Drawing boundaries: Negotiating a collective 'we' in community-supported agriculture networks

Leonie Guerrero Lara [*], Giuseppe Feola, Peter Driessen

Utrecht University, Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Princetonlaan 8a, 3584 CB, Utrecht, the Netherlands

A B S T R A C T

Research on community-supported agriculture (CSA) has highlighted the coexistence of different models and types of CSA initiatives. However, no study has explored how diverse models and definitions of CSA are collectively established, maintained, and enforced vis-à-vis changing political, economic, social, and cultural contexts. This article addresses this gap by drawing on the concept of boundary work, developed in social movement theory, which describes the process through which a social movement defines and situates itself in time and space in relation to its context. We investigate the boundary work of CSA at the level of the national network organisations in Germany and Italy, which provide a space where boundary work occurs, that is, where protagonists and antagonists are framed and a common understanding of CSA and who should join the network is constantly negotiated. By reconstructing the narratives and key topics of boundary work in both CSA networks, we showcase how the CSA model is delineated and a collective 'we' is constructed differently across countries in relation or opposition to pre-existing movements as well as the international CSA movement. Through the lens of boundary work, we highlight the internal contestations within the networks, which are often hidden by the seeming unity depicted in social mobilisations and the networks' official communication. Moreover, this study identifies different mechanisms of boundary work, which can be grouped into three types: creating, institutionalising, and enforcing the boundary. We find that the networks are engaged, to different extents and in different forms, in these types of boundary works. Based on the two case studies, we discuss potential misalignments, the implications of choosing a narrow or broad definition for the membership, and the challenge of addressing the internal heterogeneity within CSA networks.

1. Introduction

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) is a direct, long-term 'partnership between a farm and consumers where the risks and rewards of farming are shared' (Bashford et al., 2013, p. 6). The model first emerged in Japan in the early 1970s, where it is known as *teikei* (Kondoh, 2014). Subsequently, similar ideas were developed independently in Switzerland (Stapleton, 2019). Since the turn of the millennium, the CSA model has spread significantly, particularly in Europe (Urgenci, 2016a), and can currently be found on all continents (excluding Antarctica) under different labels (Stapleton, 2019). Common to CSA initiatives around the world is that they foreground principles of partnership, solidarity, locality, and close producer-consumer relations. CSA initiatives promote commitment to mutual support and risk-sharing between consumers and producers, respect the environment, relocalise the economy by shortening agri-food chains, and enable direct,

horizontal, person-to-person contacts which contribute to building mutual trust (Bashford et al., 2013). Due to these features, CSA is often regarded as a 'particularly advanced' form of alternative food networks, which effectively and coherently implements values around mutuality and equity (Piccoli et al., 2021).

Despite those widely shared principles, CSA is 'a tremendously flexible concept for a new consumer-farmer connection' (Urgenci, 2016a, p. 5). Local CSA initiatives are remarkably diverse and organise according to various logics reflecting their immediate social and cultural context, motivations, and needs (Jacques et al., 2019; Stapleton, 2019), resulting in commonalities and specificities across and within regions and countries. Research on CSA has therefore highlighted the coexistence of different models and types of initiatives (see e.g. Blättel-Mink et al., 2017, on 'socio-politically transformative', 'spiritual-communal', and 'pragmatic' initiatives in Germany; Bobulescu et al., 2018 on the differences between 'transitional' and 'ideal' initiatives; and Cristiano

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et al., 2021, on 'market-based' versus 'socially-transformative' initiatives). Nonetheless, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no research has explored how diverse models and definitions of CSA are collectively established, maintained, and enforced vis-à-vis changing political, economic, social, and cultural contexts.

We address this gap by drawing on the concept of boundary work developed in social movement theory, which describes the process through which a social movement defines and situates itself in time and space in relation to its context (Hunt et al., 1994). Delineating one's boundaries entails the negotiation of shared 'core' principles or characteristics of a movement (Melucci, 1995; Taylor and Whittier, 1992) and the creation of in-group/out-group distinctions ('us/them') via membership criteria. Boundary work thereby creates a sense of togetherness essential for maintaining collective action over time (Rupp and Taylor, 1999). The concept of boundary work is particularly insightful for the scope of this paper as it acknowledges that the process through which social movements define who 'we' are does not occur in a vacuum; it is relational and geographically, socially, politically, and culturally situated (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). This includes the relationship to a movement's opponents and other social movements.

Specifically, we investigate the boundary work of CSA at the level of the national network organisation as the network's core function 'is to set the principles, define the names and set rules for the use of these names' (Jacques et al., 2019, p. 10). In other words, these networks provide a space where boundary work happens. As our analysis shows, the questions of who 'we' are, what counts as a CSA, and who can or should join the network are constantly negotiated within national CSA networks. This is partly occurring implicitly in everyday operations (e.g. in the form of discourse) and partly explicitly as part of discussions in designated meetings or working groups. National CSA networks can also enforce their boundaries by expelling members or refusing the entry of interested actors. Furthermore, in these networks, members, the majority of whom adhere to individual CSA initiatives, come together to exchange experiences, provide mutual support, and collectively negotiate the focus and political orientation of their movement, including their common goals and objectives.

We study boundary work in two types of CSA networks, one long-standing (10 years or older) and one incipient network (less than five years old). In particular, this explanatory study aims to understand (i) how and via which mechanisms boundaries are produced and negotiated in the national CSA networks in Germany and Italy as well as (ii) the underlying tensions, challenges, and political trade-offs which emerge during boundary work over time. Germany and Italy were chosen due to their differences in longevity and due to the first author's ongoing engagement with the two networks.

For the first time in the scholarship on CSA, this article employs the theoretical lens of boundary work within social movement research. We thus provide an empirical contribution to the growing literature on CSA and advance the knowledge of how the CSA model is delineated and a collective 'we' is constructed differently across countries. By studying boundary work as a constantly ongoing process, we explore the internal contestations within the networks, which are often made invisible by the seeming unity depicted in social mobilisations and the networks' official documents.

2. Conceptual background: Boundary work in social movements

In this study, we conceptualise the CSA networks in Germany and Italy as social movements. A social movement is 'a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity' (Diani, 1992, 13). CSA networks can be fruitfully analysed through this lens as CSA initiatives organise in networks, where a shared identity based on common goals and beliefs is negotiated and collective action undertaken.

Social movements engage in boundary work, the process through which a movement defines and situates itself temporally and spatially in relation to its context (Hunt et al., 1994). Boundary work is fundamentally relational; it entails social movements defining and distinguishing themselves from 'the web of others in the contested social world' (Taylor and Whittier, 1992, p. 111). This relationality makes boundaries a useful 'thinking tool' for social movement studies and social sciences more generally and for understanding movements in their contexts (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 169). Social movements can frame boundaries in opposition to the status quo, in relation to other social movements, and even vis-à-vis other groups or factions within the same movement (Flesher Fominaya, 2019; Saunders, 2008; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). These symbolic boundaries are socially constructed and reflect the activists' views on their immediate surroundings, the world, and past experiences (Hunt et al., 1994; Wang et al., 2018). As Melucci (1995, p. 48) claims, 'in affirming its difference from the rest of the society, a movement also states its belonging to the shared culture of a society and its need to be recognised as a social actor'.

At a practical level, boundary work requires negotiating and defining a collective 'we', as well as making in-group/out-group distinctions by establishing requisites for joining the movement (Hunt et al., 1994; Melucci, 1995; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). In order words, it entails constructing protagonists and antagonists and delineating 'the boundaries between "good" and "evil"' (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 616; Silver, 1997). Whilst establishing boundaries with antagonists proves relatively straightforward, the inclusion or exclusion of subgroups 'who might reasonably be considered members' poses a challenge to movements which can lead to internal disputes (Gamson, 1997, p. 180). However, boundary work does not necessarily imply striving for narrow definitions and tight membership; it can also reflect a deliberate openness to difference, as exemplified by the 'anti-identitarian' stance of autonomous activists in the global justice movement or the British radical eco-movements (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). In these cases, collective identity formation requires participatory assemblies and defines 'the spaces in opposition to institutional left practices' (ibid., 398).

Furthermore, in line with currents of social movement scholarship which stress the dynamic character of social movements (Wang et al., 2018), we understand boundary work as a reflexive *process* which may change over time, as opposed to seeing boundaries as a fixed product. Whilst the former view it as an intra-movement phenomenon, the latter refer to the shared attributes of a movement which are recognisable by movement insiders and externals (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1995; Snow, 2001). Understanding boundary work as a process therefore entails acknowledging that movements constantly (re)define their boundaries through everyday life interactions (Melucci, 1995). In addition, boundaries themselves are 'porous', enabling the moving in and out of activists and thereby altering the movements' identity and priorities (McCammon and Boutcher, 2019).

