


“I’m Happy for People to Collaborate, but I Don’t Want to Join in”. Addressing Failure in Community-supported Agriculture Networks

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Abstract

Strategies for transforming capitalist economies often struggle with scaling up more socially just and ecologically sustainable alternatives. To avoid being stuck in a “local trap”, many prefigurative initiatives form larger networks and coalitions. Agroecological practices, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA), have been especially expansive in recent years. However, since most scholarship on the growing CSA networks focuses primarily on their development and positive achievements, we learn little about their encountered challenges and their strategies for overcoming them. This article therefore investigates the causes and extent of “network failure”, including barriers to collaboration and potential responses, among CSA networks in the UK and Germany. It draws on qualitative case studies, based on interviews, observation and document analysis. The article finds that CSA networks operate well at national and local level, but have experienced relative network failure at regional level, and encounter regular barriers to collaboration due to capacity limitations, differences and competition between members, all of which they are trying to address.

Keywords: Social networks; Network failure; Community-supported agriculture; Social innovation; Agroecology.

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1 Introduction

Strategies for transforming capitalist economies towards more socially just and ecologically sustainable alternatives often struggle to expand radical social innovations. Since many social innovations are centred around prefiguring cooperative and non-market-oriented business models, their ability to flourish within — and ultimately transform — otherwise highly competitive environments is heavily constrained. Many scholars thus caution prefigurative initiatives against becoming stuck in an escapist niche (“local trap”), urging them to develop scalable solutions instead (Russell, 2019). Countless initiatives across different social and economic sectors have thus begun forming larger networks, seeking to offset their competitive disadvantage by scaling through collaboration. Agroecological practices, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA), have done this quite actively, building multiscalar networks and experiencing a rapid expansion in recent years, which scholarship is only starting to catch up with (Espelt, 2020; Rommel et al., 2021; Bonfert, 2022).

Nevertheless, collaboration between CSAs also involves challenges, which only some of these studies address. Indeed, none provide a close examination of the causes, dynamics and intensity of *network failure* that collaboration partners are faced with. The concept of network failure encompasses not only the complete rupture of collaborative ties, but also partial dysfunctions and underperformance in active networks, as well as the inability to realise collaborative potential (Schrank & Whitford, 2011). As such, investigating network failure between CSAs reveals what barriers non-market-oriented enterprises face when trying to manoeuvre competitive environments through collaboration, as well as how effectively they can overcome those barriers.

This article examines instances of network failure, barriers to collaboration, and potential responses by CSAs in the UK and Germany, two countries whose CSA networks have existed for over a decade but only experienced a major boost in the past few years. It draws on qualitative case studies, based on semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis conducted between 2021 and 2022. The article ultimately finds that while national CSA networks in both countries operate effectively, regional sub-networks have experienced relative network failure, and collaboration in general faces several barriers caused by a lack of capacities, structural and ideational differences, and even competition between collaboration partners. Networks have started addressing all these issues to varying levels of success.

The following two sections will introduce the practice of CSA and core concepts of network collaboration and failure. Section 3 will explain the research methodology and introduce the two national cases. This is followed by a section demonstrating and discussing the research findings on network failure, barriers to collaboration, and potential responses. Finally, a concluding section summarises the findings and explains their significance.

2 Community-supported Agriculture

In community-supported agriculture (CSA), farmers and local consumers share the costs, risks and output of food production (Hinrichs, 2000). Consumers pay the costs of a farm's production in advance to gain access to a regular share of its harvest and in many cases become involved in the farming process itself (Ostrom, 2008). By matching food supply to consumer demand, CSA not only offers financial security to small farmers, but also removes food provision from the sphere of market competition and helps develop ecologically sustainable short supply chain systems (Forssell & Lankoski, 2014).

CSAs can encompass different business models and activities. Some are run by users themselves in the form of associations or cooperatives that can rent or buy land for growing. Others are launched by professional farmers who shift away from their previous commercial model (Gorman, 2018). In any case, users tend to join a CSA for a full season and pay a fee to receive weekly food shares. Fees can often be adjustable and food shares usually need to be picked up from farms or local distribution points, although some CSAs offer delivery (Goland, 2002). Many CSAs additionally require members to provide voluntary assistance on the farm or help with deliveries and food pickups (Hayden & Buck, 2012). In addition to food provision itself, many CSAs engage in community outreach, organising public events, offering education for local schools, raising awareness of environmental issues and agroecology, and participating in political activism (Hinrichs, 2000).

