The Many Faces of Solidarity: Community Building in a German Eco-farming Cooperative

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Counterhegemonic communities often attract a lot of attention to their ideological convictions and unquestionable unity, through their powerful messages. Meanwhile their internal diversity seems to go unnoticed.

Zooming in on the GreenCoop, a Community Supported Agriculture initiative in Freiburg (Southwest Germany), this study looks at the story behind these all too familiar narratives. Through an ethnographic account of members’ experiences it explores how people with counterhegemonic ideologies navigate the convergence and divergence of discourses and practices in their community building processes.

As communities are constructed in relation to ‘others’, the study starts off with an account of how the GreenCoop interacts with external actors. Because it aims to create an alternative to the dominant capitalist system, its social relations are marked by ‘solidarity’ as opposed to ‘competition’ (which they associate with capitalism). If the community would engage in any kind of competitive relation it would thus threaten their existential security. Therefore compelling social boundary maintenance is needed to keep this “significant other” at a “safe” distance while they engage in relations with different external actors. As such it is argued that the GreenCoop can be considered an ideologically gated-community, which explains the prevailing ‘united’ image of such counterhegemonic groups.

Next the study shows that GreenCoop members symbolically construct a sense of community using salient concepts like ‘solidarity’ as collective identity markers that frame communal interests and normativity. However, due to their symbolic nature these concepts can be interpreted in different ways. People who experience the community in different contexts can thus still relate to the same salient concepts and feel part of the same community. Nevertheless when community aspirations become explicit through emergent practices, internally frictions may arise because it clashes with implicit interpretations of ‘solidarity’. These frictions then need to be overcome to re-establish a sense of community. Through code-switching between the different interpretations, intermediary brokers attempt to (re)negotiate common ground among opposing stakeholders. At the GreenCoop this was mostly done by justifying the emergent communal practices, referring to the salient concept ‘solidarity’ and adding meaning to it, which both stakeholders (hopefully) can relate to. Mediation, then, can be understood as a strategic meaning-making process.

Lastly, zooming in on how power relations influence community building processes, the internal social complexity becomes even more apparent. Brokers are relatively powerful compared to other members of the community, because they are able to construct new realities through mediation, but their power is not absolute. Key cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’ limit the possible pathways that legitimize the new realities brokers attempt to construct. Moreover, brokers need access to knowledge about different stakeholders to be able to imagine what their oppositions entail and how these can be mediated. As this knowledge is not always directly accessible, they occasionally need to obtain access through other members. As such they are interdependent and need to navigate internal networks of power relations to be able to engage in mediation practices.

Ultimately then, this research explores the roots of intra-stakeholder diversity to demonstrate that the social complexities of those we study should not be avoided out of fear of falling into a cultural relativism that results in nothing more than nihilism. Instead I argue that by using the analytical ‘zones of intermediality’ approach, researchers can meaningfully study social complexities where relevant.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the Second World War, environmentalism and environmental policy were repressed in Europe under Cold War tensions. Security concerns were prioritized and emphasis placed on economic growth, conformity, and (re)industrialization (Kirchhof & McNeill, 2015). In Germany, however, this changed throughout the early 1970s when two small towns objected to the construction of nuclear facilities, which eventually resulted in a nationwide anti-nuclear energy movement (Karapin, 2007: 117).

One of these towns was Wyhl, a small village at the edge of the Rhine and the Black Forest, in the wine-growing region of Baden-Württemberg. Farmers, students and residents from nearby villages and cities, like Freiburg, united in massive protests and in 1974 they formed the International Committee of Baden Alsace Citizen Initiatives (Karapin, 2007: 118). They opposed the construction through official and conventional channels, which gained them support from many local officials, politicians, and churches. In turn, this allowed the initiatives to gain credibility, which opened up national political avenues (Karapin, ibid: 136). Nevertheless, in 1975 the groups resorted to the illegal occupation of the construction site determined to halt progress. Even after being forcibly evicted through physical confrontations with police, they occupied it again. Both conventional and more disruptive protesters cooperated in such actions, though left-wing militant groups of students from Freiburg were repeatedly excluded (Karapin, ibid: 133). Rather, with the support of the local residents and authorities of Freiburg these occupations managed to coerce major reforms in the late 1970s (Karapin, ibid: 118).

Although the conflict resumed in the 1980s, persistent local opposition eventually led national authorities to discard the plans for the Wyhl nuclear facility. In 1995, at the twentieth anniversary of the site occupation, the national government declared the region would become a nature reserve. (Karapin, 2007: 119)

![Wyhl Protest](http://www.mitwelt.org/kein-akw-in-wyhl.html)

Meanwhile, throughout the 1970s and ’80s, a squatting movement begun in West Germany (and other parts of Europe) directed at resolving housing shortages and deterioration of vacant buildings. Triggered
by the a policed eviction of a squatted building on the 12th of December 1980 in Berlin, squatting communities all over Germany rose up against authorities. While initially they simply increased the number of squats drastically over a short period of time, eventually, as more evictions followed, they took to the streets (Holm & Kuhn, 2010: 646). From 1983 until 1989, Freiburg was one of the cities where major protests and rioting occurred (Koopmans & Rucht, 2002: 246).

Standing in his kitchen, preparing our lunch, Daniel, one of my key participants, explained how they remembered these events.

There is always this game going on between these two souls in Freiburg he explained as he made an upwards intertwining gesture with his hands; the conservative and the free hippie soul. The first being the conventional German kind with the people from the Black Forest holding on to their traditions, the second being the rebellious free spirit. There has always been a bit of struggle between these two but in the ’80s it really escalated. He had not been there himself, but had been told about it. At that time there were a lot of squatting communities being evicted and there were riots to keep the police from doing so. There were even people who had come from other cities to support the squatters, but there was just too much police and eventually it got to the point where there was one week that Freiburg had become a militarized city. Then everyone must have been scared, on both sides. It simply went too far for everyone because there was a really high level of violence. But, after this had gotten so out of hand and groups started organizing collective ownership projects the local government was quite quickly alright with it, although it still had not been easy either. But simply because they must have felt it was better to let people have this than that they would start rioting again. However, Daniel stressed, this was just one theory of course.

(Extract from field notes, 13 March 2015)

Today the city of Freiburg is widely described as a green gem at the edge of the Black Forest near the French and Swiss border. It is a University town, which is home to approximately 250,000 people and has a geographical surface of about 155 km². It promotes itself as a Green city in reference to waste management and land conservation, for which it has won several national and international environmental awards (Gregory, 2011). Its “green” image is furthermore rooted in different characteristics of the town like its University offering a diverse range of ecologically orientated courses; its sustainable architecture that prides itself with the energy negative neighborhood Vauban that produces more energy than it consumes; the large solar panel industry; the Green party that is the largest political player taking up a quarter of Freiburg’s city council1; and the immense popularity of bicycles as mode of transport. But, nevertheless, it remains a city of contradictions regarding environmental activism due to an active French nuclear power facility that only a few kilometers down the Rhine, and old mining facilities up in the mountains of the Black Forest which have contaminated the soil and groundwater around the city (Stockman, Hirsch, Lippmann-Pipke, & Kupsch, 2013).

1 This intertwining of politics and environmentalism is rooted in the events of the 1970s and ’80s when protestors cooperated with local authorities to block the construction of a nuclear facility in Wyhl (Gregory, 2011).
Stefan, another participant, explained that then between 2007 and 2009 the economic crisis was strong and the international climate struggle reached a new climax, which fueled a big search for alternatives. For this, the environment of collective ownership initiatives in Freiburg was a fertile breeding ground, as people were already familiar with organizing their lives outside the dominant market logic. Food autonomy was thus not such a big step away. It was simply part of the Zeitgeist that aimed to take back control (Compilation of data from various informal conversations and an interview with Stefan).

It was this socio-political context of environmentalism, collective ownership initiatives and pressing doubts about dominant neoliberal discourses that gave rise to the GreenCoop. Zooming in, this research revolves around the lives of people who support and engage in this particular Community Supported Agriculture (hereinafter CSA) initiative located in Freiburg, Southwest Germany.

1.1. Academic Relevance & Research Question

Today there are many different CSA models (Bashford, et al., 2013). But, although farm size, member involvement, and distribution practices vary, Janssen (2010) explains that the basic principle for all CSA initiatives is shared costs and shared rewards for regionally grown produce (425). Members ‘pay farmers (...) before the growing season begins and, in return receive weekly shares of product’ (Janssen, ibid: 4). This ensures that farmers will sell all their produce and that the money comes in when seeds need to be purchased and thus costs are highest.

While most academic studies on CSA initiatives address their motivations (see for instance Hassink et al., 2013), the benefits of these forms of agriculture (see for instance Kulak, Graves, and Chatterton, 2013), or the challenges they face (see for instance Janssen, 2010; Lang, 2010), social processes within and beyond these communities are rarely considered. Janssen (2010), however, briefly notes that CSA initiatives are popularly considered to develop close relationships between producers and consumers, but points out that this description does not account for the system’ complexities (425). Therefore, addressing some of these complexities, this study attempts to outline both individual and collective processes within and beyond the initiative.

More specifically, the following research question directs the study:

How do members of the GreenCoop in Freiburg (Southwest Germany) navigate the convergence and divergence of discourses and practices in their community building processes?

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2 It has been considered to replace ‘navigate’ with ‘control’ or ‘deal with’ to avoid being too abstract. For the following reasons I have refrained from doing so. The concept ‘navigate’ is inspired by the concept ‘social navigation’ from Vigh (2009). In his study of narratives by young urban men living in Guinea-Bissau, Vigh (ibid) explains that the concept ‘social navigation’ refers ‘to how people act in difficult or uncertain circumstances and in describing how they disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape and move towards better positions’ (419). In other words, it refers to a response or coping strategy of people to an immensely insecure environment, for instance war. Although the particular environment of this study is not necessarily marked by unpredictability, the mediation processes that are the focus of this study are. This has to do with a fluid power structure of the community (they aspire to be non-hierarchical). Power relations can be and are openly contested which means people are constantly trying to determine which convergence is required and divergence is accepted in any given situation, especially when mediating. Moreover, Vigh (ibid) continues, the social navigation concept is also an analytical optic. It describes a process of motion within motion and so ‘it forces us, in a social perspective, to consider the relation between the environment people move in and how the environment itself moves them, before after and during an act’ (Vigh, ibid: 425). Thus, the concept enables researchers ‘to focus on the way people’s movement in their social environments is constantly attuned and adjusted to the unfolding of the environment itself and the effect this has on possible positions and trajectories’ (Vigh, ibid: 425). The relevance of this concept in this context thus lies in that it acknowledges the dynamic code-switching strategies of the brokers as well as their continuous pursuit of access to resources that allow them to mediate. And lastly the term ‘navigate’ embodies a neutrality that is desirable as the aim of this thesis is not to problematize divergence, but rather to delineate when divergence is problematic and when accepted or even required.
Which is dismantled into three sub-questions that address different contextual layers, slowly zooming in on the internal complexity of the GreenCoop:

**How do members of the GreenCoop navigate convergence and divergence of discourses and practices beyond their community?**

**How do members of the GreenCoop navigate diverging discourses and practices among themselves in order to accomplish a sense of community?**

**How do brokers position themselves within internal power dynamics and how does this influence their ability to mediate?**

### 1.2. Social Relevance

The social relevance of this research then lies in its aim to delineate the complex interaction of people within a counterhegemonic community, which is gaining popularity (Janssen, 2010: 4). Through this study I hope to shed light on the ways in which people with diverging ideologies or different ideas about the operationalization of an ideology mediate their differences, as well as when this mediation might be problematic.

### 1.3. Theoretical Perspective

A theoretical perspective has been adopted to guide strategic choices regarding the research focus, operationalization, and data analysis. Currently in anthropology interpretivism is a common point of departure. Besides that the actor’s point of view is considered vital, also symbolism and cultural meaning are key elements in this perspective. As a result the interpretive perspective is often referred to as a cultural relativistic stance (Eriksen, 2010c). While this approach is appealing in the sense that it concentrates on meanings and stresses ‘that cultural variation cannot be explained by recourse to material conditions’ (Eriksen, ibid: 24), I find it holds a considerable risk of falling into a simplistic cultural relativist optic. Therefore I find value in using this approach not as a complete lens, but as a supplemental part of my theoretical perspective.

Rather, the theoretical perspective I have adopted in designing and conducting this research is social constructivism. Its significance resides in that it argues that groups construct knowledge with one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings. It emphasizes that social constructions are processual, relational, and situational as they are constructed by people; both those who are “involved in it” and outsiders who acknowledge it (E. Bal, Lecture, 8 November 2013). Consequently, as this CSA study focuses on community building and mediation processes, this social constructivist perspective is particularly relevant.

In other words, by combining interpretivism and constructivism in a theoretical perspective the study is able to focus on both collective and individual meaning-making processes.

Furthermore, a frequently voiced criticism is that researchers need to deconstruct hegemonic discourses rather than adopt them (Truong, Gasper, & Handmaker, 2014; Ferguson, 2006), as they otherwise participate in the reproduction of these categories. This deconstructing of dominant categories is one of the key processes in which GreenCoop members themselves engage (particularly the brokers).

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3 Throughout this study ‘convergence’ of practices and discourses refers to union, meaning the merging or overlapping of discourses and practices among members. On the contrary, ‘divergence’ addresses deviations in discourse and practices, thus pointing at variances and differences between members. In chapter 4 these concepts are made ethnographically visible.

4 Brokers can be defined as actors who mediate different life worlds by engaging in different cultural paradigms. For a detailed description of these particular actors and their activities, please see 38-39.
Deconstructions of neoliberal categories like “consumption” (Graeber, 2011) are in that sense exemplary. As such I find that I should also be making use of the deconstructionism approach. I will, however, not be doing so for the same activist reasons. Rather, my aim is to deconstruct categories that are imposed by members of the GreenCoop, in order to determine the underlying meanings.

1.4. Thesis Outline

Hereafter this thesis continues by discussing the research process to give an impression of how and in which physical and social context the research was conducted. The following three chapters then comprise an in-depth data analysis, where ethnographic data is framed in ongoing theoretical debates to delineate how community building processes in counterhegemonic communities can be understood. By addressing each sub-question, the study as such slowly zooms in on the internal complexity of the GreenCoop community. Finally then, this thesis will conclude by discussing the main outcomes of the research and highlighting the overarching theoretical argument that social complexities can and should be studied in a meaningful way.
2. RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1. Access to the Field

My experience of gaining access to the field was marked by a persistence that I imagine a Jehovah witness might occasionally resort to as well. After a month of receiving no reply to the email I sent requesting the possibility to discuss conducting my research with the GreenCoop, I picked up the phone. Several unanswered attempts later a friendly voice greeted me on the other side of the line. My email had been received but in a wave of several research requests and as December is a busy time they simply had not gotten around to replying. When I explained I would be in the area over the upcoming days and that I would simply like to meet the group and discuss the research with them, I was lightheartedly invited to the farm. That way I could immediately help harvesting the Christmas vegetables. The community would then discuss, in their next plenary meeting on the 13th of January, if I were welcome to conduct my research there.

After two intense and exciting days, I returned home with every muscle in my body aching. I had been able to speak with several members of the *Anbau-team* as well as volunteering members, and had chosen the “direct Dutch” approach, asking them straight out what they thought about my intention to do research with them. While some said to be indifferent others had welcomed the idea. Done deal, I thought.

Although I had been able to obtain the email address of the *Anbau-team* for a friendly thank you note, they had kindly requested me not to contact them directly regarding my research. Rather I should keep in touch with the friendly voice that had invited me to the farm and so I tried. However, as it turned out, this voice had become even harder to reach.

Despite my return to the field after the Christmas break and the quickly approaching plenary meeting, the other side of the line remained silent. Eventually I resorted to the anonymous info@ email address again. In the middle of the night I then received a date and time at which I could call the friendly voice again, and so I did. To my worry I then found that it had now become a hesitant voice. At that moment, desperate, I knew I had to get my foot in the door or it was quickly going to be closed in my face. As breezy as I could I suggested attending their plenary meeting so that I could pitch the research and people could ask me questions. To my surprise the hesitant voice spoke, ‘Alright then.’

On the dark and cold night of January 13th, I made my way to the syndicate cafe, where I met with the friendly but hesitant voice of Daniel the gatekeeper, and several other curious faces. That night, despite many doubts, suspicions regarding my motives, uncertainty about their availability, and at the cost of a one page non-academic article on the research outcomes, I was granted membership status and gained access to my research field.

2.2. Research Setting

In and around the city of Freiburg there are multiple gardening projects; urban gardening, garden allotments, and CSA projects. The GreenCoop is one of three CSA initiatives in the area. It was founded in 2009 and has been actively running for the last five years. The collectively owned farm is located just 19 kilometers South of Freiburg, in an ordinary German farming village called Tunsel. The train that takes members from Freiburg to the farm, splits through wine-growing hills until it reaches the valley. There the wet frozen clay lies barren in winter, waiting to be cultivated just in time before the hot dusty summer arrives. In Tunsel there is one main street along which a few neighborhoods, a school, a church, and a small grocery store are located. On the edge of the village the farmhouses mark the beginning of the rolling countryside that extends to the iconic horizon of Black Forest Mountains and the French nuclear power plant that marks the Rhine River.

A red and green hand painted sign, a few bright colored Volkswagen vans, and a bunch of bikes under the trees mark the entrance of the farm. Walking through a broad corridor of by size-organized

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5 Translation: Gardening team.
crates you reach the hofstelle\textsuperscript{6} where all essentials meet; the people, tools, machines, washroom, cellar, changing area, allocation infrastructure, bathroom, office trailer, and kitchen container. It is the heart of the operation, surrounded by nine hectares of bio-diverse fields and tunnels\textsuperscript{7} producing organic vegetables. Tucked away behind the buildings and in-between the trees three trailers are home to unofficial residents. The lockers and crates at the hofstelle have been labeled with nametags of the appliances you can find in them. On the walls in the allocation area the distribution point signs designate which vegetables go where, and the abundantly filled crates are marked accordingly with hangtags. Grace, one of the members, beautifully described the farm as both improvised and organized at the same time.