Boundary work is essential for movements in several ways: (i) for mobilisation, indicating who can participate and who does not, (ii) for collective grievances, articulating to whom the claim is directed, and (iii) for group solidarity, marking and reinforcing personal ties (Gamson, 1997). Along similar lines, Lamont and Molnár (2002) and Taylor and Whittier (1992, p. 11) argue boundary work can 'promote a heightened awareness of a group's commonalities' and thus create the feeling of belonging and similarity. As such, boundaries constitute a vital component of a movement's collective identity and are a crucial prerequisite for the emergence and persistence of movements over time (Flesher Fominaya, 2010, 2019; Melucci, 1995; Taylor, 1989). On an individual level, a movement's boundaries can help members revalue and find pride in their marginalised identities (Gamson, 1997).

Nonetheless, boundary work can also create conflict and fragmentation within movements when different understandings and views about the desired boundaries cannot be reconciled (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Gamson, 1997). Members may leave a movement if they no longer believe it represents them (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, p. 292). Thus, to

sustain collective action, movements must navigate the challenge of clearly distinguishing themselves from oppressors, bystanders, and other social movements 'without suppressing difference' (ibid., p. 292).

Finally, studies of boundaries in the social sciences have identified and catalogued different mechanisms of boundary work, namely the 'activation, maintenance, transposition or the dispute, bridging, crossing and dissolution of boundaries' (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 187). The formulation of such abstract mechanisms is vital to move beyond a fragmented collection of case studies (ibid.). However, these mechanisms are only limitedly applicable to social movement studies as the authors draw on a multitude of boundary types ranging from spatial boundaries, national identity, and nation-building to professions, science, and knowledge as well as class, racial, and gender/sexual inequality (ibid.). In contrast, social movement scholars have largely abstained from systematising the various mechanisms through which boundaries of movements are produced (see Diani and Pilati, 2011, on self-definitions; and Flesher Fominaya, 2010, on mechanisms of exclusion when movements distinguish 'us' from 'them').

3. Research design

This research explores and compares the boundary work of the two CSA networks in Germany and Italy. A comparison is relevant because, having emerged at different points in time, both networks are embedded in distinctive contexts against which they define themselves. Whilst context can be conceptualised in manifold ways, we find it most useful to understand it as a relational phenomenon (Siméant-Germanos, 2019), that is, an actor-centred account considering the relationships between (actors of) social movements, as well as their opponents, which resonates with the idea of boundary work. Below, we describe the case studies, data collection, and analysis of this study.

3.1. Case studies

The German and Italian CSA networks were chosen as case studies due to the first author's engagement with them. During an exploratory fieldwork phase, we noted that Germany and Italy are salient case studies for comparison due to marked differences in boundary work, such as the contrast between the officially adopted definitions of CSA. The following sections briefly present the two networks.

3.1.1. Germany

The CSA movement in Germany has a longstanding tradition, with the first initiative founded in 1988. The movement is organised via a formalised network, the *Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft*, launched in 2011. Ever since, the movement has grown considerably, from 12 to over 416 individual CSA initiatives today (with an additional 98 initiatives being founded).[1] However, only approximately half of the CSA initiatives are official members of the German CSA network.

With the movement's growth also comes remarkable diversity as each CSA initiative is lived and organised uniquely. For instance, initiatives can be farmers-led or community-led; organised as cooperatives, associations, or enterprises; engage in market gardening (i.e. producing vegetables) or farming (i.e. crops and animal products in addition to vegetables); means of production (such as land or machinery) can be rented or collectively or privately owned. The network provides a space of encounter and dialogue for people with different biographies and ideological backgrounds who are united by a common goal (i.e. their struggle for a paradigm change in agriculture and the persistence of smallholder farmers who currently find themselves confronted with the false choice of growing or being squeezed out of the market).

Formally, the network is organised as a non-profit association consisting of four different organs: the general assembly, the council, the coordination, and the board. To become an official member, prospective candidates must complete an online form available on the website (www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org) and pay a yearly membership fee. There are three types of active members: (i) CSA initiatives, (ii) CSA initiatives being founded, and (iii) individual members. All members must formally accept the statute of the CSA network.

3.1.2. Italy

The Italian CSA movement, known as *Rete Italiana delle CSA*, has a much shorter history. Most CSA initiatives in Italy have existed for less than four years, with the oldest dating back to 2011, whilst the national network was founded in 2018. In 2022, 15 initiatives are listed on the official webpage (www.reteitalianacsa.it), concentrated in northern and central Italy. Similarly to the German case, the Italian network is composed of diverse CSA initiatives which follow different organisational and legal models. Ideologically, the various CSA initiatives find inspiration in struggles for Solidarity Economy, food sovereignty, and the autonomous left. Several CSA initiatives have also built on previous alternative experiences in the territory, such as Solidarity Purchase Groups (in Italian, *Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale, GAS*) or Solidarity Economy Districts (*Distretti di Economia Solidale, DES*). Most CSA initiatives are located in urban or peri-urban areas and are limited to vegetable and/or cereal production.

The Italian CSA network is informal and loosely structured. The network has no employees and is run by volunteers who are organised in working groups. It has no formal entry procedure; instead, interested initiatives can simply join the mailing list and attend the network meetings. Thus far, the network has comprised representatives of local CSA initiatives and individuals who are part of other agri-food organisations (see section 4.2.1). While no membership fee or statute is accepted before joining the network, informally, the members of the CSA network share a joint understanding of CSA which is declared on the network's webpages.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

We employ a diverse dataset comprising multiple sources collected between March 2020 and October 2022. The first author conducted 24 semi-structured in-depth interviews, 12 for Germany and 12 for Italy. In the results, the interviews are referred to as G1–G12 and I1–I12, respectively. All interviewees were either part of a CSA initiative that is a member of the networks and/or individual members (in the case of the German network). For an overview of the profile of the interviewees, see Electronic Supplementary Material.

We adapted our sampling approach to the specific conditions in each country. For the German CSA network, we interviewed members who were, at the time, or had been before part of the board, council, or coordination of the national CSA network and consequently had a representational function of the network. This sampling approach was not applicable to the Italian network, which is more informally organised than the German one. Therefore, in Italy, we interviewed those members with the most active roles in the organisation of this network. In addition, in both countries, we interviewed members of the most longstanding local CSA initiatives due to their historical overview of the development of the movement.

Because of the travelling and social interaction restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, some interviews were conducted online. All interviews were held in the local language (German or Italian) and digitally recorded and transcribed. Further sources of data include research notes from participant observation of the semi-annual network meetings of the German (three) and Italian (two) CSA networks as well as web content (e.g. NWSL n.d.(a); Ökolandbau.de, 2020; RICSA, 2022), documents (e.g. NWSL, 2019, 2018, 2017; RICSA, 2021, 2019, 2018), videos (e.g. Farbe der Forschung, 2014), and radio features (Freie-R-adios.net, 2011; (Radio Dreyeckland, 2014). We performed a content analysis of all documents with the help of NVivo. For insights into the

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[1] Cited November 2022.

process of boundary work, we organised the data chronologically to reconstruct the narratives of boundary work and inductively identify different topics which feature vital moments and debates within each network. Subsequently, by comparing the two networks, we abstracted more general mechanisms of boundary work.

4. Results

The following sections outline the boundary work and process of defining CSA in the German (section 4.1) and Italian (section 4.2) networks. To capture the dynamic character of boundary work, we present essential topics of internal debate about each network's boundary and identity which have evolved over time. Section 4.3 synthesises the results from both cases by proposing mechanisms of boundary work.

4.1. Germany

Since the foundation of the German CSA network in 2011, members have debated where the boundaries of the CSA model lie, and the notions of what can be considered a CSA initiative and who belongs to the network have changed (G2). We distinguish five topics of internal debate that were key to the boundary work of the German CSA network which we identified during the analysis. While we present the topics in chronological order, they partly overlap and continue to be relevant today. In the headings, we indicate when the topic was most prominently discussed. For each topic, we first reconstruct the overall narrative, followed by a brief overview of the observed mechanisms of boundary work.

4.1.1. Alternative to the industrial, globalised agri-food system (2011)

In its early days, the network foremost defined itself and its goals in opposition to the industrial, globalised agri-food system (G5; G10; Blättel-Mink et al., 2017; Freie-Radios.net, 2011; see also Kraiß, 2008). The founding members of the network, primarily biodynamic CSA farmers and activists of the right-to-food and anti-globalisation movements, were profoundly concerned about dire conditions for farmers who found themselves forced to '*grow or perish*' (G7) (i.e. they faced the false choice between growing and industrialising or being squeezed out of the market; see also G3). To halt the loss of smallholder agriculture happening at an alarming rate, the network members agreed their main goal was to '*reinvent agriculture*' (G5) and initiate a paradigm change (G3; G7; G9), which entailed moving from the ongoing industrialisation and concentration of agriculture towards regional, (bio-)diverse, and responsible agriculture which secured the livelihood of small-scale farmers.

