Institutional perspectives on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in agricultural enterprises amidst social movement debates

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ABSTRACT (German)

Mit zunehmenden Wetterextremen, Sorgen um die Biodiversität und den Verlust von Ökosystemen sowie der damit verbundenen strukturellen Abhängigkeit von fossilen Brennstoffen ist der Agrarsektor in den letzten Jahrzehnten zu einem der Hauptstreitpunkte geworden, da er eine Quelle für diese Probleme darstellt. Die ethischen Herausforderungen im Zusammenhang mit intensiver Primärlandwirtschaft haben die Spannungen zwischen zivilgesellschaftlichen Organisationen und Aktivistengruppen erhöht, die sich um die wirtschaftlichen, ökologischen und sozialen Auswirkungen von landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen sorgen. Die potenziell vielfältigen Ursachen für diese Probleme und die zahlreichen ethischen Probleme und Herausforderungen des Nahrungsmittelsystems (z. B. Nachhaltigkeit, Rechte und Wohlergehen von Tieren, Arbeitsbedingungen, öffentliche Gesundheit) haben die soziale Verantwortung für diese Phänomene unklar gemacht (Chiles et al. 2020). Die Aktivitäten der Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) im Bereich Lebensmittel und Landwirtschaft haben sich größtenteils auf die Umsetzung von privaten Governance-Regelungen und die Institutionalisierung von Werteverpflichtungen gestützt (Chiles et al. 2020). Private Standards adressieren jedoch nur einige wenige der Anforderungen an Unternehmen hinsichtlich CSR (Fuchs et al. 2011). Diese beziehen sich beispielsweise auf die Verbesserung der Nahrungsmittelsicherheit durch Rückverfolgbarkeit, Öko-Effizienz und Recycling auf Kosten von Grundsätzen, die dem Unternehmensgewinn zugutekommen (Verbesserung der Arbeitspraktiken, Lebensgrundlage der Landwirte, Nahrungsmittelgerechtigkeit, Biodiversität und Tierrechte). Vor diesem Hintergrund haben große landwirtschaftliche Unternehmen soziale Verantwortlichkeiten außerhalb ihrer Kernbereiche übernommen, um zur Gemeinschaft beizutragen, in der sie tätig sind, und sozial verantwortlich zu handeln (Gagalyuk und Valentinov 2019; Visser, Kurakin und Nikulin 2019). Große landwirtschaftliche Unternehmen und insbesondere Agroholdings versuchen, auf gesellschaftliche Erwartungen besonders durch CSR-Aktivitäten zu reagieren. In einigen Übergangswirtschaften haben sie sozial ausgerichtete Aktivitäten lange vor dem Konzept der CSR (wie es im Westen bekannt ist) in diesen Volkswirtschaften übernommen. Auf der anderen Seite werden groß angelegte landwirtschaftliche Unternehmen in öffentlichen Debatten oft mit einer Reihe negativer gesellschaftlicher Auswirkungen in Verbindung gebracht, wie z. B. Landraub und Verteilungsungerechtigkeit in ländlichen Gebieten, Verlust von Biodiversität aufgrund von Praktiken wie Monokulturen, Massentierhaltung, kapitalintensive Produktion, die den Einsatz von Technologie anstelle von Arbeitskräften beinhaltet, was zu Arbeitslosigkeit und anderen Bedenken führen kann.

Derzeit sind landwirtschaftliche Unternehmen verstärkten gesellschaftlichen Anforderungen ausgesetzt, die sowohl von Verbraucheraktivisten als auch von Aktivistengruppen ausgehen, wie von den Hond und de Bakker (2007) für Organisationen im Allgemeinen beobachtet wurde. Ein breites Spektrum von Interessengruppen übt Druck auf große landwirtschaftliche Unternehmen aus, ihre Geschäftspraktiken zu reformieren. Der Druck von Interessengruppen kann selbst einen Einfluss auf die operative Leistung von großen landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen haben. Die Navigation in der zunehmend polarisierten und politisierten Debatte über diese Themen erweist sich für Unternehmensbetriebe in der Landwirtschaft als herausfordernd. Da die mit CSR verbundenen Abwägungen offensichtlicher geworden sind (z. B. hat CSR strukturell zugrunde liegende gesellschaftliche Probleme wie Armut nicht reformiert), hat sich der Widerstand verstärkt. Dies äußert sich darin, dass CSR-Aktivitäten von Aktivistengruppen oft als unzureichend betrachtet werden und sogar zu Diskursversagen zwischen großen landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen und bestimmten Aktivistengruppen führen. Der Widerstand beruht auf der Auffassung, dass Unternehmen von vornherein Maßnahmen gegen das gesamte Spektrum sozialer Probleme ergreifen sollten (und nicht auf eine Regulierung warten sollten, die sie unter Druck setzt). In Übergangs- und Schwellenländern haben wir kein klares Verständnis über die durchgeführten CSR-Aktivitäten und wie diese Diskurse mit großen landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen in Resonanz stehen. Aus diesem Grund stellt diese Studie folgende Fragen: Was sind die CSR-Aktivitäten großer

landwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen? Werden große landwirtschaftliche Unternehmen stark kritisiert für ihre CSR-Aktivitäten und, wenn ja, wie können Spannungen zwischen großen landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen und Aktivistengruppen erklärt werden? Dies sind die Hauptfragen dieser Arbeit, die ein interdisziplinäres Werk darstellt und von Konzepten inspiriert ist, die in den Bereichen Institutionen, Interessengruppen und soziale Bewegungen sowie Nachhaltigkeit, Umwelt- und Agrarstudien entwickelt wurden. Bisher wurden keine Forschungsanstrengungen unternommen, um die Gründe für die öffentliche Ablehnung (sozialen Engagements) großer landwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen zu systematisieren. Geografisch konzentriert sich die Arbeit auf aufstrebende und Übergangswirtschaften in Argentinien, Kasachstan, Russland und Rumänien, wo sich Großbetriebe und steigende gesellschaftliche Erwartungen ihnen gegenüber in den letzten Jahrzehnten besonders weit verbreitet haben. Vor dem Hintergrund der beiden übergeordneten Fragen zielt diese Arbeit vor allem darauf ab zu untersuchen, wie große landwirtschaftliche Unternehmen ihre soziale Verantwortung verstehen und woher ihre Motivation für diese Aktivitäten stammt. Ein weiteres Ziel ist es herauszufinden, warum bestimmte Aktivistengruppen soziale Verantwortlichkeitsmaßnahmen als unzureichend ansehen, um systemische soziale Probleme (z. B. Armut, Mangel an Beschäftigungsmöglichkeiten, Verlust der Biodiversität usw.) zu beseitigen. Die Erreichung dieser Ziele kann Antworten auf die anhaltenden Spannungen zwischen großen landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen und Aktivistengruppen in aufstrebenden und Übergangswirtschaften liefern (Kay, Peuch und Franco 2015; Gallent et al. 2019, S. 71). Das Verständnis der Ursachen und Konsequenzen divergierender Präferenzen und Überzeugungen kann dazu beitragen, Institutionen so zu gestalten, dass sie sie bestmöglich widerspiegeln.

Theoretisch stützt sich diese Arbeit auf die Institutionentheorie und die Ansicht, dass institutionelle Bedingungen und Mechanismen beeinflussen können, ob Organisationen dazu neigen, sich sozial verantwortlich zu verhalten oder nicht. Diese Themen werden in drei Artikeln und einer umfassenden Zusammenfassung untersucht. Der erste Artikel (Hajdu, Daziano und Visser 2021) identifiziert die Aktivitäten der Corporate Social Responsibility und die Motivationen großer landwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen im Rahmen einer qualitativen Studie in Argentinien. Der zweite Artikel (Hajdu et al. 2021) untersucht die Treiber (oder Prädiktoren) der Corporate Social Responsibility-Aktivitäten von Farmen in Russland und Kasachstan auf institutioneller, organisationaler und individueller Ebene. Der dritte Artikel (Hajdu und Mamonova 2020) konzentriert sich auf die Definition der sozialen Verantwortung, wie sie von einer Aktivistengruppe gefordert wird, die in der institutionellen Umgebung der analysierten landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen in Rumänien aktiv ist. Die Studie identifiziert die Gründe, warum bestimmte Aktivistengruppen die CSR großer landwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen im Allgemeinen nicht akzeptieren. Die drei Artikel ermöglichen es dann, die institutionellen Voraussetzungen für das Scheitern des Diskurses zwischen großen landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen und Aktivistengruppen zu analysieren, wie es durch eine radikale soziale Bewegung exemplifiziert wird.

Empirisch verwendet diese Arbeit einen Mixed-Method-Ansatz. Die Analyse basiert auf tiefgehenden und halbstrukturierten Interviews und offenen Diskussionen in den südlichen und nördlichen Regionen Argentiniens mit Farm- und CSR-Managern sowie Schlüsselpersonen, tiefgehenden Interviews mit Schlüsselpersonen und halbstrukturierten Interviews mit Managern auf Farmen in Nord-, Ost- und Südrumänien. Eine groß angelegte Umfrage zu CSR-Vorhersagen in agrarwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen und privaten landwirtschaftlichen Betrieben in Russland und Kasachstan; tiefgehende und halbstrukturierte Interviews mit Mitgliedern einer sozialen Bewegung und ländlichen Bewohnern in Rumänien. Weitere Ergebnisse aus Interviews mit landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen in Rumänien ergänzen das Gesamtbild zu CSR. Beobachtungen von Teilnehmern, die während Konferenzen und Workshop-Meetings und einer jährlichen Sitzung der sozialen Bewegung durchgeführt wurden, die Analyse von Website-Dokumenten, Organisationsdokumenten, Zeitungsartikeln und

Interaktionen in sozialen Medien sowie landwirtschaftlichen Statistiken ergänzen die verwendeten Methoden.

Unter anderem argumentiert diese Arbeit, dass die Schwäche und Unvollständigkeit der institutionellen Rahmenbedingungen in aufstrebenden und Übergangswirtschaften CSR-Aktivitäten weitgehend durch individuelle Motivationen von Farmeigentümern und Managern angetrieben werden, wie es im Fall Argentiniens der Fall ist. Gleichzeitig stärken aufstrebende internationale Institutionen wie Zertifizierungen für den Export von landwirtschaftlichen Aktivitäten die Präsenz von CSR-Aktivitäten. Diese sind jedoch in der Zitrusfrüchte- oder Sojabohnenbranche vorhanden, aber weitgehend in der primären Landwirtschaft mit 'Cash Crops' wie Weizen, Mais und Gerste abwesend. Schwächen des institutionellen Umfelds führen auch dazu, dass es in Ländern wie Rumänien nur wenige und 'unter dem Radar' liegende CSR-Aktivitäten gibt.

Die Arbeit hebt auch hervor, dass in Abwesenheit von regulativen und bestimmten normativen Institutionen (z. B. ausgedrückter normativer Druck von Bauernorganisationen) große landwirtschaftliche Unternehmen nicht den Druck oder die Ressourcen haben, um mit allen aufkommenden gesellschaftlichen Problemen umzugehen. Darüber hinaus sind sie möglicherweise nicht über viele gesellschaftliche Probleme informiert, da es an wahrgenommenem normativem Druck von Aktivistengruppen mangelt. Die Ergebnisse in Kasachstan und Russland unterstützen auch die Aussage, dass schwache/unvollständige institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen CSR durch institutionelle und organisatorische Treiber beeinflussen. In Rumänien können CSR-Aktivitäten landwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen aufgrund einer möglichen institutionellen Erfassung durch lokale und politische Eliten noch weniger sichtbar sein. Aus diesen Gründen können Konflikte weiter bestehen, während radikale soziale Bewegungen zusätzlich eine konfrontative Haltung gegenüber den Initiativen großer landwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen einnehmen können, aufgrund des unterschiedlichen ideologischen Kontexts, den sie im Vergleich zu diesen bewohnen. Der Rahmen der Institutionentheorie trägt dazu bei, die Bedeutung der Positionierung verschiedener Akteure (in diesem Fall landwirtschaftliches Unternehmen und Aktivistengruppe) hervorzuheben und die Rolle, die sie bei der Formulierung ihrer Überzeugungen hinsichtlich sozialer Verantwortung spielt. Die unterschiedliche Positionierung, die durch die institutionellen, organisatorischen und individuellen Treiber für soziale Verantwortung aufgezeigt wird, verdeutlicht die fortwährenden Diskursversagen, leitet aber auch Schritte ein zum besseren Verständnis dieser Problematik.

