practice communication* and *praxis communication*, where the former encompasses any human encounter, while the latter involves the active attempt to change societal relations for the collective good: "Praxis communication is not about society as it is, but about how we can achieve an actual, true society" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 339). Therefore, political action can alter *practice* into *praxis communication* (Fuchs, 2020).

Praxis is a core concept in humanist Marxist approaches and held key in achieving humane conditions for life (Fuchs, 2020). Within critical management studies, for instance, *praxis* is claimed crucial to empower employees to deconstruct asymmetric power structures. Benson describes praxis as "the free and creative reconstruction of social arrangements", whose precondition is a dialectical view on organizational contradictions that enables new a progressive and constructive response to tensions (Benson, 1977, p. 6; Putnam, Fairhust and Banghart, 2016). Consequently, praxis communication embodies a cooperative and solidary practice, characterized by reflexive, critical, and dialectical thinking. It propels us forward amidst contradictions towards a more participative and democratic society.

Multimethod approach and Reflexive Thematic Analysis

In line with the critical research framework, I have chosen a multi-method approach that best meets the challenge to balance interpretative and structural explanations (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007) and allows for an abductive approach, in that new insights can be continuously revised through theoretical inferences, criss-crossing between the different methods (Gustafsson and Hagström, 2017). I conducted semi-structured interviews with people who participated in *tension-based work* in the past (*participant interviews*) as well as *iniciato* employees (*expert interviews*). With the impressions acquired from these individual perspectives, I subsequently immersed myself in a CSA community and 'tested' the method firsthand, supplementing my findings with group observations. This iterative data collection process aimed to capture diverse perspectives and thereby enrich the study with multiple viewpoints. As the focus of critical research approaches does, however, not lie on the choice of specific methods, but on a dialectical and reflexive application of those, I focused on empathic interaction, co-construction of knowledge and constant reflection on my own biases and positionality throughout the data collection (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007; Thorpe *et al.*, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews, that offer the advantage of exploring theoretical assumptions while still allowing for new and unexpected insights (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2018; Misoch 2019). A predefined interview guideline provided a certain structure and focus on the main topics of interest, but at the same time left room for the individuality and subjectivity of each interview through open, narrative questions. This guideline follows Misoch's (2019) four interview phases that facilitate a smooth introduction and a successively deepening into the topic: The *information-phase* provides a brief background on the research and clarifies confidentiality and recording permissions; the *warm-up phase* initiates the conversations with a broad and

narrative question to establish a comfortable interview situation that encourages the interviewees to speak openly; the *main phase* focuses on the central topic and prompts its detailed exploration; the final *closing-phase* allows participants to share additional thoughts and memories not yet discussed.

Three '*participant interviews*' were conducted with four people having experience in participating in tension-based work (P1, P2, P3, P4). As the number of such people is generally limited, I interviewed two people from the CSA context and additionally two people with a different professional background, but who had also become acquainted with the method through moderation by *iniciato*. This third interview was conducted with P3 and P4 together. The questions were based on the concepts emerging from the theory and revolved around motivations and expectations of participation as well as reflection on the process and any changes and difficulties experienced. A more detailed interview guideline for the participant interviews is shown in *Table 2* in the appendix.

Three additional '*expert interviews*' have been conducted with *iniciato* members who have already moderated tension-based work in different teams, including CSA communities, and were involved in the development of *SOFA* (E1, E2, E3). As all three experts have experience of facilitating and participating in tension-based work, the questions were related to both roles. I also used these interviews to gain feedback on my initial conclusions and reflections, which served to 'triangulate' the data and reflect on my own assumptions. The interview guide for the expert interviews can be found in *Table 3* in the appendix.

All interviews took 30 to 60 minutes, were conducted in German and online via video call, during which they were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Participant observation of selected focus groups

In order to deepen the information gained from the interviews, I supplemented my data collection with a focus group observation that allowed me to experience group communication in the realm of tension-based work first-hand and on site. The focus group was a working group from a CSA in northern Germany which was selected on the basis of its previously expressed interest in the SOFA project. The group consisted of eight participants, all farmers deeply engaged in the same CSA, working together on a regular basis. During the meeting, participants were introduced to tension-based work for the first time. The meeting procedure is shown on *Figure 5* and corresponds to the English translation in *Figure 3* in the appendix. As an *iniciato* member moderated the session, I had the opportunity to carefully observe and take notes. I intentionally prioritized this to recording in order to foster the sentiment of a safe space, particularly valuable for sensitive topics (Alvesson and Deetz, 2021). Careful note-taking is further held to support interpretive research authenticity as it does not claim completeness and thereby reminds the researcher of the limited perception of science (Deetz, 1982). In addition to my own observations, I also collected some of the written notes from the participants for my analysis, some of which are shown in *Figure 4*.
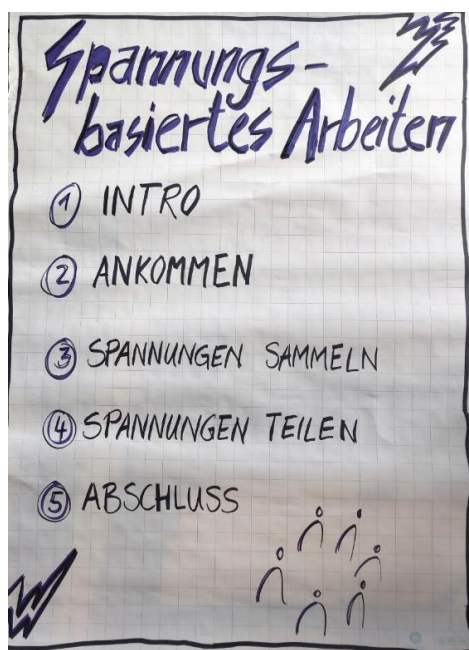

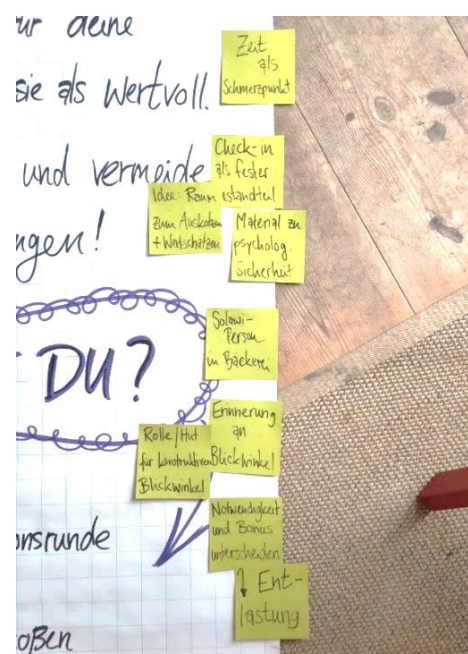*Figure 5: Procedure of tension-based work with focus group*

Figure 4: Collected tensions of focus group participants

Analytical coding process: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

In formulating questions that align with my research objectives, I reviewed critical theories of communication in order to operationalize their rather abstract key concepts into practical indicators that serve as the primary guiding topics for my interview questions. I thus focused on the fundamental tenets of *capitalist* and *cooperative communication*, identifying factors and indicators that stand in close relation to those. Interview questions centered on these indicators, but remained open to a certain extent that allows for unexpected topics not explicitly addressed in the reviewed theories. *Table 1* in the appendix provides an overview of the main indicators and the related interview questions.

Corresponding to my iterative approach, the coding process was oriented on *Reflexive Thematic Analysis* (RTA) according to Braun and Clarke (2006). RTA presents a flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis that helps to identify, cluster and interpret patterns and thereby helps the researcher to understand and report complex data sets in a structured way (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). The method's theoretical flexibility allows its application within different onto-epistemologies. As it can serve to reflect both the material 'reality' of a data set as well as its underlying ideas and beliefs, it is even considered meaningful in research that is "sitting between poles", such as dialectical materialism (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 9). The analysis process is thus oriented on the six phases of RTA as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006):
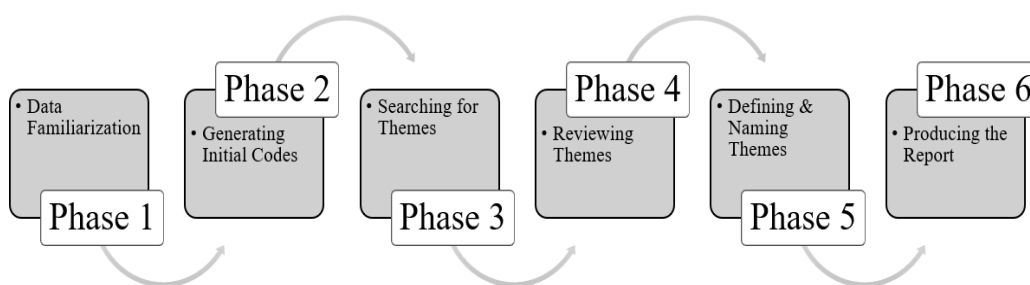

Figure 6: Six phases of RTA according to Braun and Clarke (2006)

1. *Data Familiarization:*

Through repeatedly reading the transcripts and listening to the recordings of the interviews, while making manual notes on initial impressions, I first gained an overview of the dataset and an impression of its nuances.

2. *Generating initial codes:*

Initial codes were developed using NVivo 10. While conventional research differentiates between *deductive* or 'theory-driven' and *inductive* or 'data-driven' research, the RTA approach presumes a sharp distinction impossible and advocates for an interplay of both (Byrne, 2022). This resonates with the aforementioned embracement of Peirce's logic of *abduction*. I thus coded abductively by going forth and back between the theoretical indicators and the date material. In line with my research purpose to grasp underlying perceptions, I double-coded both semantic (explicit meanings expressed by interviewees) as well as latent codes (underlying assumptions) (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

3. *Generating initial themes from codes:*

Subsequently, codes with shared meanings were combined to themes and sub-themes to capture aggregated meanings across the whole data set.