During the second overall encounter of the member of the German CSA network in 2011 in Fulda,[2] the founding members saw the need to establish a uniform name for the CSA model to gain visibility in Germany since CSA initiatives which predated the network had coined different terms and labels to denote the CSA model. The agreed-upon term, *Solidarische Landwirtschaft (Solawi)*, literally translated means 'solidary agriculture' and intentionally alludes to the Solidarity Economy movement (Gruber, 2020). The name is intended to emphasise that producers and members meet on equal terms and foregrounds the need of practising solidarity via risk-sharing schemes (G5; G12). The emphasis on risk-sharing is further formalised by specifying it as a core principle in the network statutes (NWSL, 2011). Further principles include mutual trust, joint definition of production methods, joint financing of production and adequate wages for farmers, long-term and binding relationships, freedom from economic pressures, contribution to food sovereignty, and the support of the health of soils, waterbodies,

plants, animals, and people (ibid.).

During this initial phase, the network engaged in two mechanisms of boundary work. First, it started to create boundaries by (i) engaging in antagonist/protagonist framing in relation to the status quo (i.e. the globalised and industrial agri-food system) and (ii) specifying the network's statutes which consolidated a shared set of core principles. Second, it started the process of institutionalising CSA discursively in the German context by agreeing on a common name.

4.1.2. Demarcating CSA from other alternative agricultural models (2012–2014)

Subsequently, the boundary work of the CSA network unfolded in relation to other alternative agricultural models, notably the biodynamic movement and box schemes. One interviewee recalled the need for a fundamental paradigm change '*was evident to everyone, and everyone knew that we can realise this change better with [the] CSA [model] than any other model*' (G3). Whilst the first nine CSA initiatives in Germany originated from the biodynamic movement (G3; G10; also see Kraiß, 2008), certified biodynamic and/or organic agriculture alone was not deemed sufficient to realise the envisioned paradigm change in agriculture. Therefore, during public events, such as an information event in 2012, and in official documents, the network repeatedly emphasized that the organic sector was not exempted from the globalised market and the concomitant pressures for farmers (NWSL, 2012, n. d.(b)). One interviewee summarised the perks of the CSA model over organic and biodynamic farming: whilst the latter have been subjected to market logic (the introduction of biodynamic produce in the assortments of supermarkets and discounters and the organic certification of large agribusinesses leave little doubt on that), the CSA model should remain inherently non-market-based (G10).

Box schemes, a form of direct marketing where customers pre-order a vegetable box on a weekly or monthly basis (Kraiß, 2008), were another relevant reference point for the CSA movement. Consequently, the differences to box schemes were frequently highlighted within the network: Whilst box-scheme customers purchase single products, members or 'prosumers' of a CSA initiative commit for an entire year to finance the production, thereby providing planning security for producers. Moreover, in the case of box schemes, operators often sell produce from other farmers along with their own. Thus, contrary to the CSA model, box schemes do not enable risk-sharing and have less potential to build direct relationships and trust between consumers and producers (ibid.). Members debated the distinctions between CSA and box schemes during a workshop at the national network meeting in 2014, including the possibilities to institutionalise and enforce these differences (Radio Dreyeckland, 2014). Referencing the experience of the French AMAP, the workshop participants discussed the benefits and disadvantages of having a more detailed charter and potential compliance mechanisms (ibid.). They saw a risk in overly defining and thereby restraining the German CSA movement. Simultaneously, they questioned how diversity could be celebrated within the network without turning CSA into an arbitrary model. Commenting on this tension, one member voiced that a young movement should observe and reflect on the direction it may develop before proposing a clear-cut definition (ibid.). Differentiating the CSA model from box schemes has remained relevant to today as the dissimilarities between the two models are reiterated on the network's webpage (NWSL, n.d.(a)) and in its external communication with third parties (Ökolandbau.de, 2020)).

In sum, the German CSA network refined its boundaries by extending the antagonist/protagonist framing to previously existing alternative agricultural models. Whilst mechanisms of institutionalisation and enforcement of the boundaries were discussed, they were not considered appropriate for a young, emerging movement.

4.1.3. Resisting capitalist (2012–2017) and far-right (2013–present) co-optation

Delineating the boundaries of CSA also served as a means to resist

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[2] The first meeting of the CSA network took place in October 2010 in Kassel and prepared the ground for the official foundation of the network.

attempts at capitalist and far-right co-optation. Since its inception, the CSA network has been aware of the ubiquitous threat of capitalist co-optation. Several interviewees stated that the CSA movement, due to its growth, will attract increasingly more people with an entrepreneurial mindset (G6) or even mainstream actors in the food system, such as supermarkets: '*I mean, let this [movement] grow; let it be 2000 CSA holdings. Then there will be assholes, apologies for the wording, that will be interested in using [it] for themselves*' (G5). The network's strategy to protect itself from capitalist co-optation relies on two pillars. First, already in 2012 (i.e. before any concrete attempts of co-optation were observed), the network protected the name *Solidarische Landwirtschaft* as well as its slogan, 'Sharing the harvest' (*sich die Ernte teilen*), and logo as a trademark. Ever since, the network has prevented people or organisations seeking to commercialise the CSA model from using the official name and logo. In the past, the network solved trademark infringements without taking legal measures. Instead, Solawi staff members contacted those responsible for the infringement such as a health food shop in southern Germany, explained what the CSA model entails, and asked them to no longer use the name *Solidarische Landwirtschaft* (G12). A second strategy by the CSA network to prevent co-optation is the development of a more detailed definition of what the CSA model comprises. During a workshop at the network meeting in autumn 2017, it was proposed that the definition of the key characteristics of the CSA model, such as renouncing profit maximisation, can effectively prevent big players in the agro-industry from co-opting the model (NWSL, 2017).

Second, similar to other agri-food and peasant movements, CSA appeals to right-wing environmentalists and 'folkish' settlers[3] due to an ideological overlap: the celebration of local food, environmental protection, autonomy, and (re-)connection to land (NWSL, 2020). The danger of right-wing co-optation became tangible for the first time in 2013 when council members discovered a person with far-right[4] ideologies in their midst due to a conflict unfolding in a local CSA initiative. The person adhered to a CSA initiative which had been (unknowingly) co-founded by people with left and people with folkish ideologies (G7; G11). When those with a left stance became wary of their co-founders due to their racist rhetoric, they left and founded a new CSA initiative. However, one co-founder who adhered to folkish ideologies was actively engaged in the network as a single member. Consequently, the council initiated a process to develop a clear stance against the far-right in the network's statute. Changing the statute was necessary to have a legal basis for excluding the far-right single member from the network and denying their CSA initiative membership (G5; G7). Furthermore, due to the trademark protection of CSA, the right-wing CSA initiative was no longer allowed to call itself *Solidarische Landwirtschaft* (G11).

Despite the exclusion of the member and the prohibition to use the label *Solidarische Landwirtschaft*, the case remained highly relevant: In the region of the excluded CSA, many people had begun to associate the abbreviation Solawi, which, contrary to the full name, is not protected by trademark,[5] with far-right ideologies. Some CSA initiatives nearby, which suffered from these stereotypes against the CSA model, organised a workshop during the network meeting in spring 2017. During this workshop, it became evident that the problem of far-right tendencies within CSA was not an isolated case as other participants also reported similar struggles in their initiatives. Due to the scope of the problem, a group of eight concerned members formed a voluntary working group in 2017 designated to fight against far-right co-optation and raise awareness on the issue within the network (G11).

Besides assisting CSA initiatives which encounter problems with members with far-right ideologies, the working group also asserted the incompatibility of CSA and far-right ideologies in the broader network by organising workshops in the annual network meetings and developing informational and educational material and active communication via the newsletter. For instance, since 2017, the webpage has featured a small banner, 'CSA against the far-right' (*Solawi gegen rechts*) on all subpages, which quotes the statute's passage declaring the exclusion of far-right ideologies from the network. As such, the pop-up successfully signals to both existing and potential members that the network does not welcome people with far-right ideologies; at the time of writing, one initiative voluntarily cancelled its membership, and two others decided not to join the network based on its clear stance against the far right as well as positioning statements distancing itself from the protests against the responses to the Covid-19 pandemic[6] (G7; G11). Furthermore, in 2022, the working group launched a bottom-up, participatory writing process which seeks to develop a more comprehensive positioning against the far-right, explaining why far-right ideologies and other forms of discrimination are problematic and incompatible with CSA. The process is open to all network members to ensure the values and ideas are shared beyond the working group.