Studies on CSA have revealed a range of benefits and shortcomings. The practice is known to help establish closer social contacts between food producers and consumers, as well as among local households. Farmers benefit from gaining a degree of financial security in the face of volatile market competition (Flora & Bregendahl, 2012), while users gain access to healthy food and often expand their nutritional knowledge and cooking skills (Allen et al., 2016). Through their community engagement, CSAs also help educate people on agricultural and environmental subjects and especially the more participatory models offer practical experiences with non-market based economic models (Hayden & Buck, 2012; Owen et al., 2018).

Conversely, one of the most notable shortcomings of CSA is its relative inaccessibility, as participation requires a certain financial commitment and nutritional skills. Most CSA members therefore tend to be white, well-educated and from middle-class backgrounds (Farmer et al., 2014). Many CSA members are also primarily interested in receiving food, which limits their level of commitment and makes them likely to shift to more convenient sources. Only a small core of participants consists of active members willing to dedicate time and effort to running the CSA and engaging in public activities beyond the farm (Fonte, 2013; Exner, 2013). This has led some authors to consider CSA little more than a healthy lifestyle choice for privileged households (Cone & Myhre, 2000). The other main shortcoming of CSA is its niche economic position. In the UK, CSA food production, employment and financial throughput accounts for only 0.1 percent of agriculture (DEFRA, 2020; CSA Network, 2021), severely limiting the practice's potential to offer an alternative to commercial food provision.

Consequently, CSAs in numerous countries have established larger networks to boost their collective expansion and capacity for civic and political engagement, which scholarship is only gradually catching up with. Levkoe (2014) shows how CSAs in Canada started building larger food networks with other agroecological organisations. Similarly, Rommel et al (2021) explain that German CSAs collaborate with each other as well as with more traditional farms to share resources and diversify their output. Espelt's (2020) study of Spanish CSAs highlights their ability to develop collective online tools to facilitate easier internal communication and external promotion. Finally, Bonfert (2022) demonstrates that CSA networks in the UK have reached a level of organisation that enables them to advocate for changes in agrifood policy. These studies focus primarily on the development and achievements of CSA networking, while only briefly mentioning encountered challenges. To explore the barriers of collaboration within CSA networks, as well as strategies to overcome them, we thus need to turn to the literature on "network failure".

3 Network Collaboration and Failure

There is relatively little scholarship on the challenges and mitigation strategies of CSA networks, but the literature on grassroots activist networks, including alternative food networks, provides a wealth of knowledge on the barriers networks have to overcome.

Networks between local initiatives exist across all geographical and institutional scales, from the local to the transnational (Daphi et al., 2019; Avelino et al., 2020). Especially networks of local commons initiatives are often "translocal" and "rhizomatic", reflecting a purposefully decentralised and non-hierarchical approach to collaboration that enables mutual exchange and even organising large-scale campaigns without the need for top-down decision-making (Chatterton, 2016; Carlson et al., 2018).

Social movement scholars describe a wide range of factors that can encourage or inhibit collaboration across activist networks. The political context can incentivise networking among local initiatives, either by creating opportunities in which collaboration is likely to increase their chance to affect policy (Pitt & Jones, 2016), or by presenting a common threat of unpopular policies or oppressive displays of power that are more easily contested together (Tarrow, 2011). The characteristics of prospective partners are also crucial for informing collaboration. Networks are more likely to form between local initiatives that share common political goals, ideals, tactical repertoires, and similar levels of resources (Smith & Bandy, 2005; Daphi et al., 2019).

Specialised individuals are often instrumental in establishing and maintaining links between different initiatives (and across scales), thus acting as "network brokers" (Jasny & Lubell, 2015). These individuals remain partially committed to their own original group while also developing the ability to flexibly communicate and shift between contexts. To carry out their brokerage role, they often require special training and resources (Tarrow, 2005), such as by being employed by the networks they help govern. However, network brokers are not necessarily network members themselves. In the case of alternative food networks, scholars have repeatedly noted the importance of third-party organisations in facilitating collaboration between local initiatives (Sandover, 2020; Rommel et al., 2021).