4. *Reviewing themes:*

The initial themes were reviewed in relation to the research questions. Recognizing the frequent overlap of coded data across multiple themes, I used NVivo 10 to establish relationships and interdependencies, which helped to grasp an overarching narrative within the identified themes.

5. *Defining and naming themes:*

This narrative was created through relating individual themes to both the dataset and the research questions, so they depict a fluid and coherent respond to the research questions. *Tables 4 and 5* in the appendix show the themes with related codes in regard to each of the research questions.

6. *Reporting data:*

Following Braun and Clarke (2006), I contextualized and synthesized my findings according to my methodological framework into *insight*, *critique,* and *transformative redefinition*, rather than adhering to traditional reporting conventions that separate 'descriptive findings' from 'discussion' (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

Positionality and ethical considerations

As mentioned in the very beginning, I position myself neither entirely as an *insider* nor an *outsider* in my study field, which provides both advantages and risks, and particularly underscores the importance of reflecting on positionality and ethical considerations. *Positionality* challenges the notion of objectivity prevalent in positivist science, recognizing that researchers are inherently situated within social and cultural contexts shaped by various factors such as sex, gender, ethnicity, and class, all of which influence power relations and values (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Haraway, 1988). Acknowledging positionality therefore involves understanding knowledge as always subjective, relational, and partial. It thus recognizes the impact of researchers' actions and decisions as well as their familiarity within the study field as influencing the whole research process (Berger 2015; Haraway 1988; Hesse-Biber 2011).

My prior experiences and connections within the CSA context allowed me to approach my research with some prior 'orientation' that facilitated access to participants, levelled the ground between me and the interviewees, and fostered a certain 'shared language', i.e. enhances understandings of implied content (Berger 2015; Thorpe et al. 2017; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2018). Especially in the CSA-context I kept for example noticing how a rejection of the 'mainstream', i.e. industrial and global, food system is easily assumed within conversations and my prior experiences helped me to make sense of this implied position. This familiarity, however, also poses a risk of 'blurring boundaries', potentially leading to impose personal biases and hinder exploring diverse perspectives (Berger, 2015; Thorpe *et al.*, 2017). The research thus requires a balancing act between using one's own familiarity for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, while at the same time not charging one's own experience on participants.

Consequently, in addition to standard ethical standards such as voluntary participation, anonymity and consent, I have adhered to *reflexivity* and *transparency* as key elements of trustworthiness and authenticity in research (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018; Clark *et al.*, 2021; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Hesse-Biber, 2011). Additionally, it is important to consider that research

outcomes are never neutral but value-laden and have an influence on societal formation, particularly critical research that often deals with sensitive topics and suppressed social groups (Deetz, 1982; Harvey, 1974). The most important quality therefore becomes a "positive responsibility for the production of knowledge" (Deetz 1982, p. 148), i.e. the extent to which it manages to uncover conditions of inequality and its potential to provide a means to overcome those. To meet these requirements as much as possible, I sought to mitigate potential projections and reflect on the practical implementation of my findings by being transparent about my personal background and research intentions, and by incorporating diverse critical feedback from both people involved in CSAs and external perspectives throughout the process.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the potential influence of my own biases and preconceptions as a limitation to the authenticity of this research (Berger, 2015; Clark *et al.*, 2021; Thorpe *et al.*, 2017). This is further exacerbated by the novelty of the research topic, which limited the number of potential interviewees. My data material, which presents only a few experiences and organizations, thus stands in strong contrast to the great variety of CSAs and hampers generalization of the results (Clark *et al.*, 2021). Especially in this regard, the 'expert interviews' proved to be extremely valuable as they reflect a range of experiences from different CSAs. However, it is worth noting that these experts share collective positive experiences with tension-based work as well as an interest in promoting this method for CSAs. Finally, the critical perspective I take in this work presumably leads to different categorizations and interpretations of the empirical findings compared to the perspectives of the interviewees. While this isn't necessarily problematic, it again underscores the exploratory nature of this work (Degens and Lapschieß, 2023). Therefore, rather than providing definitive solutions to communication problems in CSAs by overemphasizing tension-based work as *the* method, the findings should be seen as an offer for a new and enriching perspective that may indicate a possible new approach to communication within CSAs.

Tension-based work within CSA communities

Insights: expectations – disappointments – crisis

When people talk about how they have dealt with such situations in the past, when there has been tension or conflict, there is just a lot of consternation. I always perceive a lot of suffering and pain. (E1)[8]

As E2's statement leads to suggest, my empirical observations confirm previous research that internal conflicts constitute a major challenge in CSA communities (Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017; Schäffler, 2023). One CSA member, for instance, reports internal team conflicts as a reason for skipping meetings or leaving the CSA community: *Well you know, even if we're a young CSA, there's a history of troubles that even led people to quit* (P2). A corresponding heaviness and tense atmosphere were recognizable during the focus group session when participants claimed annoyance and stress already at the beginning of the meeting: *I'd really like to be able to look forward to a meeting again.* Accordingly, the interviewed experts unanimously describe that the main motivation of CSAs to apply for external moderation and mediation are mostly internal crises in the team (e.g. *Unfortunately, the high motivation is the crisis*, E2) Although the interview questions focused on how communities' dealing with tensions rather than the tensions' content, it became apparent that all the conflicts mentioned could be traced back to only a small number of reasons: unequal division of work and unclear responsibilities; a sense of injustice and overload; mistrust and disappointment in other team members; and ideological disputes on diverging meanings of CSA.

Noticeably, most conflicts interviewees report of appear to be rather hidden and subliminal, *smoldering in the underground*, as P3 describes, creating long-term tensions between different parties that are not openly talked about, yet well-known to all team members. P2 explained for example, how a problem had *probably been rumbling in them for a year or however*

---

[8] As all the interviews were conducted in German, all the following quotes from my interview partners, indicated by the *italics*, are based on my own translation.

long and was only laid open after demanding to *stop beating around the bush, we all know who you're talking about*.

Furthermore, most tensions encountered can be related to poor understanding of each other's behavior (*I just don't get why you're forgetting that every time, FG*), expectations *(It's just so exhausting to always have to guess what is expected of me, FG)*, or the conflict itself *(And the conflict was […]? Well, I wish I knew, P2)*. Even though the empirical findings show a remarkable willingness of cooperation and mutual support within the communities, a sentiment also echoed in my personal experiences in CSAs, this solidarity faces a notable challenge when individuals struggle to understand each other or even to understand themself. This became particularly apparent during my focus group observation when a team member was offered *let us know how we can help you*, but which seemed to cause them to become overwhelmed. Thus, participants do not lack a willingness to work through conflicts or to assist each other in the process, but there is rather a gap in understanding *how* to do so.

This leads to the crucial point that most interviewees identified recognizing and expressing own tensions as a key challenge (i.e. *I think it was a bit unusual the first few times to pay such close attention to your inner self […], I remember that sometimes it's not so easy to pinpoint exactly what it is, E1; it's even more difficult to recognize yourself in the first place and then to communicate that and put it into words, E3)*. This is corroborated by focus group observations of individuals being overwhelmed to pinpoint their own concerns, especially when asked *'What do you need?'* within the process of tension-based work. Despite efforts to organize work non-hierarchically, individuals seemed to struggle with assuming responsibility: *But it must be very difficult for them, coming from such a classic hierarchy. They're supposed to take on a lot of personal responsibility all of a sudden* (P1). Correspondingly, creating work relations at eye-level appears to be challenging for CSA communities (*You really have to be careful that you don't fall back into your old rut. […] that you really stay on the ball and say, hey, we're a team now, it's not hierarchical,* P1).

My empirical results further point to conditions that render these communication difficulties particularly challenging in the CSA context.

Interviewees spoke of a *constant turnover in the gardening-team and the board* (E2), the *seasonal dependency that agriculture is subject to* (E1), reinforced by difficulties in adapting to climate change impacts, time and financial constraints (FG). With regard to existing literature, these points prove to be common challenges in specifically the CSA context, which again emphasizes the importance of internal communication that fosters community support, especially in stressful times (Cox *et al.*, 2008; Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023; Schäffler, 2023).

Moreover, the difficulty of expressing one's own needs openly can become particularly challenging when people with different values and intentions interact, but who at the same time are dependent on close collaboration, as it is the case in CSAs. CSA communities stand out for their convergence of producers and consumers that commit to a relation of mutual dependency over a certain period of time (Bietau *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, aiming to do something 'different' from the industrial corporate food system, CSAs typically attract ideologically motivated individuals in particular (Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023). However, their ideals and visions do not necessarily align. Rather, studies reveal that CSAs bring together individuals with diverse worldviews, visions, and strategies (Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017). This diversity naturally leads to different expectations in regard to what CSAs must and can achieve, as shown in the narratives of my interviewees (e.g. *but we differ in how far we would go to 'save the world'*, P2), as well as in my focus group observation (reflected in a disagreement about different perceptions of a *'CSA identity'*, FG). Scholars confirm how different value systems, lack of trust, and issues of exclusivity pose challenges within ideologically driven groups (Barkan, 1986; Egli, Rüschhoff and Priess, 2023). However, they also recognize the potential of internal diversity to enrich the community, given the condition that different viewpoints are mutually accepted (Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017).

Insights into communication structures and habits reveal similar patterns of subliminal tensions and long-term conflicts, often arising out of poor mutual understanding. This is nurtured by an inability of individuals to recognize,

articulate, and communicate their tensions as well as assume responsibility for their own needs. These insights are particularly challenging in ideology-laden CSA communities. To gain a deeper understanding of these issues, the findings are explored on a broader, structural level by contextualizing them within critical communication theories.

Critique: instrumental rationality and 'technical skills over all'

We live in a society that is in 'everyday coping despair mode'. While we are very routinized in ticking off to-do lists, there is little room for self-reflection because we are stuck in these hamster wheels (E3).