Anna explained to me that this improvised and slightly dirty character are to her the charms of country living, while the organizational aspect, Daniel explained, is necessary to run the project efficiently, especially with so many unacquainted volunteers walking around two days a week (Compilation of data from various informal conversations with Grace, Anna, and Daniel).

Every Thursday the weekly harvest is portioned out and brought to a storage space in Freiburg, while along route two major points are already seen to. At the storage space, in a little alley, the vegetables are then loaded onto self-engineered bike trailers and cycled to thirteen distribution points scattered throughout the city of Freiburg by volunteering members. The empty crates of the previous week are then brought back to the storage space, by the returning cyclists. The total of seventeen distribution points make up a colorful variety of locations; the actual farm, the central storage space, a syndicate living-room café, four collective housing projects, a Buddhist community and meditation center, an open workspace, a student union, a district community center, a kindergarten, and five private homes of members. Each of these points represents approximately ten to twenty members, whom are expected to self-organize a preferred system of individual pick-ups.

\subsection*{2.3. Research Group}

The GreenCoop is a politically motivated initiative that strives for food autonomy. It holds approximately 300 memberships, but an estimated 800 people are fed with the organically produced vegetables.\textsuperscript{8} The reason is that memberships mostly represent a household, a shared student flat, or simply a group of friends who share the portion, because it is considered too much for a single person. Besides that each membership receives an equal share of the weekly harvest\textsuperscript{9}, they are also all equal shareholders of the farm and are thus collective owners. Accordingly one of their fundamental aims is to move away from the normative economic relation between producers and consumers, which is characteristic for CSA initiatives. A proposition often repeated to me by members was that people do not pay for the produce but rather for the agriculture, meaning that they share both the risks and rewards of farming. Members thus collectively pay for the annually required agricultural budget, to which they can contribute as much as they can or would like.

Despite that they aspire to be non-hierarchical, within this community there are a few who are employed on full-time or freelance basis by the initiative, like the Anbau-team\textsuperscript{10} and the Buro-team\textsuperscript{11}. Together this group of people is referred to as ‘the core group’. Whilst not all receive a wage, they are the people who get involved and work for the initiative on a weekly and sometimes daily basis. Previously these people were all those who initiated the project in 2009 and spread the word to find supporting members for the project. However, over the last two years this has begun to change, as some initiating

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} Although most of my communication was in English, the word ‘hofstelle’, which can be translated to ‘courtyard’, was never translated in conversation. Therefore I have decided to not translate it in my writings either as it might imply the word has come to mean much more than just being a referent of the specific location.
\item \textsuperscript{7} These are metal tunnel structures over which translucent plastic has been strung. The structure is reminiscing a greenhouse, as higher temperatures allow for cultivation of delicate vegetables, but these structures are only provided with an irrigation system and not with extra heat or light sources.
\item \textsuperscript{8} NB: These people are not living together in one large commune.
\item \textsuperscript{9} No produce are sold or traded.
\item \textsuperscript{10} These are the gardeners who run the farm.
\item \textsuperscript{11} This is the support team, which takes on tasks like legal work, administration, communication management, etc.
\end{itemize}
members refrained from the initiative to continue their studies or pursue other kinds of employment.

At bi-weekly coordination meetings\(^{12}\), in which day-to-day decisions are made, there are always a few members of both the Anbau-team and Buro-team present because of their close involvement with current events. Nevertheless these meetings are open to all members, and transcripts of the meeting are made available through their internal online communication platform.

The rest of the community is referred to as 'the members'. These are encouraged to volunteer at the farm or in the distribution chain five times a year, but it is claimed that this guideline is not controlled nor reinforced.\(^ {13} \) Moreover people are stimulated to contribute in whichever way they can or would like too. One example often referred to is the older women who cannot physically help with harvesting or distributing and therefore cook lunch for the gardeners and volunteers at the farm. Both the financial and practical framework of the project are thus constructed in such a way that diverse groups of people can partake, both in terms of their physical and financial ability.

Although there is much variation among members in terms of age and income, the community is relatively consistent in other aspects. Namely, members are predominantly Caucasian, generally higher educated, and politically left orientated. Most speak several languages and international experiences in terms of travel or living are common. Furthermore, while dietary preferences like vegetarianism or veganism are not a precondition, many members explained they do not support the mass meat industry and thus avoid these products.

### 2.4. Research Methodology

The aim of this research, to outline intra-stakeholder diversities and complexities, underlines the necessity for a dynamic overarching concept that guides the analysis. The analytical approach\(^{14} \) ‘zones of intermediality’ is exactly that (Evers, 2012b). Inspired by how in modern media different modes of communication are interconnected and together strategically compose particular cultural messages, Evers (ibid: 3) developed this interactionalist approach to study the mediation of different cultural paradigms between and within stakeholder groups. It focuses on how people make sense of the world differently and how these (possibly opposing) differences are mediated when they meet and need to reach common ground (Evers, 2012a: 113). As such it relates to both ideological tensions, which GreenCoop members encounter when interacting with external actors, as well as the navigation of diverging and converging discourses and practices within their community.

Moreover, it is then important to acknowledge that stakeholder approaches are not static. Rather, Evers (2012a) explains, when engaging with each other, different stakeholders deploy overlapping strategies interchangeably. As such they together construct new realities in order to achieve a common ground. Here, it must however be emphasized that the meanings they assign to discourses are not necessarily the same (Evers, ibid: 113). Nonetheless, stakeholders can be part of different groups at once, which is why the approach refers to zones of intermediality, implying intermediality should be conceptualized as a continuum. Hence, there are different levels of intermediality that people can engage in at different times.

Nevertheless, while Evers (2012b) uses the ‘zones of intermediality’ approach to address how diverging ‘approaches to the physical environment are mediated in the context of foreign large-scale land acquisitions’ (3), in this study it is a tool used to analyze how diverging discourses and practices, which are thought to embody collective aspirations of community, are mediated. Thus zooming in on horizontal

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12 These meetings are referred to as the Koko, which is short for Kooperative Koordination (translation: Cooperative Coordination).

13 It is however possible to monitor members’ engagement via the internal website where members are requested to sign up for upcoming activities and tasks when they plan to take part.

14 Evers (2012) refers to it as a model rather than approach. However, because the scope of this study does not allow for the statistical network analysis of key cultural concepts that she proposes, I have researched intermediality purely qualitatively, which is why I call it ‘approach’.

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(rather than vertical) intermediality. Hence, I have made use of the methodological strategy supporting this approach, in addition to other complementary methods. The following analytical frameworks and research techniques have accounted for the data collection of this study.\textsuperscript{15}

2.4.1 Zones of Intermediality Approach

While in Evers' (2011) studies stakeholders lay claims on 'land', in this study stakeholders lay claims on the embodiment of their aspired community. Hence, considering the subject matter is 'community' instead of 'land' the methodologies supporting the 'zones of intermediality' approach needed to be adapted accordingly to ensure their relevance. As such, this study delineates the physical properties and the ontological experience of the community, which has been derived from the mapping place and space strategies (as will be demonstrated below) that Evers (ibid) uses to map both physical and imagined stakeholder interaction (:4).

2.4.1.1. Mapping the Physical Properties of the Community

Considering their categorical name 'Community Supported Agriculture' it could be argued that GreenCoop members unite to collectively support regional agriculture and so the physical farm is what binds these people together. It is their shared responsibility. Hence, I propose that the locality of the GreenCoop is an elementary part of the physical embodiment of the community.

In similar vein, drawing extensively on interdisciplinary studies of the concept 'community', Barrett (2014) notes that communities are indeed inherently associated with place (:1). Likewise, following Roymans, Evers (2012b) then introduces the concept 'landscape biography'. She (ibid) explains that this refers to how people inscribe themselves in their physical environment, through long and complex processes of interaction between changing conditions (:6). Nevertheless, Barrett (2014) continues, 'it is not so much the centrality of place that defines community but the presence or absence of certain emergent structural properties.' (:2) In other words, while the community is embodied in the environment, the physical locality does not define the community. Instead, he (ibid) argues it is the emergent properties in which community materializes like social structures, institutions, and practices, that define the community (:2).

Therefore, in this analysis, the physical properties of the community entail the locality of the GreenCoop and the emergent social practices, as well as the use of these physical properties. Ultimately, by mapping and analyzing these, the aim was then to research how different actors define the GreenCoop in practical terms.

To delineate the physical properties of 'land' Evers (2011) developed a method called 'mapping geographical place'. Drawing on work by Svašek, she (ibid) explains that place in this context is defined as the physical locality where people carry out their daily routines (:4). Despite that physical locality is just one element in this mapping of physical properties, the way Evers (ibid) conceptualizes it remains relevant. It must, however, be pointed out that in this case more focus is required because the point of departure is the GreenCoop community and not a specific physical locality itself. Therefore the environment relevant to be studied only includes those places where the GreenCoop community has inscribed itself. So although other localities are also part of daily routines for members (like their homes), these were not all part of this mapping. In this study the farm in Tunsel was the most dominant locality, but also focal points in the city of Freiburg, like the syndicate café where bi-weekly meetings are held and distribution points, were included.

Elements considered in collecting data on the physical properties of the community were then the cover, use, and access of these localities (Evers, 2012b: 6), as well as emergent properties like social structures, institutions and practices. Data collection techniques therefore comprised of:

\textsuperscript{15} For a schematic overview, please see Appendix A on page 56-57.
• taking photographs of the physical environment,
• asking people to draw and describe the locality of the farm in Tunsel (in semi-structured interviews),
• participant observations on how people look and behave in this physical environment,
• participant observations on how people use the physical environment,
• asking people about membership expectations and responsibilities,
• and asking people about the legal structure of the GreenCoop.

Furthermore, my intention was to do (historic) archival research on the (development of) land cover, use and access, but I did not manage to do this. Instead I spoke to members of the GreenCoop about it, which then turned out to be a key point that was brought up in presentations for prospective members as well.

2.4.1.2. Mapping the Ontological Experience of the Community

To study stakeholder claims to land anthropologically, in addition to mapping the geographical place, Evers (2011) argues the ontological understanding of ‘place’ needs to be analyzed using a method she refers to as ‘mapping ontological space’ (:5). Adapting this again to the study of ‘community’ (rather than ‘land’) it can thus be proposed that besides mapping the physical properties, the ontological experience of the community needs to be delineated as well. Evers (ibid) explains this then concerns the ideologies of members, ‘and consists of a ‘mental picture’ of ontological and cultural positionings of people’ (:5). In other words, it addresses the meaning of the physical properties of the community and their use (Evers, 2012b: 7). As such this analysis will consist of ‘measuring meaning structures and analyzing the connectivity in semantic networks’ (Evers, 2011: 5). Mapping the ontological experience of the community thus entails discourse analyses, which are ultimately aimed at determining what the understandings, expectations and meaning structures of GreenCoop members are.

To reach a deeper level of understanding of meanings, Evers (2011) argues, anthropological methodologies need to be refined by incorporating methodologies from other disciplines (:5). Hence, she (ibid) argues for the use of the sociological ‘practice approach’. Fundamental to this approach is the understanding that ‘[d]ifferences in practice produce (and are produced by) differences in meaning’ (Mohr, 1998, as quoted by Evers, ibid: 6). In others words, cultural systems materialize in practices. Inspired by Odden’s suggestion to use lexicon tests when analyzing meaning structures, Evers (ibid) explains, it is then important ‘to determine a certain set of key cultural concepts’ which describe the practices that embody the cultural system of your study16 (:6). In this study it thus concerns concepts used to describe the GreenCoop community.

To determine what these key cultural concepts are I made use of discourse analyses and (participant) observations. Elements explored include:

• Language patterns, both in text and speech, regarding how (using which words) members talk about their community, as well as convergence and divergence in practices and discourses within the community.

• Artifacts, symbols, events, people that are considered incremental to the community by GreenCoop members, as well as which artifacts, symbols, events, people are/have been contested.

Subsequently, through semi-structured interviews as well as (participant) observations, I then assessed what actor interpretations are of these concepts. Looking for instance at how people, both individually and collectively, talk about these concepts by asking questions such as:

• Can you explain to me what the GreenCoop is?

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16 In this manner I want to allow emic concepts to be the focus of this ontological mapping, rather than ascribed concepts based on my own assumptions.
This question would trigger the use of a lot of these key cultural concepts, which made it less directive to ask about them later with questions like:

- Can you explain to me what you mean when you talk about (one of the key cultural concepts like; solidarity, grassroots democracy, self-organization, etc.)?
- Can you tell me the story behind (a significant or contested artifact, symbol, person, or event like; the excluded right-wing member)?

According to Evers (2011), the next crucial step is then ‘to ask yourself how [these key cultural concepts] are related to one another, while assessing the question of what type of practical utility such cultural concepts play within a concrete institutional context’ (:6). Hence, this study assessed the utility of emic concepts referring to the community as well as how these were used to navigate convergence and divergence in discourses and practices, both internally and beyond the GreenCoop.

Drawing on work by Carley and Kaufer, Evers (2011) suggests the use of network analyses ‘to map out the structure of meanings within narratives’ (:6). She (ibid) explains that, following Carley and Kaufer’s theorizing, the key cultural concepts can be considered focal concepts which can be analyzed along three dimension; density, conductivity, and consensus (:7). As such, Evers (ibid) argues, by establishing (1) how these concepts gain meaning through connections with each other, (2) to how many concepts they are connected, and (3) which connections are agreed on by how many people, the mediation processes that characterize intermediality can be outlined. Nevertheless, due to the restricted research period it is beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct such a statistical network analysis of key cultural concepts using analytical programs like ORA and AutoMap. Instead the aspiration to do a linguistic network analysis was integrated in the qualitative data analysis.

Hence, the following elements were explored in collective as well as individual contexts, both in text and speech:

- Which key cultural concepts are used (in combination with each other) to construct narratives about converging practices and discourses?
- Which key cultural concepts are used (in combination with each other) to construct narratives about diverging practices and discourses?
- In which situations are which narratives used?
- Do all actors involved in these situations use the same narratives?
- Do all actors involved in these situations agree on the meaning of these key cultural concepts?

According to Evers (2012b), ultimately then, this data allows us ‘to assess how the various cultural elements are differentially implicated in alternative forms of practice’ (:7). In other words, it helps establish when (internal) divergence arises, when this divergence is problematic and how it is then mediated by engaging in intermediality to (re)negotiate common ground (i.e. re-establish a sense of community) among different stakeholders, as well as when mediation does not work and results in (prolonged) frictions (Evers, 2011: 7).

2.4.2. **Stakeholder Analysis**

As intermediality is about bridging different cultural paradigms, it was furthermore important to outline stakeholder configurations to establish what cultural paradigms were at play. In this study, doing so meant outlining which internal stakeholders arise in which contexts. In turn, establishing which discourses and practices correspond with which stakeholders helped determine when convergence and divergence was required or problematic, as well as how frictions were mediated.

Moreover, in the context of organization studies and power, Roome and Wijen (2006) define stakeholders as those people who can have a substantial effect on the organization’s behavior, which can be both internal and external actors, groups and individuals (:236). Besides that this definition provides a dynamic view of who might be stakeholders, it also stresses the relevance of analyzing (internal) power
dynamics. Conceptualizing power in terms of influence, this stakeholder analysis thus also zoomed in on internal networks of power relations. Building on A Theory of Access by Ribot and Peluso (2003)\textsuperscript{17}, I mapped the flow and control of resources to determine the network of power relations among stakeholders that facilitates as well as restrains mediation processes. Acknowledging that this network of power relations is fluid and will thus continually change (even more so because the GreenCoop strives to be non-hierarchical), the aim was then to determine how brokers position themselves within these internal power dynamics and how this affects their mediation abilities.

The data to conduct this analysis was collected through documentary analyses, (participant) observations, and semi-structured interviews. The following interview questions have been useful to collect the required data for this stakeholder analysis:

- Can you tell me about the first time you came in contact with the GreenCoop? Possible probe: Can you describe the person who introduced you?
- Could you describe what you think made or makes the GreenCoop possible?
- How would you describe yourself in the context of the GreenCoop?
- How do think others would describe you in the context of the GreenCoop?
- Could you explain to me what happened at (an incident that has come up, like; the exclusion of a right-wing political member or the annual general assembly where it was decided to integrate cows in the production cycle)? Possible probe: What stands out for you when remembering this incident? Possible probe: Can you describe the people that were important in this process?
- Can you tell me about your relation with (e.g. other solidarity projects in the region, the national SoLaWi network, neighbors in the village, and the landlord)?

2.4.3. Life History Method

According to de Chesnay (2014) ‘life histories are collected to round out the perspective of culture from the point of view of members’ (p.1). The life history method as such allows the researcher to be taught by the people who are knowledgeable about the culture at study (de Chesnay, ibid: 5). In this way the method leaves room for participants to draw attention to elements they consider relevant.

The rich data derived from this technique, however, not only provides an insider’s perspective, it also gives a context to the studied phenomena. For instance, understanding the past experiences of participants and their perception of the future helped clarify what preconceptions, motivations, and objectives influence their navigation strategies of diverging discourses and practices.

Likewise, data on participants’ backgrounds also helped understand why and how (with what skills) some GreenCoop members are able to be brokers, as well as how they navigate (internal) power dynamics. As well as that it explained why resources were (or were not) allocated in a specific way to certain people or in particular situations.

Moreover, by taking the history of particular members with external actors in to account it could be determined on what basis the GreenCoop was interacting with these external parties. Here the life histories method was then also lifted to the level of the community and used to clarify certain interactive dynamics, looking at what previously the relation had been between the GreenCoop and external actors as well as how GreenCoop members envisioned future interaction with these actors.

Consequently, for this enriching method I predominantly used the semi-structured interviews technique, asking members questions like:

- Can you introduce yourself?