Conversely, networks are likely to encounter challenges when prospective partners have diverging attributes and uneven levels of resources, which can fuel conflicts (Daphi et al., 2019), or when networks span across geographical distances that necessitate traveling, overcoming language barriers, and connecting across different politico-economic contexts (Baglioni et al., 2021). When challenges accumulate or prove insurmountable, networks are faced with the possibility of failure.

3.1 Network failure

Network failure can have a range of different causes. Networks can fail due to environmental conditions, such as external political and economic constraints or having governance structures that are unable to operate within their organisational context. They can also fail due to internal social conditions, such as a lack of trust between members. Failure can also take different forms and levels of intensity. "Absolute network failure" sets in when networks are wholly incapable of exercising their intended function, either due to a break-up of collaborative ties ("devolution") or by being unable to develop sufficiently productive ties to begin with ("stillbirth"). In less definitive cases, "relative network failure" describes a state in which networks are able to operate but significantly underperform compared to their ambitions. This underperformance can be the result of members acting opportunistically against the network's collective bene-

fit ("contestation") or a reflection of the network's overall lack of competences ("involution") (Schrank & Whitford, 2011).

The nature and causes of network failure are often difficult to determine, not least because a network's level of functionality can fluctuate. Grassroots activist networks often grow dormant for a period, before being resurrected during times of increased political activity (Sears, 2014), thus indicating that they did not actually 'fail' in the first place. Some networks also emerge strengthened after having severed certain ties that inhibited their functionality. Especially alternative food networks often split apart for strategic reasons, as this can allow them to increase the number of local initiatives and attract a wider clientele, thus effectively "scaling-out" as a movement (Hasanov et al., 2019).

While it may be difficult for networks to change their external environment or overcome an absolute breakdown in communication, they can build safeguards against adverse internal conditions and relative failure. This can involve developing more transparent and accountable governance mechanisms and investing in knowledge dissemination and capacity-building for members, thereby establishing a "reciprocal relationship between confidence and competence" (Schrank & Whitford, 2011, p. 158). When developing internal governance mechanisms, networks need to find ways to reconcile differences while simultaneously retaining a productive level of pluralism. Reconciling diverse preferences also requires networks to take account of structural differences between members, rooted for instance in their social status or available resources. Otherwise "difference blindness" risks breeding latent conflicts and distrust (Buchanan, 2019). At the same time, alternative food networks often explicitly seek to construct a variegated economy of relatively autonomous communities with diverse identities and business models (Hasanov et al., 2019). Effective democratic mechanisms and relations of mutual solidarity are crucial for finding a good balance between these objectives and, by extension, for enabling networks to avoid suffering from failure.

4 Methodology

This article investigates the encountered challenges and mitigation strategies of CSA networks in the UK and Germany, using qualitative case studies.

4.1 Cases

National CSA networks in both countries have experienced rapid growth in recent years and operate in relatively similar ways, working to facilitate mutual exchange, offer advice and support to their members, promote CSA, raise awareness of environmental issues, and advocate for policy change. Both networks were also launched at national level first before establishing more decentralised sub-networks over the years.

The British "Community Supported Agriculture" network was founded in 2013 and counts over 150 member CSAs as of 2022 (CSA Network, 2022). It primarily facilitates mutual exchange and provides advice and mentoring to members, but also increasingly engages in public campaigns and policy advocacy. Strategic decisions are made by a board of elected representatives, which include both growers and consumers, and practical coordinating activities are carried out by a team of paid coordinators (Bonfert, 2022). The network began organising regional networking events around 2014 to enable local initiatives to collaborate more closely and easily integrate new starters, especially in Northern England, Scotland and Wales (CSA Network, 2015a, 2016, 2019). Although these meetings were well-attended, only

the Welsh CSAs took the additional step of forming an official regional sub-network and drew up an organisational charter with collective decision-making rules in 2015. This was largely due to their access to financing and organisational support by the Welsh branch of the "Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens" (now "Social Farms & Gardens", SFG). The Welsh CSA network offered a regional hub for CSAs to engage in mutual exchange and public engagement, to discuss region-specific issues of agriculture and food provision, and to link up with other agroecological organisations in Wales, such as the "Landworkers Alliance" (CSA Network, 2015a, 2015b).