The presented insights into communicational problems resonate with Fuchs's notion of the loss of "mental and linguistic capacity of humans to think and communicate antagonisms" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 131). Applying a dialectical perspective on capitalism as a 'societal formation' that imposes its instrumental rationality on all dimensions of social life offers a structural explanation to this phenomenon. According to this perspective, the whole capitalist system is designed to retain people within its rationality, so that everyday life becomes structured towards productivity and effectivity (Fuchs, 2020; Rosa, 2013). As a result, a very one-directed image of what is of value and what is not is propagated within society. Fuchs' theory explains how communication systems, including media and state institutions, become the means to transfer this capitalist ideology into society (Fuchs 2020; Williams 2005). As reflected in E3's observation, this leads to a prioritization of supposedly 'rational thinking' and so-called 'hard skills': *'education of the heart' […] doesn't really have a place in mainstream schools. […] it's about technical cognitive skills above all and the other things are not brought closer (E3).* This shows that even education becomes instrumentalized in the interests of corporate capitalism, and a form of "employability education", in that "the person who is asked to demonstrate employability enters a relationship with capital before even necessarily being employed" (PWB, 2017, p. 8).

As a result, people are not encouraged to address their own needs and stand up for them. Rather, capitalist corporations and advertising agencies dictate our 'desires', persuading that these are to be satisfied by consumerism, so that even immaterial things like mindfulness and happiness become commodified in capitalist society (Marcuse, 1991). In this way, a 'false consciousness' of freedom of choice is pretended, while in fact human needs are standardized for the sake of capital accumulation, power and control (Firth, 2016; Fuchs, 2020; Williams, 2005). Critical thinking and the recognition of capitalist system's antagonisms become structurally suppressed and, as revealed by my empirical results, individuals struggle in recognizing their own needs and assuming responsibility for them.

However, the findings further show that even communities that are aware of these constraints and deliberately distance themselves from the capitalist system, such as CSAs, run the risk of falling back into its patterns. Research from the field of self-organized organizations confirms this and claims socialized roles and habits, in our system are necessarily shaped by capitalism, as an underlying cause (Breit, 2023). Robertson (2015), for example, describes that even after the dissolution of hierarchical structures in organizations, employees often orient themselves towards former superiors after some time. Further research has shown that even 'alternative spaces' that deliberately intend to break down unequal power relations are not automatically free from intersectional inequalities but rather risk reproducing them (Bauhardt, 2013; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2011). Critical feminist theories provide an explanation for this, arguing that we are all socialized to norms and beliefs that prescribe us certain roles from which it is hard to break free (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019). In instrumental, one-dimensional reasoning, humans are being categorized into social groups according to certain attributes that are either valuable or not in capitalism (Fuchs, 2020). Thus, the *homo economicus,* symbol of toughness, independence, and technical rationality, is ascribed economic success while emotionality and care are denied value and become displaced to the 'invisible' private sphere (Federici, 2019). Particularly in professional contexts, this makes it hard to expose vulnerabilities, as individuals, "reproducing and reinforcing themselves as neoliberal subjects" (PWB, 2017, p. 8), strive to

maintain an idealized image in professional settings. This is also pointed out by E3 when talking of a feeling of *'shame'* they experienced when individuals shared insecurities with their teams. This can create a false image of 'normalcy', or, in Fuchs's words, 'false consciousness' while simultaneously contributing to subliminal stress and anxiety within individuals (Fuchs, 2020).

This categorization is further problematic as it goes hand in hand with gender and intersectional dimensions, thereby perpetuating patriarchal structures. Existing expectations towards care work, technical knowledge, and competences are for example still structurally gender-related, creating social norms and beliefs that make it hard for individuals to break out of their prescribed roles (Bauhardt, 2013; Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019). Even structures that distance themselves from the capitalist market, such as *commons,* are not automatically free from these inequalities (Bauhardt, 2013; Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019; Wichterich, 2017). Such gender-socialized behaviors were also reflected in my interviews, with three respondents explicitly noting gender as a factor in individual's engagement in group discussions and their ability to express emotions, i.e.: *Well, I do have the feeling that there are patterns of what we've been taught and what we haven't and what is recognized as appropriate feminine and what is recognized as masculine* (E2). This suggests that social norms and beliefs prevalent in capitalist society impose certain behaviors on individuals based on their gender, which in this case proves to be an obstacle to honest communication: *And showing any weaknesses or somehow talking about things that take away your energy, that's not something typically male* (P2).

Overall, socialized within capitalist society, it proves difficult to break down capitalist structures despite efforts to do so. The one-dimensional and instrumental rationality that is perpetuated by communication systems we are exposed to in everyday life provokes a desensitization towards personal emotions and needs, a form of *alienation* from ourselves. This makes it hard to assume responsibility and create a community that provides for everyone's needs. Rather, capitalist stereotypes and patriarchal structures appear to creep back in, hindering individuals to show themselves openly and vulnerable. An

environment that fosters openness and authenticity is essential to this endeavor. Targeted practices of communication are emphasized in theory as helpful in creating such an environment (Bauhardt, 2013; Jessen, 2022; Schäffler, 2023). To what extent, then, can the method of tension-based work help to break through capitalist patterns by redefining them in a transformative way?

Transformative redefinition: Potentials of tension-based work

I think communication is just such a big word and something you've heard so often. But how can we really do it better? [...] It's nice to have such a starting point that fills this space of possibility with structure. (P4)

A 'starting point' for dialogue

The tension-based work first of all opens up a space for sharing *everything that is currently on your mind* (P1), including topics that often remain suppressed and unspoken, especially within the productive and efficiency-driven everyday work life. As E2 summarized, the method's task is thus sometimes simply *to precisely open this space because it didn't exist before* (E2). According to the interviewees' experiences, the mere sharing of worries is often already enough for participants to ease their tensions, which shows that opportunities to do so have been lacking before. This aligns with my own and other researchers' experiences, that places for communication and reflection within particularly productive sectors such as agriculture rarely exist due to permanent time pressure (Jessen, 2022; Schäffler, 2023). Interviewees agreed that tension-based work can help to uncover previously subliminal issues before they turn into a major conflict. For instance, P4 explains how fundamentally different opinions, which everyone was aware of but were given no room, could finally be discussed (*and these differences have finally been given space),* and thereby brought to light problems that have been simmering in people for a long time: *This was then transformed from a smoldering, not openly complicated conflict into an open conflict that could then be resolved very constructively within the framework of tension-based work.* Tension-based work can thus be a preventative method that

hinders conflicts from '*boiling over*' (E1), but also just an open space for dialogue without the pressure to talk about something specific: *So for me, it's just really a way for us to bond when we talk about it, even when there's nothing going on (P1).*

Moreover, tension-based work offers a space for discussion and redistribution of responsibilities, so that unequal work relations and overworking can be prevented, as P1 pinpoints: *so that everyone knows where the other person stands and how they feel about taking on certain tasks, which are more or less difficult, and to see who has a lot of and who have less responsibility.* Against the background that unequal power and work relations tend to be perpetuated due to prevailing norms and values in capitalism, tension-based work is here highlighted as an instrument for helping to prevent this. In line with that, feminist scholars agree that *commons* hold great potential to overcome gender disparities, given that clear regulations that ensure a fair distribution between reproductive and production work. Otherwise, as Bauhardt (2013) notes, knowledge hierarchies become entrenched and 'necessary background work' such as housework and childcare often performed by the same people, predominantly women. Clear communication strategies and regulations that allow for reflection and redistribution of work relations are emphasized as crucial to realize commons' potential to overcome such inequalities (Bauhardt, 2013; Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2019; Wichterich, 2017). By opening a space in which responsibilities can be collectively reflected upon and (re-)distributed, my findings suggest tension-based work to be such a communication strategy and its implementation an initial step towards dismantling capitalist patterns, a '*starting point*' for dialogue.

A 'simple expression of care'
Findings further suggest that impacts of the tension-based work go beyond improving collaboration and work relations but also create *a different way of being together* (E1, E2, P1, P4). Accordingly, participants have experienced a *great understanding within the group* (E2) and a *shared feeling for the other person* (P1) through the regular implementation of tension-based work, which promotes trust within their community as well as a feeling of 'being heard':

knowing that you can always go there and that there's always an open ear. And this, yes, just this place of 'I'll be heard' (P1). Through the circular procedure, it is the sheer structure of the method that ensures space for every participant to talk, a space for "voice and recognition of all" that Fuchs attributes cooperative communication (Fuchs, 2020, p. 305). In combination with the method's *simplicity*, *self-explanatory and low-threshold* nature*, mentioned among most interviewees (E1, E2, E3, P3, P4), findings lead to suggest a high level of *inclusivity* and *participation* within tension-based work.

This further aligns with the 'community-feeling' interviewees reported. Participants for instance describe experiences of cooperative moments: *And everyone else is on board and helps to work through this tension, so that a cooperative dynamic is created* (E3); *but if I can't do it right now for whatever reason, the team can make up for it* (P2). This is particularly notable behind the background that the method foregrounds the question 'What do *you* need?', thus centers on the individual rather than the group. These narratives therefore lead to assume that individual needs and tensions were approached in a cooperative way and interviewees seemed to recognize an enrichment of not separating individual from collective needs. Therein lies a dialectical view on actors and the social structures they are embedded in, according to which the community is constantly transformed by individual practices, while the latter in turn influences the actions and values of the individual (Fuchs, 2020). As indicated by the interviewee, this perspective allows for mutual support and, as "humans do not produce alone, but collectively and in relation to each other" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 61), collective action that produces new social relations.

Sharing own tensions within a group and thereby, as the method demands, only speaking for oneself, often requires one to admit to be insecure or overwhelmed by situations – it entails showing *oneself vulnerable* (E3). Tension-based work has been mentioned in relation to showing *weaknesses* (E1; E3; P3; P4) and described as a *space for vulnerability* (E1). P3 and P4 even tell how the method's implementation introduced a new '*culture of failure*' that has fostered trust within the team. These narratives create a counter-image to the rational, tough and independent *homo oeconomicus*

dominant in capitalist ideologies, through which weaknesses and emotions are being suppressed and people become disconnected from each other and from their 'true selves' (Marcuse, 1991; PWB, 2017; Rosa, 2013). By encouraging open expression of emotions and constraints, the method nurtures an image of an emotional and irrational human being and thereby levels the ground for a different culture, one of transparency and honesty. It thereby enables participants to ask for support and promotes caring for each another – in other words, *it is simply an expression of care* (E1).