Despite these efforts, the strategy of a clear delineation of the CSA model has limitations: Several initiatives which are inspired by the model but do not comply with the network statutes have started to use other related names which allude to CSA. By choosing a name similar to *Solidarische Landwirtschaft*, the initiatives try to capitalise on the recognition CSA has gained in Germany. As these initiatives are neither members of the network nor use the protected label, the network has little margin to influence them. For actors outside the CSA movement, the difference between these initiatives and the CSA model as defined by the German CSA network is not immediately apparent. Consequently, these initiatives risk leaving 'brown stains'[7] on the network's reputation.

This section has shown that the German CSA network engaged in three mechanisms of boundary work. It reinforced boundaries by developing a more detailed definition which specifies CSA as non-profit-oriented. It institutionalised the boundary by adjusting its internal organisation and particularly its membership criteria within the statute to highlight the incompatibility of CSA and far-right ideologies. Finally, it enforced legal boundaries (i.e. by protecting CSA as a trademark and expelling or refusing entry to members who do not comply with the

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[3] The term folkish (in German 'völkisch') refers to ethno-nationalist and racist ideas that are erected on the supposed links between the homeland (in German 'Heimat'), people and nature (Forchtner, 2020). Folkish ideologies typically criticise modernity and postulate an anti-urban and anti-industrial-capitalist agenda (Forchtner, 2020; Hellweg, 2020). As the name alludes, folkish settlers settle in rural areas where they aspire to create their ideal, racial community (German: 'Volksgemeinschaft') on a small scale (Hellweg, 2020). This is a conscious strategy to undermine state structures and power (ibid.). Agriculture and farmers play a key role in folkish ideologies since they 'were seen as key ingredients in a healthy nation' (Turner-Graham, 2020).

[4] While there is no clear-cut definition of far-right ideologies in the context of Germany, far-right worldviews are typically marked by one or several of the following elements: nationalism, xenophobia, folkish ideologies, antisemitism, the glorification of the nazi regime and the relativisation or denial of the holocaust, as well as the rejection of democracy and the constitutional state (Nandlinger, 2008). Thus, far-right extremists reject the democratic constitution and order and aspire to construct a totalitarian and autocratic state, in which nationalist and racist ideas form the basis of society (ibid.). This also entails that far-right extremists do not shy away from violence to realise these ideals.

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[5] According to German trademark rules, if a term is considered 'common parlance', i.e. if a term is already being used by many people, it can no longer be protected as a trademark. When the network tried to protect the abbreviation *Solawi* in 2016 it was already widely used by the, at the time, more than 100 CSA initiatives. Therefore, the network was unable to establish *Solawi* as a trademark.

[6] The working group problematised these protests since they were attended by both people from the ecological and anthroposophical movements, including members of CSA initiatives, as well as by conspiracy theorists and right-wingers (AG Rechte Tendenzen, 2020).

[7] In Germany, brown is the political colour of the far right, alluding to the uniforms worn by the paramilitary wing of the National Socialist German Workers' Party.

statute).

4.1.4. Factionalism between agricultural holdings and community-supported enterprises (2019–2021)

Whilst in the initial phase the network's relationship to other social movements and actors in the food system significantly shaped the process of defining CSA, internal disputes and factionalism dominated the boundary work within the network over time. This development was spurred by the changing composition of the network's members. From being founded primarily by (biodynamic) CSA farms (G3), the network evolved to being composed mostly of vegetable-gardening initiatives, often organised as collectives or cooperatives. These two groups have different modus operandi in how they set up and run a CSA initiative, which, in their extremes and to use the words of one interviewee, can be stylised into, on the one hand, '*patriarchal hierarchical family farms*' which farm on privately owned land and, on the other, grassroots projects which experiment with '*common property … as well as collective decision-making processes*' (G7). Building on this, they also have different visions of what the network stands for: whether it should fight solely for safeguarding peasant agriculture or become more broadly '*an actor of a social-ecological transformation*' (G4).

In particular, the factionalism was triggered in March 2019, when the co-founder of the oldest CSA cooperative in Germany organised a meeting with other cooperatively organised CSA initiatives, envisioning establishing their own network. The group of, at the time, 10 cooperatively organised CSA initiatives did not feel represented (or appealed to) by the CSA network's emphasis on peasant agriculture (G4). However, when approached by the CSA network, they decided to unite forces and not have two competing movements. Subsequently, the cooperatively organised CSA initiatives were integrated in the form of a working group in the existing network (G5). This integration resulted in new impulses and ideas which substantially altered the network's vision and definition of CSA (see 4.1.5.), albeit not without fierce discussions during internal meetings and over the electronic mailing list. Especially some members of the older generation found it difficult to accept that the network was becoming less of a peasant struggle. One founding member complained, '*All of this [the activities of the network] run under the label of solidarity agriculture [Solidarische Landwirtschaft]. If you look at the holdings which take part of the network and which do agriculture, of 400 [CSA] holdings, those which I consider do agriculture are 25 to 30 holdings; the others are vegetable gardens … The initial impetus [of the network, i.e. safeguarding peasant agriculture] is no longer alive*' (G5). The interviewee continued warning against loosening the focus on peasant agriculture as this would further weaken the network's capacity to appeal and speak to traditional agricultural farmers, an important target group. This observation is supported by another member, who stated that the network has been relatively unsuccessful in mobilising traditional family farms (G2). Whilst there are undoubtedly practical challenges which hinder traditional farms from becoming a CSA (e.g. it proves significantly more challenging to transition an existing farm to the CSA model than starting a market garden as a CSA [G3, G5]), one interviewee believed the main reason for the lack of CSA farms is the closed '*mindset of the peasant clientele*' who are not willing to experiment with a '*radically transformative economic model. Let alone commonly owned property or possibilities of participation of "city folk"*' (G5).

Moreover, discourse was central to the heated disputes and the internal boundary work, including which words the network should use in official documents, talks, and internal documentation to denote the CSA initiatives. The choice of words ultimately enables or constrains whether current and prospective members can identify with and feel part of the movement: '*Under these circumstances [if the network was framed exclusively, or at least primarily, as a peasant struggle], as an unofficial representant of the CSA cooperatives, I cannot explain to them [cooperatively organised CSAs] why they should join this network. No cooperative understands themselves as peasants. If in this network [there] is only place for peasant agriculture, which place do we have?*' (G4).

To settle this dispute, a representative of the cooperatively organised CSA initiatives proposed to replace 'peasant agriculture' [German: *bäuerliche Landwirtschaft*] with 'smallholder agriculture' [German: *kleinstrukturierte Landwirtschaft*], hoping both sides could identify with this supposedly more neutral term. However, to older generation members, it was fundamental to explicitly refer to peasant agriculture. To them, peasantry is a political category with a longstanding international history of resistance (personal communication with interviewee G4, 2 February and 26 September 2022). Peasant agriculture then is the antithesis of industrialised agricultural production and therefore perceived as a powerful slogan (personal communication with interviewee G4, 26 September 2022). Thus, in the end, the network decided not to use the term 'smallholder agriculture' and instead explicitly name both 'peasant holdings' and 'community-supported enterprises' in its documents and on its webpage (G4; NWSL n.d.(a)). The factionalism has become less pronounced since some members with a strong peasant identity exited the network in early 2021 and due to efforts to end the conflict and shift focus to the '*integrative capacity*' of the network (G1). Nonetheless, the issue still resurfaces on different occasions.

Finally, we observed a process of re-institutionalising the boundaries of CSA which manifested in the form of discourse (peasant versus community-supported enterprises) and internal organisation (formation of the working group for cooperatively organised CSA initiatives).

4.1.5. Collectively defining CSA (2018–2021)

A first step towards a collective definition was the co-development and official adoption of the international CSA charter, also known as the 'Ostrava declaration' in 2016 (NWSL, 2016a). Despite the adoption and announcement of the CSA charter to its members, in their official communication via the newsletter, the network pointed out that the German CSA model, known as Solawi, is narrower than the international CSA model (NWSL, 2016b).

Two years later, in November 2018, the network then embarked on a collective and participatory process to define the core principles of the CSA model in the German context (G2). The discussions during that process reflected and built on earlier debates within the network, uniting themes from the previous subsections. The participatory process was initiated to delineate the CSA model from other alternative agricultural models and support the identity formation of the network, which due to its rapid growth in membership, needed to reaffirm its boundaries (NWSL, 2019, n.d.(a)). Furthermore, defining the core principles of CSA was expected to create a consistent image of the movement for the general public (NWSL, 2018) and was considered necessary to becoming eligible for state funding in the future (G8).

The elaboration of the collective definition occurred in different spaces: input was collected from the movement during the council and semi-annual network meetings, and a working group was established to develop text blocs. Specifically, collective discussions on the boundaries of CSA were organised during two network meetings in 2018 and 2019 (NWSL, 2019, 2018). During the workshops, which were open to all interested participants in the network meetings, the desirability of adopting a narrow as opposed to a broad definition was discussed, followed by elaboration of a first set of soft criteria. Based on experiences of other CSA movements in Europe, one member remarked that the Swiss CSA movement encountered difficulties when it adopted a narrow definition and that the broad but inclusive approach of the French AMAP movement may be a better role model for the German network. Additionally, members debated the relationship between *Solawi* and the broader international movement, postulating that *Solawi* extends beyond CSA: 'While every Solawi is a CSA, not every CSA is a Solawi' (NWSL, 2018, p. 16). This statement shows that, while having a sense of belonging to the international CSA movement, the German movement saw the necessity to carve out its own definition and boundaries.