\textsuperscript{17} In this theory Ribot and Peluso (2003) argue that networks of power negate access to resources, which in turn provides power. Because they (ibid) furthermore outline different mechanisms of how people can obtain and/or maintain access to resources and therefore power, access theory can also be implemented as an analytical tool that delineates power relations. For a more detailed account of this theory see page 44-46.
• Can you tell me about the first time you came to the farm?
• Can you tell me about the person who introduced you to the GreenCoop?
• Can you describe a typical day in your life when busy with the GreenCoop?
• Can you give me an example of a meeting in which a difficult decision had to be made?  
• Can you tell me about your relation with (e.g. other solidarity projects in the region, the national SoLaWi network, neighbors in the village, and the landlord)?

2.5. Data Collection

The discussion presented in this thesis draws on data from 37 participant observations and 12 semi-structured interviews with members of the GreenCoop, as well as a rich variety of collected artifacts, and photographs. The fieldwork was conducted over the first three months of 2015 and undertaken by myself, as part of the curriculum of the Social and Cultural Anthropology Master’s degree at the Vrije Universiteit van Amsterdam. As such I believe it is important to point out that this was a learning based research, meaning the primary purpose was educational. Although I have been as meticulous as I could in collecting the data, it is possible that I have made mistakes and/or missed relevant data.

2.6. Ethics

With regard to conducting qualitative research sociologist Guillemin and philosopher Gillam (2004) demonstrate there are two dimensions of ethics; procedural ethics and ‘ethics in practice’ (p.261). While the first refers to the ethical considerations made in the research design phase, like consent, anonymity and confidentiality, the latter refers to ‘ethically important moments’ that may arise during the research process (Guillemin & Gillam, ibid: 264-265). To overcome such unforeseen matters, they (ibid) suggest reflexivity, on behalf the researcher, is needed to make ethically sound choices (p.275), always keeping in mind the highest priority is to cause as little pain or harm as possible to participants (O'Reilly, ibid: 66). Moreover, considering that ‘ethical dilemmas must be resolved on a case-by-case basis’ (O'Reilly, ibid: 62), the following section discusses how in this study I approached and dealt with both procedural ethics and ‘ethics in practice’.

Informed consent, O'Reilly (2012) explains, entails that participants are aware of what the researcher is doing, why, and what will happen with the data collected (p.65). Nevertheless, she (ibid) adds, in the field this might be more complex then it appears. In my particular case, for instance, only six people came to the meeting where I presented my research and explained that people were free to refuse participation or withdraw consent at any time. So a relatively small group was entirely informed and decided that I was welcome to conduct my research with the whole community. Although their philosophy was that people who want to be part of the decision should come to the meeting, having informed consent from only such a small group did make me feel uncomfortable at times. For example, when volunteering members were at the farm and thus part of my observations without being aware of it. Conflicted about my responsibility in the matter, I decided to simply explain my position as a student researcher when they asked why I was visiting Freiburg or how I became a member. Although most did not seem bothered by it (rather intrigued), I would always add that I was looking at group dynamics and not at particular individuals, to make them feel at ease instead of watched. Once in awhile people would also respond with ‘Oh that’s you!’ and so I figured there must have been some information sent out to members about my research, which

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18 For a structured overview of the questions guideline used for the semi-structured interviews, please see Appendix B on page 58.
19 NB: As most of these participant observations consisted of days working at the farm with the Anbau-team and volunteering members, much data was gathered through informal conversations.
20 For a detailed overview of the collected data please see Appendix C on page 59-60.
had simply escaped some people's attention.

Moreover I had the impression participants were not always aware of how far my data collection process reached. Therefore, in a few instances, I decided to leave out sensitive information from my field notes about participants' private lives. Firstly because I felt they might have understood our encounter as friends spending time together rather than events that would be part of my research, meaning their consent might not reach this far, and secondly I found that including this information in my data could do harm to my participants and was therefore not ethically justifiable.

Consequently, although my identity as a student researcher was generally known and I explained the research addresses social dynamics, zooming in on the communities' diversity, my research took place along, what O'Reilly (2012) calls a covert-overt continuum (:65) which confirms the necessity to remain ethically reflexive throughout the entire research process.

In regard to researching children's experiences, Hill (2005) points out that ethically three different levels of confidentiality need to be considered (:75). Although this study does not concern children the distinction is nonetheless useful.

The first level, Hill (2005) explains, is public confidentiality, which concerns ensuring anonymity for participants in the end-products of the research, like a report or presentation (:75). To do so in this study, all participants have been given fictive names21. At the start of each interview I would explain this anonymity precaution stressing that even if they wanted me to reveal their identity, I would not as the impact of the data could not be predicted nor who would get access to it in the future. In addition, I have extended this protective measure to the level of the community by giving the CSA initiative a fictive name as well, to ensure that an unfamiliar third party cannot easily connect the study to this particular community.

The second level, Hill (2005) continues, is social network confidentiality, which means information gathered from participants may not be shared with their social environment (:75). The degree of social control and normative transparency within this particular community made this a relevant concern. Although I did not discuss whom I had interviewed, most of the time participants told each other or members of the community would run into my participants and I during interviews. Following this, participants would then often check with me how interviews with others had been. My reply was then that it went well and was fun, but that I could not discuss the content for privacy reasons. In one instance, a core-group member laughed when I explained this to someone else and said that he read between the lines that this meant the interviewee had said something about this person. I smiled and said he was looking for things that were not there (this was the participant who suggested I was a spy and therefore refused to do an interview with me) and that I was simply sticking to the rules of the ethics committee from the University. Furthermore, when referring to information I had gained, for instance to ask someone's opinion on an incident, I neither mentioned nor explained how I had gotten to this information.

The last level of confidentiality to be considered is third party breach of privacy. Hill (2005) explains that this addresses the dilemma that arises when a participant reveals sensitive information about another participant (:76). This occurred once during the research. As the information was telling and led to other useful data I decided to disconnect it from the participants in question and only made a subtle reference to it in this report.

To avoid creating the illusion that I could guarantee absolute anonymity, I furthermore always pointed out to participants that recognizability would be something I could not fully protect them from. For instance, I explained, other members could figure out who said what, simply based on vocabulary use, statements made, or peoples’ roles within the project. In this regard no objections were made.

Furthermore I had a discussion with one of my participants about giving them feedback on a few social issues they were dealing with, which I found ethically difficult. Apart from that I did not think I had

21 Moreover, to avoid that members can trace what fictitious names correspond with which participants, I have decided not to mention the specific dates on which interviews took place in this thesis.
enough knowledge to give them feedback, I argued that it was not right to come into their lives, give feedback that might have repercussions and not be accountable for it, because I would leave again. This he did not agree with. Rather he felt that it meant I thought they could not handle my feedback. His opinion was that they were all responsible enough to be able to deal with it and think for themselves instead of blindly following my suggestions. I responded to this with that it really depends on my position in the group and that some might be more open to my feedback than others. This he understood. After considering this discussion for a few days I decided to respect his request, feeling it was not justifiable to put myself in the position of having to “protect” him, and so discussed with him his own behavior and position in the group.

2.7. Reflexivity and Positionings

Considering that the researcher is the key instrument in both collecting and interpreting the data, Sustein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) suggest it is important to consider the ways in which the researcher is related to both the study and participants (112). To do so, they (ibid) propose three categories of positionings to reflect upon; fixed positions, subjective positions, and textual positions (112).

As a twenty-five year old Dutch Caucasian woman my ‘fixed positions’ were quite close to those of my German, predominantly Caucasian, participants. Although differences in both gender and age did reflect in my relationships with some participants it did not influence our contact in unexpected ways. A noteworthy difference that did make me feel disconnected was that of class. On my first day working at the farm I mentioned to one of the gardeners that I had lived in Madrid. He responded to this with that Madrid is a city with no air and full of fascists. Apart from that this (in my opinion) outdated remark surprised me, it showed that there were clear ideas about right and wrong among participants and so I decided not to share much more about my background. Later on, when this made me feel lonely and people were becoming reserved or suspicious of me (some joked about me being a spy), I started sharing feelings or talking about my close relationships back home to be more open about myself, without having to share my social and economically privileged background. Once, in my last week, I did share more personal details with a participant with whom I had become friendly. He immediately concluded I was from a “high society” and asked if they were the most alternative people I had ever hung out with, which gave me the impression he suddenly felt like they were exotic to me. I laughed it off and said this was definitely not the case and that it was just the most political scene I had been in. Although this incident did not significantly affect our contact afterward, it did give me the impression that I had made the right decision not to share such details about myself. Nevertheless there were moments where this felt ethically contentious. People shared such personal stories with me while I avoided telling them about myself. That is why I decided to begin my interviews with an introduction of myself in which I discussed personal subjects like my struggles with my dyslexia, my view on life, and my relationship with my boyfriend, to do their faith in me justice.

Furthermore, in regard to my ‘subjective positions such as life history and personal experiences’ (Sustein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012: 112) there was not really a match with my participants either. For instance, although several had also lived abroad, my experience had been quite different. While they had lived in other countries to work in solidarity projects or to be part of social movements, I had lived abroad in an expat setting. Furthermore, I come from a religious and stable family with a relatively traditional task division and have a stable long-term relationship since a rather young age. On the contrary, participants were often from families with separated parents, had gotten divorced themselves, or did not believe in the institution of marriage or monogamy. Moreover I had not previously been involved in social movements or demonstrations and was therefore not familiar with corresponding customs.

However, zooming out to assess what this personal deviation from participants in terms of class

\footnote{22 It was for instance easier to tag along with participants my age and so I have seen them in other social settings then at the farm, which was harder to achieve with older participants.}
and life history means for my relation to the research I would argue it can be considered an advantage. Because my interest in counterhegemonic communities is not motivated by an activist ideology, as tends to be the case for other theorists such as Graeber (2011) and Low (2011), I hope to have been able to offer more reflexivity.

Then, in respect to my ‘textual positions’ it is important to point out that there was a language barrier. As I am not fluent in German and not all participants were fluent in English there may have been misunderstandings, some which I picked up on and was able to correct, others that I probably missed. Furthermore, as I was unable to fine-tune my German I could not understand subtleties and nuances in conversations among participants. Attempting to turn this handicap into an advantage, I would afterward ask people to explain discussions to me, at which point they would often give me their opinion as well. Nonetheless I certainly will have missed data because of this language barrier.

But, despite that this language barrier also made my integration more difficult, I did manage to find common ground with participants by wording my ideas accordingly, drawing on their lexicon. As such it could be argued that just like intermediary brokers do, I mediated my position within the GreenCoop. Beside verbal mediation, I also extended this strategy to my physical appearance by wearing no make-up and dressing in a similar style with big knitted sweaters, self-made wool socks, dirty jeans and steel-toe boots. Moreover I earned my stripes by voluntarily doing activities no one wanted to do, helping when others were too tired and went home, as well as pro-actively looking for solutions to solve practical issues that were dragging on.

Nevertheless as a foreign student researcher I always remained an outsider. This was made explicit through joking relations, as well as in more serious manners. For instance, when I would do something clumsy one of my participants would always smile and say “Academics in the field!” while shaking his head. But, by the same token it was also mentioned several times that I was welcome at events but that if it would be too busy I could not attend because I did not really add anything and would not stay with them. However, because I regularly worked at the farm, soon I had the “most experienced member” status, which made me neither an insider nor outside of the core-group. Whereas this led me to feel like the “enemy within” among some members, at a later stage I appreciated this position because I noticed I could use it to my advantage. It for instance enabled me to ask confrontational questions and allowed me to have ideologically different views, which would then be discussed without it having broader social repercussion. Likewise this liminal position also made it possible for me to move freely through the community, because I had no clear responsibilities that corresponded with specific expectations.

23 For example, I explained my intentions using phrases like: “I believe there needs to be a connection between participants and myself to be able to do a social study like this” and “I think these relationships need to get space and time to develop organically”, as well as that I explained I do not see research as a linear process, but rather a relational and dynamic process, which is why I will return to the field to discuss my data analysis with participants.

24 This confirms that mediation should be understood not only as a process that aims to bring others closer together, but rather also as a strategy implemented to establish a sense of belong and comfort for brokers themselves (in this case me).
3. AN IDEOLOGICAL COMMUNITY AND ITS “SIGNIFICANT OTHER”

“You can create some kind of free space and so on but... we are embedded in capitalism. So this is why we are talking... increasingly now about ehm... solidarity economy. Which is the idea simply... to try to find mechanisms within capitalism, so that we find... a fair way of dealing with money. Like eh... to live in solidarity.”

(Interview with Daniel, March 2015)

Communities are constructed in relation to ‘others’ (Eriksen, 2010a: 74). As Daniel explained, the GreenCoop constitutes itself in relation to capitalism. Consequently, Eriksen (ibid) stresses, identities like these are ‘a product of contact and not of isolation’ (42), which is why the GreenCoop community cannot be studied in isolation either.

Moreover, Rubin (2004) argues in his study of Latin American social movements, that analyzing political phenomena with ‘a historical and cultural perspective enables us to see the interconnectedness of movements and states and suggests that these are neither homogenous nor distinct spheres.’ (:107) In other words, political phenomena are not just constituted in relation to a “significant other”, they are interconnected as well, which emphasizes even more strongly that the GreenCoop cannot be understood without understanding its relations with external actors.

This chapter therefore explores the interconnectedness of the GreenCoop with external actors. However, because the research is focused on the GreenCoop in particular, this study does not address these ‘others’ in their own right, but rather zooms in on the perception of GreenCoop members of these external actors.

3.1. Cooperating Beyond the Community

Despite that the initiative strives for food autonomy, currently the GreenCoop is not entirely self-sufficient. Engaging in profitable interactions with external actors is thus required. In this vein, Janssen (2010) points out that while CSA initiatives are often discussed as if they solely dependent on the relationship between producers and consumers, more players are needed to make them successful. Rather, she (ibid) argues, they are reliant on a broad network of support organizations in addition to their members (4).

One such external actor that the GreenCoop relies on is Piluweri, a nearby Demeter farm. Because growing their own seedlings is too energy intense, the initiative buys its seedlings from Piluweri, which is just 10 kilometers away and therefore a good regional alternative. However, besides that it grows seedlings, this GmbH also produces vegetables for supermarkets and makes delivery boxes (Interview with Eric, March 2015). Nevertheless, despite their systematic differences, this farming business shares a history with the GreenCoop as most members of the Anbau-team used to work at Piluweri. One of them is Vincent:

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25 NB: Although the GreenCoop is a politically motivated project that affiliates itself with social movements like the ‘food autonomy movement’ I do not consider the initiative to be a social movement in itself. Rather I distinguish between the social movement that wants permanent change in the food system and the GreenCoop which is a tool in achieving this. Nevertheless, understanding the GreenCoop as a political phenomenon remains relevant.

26 Moreover Janssen (2010) adds that media is a key as well. Considering that the communication of the GreenCoop is done by members of the Buro-team (one who works at free radio station and does a monthly podcast, and another who is a filmmaker that made a documentary about the initiative) this would interesting element to analytically pursue for the GreenCoop as well, but unfortunately that goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

27 Demeter is the Ancient Greek goddess of the harvest and fertility of the earth. Today her name is the quality label for biodynamic agriculture in which enhancement of the soil and natural growth are central elements (Stichting Demeter, 2015).

28 It would require about a third of their fields, dedicated to growing seeds.
These seedlings are necessities for the GreenCoop. Without them the initiative could not produce the same variety and quality of vegetables. Here the external actor, a biodynamic farming business, is thus fulfilling a fundamental need of the GreenCoop and has a complementary role in a practical sense.

However, interaction with external parties does not only stem from necessity. This spring the *Anbau-team* was about to start cultivating fields that previously had been too contaminated with heavy metals but which had now been cleaned. In pursuit of soil tests to monitor the improvement of the fields, Laurence, a member of the GreenCoop who worked at the University of Freiburg, arranged for a meeting between Vincent and someone from the Environmental Geo-sciences department. On the day of the meeting it turned out that this person was Tessa, another GreenCoop member. Later she explained that she used to work at the University where she got her PhD in soil ecology. Although she did not work there any more, the professor of the department where she used to work had requested her to set-up and unofficially supervise this project, knowing that she was part of the GreenCoop (Compilation of various field notes extracts).

Reflecting on this interaction Tessa explained *“it is a win win situation”* (Interview with Tessa, March 2015). Moreover, Vincent clarified, it is creating these kinds of synergies that are interesting for the initiative. By having students conducting soil studies using the institute and laboratory, the GreenCoop can be helped to do more meaningful work (Interview with Vincent, March 2015). In this instance the external actor is thus enriching the content of GreenCoop practices.

Despite that the initiative is focused on regional production, they also engage in transnational relations with external actors. For instance, among themselves, GreenCoop members frequently speak about Latin American movements. Mostly their struggles, success and their longevity are discussed. One of these is the forty-year-old Venezuelan Cecosesola. This solidarity super-structure involves approximately 40,000 people and has, besides a CSA system, its own solidarity based healthcare system, transportation facilities and educational structure. Several times people from Cecosesola visited the GreenCoop, and vis-à-vis, some just as friends, others with productive aims like doing research (Compilation of data from various informal conversations).

These connections with other solidarity initiatives, Daniel explained, are about sharing knowledge, which is why the GreenCoop is now also in the process of setting up an infrastructure to give trainings (Extract from field notes, 19 February 2015). In this instance the GreenCoop thus interacts with external actors not only to position itself in an international context that gives weight to their ideological pursuit, but it also does so to exchange knowledge on possible practices to be implemented.

From these examples it becomes clear that when engaging in profitable interactions with external actors, members of the GreenCoop emphasize that these relations are *‘complementary’*. In other words, they focus on practically beneficial divergence, while under-communicating convergence in discourses.

Thinking back to how Stefan explained the GreenCoop arose, we are reminded that it is not just constructed in relation to capitalism; the initiatives’ aim is to create an *alternative* to the dominant capitalist system.