A 'training to recognize and formulate own needs'

In sharp contrast to one-dimensional thinking, tension-based work consciously encourages people to consider their own tensions as valuable. As P4 reports, this can release energy for positive change: *it actually revealed undiscovered potential in the people concerned that I would not have suspected* (P4). An essential aspect is the perspective shift from 'tensions' as something negative to a more positive connotation: tensions as something hopeful, a 'driver for change'. This perception is uncommon for most people, as within more one-directed thinking, tensions are typically understood as something negative, hindering progress and success (Benson, 1977; Putnam, Fairhust and Banghart, 2016). Accordingly, 'tension' is one of the most common concepts within mainstream literature on organizational conflicts, however typically described as "stress, anxiety, discomfort or tightness in making choices" (Putnam, Fairhust and Banghart, 2016, p. 4). In line with its origin in the holacracy approach, tension-based work instead advocates a view on tensions as the "gap between reality and the desired state", as well as a "potential" (Robertson, 2015, p. 6). This reflects a dialectical view on tensions in line with Benson's (1977) dialectical approach to organizations. Recognizing that "the organization is typically the scene of multiple contradictions" (Benson, 1977, p. 15), he argues for a more nuanced view of tensions. While 'mainstream organizational studies' tend to repress tensions and deny contradictions, a dialectical perspective opens new possibilities for awareness and action through findings ways to deal with them (Benson, 1977; Putnam, Fairhust and Banghart, 2016).

This pertains to how interviewees describe their own and/or their group's increased awareness and responsiveness to emotions and feelings: *In the end, this method is actually also a way of training yourself to recognize and formulate your own needs.* (E1). As E2 confirms, the targeted questions within tension-based work appear to help in identifying and localizing emotions and concerns: *the more often you do it, the faster you actually get to the core and realize, okay, there are the emotions that come up when I experience a tension, there are the feelings and somehow also the body parts that move with it and you realize like, ah, yes, that's something I have to say here today (E2).* Centering the discussion around the question *'What do you need?'*, the method foregrounds the affected person's needs, which is reflected in the interviewees' accounts of feeling acknowledged and respected in their own wants and desires: they *see me as a whole person, not just as an employee* (P1). It is noteworthy that this experience seemed to be perceived as unfamiliar among the respondents, even pronounced *'totally new'* by P1. A structural perspective confirms that within capitalist society, profits are typically prioritized over human needs, and individual desires are strategically standardized in order to retain control and domination (Fuchs, 2020). Hand in hand with the suppression of individual needs and emotions, the mind is being separated from the body (Fuchs, 2020) (Firth, 2016). Likewise desires, bodies become homogenized and commodified for the sake of accumulation, thereby 'alienating' humans from their own bodies and feelings (Federici 2019; Fuchs 2020; Firth 2016).

Tension-based work*,* instead, invites participants to embrace their emotions, with E3 suggesting that it can even present a form of somatic work for enhancing body-sensitivity: *where there are the feelings, there are somehow also the body parts that move with it, and you learn to sense this.* Likewise, E2 describes how the regular implementation of tension-based work helped to better cope with own emotions, even helped to channel them into progressive action. Critical approaches of somatic pedagogies affirm that practices of embodiment can help to cope with emotions and overcome feelings of alienation and anxiety, widespread within global neoliberal societies (Firth, 2016). Tension-based work thus counters an instrumental logic that separates body and mind, and foregrounds human needs and

emotions while recognizing their individuality and variability. In doing so, it helps individuals to regain control over their own needs and emotions and thereby contributes to the preconditions of "a true society that corresponds to human needs and develops all human potentials so that all benefit" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 339).

A 'small wheel to turn'

This becomes further supported by the increasing autonomy and self-efficacy that interviewees experienced. E2 describes how the competence to express one's feelings encourages to assume responsibility for the own needs, further associated with an increasing feeling of self-efficacy: *So I believe that the more the self gets to know itself, the more it learns to stand up for itself.* It thus appears that the ability of individuals to express oneself authentically helps them to cultivate an environment that aligns with their needs, fostering a sense of control and self-efficacy.

Likewise, the method contributed to a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Findings show that it helped participants in finding their own role within the team (*It helps me to do that, doing that in the CSA helps me to sort out my life there, P1*) and contributed to feeling seen and understood in this role: *it's just really a way for us to bond. […] And they know how I feel* (P1). Knowing of the possibility to share one's own tensions also conveys a sentiment of '*calmness*', as E1 describes: *So there is definitely a sense of calm knowing that there is always this place where tensions have their place.* These narratives align with the concept of 'team psychological safety' that Edmondson (1999, p. 350) describes as the "shared belief held by members of a team that the tea is safe for interpersonal risk taking". This feeling of safety encourages individuals to introduce unconventional ideas, criticize, question, admit a mistake or risk a conflict, and is held to significantly contribute to individual as well as collective wellbeing within an organization (Edmondson 1999). Tension-based work appears as a safe space that contributes to this psychological safety. Thereby, the method encourages participants to actively create a working environment that resonates with their needs and abilities, which in turn contributes to wellbeing and self-efficacy: *I always come back to that it's the small wheels that I can turn. And these are*

in my personal environment, just as in myself, and then I can carry this outwards as a beacon. For me, this possibility is tension-based work (E2).

Tension-based work provides a simple and accessible approach to structure communication about sensitive topics within teams, thereby opening a space for reflection and inclusive dialogue that bears potential to achieve *cooperative* or even *communicative rationality* within the team. In opposition to instrumental logic, it promotes emotionality and body-sensitivity and can serve as a safe space for weaknesses and vulnerability. This facilitates and encourages honesty, authenticity, mutual understanding, shared responsibility, and a culture of care – preconditions for a 'society of the commons' according to Fuchs (2020). Notably, the majority of interviewees describe a change in perspective on tensions and an increasing ability to sense, articulate and communicate about them. This resembles a dialectical perspective that can promote collective awareness as a precondition for transformative action, reflected in the interviewees' sense of increased self-efficacy and self-actualization. It therefore reflects a means of *appropriation* in Fuchs's sense, and furthermore contributes to a feeling of *resonance* according to Rosa (2016), as participants indicate a stronger connection to their close work environment. These inferences suggest tension-based work as a potential form of *praxis communication* that can enrich CSA communities despite internal disparities and differing worldviews.

However, while most of the results point to this potential, there was also one CSA community of the interviewees in which tension-based work received a less positive response: *So, we won't use tension-based working in the future [...]. It just didn't suit us well and also didn't help us out of our conflict either* (P2). This case shows that the potential of the method to promote cooperative communication is not unconditional and raises all the more the question as to what influences the realization of the tension-based work's potential as potential as *praxis communication.*

Conditions for tension-based work as *transformative praxis*

As diverse as CSAs are in their organizational form and appearance, so are the conditions under which they engage in tension-based work. Identifying clear conditions that guarantee success would contradict the dialectical perspective taken in this thesis. However, some beneficial patterns emerge from the narratives of the respondents.

Openness to share occurs as a critical factor in the method's impact. Notably, participants do not need to share their deepest thoughts and emotions equally for the method to be perceived as enriching (*well, that's so good about it, each person can decide for themselves how deeply they go into their tensions*, P1), but a 'basic level of openness' towards the method proves essential according to the experts' experience. As has been shown, willingness to share is very individual and partly influenced by the socialization of a person, e.g. in relation to their gender and age (E2). But a basic level of trust within a team can foster an environment where even those less inclined to share can be encouraged by more '*courageous*' (E2) members, regardless of different 'starting conditions'.

Trust, remarkably mentioned as both a condition and an effect of the method, plays a significant role here. Respondents reported that already established trust among the team facilitated honest and open dialogues (*Well we just talk and this creates trust I guess*, P1), whereas the one case where the method became mired in an entrenched conflict is most likely to be traced back to a lack of trust within the team: *They simply didn't dare to say it in front of others* (P2). At the same time, interviewees also described increasing trust through tension-based work, which in turn further encouraged them to speak directly and honestly. A culture of trust and the openness to share tensions are thus *so intertwined, so simultaneously*, as P1 describes, so that it becomes hard to say which of the two precedes the other. This presents us with a kind of 'hen-and-egg-problem', as likewise summarized by P2: *So, if you have trust, then you can say it and build trust*. This indicates that a certain foundation of trust must be given to provide openness as an entry point into tension-based work, or, in P2's words, that *maybe it's a method for established teams that don't need to build trust.*

In this context, *hierarchical structures* seem to represent a leverage point. Participants expressed doubts as to whether they could show themselves *'flawed'* (P3) when engaging in tension-based work with superiors of whose opinion they feel dependent on. Likewise, P1 reports how open communication becomes easier when being at eye level: *when you work at eye level you just communicate differently* (P1). This alludes to the fact that hierarchies are often associated with pressure to conform to a certain image and fear to admit mistakes and weaknesses, as also argued by Breit (2023). Job security and a feeling of being accepted with all personal facets appear to be preconditions for authentic engagement with the method.

In order to not return to old patterns that might lead hidden power structures to creep back in, *regularity* in the implementation of the method has been often emphasized as helpful, as for example pinpointed by P1: *So, when I think about it, the most important thing for me now is to stick to this regularity, not just to wait until a problem is already there.* Research on organizations that dissolved hierarchical structures confirm that employees tend to return to old patterns, e.g. orientation on superiors, and that a regular 'learning' processes of self-organization help to prevent this (Robertson, 2015). As an underlying reason, Breit (2023, p. 93) argues that methods for self-organization too often lack to address the divergent individual "experiences of power" within teams. In agreement with the interviewed experts, scholars advocate for engaging a facilitator that consciously includes everyone and thereby prevents hidden power structures, which for example manifest in unequal speaking time, to reoccur (Breit, 2023; Robertson, 2015).