The collective process consolidated a shared, solid understanding of the core principles of a CSA whilst also inevitably leading to contestations amongst different factions of the network (see also **4.1.4**; G2; G7).

To ease these tensions and ensure inclusivity, the statement's first sentence explicates that CSA 'means diversity', acknowledging that this diversity is both a challenge and a strength (NWSL n.d.(a)). Although finding and foregrounding commonalities amongst heterogenous actors is a laborious and continuous endeavour (G3), it is also a strength to unite people with distinct ideological backgrounds who otherwise seldomly interact (G1).

A long internal reflection process lasting approximately two-three years was necessary to derive a joint definition, which was approved by the council in late 2021. Along with fundamental questions on the strategic orientation of the network (e.g. Who do we envision joining the movement? How can we reach a broad audience without losing our core values? What do we talk about: peasants, agriculture, collectives, gardening?), practical questions were raised (e.g. What do we mean by sustainable agricultural practises? What is a fair wage? (G2)).

During the participatory process, the network identified seven central pillars of CSA:

1. Joint financing of the agricultural production and sharing of risks and harvest
2. Recognition and appreciation amongst all parties involved
3. Direct relations with and involvement of members
4. Transparency regarding the annual budget and production methods
5. Future-proof agricultural practises
6. Good working conditions and social security for farmers
7. Tolerance within the network and exclusion of far-right ideologies (NWSL n.d.(a))[8]

Each principle is explained on the network's webpage, including 'optional' requirements (NWSL n.d.(a)). For instance, contributory rounds, a widely adopted system in Germany, are encouraged but not mandatory. Contributory rounds are a solidarity funding mechanism via which members indicate the financial contributions that they can afford and are willing to make in order to receive a harvest share. An indispensable prerequisite is that, taken together, the contributions of all members cover the costs of the farm operation.

The network abstained from defining more than these seven principles to provide room for the diversity of CSA initiatives (G2). Consequently, the definition does not stipulate forms of member involvement such as their participation in the fields and their role in decision-making processes, nor does it exclude producers who engage in forms of marketing other than the CSA, as long as they are transparent about it. At the time of writing, the network does not verify or assess the initiatives' adherence to the core principles. One interviewee clarifies, '*CSA would just become a strong certificate, which they [CSA initiatives] could not lose under any circumstances. […] I don't think the network strives to bind people via restraints or formal requirements*' (G2).

In brief, the German network engaged in (re-)creating the boundary by starting a deliberate and participatory process to formulate an inclusive definition. This boundary was institutionalised through discourse, particularly by framing CSA as a diverse struggle.

4.2. Italy

The following section presents three topics which emerged from the data analysis and were essential to the boundary work of the Italian CSA network. We first analyse the ideological roots of the Italian CSA network, followed by an exploration of the adoption of the rather broad, international CSA charter. We conclude by reporting the latest developments within the network towards adopting a narrower definition of CSA.

4.2.1. Ideological roots of the Italian CSA movement (2011–2018)

Similar to the German case, the Italian CSA model can be read as an alternative and response to the dominant, neoliberal 'agro-industry' (I6). Considering the agri-food system's detrimental effects on the environment, health, the viability of small-scale farmers and social justice, as well as the alienation between consumers and producers, CSAs are framed as prefiguring 'more sustainable and just food practices' (Piccoli et al., 2021, p. 2) and overcome elements of the dominant market paradigm such as competition, rivalry and exploitation among and between producers and consumers (I6).

However, in addition to this reading, the ongoing boundary work of CSA in Italy differs from the German CSA network. To understand these differences, it is helpful to first explore the ideological roots of the movement and situate it in the strong and longstanding Italian alternative food network, comprised of farmers' markets, GAS, biodistricts,[9] DES[10], and food self-provisioning in rural areas (I10). Particularly relevant for CSA in Italy is the GAS movement, a consumer-initiated and collectively organised form of direct provisioning of ethically and sustainably sourced products which is ideologically rooted in the Solidarity Economy paradigm (Fonte, 2013; Grasseni, 2014). The GAS movement, which originated in the early 2000s, is well established and widely recognised in Italy (ibid.). While for some time, GAS was conflated with or regarded as the Italian form of CSA (Medici et al., 2021; Urgenci, 2016a), more recently scholars have argued that CSA is an 'even more advanced experience' of transformations around food than GAS (Piccoli et al., 2021, p. 9; Rossi et al., 2021).

During the last decade, GAS was repeatedly criticised for becoming conventionalised—notably also by its own members and supporters. The increased popularity of the GAS movement was interpreted as a 'weakening of the original transformative character of the model' since less conscious people started to enter the movement (Rossi et al., 2021, p. 9). Concomitantly, a search for other models which better embody the values of Solidarity Economy[11] started. In particular, during an encounter with the Italian Solidarity Economy network (Rete Italiana di Economia Solidale, RIES) in 2016,[12] one of the founders addressed the present 'gasistas' (members of GAS initiatives), claiming an orientation towards the community dimension was necessary to counter the stagnation of the movement (I6). The meeting was attended by one person, who—inspired by the talk—later founded a CSA initiative. Further members who are presently part of the Italian CSA network have strong ties to RIES and therefore were influenced by the discussions regarding which alternative models are the most promising from a Solidarity Economy perspective (I7; I11; I6). Moreover, various CSA initiatives, including the first Italian CSA, developed from an existing GAS and/or DES (I6; I7; I11) as a deliberate decision to strengthen their ideological roots within the Solidarity Economy and go beyond the GAS experience and its limits (I3; Rossi et al., 2021). In addition to the GAS and

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[8] However, the definition is not considered final in any way; rather, reflecting the idea that a movement's boundaries keep evolving and that defining CSA is a (continuous) process, it is merely considered as the current state of affairs (G3).

[9] Biodistricts aim to improve natural resource management in a specific territorial space based on the principles of organic agriculture (Anderson et al., 2020). For this purpose, this initiative brings together multiple actors, such as farmers, consumers, the touristic sector, municipalities, and other local associations. As such, biodistricts set out to improve the overall governance, strengthen the interlinkages between the different actors, and improve the local economic, social and ecological conditions (ibid.).

[10] Social Economy Districts are defined as 'economic systems of material flows based on mutual engagement and joint activities among different actors that help each other to meet their needs of purchase, sale, exchange goods, services and information, according to principles inspired by a commitment to building an economy that is local, fair, supportive and sustainable' (Forno and Weiner, 2020; xv).

[11] Loosely defined, the Solidarity Economy, can be understood as an alternative model to the dominant capitalist system seeking to 'democratise and socially re-embed the economy' (Bonfert, 2022, p. 501; Rossi et al., 2021).

[12] Until 2020, the official name was Tavolo RES (Roundtable of the Italian Solidarity Economy network).

Solidarity Economy movement, some initiatives form part of agricultural rural community and food sovereignty movements (I1) such as Genuino Clandestino, a network of community and peasant movements promoting autonomy and resistance to industrial agriculture (I2) and the Italian Rural Association (Associazione Rurale Italiana, ARI; I3). Moreover, Italy's second-oldest and best-known CSA, which functions as a reference point for other Italian CSA initiatives, is ideologically rooted in the food sovereignty paradigm (I12): "*We are part of CampiAperti* [a local association for food sovereignty] *because we recognise our right to food sovereignty*" (Arvaia, n.d.).

All in all, whilst the Italian CSA network had not yet been officially founded, future members were already engaged in protagonist/antagonist framing. In particular, they framed CSA in opposition to the dominant agri-food system and as an essential actor in the Solidarity Economy movement which prefigures the values of the Solidarity Economy more effectively than other alternative economy initiatives, such as the GAS movement.

4.2.2. Adoption of the international charter (2018)

The first meeting of the Italian CSA network occurred in Bologna in 2018. Besides the different CSA initiatives, it was also attended by several members of Urgenci, the international CSA network, who, to start the meeting, presented the European charter of CSA, also known as the Ostrava declaration (RICSA, 2018). The charter had been co-developed by CSA activists from different European countries in 2016. Activists from Italy participated in this process, even if no national CSA network existed back then (I1).