*When George and I get a little closer to each other while harvesting I tell him the word solidarity has come up in many conversations and ask if he can explain to me what is meant by it. He explains he thinks it is what people consider the opposite of competition. And competition is characteristic of our system right now, which is very much about economics and is based on capitalism.*

(Extract from field notes, 12 March 2015)
So, as George clarifies, because the GreenCoop is attempting to create an alternative system, their social relations are marked by solidarity rather than competition (which is considered the fundament of capitalism). Consequently, if the community would engage in any kind of competitive relation it would threaten its existential security. This, in turn, explains why emphasis is placed on the complementary features of external actors and their relations are described as mutually beneficial using words like ‘cooperation’ and ‘synergy’.

Divergence in discourses is however a more complex issue, especially when cooperation is a necessity like in the example with Piluweri. In this case, while the external actor is praised for its remarkably high quality of biodynamic farming (to which the GreenCoop also aspires), their competitive position in the market is a point of discussion. Among members of the GreenCoop, external actors may thus be contested.

For instance, during a workshop where opportunities for a broader network of solidarity projects in the region were explored, currently existing initiatives were outlined and additional needs were added in the form of potential projects. A discussion arose about which other regional actors are solidarity projects. Although some are not community supported, they are sharing other ideals and characteristics with the GreenCoop and so these were considered projects that could also be interacted with or maybe helped to improve. One of these was Piluweri. Jokingly suggesting to call it “CS-Piluweri”, it is proposed to stimulate Piluweri to become collectively owned as well (Compilation from field notes, 28 March 2015).

So despite that they are contested, external actors with whom the GreenCoop cooperates are not shunned and classified as “the significant other” when their discourse diverge. Instead it is proposed to assist these external actors become more solidary like the GreenCoop.

Ultimately then, although it may be under-communicated, the importance of ideological convergence prevails. As shown in the examples above, to manage such divergence in discourses and neutralize the threat it might pose to the existential security of the GreenCoop, a relational mechanism is put into place, where personal ties facilitate contact and interaction with external actors.

In ‘The Strategy of the Crooked Cucumbers’, a documentary about the GreenCoop, Vincent explains:

*We are a politically realistic project and so, despite our criticism, we have to work with the system. (...) We are in capitalism and cannot just drop out of it like that. So instead we have to face these big problems because progress is the work of the dissatisfied. And we must always be self-critical and keep questioning everything and look at what structures can still be built on, how to get more horizontal, and how to attract more people in this self-organization.*

### 3.2. The Role of the “Significant Other” in Community Building Processes

As Vincent’s explanation implies, interacting with external actors is thus not only about pragmatic subsistence, it is also about including more people in the alternative solidarity system, in other words, community building.

**Vignette 1: Uniting over a Common Enemy**

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29 *Existential security is the human attempt to make sense of this world and of the human being’s place in it, in relation to family, community, society and the wider cosmos, through processes of signification in connection to belief, trust, belonging, and mental and spiritual fulfillment.* (Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, as quoted by Evers, 2010: 210) In this instance it does however not concern the existential security of members at a personal level, but rather at the level of the community. Along the lines of ‘solidarity’ the GreenCoop aims to define its place in the world, which is to oppose the dominant capitalist system and create an alternative way of life.
Every three months an introduction night is held by the GreenCoop at the syndicate Strandcafé to raise awareness for CSAs and to get the word out about the GreenCoop to prospective members. Daniel, one of the core-group members, generally does this presentation. After a short personal introduction, he begins with the intentions of the project; finding an alternative to the current market. Or as he said (in English) “Business as usual is not an option!” He explains that mono-agriculture ruins biodiversity and that in the deceptive booming Bio industry “bio” does not necessarily mean a product is produced in an organic way, as seeds might be hybrids and the soil filled with non-organic matter. He then continues to explain that the GreenCoop is an idealistic project, surrounded by mass-producing monoculture farms, a nuclear-energy facility, and a garbage incinerator. Moving on to the political motivations of the project he mentions that food autonomy is central, which in the case of the GreenCoop is translated into several key values: far-reaching ecological farming, climate-conscious and resource-friendly, self-organized and grassroots democracy, collectivity and solidarity, regional and seasonal, and overcoming market logic. Of course, he adds, different elements weigh differently for different people but these are all considered.

Later on, when discussing the location of the farm more specifically Daniel mentions that the soil and water in the area has been contaminated by old mining facilities in the mountains of the Black Forest. Showing a diagram of the contaminated areas he explains that the GreenCoop has solved the toxic water reservoirs problem by putting a filter in the kitchen, as well as that they have their own groundwater well that reaches deep enough not to be contaminated. As for the soil contamination, their fields that were too contaminated to be cultivated are now in an organic cleaning process and meanwhile the University has begun testing to monitor the soil pollution.

(Extracts from field notes, 19 February 2015)

According to Lyons (2014) when advocating approaches to address the current food crisis, members of food movements use diverse tactics, drawing on different discourses of food security and food sovereignty (:212). For instance, she (ibid) explains, radical projects (like the GreenCoop) actively insert ‘non-market values into food systems, including social and ecological justice.’ (:215) In this vein, as shown in the vignette above, when interacting beyond the community with the purpose of being inclusionary, GreenCoop members draw on different discourses to address differently motivated prospective members. In other words, by switching between political and environmental activist rhetoric it is demonstrated that there is room for internal divergence. In this way they try to avoid that, for example, environmentalists do not want to join the project because it is be too politically motivated for them.

However, referring to a common goal (i.e. resolving the food crisis) is not enough to include external actors in community building processes. Rather the “threat” of a “significant other” (in this case the capitalist world) is needed to fortify an overarching sense of convergence. Hence, for their community building purposes, the outside world is blurred into the “significant other”, which allows for the suggestion to unite over a common enemy.

This outcry for solidarity and unification is then fortified by the compelling image that Daniel sketches when describing the GreenCoop as “surrounded” by monoculture farms and polluting facilities. Similarly, he explains in the documentary The Strategy of the Crooked Cucumbers: “We feel like a little green island amid the ruins of industrial society”. As such he adds a metaphorical layer to the locality of the GreenCoop, making its physical properties referents of its ideological position. Like this he makes the message visible, simplifying and essentializing it, which ultimately allows it to transcend divergence among prospective members as it becomes easier to relate to.
Moreover, to then distance those at the periphery of the community from the “significant other”, they are given a simple choice; either become like “us” or you will be like the “them”. The vignette for instance clearly shows that it is asserted that even trying to make the right choice by buying biological produce will not help. The world is too corrupted by competitive capitalism and so there is no other option for external actors than to join the GreenCoop in solidarity if they really want to do what is best for the world and themselves.

This compelling kind of social boundary maintenance between the community and the outside capitalist world is thus eventually aimed at both community building processes as well as keeping the “significant other” at an ideologically “safe” distance. Like this the GreenCoop’s existential security can be safeguarded while opening the community “gates” and becoming inclusive of for external actors that find themselves at the periphery of the initiative.

3.3. An Ideologically Gated-Community

So whilst its members describe the GreenCoop as an open and inclusive initiative due to its low institutionalized entry barriers, the same does not seem to hold in an ideological sense. Instead the social boundary, marking the solidarity versus competition divide, rises high between the community and mainstream capitalist society.

In a study of spatial inequality and social exclusion, Low (2011) argues that the privatization of public space has lead to contemporary forms of race and class segregation. Her argument, linking physical properties to social dynamics, is grounded in the notion of “spatializing culture”, which she (ibid) explains encompasses the ‘social production, social construction, embodiment, and discursive practices’ of space and place (:392).

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30 Members of the GreenCoop described it as an open initiative, referring to how accessible the project was for people in terms the financial and physical contributions required, as well as the common assertion that almost everyone just has other jobs next to the project and that they do not live all together in a commune. Two members however pointed out that they felt the project was probably less open than they liked to believe, which was according to them reflected in the lack of immigrants partaking.
One of the empirical case studies Low (2011) discusses to illustrate her argument, concerns gated communities. In these communities the walls and gates are not the only elements that influence social relations (398). In similar vein to how Barrett (2014) argued that communities are not defined by their physical locality but instead by their emergent practices, Low (2011) notes that rather than just the spatial enclosure it is the ‘interlocking of spatial, legal and governance systems in gated communities that creates a “securitized” environment.’ (398)

Hence, although the GreenCoop is not a physically gated-community that instills race and class segregation, it could be argued that their ‘solidarity’ aspiration creates a ‘spatializing culture’ as it materializes in the communities’ emergent social practices. In other words, moving beyond notions of physical "gated"ness, the GreenCoop creates spatial segregation and social exclusion between themselves and mainstream society because of their ideological aspiration to create an alternative to the dominant capitalist system. In this vein, Low (2011) remarks that a ‘spatializing culture’ is particularly powerful in a political and social sense ‘when evoked by residents’ fear or anxiety about Others and the desire to live with “people like us”.’ (402) So, due to the compelling social boundary maintenance that comes with safeguarding their existential security that is rooted in opposing dominant societal discourses, social segregation and exclusion are immanent, which is why, in an ideological sense, the GreenCoop community is rather “gated”.

3.4. Gate Keeping

Nevertheless, despite its intense investment in these ideological walls and gates, the communities’ existential security is not a given.

Vignette 2: The Enemy Within

In September 2013, Germany was going to vote for federal elections. At this time, a member of the GreenCoop distributed flyers for one of the political parties, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), at her distribution point. Soon word got out to the rest of the community.

When it turned out that she was a prominent member of the party she propagated, this did not sit well with other members. The relatively unknown party that was founded the same year took a Eurosceptic and conservative stance. While this member had argued it was compatible with a re-localizing project like the GreenCoop, other members did not agree. Rather the party was considered to take a racist, homophobic, and socially discriminating position, which did not fit with the ideals of the GreenCoop.

A series of organized discussion groups, both with and without the AfD member, followed over several months. Although it had been clear for some members from the start that she could not remain a member because “We don’t grow vegetables for fascists…”, there were also voices from within the community that asserted the project was inclusive and that therefore nobody could be excluded. Thinking back members as such described it as a long and difficult. Nonetheless, seeing that “Against intolerant people, you can be intolerant” she was eventually excluded.

Jonah, an active GreenCoop member, explained that this process had been long but good, because it was the first time the GreenCoop expressed itself politically. The incident had made it clear that the project was ideologically coherent with left political aspirations and so the GreenCoop had constructed an official clause in their constitutional documentation to communicate this to existing and new members.

(Compilation of data from various interviews and informal conversations)

31 The difference in perception of how open the community is might then have to do with perspective. Whereas they consider themselves “open”, this is merely in regard to those at the periphery of the community. Just as members of a gated community can have friends visiting, the GreenCoop interacts with external actors through personal ties. But just because the gates can open for affiliates it does not mean there are no gates at all.
So while she was initially perceived as an ideologically converging member, once she made her political convictions explicit, this AfD member was no longer considered to be in tune with the community. Vincent clarified that the GreenCoop does not ask what party people vote for or anything like that. It is for everyone. But it is not the idea that people push for their own political agenda within the project.\textsuperscript{32} “Definitely not any kind of party politics” (Extract from field notes, 26 March 2015). As such it is not the illusion of flawless ideological convergence among GreenCoop members that is under threat by this AfD member. Rather, Bartels, Knibbe, de Koning and Salemink (2010) propose that existential security is maintained through the negotiation of the \textit{boundary} between security and insecurity, certainty and uncertainty, instead of the creation of securities or certainties (:121). In other words, the AfD member posed a threat to the existential security of the initiative because her overt presence \textit{in} the community drew the social boundary between the GreenCoop and its “significant other” into question, as she came to symbolize the enemy within. Therefore it could be argued that her exclusion was imminent.

Nevertheless, Bartels et al. (2010) explain, sudden shocking events like these may ‘require a renegotiation of this [social] boundary.’ (:121) As such, by renegotiating the meaning of ‘solidarity’ and establishing that being intolerant to intolerance is acceptable, the AfD member could legitimately be excluded, the social boundary could be re-established, and so the GreenCoop’s existential security was maintained.\textsuperscript{33} Moreover, by institutionalizing the communities’ political convictions and explicitly linking it to the ideologically motivated social boundary, the exclusion of this member even fortified their ideological gates.

But besides that insiders can turn out to be outsiders, there are also those who are harder to pinpoint. What to make of an independent student researcher for example?

\textbf{Vignette 3: A Friend of the Enemy}

\textit{Everyone makes their way back to their seats but Charles’s chair next to Allan is still empty. I go sit on the tip of the chair and lean over to Allan. Softly (I don’t want to attract too much attention) but clearly I ask Allan if he has seen my email and say that if he does not want to do the interview or is too busy it is ok as well but then I would just like to know. He looks down, stutters and says "Then... In that case no." and laughs uncomfortably. I smile and say that is fine. He apologizes for not emailing me back as I move out of Charles’s seat, who is now walking up. I tell Allan I understand and that he does not have to worry about it. Then Stefan laughs and clarifies he has had a bad experience, looking from me to too Allan with a smile. I smile back as I take my seat and wonder if I should push this. Slightly leaning forward in my seat again, I look at Allan and ask if he thinks I am a spy and then laugh. Stefan laughs too. Allan smiles while he replies ‘No, I am pretty sure you are not one.’ Or she is just a really good one’ Stefan adds, now laughing even more. I smile and then the meeting starts again.}

(Extract from field notes, 10 March 2015)

A few days later, Daniel, the communities’ gatekeeper\textsuperscript{34}, spoke to me about cooperation with researchers and the unwillingness of some members to partake:

\textsuperscript{32} Nevertheless, this idea of keeping your convictions to yourself did not seem to hold for politically left orientated members. They had the right to express themselves more freely as there are left-wing political messages all around the farm, like an anarchist symbol spray painted on a compost pallet as well as political stickers, pamphlets, and posters in social spaces like the changing area, the Hofstelle, and the kitchen container.

\textsuperscript{33} This mediation process is aimed at keeping the community together and diffusing the friction regarding the aspiration to be an inclusive initiative while other want the excluded this contested members. The following chapter discusses such horizontal mediation processes within the GreenCoop community in more detail.

\textsuperscript{34} Daniel is the gatekeeper of the community in the sense that for those who have no personal ties with members of the GreenCoop, the only contact information available leads to him. As such, especially in the beginning phase of my research he controlled all my access to the rest of the community. Furthermore, he is also the person who gives most of the introductory presentations for new members and does information stands about the GreenCoop at events like the Seed Exchange (a locally organized meeting where people exchange “pure” seeds that are not hybrids).
In his calm understanding voice Daniel explains it is of course good that there are people doing research and looking at it on a more macro level but there are people that are quite skeptical about research and worried about what might happen with this information. Like they do not want information about these kinds of initiatives to fall in the hands of the enemy. For instance, some members are children of the green generation. These people were the ones in the 80s that were really making a difference, fighting for change, and over time they have seen how their ideas and visions have been corrupted. A good example is for instance the mayor of Freiburg. He was hanging out with squatters and throwing rocks at the police in the 80s, really in the middle of it all... But then he became more and more political and as his career developed he integrated more to the point that now he is even trying to privatize all these buildings where the squatting communities are living.

(Extract from field notes, 13 March 2015)

As shown in this vignette, a history of deceit justifies suspicions regarding actors that engage in both constructive relations with the community and the dominant societal system. The (student) researcher, in this case me, is as such perceived as taking information out of the gates of the community and (potentially) across the social boundary to the “significant other”. So although their ideological stance might converge with that of the GreenCoop, these actors still pose a potential threat to the existential security as they blur the boundary between the community and its “significant other”.

Consequently, whilst I was not considered the "enemy", certain members were aware that indirectly the information I obtained could become available to their "significant other". Access was thus granted with the utmost care, and commitments were often accompanied by protective clauses that if it would be too busy, it would be better if I would not join (which was legitimized by the notion that soon I would leave again and so I did not really add anything in the long run any way). Some meetings, when the teams had to focus, were however simply off limits.

Following van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002), it can thus be proposed that gate keeping processes, ‘involve a contested and contextual quest for the freedom we allow for others and the doubt and uncertainty we allow for ourselves’ (:135). In other words, navigating convergence and divergence in practices and discourses is about the tension between ‘unconditional morality and conditional pragmatism’, ultimately thus balancing freedom and security.

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So... How do members of the GreenCoop navigate convergence and divergence of discourses and practices beyond their community?

Communities are constructed in relation to ‘others’. As such the GreenCoop has been created as an alternative to their “significant other”, namely, the dominant capitalist system. As GreenCoop members believe social relations in capitalism to be marked by competition, their social relations are in contrast defined by solidarity. In turn, this means that if the community would engage in any kind of competitive relations it would threaten their existential security.

When engaging in profitable interactions with external actors, these are therefore then referred to as mutually beneficial and described using words like ‘cooperation’ and ‘synergy’. Divergence in practices is then thus considered beneficial and is emphasized to demonstrate complementation (rather than competition). In turn, to manage divergence in discourses, which could also pose a threat to the existential security of the community, GreenCoop members facilitate the contact with the external actors through personal ties. This does however not mean that external actors remain uncontested. But instead of shunning them and classifying them as “the significant other”, it is proposed to assist these external actors become more solidary like the GreenCoop.

Moreover, when engaging in inclusionary interactions beyond the community, divergence and convergence in practices and discourses are approached differently to still ensure the communities’ existential security. To be inclusive for differently motivated prospective members, whilst keeping the
“significant other” at an ideologically “safe” distance, GreenCoop members engage in an essentializing and compelling kind of social boundary maintenance. Meanwhile the threat of a “significant other”, an enemy in common, is implemented to expand community building processes, as it creates an overarching sense of convergence among different external actors at the periphery of the community. Simultaneously, drawing from different rhetorics associated with environmental and political activism, it is demonstrated to potential members that there is room for internal divergence.