However, time and financial constraints proved to exacerbate both regularity and professional facilitation. *'Trigger point time'* (FG) played a major role almost throughout all research CSAs and proved to be an inhibiting factor for the method's regular use. In combination with pressures stemming from seasonal and weather dependency that CSAs are exposed to, this leads to a permanent feeling of *'being on the brink of collapse'* (FG). As the case of P2 shows, such time constraints can prevent from engaging with the method: *because it is simply far too tedious for us* (P2). Likewise, not only time but also financial resources present CSAs with a dilemma. While results show that external moderation facilitates tension-based work, CSAs must struggle

to afford professional moderation or mediation, as mainly revealed within the focus group session. It shows that CSAs, although largely outside the capitalist market system, are still influenced, even partly dependent, by the broader system's regulations and structures. This well illustrates the dialectic relation of CSAs with the broader structures they are embedded and further confirms capitalist structures as constraining, or 'enclosing' CSAs development (Fuchs, 2020; Helfrich, 2012; Helfrich and Bollier, 2019). Existing ideas and visions within CSAs are thus not independent of the material conditions of capitalist society, which leads to a dilemma regarding time and money and further to what I call an *'efficiency paradox'*.

While time and money constraints pressure CSAs to be efficient, it is the 'efficiency-driven' everyday life that hinders a cooperative and democratic community to emerge. Citing Harvey, Fuchs (2020, p.128) argues that "capitalism has been characterized by continuous efforts to shorten turnover times, thereby speeding up social processes while reducing the time horizons of meaningful decision-making". The accelerated everyday life, particularly present in agriculture, thus risks to suppress tensions and emotions in order to 'get ahead' productively. On the one hand, it is precisely *quick, effective meetings* (FG) that CSA communities often want and need in their stressful everyday lives, and tension-based work can indeed be used to this endeavor: *Well, it can for sure be used to make quick decisions, to fasten task delegation, and to work more smoothly* (E1). On the other hand, it is reasonable that the instrumentalization of tension-based work as an 'efficiency-enhancing tool' may inadvertently limit opportunities for sharing deep tensions and emotions. This presents CSAs with a difficult balancing act of maintaining efficiency while enabling intense human encounters. There is probably no right solution to this, just as there is no 'right life in the wrong one' to put it in Adorno's (1951) words. Rather, the focus shifts to identifying the tipping point at which tension-based work evolves into a truly cooperative communication practice and thus becomes helpful in mastering this balancing act.

This question prompts us to return to the fundamental point by which Fuchs distinguishes *praxis communication* from *instrumental communication*: the dialectical perspective. Viewing communication as dialectical involves not only consciously allowing for contradictions and

tensions, but also to recognize them as constantly evolving, or, in other words, to acknowledge their process-like nature. Acknowledging *processuality* contrasts with finality-oriented thinking, which dominates in capitalist society in several respects. Within his theory of acceleration, Rosa (2013) describes how the accelerated nature of capitalism contributes to goal-oriented thinking that prioritizes quantity over quality, manifested in the prioritization of quick choices rather than democratic decision-making processes. Thereby, processual aspects become neglected and intermediate steps often skipped, resulting for example in governmental decisions that fail to consider complexity and long-term impacts, whereas on an individual level, persons may no longer identify with the process, which provokes a feeling of meaninglessness and alienation (Rosa, 2013).

A process-oriented perspective, in contrast, entails acknowledgement that "social life is rent with contradictions" and that those are in constant development (Benson, 1977, p. 5). Applied to the context of CSAs, this first means to recognize tensions as always present, both among members and within individuals themselves. Secondly, it involves seeing that once a tension is resolved, a new one arises from it. As emphasized by process-oriented approaches, these opposing sides can promote energy, creativity and dialogue, and tensions can thus become key drivers for change (Benson, 1977; Putnam, Fairhust and Banghart, 2016). In terms of tension-based work, this leads to an understanding that fixation on resolving tensions instrumentalizes the method, as some aspects may not be taken into account so that participants may not feel fully involved. Consequently, inclusive cooperation, and with-it open communication, is effectively prevented and, as shown in the case of P2, people do no longer understand each other, which leads to divergent meanings and expectations and can end in disappointment and conflict.

Embracing processuality, on the other hand, can enrich the method and allow it to shift it from instrumental communication towards 'true communication' in Fuchs' (2020) sense. Breit (2023) confirms that the assumption that tensions can always be resolved shifts the focus within organizations on performance. Approaches that, in contrast, acknowledge tensions as sometimes unsolvable 'paradoxes', community and equality are foregrounded (Breit, 2023). My empirical research shows that tension-based

work is considered particularly enriching when the respondents are not fixed on solutions, but open to process, emphasizing the method *as constant trial and error'*(P1) and a space for *learning and un-learning* (E1). This requires a willingness to compromise and *indulgence with one another* (E3), as well as with oneself.

Recognizing processuality can thus be identified as a tipping point that shifts tension-based work in the direction towards *transformative praxis* rather than remaining a mere tool for effective decision-making and conflict management. Recognizing processuality means to acknowledge the antagonisms within CSAs, but also between CSAs and their broader structures. It involves to see that we cannot simply neglect the material conditions of society and suddenly wake up in utopia, but that we have to face up to external constraints and antagonisms – to develop a "utopianism of process", as Harvey (2000, p. 173) calls it. This utopianism is dialectical in the sense "that is rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories" (Harvey, 2000, p. 196). Cooperative communication, as Fuchs's theory argues, becomes a means to collectively create this 'utopian process' and tension-based work a potential tool within it. Recognizing processuality means to recognize that we can only approach utopia, step by step - two forward, one backward – just as in a 'dialectical dance' between ideology and reality:

In the dialectical dance of communication, humans take one step back by critically reflecting on what was communicated and then together jump to a higher level by together envisioning and creating the future, which fosters co-operation, community, the commons, and the public sphere.

(Fuchs, 2020, p. 367)

Conclusion

Insights gained from the present research confirm prior studies that internal problems within CSA communities often stem from miscommunication and resulting poor mutual understanding (Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017; Schäffler, 2023). Interviews and focus group observations revealed that these problems most often stand in relation to difficulties to recognize, articulate, and share tensions, reinforced within the special context of CSAs that provides for diverging everyday realities, visions and expectations (Robert-Demontrond, Beaudouin and Dabadie, 2017). On a structural level, *critique* assumes capitalism, as a 'societal formation' (Fuchs 2020) to be a root cause for these issues. The critical perspective taken in the analysis showed that *instrumental* and *one-dimensional* thinking, rooted in capitalist rationality, even extends to more 'market-independent' spaces such as CSAs and influences their internal structures and relations. This becomes especially reflected in the individuals' difficulties in sensing and communicating their own needs, emotions, and tensions. Resembling a Marxist critique of *alienation*, this prevents open and honest communication and thereby the conditions of a 'good life for all' (Fuchs, 2020).

This thesis examined how the intervention of *tension-based work* influences such communication patterns within CSA communities, and the empirical analysis indicates that tension-based work holds great potential to change these capitalist patterns towards a more cooperative and reflective way of communicating. By providing a simple and accessible structure for discussing tensions within groups, tension-based work also opens up space for reflection and inclusive dialogue, too often missing in CSA communities (Bauhardt, 2013). Opposing a one-dimensional logic, the method adopts a *dialectical* perspective by deliberately advocating for expression of antagonisms, weaknesses, and emotions, as well as of embracement of tensions as drivers for change (Benson, 1977).

Findings reveal an increase in ability to recognize and stand up for one's own needs, and individuals appear to feel more comfortable with exposing emotions and weaknesses. Thereby, tension-based work can contribute to more open and authentic communication within groups. On a collective level,

this enhances mutual understanding and acceptance of different standpoints, thereby preventing conflicts from 'boiling over' and hindering an unintentional reproduction of capitalist power structures. On an individual level, findings suggest an increase in a sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and work satisfaction. Tension-based work can therefore be a means to reclaim what has been lost in capitalist society: critical thinking, collaboration, inclusivity, and equality, along with deep relationships and environments that resonate with us, oriented towards our needs and not profits. Aware that these are potentials rather than definitive effects, I assert that the method represents a form of *praxis communication* in the sense of Fuchs (2020) and thus an exemplary form of communication as a way of *transformative praxis*.

I further asked which conditions would facilitate the method's potential to do so. Even if no clear 'conditions for success' can be generalized due to the different prerequisites of the CSAs and the limited testing of the method, some patterns have emerged that allow inferences to be drawn about supporting conditions. First of all, these include a certain degree of *trust* within the team, which enables an honest sharing of tensions. Given this condition, the method appears to further nurture a culture of trust and openness. It was found that hierarchical organizational structures tend to hinder this process, which confirms the advantages of low hierarchies for a fairer distribution of responsibilities and power in organizations (Breit, 2023). Furthermore, regularity and professional moderation proves to be essential for a long-time benefit of the method. However, these do not come without difficulties and risks, as they demand time and financial resources, usually scarce in CSAs. Consequently, tension-based work may be used instrumentally to accelerate task delegation and decision-making at the risk of silencing individual voices, exacerbating subliminal tensions and perpetuating inequal power dynamics. These findings indicate a 'dual potential' of tension-based work to serve both cooperation within communities but also reproduction of capitalist communication patterns.

The tipping point from one to the other, I conclude from my research, lies in the recognition of *processuality*. Opposing capitalism's finality-orientation that suppresses contrasting perspectives and aspects for the sake of quickly reaching its 'goals', a process-oriented perspective acknowledges ever

occurring contradictions and tensions as valuable for constant development (Benson, 1977; Putnam, Fairhust and Banghart, 2016). Approaching tension-based work in a process-like way means not to force solutions to tensions, but to collectively find a way to deal with contradictions and differences. This reflects a dialectical worldview that recognizes that there is no perfect 'endpoint', no 'utopia', but that we can only approach it in a collective process, enriched by a multitude of perspectives (Fuchs, 2020; Harvey, 2000). Understanding the method as processual is therefore of great importance in strengthening cooperation and community cohesion, but also in channeling individual motivations, as diverse as they may be, into a collective energy that strengthens communities to effectively challenge industrial corporate food systems.