ABSTRACT (English)

With increased weather extremes, concern over biodiversity and ecosystems loss and associated structural dependence on fossil fuels, the agricultural sector has been one of the main areas of contention over the past decades as one source for these problems. Ethical challenges associated with intensive primary agriculture have increased tensions coming from civil society organizations and activist groups concerned with farming enterprises' economic, environmental and social impact. The potentially multiple causes for these problems and the numerous ethical problems and challenges of the food system (e.g., sustainability, rights and welfare of animals, labor conditions, public health) have made social responsibility for these phenomena ambiguous (Chiles *et al.* 2020). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in the area of food and agriculture, has mostly relied on the implementation of private governance schemes and the institutionalization of value commitments[1] (Chiles *et al.* 2020). Private standards however only address a small handful of the demands placed on companies for CSR (Fuchs *et al.* 2011). These refer to e.g. improving food safety through traceability, eco-efficiency and recycling to the detriment of principles that help the bottom line (improved labor practices, farmer livelihoods, food justice, biodiversity and animal rights). At this background,

large farming enterprises have taken up social responsibilities outside of their focus areas in an effort to contribute to the communities they are active in and be socially responsible (Gagalyuk and Valentinov 2019; Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin 2019). Large farming enterprises and particularly agroholdings are trying to respond to societal expectations specifically by means of CSR activities. In some transition economies, they have taken over socially oriented activities long before the concept of CSR (as it is known in the Western world) entered these economies. On the other hand, large-scale agricultural enterprises are often associated with a number of negative societal impacts in public debates, such as land grabbing and distributional injustice in rural areas, loss of biodiversity due to e.g. practices such as monocropping, factory farming, capital-intensive production, which involve the substitution of technology for labor, can lead to unemployment and raise other concerns.

Currently, agricultural enterprises are subject to increased societal demands stemming from consumer activism as well as activist groups as den Hond and de Bakker (2007) observed for organizations more broadly. Pressure from a large set of stakeholders is exerted on large farming enterprises[2] to reform their business practices. The pressure from stakeholders can itself have an influence on the operating performance of large farming enterprises. Navigating the increasingly polarized and politicized debate around these issues is proving challenging for corporate farming enterprises. As the trade-offs associated with CSR have become more apparent (e.g. CSR has not reformed structural societal problems such as e.g. poverty), resistance has become more entrenched. This manifests in CSR activities often being considered insufficient by activist groups and result even in instances of discourse failure between large farming enterprises and certain activist groups. The resistance is based on the position that companies should take action on the whole spectrum of social issues in the first place (and not await regulation to pressure them to do so). In transition and emerging economies, we do not quite have a clear understanding of the CSR activities conducted and how these discourses resonate with large farming enterprises. This is why this study asks: What are the CSR activities of large farming enterprises? Are large farming enterprises highly criticized for their CSR activities and, if yes, how can tensions between large farming enterprises and activist groups be explained? These are the main overarching questions of this thesis, which is an interdisciplinary work inspired by concepts developed within the institutional, stakeholder and social movement theories as well as within sustainability, environmental and agrarian studies. To date, no research efforts were made for systematizing the reasons for public unacceptance (of social engagement) of large farming enterprises. Geographically, the focus of the thesis is on emerging and transition economies of Argentina, Kazakhstan, Russia and Romania where large-scale farming, as well as rising societal expectations toward them, have become particularly widespread over recent decades. At the background of the two overarching questions, the main aim of this thesis is to examine how large farming enterprises understand their social responsibility and where their motivation to conduct these activities stems from. Another purpose is to elicit why certain activist groups consider social responsibility activities insufficient in eliminating systemic social ills (e.g. poverty, lack of employment opportunities, biodiversity loss etc.) Achieving these aims can give answers about the persistent tensions between large farming enterprises and activist groups in emerging and transition economies (Kay, Peuch and Franco 2015; Gallent *et al.* 2019, p. 71). Understanding the causes and consequences of diverging preferences and beliefs can help to design institutions in a way that best reflects them.

Theoretically, this thesis builds on institutional theory and the view that institutional conditions and mechanisms may influence whether organizations are likely to behave in socially responsible ways or not. These issues are explored in three papers and a comprehensive summary. The first article (Hajdu, Daziano and Visser 2021) identifies the corporate social responsibility activities and the motivations of large farming enterprises to undertake them within a qualitative study in Argentina. The second article (Hajdu *et al.* 2021) investigates the drivers (or predictors) of corporate social responsibility activities of farms in Russia and Kazakhstan at the institutional, organizational and individual levels. The third article (Hajdu

and Mamonova 2020) focuses on the definition of social responsibility as demanded by an activist group active in the institutional environment of the analyzed farming enterprises in Romania. The study identifies the reasons why more generally certain activist groups do not accept the CSR of large farming enterprises. The three articles enable to then analyze the institutional preconditions for discourse failure between large farming enterprises and activist groups, exemplified by a radical social movement.

Empirically, the thesis uses a mixed method approach. The analysis is based on in-depth and semi-structured interviews and open discussions in the Southern and Northern regions of Argentina with farm and CSR managers and key informants, in-depth interviews with key informants and semi-structured interviews with managers at farms in Northern, Eastern and Southern Romania; a large-scale survey on CSR predictors in corporate and private farms in Russia and Kazakhstan; in-depth and semi-structured interviews with members of a social movement and rural residents in Romania. Further results from interviews with farming enterprises in Romania complement the overall picture on CSR. Participant observation carried out during conferences and workshop meetings and one social movement annual meeting, analysis of website documents, organization documents, newspaper articles and social media interactions as well as agricultural statistics complement the methods used.

Among other conclusions, this thesis argues that the weakness and incompleteness of the institutional frameworks in emerging and transition economies leaves CSR activities to be largely motivated by individual motivations (of farming enterprises' owners and managers), as is the case of Argentina. At the same time, emerging international institutions such as certifications for exporting farming activities strengthen the presence of CSR activities. These however are present in the horticultural sector or for soy but remain largely absent in the primary agriculture of cash crops such as wheat, corn and barley. Weaknesses of the institutional environment also lead to a few and 'under the radar' CSR activities in countries like Romania.

The thesis also highlights that in the absence of regulative and certain normative institutions (e.g. expressed normative pressure from farmers' organizations), large farming enterprises do not have the pressure or the resources to address all emerging societal issues. Additionally, they may not be aware about several societal issues due to a lack of perceived normative pressure from activist groups. Furthermore, the results in Kazakhstan and Russia support the statement that weak/incomplete institutional frameworks affect CSR via institutional and organizational drivers. In Romania, CSR activities of farming enterprises may be even less visible due to potentially institutional capture by local and political elites. Because of these reasons, conflicts may persist while radical social movements at the fringe may pose additional confrontational stance to large farming enterprises' initiatives due to the differing ideological context they inhabit compared to these. The institutional theory framework assists in highlighting the importance of positionality of different actors (in this case farming enterprise and an activist group) and the role it plays in framing their beliefs around social responsibility. The differing positionality explained through the institutional, organizational and individual drivers for social responsibility explains the continuing discourse failures but also draws steps to better understanding these.

Keywords: agroholdings, corporate social responsibility, grounded theory, institutional pressure, large-scale agriculture, post-Soviet countries, radical social movement

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List of Abbreviations

CAP – Common Agriculture Policy
CEO – Chief Executive Officer
CCAC – Climate and Clean Air Coalition (to reduce short-lived climate pollutants)
CSR – Corporate social responsibility
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
GMO – Genetically modified organism
IFPRI – International Food Policy Research Institute
LVC – La Via Campesina
NGO – Non-governmental organization
PR – Public relations
R&D – Research and development
SMEs – Small and medium-sized enterprises
UN – United Nations
WBCSD – World Business Council for Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

Situating the research focus within societal debates related to the impact of large-scale agriculture - frictions and key features

The agricultural sector globally has recently faced increased societal scrutiny. Within public debates conventional agricultural practices are associated with depletion of natural resources (e.g. biodiversity and ecosystem services loss) and unsustainable dependence on fossil fuels (Power 2010; Robertson *et al.* 2014; Zhang *et al.* 2007). While alternative practices have emerged (e.g. organic agriculture, regenerative agriculture, multifunctional agriculture, sustainable agriculture and agroecology) a moral conflict between societal groups and conventional farming enterprises persists. Farming enterprises are caught between ensuring a sustained income in the face of market and consumer pressures to produce more for less on the one hand and societal demands for a healthful environment (Robertson *et al.* 2014), equity and social justice on the other hand (Alkon and Norgaard 2009). Since the food price crisis of 2007-2008 and financial crisis of 2008, large-scale enterprises have re-become the focus of contention, this time due to concerns over land grabbing and speculation on land markets[3] (De Schutter 2011; Visser and Spoor 2010; Visser and Spoor 2011; Visser, Mamonova and Spoor 2013). CSR (an elaborate definition of how it is understood in this work is given in Fig. 1- Info Box 1, p. 15) can be and, in fact, often is motivated by existing institutional logics (Jamali *et al.* 2017), which differ from developed to developing, emerging, and to transition economies. This is why the largely researched global nature of CSR focusing mostly on developed economies (Pisani *et al.* 2017) does not apply to other types of economies (Pisani *et al.* 2017). In many countries the responsibility to address social issues (such as those related to the natural environment, working conditions and human rights) is increasingly being transferred from the state to firms (Matten and Crane 2005). Emerging and transition economies are adjusting to the norms imposed by western (developed) societies by gradually adopting environmental and social standards. Farming enterprises adopt more and more CSR practices (de Olde and Valentinov 2019) but their activities do not always match the requests of civil society (FIAN 2017). A resolution that scholars have provided so far for the persistent "moral conflict" between farming enterprises and activist groups is a vision (e.g. an agricultural policy) that enforces their common grounds (Jauernig and Valentinov 2019). De Olde and Valentinov (2019) have presciently contended that the practical determination of the common ground would require in-depth investigations of specific trade-offs and conflicts of interest.

As the activities of (agricultural) enterprises have become matters of public debate, pressure from activist groups has become more prevalent (den Hond and de Bakker 2007). In line with den Hond and de Bakker, this study regards activist groups as stakeholder groups that represent a social movement or that claim to do so. A social movement can be defined as a shared belief about a preferred state of the world (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 2001), having the ability to mobilize people into an organized collective effort to solve social problems or even to transform social order (Buechler 2000 in den Hond and de Bakker 2007). One of the main objects of activist groups' critique is in particular large farming enterprises, which are widespread in transition and emerging economies. They are often associated with issues such as land grabbing, access to land difficulties, collaboration with leaseholders involved in modern-day slavery, bribery (Gallent *et al.* 2019, p. 135), land dispossession, benefits

that do not flow to local communities, shortcomings in due diligence (ibid. p. 135). Noteworthy, large farming enterprises, have been shown to respond to at least some portion of societal expectations, e.g. by means of CSR (Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft 2018). However, in general, social responsibility practices of these enterprises are largely understudied and, in the view of continuing criticism on the part of activist groups, it is unclear to what extent they are capable of (or interested in) addressing the issues raised via own CSR.

Accordingly, this research addresses the following questions: 1.) What types of CSR activities do large farming enterprises engage in and what are their motivations for conducting these activities? (Paper I, II) 2.) Do CSR activities and motivations for CSR of large farming enterprises align with the requirements of activist groups and, if not, why? (Paper III). The thesis responds to these questions by illustrating the argument through the analysis of CSR activities of large farming enterprises and the rhetoric of an (agrarian) social movement. In doing so the study contributes fresh insights into how institutional theory and social movement perspectives can be effectively combined to develop new theoretical and practical implications on corporate social responsibility activities of farming enterprises.