The German "Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft" (*Network of Solidarity-based Agriculture*, NSL) was founded in 2011 and by 2022 included around 400 CSA enterprises (NSL, 2022a). Its activities and organisational structure roughly mirror the UK's CSA Network, but it also has several working groups focused on specific tasks. These include groups on horticultural education, research, and digitalisation, which support capacity-building among members and try to raise the profile of CSA by collaborating with academics. They also include a group on "rightwing tendencies", which raises awareness of the problem of far-right actors trying to co-opt the CSA model, as well as a group on "Cooperatives", which enables CSAs with a cooperative model to network semi-autonomously (NSL, 2023a). In 2014, the NSL created 12 *Regiogruppen* ("regional groups"), roughly matching the territories of German states (NSL, 2016). These were less formalised than the Welsh CSA network but went on to organise bi-annual meetings and created email newsletters and a Telegram channel for their members to engage in regular communication.

4.2 Methods

The research is based on combining multiple qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), participant observation (Emerson, 1995), and document analysis (Westle & Krumm, 2009). 20 interviews were conducted between May 2021 and July 2022 with national and regional CSA network representatives (incl. coordinators and board members) and local member initiatives (Table 1). Interviews lasted on average an hour and revolved around the scope, primary activities and aims of network collaboration, as well as the recipients' encountered challenges, such as conflicts, failed communication, and structural barriers. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed through qualitative open coding, thereby creating several analytical categories to tease out the different forms and levels of network failure, as well as strategies to overcome them.

Table 1: Interview respondents

#	Network	Function
R1 — R3	CSA Network	Board members
R4	CSA Network	Network Coordinator
R5 — R7	CSA Network	Member farmers
R8	SFG	Network coordinator
R9	NSL	Network advisor
R10	NSL	Board member
R11	NSL	Network working group organiser
R12 — R20	NSL	Member farmers

Due to the prohibition of face-to-face research during the pandemic most participant observation was conducted during online network meetings and events. The exception was one visit to an in-person gathering of Welsh CSAs, organised by SFG in July 2021. During observation, written field notes were taken to keep track of the content and form of mutual interactions between network members, which were later analysed using the same open coding method described above. Additionally, CSA network documents such as organisational statutes, online posts, and other primary publications were studied to capture the development and previous outcomes of network collaboration.

5 Findings

National CSA networks in the UK and Germany are highly active and rapidly growing, so neither has experienced *absolute* network failure. However, in both countries, collaboration experienced a decline at regional level, signifying a degree of *relative* network failure. These developments had different causes, which were primarily internal in Germany and external in the UK.

5.1 Relative failure of regional networks

The German *Regiogruppen* gradually grew dormant due to dwindling interest among participants. Since much of their exchange consisted of advice and support for new starters, the growing number of experienced CSAs no longer had as much of a need for gaining new ideas and inspiring one another. On top of this decline in demand, the 2020 pandemic prohibited face-to-face meetings, forcing any regional gatherings to take place over zoom. While some CSAs continued to participate and offer online workshops for their regional group, most of the former networking was relegated to posting questions and answers in shared Telegram channels (R19).

Except for Wales, the UK did not see the formation of regional CSA networks to begin with. This was not necessarily a case of *network stillbirth*, since there continued to be informal regional gatherings, but these were not consolidated into formal organisational structures. The Welsh CSA network eventually grew dormant as well, after SFG's project funding ceased in 2018, itself a result of the departure of the organisation's main CSA contact person. While individual experienced CSAs such as Cae Tan still act as mentors for other initiatives in the area, common networking activities were too reliant on SFG to continue (R2). This experience highlights the structural fragility of networks whose governance is largely dependent on external funding and brokerage by third parties.

In both contexts, the relative network failure at regional level was compensated for by an increase in local collaboration among neighbouring CSAs, thus representing an overall scale shift in networking rather than an absolute decline. As the number of CSAs rapidly increased since 2020, so did their concentration around certain local hub areas. The regional group "Mittendrin" in Germany, for instance, counts around 20 CSAs (NSL, 2022b) and Southern Wales also saw the foundation of numerous new initiatives during the pandemic (R2). Consequently, the higher concentration of CSAs allowed them to fulfil many of their networking needs among immediate neighbours, rather than having to rely on regional networks as they did in the past.

That said, when SFG acquired new funding in 2021 to support local horticulture in Wales, the organisation decided to found a new "Welsh CSA Cluster". Unlike the previous Welsh network, this cluster does not aim to involve experienced CSAs or engage in political organising.