Implications for CSAs

In line with previous research, this thesis advocates for spaces that intentionally promote dialog and reflection within CSA communities. Especially because CSAs create close relations between producers and consumers whose day-to-day realities typically differ a lot, it is helpful, if not necessary, to facilitate exchanges about positions and expectations to prevent miscommunication and disappointments. Furthermore, using methods and strategies that encourage individual reflection on one's own habits and biases, as well as collective reflection on the distribution of responsibilities, also in regard to personal backgrounds such as gender, are needed in order to avoid unintentionally perpetuating unequal dynamics.

Tension-based work proves to offer a low-threshold method that can provide such a space. Even though preconditions for the method vary considerably between CSAs, a certain basis of trust has been shown to be essential. This implicates that communities should think about measures to foster community cohesion as a prerequisite for good conflict management and in addition to tension-based work. These could entail simple 'check-in' rounds before meetings that allow for brief sharing of sensitivities, or collective activities. In this context, Dolley and Bosman (2019) emphasize the potential of 'third spaces', which offer the opportunity to experience each

other in new settings outside the everyday context and thereby create common experiences that foster community cohesion.

Furthermore, regularity in the implementation of tension-based work is helpful to provide for a learning and *un*-learning process over time and benefit from the method's long-term impacts. Constant time pressure and overwork within the agricultural sector makes foregrounding reproductive work a constant challenge. Nevertheless, taking regular dialogue and reflection seriously can ultimately save energy in the long run, as it has been pinpointed within the focus group: *if time is saved at the wrong end, you end up having to invest even more time (FG).*

Just as facilitation of meetings is generally recommended to ensure equal possibilities of engagement (Breit, 2023; Strüber *et al.*, 2023), it proves particularly helpful in tension-based work. Especially because conversations about internal issues related to CSA-internal affairs may be heated, an experienced external moderator can be helpful. This often stands in contradiction to financial constraints burdening CSAs. One solution in this regard could be to find ways to collectively funding facilitation among several CSAs, as proposed in the SOFA project of *iniciato*. In view of CSA's pioneering role in the transformation towards sustainable development, special funding for facilitation for CSAs would be generally highly appropriate.

Finally, this work is an invitation for CSAs to give tension-based work a try as well as an encouragement to approach it as an open process, even if this may initially feel shaky and requires a difficult balancing act in our fast-paced and solution-oriented world.

Reference list

Adorno, T. (1951) *Frankfurt School: Minima Moralia by Theodor Adorno*. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1951/mm/ch01.htm.

Alvesson, M. and Deetz, S. (2000) *Doing Critical Management Research*. (SAGE series in Management Research). London: SAGE.

Alvesson, M. and Deetz, S. (2021) *Doing Critical Research*. London: SAGE.

Alvesson, M. and Sköldberg, K. (2018) *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. 3rd edn. London: SAGE.

Antoni-Komar, I. *et al.* (2021) *Levels of resilience in Community Supported Agriculture. A framework for food system transformations towards agroecology, solidarity and community. YEEES Conference: Resilience through Sustainable Entrepreneurship, Digital Solutions and Education,* March 2021.

Barkan, S.E. (1986) 'Interorganizational Conflict in the Southern Civil Rights Movement', *Sociological Inquiry*, 56(2), pp. 190–209. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-682X.1986.tb00083.x

Bauhardt, C. (2013) 'Wege aus der Krise? Green New Deal - Postwachstumsgesellschaft - Solidarische Ökonomie: Alternativen zur Wachstumsökonomie aus feministischer Sicht', *GENDER - Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, 5(2), pp. 9–26. Available at: https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/document/39816/1/ssoar-gender-2013-2-bauhardt-Wege_aus_der_Krise_Green.pdf.

Bauhardt, C. and Harcourt, W. (2019) *Feminist political ecology and the economics of care: In search of economic alternatives*. (Routledge studies in ecological economics). Milton Park Abingdon Oxon: Routledge.

Benson, J.K. (1977) 'Organizations: A Dialectical View', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 22(1), pp. 1–21. doi: 10.2307/2391741

Berger, R. (2015) 'Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research', *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), pp. 219–234. doi: 10.1177/1468794112468475

Bhaskar, R. and Hartwig, M. (2010) *The formation of critical realism: a personal perspective*. New York: Routledge.

Bietau, P. *et al.* (2013) *Solidarische Landwirtschaft - eine soziale Innovation? Eine empirische Studie aus soziologischer Perspektive.* Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität. Available at: https://www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/48975490/Abschlussbericht_SoLawi_final.pdf.

Boddenberg et al. (2017) 'Solidarische Landwirtschaft als innovative Praxis - Potenziale für einen sozial-ökonomischen Wandel.', in Jaeger-Erben, M.,

Rückert-John, J. and Schäfer, M. (eds.) *Soziale Innovationen für nachhaltigen Konsum:* Springer VS., pp. 125–148.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2). Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235356393_Using_thematic_analysis_in_psychology.

Breit, E. (2023) *Organisationale Spannungen und Paradoxien in radikal selbst organisierten Unternehmen*. Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler.

Bronner, S.E. (2017) '1. The Frankfurt School', in Bronner, S.E. (ed.) *Critical theory: A very short introduction.* (Very short introductions). New York NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 7–16.

Byrne, D. (2022) 'A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis', *Quality & Quantity*, 56, pp. 1391–1412. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y.

Cecez-Kecmanovic, D. (2007) *Critical Research in Information Systems: The Question of Methodology*. Available at: http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2007/150.

Clark, T. *et al.* (2021) *Bryman's Social Research Methods*. 6th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cone, C. and Myhre, A. (2000) 'Community-Supported Agriculture: A Sustainable Alternative to Industrial Agriculture?' *Human Organization*, 59(2), pp. 187–197.

Cox, R. *et al.* (2008) 'Common ground? Motivations for participation in a community-supported agriculture scheme', *Local Environment*, 13(3), pp. 203–218. doi: 10.1080/13549830701669153

CSX Netzwerk e.V. (2024) 'Praxisbeispiele'. Available at: https://gemeinschaftsgetragen.de/praxisbeispiele/.

Deetz, S. (1982) 'Critical Interpretive Research in Organizational Communication', *THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION*, 46, pp. 131–149. doi: 10.1080/10570318209374073

Degens, P. and Lapschieß, L. (2023) 'Community-supported agriculture as food democratic experimentalism: Insights from Germany', *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 7. doi: 10.3389/fsufs.2023.1081125

Dolley, J. and Bosman, C. (eds.) (2019) *Rethinking third places: Informal public spaces and community building*. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Edmondson, A. (1999) 'Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), pp. 350–383. doi: 10.2307/2666999

Egli, L., Rüschhoff, J. and Priess, J. (2023) 'A systematic review of the ecological, social and economic sustainability effects of community-supported

agriculture', *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 7. doi: 10.3389/fsufs.2023.1136866

Federici, S. (2019) *Re-enchanting the world: Feminism and the politics of the commons*. Oakland California: PM Press.

Firth, R. (2016) 'Somatic pedagogies: Critiquing and resisting the affective discourse of the neoliberal state from an embodied anarchist perspective∗', *ephemera*, 16(4), pp. 121–142. Available at: https://repository.essex.ac.uk/21978/1/Firth16-4.pdf.

Fuchs, C. (2016) *Critical Theory of Communication. New readings of Lukács, Adorno, Marcuse, Honneth and Habermas in the Age of the Internet.* London: University of Westminister Press. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5vddf2.

Fuchs, C. (2017) 'Raymond Williams' communicative materialism', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(6), pp. 744–762. doi: 10.1177/1367549417732998

Fuchs, C. (2020) *Communication and Capitalism: A Critical Theory*. London: University of Westminister Press.

Furness, E. *et al.* (2022) 'Communication and building social capital in community supported agriculture', *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 12(1), pp. 63–78. doi: 10.5304/jafscd.2022.121.009

Graefe, S. (2017) 'Das Subjekt in der Krise: Erschöpfung, Resilienz, Widerstand: Zum Wandel von Subjektkonzepten unter aktuellen gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen', *Soziale Psychiatrie*, 02. Available at: https://studylibde.com/doc/7798070/das-subjekt-in-der-krise--ersch%C3%B6pfung--resilienz--widerst.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research', in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, pp. 105–117.

Gustafsson, K. and Hagström, L. (2017) *What is the point? teaching graduate students how to construct political science research puzzles.* Swedish Institute of International Affairs; Swedish Defence University. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-017-0130-y;.

Habermas, J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 1*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Haraway, D. (1988) 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), pp. 575–599. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2017) *Assembly*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (1974) 'Population, Resources, and the Ideology of Science', *Economic Geography*, 50(3), pp. 256–277.

Harvey, D. (2000) *Spaces of hope*. (California studies in critical human geography, 7). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Harvey, D. (2018) 'Universal Alienation', *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 16(2), pp. 424–439. doi: 10.31269/triplec.v16i2.1026

Haug, F. (2003) 'Geschlechterverhältnisse als Produktionsverhältnisse', *Widerspruch: Beiträge zu sozialistischer Politik*, 23(44). Available at: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-651907.

Helfrich, S. (2012) *Sorge tragen: Commons und Gender. Interdisziplinären Politischen Salons „Zeit für Allmende"*. Berlin, 16.05. Available at: https://commonsblog.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/doku-gender-commons-def1.pdf.

Helfrich, S. and Bollier, D. (2019) *Free, fair and alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*: New Society Publishers.

Hesse-Biber, S.N. (2011) *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and Praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Jessen, A. (2022) *The reproduction of the reproduction: To what extent do Commons as alternative economies break down gendered power relations resulting from reproductive labor? An empirical analysis taking Community Supported Agriculture as example*. Bachelor's thesis. Leuphana University.