Previous research on CSR in transition countries has shown that CSR in these countries is largely about development/improvement of public infrastructure (studies by Bavorová *et al.* 2021; Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft 2018; Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin 2019). While these studies enumerate the types of activities conducted, there is little understanding on where the motivation for the activities stems from and on how socially and ethically minded these activities of agricultural enterprises are. Bavorová *et al.* (2021) have touched upon this issue by bringing institutional theory considerations as motivating factors for CSR activities into the discussion. The authors focus on organizational-level aspects such as legal form, size and economic performance of a farm and individual level factors such as a farmer's age and risk perception as motivating factors for CSR. Previous studies also highlighted the rural residents and small farmers as stakeholders of large farming enterprises and these responding to their needs by different configuration set-ups (e.g. Grouiez 2012, 2014; Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin 2019). The studies pointed to potential conflicts due to e.g. land access concerns or those associated with outcomes the large farming enterprises themselves may cause. However, the studies have not analyzed the interaction between the large farming enterprises' CSR activities and the social responsibility expectations generally posed to them by activist groups. Moreover, none of the studies analyzed the multiple sets of farming enterprises' motivations for CSR stemming simultaneously from institutional, organizational and individual levels. This thesis fills these gaps. It formulates a framework that articulates why the tensions may perpetuate frictions despite potentially present CSR efforts from large farming enterprises. This research looks into the rhetoric of a social movement active in transition and emerging economies with the aim to highlight the cognitive and normative understanding of social responsibility this social movement inhabits in contrast to large farming enterprises. The types of CSR activities conducted, the motivations to undertake them as well as the potential differences in the cognitive and normative understanding of CSR may give insights into the discourse failure between large farming enterprises and societal groups.

Info Box 1: CSR definition

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is generally understood as a set of activities business organizations undertake to contribute to the quality of life for employees and their families, as well as the local community and wider society, to act ethically and contribute to economic growth (WBCSD, 1999). For the purpose of this work the manifestation of CSR lies in unstructured and structured organizational strategies and policies as well as in context-specific activities.[1]
If farming enterprises take over functions that are traditionally taken over by the state, they (respectively the interviewees in this thesis) categorize them as CSR activities. What the definition does not include are activities undertaken for enhancing one's corporate brand through CSR as a marketing and public relations strategy[2] or for the purpose of enhancing their economic performance. Across the papers in this study, we understand corporate social responsibility as activities concerning the social good beyond the interests of the firm (McWilliams and Siegel 2000: 117). Theorists have adopted a variety of views, of which instrumental (e.g. stakeholder theory[a]), political[b], integrative[c] and ethical (normative)[d] theories are to be mentioned.

Fig. 1 - Info Box 1 on the definition of CSR (additional information on the Info Box is available in the Appendix)

2. Objectives

2.1 Research aims and research questions

Farming enterprises may have a hard time discerning between so many constituents and correctly evaluating what is being asked of them. This difficulty derives partly because of the large number of different, and sometimes inconsistent, signals companies receive from a variety of stakeholders, but also partly because of the limited attention companies pay in teasing out the demands raised (Zollo *et al.* 2007). To this purpose the first aim of this thesis was to uncover at a fundamental level what large farming enterprises understand as their social responsibilities (with an emphasis on the social aspects) in the different institutional contexts in which they operate (Paper I, II). Hence the study inquired and surveyed how they actually define their social responsibility and what types of activities they undertake. In a next step, the thesis aimed at assessing the motivations behind conducting these activities. Institutional theory proved to be a suitable framework for interpreting the results, as the themes derived from the interview responses pointed to institutional factors (Paper I). These results then shaped a more thorough survey of three CSR levels (Paper II). Then, the (implicit and explicit) understanding of social responsibility of large farming enterprises was investigated, offered by one societal counterpart, a radical (agrarian) social movement (Paper III). Finally, the thesis inquired for the reasons why certain activist groups do not accept the CSR activities conducted by large farming enterprises. All these steps are covered with three published papers (represented below in three chapters) that address the framework of the study as follows: Aim 1: Assess at a fundamental level what large farming enterprises understand as their social responsibility toward society in the different institutional contexts in which they operate and determine the motivating factors behind

the presence of CSR activities. Aim 2: Assess the reasons that contribute to CSR activities of large farming enterprises not being accepted by certain societal groups via juxtaposing the large farming enterprises' activities and motivations for CSR and the cognitive and normative understanding of social responsibility offered by an activist group, part of a radical (agrarian) social movement.

Whereas previous empirical research has mostly focused on the processes of CSR (how it unfolds within an organization and the impact it has on its performance – i.e. the work of Cochran and Wood 1984; McWilliams and Siegel 2000; Windsor 2001 etc.) such a methodology does not reflect the grounding motivations to do CSR activities and relies on published data or systemized data by the organizations. Similarly, those studies that have singularly focused on the motivation of organizations to conduct CSR activities (e.g. Bavorová *et al.* 2021; Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft 2018; Grouiez 2012, 2014; Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin 2019) did not further investigate how their perceptions and those of their immediate or distant stakeholders (mis)align. This thesis collects largely undisclosed and not systemized CSR data from large farming enterprises. It also investigates cognitive (mis)alignment between farming enterprises and stakeholders. It builds on earlier empirical insights showing that both factors of cognition and motivation are necessary for all parties to frame their thinking about societal problems in similar ways to reach cognitive alignment on the understanding of social responsibility (Zollo *et al.* 2007, 2009).

2.2 Empirical context

Large farming enterprises have been an analytical focus especially within the agroholdings, large-scale land acquisition, and farmland investments research area in development, geography and environmental and sustainability studies. Scores of information have been uncovered in relation to farmland investment models, financial investments in land and typologies of large farming enterprises (see the works of Abeygunawardane *et al.* 2022; Kronenburg García *et al.* 2022; Kuns and Visser 2016; Kuns, Visser and Wästfelt 2016; Magnan 2012; Senesi *et al.* 2016; Spoor, Visser and Mamonova 2012; Visser and Spoor 2011; Visser, Spoor and Mamonova 2014). Juxtaposing the work in those studies that have largely focused on the negative impacts of these farming activities (cited partly in the introduction of this thesis), the former studies on agricultural and land investment models offer a more neutral account of large farming enterprises, highlighting the challenges and risks they face along the contradictions of their activity (Kuns and Visser 2016, p. 19). Within this context, the work on CSR of large farming enterprises in agricultural economics by Gagalyuk and Schaft (2016), Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft (2018), Gagalyuk and Valentinov (2019), Schaft and Brosig (2020), and, more recently, Bavarová *et al.* 2021 and Gagalyuk *et al.* (2021) and development studies (Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin 2019) have been the sole focus on the corporate social responsibility conduct of large farming enterprises.

Gagalyuk and Valentinov (2019) have found that in post-Soviet countries, as is the instance of Ukraine, environmental turbulence and a context of weak institutions leads large farming enterprises to take on more social responsibility than requested, for the purpose of filling institutional voids. Transition and emerging economies are characterized by pervasive institutional voids (Pisani *et al.* 2017) and often experience rapid changes in laws and the regulatory framework within their transitioning

institutional environments. Strengthening of these types of formal institutions is a key focus for the initial transition stage but institutional weakness (Puffer *et al.* 2016) persists. This is because a lack of formal institutions (laws and regulations) and informal institutions (e.g. shared industry norms and common business practices) involves high levels of risk and complexity (Peng 2001). Gagalyuk and Valentinov (2019), emphasize that this is why environmental turbulence, a state of unpredictability of change (Milliken 1987), dominates such economies. Accesses to financial capital, information, and human capital or compliance with law (property rights enforcement) are some of the key factors of a properly functioning market (Schrammel 2014). Where voids exist, actors search for alternative institutions (e.g. informal giving - Kurakin 2015) in order to close these voids so that the market development is not hindered. Scholars have stressed the need to focus on such voids particularly in concert with CSR practices (Ghoul, Guedhami, and Kim 2017; Kolk 2016; Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos 2015) as these may have the potential to bridge the voids (Kolk and Lenfant 2015).

Therefore, one can assume that emerging and transition economies have similarities and differences when it comes to the manifestation of CSR, especially because of, thanks to or potentially despite the institutional settings these countries are characterized by. It certainly becomes a point of interest to then simultaneously look at CSR of large farming enterprises in countries that have experienced a transition from one political-economic regime to another. Countries like Argentina, Russia, Kazakhstan and Romania are all good examples of such transition(s) and related coming to grips with a weak institutional environment. (The reasons for the multi-country approach will be described in greater detail in Chapter 3, p. 28). Noteworthy, large-scale farming can be to a great extent considered an artifact of these institutional environments (Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft 2018). Therefore, how large farming enterprises perceive social issues and construct their CSR is important for these transition and emerging market economies that face severe issues such as poverty, environmental degradation and poor institutional governance (Egri and Ralston 2008). On-the-ground-research in these countries can determine the appropriateness of CSR programmes but also their institutional context-related configuration. The purpose of this research is to advance policy dialogue around the different social responsibility narratives and how they can be integrated into an encompassing narrative for bridging discourse failures. This policy dialogue is better enabled if farming enterprises have the necessary knowledge about different stakeholders and vice-versa.

In very aggregate terms, aside the commonalities in the institutional environment, the focus of production in the studied countries is also similar: mostly grains in different combinations for commercial markets. Large farming enterprises in Argentina produce the bulk of the country's agricultural exports (Verner 2006). Farms of more than 1000 hectares in size (7.6% of all farms) occupy 75% of the total agriculture area (UPOV 2005). The largest farmers are amongst the wealthiest of the population, while small farmers (with less than 25 hectares, that occupy 1% of the agricultural land) typically live in highly precarious conditions and in chronic poverty (van Zwanenberg and Arza 2013). The opening up of the Argentine economy to foreign investment and international trade has been driving sweeping agricultural policy reforms. The loss of agricultural income purchasing power has resulted in the concentration of land in larger production units (Eakin *et al.* 2006). Those smaller units that have remained in production have been forced to restructure and have faced an increasing burden of debt (Latuada 2000; Peretti 1999; Wehbe 1997). Highly capitalized farms had access to new

technology and achievements of high productivity. At the other end, small farmers had only marginal access to technology and obtain meager incomes from agriculture exacerbating the differences between the two extremes over the last two decades (Landini and Murtagh 2011; van Zwanenberg and Arza 2013). The largest version of these farms, agroholdings, their development and activities, has received considerable attention in Argentina (Senesi *et al.* 2017). Agroholdings are also spread in different parts of the world, i.e. in the US, Australia, Canada, Brazil and post-Soviet countries, where they operate vast areas of land.[4]

The agricultural sector in Argentina is not subsidized and farmers take on the full risks inherent in commodity markets (Arora *et al.* 2016). This created an incentive for experiential farming that led to 90% of Argentinian farmland being farmed as "no-till/no-burn agriculture" or conservation agriculture (CCAC Secretariat 2019). Despite this adaptation (contrary to farms in e.g. Romania, which still mainly plough and occasionally burn the crop residues on their plots – Stan, Fintineru and Mihalache 2014), agribusiness activity in the Pampas (one of the regions of the thesis' interviews) is coupled with environmental and social changes due to flooding and drought risk (Aragón *et al.* 2011), associated costs of climate impacts (Cisneros *et al.* 2011), and the expansion of agribusiness more generally (Cáceres 2015). The Northeastern region of Argentina grapples with environmental risks (Chiummiento 2022; Seghezzo *et al.* 2020), while harvesters with dependents in the horticulture sector (lemon crops) seldom escape poverty (Ortiz and Aparicio 2007). To highlight the social responsibility implications of farms, one study in the Pampas region has found that agribusinesses consider economic, environmental and social goals in their planning processes (Arora *et al.* 2016). Another study in the Northeastern Chaco region reports on farmers' personal sustainability assessment. The study finds that among 185 farms assessed in four provinces of the Chaco region none of the farms was entirely sustainable according to the study's sustainability threshold (Seghezzo *et al.* 2020). Further searches do not uncover a more clarifying picture on CSR in the primary agriculture of Argentina.