It has then been argued that the solidarity aspiration of the GreenCoop creates a ‘spatizaling culture’. Embodied in emergent practices, ‘solidarity’ marks the compelling social boundary between the community and its “significant other” (the capitalist outside world), thus creating social segregation and exclusion between them. As such it is proposed that the GreenCoop can be considered and ideologically gated-community.

While the aim of these ideological walls and gates is to protect the communities’ existential security, even within these walls, gate keeping processes (i.e. managing divergence and convergence of discourses and practices) remain crucial as the “significant other” has proven difficult to pinpoint. For instance, when an independent student researcher enters through the community gates and takes information out which might become accessible to the “significant other”. As such navigation of divergence and convergence in discourses and practices beyond the community is marked by, what Eriksen (2010b) calls ‘our era’s simultaneous obsession with freedom and security.’ (18-19)
4. WHERE CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE MEET

As communities are constructed in relation to others, their identities are defined with the "significant other" in mind. The previous chapter demonstrated that 'solidarity' is the key cultural concept of the GreenCoop that sets them apart as it is considered the opposite of competition, which defines social relations in capitalism.

When defining the concept 'community', nowadays, most theories are grounded in Cohen's seminal work *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985). Eriksen (2010a) clarifies that moving beyond the then dominant 'Barthian boundary concept' Cohen (re)inserted the importance of cultural content (:67). While Barth theorized social boundaries as tools that organize complex social relations (meaning the forms of these boundaries are determined by the contextual sociocultural system) Cohen insisted that such boundaries are also used to secure the community's 'symbolic capital' (Eriksen, ibid: 63). So, while GreenCoop members use the concept 'solidarity' to define the social boundary between their community and its "significant other", they can only do so if they use it to define their own social relations as well. Fundamental to this addition is that Cohen (1985) argues 'people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity’ (:118). Focusing on the symbolic dimension of community, Cohen (ibid) thus proposes that it is about both (re)producing social boundaries *and* the production of meaning (:9).

Following Cohen’s (1985) suggestion to explore how communities are symbolically constructed, this chapter zooms in on the role of the key cultural concept 'solidarity' in community building practices within the GreenCoop.

4.1. When 'Solidarity' Becomes Tangible

Through an interdisciplinary analysis Barrett (2014) deconstructs the concept 'community'. His point of departure is that communities have three fundamental dynamic dimensions; identity, interests, and normativity (:4). Whereas the 'identity' dimension refers to the symbolic key cultural concepts, 'interests' refers to the pursuit of gains, and 'normativity' to the network of conduct and rules that emerges through enduring patterns of interaction (Barrett, ibid: 8). The key cultural concepts as such frame interests and normativity (Barrett, ibid: 13). Moreover, Barrett (ibid) clarifies, as these collective interests and norms are manifested at the community-at-large level (:5), they materialize in emergent social practices like communal structures and institutions (:2). In this sense, the financing system of the GreenCoop is an illuminating example of how 'solidarity' emerges through social structures that define the community.

Vignette 1: Institutionalizing ‘Solidarity’

*Apart from the conventional CSA solidarity between members and farmers*, the GreenCoop has institutionalized ‘solidarity’ in socio-economic relations among members as well. *Motivated by an awareness that everyone has different preconditions in life and that peoples’ abilities should not determine if a person can afford ecological produce or not, the GreenCoop has translated its solidarity aspiration into practically non-existent financial barriers to entry. Members can thus contribute whatever they can to the agricultural budget and are expected to collectively feel responsible to provide what is needed in total.*

*Before the annual Mitgliederversammlung* members make an offer of what they can contribute for the upcoming year. *Usually at the meeting members are then requested to reconsider their offers, as more is

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35 As explained above, the basic CSA principle is solidarity among members and farmers, who sharing the risks and rewards together. This means that if the harvest is bad, for instance due to unforeseen weather conditions or pests, farmers still get the same wages and the negative harvest impact is spread over the whole community. It is as such also about trust between the members and the farmers, that they do their best to have the best production. Simultaneously this also means that if the harvest is good, farmers still get the same wage and the members get more produce.

36 Translation: General Assembly
needed. But while in previous years people had to be motivated to make ends meet and occasionally fund raising events had to be organized, this year was the first that no extra encouragement was needed. An estimated third of the members paid more than average, which made it possible for the other two thirds to partake.

Several members, however, explained that paying less than average did not leave them feeling neutral. Different strategies were used to deal with this unfamiliar custom. While some were simply grateful, others tried to make up for the lack of financial support that they can offer by contributing in another way, such as doing more volunteer work. Nevertheless there were also those who considered themselves to be a weight on the shoulders of others, which occasionally results in members leaving the initiative out of guilt.

(Compilation of data from various interviews and informal conversations)

From this example it becomes clear that the ‘solidarity’ ideal, which the GreenCoop aspires, is not flawlessly translated into emergent practices. Living up to this ‘solidarity’ ideal can be challenging. In this vein, Amit (2002) suggests, community should be understood as carrying an emotive capacity, which arises in the dynamic interaction between ‘an imagined community’ and the actual ‘limited social relations and practices through which it is realized’ (:18). According to Bauman (2004) this dynamic interaction materializes in that the limited social relations and practices claim to embody the ideal community, and ‘demands unconditional loyalty’ from members (:4). In this vein, Vincent explained that their solidarity payment system also puts social pressures on those members with more financial capital:

“We have people paying 300 euros a year, who have no money, others pay... 2,500 because they have lots of money and there we get, we force people with money also to like properly show their solidarity.”

(Interview with Vincent, March 2015)

It can thus be suggested that this explicit embodiment of the salient concept ‘solidarity’ in the financing system creates a prerequisite kind of convergence by making an explicit loyalty demand. It could then be argued that this financing system institutionalizes ‘solidarity’.

Drawing on Foucault as discussed by Lemke (2007), governmentality defined as ‘the conduct of conduct’, then comes to mind. In this instance it could be argued that this concept does not only address societal power relations, but instead can be interpolated to the level of CSA initiatives. Although GreenCoop members might attempt to escape societal forms of governmentality, they (re)produce their own forms of governmentality by formulating internal (and external) codes of conduct and implementing social control mechanisms, to build community.

An example of such social control mechanisms is conformity pressure. According to van Kercken, van de Putte, and Stevens (2014), this community building practice can be defined as a pressure aimed at stimulating community members to conform to those norms, values and practices that are believed to be essential to the community (:277), thus stimulating convergence. All these elements (norms, values, and practices) join in the communities’ salient cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’.

In this case, it could be argued that the financing system of the GreenCoop community has translated ‘solidarity’ into a form of governmentality. George, an active member, for instance mentioned he is not a friend of solidarity because it is also a way of controlling people, making them do things they might not want to do because otherwise they are not being solidary. Instead, he suggested it should be about connections between people. The solidarity norm has as such become a tool to exert conformity pressure to make members conform to certain emergent practices.

Moreover, van Kerckem et al. (2014) explain, conformity pressure can be ‘exerted either directly and explicitly through discourses (…) or indirectly through social control and social sanctioning when norms are violated’ (:277-278). Considering that it is repeatedly stressed in discourses that the financing

37 As used by Amit (2002) ‘imagined community’ does not refer to Anderson’s concept of imagined community that addresses the identification of individuals with others they have never met. Rather it refers to the ideas people have of what their community stands for; the image/imagination of their community.
system is marked by solidarity among members, it can thus be considered an explicit community building practice, aimed at convergence at the level of the community-at-large.

Bauman (2004) as such explains that the tension between these two forms of community concerns the balance between security and freedom; the security of belonging to this community means giving up freedom in terms of autonomy and self-assertion (:4). Bauman (ibid) thus conceptualizes ‘community’ as a rather restrictive structure.

However, Tsing (2005) argues that aside from the tension between ideal and actual practices that results from making solidarity tangible at a community level, we must consider how universal aspirations travel across distances and differences (:7). Thus, we turn now to how the key cultural concept ‘solidarity’ travels across differences in the community, by examining how different members experience it.

Besides that ‘solidarity’ is embodied in institutionalized practices, like the financing system, GreenCoop members also experience it on a personal through (daily) noninstitutionalized practices and discourses. That these practices and discourses might be under-communicated at the community-at-large level does not mean that they are not relevant for people’s lived experiences. Rubin (2004) as such suggests that ‘tensions between the essentialisms embodied in political proposals and practices, on the one hand, and people’s beliefs and experiences, on the other, can perhaps better be characterized as ambiguities and contradictions inherent in cultures and movements.’ (:128) Internal divergence regarding the interpretation and embodiment of key cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’ is thus intrinsic in the GreenCoop and therefore also needs to be accounted for.

**Vignette 2: Customizing ‘Solidarity’**

As I ask her how she got involved with the GreenCoop, the charismatic Grace, an active member who is frequently part of the bike distribution crew looks at me with her big smile. She explains Stefan, who also works at the radio station like her, used to always mention there were not enough people to do the biking. So then one day she decided to help out. “And he was right!” she adds and begins to laugh. Later when I ask her to explain to me what she means with that the GreenCoop is a solidarity initiative, she pauses just a few seconds, smiles and tells me:

“Ehm... for me solidarity is when ehm... the different work is equal... has an equal value. If you cook that has the same value as when you distribute the vegetables.”

However, she adds, work is actually not valued equally in the GreenCoop because there is paid and non-paid labor. And in Tunsel people cook warm food for the volunteers, but this does not happen at the storage unit for the people who do the distribution by bike. After this was brought up by one of the other committed cyclists a meal was organized twice but then it stopped again. But perhaps the warm food was not really the point, she concludes with a big smile.

Later on in the same interview Grace explains that there are often too few volunteers who help with the distribution by bike on Thursdays and so it is a challenge to get all the vegetables delivered to the pick-up points. The other week, for instance, one of her friends, an older man, had to take two heavy loads over a hill. He had already done a couple of points so he wanted to take the double load in one go. She did not think this would be good so, after doing her points, she had helped him with that ride as well.

(Interview with Grace, March 2015)

Sitting in the sun filled garden Eliza, a new member of the Anbau-team tilts her head when I ask her if she can explain to me what she means with ‘solidarity’. She looks puzzled. After a little while she answers:

“Ehm... solidarität... well the word I think is to... be... to have respect and... to look on other people and not only on yourself. And... maybe not only on people, also on the other beings.”
Later on in the same interview Eliza explains that occasionally the social processes in the team can be difficult. There are several new members in their team and it is not always clear anymore who is responsible for what, which sometimes causes mistakes and delays and then other members of the team get frustrated. And so, in respect to the future, she thinks it would be good if the social discussions and processes become more positive in the team, though she is not sure how.

When I ask her what her role is in the GreenCoop she explains it is having joy during the work and making sure that her colleagues do so too. To achieve this she tries to point out the positive things like the processes that are working well, and she likes to take the time to help other members with their work.

(Interview with Eliza, March 2015)

While both these members can relate to the notion that the GreenCoop is a solidarity initiative, because they experience ‘solidarity’ in their discourses and practices, they both experience it in very different ways. In an attempt to explain such internal divergence, we turn to Barrett’s (2014) deconstruction of community once again. Besides that the three fundamental dimensions of communities (identity, interests, and normativity) have collective manifestations, he (ibid) clarifies these also emerge in daily practices in a more private context. More specifically, Barrett (ibid) continues, individuals connect collective identity markers to their self-image, in their particular context of the community ‘through the assumption of roles and accompanying standards of conduct’ (:10). In other words, key cultural concepts percolate into the private norms and interests of different stakeholders.

As the vignette above shows, both Grace and Eliza have interpreted ‘solidarity’ in a way that refers to their experiential context and they translated this into their roles within their team. In the case of Grace this concerns supporting others in their heavy workloads, while for Eliza this means supporting others by bringing positive attention to the processes within the Anbau-team. So although both Grace and Eliza have the same collective interest of improving social relations within their stakeholder units, by coming closer to the aspired ‘solidarity’, their practices and discourse on how to achieve this diverge remarkably.

Thus, as suggested by Barrett (2014), intra-communities form within the overarching GreenCoop community (:8). Whereas collective manifestations of key cultural concepts are associated with converging tendencies in community (:6), private manifestations thus tend to be associated with diverging dynamics (:5). As such, Barrett (ibid) demonstrates that because the three dimensions have both collective and individual manifestations, deconstructing them brings tensions between the aspired collective convergence and stakeholder divergence to the limelight.

This does, however, not mean that divergence in practices and discourses among members is an obstacle for community building processes. Tsing (2005), for instance, points out that just because key cultural concepts ‘do not fulfill their own dreams to travel anywhere at any time (...) this does not make them wrong-headed and irrelevant.’ (:8) More specifically, Rubin (2004) clarifies, just because the ideal convergence does not physically exist does not mean it does not exist at all. It exists in peoples’ minds and thus it has effects (:108). In other words, it is exactly because members can interpret ‘solidarity’ differently (within different practical realities of the GreenCoop) that they can relate to the same salient concept and thus feel part of the same community. So because these key cultural concepts are symbolically constructed, they are multifocal, which means that these identity markers have the powerful ‘ability to transcend social divides.’ (Barrett, 2014: 11)

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38 Important is to point out that private here is not distilled to the level of the individual; rather it refers to ‘personhood, family and household’ (Barrett, 2014: 5). Extrapolating this to internal dynamics of the GreenCoop it could then be argued that ‘private’ does not refer to kinship units, but rather internal stakeholder units, like the distribution crew, the Anbau-team, the Buro-team and so on. In this vein, Grace, a member of distribution crew explained: “There are very much groups. Like the distribution groups or the group, which is organizing the theatre event next week... and... yeah. I think there are... Some people really love to be in the GreenCoop and love to be in Tunsel and other people... have other... priorities... where they work in the GreenCoop. So my priority is in the moment the distribution by bike.” (Interview with Grace, March 2015)
In this vein, Tsing (2005) points out it is actually through the community’s inherent divergence that communal universals (i.e. salient concepts) work, as they ‘are effective within particular historical conjunctures that give them content and force.’ In other words, as long as divergence remains implicit it even deepens and fortifies the sense of community (i.e. convergence) as it makes the salient concept ‘solidarity’ tangible for different stakeholders. That is, there is value in the ambiguity of the concept.

In summary, salient concepts like ‘solidarity’ materialize in emergent practices at two different levels of the community. The first is the collective level, where it is translated into institutionalized practices (like the financing system) to create prerequisite communal convergence. The second level is that of different groups of members. In these experiential contexts ‘solidarity’ is interpreted in different ways, which ultimately leads to divergence in practices and discourse, but creates a deeper sense of collective convergence. ‘Solidarity’ can as such be considered a symbolically constructed community building tool.

4.2. Problematic Divergence in ‘Solidarity’ Interpretations

Nevertheless, while divergence in practices and discourses can provide a sense of convergence, it can also stand in the way of explicit convergence at the communal level as diverging interpretations of salient concepts like ‘solidarity’ can lead to different expectations, choices, and (re)actions among members.

**Vignette 3: Animal Farm**

In November 2012, at a general assembly, an infamous announcement by the Anbau-team sparked months of heated discussions and arguments within the community; the GreenCoop was purchasing three cows. Eventually a self-sustaining herd of five cows, five calves, and a bull would complete their organic nutrient cycle and would thus be an essential step in achieving their aspired food autonomy. Although it was clear that the animals would serve the purpose of processing grasses into fertilizer, and were thus not produce any other consumer goods, certain members, mostly those who were vegetarians and vegans, did not take this lightly.

The opposing members questioned whether there were no alternative options to obtaining organic fertilizer, like the use of human urine. This was however turned down by one of the core-group members, as it was asking for problems due to the urban environment of the project where medicine and antibiotics were commonly used.

It was then suggested to get fertilizer from other CSA projects in the area that had cows any way. Then, at least, no extra methane emission would be produced by the eleven extra cows, which they would add to the system. This argument was however countered by the notion that this strategy would just be externalizing the problem and that organically fed cows do not produce methane (but rather reduce greenhouse gasses), unlike industrial cattle that is fed imported genetically modified soya from Brazil, which was grown on destroyed rainforest.

Then it was proposed to rescue older animals from the industry so that at least this would improve the life these animals. But again this was counterweighted, now by the argument that these animals are more susceptible to diseases and would thus not sustain life really long on an organic farm.

Eventually then, besides occasional contestations of the counterarguments, a strong voice remained among those who opposed the integration of animals:

"Why doesn’t the GreenCoop make a reality adjustment regarding the question: How many members want to support that animals get slaughtered? Apparently, the GreenCoop also attracts people for whom animals are individuals and who do not apply their concept of solidarity only to their own species."

(Translation: Comment by Noa, discussion forum of the GreenCoop website, November 2012)
As such a frequently voiced question that persisted among those opposing was that if the integration of animals would really happen, could they still support this project idealistically?

Meanwhile members of the core-group, both from the Anbau-team and the Buro-team, insisted that this goal to integrate animals in the agricultural processes had always been communicated. It was incorporated in the constitutional statements of the GreenCoop and therefore did not need to come as a surprise. Though some members (even those in favor) mentioned they were unaware of this, others confirmed the existence of such a clause.

Moreover core-group members argued there is actually no such thing as vegan agriculture. There are always organisms that you crush or mice that you need to exterminate to avoid that they eat your crops. The cows would have a good life and would not be harmed in the process of obtaining the manure so there should not be a problem.

Nevertheless, eventually an estimated forty to fifty members left the project due to these heated discussions. While general consensus is there today, the debate is expected to revive when the first instance arises that an old cows has to be brought to the slaughterhouse.

(Compilation of data from various interviews, informal conversations, and forum posts)

While it has been demonstrated above that the multifocality of salient concepts can be its virtue, Barrett (2014) warns us that it can simultaneously a vulnerability (:12). For instance, as shown in the vignette above, when an emergent practice is established at the community-at-large level, and thus demands collective convergence, there is the risk that it clashes with an implicit interpretation of ‘solidarity’ at the level of the members. In this case it becomes evident that there are those who consider animals to be part of social relations, and thus (considering all relations of the GreenCoop community should be marked by solidarity) they regard it a violation of this ‘solidarity’ aspiration to integrate animals in agricultural processes.