Löbbering, S. (2018) *Zukunftsfähiges Wirtschaftsgemeinschaften - Übertragung des Comminty-Supported Agriculture-Ansatzes (CSA) auf das Bäckerhandwerk (CSB)*. Masterarbeit. FH Münster. Available at: https://orgprints.org/id/eprint/34292/1/Masterarbeit%20-%20L%C3%B6bbering.pdf.

Magdoff, F. (2015) 'A Rational Agriculture Is Incompatible with Capitalism', *Monthly Review*, 66(10). doi: 10.14452/MR-066-10-2015-03_1

Malm, A. and The Zetkin Collective (2021) *Black Skin, White Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism*. London and New York: Verso.

Marcuse, H. (1991) *One-dimensional man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. 2nd edn. London and New York: Routledge.

Mies, M. (1998) 'Globalization of the Economy and Women's Work in a Sustainable Society', *Gender, Technology and Development*, 2(1), pp. 3–37. doi: 10.1080/09718524.1998.11909879

Mies, M. and Bennholdt-Thomsen, V. (2011) 'Defending, Reclaiming and Reinventing the Commons', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 22, pp. 997–1023. doi: 10.1080/02255189.2001.9669952

Misoch, S. (2019) *Qualitative Interviews*. 2nd edn.: De Gruyter.

Mumby, D.K. and Kuhn, T.R. (2019) *Organizational Communication: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd edn.: SAGE.

Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft e.V. (NSL) (2021) *Solidarische Landwirtschaft: Das Netzwerk stellt sich vor.* Available at: https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/fileadmin/media/solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/Das-Netzwerk/Ueber-uns/Selbstdarstellung_2021_DRUCK.pdf.

Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft e.V. (NSL) (2024) *Solawis finden - Karte*. Available at: https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/solawis-finden/karte#/ (Accessed: 8 February 2024).

Neue Narrative (2024) *Neue Narrative | Unsere Arbeitswelt braucht ein Update!,* 26 April. Available at: https://www.neuenarrative.de/ (Accessed: 26 April 2024).

Niranjan, A. (2024) 'Why Europe's farmers are protesting – and the far right is taking note', *The Guardian,* 15 January. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/15/why-europe-farmers-are-protesting.

Paech, N. *et al.* (2020) 'Das Wirtschaftsprinzip der kleinen Einheiten – Resilienz durch gemeinschaftsgetragene Versorgungsstrukturen am Beispiel Solidarischer Landwirtschaftsbetriebe', *Haushalt in Bildung & Forschung*, 9(4), pp. 47–63. doi: 10.3224/hibifo.v9i4.04

Petrovic, G. (1963) 'Marx's Theory of Alienation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 23(3), p. 419. doi: 10.2307/2105083

Precarious Workers Brigade (PWB) (2017) *Training for exploitation? Politicising employability and reclaiming education*. London: Published and distributed by Journal of Aesthetics & Protest Press. Available at: https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/24826/.

Putnam, L., Fairhust, G. and Banghart, S. (2016) 'Contradictions, Dialectics, and Paradoxes in Organizations: A Constitutive Approach', *The Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1), pp. 1–107. doi: 10.5465/19416520.2016.1162421

Robert-Demontrond, P., Beaudouin, V. and Dabadie, I. (2017) 'Diverse, conflicting and complementary worldviews: An anthropological investigation of consumption in CSA', *Recherche et Applications en Marketing*, 32(4), pp. 32–52. doi: 10.1177/2051570717721076

Robertson, B.J. (2015) *Holacracy: The revolutionary management system that abolishes hierarchy*. London: Portfolio Penguin.

Rommel, M. (2017) *Zukunftsfähige Wirtschaftsgemeinschaften (CSX) - Übertragung der CSA-Logik auf andere Versorgungsfelder*. Master's thesis. Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg.

Rommel, M. *et al.* (2024) 'Jenseits der Marktwirtschaft: Grundzüge gemeinschaftsgetragenen Unternehmens', *Ökologisches Wirtschaften*, 1(39), pp. 30–36. doi: 10.14512/OEW390130

Rosa, H. (2013) *Social acceleration: A new theory of modernity*. Translated by Trejo-Mathys. (New Directions in Critical Theory). New York: Columbia University Press. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/ASJ/Acceleration_and_Resonance.pdf.

Rosa, H. (2016) *Resonanz*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Rößler, S. (2017) *Gemeinwohlorientiertes Wirtschaften im ländlichen Raum. Projektrecherche für ein solidarisches Restaurant im südlichen Schwarzwald*. Masterarbeit. Donau-Universtität Krems.

Sayers, S. (2011) 'Alienation as a critical concept', *International Critical Thought*, 1(3), pp. 287–304. doi: 10.1080/21598282.2011.609265

Schäffler, A. (2023) *Challenges for Small Scale Community Movements: Social Conflict in Community Supported Agriculture*. Bachelor's thesis. Universität Leipzig.

Schiermer, B. (2020) *Acceleration and Resonance: An Interview with Hartmut Rosa*. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/ASJ/Acceleration_and_Resonance.pdf.

Selwyn, B. (2021) 'A green new deal for agriculture: for, within, or against capitalism?' *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 48(4). doi: 10.1080/03066150.2020.1854740

Solawi Genossenschaften (2024) *Organisation und Entwicklung – Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Solawi-Genossenschaften,* 26 April. Available at: https://solawi-genossenschaften.net/organisation-und-entwicklung/ (Accessed: 26 April 2024).

Strüber, K. *et al.* (2023) 'Handbuch Solidarische Landwirtschaft: Solawis erfolgreich gründen & gestalten'. Available at: https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/solawis-aufbauen/handbuch.

Szuster et al. (2021) 'Small-scale shrimp farming and community supported fisheries in Southeast Asia', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 52, pp. 539–553. doi: 10.1017/S0022463421000588

Thorpe, R. *et al.* (2017) 'Hidden boundaries and shared meanings: the roles of researcher characteristics and cultural norms in shaping understandings of sexuality in the unstructured interview setting', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. doi: 10.1080/13645579.2017.1350016

Vincent, S. and O'Mahoney, J. (2016) 'Critical Realism and Qualitative Research: An Introductory Overview', in Cassell, Grandy and Cunliffe (eds.) *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods:* SAGE.

Weisser, J. (2020) *The reproduction of modes of subjectification (in the context of a capitalist society based on growth) of actors of the anticapitalist climate and degrowth movement*. Bachelor's thesis. Leuphana University.

Welzer, H. (2011) 'Mentale Infrastrukturen: Wie das Wachstum in die Welt und in die Seelen kam', *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung: Schriften zur Ökologie*, Band 14. Available at: https://www.boell.de/de/oekologie/publikationen-mentale-infrastrukturen-schriften-oekologie-11871.html.

Wichterich, C. (2017) 'Viele Orte überall: Care-Logik in alternativen Projekten und Potentiale von Gegenmacht.', *Feministische Studien.*, 35(2), pp. 259–275. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1515/fs-2017-0029.

Williams, R. (1976) *Communications*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Williams, R. (2005) *Culture and materialism: Selected essays*. (Radical thinkers, no.11). London: Verso.

Appendix

Appendix A: Worksheet for the procedure of tension-based work

METHOD PROCEDURE

Important Roles: Moderation and minutes taker

Group size: 3 to 15 people

Material: Pens, post-its/paper, blackboard/wall

Time: 1.5 to 3 hours (depending on group size, frequency of use, and intensity of tensions)

Frequency: repeat every 3 to 4 months

1. **Create a comfortable environment.**

2. **Everyone collects their own tensions in silence and writes them down.**

3. **Tensions are shared in a round sequentially.**

4. **Individual tensions are discussed, and, depending on the time frame, collectively tried to be eased.**

Variation: Each person only chooses the most important/urgent tension.

Tensions are addressed according to the following principles:

- Take responsibility for your own tensions.
- Consider them as valuable.
- Think in a solution-oriented way.
- Stay with your own tensions, i.e. avoid 'second-hand' or 'proxy tensions'.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?
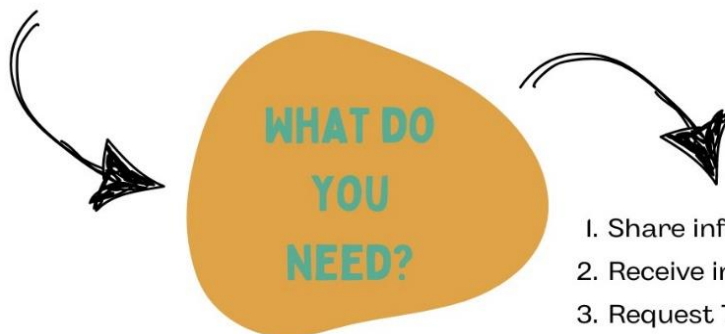
1. Share information
2. Receive information
3. Request To-Do's
4. Request task package / project
5. Change roles / rules (structural level)

www.iniciato.de

Table 1: Operationalization of analytical indicators

	Capitalist communication		Praxis communication		Resulting Analysis Code	Related interview question	
						Open	Concrete
Underlying rationality	Instrumental and ideological	"purpose of communication is to protect, maintain or advance a social order base on minority power" (p.294)	Cooperative and critical			*II. What comes into your mind when thinking of communication in your team?*	*What do you see the method of tension-based work for?*
	Profit-oriented	Communication for profit means, communication systems as trade systems → Commodification of communication	Use-oriented	Communication in the sense of sharing and making something common (p.309); communication systems based on needs			
Mode of communication	Exclusive	Centralized and partial access to information (p.152) \n\n single voices dominant	Inclusive, de-centralized	Voice and recognition of all (p.345) \n\n Active audience (p.345)	Sense of belonging \n\n Integration in information systems	*I. Can you shortly describe your team and your teamwork in general?* \n\n *What is your role within that?*	*How is work distributed?*
	Centralized information access		De-centralized information access	Shared responsibility	responsibility ➔ distribution ➔ self-responsibility		*How is responsibility distributed?*
	One-dimensional	No critical thinking, Unconscious of power relations, inability to communicate and think antagonisms (p.131)	Dialectic	advance imagination and complex, critical thinking (p.345); questioning of power relations (p.308); Ability to think and communicate antagonisms; Embracing antagonisms as drivers for change (p.345)	tensions and conflicts ➔ handling ➔ perspective on ➔ consciousness	*III. How do you (and your team) normally deal with tensions and conflicts?* \n\n *IV. Have you noticed any changes with the implementation of tension-based work?*	*Is it easy for you to identify your tensions? (Did that change with implementing the method?)*
	Accelerated	Time-pressured (p.126): maximization of decisions, social relations and experiences per time	Decelerated		Time ➔ Time-Pressure ➔ Willingness to take time		*Does it feel easy to take enough time for the method?*