The presentation of the European charter framed the meeting significantly and led to an explicit discussion of the boundaries of the network: How can common denominators be singled out without falling back to rigid definitions? As part of this discussion, the relationship between CSA and GAS was raised. It was proposed that creating a network could make the specificities of CSA and its differences in relation to GAS recognisable and position CSA as one of the most advanced alternative models of the Solidarity Economy (RICSA, 2018). Contrary to the experience of the German network, finding an Italian term was not necessary since the acronym CSA in Italian can be translated literally as *Comunità a Supporto dell'Agricoltura.*

One year later, in 2019, during the second annual meeting, the Italian CSA network again debated the European charter of CSA and decided to formally subscribe to it. The charter defines CSA as '*a direct partnership based on the human relationship between people and one or several producer(s), whereby the risks, responsibilities, and rewards of farming are shared, through a long-term, binding agreement*' (Urgenci, 2016b) and specifies the core principles of CSA initiatives. On its recently constructed webpage, the Italian network outlines the following principles of a CSA, which were adopted from the Ostrava declaration:

1. Responsible care for the soil, water, and seeds
2. Food as a common good
3. Support of peasant/smallholder agriculture
4. Fair working conditions
5. Community-building around food
6. Diffusion of trust relationships (RICSA, 2022)[13]

In the official documentation of its annual meeting in 2019, the network praised the 'strength and importance' of the definition, particularly with regard to distinguishing CSA from any other form of market relation (RICSA, 2019). However, the early adoption of an already existing charter can also be understood as a pragmatic decision; the Italian network hardly had the capacity and time to formulate its

own definition (I3).

According to many members of the network, the charter should be understood as a guideline which explains '*in general what [a CSA] is or, rather, what it should be'* (I4, see also I5). The network can then be a space where initiatives can constructively confront each other and inquire '"*Why don't you try to do also this? This would get you even closer [to the CSA model]." Or if they don't do it [ask]: "Why don't you do it? Why is this not feasible in your current condition?"'* (I5). However, the potential of the charter to shape the understanding of the boundaries of CSA in Italy more broadly was, at least until recently, very limited. The charter is barely known to those initiatives which self-define as a CSA but are not part of the network for a simple reason: until the webpage launch in December 2021, the document was not publicly available (I1; I2; I4).

The network created boundaries by adopting the pre-existing definition of the European charter. The boundaries were informally institutionalised by in-depth discussions on the core principles of CSA. However, due to a lack of external communication, the formal institutionalisation of the boundaries only occurred a couple years later.

4.2.3. From different interpretations towards a narrower definition of CSA (2019–2022)

Despite the formal adoption of the European charter, the interviews revealed a selective reading of which principles and aspects are considered essential to the CSA model and differences in the rigour in which the principles are concretely implemented. The different implementations of the CSA principles spurred internal discussions (e.g. Must an initiative exit all market relations and refrain from having other income sources? What is a reasonable size for a CSA to ensure community-building? [I7; I8; I9]). Additionally, one interviewee, taking the example of the second principle (food as common good), questioned whether all concepts in the charter are known to existing and prospective members of the CSA network: '*People do not even know what food as a common good means, at least the vast majority'* (I1).

Depending on which aspect of the charter is considered essential and how the principles are implemented in practice, members derive different conclusions as to which initiative can legitimately claim to be a CSA. Several interviewees highlighted rigorous co-financing and risk-sharing amongst consumers and producers as key principles (I6; I7; RICSA, 2021). These members typically stressed that CSA should be understood in a narrow sense. As such, several network members referred to those CSAs which fully practise risk-sharing as '*true'* (I7) or '*pure'* CSAs (I8) whilst criticising that there are many initiatives which wrongly self-label as a CSA (I3, I6). One interviewee explains, '*They are an agricultural holding where you go on a Saturday morning to get your groceries. And they say, 'We are a CSA'. No, you are not a CSA'* (I6). A related critique is that the label 'CSA' is used in an '*inflationary manner' (I6)*. In other words, it is used without referring to a defined model but to the literal meaning of community-supported agriculture: '*Because within their possibilities [and/or] means, many communities* support *the agriculture'* (I6; see also I3).

The rigour with which members interpret and implement the CSA model correlated considerably with their ideological roots. Network members with strong ties to the Solidarity Economy movement were concerned with promoting a strict definition of CSA, whilst other members had a looser approach to implementing the CSA model since they do not seek to establish it in relation or opposition to a pre-existing movement. In the view of the former, recognising the differences between a CSA and other alternatives models is vital to understand in which direction the movement is heading (I6), which seemed to be lacking: '*I think that many don't even know for sure what a GAS entails, they don't know anything about different models, and neither do they know about the Solidarity Economy'* (I7).

However, not all network members agreed with the reading of CSA as an evolution of GAS. Instead, one member specified that only certain aspects of CSA are superior to GAS (I2), whereas another interviewee asserted the two models are not very different (I4). These internal

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[13] The principles are explained more extensively on the webpage of the Italian CSA network.

differences and discussions can be also interpreted considering a change in membership composition. With the growth of the movement and the individual initiatives, the shared understanding of the ideological roots of the Italian CSA network and its connections to the Solidarity Economy was weakened. In particular, some and especially the newer members are not acquainted with the differences between the CSA and GAS models.

Nonetheless, there was consensus among the different types of members that the vagueness of the European charter was problematic as it did not provide clear guidance (I2; I3; I4; I5). During the national network meeting in June 2022, the Italian network therefore decided to form a working group which specified the principles of CSA (personal communication with interviewee I7, 28 September 2022). Whilst building on the already existing charter, the working group envisioned defining more tangibly what the different principles entail. In other words, they 'translated' the Ostrava declaration into principles that were more attuned to the Italian network. The result was narrower definition of CSA based on five principles, which can be found on the network's homepage:

1. Collective planning of farm business decisions
2. Members prefinancing the CSA costs
3. Risk sharing
4. Overcoming the concept of price
5. Redistribution of the benefits among all members

The proposal of the working group was collectively discussed and approved in autumn 2022 during a network meeting (personal communication with interviewee I5, 17 October 2023).

Another point of contention entailed who can enter the network and how this relates to the core principles of CSA. For instance, one interviewee questioned whether it is desirable that the network strives to only be a space for those initiatives that adhere to all principles (I1). The interviewee then foregrounded long-term direct partnerships over the other CSA principles, as this would allow for envisioning various forms

of relationships between producers and consumers beyond the narrow CSA model (I1). A deliberate centring of direct producer-consumer partnerships is believed to making the movement more accessible to, for instance, peasant farmers, who thus far have shied away from joining the network, thereby supporting the growth of the movement (I1). During the national network meeting in June 2022, the rules for managing membership were intensively debated. While it was generally recognised that not all initiatives implement the CSA model with the same rigour, sanctioning or excluding these initiatives was not regarded a priority. Rather, network members strive to aid each other to work towards becoming more aligned with the CSA principles over time (see also **section 4.2.2**). In addition, they decided to contact external CSA that are not adhering to core principles of the CSA model and to make them aware of the CSA movement, its principles and goals.

This subsection explored the recurrent discussions on the boundaries of the Italian network, which lead to the adoption of a narrower definition of CSA. In addition, it shed light onto a shift in the membership composition of the network, which is palpable in the coexistence of ideological-political approaches inspired by the Solidarity Economy and more pragmatic interpretations and implementations of the CSA model.

4.3. Synthesis: Comparing boundary work in Germany and Italy

Our findings reveal at least three different mechanisms of boundary work: (i) creating, (ii) (re-)institutionalising, and (iii) enforcing the boundary (**Table 1**). Our two case studies engaged, to different extents and in various forms, in these mechanisms. Both networks partook in boundary creation via protagonist and antagonist framing, albeit in partly different ways; while both clearly opposed the dominant, industrial agri-food system, a closer look showcases that they also framed their struggles in relation to previously existing movements.

A further similarity is that both networks adopted the European charter. Yet the Ostrava declaration influenced the nationally adopted definitions of CSA of the two networks to different extents, which can be explained, at least partially, by the differences in longevity of the

Table 1
Overview of mechanisms of boundary work.