Imagine for example that this vase with its many faces is the salient concept ‘solidarity’. When one face (i.e. interpretation) is made explicit by coloring it in, suddenly you will see the other faces are then missing an eye. In other words, by being made explicit in an emergent practice, the salient concept suddenly loses part of its flexibility and internal frictions may arise.
This dualistic tension of salient concepts, Barrett (2014) explains, materializes in normative processes. Remembering that Barrett (ibid) defines normativity as a network of conduct and rules that emerges through enduring patterns of interaction, it becomes clear that in this particular example it concerns a normative discussion between two stakeholders; the *Anbau*-team and vegans.39 While in their daily interactions vegans treat animals as their equals and include them in their notion of social relations, Vincent, one of the members of the *Anbau*-team explained: "Many of us were coming from biodynamic farms, where it's totally normal to involve cows." However, because the decision to integrate animals lifted the normative rules of the *Anbau*-team to the level of the community-at-large, suddenly vegans needed to conform to these normative codes that clashed with theirs.

In this vein, Barrett (2014) clarifies, 'in many instances normative discussions are framed as a threat to the very identity of community and its way of life. Reactions can provoke heightened emotional responses, moral panic, labeling and ostracism.' (:10) As such the vignette above shows that those opposing the integration of animals questioned the idealism of the GreenCoop, while core-group members suggested that organic vegan agriculture is impossible. So, although normativity might be aimed at internal cohesion, communal erosion and factionalism is another probable outcome. ‘Community vulnerability, therefore, has a distinctly normative side.’ (Barrett, ibid: 8)

In their article on ethnic conformity, van Kerckem, van de Putte, and Stevens (2014) however argue that conformity pressures are not inescapable. Focusing on possible responses they (2014) outline three negotiation strategies that members can adopt; conformity, creativity, and disregard (:295). Members who supported or accepted the integration of animals in agricultural practices simply conformed to the new normative values. Meanwhile, as shown in the vignette above, some members however selected the creativity strategy by exploring different possibilities to achieve the same goal of getting organic fertilizer but simply through other mechanisms. Lastly then, the forty to fifty members who left the GreenCoop over this confrontation chose the latter strategy of disregard.

The strategy people choose, van Kerckem et al. (2014) explain, 'is shaped by a number of interrelated factors’ like the gravity of the violation of norms, the social structure of the community, embeddedness in the community, and the availability of another social support network (:295). This demonstrates that even compelling community building practices can evoke different reactions among members. Therefore, Barrett (2014) emphasizes, communities should be understood as contested spaces (:13).

In theorizing global interconnections Tsing (2005) argues that both local and global discourses influence each other in the spaces they share and that 'the messy and surprising features of such encounters across difference should inform our models of cultural production.’ (:3) Although this study does not focus on global interconnections, this theory can be interpolated to the level of the community and its internal stakeholders; having "global" discourses symbolize collective “convergence” (i.e. the collective embodiment of key cultural concepts) and “local” discourses symbolize internal “divergence” (i.e. the different stakeholder interpretations of these salient concepts). Ultimately then, this would mean that when communal convergence and stakeholder divergence meet, as happened in the vignette above, the community’s culture is produced.

Moreover, Tsing (2005) continues, their mutually conditioning influence can be both empowering and restraining at the same time for either one. Therefore, Rubin (2004) explains, ‘there can be no autonomous identities or cultures’ (:136). Instead it should acknowledged that ‘identity and interest are changing factors amidst multiple power relations.’ (Rubin, ibid: 137) Like for example how

39 This essentializing way of defining stakeholders does not coincide with the argument of this thesis. It should thus be noted that this is just for clarity’s sake. It does not mean that all vegans opposed the integration of animals nor that the *Anbau*-team had a uniform take on the decision.

40 They also add gender to this as a factor that influences strategy of dealing with conformity pressure. While in their study of ethnic conformity the gender dimension is likely to be influential as there are often different expectations from men and women in ethnic contexts, I have found no support to assume that gender influences members’ behavior regarding conformity pressure in this particular study.
some vegans adjusted their stance on the integration of animals in response to counterarguments that were offered by core-group members.

To make sense of this co-producing dynamic between converging and diverging practices and discourses, Tsing (2005) suggests the concept ‘friction’ to capture ‘the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.’ (4) Ultimately then, she (ibid) emphasizes that these mutually dependent discourses and practices should not be separated in their analysis, but that rather ‘the realm of friction’ should be ethnographically studied to understand how ‘unexpected alliances arise, remaking [collective] possibilities.’ (12)

4.3. (Re)Negotiating the Meaning of ‘Solidarity’

To move past frictions and reproduce a sense of community, common ground needs to be reached among the opposing stakeholders. In regard to the issue of integrating animals in their agricultural processes Daniel explained to me how he experienced this process.

Vignette 4: Animal Friends

‘It's like a, its a conflict, a political and ideal, and also moral conflict. Because they were very much... when we argumented about... you know... when we were going “These are the advantages of using... animals. And, and look at them, we are not going to k... we are not going to exploit them. You know, they are just there to be on the, on the grass and they... and they, you know the mothers are with their babies, and, and we are not getting the milk, they drink it themselves.” Ehm... they were... they were saying... you’re exploiting the animals or so. So... But I, I believe the... the human relation, I mean cows is already eh... eh... A cow could not subsist eh... wild... in this society. You need somehow to be... you know... interacting with humans. And... so ehm... if you look at the... human content. No, the content of the life of the cow, its eh... very positive life they have. They, they, you know they have... and, and... the interesting thing is... or... what I really always told people, is (In a softer, sweet voice) "Our farmers would like to have cows also because the love the cows! They... I mean... they really have eh... a good relationship with them. And you know... they treat them well, they give them names and they, you know... they are part of the team... and they are... and they are very peaceful animals." And I think the cows have eh... were very good for the community. Like I’ve never seen members, that come to the farm, see the cow, that go... “Oh poor cow!” or feel... somehow bad about it. Everybody loves the cows. And ehm... the... very very meaningful thing is. Right now there is an... eh... a vegan activist. That is... ehm... became a member of our community. And she is... doing social work, at the farm, with, with the... child, with the young child, and they are somehow working with the cow! But she’s a... she’s very much about... about veganism, or like you know convinced about being vegan. So I, I think its... that’s what I like you know. Its somebody that is vegan, but to like... think about the problem and confront it and... somehow... deal with it. So I, I think all in all it was a positive ehm... that is... something very good about the GreenCoop. I think we have the culture... of conflict resolution... that is very ehm... positive. That is, is about... inclusion. Its about... what are your needs, what are my needs, can we, can we actually have a consensus decision making. And maybe the consensus sometimes, I mean if you cannot reach consensus you have to split. You have to go a different ways. And this is what happened. People that were not supporting the idea of the cows... just eh... left the project. But, but we... I mean we... we took that very seriously. Like we discussed it for... months... weeks.’

(Interview with Daniel, March 2015)

As this vignette shows, Daniel tried to mediate frictions between vegans and the Anbau-team. In theorizing mediation practices between different life worlds, Lewis and Mosse (2006) employed an actor-oriented perspective, which allowed them to address the role of intermediary brokers. These brokers

41 As this statement shows, friction are not hidden, but rather are turned into something positive. Here Daniel for instance argues that how they overcame frictions, testifies of their culture of conflict resolution.
operate ‘at the “interfaces” of different world-views and knowledge systems’, and therefore play an important role in representing different stakeholders and in negotiating differences (Lewis & Mosse, ibid: 10). Evers (2012b) explains that to mediate frictions, brokers then engage in, what Tsing (2005) calls, ‘scale-making’ through code-switching practices (:114). Code-switching here refers to engaging in the different cultural paradigms of stakeholders, for instance, in terms of rhetoric or physical customs like dress codes to establish rapport. In turn, scale-making is then the interweaving of oppositional notions in one message.42 In this vein, Daniel tried to mediate that the integration of cows is a positive development, by drawing on the rhetoric of vegan stakeholders and including their notion that animals are part of social relations. He specifically did so by suggesting that the cows are not being exploited and that rather the animals are part of the team, thus implying there is ‘solidarity’ among the farmers and animals.

It could as such be suggested that brokers play with convergence and divergence in discourses, which allows them to be part of different stakeholders at once and thus results in their intermediality (Evers, 2012a). More specifically, members of the GreenCoop, like Daniel, who try to mediate oppositions within the community, should be considered brokers who engage in horizontal zones of intermediality.43

As Daniel’s mediating attempt shows, salient cultural concepts (i.e. universals) like ‘solidarity’ are elementary in these processes. Tsing (2005) explains that ‘[w]hether it is seen as underlying or transcending cultural difference, the mission of the universal is to form bridges, roads, and channels of circulation.’ (7)

However, not everything goes. While stakeholders (in this case the core-group) rely on universalizing rhetorics to make their case to a wider audience (the whole GreenCoop community), they also need ‘to make these rhetorics work within the compromises and collaborations of their particular situations.’ (Tsing, 2005: 5) In other words, they also need to make the mediated message understandable and (preferably) acceptable for the members opposing their proposal to integrate animals in the agricultural system. Therefore essentializing makes mediation practices easier; the simpler the message, the easier it can bridge different cultural paradigms. 44

Subsequently, in mediation processes ‘new meanings and genealogies are added’ to the salient concepts used (Tsing, 2005: 5). This co-producing dynamic that mediates frictions, is thus the active construction of meanings for salient cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’. In other words, mediating can be understood as meaning-making processes.

In regard to how such meaning-making works, Tsing (2005) explains that ‘it’s important to learn about the collaborations through which knowledge is made and maintained.’ (:13) When collective convergence and stakeholder divergence collaborate in these mediation processes, new realities are constructed in terms of the community’s embodiment (Tsing, ibid: 13). However, Tsing (ibid) reminds us that these are not equal encounters and that thus there is ‘no reason to assume that collaborators share common goals.’ (:13) In this vein, Evers (2012a) clarifies, stakeholders together construct new realities in order to achieve common ground, but that the meanings they assign to key cultural concepts and discourses are not necessarily the same (:113).

Moreover, Tsing (2005) continues, by considering how meaning-making works the discussion can move beyond stakeholder oppositions, although this is not due to that compromise is always imminent. Rather, Tsing (ibid) clarifies, ‘collaborations create new interests and identities, but not to everyone’s benefit.’ (:13) More specifically, she (ibid) suggest, that when convergence is established at the

42 Brokers need skills to be able to do this. Daniel for instance is able to speak several languages, which arguably helps him to engage in code-switching practices and thus to be a broker.
43 Members who reach out beyond the community and actively try to mediate the opposing ideological paradigms of their community and external actors (like discussed in the previous chapter) are also brokers. Mediation processes thus take place on multiple levels at the same time. However, for the sake of clarity, this study zooms in on horizontal (rather than vertical) mediation processes.
44 Something that stood out during my research was that when mediating, brokers often used catchy phrases like slogans, metaphors and hand gestures.
level of the community-at-large, ‘truths that are incompatible are suppressed.’ (:13) In this regard, Daniel mentioned:

'It wasn’t stated somewhere but now... when I do the introduction... ehm... I always say "Look we use cows and we’re not going to discuss that anymore. Either you support that idea, if you do not support it, you can start your own project or join another project that is not... using cow fertilizer but we do that. Its part of our Anbau-filosofie." Because if we do do, if we... chose not to do it, we would have to fire our farmers. And I don’t want to fire them. ‘Cos, I know I actually trust them.'

(Interview with Daniel, March 2015)

Thus, after frictions arose regarding the integration of animals, new communal interests and identities were created for the GreenCoop community. Since then these are communicated, for instance, at introduction nights for new potential members to ensure communal convergence regarding this issue is maintained.

On a more contextual note, Tsing (2005) then suggests that key cultural concepts are ‘local knowledge in the sense that they cannot be understood without the benefit of historically specific cultural assumptions.’ (:7) In other words, mediation (i.e. meaning-making) processes happen in a specific context. Rubin (2004) explains that exactly because ‘meanings are historically shaped amidst political and economic processes’ ethnographic focus should not just be on ‘a non-material and non-institutional domain of words, art, and ritual.’ (:137) Rather, he (ibid) suggests the analysis of mediation practices should also address how ‘material resources, cultures and institutions’ are used as mediation tools that give force to these message (:137). In other words, strategic mediation does not only materialize in narratives and discourses, practices play a significant role in meaning-making as well. In this case the vegan activist who joined the community after the incident and helps with the maintenance of the cows is a telling example and tool that can be referred to give weight to the mediated message that the integration of cows is the right decision.

Ultimately then, mediation is a political activity; which meaning is made and added to a key cultural concept is a strategic choice with a desired outcome. A salient concept like ‘solidarity’ is for instance given additional meaning to justify the integration of cows in agricultural practices. Reflecting on this it can be suggested that brokering to mediate frictions is an informal and implicit form of clientalism, which takes place between unequal parties. As such, in this example, Daniel was brokering “for” the decision of the Anbau-team, legitimizing their proposal despite the opposition of vegan members. In this vein, it could then be argued that mediation is what Tsing (2005) calls ‘politics-in-friction’ (:14).

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So... How do members of the GreenCoop navigate diverging discourses and practices among themselves in order to accomplish a sense of community?

Following Cohen’s (1985) seminal theory, the study showed that GreenCoop members symbolically construct a sense of community using salient concepts like ‘solidarity’. These key cultural concepts materialize in emergent practices at two different levels of the community (Barrett, 2014). The first is the collective level, where it is translated into institutionalized practices (like the financing system) to create prerequisite communal convergence. The second level is that of different groups of members. In these experiential contexts ‘solidarity’ is interpreted in different ways, which ultimately leads to divergence in

45 Apart from that this quote is interesting regarding how the GreenCoop integrated the new interests and identities that resulted from the frictions over the cows, Daniel moreover suggests that opposing the proposal of the Anbau-team, testifies of mistrust. It could thus be suggested that he is implying that those opposing the proposal are not showing ‘solidarity’ with these Anbau-team members. Which is an interesting contrast with the argument of vegans that the community was not showing solidarity with the animals.
practices and discourse, but creates a deeper sense of collective convergence. The salient concept ‘solidarity’ can as such be considered a symbolically constructed community building tool.

Nevertheless, while the multifocality of these salient concepts is thus a virtue, simultaneously it is their weakness (Barrett, 2014). When community aspirations become explicit through emergent practices these might clash with implicit interpretations of key cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’. If so, internally frictions arise. To resolve these frictions and re-establish a sense of community (i.e. convergence), the meaning of ‘solidarity’ is then (re)negotiated through mediation processes. By code-switching between the different life worlds, brokers engage in horizontal zones of intermediality to try and (re)negotiate common ground among opposing stakeholders (Evers, 2011). The ethnographic data showed that the contested emergent practices are then justified by referring to the salient concept ‘solidarity’ and adding meaning to it (Tsing, 2005), which both stakeholders (hopefully) can relate to. Mediation can as such be understood as a strategic (and thus political) meaning-making process, which in this ethnographic case was aimed at community building.

According to Barrett (2014) it is can therefore be concluded that communities are shaped by contradictory processes associated with convergence and divergence (:1). As ‘these two opposing tendencies are neither independent of each other nor static’ (:13), he (ibid) explains they can be considered forces which ‘pull people together while simultaneously pushing them apart’ (:4). Arguably then, the GreenCoop community needs to maintain an exceptionally delicate balance in their community building practices, for which mediation is key.
5. COMMUNITY BUILDING POLITICS

As mediating is a strategic and political process, a discussion of (internal) power dynamics is inevitable. Therefore this chapter will address how brokers position themselves in internal power dynamics and how this influences their ability to mediate. But before moving on to discussing mediation as ‘a central component of politics’ (Rubin, 2004: 137), it is necessary to touch upon a debate which lies at the heart of virtually every anthropological study; that of structure and agency. Though already implicitly present in several sections above, an explicit account is required to clearly define the way in which these elements are conceptualized in this particular study.

Whilst structure and agency are in theory often approached as opposing elements, the way in which these elements interact is crucial in the study of community building processes. A seminal theory on their interaction is Giddens’ Structuration Theory. He (1998) explains that agency is ‘essentially the capability to have done otherwise’ and that ‘structure is primarily expressed in the things that people do in a regularized and institutionalized way’ (78). As such the fundamental notion of Structuration Theory is that agents, through their actions, reproduce structure, and that simultaneously ‘structural properties make those actions possible’ (Giddens, ibid: 83). It is exactly this that concerns GreenCoop members. Using their agency, they attempt to restructure several dominant structures in society, like the economic system. But, more importantly, this social constructivist understanding of structure and agency is also relevant in the analysis of community building processes. In the previous chapter we have already seen evidence that mediation is a structuration process. For instance, it was show how different stakeholders within the community collectively (re)negotiate what the meaning of ‘solidarity’ is and how this should materialize in emergent practices and discourses, but at the same time this salient concept restricts which possible meanings can be assigned to it.

5.1. The Distribution of Power

Vignette 1: Sharing Power

For quite a while now the GreenCoop has been struggling to make ends meet in their distribution system. Members frequently volunteer in Tunsel, but almost every Thursday the biking crew is short of people. To rethink their strategy and debate possible changes, a meeting was scheduled late January 2015.

At this meeting Stefan, a core-group member, suggested it could help if the distribution process would be more explicitly coordinated, which would require the appointment of coordinators. Not only would this improve efficiency, some volunteers might even feel more welcome. Active members involved in the distribution on a regular basis however did not agree. Rather they argued that there is practically always someone there who knows how everything works. As long as other volunteers arrive on time, they can explain how everything works and explicit coordinators would not be necessary. Moreover, if it does happen that no one knows what to do that can also be a good thing. At those instances people will have to self-organize and that is when they learn. Exactly that spreading of knowledge is what is empowering. Upon suggestion of Daniel it was then agreed to get back to this point later.