A discrepancy between very large and very small farms exists also in Russia, Kazakhstan and Romania. Agriculture in former Soviet Union countries had and still has a dualistic structure (Koester 1996). This legacy remains from the times when most land was cultivated by the state and collective farms (Koester 1996). Only a small area of farmland was in the ownership of the members of collective farms and employees of state farms in the form of household plots. The rest, i.e. major part of the farmland area, was in the use of these collective and state farms that were owned directly by the state. It is worth noting that in the republics of the former Soviet Union, large collective farms were central to the life of rural communities. They secured employment and support for subsistence farming, access to production inputs such as fertilizers, seeds and machinery, social services and infrastructure (Gagalyuk and Hajdu 2021). With the end of the Soviet era, agricultural enterprises were not coerced to continue their social obligations anymore. However, amid the transition period characterized by high environmental turbulence, many more agriculture-proximate areas are in need of strong governance and institutions (ibid. 2021). For example, more general issues of rural development, such as rural unemployment, aging population, poverty, lack of education and medical infrastructure have become acute over the last decades. Furthermore, at farm level, farming enterprises are also vulnerable to environmental turbulence arising from market imperfections of production factors such as land, capital and labor.

A transition economy like Russia and Kazakhstan differs thus from a developing economy, like that of Argentina, in that its former centrally planned economy had no free markets and everything was controlled by the state (Radas and Božić 2009). This structure has important implications as the countries have developed unique features of governance based on (or due to) the Soviet legacy (McGee 2009a, 2009b). At the example of Russia, Koester and Petrick (2010) explain the persistence of large farming structures by the existence of first level or embedded institutions. These are deeply ingrained mental models that drive the behavior of people. Koester and Petrick (2010) underline that individuals accept these rules without any reflection on the origin of the rule and on the rationale of it. For example, cognitive-cultural institutions such as patrimonialism, patriotism and informal patronage (Bavorová *et al.* 2021, Kurakin 2015) have been identified to be motivating factors for CSR in the Russian Altai Krai province.

Particularly for the main cereal producing countries Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan numerous large-scale agroholdings have emerged (Petrick, Wandel and Karsten 2011, Wandel 2011). Agroholdings integrate the agricultural production enterprises, often throughout the entire supply chain, such as crop/fodder producers, elevators, processing units and wholesalers (Matyukha, Voigt and Wolz 2015). The persistence of large farming enterprises can be attributed to cultural beliefs that discourage new farmers from adopting an entrepreneurial attitude, trusting formal transactions, or deviating from collective behavior. Furthermore, weak property rights, lacking bankruptcy enforcement, underdeveloped financial markets, and an insecure supply of raw material from agricultural primary production (Koester and Petrick 2010) motivate the proliferation of agroholdings. Thus, weak and lacking formal institutions and the lack of rule of law have further incentivized and promoted the emergence of agroholdings in these countries. Political support also highly contributed to this phenomenon (Matyukha, Voight and Wolz 2015). In the post-Soviet field, agroholdings appeared quite rapidly after 2005, and can now be said to be one of the most visible long-term results of post-Soviet land reforms in the grain-belt of Russia and Ukraine (Kuns 2017).

Romanian large farming enterprises exist within the same dualistic structure and structural polarization. Roger (2016) also adopts an institutional perspective in motivating their continuance. He argues that the dominant position of large-scale agricultural holdings can be attributed to underlying political, administrative, and scientific forces. Primarily located in the East and South of Romania, the businesses that manage these holdings benefit from most of the available European subsidies, and the main markets are export markets (Roger 2016).

Our understanding of how farming enterprises in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Romania perceive and practice CSR is severely limited. While Bavorová *et al.* (2021), Grouiez (2014) and Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin (2019) have provided some insight on CSR practices in Russia, there remains a major conundrum regarding one of the most contested sectors with respect to its social responsibility activities. Studies that further adopt institutional theory refer to the communitarian nature of the institutional settings that prevent CSR from taking root in Russia (Shulimova 2013). As per Gagalyuk and Valentinov's (2019) description of the turbulent environment, Zhao (2012) notes that in countries like Russia, non-regulatory processes such as business control, administrative requests, or normative/ideological influence may play a more significant role in shaping the form of CSR compared to formal institutions like regulations. Thus,

the motivation for CSR in such context may be strategically motivated so that companies can access state resources. In such contexts, the form and priority of CSR are to a large degree shaped by the state and CSR serves the enterprise's political strategy in various ways (Zhao 2012). Furthermore, Russian companies invest in long-term social programmes, which are included in business agreements with local governments. Such activities may be particular also to agribusinesses, however no data has been collected so far to elicit the different types of CSR activities. In Kazakhstan, Yrza and Filimonau (2022) show that businesses anticipate the state to lead on environmental conservation by issuing prescriptions and providing guidelines. In Romania, no studies can be found on CSR in primary agriculture. This underlines the need for a dedicated stream of research that focuses on systematically examining the determinants for CSR activities in emerging and transition economies. It is fundamental to understand how farming enterprises can be more participative and aware of their role as sustainability promoters in weak institutional environments. However, there is still a necessity to understand, which dynamics are able to promote or limit such approaches.

In strong institutional environments, the prevailing view of CSR suggests that the occurrence of CSR is contingent on the presence of strong institutions (Campbell 2007; Deakin and Whittaker 2007; McWilliams and Siegel 2001). However, further empirical inquiries have shown that organizations' CSR choice is not random and may depend on a particular constellation of institutional contexts (Amaeshi *et al.* 2016; Forgione *et al.* 2020; Ortiz-de-Mandojana *et al.* 2016; Young and Thyil 2014). Similarly, companies may address urgent societal issues in the manner of "issues management" regardless of the characteristics of the institutional context they operate in. Starting from the early 1990s, industrialized countries witnessed a resurgence of the broader CSR concept, which encompasses aspects such as working conditions, child labor, union rights, training and technical assistance, gender issues, and more. Public interest groups' demand for farms to be socially responsible persists but became much broader in its focus. In developed nations that are considered non-turbulent environments and institutionally stronger than emerging and transition economies, CSR policies have evolved into an implemented practice that is woven into companies' core strategies and is no longer limited to charity events, donations and public relations (PR) oriented "doing good" (Sharma 2019).

On the contrary, in developing and transition countries, CSR is less formal and targeted at resolving local socioeconomic issues (Visser 2010; Visser and Bidaseca 2010). Giveaways, financial aid and collaborations with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) compensate for resource costs or the lack of suitable institutional setups to address the problems here (Possenti 2012). Weak(er), precarious and challenging institutional environments are those that typically have weak(er) institutional frameworks. Emerging countries and transition economies where legal enforcement mechanisms and the rule of law are much weaker than in developed countries are considered weak(er) environments. In these countries the landscape of independent political and civic groups is sparse (Gollwitzer and Quintyn 2010). In Latin America more specifically, those civic groups that promote social responsibility (Fifka *et al.* 2016) in the agricultural sector are rare, while there is a substantial number of studies on corporate social responsibility in developing countries in general (Baskin 2006; Frynas 2006; Li *et al.* 2010; Visser 2008) and Eastern Europe and Central Asia in particular (Djalilov and Holscher 2017; Koleva *et al.* 2010; Kotilainen *et al.* 2015; Mahmood and Humphrey 2013; Potluri, Batima and Madiyar 2010; Smirnova 2012,

2015) but little on-the-ground CSR research in countries where the need for CSR is most pressing due to greater poverty, environmental degradation and institutional governance issues (Egri and Ralston 2008, p. 325). However, only very few studies addressed CSR in primary agriculture, which is to some extent surprising given the role agriculture plays in the GDP and employment of these countries (The World Bank 2021) and the increasing negative attention farming enterprises more generally receive by stakeholder groups in public debates (de Olde and Valentinov 2019).

In developing countries and transition economies radical activist groups are weaker in exerting their demands and are only of marginal importance to farming enterprises as stakeholders, as they lack legitimacy at the domestic level (state level). However, radical activist groups with a transnational reach that reject the practices of existing organizations on moral arguments do exist (den Hond and de Bakker 2007). Activist groups are a category of potentially influential stakeholders on farming enterprises' operations but also one that is difficult to grasp.

We have diffuse knowledge on the reasons why certain societal groups do not accept the CSR of large farming enterprises. Not the least, the mitigation of public issues, whether of an economic, environmental or social nature, requires parties that are able to reach agreements on priorities and plans of action. Differing cognitive and normative perspectives on the part of farming enterprise managers and stakeholders can delay coherent action and threaten the success of the alliance between business and society at its foundation (Zollo *et al.* 2007). The possibility to reach agreements/common grounds between parties for just and peaceful development and coexistence is therefore an important aspect for scrutiny. By systemizing CSR motivations of large farming enterprises and more deeply understanding activist groups we can explore this possibility and herewith respond to a need of moving away from a universal CSR template to a more contextualized theory of CSR (Filatotchev and Nakajima 2014).

2.3 Theoretical background and literature overview

2.3.1 Levels of CSR analysis and types of institutions motivating CSR activities

CSR has been one of the mechanisms that organizations adopt to contest past institutional logics and redefine the responsibilities of the firm. The process of defining, shaping and controlling issues of CSR can be regarded as a process of deliberately maintaining and/or changing certain norms. Since the 1920s in the United States organizations adapted by developing structures or activities to address prevailing values, norms and rules of society, thereby gaining legitimacy. Gaining legitimacy however is challenging on the global playing field where there are no broadly accepted normative standards, neither in legal nor in moral terms (Habermas 2001; Huntington 1998). Most of the theories analyzing corporate social responsibility of organizations have focused on investigating its connection to financial performance (Campbell 2007). Maignan and Ralston (2002) and Margolis and Walsh (2003) concurred that more attention needs to be paid to other factors, such as institutional mechanisms (beyond the market) that may influence whether an organization behaves in a responsible way or not. As Scott (2003, p. 46) had underlined, the institutional analysis is useful because often such institutions are necessary to ensure that organizations are responsive to the interests of social actors beside themselves, particularly in an increasingly global economy. Through the lens of institutional theory we can explore the set of institutional

conditions under which CSR is conducted or not and how these activities (mis)align with the demands of an activist group.

In both a global context and in the context of underdeveloped or weak institutions in transition and emerging economies, additional strong drivers and pressures for CSR may be present along with or even prior to institutional factors (Dorobantu, Kaul and Zelner. 2017; Gatignon and Capron 2020). The motivations for undertaking CSR activities can derive from pressures at three different levels - institutional, organizational and individual[5]. Regulations and laws (Buehler and Shetty 1974; Fineman and Clarke 1996), standards and certifications (Christmann and Taylor 2006) are classified as addressing CSR at the institutional level of analysis (Aguinis and Glavas 2012). Similarly, normative and cultural-cognitive (Scott 1995) pressures coming from normative expectations of society, consumers, and stakeholders are also classified as focusing on the institutional level. Through norms, values and beliefs different stakeholders e.g. local community, interest groups (Agle, Mitchell and Sonnenfeld 1999; Boal and Peery 1985; Greening and Gray 1994; Marquis, Glynn and Davis 2007; Sharma and Henriques 2005; Stevens *et al.* 2005) can exert a cognitive-cultural pressure on enterprises (e.g. normative pressure from NGOs and social movements).

From an organizational-level perspective, organizations are motivated to conduct CSR out of instrumental reasons (e.g. expected financial outcomes) and normative reasons (Aguinis and Glavas 2012) that lie in the organizations' corporate culture (doing the right thing). This implies that decisions are made based on moral grounds as well as rational economic (i.e. self-interested) grounds (Frederick 1986; Etzioni 1988).

From an individual perspective (internal motivation) researchers have found personal values of managers to motivate CSR activities (Mudrack 2007) as well as individual concern with certain issues (Bansal 2003; Bansal and Roth 2000; Mudrack 2007). These can also stem from a cognitive-cultural pressure, where the norms and beliefs of a society can put pressure on the personal one. As Aguinis and Glavas (2012) argue, personal values are part of the decision-making processes whether individuals realize it or not, so it is important to understand how values influence engagement in CSR (Hay and Gray 1974; Swanson 1999). Visionary leadership and management commitment to ethics (Muller and Kolk 2010) and their equity sensitivity (Mudrack, Mason and Stepeanski 1999) positively affect CSR commitment. The presence and absence of all these levels affect the extent and types of CSR actions and policies organizations choose to implement (Aguinis and Glavas 2012). Figure 2, p. 23 gives an overview of the motivating factors at each level.