Mechanisms of boundary work		Empirical examples	
		Germany	Italy
Creating the boundary	Relation to the international-European CSA definition	Codevelopment and adoption of the European CSA charter; yet the German CSA model was always perceived as more specific than the European charter	Codevelopment of the European CSA charter, albeit before the official foundation of the network; later official adoption of the charter
	Deliberating on a definition of CSA	(Participatory) development of own definition and positioning statements	Translation of the European charter to the Italian context
	Protagonist/antagonist framing	Protagonist: CSA as an actor in the agricultural transition Antagonist: industrial, large-scale agriculture; alternative agricultural movements	Protagonist: CSA as an actor that creates new practices and relations around food, inspired by the Solidarity Economy and transcending market logics Antagonist: the dominant agri-food system; going beyond the GAS experience (for parts of the network)
	Developing discourse	Establishing new term: *Solidarische Landwirtschaft* Coexisting discourse: CSA farms versus community-supported enterprises	Adopting the existing term *CSA*; Shared vision of CSA model, but different degrees of implementation
(Re-)institutionalising the boundary	Organising (internally)	Formal network: the creation of formal membership criteria (adhering to the network's statute); council as a legitimised organ of the network to take decisions on boundary work Creation of subgroups/factions	Informal network: no formal membership criteria; formation of several working groups
	Communicating (internally and externally)	Sharing the definition on the website and during network meetings; CSA-against-the-far-right button; circulating positioning statements	Sharing the definition during network meetings and since 2021 on the website
	Creating legal boundaries	Protecting the CSA slogan and logo as a trademark; embedding the incompatibility of CSA and the far right in the network statute	/
Enforcing the boundary	Prohibiting use of the trademark	Prohibit use of the CSA slogan and logo	/
	Dealing with noncompliant members	Excluding a member with far-right ideologies	Addressing and helping members that do not comply with all CSA principles
	Refusing entry to noncompliant members	Refuse entry of far-right initiatives	/

respective network at time of developing and releasing the charter. At the time of writing the European declaration, the German network, which emerged five years prior to the charter, had already begun to establish its boundaries more narrowly than the international use of the term CSA. Consequently, *Solawis* are considered a CSA, but not vice-versa. In contrast, the relatively young Italian CSA network, which was officially founded two years after the Ostrava declaration, adopted and built on the European definition of CSA early on and only later adapted it to its own reality. Since several Italian CSA activists were involved in writing the charter, their views and understandings of CSA were already represented in the European definition, which facilitated the swift adoption.

We see further differences in the institutionalisation of their boundaries. The longstanding German network has institutionalised its boundaries informally in the form of discourse, and formally via its internal organisation and communication. At the same time, the German CSA network showcases how existing boundaries can be challenged (i.e. re-institutionalised) when the composition of the network's members changes over time and, with it, the discourse. In Italy, the young CSA network has shown advancements regarding the informal institutionalisation of its boundaries. While different implementations of the CSA model continue to coexist, there is overall agreement on the CSA model that ought to be pursued. However, similarly to the German case, the Italian network faced a change in member composition resulting in a loss of knowledge on the ideological roots of the movement. In addition, their informal organisation hindered the formal institutionalisation of the boundaries. For instance, not having a webpage until 2021 impeded sharing the definition beyond those already active within the network.

Finally, only the German network has started to enforce its boundaries by creating legal boundaries based on which they could prohibit the use of the trademark *Solidarische Landwirtschaft*, as well as expelling and refusing the entry of members in line with the network's statutes. Being formally organised was essential to create legal boundaries and have the ability to enforce them. Such a strategy seems purposeful for large networks, such as the German one; without enforcement mechanisms and with a steady increase of members, the network could hardly ensure that all members share a core vision and values. In contrast, for the rather young and small Italian network a strict enforcement of the definition is not a priority, even if the appropriation of the term CSA by initiatives who do not fulfil the principles is regarded as problematic. While the different CSA initiatives across Italy do not implement the CSA model with the same rigour, the small size of the network allows to for mutual exchanges and help to become closer to being a 'pure' CSA.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study comparatively analysed how the German and Italian CSA networks have (re-)defined the core principles and boundaries of the CSA model over time. Drawing on the concept of boundary work from social movement theory allowed us to understand the construction of a collective 'we' as a relational process which unfolded at times in opposition to and at times inspired by other already existing movements in the country as well as the international CSA movement. To emphasise the processual character of boundary work, we reconstructed the narratives and key moments of both movements during which they framed antagonists and protagonists and negotiated the core principles of CSA and who should be part of the networks. Moreover, this study distinguished essential mechanisms through which boundaries are produced (i.e. creating, institutionalising, and enforcing the boundary) and thereby provided a first attempt at systematising them for social movement scholarship. This study focussed on CSA networks specifically and did not focus on the larger CSA movement. For this reason the study does not include the viewpoints of those CSA initiatives that are not members of the respective networks. This is particularly relevant for the German network, which only unites approximately half of all CSA initiatives in Germany. Future research on the topic of boundary work at

the level of CSA movements more generally (as opposed to research on the level of the national network) is therefore needed.

Below, we present three practical challenges around boundary work which we have identified in the German and Italian CSA networks. First, we discuss the distinction between boundary work as a process and a product as well as a potential misalignment between the two. Then we unpack the implications of choosing a narrow or broad boundaries for the membership of the CSA networks. We end with reflections on how the internal heterogeneity within CSA networks, particularly the coexistence of members with food sovereignty and alternative economies backgrounds, presents a challenge during boundary work.

5.1. Boundary work: process or product?

As explained in the conceptual background (**section 2**), this study approached boundary work as a reflexive process among network members, enabling us to look beyond the seeming unity produced in official documents and visible moments of mobilisation. Our analysis instead reveals 'the tensions, contradictions, and negotiations' (Flesher Fominaya, 2010, p. 398) occurring in CSA networks, such as the decision to adopt a narrow or broad definition (**section 5.2**) and the struggles related to dual affiliation (**section 5.3**). A process lens which views boundary work as relational was also instrumental for reconstructing the interactions with and historical influence of other related agri-food movements and actors in shaping how the networks frame antagonists and protagonists, define the principles of CSA, and formulate membership criteria.

Moreover, the analytical distinction between process and product allowed us to detect misalignments between internal disputes and the reproduced definitions in both the German and Italian CSA networks. Our results show that the formally adopted definition and discourse do not necessarily reflect the interactions, collective discussions, and internal reflections within the networks. To some extent, this misalignment is unavoidable due to the dynamic nature of boundary work and movements themselves. For instance, both cases show that the growth of a movement (and the concomitant change of the member composition) can foster and exacerbate misalignments. In the German network, this manifested in the factionalism between agricultural holdings and community-supported enterprises (**section 4.1.1**), while for the Italian network differences between longstanding members with ideological roots in the Solidarity Economy and newcomers became evident. To productively address misalignments, movements need an openness to question and challenge established boundaries, despite the possibility of conflict. In other words, they must approach boundary work as a (continuous) process which requires a high degree of reflexivity (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Gamson, 1991).

Drawing on the experience of the Italian CSA network, we also observe that when a national network develops as an expression of a well-established international movement who has already defined its boundaries, the former is likely to be influenced by the latter's framings, principles, definitions and goals. While this is hardly surprising, it comes with concrete implications for incipient movements; adopting a pre-existing definition (boundary) may increase the chances of misalignment because it potentially precedes and shortcuts the process of collectively establishing those boundaries. Even in the case of the Italian network, where some CSA activists were involved in codeveloping the European charter, we observe that newcomers to the movement did not fully share the same understanding of the CSA model. In response to this misalignment, the Italian network had recurrent conversations about the meaning of the charter and the core principles of CSA, which ultimately lead to the their reworking. Such reworking enabled the translation and adaption of the general European charter to the specific Italian context. As argued by various scholars, such translation and adaptation are prerequisites for a successful diffusion of social movements across countries (Shawki, 2013; Soule and Roggeband, 2019).

5.2. Persisting tension: broad versus narrow boundary work

When movements engage in boundary work, they face an unavoidable dilemma: should they define themselves narrowly or broadly, and what benefits or challenges does this choice entail, in particular regarding the exclusion/inclusion of potential members? These questions have been extensively discussed not only by the Italian and German CSA networks but also by social movement scholars more generally. The broader the definition and identity of a movement, the more inclusive and diverse is its membership (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Mansbridge, 1986). Conversely, a narrow definition promises ideological purity and reflects a strong sense of idealism whilst possibly excluding potential members (Mansbridge, 1986). Similarly, based on the UK CSA network, which consciously adopted a convergent identity to be open to new members, Bonfert (2022, p. 506) has warned that refraining from promoting a specific model may dilute 'CSA's non-commercial and ecological ambitions'. This concern is echoed by several scholars who foreground only those 'ideal' (Bobulescu et al., 2018; Feagan and Henderson, 2009) or 'socially transformational' (Cristiano et al., 2021) CSA initiatives which decommodify food, cultivate strong prosumer relations, and are inherently non-market based, in other words, those which embody 'a radical critique of capitalism' (Earles, 2007, p. 5).

Striving for purity and adopting and enforcing a narrow definition would, however, certainly exclude many CSA initiatives from the networks. Therefore, the German network has chosen an alternative approach which emphasises the diversity of the CSA model and seeks to accommodate different factions within the network, in line with what Bonfert (2022) calls 'pragmatic pluralism'. Ultimately, it is a deliberate strategy of the network seeking to connect to a range of potential members with at times conflicting ideas. In other words, to spread the CSA model in Germany, it is necessary to adopt a definition open enough to engage a diversity of actors and narrow enough to prevent co-optation.