A few days after, in a more private setting, Daniel explained that at the farm in Tunsel this coordination system works well. But because there are so many people part of the distribution crew, there is a lack of feeling responsible. Nevertheless, he assured me, this coordination question is something they will figure out.

(Compilation of data from participant observations, interviews, and informal conversations)

As this vignette shows, the members who regularly partake in the distribution do not necessarily have more power to determine the new strategy than core-group members. In this vein, Giddens (1998) clarifies that the third feature defining structuration processes is power. Whilst ‘agency is an elemental basis of power’ (Giddens, ibid: 84) and thus everyone has power, it is a resource that is unequally
distributed. The more power an agent has, the more freedom he/she has in reproducing (and possibly altering) the structure. Connecting this to structuration processes like mediation, it becomes clear that this is indeed a political activity between unequal parties. In contrast to all GreenCoop members who can produce (diverging) interpretations of salient concepts like ‘solidarity’, brokers have the ability to (re)define salient concepts (i.e. the structure) and thus determine what the embodiment of the community should entail. In other words, it is thus the brokers who have the power to construct the new arrangements of ‘social, political, and economic roles rather than simply follow normative scripts’ (Lewis & Mosse, 2006: 11). In turn, this then confirms once again that communities cannot be considered homogenous in terms of ‘social realities, economies, political relations, knowledge, views and perceptions’ (Evers, 2012a: 114).

But although brokers are relatively powerful compared to other members of the community, their power is not absolute. Returning to Giddens’ (1998) Structuration Theory, we are reminded that the agency of brokers’ is also influenced by the structure, and so they are not entirely free to construct any reality they like. Rather, they have to refer to the salient cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’ to legitimize the new realities they propose and as such the salient concepts limit the possible mediation pathways. In this vein the vignette above demonstrates that the different stakeholders both attempt to legitimize as well as dismiss the suggestion to appoint coordinators for the distribution by presenting arguments that relate to an interpretation of ‘solidarity’. While those in favor suggested people would feel more welcome, which would lead volunteers to become more supportive of the distribution crew, those opposing suggested that self-organization by default would lead to empowerment making members more equal. In other words, it became a question of which interpretation of solidarity should be prioritized. In this vein, Tsing (2005) proposes these universals (i.e. salient concepts) are the frameworks for the practice of power (:10).

For the sake of clarity this analysis will now zoom in on Daniel, a prominent broker of the GreenCoop, to explore how he is able to mediate within these frameworks for the practice of power. It must however be noted that there are many such brokers within the GreenCoop community.

5.2. The Flow of Information

Vignette 2: Tracing Knowledge

The website of the GreenCoop is described by core-group members as an important communication tool that facilitates transparency regarding internal processes. Through this website, members can access information such as meeting records, harvest overviews, ongoing discussion forums, an overview of upcoming activities, and public newsfeeds that covers stories about organic agricultural developments, political summit demonstrations, and other solidarity initiatives. Stefan explained that this transparency is elementary in involving as many people in decision-making processes as possible, which is needed to achieve their aspired grassroots democracy. But moreover, he added, it is also there to communicate to people what is going on in the project so that they can understand where help is needed and thus it enables self-organization.

Though all members can post comments and messages, Daniel is the administrator of this internal website, which is communicated through his user name that has _admin behind it. He is as such one of the

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66 Considering that power is a broad concept that can take many forms (Epstein, Bennett, Gruby, Acton, & Nenadovic, 2014), it is crucial to specify how it has been operationalized in this study. Because power is brought up in reference to structuration theory and mediation processes it concerns the ability of members (in particular the brokers) to influence the structure (i.e. the ideal community), which ultimately enables them to determine the embodiment of the community. This is coherent with the applied definition of stakeholders, whom are those that can have a substantial effect on the organization’s behavior (Roome & Wijen, 2006).

67 Nor can external actors be considered homogenous.
key persons that posts messages, gives updates, and responds to questions or remarks of members on the forums.

(Compilation of data from various interviews, informal conversations, and the internal website)

In theorizing how stakeholders obtain power, Ribot and Peluso (2003) have developed A Theory of Access. They (2003) explain that in the study of land acquisitions it is necessary to move ‘beyond the “bundle of rights” notion of property to a “bundle of powers” approach to access’ (173). More specifically, they (ibid) argue that networks of power negate access to resources, which in turn provide power. Among others, these resources include knowledge, technology, social relations, identities, financial capital and authority. Arguably this theory is also applicable to the study of a community’s internal power dynamics. Looking at Daniel’s case, it could for instance be suggested that because of his role as the website administrator, Daniel can legitimately gain access a lot of knowledge which he needs to disperse over the community to ensure transparency. As such he gets involved with many activities of different GreenCoop stakeholders. He is, for example, almost weekly in Tunsel where he does both volunteer work and attends meetings of the Anbau-team, he has meetings with the Buro-team (which he is part of), and he furthermore goes to meetings such as bi-weekly Koko’s and additional gatherings like the distribution strategy session. He then determines what knowledge the rest of the community gets access to as he selects what becomes available on the website. In this way he can steer in which aspects of the community members can and should get involved.

But besides that Daniel has the power to determine how the information flows through the community, this abundant access to knowledge also puts him in a powerful position in other contexts. Recalling that Lewis and Mosse (2006) define brokers as those ‘operating at the “interfaces” of different world-views and knowledge systems’ (emphasis added: 10) it can be argued that the resource knowledge is most elementary for brokers to be able to mediate. Precisely because of the knowledge they have on different stakeholders, brokers are able to imagine what their oppositions entail and how these can be mediated. So, Daniel’s overwhelming access to knowledge enables him to engage in zones of intermediality with the different knowledge systems of opposing stakeholders. Ultimately then, through scale-making he can construct new communal knowledge systems. Thus, coherent with Ribot and Peluso’s (2003) theory that power negates access to resources which again provide power, Daniel’s powerful position as the website administrator in turn enables him to become a powerful broker who can construct new realities when frictions arise.

5.3. Networking

However, sometimes this required knowledge is not directly available to brokers. As such, Ribot and Peluso (2003) emphasize it should be kept in mind that ‘[s]ome people and institutions control resource access while others must maintain their access through those who have control’ (154). Although he is present at many, Daniel can for instance not physically attend every activity of the GreenCoop community. When it happens that he cannot be present, he contacts those who did attend the activities to

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48 It should however be pointed out that just knowing about other stakeholders is different from then also doing something with this knowledge. Not everyone can or will mediate just because they have access to this resource. As pointed out in the previous chapter, brokers for example need skills to be able to mediate as well.

49 This pursuit of knowledge that enables brokers to mediate (and thus makes them powerful) is not necessarily an egocentric enterprise. It can for example be motivated by brokers wanting to diffuse frictions within the community and thus strength communal convergence. But, nonetheless, this idea of mediating for the greater good of the community does not make it a neutral activity. Rather, it is still strategic and political activity that is possibly appreciated by other members in the community. Joyce for instance explained it is people like Daniel that are needed to make a project like the GreenCoop work; people who are “always there, always informed, and always engaging.” (Interview with Joyce, March 2015)

50 An important side note is that this also means that, just like other stakeholder groups, brokers cannot be viewed as one homogenous group. While some might control resource access, others need to maintain access through different people, and thus there can be differences in power dynamics among brokers as well.
obtain feedback. This way he gathers knowledge through these other members, which he needs for both maintaining the website and being able to mediate. In this vein, Ribot and Peluso (ibid) explain, it is possible that the same individual (or group) both controls access to resources like knowledge and maintains access to them through others in different relations or situations.

Furthermore, to obtain and maintain access through others, Ribot and Peluso (2003) demonstrate that structural and relational mechanisms can be implemented (:164). The structural mechanism is when access to certain resources can provide people with leverage for negotiating access to other resources (Ribot & Peluso, ibid: 165). In this vein, Daniel would for instance leverage the resource social relations with me (a student researcher). He would bring me into contact with others of the community51 for my research but request feedback afterward thus trying to obtain more knowledge through me. The relational mechanism is then when access to certain resources is obtained and maintained through social relations (Ribot & Peluso, ibid: 172). Again, Daniel also implemented this strategy in his pursuit of knowledge. It was for instance him who had asked Laurence to arrange with the University the possibility to do soil tests on the fields of the GreenCoop.52 Thus pursuing access to resources like knowledge and technology on behalf of the community, through this relational mechanism.

These different mechanisms thus all constitute power relations through which brokers can gain (or lose) access to resources. As such they find themselves in a network of power relations, which they strategically navigate to be able to mediate.

5.4. Power Contested

Resources are, however, not the only source of power that members of the community have. Returning to Giddens’ (1998) Structuration Theory, we are reminded that everyone has some agency and thus power. Especially considering that the GreenCoop is a proclaimed non-hierarchical community, it should thus be explored how stakeholders, who’s life worlds are mediated, influence brokers ability to do so.

Vignette 3: Who to Thank?

A few weeks before my departure a group of elderly active members organized a festive dinner to thank those who had been of invaluable help to the initiative over the last year. This was something that had been initiated the previous year when a few gardeners had left the project. Daniel, my gatekeeper, who was also invited, told me about it and suggested I should come, but then hesitantly added that he should check with the others first.

A couple days before the dinner would take place, there was a bi-weekly Koko meeting. At this meeting the Daniel brought up the dinner and asked how many people could be present. Erica, another member of the Buro-team who was living in the same commune as one of the organizers, explained there was space for approximately twenty people. When they concluded that there were not yet twenty guests, Daniel suggested inviting a few others, including me. This was, however, not appreciated by Allan and Erica, two other Buro-team members. Allan was particularly upset. Not looking at me but at the Daniel he suggested, raising his voice, that they did not need to thank me, that rather I should thank them. The other extra guests Daniel had suggested were another story, but in my case it was a definite ‘no’. Erica then added that the idea of this dinner was indeed not like that and it would be too much for the people organizing the dinner. Daniel tried to defend his suggestion by clarifying that I had been very active and helpful over the last weeks, as were the others who he had suggested, and that he thought that was the point of the dinner. Allan and Erica did however not leave much room for him to clarify and said this was simply not a good idea.

51 An important side note is that Daniel (as mentioned before) is the gatekeeper of the community for those who have no personal ties with GreenCoop members. His position is as such an immensely powerful one in the sense that he controls who has access to the community and what elements of the community are made accessible for these external actors.

52 As Laurence did not work at the correct department of the University he then in turn used his resource identity (as a member of the University) to get access to the correct department that could set up a study to conduct the soil tests.
With defeated body language Daniel then did not further the discussion. At that point others in the meeting turned to me and asked if I understood the discussion. I thanked Daniel for thinking of me and explained that I also understood the point made by Allan and Erica so that it was not a problem and that I was not personally offended. In the break of the meeting Daniel then spoke with another core-group member about that you can always invite more people and concluded that it is hard to know where the cutoff point is.

The day before the dinner when Daniel I met up again he brought up the incident. He spoke in a condemning way and said he still did not understand their disapproval, explaining that some guests now even refused to come because of the pressure that was put on it. After the dinner had taken place it was brought up only once more in a Koko meeting to give general feedback, mentioning there had been a nice atmosphere. 53

(Compilation of field notes extracts)

As shown in this vignette, with the ability of brokers to construct new realities comes the risk of causing discontent among other members of the community. Arguably this is because these mediation practices require brokers to engage in zones of intermediality, meaning they get involved in opposing practices through code-switching. Evers (2012a) therefore points out that it is important to realize that mediation practices are ‘highly contextual and conducted through political processes of social navigation (...) imagination and interaction between and within stakeholder groups’ (114).

Consequently, as shown in the vignette above, despite their best efforts brokers do not always achieve their goal to establish common ground among diverging stakeholders. The power of brokers when mediating can be undermined, arguably even more so due to the proclaimed horizontal power structure of the GreenCoop community. It is then important to note that Ribot and Peluso (2003) conceptualize ‘access’ in terms of peoples’ ability to benefit from resources (153). For GreenCoop members to become powerful brokers it is thus not just about having resources like knowledge to their exposal (and having the skills required to code-switch), they also need to have the ability to use these in mediation practices. For instance, in this case Daniel argued that I had been solidary with the GreenCoop community, as I put in hard work, to justify his proposal. Nevertheless his argument was not effective because its validity and authority were not acknowledged by all stakeholders involved in the mediation process. The powerful position of brokers is thus neither uncontested nor absolute, as other members can also exert power them. As such, Ribot and Peluso (ibid) clarify, this way of conceptualizing access ‘brings attention to a wider range of social relationships that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources’ (154). Thus, in other words, these potentially powerful brokers are interdependent on network of stakeholders for their empowerment.

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So... How do brokers in the GreenCoop position themselves in internal power dynamics and how does this influence their ability to mediate?

Following Giddens' (1998) explanation of Structuration Theory it has been argued that power is at the core of human interaction and is as such elementary in the study of mediation processes. But as it is unequally distributed, some agents can exercise more influence when (re)negotiating structures than others. Reflecting on Lewis and Mosse’s (2006) definition of brokers, it is established that it is exactly these key members who have most power as they can construct new realities by adding meaning to key cultural concepts through mediation practices.

53 In regard to the internal power dynamics of the GreenCoop this incident is remarkable on multiple levels. For instance, this dinner initiative confirms there is a distinction made between active and passive members; those who should or should not be thanked. This came to me as a surprise because some active members had clarified that they were active members because they paid little. As such I wondered if passive members who pay a lot were then also invited, or whether physical contributions outweigh financial contributions. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity the analysis zooms in on the contested position of this broker.
Brokers are nevertheless not entirely free to construct any reality they like. Rather, they have to refer to salient cultural concepts like 'solidarity' to legitimize the new realities they propose, meaning these salient concepts restrict their mediation possibilities. In this vein, Tsing (2005) clarifies, that these are therefore the frameworks for the practice of power.

But, to mediate and engage in different zones of intermediality, brokers need to be able to imagine what the oppositions of stakeholders entail. As such it has been argued that access to knowledge enables them to code-switch between the different life worlds (i.e. knowledge systems) of stakeholders. Drawing on Ribot and Peluso’s (2003) Theory of Access, it therefore suggested that access to resources (in particular knowledge) provides brokers with the power that enables them to construct new realities.

Nevertheless, brokers might only have access to certain resources through other members of the community. To obtain and maintain access they can then implement different strategies, like leveraging other resources they have or social relations (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Brokers thus find themselves in a network of power relations, which they need to strategically navigate to be able to engage in mediation practices.

Lastly then, Ribot and Peluso (2003) draw our attention to the power retained by the less powerful agents in the community. For common ground to be established, all stakeholders involved ultimately need to accept the validity of the mediating practices. In other words, brokers thus need to be empowered by the community to be able to mediate and construct new realities.
6. CONCLUSION

This study revolves around the lives of people who are looking for alternatives to what they deem to be damaging practices of the capitalist world. Their colorful opposition to dominant discourses is fascinating and catches a lot of attention, but just looking at the diverse history of environmentalist discourses in Freiburg alone, the uneasy feeling sets on that there is more than meets the eye.

Zooming in on the GreenCoop, a Community Supported Agriculture initiative in Freiburg (Southwest Germany), this study has looked at the story behind the all too familiar narratives. Through an ethnographic account of members’ experiences it has been explored how people with counterhegemonic ideologies navigate the convergence and divergence of discourses and practices in their community building processes.

As communities are constructed in relation to ‘others’, the study starts off with an account of how GreenCoop members interact with external actors, in particular exploring how members navigate convergence and divergence of discourses and practices beyond their community. Because the GreenCoop is created as an alternative to the dominant capitalist system, its social relations are marked by ‘solidarity’ as opposed to ‘competition’ (which they associate with capitalism). The key cultural concept ‘solidarity’ is thus used to produce and demarcate the social boundary between the GreenCoop and its “significant other”. In turn, this means that if the community would engage in any kind of competitive relations it would threaten their existential security.

Drawing on ethnographic data it was then established that depending on the underlying motive of the interaction with external actors, different navigation strategies are implemented. When engaging in profitable interactions with external actors, these interactions are referred to as mutually beneficial and described using words like ‘cooperation’ and ‘synergy’, rather than speaking off supply-and-demand, buying-and-selling or other terminology related to market forces. Divergence in practices is in this context thus considered beneficial and is emphasized to demonstrate complementation (rather than competition). In turn, to manage ideological divergence in discourses (which could pose a threat to the existential security of the community), GreenCoop members facilitate the contact with these external actors through personal ties. In this way a sense of convergence and compatibility is created. This does however not mean that external actors remain uncontested. But instead of rejecting them and classifying them as “the significant other”, it is proposed to help these external actors become more solidary like the GreenCoop.

Then, when becoming inclusive of external actors, divergence and convergence in practices and discourses are approached differently to safeguard the community’s existential security. For instance, when becoming accessible for prospective members, GreenCoop members engage in an essentializing and compelling kind of social boundary maintenance, to keep the “significant other” at an ideologically “safe” distance. Meanwhile other external actors are blurred into an enemy in common to expand community building processes, as it creates an overarching sense of convergence among prospective members at the periphery of the community. Simultaneously, GreenCoop members show to potential members with different motivations that there is room for internal divergence, by drawing from different rhetoric associated with environmental and political activism (Lyons, 2014).

Inspired by Low’s (2011) theorizing, I then argue that with its innate solidarity aspiration the GreenCoop creates a ‘spatializing culture’. As ‘solidarity’ marks the compelling social boundary between the community and mainstream capitalist society it creates social segregation and exclusion between them. As such it is has then been proposed that the GreenCoop can be understood as an ideologically gated-community.

While the aim of these ideological walls and gates is to protect the communities’ existential security, even within these walls, gate keeping (i.e. managing divergence and convergence of discourses and practices) remains crucial. For example when the enemy suddenly turns up within the community confines, (re)negotiating the social boundary is required to re-establish the communities’ existential security. Nevertheless, the “significant other” has proven difficult to pinpoint. For instance, when an
independent student researcher enters through the community gates and takes information out which might become accessible to the "significant other". As such, following Eriksen (2010b) it has been argued that navigation of divergence and convergence in discourses and practices beyond the community is defined by tensions between freedom and security.