An insightful approach from Aguinis and Glavas (2012) is classifying the literature on CSR motivations not only into motivating factors or predictors (what we here define as drivers of CSR), but also identifying mediators (mediating effects) and moderators (moderating effects), conditions under which CSR leads to specific outcomes. Moderators are those factors that describe the conditions under which CSR initiatives influence outcomes, while mediators are those variables that explain the underlying processes and mechanisms of why CSR initiatives are related to an outcome (Aguinis and Glavas 2012). These variables can be present at each level - institutional, organizational and individual.

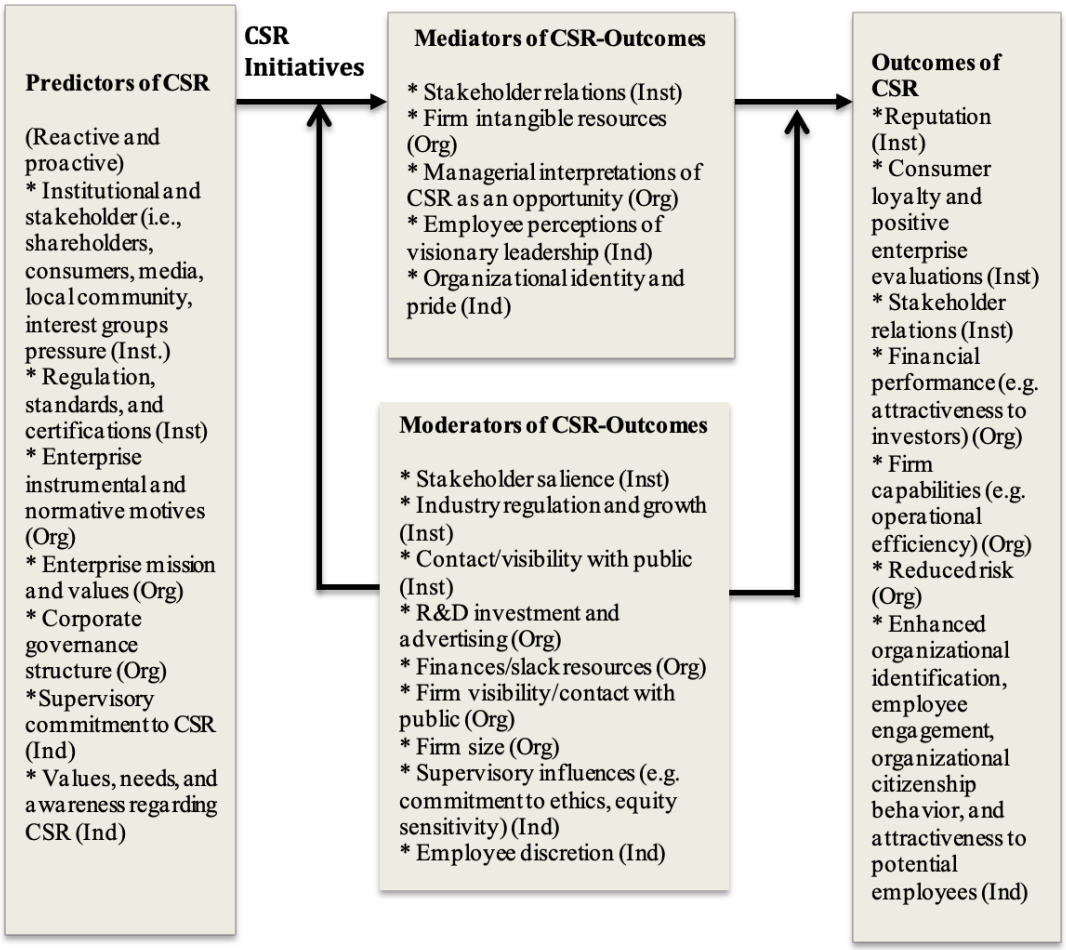

Fig. 2 - Multilevel and multidisciplinary model of corporate social responsibility (CSR): predictors, outcomes, mediators and moderators, adapted from Aguinis and Glavas (2012), *Note:* Inst = institutional level of analysis; Org = organizational level of analysis; Ind = individual level of analysis

The pressure of existing (or missing) institutions can motivate CSR activities. Institutions can be understood as constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction (Garrido, Cunha and Cavalcante 2014; North 1991). They are devised to impose restrictions by defining legal, moral and cultural boundaries (Scott 1995, p. 5). Pressure from societal institutions and collective rationality give a general perception of those organizational actions that are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Suchmann 1995, p. 576). Therefore, certain sets of institutions may be strong and well developed in a nation while being weaker in another one. Similarly, the desirability for expected actions from organizations may be different across different institutional contexts. This is why analyzing CSR in different institutional contexts of the agricultural sector in emerging and transition economies is a fruitful avenue for research but also because emerging, developing countries and transition countries are understudied (Pisani *et al.* 2017). The CSR literature is fragmented regarding the levels of analysis (Aguinis and Glavas 2012). Usually CSR is studied at one level at a time and mostly at the institutional or organizational levels rather than at the individual level. For a more comprehensive understanding of CSR,

multilevel analyses, i.e. concomitant consideration of two or three of the levels (institutional, organizational, individual) are needed (Aguinis and Glavas 2012; Pisani *et al.* 2017). The present study adopts this view and analyzes corporate social responsibility at institutional, organizational and individual levels.

Each CSR level includes interactions of an enterprise with particular stakeholders and these interactions may be designed and maintained differently, depending on the level they are taking place at. Looking at stakeholder interests is the way to respond to the broader concerns increasingly expressed by public interest groups/civil society. Stakeholder theory is the approach to identify the categories of stakeholders and their concerns. The theory offers a combination between inside-out (organization-centric) and an outside-in (society-centric) approach (Whetten, Rands and Godfrey 2003). However, in practice most of the literature departs in the external approach, in which CSR is constituted by a decision made by society, not by business (Whetten, Rands and Godfrey 2003). In this view CSR is a set of expectations placed on the organization by society (Carroll 1979). When this happens, the external, society-centric perspective takes precedence. However, this approach seems too one-stringed and fails to recognize in its full extent the relationship between business and society (Zollo *et al.* 2007, 2009). Companies shape and are shaped by the expectations of different stakeholders (Granovetter 1985). At the same time, companies can affect stakeholders' expectation in a constructive way through dialogue, communication, and information and in a less constructive way through co-optation (Oliver 1991) and manipulation (Ackerstein and Lemon 1999; Scherer and Palazzo 2007). At the same time, external stakeholder pressure might be ambiguous, incompatible or lack the willingness for dialogue (den Hond and de Bakker 2007) making it difficult for companies to transfer these demands into concrete actions. Consequently, an enterprise's ability to be responsive to society's expectations will depend on the interpretation its managers make of what society expects from them. Moreover, managers' morality and understanding of the enterprise's role in society will affect CSR policies and practices. Those managers who understand CSR as not only benefitting their business but also as a tool to benefit different stakeholders will be able to contribute and maintain the relationship between business and society.

The interpretation managers give to what society expects from them lies within the understanding and perceptions these have about societal issues. According to Zollo *et al.* (2007) the majority of research within the field of CSR has focused on societal demand for what corporate behavior is or should be. The question of what companies perceive societal demands upon themselves to be and what explains the gap between their perception about societal issues and that of certain stakeholders has been largely left un-researched. Zollo *et al.* (2007) have undertaken an initiative in this direction aimed at examining multinational corporations operating in various industries across Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries. The study found that there is a wide gap between managers' and stakeholders' understanding on what constitutes corporate social responsibility. They have also found that the larger the pressure from stakeholders, the higher the cognitive alignment between managers and stakeholders (Zollo *et al.* 2007). A similar study in the primary agricultural sector focusing on a specific stakeholder (see p. 27 - Radical (agrarian) social movement activism) has to my knowledge, not been conducted yet. Further systematic reviews into CSR call for a need to expand the study of new actors (such as social movements and NGOs Aguilera-Caracuel *et al.* 2015 in Pisani *et al.* 2017, or stakeholders without a voice - Pisani *et al.* 2017) and

geographical contexts and grasp the unique opportunity to gain theoretical inspiration from other fields than business fields, where CSR has been traditionally addressed (Pisani *et al.* 2017). This thesis extends this work by focusing more in-depth on one industry and on an existing (and not explored) tension between farming enterprises and one radical (agrarian) activist group (peasants are historically considered to be a group without a voice – e.g. Schreg 2020).

Except studies focusing on agriculture more broadly and on the wider food sector (e.g. Elder and Dauvergne 2017; Hartmann 2011; Heyder and Theuvsen 2009; Luhmann and Theuvsen 2016, 2017; Maloni and Brown 2006; Mazur-Wierzbicka 2015; Murphy-Bokern and Kleeman 2014; Mueller and Theuvsen 2014 to name a few), research on CSR activities, specifically in the primary agriculture sector, has been virtually largely neglected. These studies had focused on the following:

- Walmart's CSR activities in Nicaragua, where Elder and Dauvergne (2017) interviewed supply chain personnel and smallholder farmers and found that Walmart's efforts to control supply chains in Nicaragua do not advance rural sustainability, failing to help agrarian societies and confirming CSR as a business strategy;
- CSR in the food sector and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), where Hartmann (2011) underlines the aggregate social and environmental impact of SMEs and the importance of these engaging in a more proactive strategy with respect to CSR. The author also highlights the importance for research to focus on the challenges SMEs face to secure CSR compliance;
- CSR in German agribusiness companies, where Heyder and Theuvsen (2009) give insights into the perception of high external pressure in various fields linked to food production (especially with regard to the position of an enterprise towards GMOs), the understanding of social responsibility by the agribusiness companies and the way CSR is integrated into the firm's strategic management;
- The state of the research on CSR in agribusiness, where Luhmann and Theuvsen (2016) find that research on agribusiness-related topics in CSR is still scarce and explorative fieldwork such as expert interviews with different stakeholders to be suitable for gaining insight into agribusiness-specific aspects of CSR in firms;
- CSR in the German poultry sector, where Luhmann and Theuvsen (2017) identified the areas consumers most place concern on such as product quality, animal welfare and employee issues. The authors recommend that firms should adapt their CSR activities to the preferences of different target groups.
- CSR in the food supply chain, where Maloni and Brown (2006) develop a comprehensive framework of supply chain CSR in the food industry;
- Mazur-Wierzbicka (2015) showed that CSR could be applied in agriculture as a sustainable development tool. They show the connection between CSR and the Common Agricultural Policy and public opinion on socially responsible agriculture expressed by EU citizens. They arrive at the conclusion that farmers should take the CSR concept into account, as it would contribute to the improvement of farmers' image as perceived by stakeholders.
- The role of CSR in reducing emissions from agriculture and food, where Murphy-Bokern and Kleeman (2014) in a study for IFPRI find emerging early efforts in the agri-food sector to introduce climate responsibility strategies in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;

- Mueller and Theuvsen (2014) argue that consumers are a firm's most important stakeholders. Their results show that consumers distinguish between a firm's economic, internal and external responsibilities. This does not confirm Carroll's distinction between four responsibility classes (economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic).

This lack of CSR studies in primary agriculture is particularly notable in former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asian countries, and Latin American countries. Some academic research has underscored the responsibility activities of large farming enterprises in Russia and in Ukraine (e.g. Bavorová *et al.* 2021; Denisenko *et al.* 2021; Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft 2018; Grouiez 2012; Levkivska and Levkovych 2017; Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin 2019). In addition, research has shown that farming enterprises in the transition countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia have to cope with the turbulence of a poorly reformed institutional environment (Gagalyuk and Valentinov 2019), which differentiates these countries from Western economies characterized by more stable institutions. This turbulence is discernible in and nurtured by the presence of institutional weakness involving the lack of strong governance, legal systems, market and civil society. Farming enterprises respond to the challenges mentioned by engaging in CSR activities (Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft 2018; Gagalyuk *et al.* 2021).