Instead, it is solely intended to provide mentoring and support to new CSAs and potential new starters (Social Farms & Gardens, 2021), offering a platform for mutual exchange and distributing advice on issues such as CSA financing, planning, farm work and outreach. The cluster has thereby tailored its activities around the specialist needs of new CSAs, which they are less likely to receive from neighbours. Thus, SFG was able to overcome its previously experienced *network failure* by both acquiring new funding and shifting the goals and scope of its network activities. However, this solution is likely only temporary and does not overcome the regional network's dependence on external brokers, thus lacking a safeguard to protect it from the same fate as its predecessor.

5.2 Barriers to collaboration

Besides these instances of relative failure, CSA networks in both countries are confronted by a range of additional barriers that limit the effectiveness of their collaboration and their ability to expand.

The most basic and widespread barrier to CSA networking in both countries is the strict limitation of practical capacities. Growers work long hours and often barely have the time to run their own CSA, let alone engage in collaborative activities beyond it:

I work full-time, so if meetings or online webinars are during the day I can't make them because I'm working. And then if there's a weekend meetup [...] I'm reluctant to go and spend my weekends talking about soil and things like that, because that's what I do in my working life. To spend my free time also sort of at work doesn't really appeal to me. (R6)

The tasks of networking and community engagement therefore often require other CSA members to volunteer their time, which only a small handful of them are willing and able to do (R12). As these few highly engaged members take on multiple responsibilities they grow into the role of network brokers themselves, inadvertently concentrating much of their network's communication and making it vulnerable and dependent on their continued activity.

For national CSA networks, capacities are highly limited and concentrated as well. Since the UK's CSA Network is primarily funded by grants, it lacks the security for long-term investments and can only afford a small number of employees, limiting the scope of its activities:

It's tricky, because the CSA network could do a lot more if there were more resources available particularly to hire more members of staff. Then you could do that kind of more policy work and justify maybe charging a higher price, but how do you get there in the first place? (R1)

Some members of the NSL also feel that the German network falls short of fulfilling its potential. They consider its organisational structures to be relatively informal and ineffective at implementing more ambitious strategies and ensuring accountability, thus inducing a form of *involution*:

The network is very good at achieving its objectives but that's because it's not trying to do much. [...] I see the greatest challenges of the network in the fact that the internal structure is too informal. [...] If an organization has no clear rules, then everyone just follows their individual habits. And then you have a motley crew that

is basically ineffective. So, there is a need for a stronger focus on a clear structure, determining who decides what and who is responsible for what. (R9, translation by author)

Another source of tension is the pluralism of different CSA conceptions and business models. Both national networks are highly inclusive and for a long time refrained from defining the characteristics of CSA in a way that could constrain members or exclude newcomers.¹ Their ability to maintain this level of pluralism is highly valued by all respondents. However, there is a risk that avoiding a discussion on the defining principles of CSA may cultivate a level of *difference blindness* that can cause certain members to withdraw from collaboration. One respondent, for instance, was alienated by the CSA Network's liberal stance on livestock:

We need to find ways to keep land fertile without animal inputs, [so] the last place I want to go and spend my weekend is at a dairy farm. [...] It's quite alright, I'm quite happy for people to [collaborate on that] but I don't want to join in. (R6)

Finally, a novel challenge to collaboration is the growing economic competition between CSAs. This phenomenon is rarely mentioned in scholarship, likely due to CSA's scarcity having prevented a critical number of enterprises from developing in close proximity. This has started to change in recent years as clusters of multiple CSAs have developed around certain cities, especially in Germany. In Leipzig, for instance, the recent foundation of a large CSA cooperative came at the cost of drawing members and even growers from other nearby CSAs, creating unresolved tensions between them. Especially the cooperative's more professional marketing activities, such as distributing branded apparel, was considered an irritating departure from the non-commercial vision shared by the other CSAs, leading to arguments within their local network (R13). Respondents in the UK were also concerned about competition potentially souring the relationship between CSAs and other small ecological producers, especially when the former 'unfairly' rely on volunteer labour even after reaching a competitive scale:

When people are actually advertising and selling their vegetables then they're competing on the market with all other growers. And if people are using voluntary labour to be able to do that then they're skewing the playing field. It's not fair for me to be on the same farmers market as someone else whose products are using lots of volunteers. (R6)

Competition is not unexpected even among non-market-oriented enterprises (Hogeland, 2006) but its potential for disrupting collaborative networks from within by introducing a level of *contestation* is obviously a challenge CSAs will need to take seriously as they continue to expand and multiply.