Then, zooming in on how GreenCoop members navigate diverging discourses and practices among themselves in order to accomplish a sense of community, it was attempted to shed light on when internal divergence is problematic and how this can be overcome.

Following Cohen’s (1985) seminal theorizing, the study showed that GreenCoop members symbolically construct a sense of community using salient concepts like ‘solidarity’. These key cultural concepts constitute the collective identity markers that frame communal interests and normativity, which then materialize in emergent practices to create convergence (Barrett, 2014). But, as Bauman (2004) and Amit (2002) pointed out, there is a gap between the ideal community (which these salient concepts refer to) and the actual limited social relations and practices that claim to embody it. As Tsing (2005) suggested, this gap is however not the ethnographic focus. Rather the study continued by analyzing how key cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’ travel across internal differences. In this vein, the study showed that salient concepts like ‘solidarity’ not only define the collective identity, interests, and normativity, they also frame these three dimensions at the level of different stakeholders within the community. In other words, because of their symbolic nature salient concepts like ‘solidarity’ are multifocal and can thus be interpreted in multiple ways. People who experience the community in different contexts can thus still relate to the same salient concepts and feel part of the same community. It has as such been established that divergence is not necessarily an obstacle for community building processes. Rather, as long as divergence remains implicit it even deepens the sense of community (i.e. convergence) as it makes the salient concept ‘solidarity’ tangible for different members. That is, there is value in the ambiguity of the concept.

Nevertheless, while their multifocality is thus a virtue, simultaneously it is the weakness of these salient concepts. When community aspirations become explicit through emergent practices these might clash with implicit interpretations of key cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’, which then results in internal frictions. To resolve these frictions and re-establish a sense of community (i.e. convergence), the meaning of ‘solidarity’ is then (re)negotiated through mediation processes. By code-switching between the different interpretations, brokers engage in horizontal zones of intermediality to try and (re)negotiate common ground among opposing stakeholders (Evers, 2011). Contested emergent practices are then justified by referring to the salient concept ‘solidarity’ to which mean is added, which both stakeholders (hopefully) can relate to. Mediation can as such be understood as a strategic (and thus political) meaning-making process (Tsing, 2005).

Following Barrett (2014) it is therefore concluded that in community building processes, convergence and divergence of discourses and practices can be understood as forces that ‘pull people together while simultaneously pushing them apart’ (:4). It is then mediation that is key to balance these forces in community’s embodiment.

Lastly, addressing how power relations influence community building processes, the internal social complexity of the GreenCoop becomes even more apparent. As brokering is a strategic and political process, the role of power in mediation processes needed to be addressed. More specifically, this study has discussed how brokers position themselves in internal power dynamics and how this influences their ability to mediate.

Following Giddens’ (1998) Structuration Theory and reflecting on Lewis and Mosse’s (2006) definition of brokers, it is established that they are the ones who have most social power as they can (re)negotiate new realities by adding meaning to key cultural concepts through mediation practices. But although brokers are relatively powerful compared to other members of the community, their power is not absolute. In this vein, the ethnographic data showed that brokers are not entirely free to construct any reality they like. Rather, they have to refer to the salient cultural concepts like ‘solidarity’ to legitimize
the new realities they propose and as such the salient concepts limit their mediation possibilities. These key cultural concepts, Tsing (2005) clarifies, are therefore the frameworks for the practice of power.

However, before brokers can mediate and engage in different zones of intermediality, they need access to knowledge on different stakeholders to be able to imagine what their oppositions entail and how these can be mediated. In other words, they need access to the resource knowledge that enables them to code-switch between the different life worlds (i.e. knowledge systems) of stakeholders. As such, drawing on Ribot and Peluso’s (2003) Theory of Access, it has been argued that access to resources (in particular knowledge) enables brokers to mediate and thus provides them with more power to influence the embodiment of the ideal community.

Nevertheless, brokers might only have access to certain resources through other members of the community (or external stakeholders for that matter). To obtain and maintain access they then implement different strategies, like leveraging other resources they have or social relations (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Moreover, all stakeholders involved ultimately need to accept the validity of the mediating practices for common ground to be established (Ribot & Peluso, ibid). Thus, brokers need to be empowered by the community to be able to construct new realities. As such they are interdependent and need to navigate internal networks of power relations to be able to engage in mediation practices and actively construct community.

Zooming back out to academic relevance, this research was aimed at filling a relational gap in the study of CSA initiatives. As mentioned above, often research on these counterhegemonic initiatives is primarily focused on understanding the fundamental motivations and their durability, concentrating on their virtues and challenges (Hassink et al., 2013; Kulak et al., 2013; Janssen, 2010; Lang, 2010). In contrast, this study has focused on both individual and collective processes within and beyond such a community. Like a flock of birds gliding through the sky as one beautiful entity, counterhegemonic communities like the GreenCoop often manage to create a prevalent image of unity. Exploring what tools and mechanism are put into place to build a community as such, my intention was to acknowledge the meaningful complexity of those we study.

Thus, instead of falling into a cultural relativism on the individual level that results in nothing more than nihilism, my aim has been to demonstrate that social complexities can be studied in a meaningful way. Using of the analytical ‘zones of intermediality’ approach as an interdisciplinary tool, I argue researchers can move beyond simplistic methodologies and analyses to delineate complexities where relevant.
‘THE ART OF SIMPLICITY IS A PUZZLE OF COMPLEXITY.’

- Douglas Horton
REFERENCES

Academic


Evers, S. J. T. M. (2012b). Negotiation, conflict and consensus on land: 'Zones of Intermediality' as analytical model for Foreign Large-Scale Land Acquisition, Discussion Series (8).


**Non-Academic**


The website of the GreenCoop has also been consulted and has been a source of ethnographic data and visuals, but to ensure confidentiality it has not been listed among these references.
## APPENDIX A: Methodologies Table

**Main Research Question:** How do members of the GreenCoop in Freiburg (Southwest Germany) navigate the convergence and divergence of discourses and practices in their community building processes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-questions</th>
<th>Methodologies</th>
<th>Data Collection Techniques</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. How do members of the GreenCoop navigate convergence and divergence of discourses and practices beyond their community?</strong>&lt;br&gt;Stakeholder analysis*&lt;br&gt;Making external stakeholder configurations, by outlining which external actors the GreenCoop interacts with in which contexts.</td>
<td>1. <strong>discourse analysis</strong> (documentary/language/practices) to establish which and how key cultural concepts are used in relation to external actors&lt;br&gt;2. <strong>participant observation</strong> attending meetings (e.g. Introduction night or the soil testing meeting) when GreenCoop members interact with external actors, to establish which discourses are used in which relational contexts&lt;br&gt;3. <strong>semi-structured interviews</strong> with GreenCoop members, to determine their perception of external actors and their relations with them</td>
<td>Delineating the external stakeholder configuration and which discourses/narratives correspond with what external stakeholder context, helped determine when convergence and divergence is required or problematic is beyond the community.</td>
<td><strong>1. semi-structured interviews</strong> with GreenCoop members asking them to tell me about their connection to particular external actors and what their role is in the interaction with &quot;others&quot;. <strong>2. participant observations</strong>, among members to establish if there is a history with particular external actors and determine how people speak about this history as well as their future plans with external parties</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. How do members of the GreenCoop navigate diverging discourses and practices among themselves in order to accomplish a sense of community?</strong>&lt;br&gt;Life history analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1. semi-structured interviews</strong> with GreenCoop members asking them to tell me about their connection to particular external actors and what their role is in the interaction with &quot;others&quot;. <strong>2. participant observations</strong>, among members to establish if there is a history with particular external actors and determine how people speak about this history as well as their future plans with external parties</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mapping the Physical Properties of the Community</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mapping the physical locality of the GreenCoop (zooming in on the farm, the syndicate café where bi-weekly meetings are held and distribution points throughout the city of Freiburg) and the emergent social practices, as well as the use of these physical properties.</td>
<td><strong>1. taking photographs</strong> of the physical environment,&lt;br&gt;2. <strong>participant observations</strong> on how people look and behave in this physical environment, as well as how people use the physical environment&lt;br&gt;3. <strong>semi-structured interviews</strong> asking people to draw and describe the physical locality, to elaborate on the (development of) land cover, use and access, and explain institutionalized and normative practices.</td>
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<td>By mapping the physical locality as well as the emergent practices I can establish how members define the GreenCoop in practical terms. In other words, establish what entails the physical embodiment of their community.</td>
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<td><strong>Mapping the Ontological Experience of the Community</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mapping the meaning of the GreenCoop and it use, first by determining key cultural concepts and actor’s perceptions of these concepts, and then by analyzing how these concepts are used (in connection to each other).</td>
<td><strong>1. discourse analysis</strong> to look at language patterns (in text) among GreenCoop members, as well as common or contested symbols and artifacts,&lt;br&gt;2. <strong>participant observations</strong> among members to establish language patterns (in speech), and to establish which key cultural concepts are used when and in which narratives&lt;br&gt;3. <strong>semi-structured interviews</strong> with members to establish what their interpretation is of key cultural concepts, and to establish which key cultural concepts are used when and in which narratives</td>
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<td>This data allows me to assess how the various cultural elements [that define the community] are differentially implicated in alternative forms of practice and thus establish when internal divergence arises. Moreover this data will help me determine when internal divergence is considered problematic and how this is then mediated to (re)establish common ground (i.e. re-establishing a sense of community), as well as when mediation does not work and results in (prolonged) frictions (Evers, 2011:7).</td>
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### Stakeholder analysis:

Making stakeholder configurations by outlining which internal stakeholders arise in which contexts.

1. **discourse analysis** (documentary/language/practices) to establish which and how key cultural concepts are used in relation to stakeholders
2. **participant observation** attending meetings when different internal stakeholders interact, to establish which discourses are used in which relational contexts
3. **semi-structured interviews** with GreenCoop members, to determine their perception of different internal stakeholders and their relations with them

Delineating the stakeholder configuration and which discourses/narratives correspond with what internal stakeholder context, helps determine when convergence and divergence is required or problematic is, as well as how frictions are mediated.

### Life history analysis:

Establishing the experiential context of participants, by asking them to tell me more about themselves. This method thus allows for an insider's perspective as well as a contextual approach, because it gives room for participants to give more input.

1. **semi-structured interviews** with members asking them to introduce themselves and tell me about memorable moments at the GreenCoop and how they envision the role of the GreenCoop in their future.
2. **participant observations**, through informal conversations with participants finding out about their past experiences and future prospects

Understanding the past experiences of participants and their perception of the future helps clarify what motivations and objectives influence their navigation of diverging discourses and practices.

### 3. How do brokers position themselves in internal power dynamics and how does this influence their ability to mediate?

**Stakeholder analysis**

Mapping the flow and control of resources to establish power dynamics among and within stakeholder groups

1. **discourse analysis** (documentary/language/practices) to establish what resources there are available
2. **participant observation** among GreenCoop members, to establish which resources are available, who has access, who controls these, and who has (no) access.
3. **semi-structured interviews** with members to establish how resources, their allocation, and power relations are perceived

By analyzing who controls which resources and who has access to resources through which mechanisms, will help outline internal power dynamics that influence mediation processes.

**Life history analysis**

Establishing the experiential context of participants, by asking them to tell me more about themselves in the context of the GreenCoop. This method allows for an insider's perspective as well as a contextual approach, as it gives room for participants to give more input.

1. semi-structured interviews with members asking them to tell me about their role in the GreenCoop and how others might view them in the context of the GreenCoop, as well as how they imagine their future with the GreenCoop.
2. **participant observations**, through informal conversations with participants finding out about their past experiences and future prospects

Understanding the past experiences of participants and their perception of the future, can help clarify why resources are or are not allocated to certain people or in particular situations. Moreover it will help understand why and how some GreenCoop members are brokers, and how they navigate (internal) power dynamics.

*While I conducted the research it turned out external actors with whom the GreenCoop interacted were not stakeholders who laid claims on the embodiment of the community (this could have been the case for instance with organizations providing funding or legislative parties). As such, in this thesis, I do not refer to them any more as "external stakeholders" (instead "external actors") but this is in how they have been approached when I was collecting the data. Therefore in this methodologies table I feel it is appropriate to point out I used part of the stakeholder analysis methodology (establishing a stakeholder configuration) to analyze the role of external actors in community building processes of the GreenCoop.*

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<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Life history analysis:</td>
<td>1. <strong>semi-structured interviews</strong> with members asking them to introduce themselves and tell me about memorable moments at the GreenCoop and how they envision the role of the GreenCoop in their future.</td>
<td>Understanding the past experiences of participants and their perception of the future helps clarify what motivations and objectives influence their navigation of diverging discourses and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing the experiential context of participants, by asking them to tell me more about themselves. This method thus allows for an insider's perspective as well as a contextual approach, because it gives room for participants to give more input.</td>
<td>2. <strong>participant observations</strong>, through informal conversations with participants finding out about their past experiences and future prospects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder analysis</strong></td>
<td>Mapping the flow and control of resources to establish power dynamics among and within stakeholder groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>discourse analysis</strong> (documentary/language/practices) to establish what resources there are available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>participant observation</strong> among GreenCoop members, to establish which resources are available, who has access, who controls these, and who has (no) access.</td>
<td>By analyzing who controls which resources and who has access to resources through which mechanisms, will help outline internal power dynamics that influence mediation processes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>semi-structured interviews</strong> with members to establish how resources, their allocation, and power relations are perceived</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life history analysis:</td>
<td>1. semi-structured interviews with members asking them to tell me about their role in the GreenCoop and how others might view them in the context of the GreenCoop, as well as how they imagine their future with the GreenCoop.</td>
<td>Understanding the past experiences of participants and their perception of the future, can help clarify why resources are or are not allocated to certain people or in particular situations. Moreover it will help understand why and how some GreenCoop members are brokers, and how they navigate (internal) power dynamics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing the experiential context of participants, by asking them to tell me more about themselves in the context of the GreenCoop. This method allows for an insider's perspective as well as a contextual approach, as it gives room for participants to give more input.</td>
<td>2. <strong>participant observations</strong>, through informal conversations with participants finding out about their past experiences and future prospects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: Guideline Semi-structured Interviews

- Thank him/her for taking the time to do the interview.
- Ask if it is all right to record the conversation. Possible justification: Like this I can focus on listening rather than taking notes. No one else besides me will listen to these audio files.
- Explain anonymity and privacy regulations that I will follow.
- Explain some questions might be straightforward. The reason is that I would like to hear what you (the participant) think rather than that I do not know the answer.
- Introduce myself
- Ask him/her to introduce self

- Could you explain to me what the GreenCoop is?
  o Possible probe: Could you explain to me what you mean when you talk about (one of the key cultural concepts like; grassroots democracy, solidarity, organic agriculture, etc.)?
- Can you tell me about the first time you came in contact with the GreenCoop?
  o Possible probe: Could you describe the person who introduced you?
- Can you tell me about the first time you went to the farm in Tunsel?
- Would you draw the farm in Tunsel for me?
  o Possible probe: Can you explain your drawing to me?

- What do you think made or makes the GreenCoop possible?
  o Possible probe: Could you describe the people that were/are important in this process?
- How would you describe yourself in the context of the GreenCoop?
- How do you think others would describe you in the context of the GreenCoop?
- Can you describe a typical day on which you are busy with the GreenCoop?

- Can you give me an example of a moment like a meeting in which a difficult decision had to be made?
  o Possible processes and incidents that I can bring up: the exclusion of a right wing member / the meeting in which the integration of cows in the production cycle was presented / the switch of generation in the core-group / Carla cargo.
  o Possible probe: What stands out when you thinking back to this incident?
  o Possible probe: Can you describe the people that were important in this process?

- Can you explain to me what is going on with the GreenCoop trying to buy the farmland?
- Can you tell me about the other CSA projects in the area?
- Can you tell me about your relationship with the neighbors and the rest of the village?

- Is there anything else that we did not discuss but what you think I should know about? Or maybe something I should do/see?
- Do you have any questions from me?

- Thank him/her again for taking the time and the wonderful conversation.
APPENDIX C: Overview of Data Collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Category</th>
<th>Specifics</th>
<th>Number of Times</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Participant) observations</strong></td>
<td>Days working at the farm with volunteers (generally twice a week)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Days helping in the distribution chain</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bi-weekly meetings (Koko)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Additional distribution strategy meetings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction night for new members (every 3 months)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Monthly Kneipe</strong> (translation: bar shift at syndicate cafe)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting on soil testing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cabaret night to raise additional funds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual Spring Workshop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make Sense Workshop for Carla Cargo (spin-off project)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Events (Birthday party, political rave, and breakfast)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semistructured interviews</strong></td>
<td>Members of Anbau-team</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Members of Buro-team</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active members</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passive members</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artifacts</strong></td>
<td>DVD of documentary about the initiative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poster about the documentary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calendar made to raise extra funds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poster &amp; flyer to spread the word about cabaret night</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Film given to me by an active member</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal website</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcripts of all meeting since 2014</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly newsletters (of the weeks I was a member)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correspondence through email, Whatsapp, text messages with participants</td>
<td>approx. 70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photograph Documentation</strong></td>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>approx. 250</td>
<td>approx. 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area surrounding farm (Tunsel &amp; farmlands)</td>
<td>approx. 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City of Freiburg</td>
<td>approx. 70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution points in Freiburg</td>
<td>approx. 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other solidarity projects around the city of Freiburg where members meet</td>
<td>approx. 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring Workshop</td>
<td>approx. 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anbau-team</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>mid 30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buro-team</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>mid 40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stefan</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Active” Members</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Wilfred</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jonah</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>late 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tessa</td>
<td>mid 30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>early 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Passive” Members</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>early 30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>Male: 6</td>
<td>Age range: 25-71</td>
<td>17:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female: 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>