Despite mounting societal debates on the environmental and social impact as well as moral concerns over the activity of the agricultural sector, and more specifically large farming enterprises (addressed among others in the works of Balmann *et al.* 2013; Clapp 2017; Harvey 2021; Hermans *et al.* 2017; Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2010; Lambin and Meyfroidt 2011; Lapa, Gagalyuk and Ostapchuk 2015; Lindner and Vorbrugg 2012; Messerli *et al.* 2015; de Olde and Valentinov 2019; Plunkett *et al.* 2017) and growing public demand for farming enterprises to accomplish more sustainable practices (see Codron *et al.* 2005; Friedrich, Derpsch and Kassam 2012), research has been less concerned with exploring how farming enterprises are equipped to interact with such concerns. Those studies that have concentrated their focus on large farming enterprises point to CSR motivations unfolding along a 'business case' CSR (Grouiez 2014; Harbar 2020; Moser 2015: 261-262; Moser 2016). Some studies have also identified social support configurations in rural areas of Russia (Grouiez 2012) and the Altai Krai province, where CSR is seen as a form of goodwill and moral responsibility, or as "'gift', 'sponsorship', 'altruism'" to prevent rural degradation and depopulation (Kurakin 2015). Additionally, in Eastern Europe and Central Asian countries, CSR is viewed as a means of supporting smaller farms and household plot owners (Hanf and Gagalyuk 2018). CSR also unfolds concomitantly along a public relations strategy (Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin 2019), as a political objective (Amelina 2000a, 2000b, 2001) or in the shape of informal relations between farms and municipalities (Kurakin 2015) that mitigates both the weakness of the state and of market self-regulation (Kurakin 2015). More recent studies (e.g. Bavorová *et al.* 2021) account for the importance of institutional theory in addressing CSR in transition economies.

2.3.2 Radical (agrarian) social movement activism

Agrarian social movements in the studied countries are present but existing literature does not confirm they have an influence on the way farming enterprises conduct their CSR activities.

Radical transnational social movements are organizations, networks, coalitions and solidarity linkages of farmers, peasants and their allies that cross national boundaries and that seek to influence national and global policies (Edelman and Borras 2021). They have contributed to reframing the terms and parameters of a wide range of debates and practices including environmental sustainability and climate change, land rights and redistributive agrarian reforms, food sovereignty, neoliberal economics and global trade rules, crop genetic material and other agricultural technology, the human rights of peasants and gender equity. The need of solidarity beyond the nation-state is not new, as it was present in Central and Eastern Europe under the form of the "Green International" in the early twentieth century (Hajdu and Mamonova 2020). In more recent decades, efforts to organize across borders in Western Europe, Central America and Southeast Asia drew on regional traditions and later brought into being wider coalitions, such as La Via Campesina (LVC). La Via Campesina consists largely of national-level movements that transcend national frontiers and make claims on states and on supra-state institutions (e.g. Food and Agriculture Organization-FAO, United Nations-UN etc.) but are still bound to "national" institutions such as e.g. norms and beliefs (Hajdu and Mamonova 2020). La Via Campesina has been the most famous radical transnational agrarian movement on the global social justice scene during the past twenty years (Edelman and Borras 2021). In 2014, it had 164 affiliated movements and declares it represents 200 million farmers (Edelman and Borras 2021).

Agrarian scholars contend that the emergence of transnational agrarian movements was closely linked to the political and economic landscape of the 1980s, characterized by the spread of neoliberal globalization, and that this context underpins their institutional approach. Transnational agrarian movements can have large commercial farmers, rich farmers, middle farmers, poor farmers, middle peasants, poor peasants or landless laborers as part of their constituency (see Edelman and Borras 2021 for more detail on La Via Campesina) and are rarely coherent, contrary to what activists tend to project in their rhetoric. Large transnational movements such as LVC are generally ideologically diverse but a dominant ideological framework guides the movement. Its leadership is radical agrarian populist, anti-capitalist and aspires to an alternative agricultural vision in which the "middle peasantry" is at the center. While other transnational social movements are concerned with linking producers to markets and trade (e.g. World Farmers Organization-WFO), LVC emphasizes autonomy of smallholder agriculture and "strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are destroying people and nature" (La Via Campesina 2011). It does so by adopting a confrontational discourse that refuses to engage with certain institutions (e.g. The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, The World Trade Organization), contrary to other movements with other political orientations (e.g. International Land Coalition-ILC, to give one example, a conservative-progressive coalition of international financial institutions and NGOs, which prefer to form partnerships with intergovernmental and supra-state institutions). The contrasting ways that radical transnational (agrarian) social movements engage with intergovernmental institutions are related to their distinct ideological perspectives.

Social movements theory has shown that there are reformative movements that adopt a collaborative activism with the aim to reform institutions (de Bakker, den Hond and Laamanen 2017). However, there are also radical movements, who do not aim to reform institutions but want their radical change. This is why they adopt "expose and oppose" or "naming and shaming" mechanisms. They expose those organizations that fail in their social responsibility activities, even if they are more proactive than other organizations. If radical groups can clearly show how even proactive firms are incapable and failing at changing institutions, the consequence will be that laggard firms are viewed as even less able to do good, which, in turn, implies a need for fundamental change in the radical movements' view. To bring about field-level change, radical activist groups are more likely to challenge proactive firms, whereas reformative groups are more likely to challenge laggard firms and work with proactive firms (de Bakker, den Hond and Laamanen 2017).

3. Methodological approach and methods

The present work aims to inform about CSR activities of farming enterprises and how these activities are reflective of the motivations and pressures to undertake CSR activities in the context of transition economies and emerging economies of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Latin America. To fulfill this aim, the study is based on primary data on CSR collected in Argentina (Paper I) and Russia and Kazakhstan (Paper II). A further elaboration focusing on activist groups in the primary agricultural sector of Romania gives insight into the demands generally posed by these on large farming enterprises. The case study of the radical (agrarian) social movement (the food sovereignty movement) reveals emerging demands posed to large farming enterprises in Eastern Europe and globally (Paper III). Additional insights gathered through in-depth interviews in Romania with farming enterprises and key informants contribute to the methodological approach.

The decision to focus on the four countries (Argentina, Romania, Kazakhstan, and Russia) has three motivations. One is the rapid development of large-scale farming activities and that of agroholdings and the associated social and environmental concerns of intensive farming methods (Horrigan, Lawrence and Walker 2002; Khanna, Swinton and Messer 2018; Nijkamp and Vindigni 2002; Ramankutty and Rhemtulla 2012; Tilman *et al.* 2002) as well as the associated societal demands to address these concerns in these countries. A second one is the extensive agrarian structure of these countries and the vast rural population still dependent on subsistence agriculture as a social buffer (Petrick and Tyran 2003). Last but not least, the presence of the agrarian social movement (food sovereignty movement) in Romania, Argentina and Central Asian countries prompted this focus. So why study a social movement and its interplay with the social responsibility activities of companies in transition and emerging economies? While bringing about newly emerging pressures, radical (agrarian) social movements have at present little overt impact on companies' operations and decision-making processes. However, activist groups face formal institutional voids around their issues and engage in informal institutional work to build supporting communities to fill the voids (Ali *et al.* 2022). Considering their legitimacy in supra-state levels (European debates on agricultural development as well as policy design - e.g. CAP, UN declaration on the rights of peasants, FAO etc.), from a practical view it would be important to study the potential of agrarian social movements to impact the social responsibility

conduct of farming enterprises and vice versa the farming enterprises to be aware of this one social movement. From a theoretical perspective, this thesis aims to investigate what the perceptions on social responsibility of a radical movement are and whether and to what extent these align with those of agricultural managers.[6] Overall, the thesis focuses on the motivations and demands for farm engagement in CSR, as well as on the interactions of farms' CSR activities with country-specific institutional arrangements and developments.

The results derive from a qualitative study in Argentina involving in-depth interviews with 18 farm managers (17 farming enterprises) in the cereal and citrus sector.[7] The analysis in this first paper is based on interviews with farming enterprises, CSR managers and CEO's in Northern, Northwestern, Central and Eastern regions of Argentina. Additionally, 16 interviews with key informants from the academic sector, NGOs, extension services for small farms, contractors, small farmers complement the perception about the agricultural sector in Argentina.

In Russia and Kazakhstan, over 800 farms of various sizes and ownership types, that produce various agricultural commodities involving crop and animal production, were surveyed. A structured questionnaire survey was used for data collection and descriptive statistics and logistic regression (Peng, Lee and Ingersoll 2002) for the assessment of the survey data. The logistic regression technique was applied to predict a binary outcome of farms' CSR engagement or non-engagement based on a series of independent variables representing the institutional-, organizational- and individual-level factors of CSR.

Aside of using thematic analysis, participant observation and case study analysis for the qualitative inquiries, one important aspect of the methodological approach was to apply grounded theory coding techniques. The primary focus for the first paper, at the stage where nothing was known at all about the corporate social responsibility of large farming enterprises in Argentina, was not to test a hypothesis derived from existing theory. The focus was on seeking to construct themes and qualified generalizations from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses. Additionally, grounded theory is widely used in areas that are considered "exploratory" or discovery-oriented. For the purpose of this study, grounded theory coding techniques assisted in three ways: first, they helped define 'individual values' of farm managers supporting the engagement of their farms in CSR activities. Second, they assisted with self-reflexivity and handling own prejudices and assumptions on different themes by writing reflective memos during the fieldwork and data analysis. Third, it defined the research process into conducting literature reviews on 'individual values' after data analysis. In addition to extensive literature reviews before the fieldwork the author conducted literature review during and after the data analysis to interpret the data. In comparison with thematic analysis that was used for the rest of the analysis in the paper, grounded theory techniques are an iterative process that includes multiple cycles of coding and interpreting already during the collection of fieldwork data.

These results are further corroborated with the analysis of the pressures in the external environment of Romanian farming enterprises deriving from the activity of an activist group part of an agrarian social movement active internationally in numerous developed as well as emerging and transition economies. 23 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with social movement representatives and members and 9 key informants

were conducted for this analysis. The understanding of CSR activities in transition economies was complemented with 24 in-depth and semi-structured interviews conducted with farm managers in Northern, Eastern and Southern Romania and 9 interviews with key informants. An additional 6 interviewees refused to be recorded) (to date unpublished results but results that are referred to in this thesis). Further questions about the movement and the themes raised by them (e.g. land grabbing) have been addressed to farming enterprises in both Argentina and Romania.

4. Results

4.1 Academic article summaries

Paper I: **Institutions and individual values motivating corporate social responsibility activities in large farms and agroholdings** Anna Hajdu**,** Marcos F. Daziano, Oane Visser **–** *Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities have been shown to derive from external and internal motivations of an enterprise. Little attention has been given to motivations of managers in large farms and agroholdings to undertake CSR activities thanks to individual values and pressure from institutions. We therefore investigate the types of CSR activities conducted by 18 managers in large farms and agroholdings in Argentina. We underline their perception of social issues and their motivations to do CSR activities. The framework developed in this paper shows that given the lack of pressure from national-level formal and other informal institutions, individual values (informal institutions) and international institutions (certification schemes-formal institutions) carry more weight in managers' decision to do CSR activities. While some of these motivations have an instrumental background, they overlap with normative motivations that underlie the business activity.*

Paper II: **Determinants of corporate social responsibility among farms in Russia and Kazakhstan: a multilevel approach using survey data** Anna Hajdu, Taras Gagalyuk, Eduard Bukin, Martin Petrick **–** *Building on the institutional theory of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and research on CSR in the agriculture of post-Soviet transition economies, the present paper investigates the institutional, organizational and individual factors of farm engagement in CSR activities. Based on a survey of 800 farms in Russia and Kazakhstan, the interaction between the farms' social role and multilevel institutional characteristics is addressed. We observe notable positive effects of local labor sourcing, insecure land use conditions and farm size (in terms of land area) on farms' CSR engagement. Individually owned farms, as opposed to corporate farms, tend to be more CSR affine. In addition, we find weak statistical evidence of CSR engagement among the farms affiliated with agroholdings. We discuss the results in the context of different levels of CSR analysis.*

Paper III**: Prospects of Agrarian Populism and Food Sovereignty Movement in Post-Socialist Romania** Anna Hajdu, Natalia Mamonova **–** *The paper investigates a transnational social movement and its discourse at the example of La Via Campesina in Romania**.** We assess the definition of social responsibility as demanded by an activist group active in the institutional environment of the analyzed agricultural organizations. We further, separately of the article, evaluate whether their demands on social responsibility align with the definition of CSR of large farming enterprises in the studied regions. We find that the movement's belief system is anti-capitalist (although*

the position is contested in Romania) and underpins their rhetoric. The movement requires a rollback on land deals arguing that these have an impact on access to land for young farmers, they prioritize a struggle against dispossession, control of seeds, biodiversity, feminism, food justice and food sovereignty. However, some of the movement's themes do not find understanding among the largely conservative constituency of rural areas in Romania, to whom feminism or food sovereignty may be rather abstract or distant constructs compared to the main social issues (lack of medical and educational infrastructure, high outmigration, lack of alternative sources of income to subsistence agriculture).