5.3 Responses

Many of the above barriers are relatively novel experiences for CSA networks, so most attempts at avoiding or mitigating them have only yielded tentative results thus far.

To overcome the problem of capacity limitations, CSAs tend to rely on partner organisations for taking the lead on common projects, including facilitating collaboration between

1. A notable exception is the NSL's strict exclusion of far-right initiatives trying to claim the CSA model (NSL, 2021)

CSAs themselves. CSAs around Leipzig, for instance, have founded an association that organises their monthly meetings and public events and engages with policymakers on their behalf (R13). The same applies at national level: Before the UK CSA Network was advanced enough to engage in policy advocacy, it relied on agroecological organisations such as the Landworkers Alliance to lobby for its shared cause and would only occasionally supply the organisation with data and feedback. At least in Wales, this division of labour between CSAs and Landworkers Alliance still persists (R5). However, as the experience of the first Welsh CSA network demonstrates, relying primarily on external allies and brokers can create its own dependencies and does not help overcome the risk of network involution. Reaching a higher level of independence and variety of praxis ultimately requires networks to be more financially self-sustaining, which may well be solved only through continued organisational growth and maturation.

CSAs have anticipated the risk of competition long before encountering it. It is therefore customary to contact existing CSAs before setting up a new operation in their area to make sure there are no immediate conflicts (R18). However, this does not protect against competition becoming a problem later on, nor does it offer a way to expand CSA beyond its current niche. Instead, German CSAs faced with competition attempt to enhance their public visibility collectively and diversify their promotional activities to reach a wider potential clientele beyond the traditional leftist-environmentalist bubble. Besides engaging in more outreach and organising public events, some local CSA networks started developing a shared online presence (for instance via their municipal food council's website) to enable all neighbouring CSAs to promote their schemes together. The aim of this is to flatten any differences in promotional resources and allocate potential members more fairly (R13, R16). Thus, in addition to tackling network failure through *capacity building*, as suggested by the literature (Schrank & Whitford, 2011), these networks also practice what could be called *capacity balancing*.

Finally, both the CSA Network and NSL recently started addressing their openness and informality by drafting new mission statements. The NSL conducted a participatory process to define the characteristics of CSA for its members in a way that could distinguish the practice from farmers markets, food boxes and other similar schemes. The resulting document contains a shared vision and a list of foundational principles that include collective financing, valuation, direct relations between producers and consumers, business transparency, sustainable agricultural practices, social security and good labour conditions, as well as tolerance and openness (NSL, 2023b). Similarly, the CSA Network developed a new charter that defines the practice of CSA to be agroecological, rooted in community investment and shared risk, reward and responsibility, hyper-local and mostly self-sustaining, and capable of producing food, fibre or fuel at least to official organic standards (CSA Network, 2023). To what extent these mission statements can help overcome difference blindness and reconcile diverging ideals remains to be seen, but the process of developing them has already contributed to a more conscious and transparent discussion within the networks.

6 Conclusions

The article has uncovered several barriers to collaboration between CSAs in the UK and Germany, most notably their relative lack of time and resources, latent structural and political differences between their members, and dynamics of economic competition especially between close neighbours. Moreover, the article has explained that in both countries regional level CSA networks have experienced relative network failure, due to a loss of funding and member engagement, respectively. This relative failure, however, was partially compensated by a shift of CSA

collaboration to the local level and, in Wales, by acquiring new funding for regional exchange. In several cases, network failure was only overcome with the aid of external partners, whose brokerage represents both a resource and potential source of vulnerability. Other responses include combining capacity building and balancing to raise collaboration partners to an equal footing, and facilitating a collective discussion process to develop a clear network vision and identity around CSA.

To some extent, the above issues are distinctive to the practice of CSA. For instance, the high labour intensity of agricultural production is particularly impactful on members' personal capacities, while the networks' internal plurality reflects the variation of CSA business models. However, as studies on cooperatives (Vieta & Lionais, 2015), energy communities (Haf & Robison, 2020) and the solidarity economy show (Dinerstein, 2017), scaling any radical social innovation requires building networks in a market environment that fuels competition even among collaboration partners, and relying on external actors without becoming dependent on their support. How successfully CSA networks can meet these challenges may therefore offer important insights into whether and how social innovations can flourish within competitive environments in general.

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
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