In contrast, the Italian network has chosen a different approach. Over time, it has translated the rather broad European charter into a narrow set of CSA principles. To correctly interpret this development, it is important to understand the Italian context and the multitude of initiatives that have historically developed around food as part of the Solidarity Economy paradigm, such as GAS and DES. Considering the existence of these similar alternative agri-food initiatives, narrowly defining CSA is purposeful for clearly distinguishing these models. This is particularly relevant, since CSA, due to its the potential of redefining producer-consumer relationships, is often framed as an evolution of the GAS experience and as the most advanced expression of the Solidarity Economy (Rossi et al., 2021). However, whilst formally a narrow definition has been adopted, different implementations of the model coexist, ranging from pragmatic to political-idealistic interpretations of the CSA model.

In addition, some members view certain advantages in having broad boundaries in terms of membership; most importantly, they would allow the movement to grow and attract a range of actors, such as peasants and small-scale farmers, who, according to some members, are only attracted to the CSA model to a limited extent. Given the past conventionalisation and mainstreaming that accompanied the growth of agri-food movements in Italy, but also globally (see e.g. Darnhofer et al., 2009; Fonte and Cucco, 2014; Rivera-Ferre et al., 2014), a central question would be how the Italian CSA network could prevent similar weakening of its core values and principles. A compromise between adopting narrow and broad boundaries could consist of following the example of Urgenci and AMPI (https://www.asociaceampi.cz), the Czech network organisation of local food initiatives. To cater to a wider range of actors and initiatives, Urgenci has, for instance, started to introduce alternative terminologies additional to CSA thereby allowing the movement to be more inclusive and enlarge its member's base. This way, a narrow definition of CSA can be implemented whilst simultaneously supporting other forms of alternative agriculture. Both networks therefore not only seek to develop specific projects and strategies to facilitate exchange between existing CSA initiatives and promote the creation of new CSAs, but also strengthen and empower local food initiatives more broadly (Krcilkova et al., 2016; Urgenci, 2016a).

Contrasting the German and Italian networks helps us better understand different approaches to drawing boundaries narrowly or broadly. In the Italian context, while a narrow definition was adopted, CSA initiatives implement the principles to different extents. Thus, the internal diversity is a result of not strictly enforcing the boundaries of the CSA network. This seems a strategic choice; it allows the CSA initiatives to implement the aspired model more rigorously over time. The network members then mutually support and constructively challenge each other in the process of becoming more aligned with CSA model. This approach seems particularly well-suited for small networks, where members know each other well and have a high degree of trust.

In contrast, for the large German CSA network a broad but sharply bounded definition is purposeful: it grants access to various types of members, allowing for inclusivity and diversity within the network, whilst explicitly articulating who is not part of the network (e.g. those with far-right ideologies). Therefore, the clearly delineated definition, combined with the creation of legal boundaries, protects the German CSA network from attempts at far-right and capitalist co-optation (see also Raridon et al., 2020, on boundary maintenance in response to attempts of co-optation of the grass-fed livestock movement in Texas, USA).

Indeed, when considering the historical link between the far right, the natural environment, and environmental protection in Germany, the *Solawi* network's necessity to defend its boundaries against the far right is hardly surprising (Forchtner, 2020; Uekötter, 2014). Our results show the Italian network has not explicitly demarcated itself from the far right. Does this mean that in Italy there is no immediate threat from the far right? Contrary to Germany, in Italy the environment has not been a prominent topic for far-right parties and movements (except CasaPound, an Italian neo-fascist movement; Bulli, 2020). Nonetheless, the Italian CSA network may wish to carefully monitor to what extent CSA can become attractive to these ideologies. The rise in support of the far right, which culminated in the election of the right-wing coalition led by the party *Fratelli d'Italia* ('Brothers of Italy'), presents a severe threat to agricultural grassroots movements. In particular, the decision of Italy's government to rename the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies to Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty shows the far right is attempting to co-opt ideas close to the CSA movement such as food sovereignty, which is then interpreted as autarchy and food nationalism (Giusberti, 2022; Sferini, 2022).

5.3. Navigating the dual affiliation of CSA

Judith Hitchman (2019, 2014), the renowned food sovereignty activist and president of the global CSA network, Urgenci, has argued that CSA, by definition, has a 'dual affiliation': to the food sovereignty and peasant movement(s), on the one hand, and to the alternative economies movement and particularly Solidarity Economy on the other. Drawing on her experience of political advocacy work for the CSA movement, she noted that despite overlaps, the bridge-building attempts between food sovereignty and alternative economies 'is no easy job' (Hitchman, 2019, 2014, p. 13). Our empirical insights on boundary work, at least for the German CSA network, show that the dual affiliation can complicate the process of negotiating a shared sense of 'we-ness'. Since the CSA networks source a large share of their members from people engaged in other spaces and movements, notably from agricultural/peasant or alternative economies movements, power struggles over how the CSA movement should define and distinguish itself from other actors can arise.

In the context of Germany, one central point of conflict between members of the CSA networks who adhere to different sides of the dual

affiliation is language (e.g. which words are appropriate to denote CSA initiatives?). Language is a key mechanism for institutionalising the boundaries of the networks as words and concepts determine who does or does not identify with the movement now and in the future. As elaborated in **section 4.1.4**, in Germany, those from a food sovereignty background who identify as peasants wish to speak of CSA as an agricultural struggle. These CSA farmers depend on farm income for a livelihood and therefore experience the hardship of farming first-hand, particularly the prevailing competition amongst farmers due to liberalisation and unification of the European agricultural market, the discrepancy between production cost and prices for the produce, and a lack of recognition for farming (Blättel-Mink et al., 2017). To them, using the term 'peasantry' is therefore a political act (see also AbL, 2015). Whilst in everyday language, the term 'peasant' is pejoratively connotated, evoking some sort of backwardness, they take inspiration in the international food sovereignty movement, which resignified the term and uses it to reaffirm a collective peasant identity (Desmarais, 2008; Edelman, 2013). At the core of the peasant identity is 'a deep attachment to [rural] culture' (Desmarais, 2008, p. 141) and pride in being a farmer (Desmarais, 2008; Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010).

In Germany, actors who locate themselves primarily within alternative economy movements are often disconnected from the struggles of farming, specifically from the 'historical and contemporary oppression of peasants' (Edelman, 2013, p. 13). Even practitioners of gardening collectives or cooperatives often do not identify as farmers or peasants as many of them are newcomers to gardening. These newcomers, who are often highly educated (see Jarosz, 2011, on CSA in the United States; and Monllor and Fuller, 2016, on newcomers to farming in Europe) consciously chose gardening as a second career path, seeking to attribute meaning to their professional lives (Jarosz, 2011). Experimenting with alternative agricultural practises is often part of a political and intellectual project, which is reflected in their discourse ('community-supported enterprises' in Germany or 'producing members' in Italy). Thus, the quarrel over language in the CSA networks points to the profound and challenging issue of privilege and inequality. Contrary to farmers who depend on agriculture for their livelihood, the often well-educated actors of the alternative economies movement can enter and leave gardening or farming as 'they and their partners can seek other opportunities' (Jarosz, 2011, p. 315).

The power struggle between the different factions teaches us that boundary work unfolds in an interplay with individual members' personal histories and identities (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Snow, 2001). Whilst these negotiations are bound to be conflictual (see, e.g., Gamson, 1997, on the conflicts within sex and gender movements), they are particularly challenging to navigate when the various positions are underpinned by privilege and historically grown power relations which are reflected in the individual identities of different movement members, such as members with a longstanding peasant identity (e.g. What does it mean to enter discussions of who 'we' are as partners on equal footing when differences in privilege are not collectively unpacked?). We argue that the German CSA network could benefit from reflecting on these different positions of privilege during its boundary work as a means to create a better understanding of the different coexisting positions and consolidating their integrative capacity (i.e. negotiating a shared 'we-ness' in which different personal and collective identities have space).

Contrasting the experience of the German CSA network with the Italian CSA network, showcases that the 'dual affiliation' does not necessarily create intra-movement conflicts. In fact, members of the Italian CSA network generally view the visions and values of the Solidarity Economy and food sovereignty movements as integrated. One potential reason is that, due the longstanding presence of the GAS movement in Italy, which draws on both sides of the dual affiliation, the individual identities of the network's members seem to better accommodate both approaches. In addition, differently from the German network, the Italian network is organised in a much more informal

manner. Deciding which side of the dual affiliation is centred in their framing has concrete impacts for the formalised and outward-oriented German network. For instance, it shapes the network's goals, who are considered potential coalition partners and on what topics the network should advocate. As such, whether to frame CSA primarily as a food sovereignty or alternative economy movement influences the network's allocation of human and material resources. This is not the case for the much younger and loosely organised Italian network, or at least, not to the same extent.

Author contributions

Leonie Guerrero Lara: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing. Giuseppe Feola: Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Supervision; Writing – review & editing. Peter Driessen: Supervision; Writing – review.

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Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

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