4.2 Research Question 1: Types of CSR activities and motivations for CSR

4.2.1 CSR activities

The inquiry on CSR activities identified that farming enterprises in Argentina conduct community development and philanthropic activities. They collaborate with NGOs and in an instance a consultancy, to address the issues of poverty and education. The CSR activities range from a mix of basic charitable giving in the form of product and money donations for educational and health purposes to targeted programmes devised by the enterprise or together with schools and health organizations for addressing specific issues (women's employment opportunities, growing crops, substance abuse, child labor, first aid and fire prevention courses, environmental education activities, biodiversity monitoring etc. (a detailed overview of CSR activities can be found in Fig. 3, p. 35). As reformative organizations (den Hond and de Bakker 2007; Dzhengiz, Barkemeyer and Napolitano 2021) these NGOs enable interaction and collaboration with the agricultural sector. They have legitimacy in local communities and together with other local organizations (e.g. schools, hospitals, consultancies etc.) they exert a request (not pressure) toward farming enterprises to engage in these activities.

All the 17 farming enterprises interviewed in Argentina undertake some form of CSR activities, except one of the enterprises. On a first level of engagement, some managers resume to ad hoc donation of goods or money to charity or assistance of employees with educational or health matters (ad hoc refers to non-systematic activities that derive instantly, depending on the issue at hand. Enterprises may have an allocated budget to these types of activities or may have no established budget at all.), a type of CSR Newell and Muro (2006) framed as 'rather passive and concentrated in its 'soft, voluntary and philanthropic phase'. On a second level companies channel their philanthropic activity in a more coordinated way by collaboration on health and educational projects with NGOs. A third level of engagement is that of devising own projects and goals through a company NGO and establishing partnerships with other private sector organizations, NGOs and educational institutions. Another level comprises companies that also collaborate with research institutes to address environmental problems that may have social consequences (e.g. monitoring of bees for cross-contamination with pesticides, wildlife monitoring).

The CSR activities conducted in Kazakhstan and Russia considers farms' engagement with regard to land use structure, labor hiring, corporate and individual ownership, specialization, and perceptions of the strength of existing institutions. The CSR activities identified in the study include rural infrastructural support, addressing uncertain lessee-landownership relationships (risk of losing land) and dependence on local labor supply, maintaining and operating assets, caring for employees, and

engaging with the general public. The study also reveals that CSR engagement tends to increase with increasing farm size, individual farm ownership, and agroholding affiliation, while decreasing with a greater value of assets.

CSR activities in Romania focus on strategic (company excursions, compensation packages to attract and keep young people) and ad-hoc activities (individual assistance with resources) focused on employees. Other activities envisage philanthropic donations for annual community events, health or educational projects, as well as the improvement of rural infrastructure (roads, drainage canals, waste cleaning).

4.2.2 Levels of CSR analysis and types of institutions motivating CSR activities

In Argentina, the study identifies CSR motivations that pertain to the i) institutional, and ii) individual level. Motivations for CSR at the institutional level derive from large farming enterprises catering to export markets that align with institutional-level conditions of international certification schemes (e.g. UN Global Compact) to comply with sustainability standards. At the individual level, primarily the management of the family-owned farming enterprises is motivated out of the personal values of identification, benevolence and obligation to be socially responsible. These findings suggest that CSR engagement of large farming enterprises is subject to the simultaneous effects of factors representing different levels.

The thesis' qualitative studies in Argentina and Romania did not show CSR motivation to derive at the organizational level. Thus, while CSR is not likely to be embedded within an overall enterprise vision and culture in Romania and appears as part of the enterprise's everyday agenda only in four cases in Argentina, farming enterprises in Russia and Kazakhstan point to an organizational level motivation for CSR. At the organizational level, the results show that CSR increases with farm size. At the same time, the engagement in CSR activities tends to increase for agroholding-affiliated enterprises and for considerably smaller individual farms that have less power on the land market and may conduct CSR activities motivated out of resilience concerns of their own activity.

Since civil society is not as strong as in developed economies and the domestic societal norms differ, farming enterprises may feel less pressure at organizational level to address societal issues. In Kazakhstan and Russia, the role of the state and how it supports or impedes civil society as well as the types of NGOs and social movements present to potentially exert this pressure, deserve closer scrutiny in future research to understand the pressure at/motivation deriving from the organizational level.

The thematic analysis indicates that managers of large farming enterprises do not experience sectorial nor national-level institutional pressures. No coercive political regulation nor formal constraints or normative pressure of professional groups through for example farmers' associations or other independent organizations exist. Most of the companies are part of at least one farmers' organization. Especially in Aapresid (Argentine Association of Direct Sowing Producers – Asociatión Argentina de Productores en Siembra Directa) social issues are discussed and awareness about them is raised but the companies unanimously do not feel pressure to be socially responsible[8]. This situation is further coupled with non-existing activism from consumers and employees and the apparent lack of other formal organizations such as NGOs that

would be critical of these companies' activity or would request to specifically address a wider array of social issues.

While among the institutional level factors this study has found that regulative pressures are less present in domestic markets for cash crops such as wheat, regulative pressure in the form of international certifications are present in the soybean and horticulture (citrus) sector, where standards and certifications are requested by world markets. Despite the lack of this pressure the study finds the presence of individual level factors motivating CSR in all sectors including the cash crops sector. While the literature further argues for organizational level factors and our study confirms this finding in Russia and Kazakhstan, results in Argentina and Romania could not elicit strong motivation at the organizational level. Our study rather finds that individual motivations have more weight in the decision-making process for CSR.

The results from Argentina motivate a multilevel approach to investigating the CSR activity of large farming enterprises at three levels - institutional, organizational and individual. Therefore, the thesis further proceeded with hypothesizing the institutional-, organizational- and individual-level factors for CSR engagement of farming enterprises in Kazakhstan and Russia. The findings here indicate that farms' CSR activities in the form of infrastructural support to rural communities likely address the uncertainties of local institutional environments, associated primarily with the risk of losing land and dependence on local labor supply.

The additional study on CSR conducted in Romania gives a broader understanding of the role of institutional environments in the (de)motivation to conducting CSR activities. We find that in Romania, despite being conducted by a few farms (6 out of 24), wide-range CSR activities in the primary agriculture sector are missing. The majority of large farming enterprises interviewed do not engage in CSR activities. Those enterprises that do undertake CSR, undertake either a low-profile CSR or a variety of ad-hoc CSR activities.

Overall, interviewees in Romania pointed to institutional constraints such as lack of irrigation, expensive and unsuitable inputs, lack of a cadastral plan, approaching climate change issues, lack of qualified labor which all pose a greater concern for their farming enterprises than CSR issues. A hurdle for these enterprises in the case of Romania is insecure institutions. Private interests in Romania dominate public institutions, leading to a lack of transparency, accountability and democratic control. These conditions make it difficult for farming enterprises to engage in CSR activities as they face various barriers and challenges. Captured institutions are often associated with corruption and limited access to information, which can negatively impact CSR activities. Lack of transparency can prevent companies from knowing the needs of the communities they aim to impact, which can lead to ineffective CSR programmes. The weak institutional environments may thus further deepen the difficulty in solving the moral conflict between large farming enterprises and societal groups. CSR activities under such conditions are even less present and emerge under a sense of inertia. The CSR activities may be perceived as threats to their power and authority by those elites who have captured the institutions (a more detailed analysis of the reasons why local elites may perceive CSR activities as a threat is not part of this thesis' purpose).

One important finding is that companies prioritize actual CSR actions over communication of those actions, which is in contrast to previous research suggesting a misbalance in favor of CSR talk/communication. This holds true across all countries studied, and indicates that companies prioritize doing socially responsible activities rather than just talking about them as a greenwashing or Western-like PR strategy. Overall, the study's main message is that there is a discrepancy between CSR action and communication, but this discrepancy is in favor of CSR action.

This finding is particularly significant because it challenges the prevailing notion that CSR is merely a superficial public relations strategy used by companies to protect a positive image. Instead, it suggests that companies are taking concrete actions to promote social responsibility, even if they may not always be explicitly communicating these efforts. This highlights the importance of looking beyond an enterprise's public statements and marketing materials and examining its actual behavior and impact. Furthermore, it underscores the need for enterprises to prioritize genuine CSR efforts rather than simply using it as a tool for image building.

Finally, the results in the studied countries show that CSR cannot be applied as a mechanism to address all societal needs. One main reason is that farming enterprises acknowledge to not have the resources to address all the issues themselves. The study in Kazakhstan and Russia points to CSR engagement across a variety of scales (irrespective of enterprise size) and raises the need to better understand the institutional and cultural contexts under which these activities and the necessity to be addressed emerge.

4.3. Research question 2: Juxtaposing the large farming enterprises' activities and motivations for CSR and the cognitive and normative understanding of social responsibility offered by an activist group

The thesis' second overarching question was whether the CSR activities reflect the requirements of an activist group. As the methodology for this study did not allow for the analysis of the whole spectrum of farms' stakeholders, this question is addressed from a farming enterprises perspective. The activities conducted in Argentina and Romania respond to some institutional gaps identified by the farming enterprises and can be covered with farming enterprises' own expertise and resources and those of local NGOs. Fringe stakeholders such as agrarian groups (e.g. food sovereignty movement) are not overtly present in the farming enterprises' institutional environment, which is why large farming enterprises do not perceive and are not pressured by the needs of this specific activist group. This is why the CSR activities conducted do not reflect the requirements of radical activist groups. The analysis of the radical (agrarian) social movement in Romania (part of La Via Campesina food sovereignty movement-LVC[9]) elicits where it positions itself within the institutional environment. It finds that large farming enterprises represent a different ideological context (globalized capitalism ideology) to that of the radical food sovereignty movement (anti-globalist ideology). This difference in ideological contexts underscores a cognitive misalignment on the meaning of social responsibility (represented in Fig. 3, p. 35) and the importance of positionality of actors that underpins future discourse failure with this societal group.

La Via Campesina 'social responsibility' activities and demands	**Farming enterprises' social responsibility activities**
Stakeholders: peasants, small-scale farmers and landless people *Approach:* nonviolent resistance to corporate-led agriculture *Interest:* instrumental and moral *Values:* humanism as opposed to individualism and materialism; equality and social justice, solidarity	*Stakeholders:* local communities, employees, NGOs *Approach:* community development and philanthropic CSR activities; fulfillment of standards e.g. United Nations Global Compact *Interest:* instrumental and moral *Values: identification, benevolence, obligation*
- agroecology and peasants seeds (agrarian reform and peasant-based agriculture) - climate and environmental justice - food sovereignty (as response to hunger, rural poverty and destructive agricultural practices); against trade liberalization - international solidarity - access to land, water and territories - peasants' rights as human rights, migrating farmers' rights - women and gender parity	- poverty - education - health - biodiversity monitoring - child labor - (women's) employment opportunities - local infrastructure (roads, canals) - donations and charity (philanthropic activities) - adherence to labor laws - environment (acc. to e.g. UN Global Compact standards)

Fig. 3 – Social responsibility activities and goals of agricultural enterprises interviewed in Argentina and Romania and that of the radical social movement La Via Campesina

The study of the radical activist group suggests that the critiques we find in Western societies' public debates, as well as in the academic literature do exist in the agricultural sector of Romania and Argentina. Interviews with social movement members, key informants and large farming enterprises in Romania as well as analysis of local media communications confirm this. Insights from interviews with key informants in Argentina (academics, small farms extension agencies, small farmers, NGOs) show similar developments in Argentina. However, the interviewed companies have not found themselves criticized by this specific stakeholder. The conclusion derived from here is that the radical (agrarian) social movement acts at the fringe of farming enterprises' (CSR) activity, even if these engage minimally in CSR activities. Companies with other characteristics than those identified by this study may be more present where the agrarian social movement is active.