Impacts on individuals and social structures	Competition	Seeing oneself in constant concurrence with others; "lone fighters" Egoism	Solidarity	Mutual respect Altruism Team-work	Team-work	*V. What do you see as main challenges for implementing the method? What do you see as requirements for a good implementation?*	*How would you describe your teamwork? (Did that change with implementing the method?)*
	Domination / inequal power relations	Subordination and clear power differences (p.346); Patriarchal and racist structures, e.g. gendered labor time (p.129)	Participative and democratic / people power	Common decision-making	Participation Integration in decision-making Gendered work relations		*Do all team members participate to the same level? Do all members take the same share of responsibility?*
	Alienation (p.200)	Economic: Work dissatisfaction and exploitation, propertylessness Political: disempowerment and exclusion, centralization of power Cultural: Insignificance of voice, disrespect, malrecognition, centralization of information	Appropriation (p.201)	Economic: Self-realization and self-management, Political: people power, participatory democracy Cultural: involvement, mutual understanding, respect and recognition	Satisfaction with work place Empowerment / courage to change work conditions		*How satisfied are you with your working environment? (What are the reasons?)* *(To what extent do you feel empowered to change these conditions?)*
	Particularism	Individualism, separation and isolation	*Commoning / Society of the commons*	Collective self-organization (p.305); Creation of sociality and shared meanings			*How belonging do you feel in the team?*

Table 2: Guideline for Participant Interviews

Phase	Main topic	Main questions	Sub-questions	Key points of interest
Information	Aufklärung	☐ Auf Anonymität hinweisen ☐ Um Erlaubnis zum Aufnehmen fragen ☐ Darauf hinweisen, dass die Arbeit und/oder Transkript im Nachhinein geschickt werden kann ☐ Kurze Erläuterung des Themas		Continuously: Notion of time in regard to communication Purpose of communication system in general
Warm-up	Kennenlernen	I. *Beschreibe kurz das Team und deine Rolle in der Solawi*	*Wie ist Arbeit aufgeteilt? Wie sind Verantwortlichkeiten aufgeteilt?*	Responsibility Work relations
	Hinleitung zu Kommunikation-strukturen	II. *Was fällt dir zum Thema Kommunikation bei euch im Team ein?*	*Wie lange habt ihr das spannungsbasierte Arbeiten schon eingeführt? Worin siehst du die zentrale Aufgabe der Methode?*	Level of integration Communication structures / conflict management Access and integration in information and decision-making / Participation
Main-phase	Umgang mit Spannungen generell	III. *Was fällt dir zum Umgang mit Spannungen in deinem Team ein? Und wie gehst du selbst normalerweise mit Spannungen um?*	*Fällt es dir leicht, Spannungen wahrzunehmen, einzuordnen und zu kommunizieren?*	Consciousness, critical and dialectic thinking Perspective on tensions / antagonisms Ability to think and communicate antagonisms
	Veränderungen durch das spannungsbasierte Arbeiten	IV. *Hast du durch die Einführung des spannungsbasierten Arbeitens Veränderungen wahrgenommen?* ➔ *Was hat sich bei dir persönlich geändert?* ➔ *Was hat sich bei euch im Team verändert?*	*(Wie) hat sich eure Arbeitsweise im Team verändert?* *Beteiligen sich alle Teammitglieder gleichermaßen?* *Inwiefern fällt es schwer, Zeit dafür zu finden?* *Bist du zufrieden mit deinen Arbeitsbedingungen? Inwiefern fühlst du dich ermutigt, diese selbst zu ändern/Spannungen anzusprechen?*	Participation / Integration Sense of belonging Mutual respect, shared meanings, *commoning* Self-responsibility and autonomy / empowerment (Role of time)
	Bedingungen fürs Gelingen/Scheitern	V. *Fällt dir was ein, was besonders gut funktioniert an der Methode oder was noch verändert werden müsste?*	*Was würdest du anderen Solawis mitgeben, die diese Methode einführen wollen?*	Success factors Challenges Suggestions for improvement
Closing-phase	Hast du noch abschließende Gedanken oder Fragen?			

Table 3: Guideline for Expert Interview

Phase	Main topic		Main questions	Sub-questions	Key points of interest
Information	Aufklärung		☐ Auf Anonymität hinweisen ☐ Um Erlaubnis zum Aufnehmen fragen ☐ Darauf hinweisen, dass die Arbeit und/oder Transkript im Nachhinein geschickt werden kann ☐ Kurze Erläuterung des Themas		
Warm-up	Kennenlernen		I. *Seit wann kennst du das spannungsbasierte Arbeiten und in welchem Kontext bist du das erste Mal auf die Methode gestoßen?*	*Seit wann führt ihr das spannungsbasierte Arbeiten im Team durch?/ Seit wann moderierst du das spannungsbasierte Arbeiten?* *Worin siehst du die zentrale Aufgabe der Methode?*	Purpose of the method/ of internal communication in general Perception of tensions general
Main-phase	Idee und Entwicklung von SOFA	Motivation f. Teilnahme Begründung der Methode	II. *Wie ist die Idee für SOFA zustande gekommen?*	*Was war die Hauptmotivation für die SOFA-Entwicklung?* *Warum ausgerechnet die Methode des spannungsbasierten Arbeitens?*	Perceptions of tensions in CSAs Characteristics of SOFA
	Erfahrungen als Moderator*in	Wahrnehmung der Teilnehmenden Veränderungen durch das spannungsbasierte Arbeiten Bedingungen fürs Gelingen/Scheitern	III. *Welche Erfahrungen hast du als Moderator*in bisher gemacht?* a) *Was nimmst du bei den Teilnehmenden als Hauptmotivation für die Teilnahme wahr?* ➔ *Explizit bei Solawis?* b) *Was sind die größten Herausforderungen / Schwierigkeiten für die Teilnehmenden?* ➔ *Explizit bei Solawis?* c) *Was sind die größten Herausforderungen für dich in der Moderationsrolle?*	*Fällt es den Teilnehmenden leicht, Spannungen wahrzunehmen, einzuordnen und zu kommunizieren?* *Beteiligen sich alle Teammitglieder gleichermaßen?* *Inwiefern fällt es schwer, Zeit dafür zu finden?* *Nimmst du bei den Teilnehmenden Veränderungen wahr?*	Perception of antagonisms, consciousness, critical, dialectic thinking, ability to think and communicate antagonisms Communication structures, conflict management, role of time Work relations, distribution of responsibility, access and integration in information and decision-making Participation, Integration
	Erfahrungen als Teilnehmende*r	Wahrnehmung als Teilnehmende Veränderungen durch das spannungsbasierte Arbeiten Bedingungen fürs Gelingen/Scheitern	IV. *Was hast du als Teilnehmende für Erfahrungen gemacht?* a) *Was hat sich bei dir persönlich geändert? Was hat sich bei euch im Team verändert?* b) *Was sind die größten Herausforderungen für dich in der Teilnehmenden-Rolle?*	*Hast du durch die Einführung des spannungsbasierten Arbeitens Veränderungen wahrgenommen?* a) *Bei dir persönlich?* *Inwiefern fühlst du dich ermutigt, diese selbst zu ändern/Spannungen anzusprechen?* b) *Bei euch im Team?* *Was ist für dich für eine gelungene Umsetzung der Methode das Wichtigste?*	Sense of belonging, mutual respect, shared meanings, *commoning* Self-responsibility and autonomy / empowerment Success factors Challenges Suggestions for improvement
Closing phase			V. *Hast du noch abschließende Gedanken oder Fragen?*		

Table 4: Codebook for RQ 1: 'Potentials' (codes assigned to main themes)

	Community-level		Individual level	
Theme	**Structured way of conflict prevention**	**Team culture: Creating different way of togetherness**	**Enhancing ability to sense, articulate, and communicate one's own tensions**	**Psychological security on workplace and self-efficacy**
Codes	Structuring way of communication about tensions / conflicts; Exposing underlying tensions and conflicting worldviews ➔ Conflict prevention Enhance mutual understanding and trust ➔ Teambuilding Structured way of distributing responsibility ➔ Facilitation of collaboration Easy accessibility and low thresholds ➔ Participation and inclusivity	Open up room for communication in general Room for caring Room for weakness and insecurity ➔ enables to hand over responsibilities Inclusivity, a place of everyone being heard	Awareness of own tensions Facilitate access to own tensions Coping own emotions	Mental and physical wellbeing Self-efficacy Sense of belonging Sense of being equal Sense of being heard
Relations to other codes	Sense of security and calmness Sense of belonging Trust and openness	Inclusivity Trust Handing over responsibilities	Exposing underlying tensions Ability to articulate overloads, hand over responsibilities	Sense of security/stability Courage to communicate tensions

Table 5: Codebook for RQ 2: 'Conditions' (codes assigned to main themes)

Theme	Habitualizations	Organizational structure and culture	Resources / external factors	Openness to process / Attitude to process
Codes	Insecurity Openness to show emotions Gender	Culture and norms Communication habits Level of hierarchies Heterogenity Efficiency-orientation Worldviews within organization / heterogeneity	Setting Time Financial situation Moderation	Openness to process Willingness to communicate tension
Related codes	Sensitivity and ability to communicate Acknowledgement of communication as relevant Attitudes towards the method	Fundamentality and emotionality of topics Nature of tension	Regularity External moderation	