The findings show that some farming enterprises in Romania are aware of the existence of the activist group but similarly have not perceived pressure from it towards their activities. The farming enterprises interviewed in Argentina do not experience the critiques present in public debates and expressed by the radical (agrarian) social movement analyzed. However, in both Romania and Argentina, the agricultural sector and more specifically large farming enterprises are subject to looming critique on their environmental and social effects, as the key informant interviews and case study suggest. In both countries there is a perception that land is concentrated in the hands of a few large landowners, which leads to concerns of unequal distribution of resources and power, disappearance of family farms in Argentina and lack of young farmers'

access to land and of small farms to consolidate their plots into larger ones in Romania. There is concern that this concentration of land ownership can also result in land and environmental degradation. Labor conditions are an additional concern with reports on long working hours, low wages, and limited access to labor rights and protections. This can contribute to a negative perception of farming enterprises as exploitative or unethical. Furthermore, in both countries, the historical context contributes to a negative perception of large farming enterprises. In Argentina the agricultural sector has historically been associated with the exploitation of indigenous peoples and small farmers. In Romania, the legacy of communism but also the aftermath of transition and farmland investments may have contributed to a negative view of large-scale agriculture as a symbol of corruption, state control and oppression. There are likely many more factors that contribute to these perceptions. Additionally, there may be positive aspects of the sector that are not at all or fully being recognized. Understanding the factors and the reasons that shape these perceptions needs to be the concern of future studies.

This thesis did not find pressure from civil society and specifically from this activist group on farming enterprises and identified the reasons why their pressure is not felt by farming enterprises. This is why it cannot affirm or disaffirm the contention that the larger the pressure from stakeholder groups the higher the cognitive alignment between managers and stakeholders (Zollo *et al.* 2007). However, the thesis argues that this alignment following pressure may be the case with reformative civil society groups, who are willing to cooperate but less likely with radical groups whose cooperation would be seen as a confirmation of existing structures they discredit. The challenge for radical activist groups that are present in the agricultural sector remains to inform farming enterprises of their interests and receive cognitive legitimacy for their own understanding of social responsibility.

5. Discussion

CSR research in primary agriculture is incipient. This work is a pioneering exploratory research into CSR engagement and the motivation of large farming enterprises. It discusses the motivations behind corporate social responsibility activities of large farming enterprises in Argentina, Kazakhstan, Romania and Russia.

This thesis' main contribution is an empirical analysis of CSR at three different levels of analysis simultaneously, which is a novel approach in CSR research, especially in the agricultural sector. One of the main theoretical contributions of this thesis is the proposition of a transitory trait of the locus of motivation for CSR. This suggests that the driving force for CSR may shift across different levels, depending on the context and specific circumstances and may also act as a bridge between levels. For example, as the case of Argentina suggests, if there is an absence of CSR drivers at the institutional or organizational level, farming enterprises owners (individual level) may be more motivated to engage in CSR activities. While macro-level institutional structures in Argentina reflect different values that prescribe specific roles and responsibilities for actors in certain contexts (a minority of agricultural enterprises conducting CSR activities) those values simultaneously drive CSR agency within these contexts, leading agricultural enterprises to adopt a particular type of CSR. The contrary may also be the case (but did not derive from the conducted interviews for this study)

that in the absence of institutional and organizational level drivers, there is an absence of individual level drivers too. A variety of drivers can contribute to these shifts among levels. This study highlights the relevance of such an approach and uncovers a more dynamic understanding of CSR as a process shifting across individual, organizational and institutional levels depending on the driving factors present in the context analyzed. The idea that CSR can shift across different levels highlights the importance of taking a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing CSR issues, and ensuring that enterprises are aligned with societal expectations and values. This novel understanding builds on previous approaches focusing on the bridging function of values in institutional theory-based CSR research of non-Western contexts (Risi *et al.* 2023). Simultaneously, such research can consider the influence of actors conducting CSR activities on their institutional environments, not only the other way around.

The thesis also highlights the potential for CSR motivation to appear simultaneously at all three levels or be mostly absent at all three levels (as shown in the case of Romania). These findings underscore the complexity and variability of CSR motivations in different institutional contexts. Furthermore, they highlight the significance of utilizing a multi-level analysis approach to better understand CSR drivers and rationales in different institutional contexts. A framework deriving from the results of the thesis is presented in Fig. 4, p. 37.

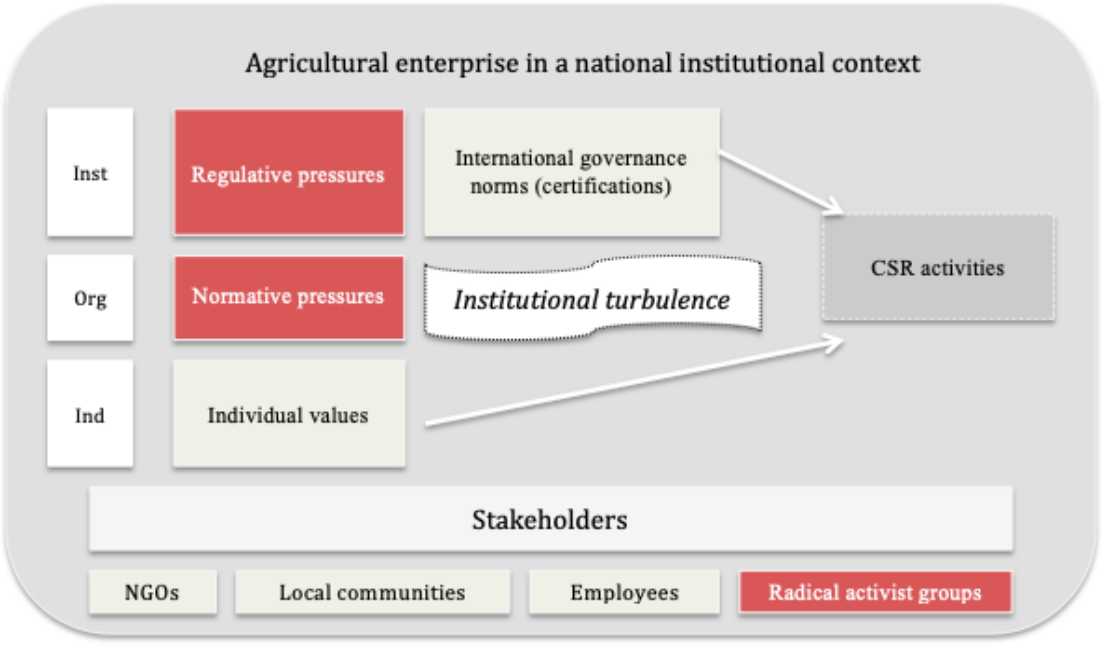

Fig. 4 – Overview of the thesis framework

Note on the figure: Overview of the thesis framework showing the absence of regulative and normative pressures and that of radical activist groups on agricultural enterprises in a national institutional context defined by institutional turbulence and the presence of certifications and individual values as well as of the requests of NGOs, local communities and employees in the motivation for CSR activities (boxes marked with blue are indicative of presence and red is indicative of the absence of an institution respectively of a stakeholder).

Herewith this work enriches the institutional theory (Aguinis and Glavas 2012; Buehler and Shetty 1974; Christmann and Taylor 2006; Fineman and Clarke 1996) on corporate social responsibility. Institutional theory argues for organizations to be embedded within broader social structures that are composed of different types of institutions, which exert significant influence on the decision-making process of a corporation (Campbell 2007; Campbell, Gulas and Gruca 1991). Additional work has underlined that CSR activities are framed within the existing social context and are thus influenced by institutions that are present in such contexts (Jackson and Apostolakou 2010). In addition to the authors arguing for CSR to be context dependent, Moser (2015, 2016), along the lines of Bluhm (2008) and Meyer and Rowan (1977), described CSR of agroholdings in Russia, in the neo-institutional conception, as a "rationalized myth". The term gives expression to the fact that CSR activities do not correspond to the specific needs of the institutional context agroholdings find themselves in but the activities draw their validity from generalized accreditation at the transnational level. Similarly, Schriewer (2009) argues that CSR activities are not necessarily developed based on accumulated experience in specific conditions and contexts that address particular cases adequately. This present study shows the contrary, namely that CSR activities derive from the needs of the local context the enterprises are embedded in and simultaneously also from the requirements of transnational contexts.

Institutional literature also suggests that enterprises are embedded into national and international institutions, influencing the different interpretations of CSR in each such context (acc. to Ioannou and Serafeim 2012 and Khan, Lockhart and Bathurst 2021). Actors within each institutional field, national or international, face a unique combination of various governmental regulations, civil society groups, industrial norms, NGOs, and societal expectations that may results in different CSR policies and practices (Campbell 2007, represented in Fig. 5, p. 39). This thesis' results show that individuals' values can influence their attitudes towards CSR and their willingness to engage in socially responsible behavior. For example, individuals with stronger values related to social responsibility such as identification, benevolence, and obligation are more likely to support and engage in CSR activities. These individual values are themselves shaped by broader social structures and institutions, which can vary across different contexts and countries. Therefore, institutional theory provides a useful framework for understanding how these broader social structures and institutions influence the development and implementation of CSR activities by corporations. A deeper understanding of the institutional context in which CSR activities are developed and implemented is crucial for understanding how CSR unfolds and impacts society.

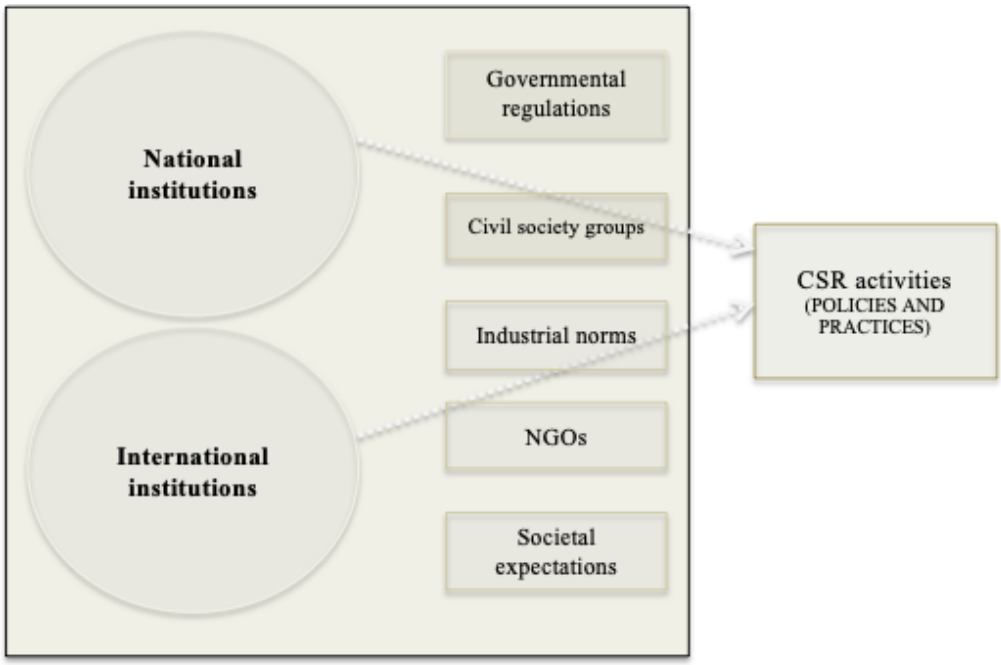

Fig. 5 National and international institutions as the backbone of CSR interpretations in agricultural enterprises. (How governmental regulations, civil society groups, industrial norms, NGOs, and societal expectations are enacted, influences CSR activities).

This study challenges the contention that CSR is a "rationalized myth" (Moser 2015, 2016), which highlights the potential for CSR activities to be disconnected from the specific needs of local contexts and are instead driven by generalized accreditations at the transnational level. Within the farming enterprises interviewed, the study finds that except the CSR activities for export markets in the horticulture sector and for soy that require international certification, the rest of CSR activities in Argentina are not conducted according to the way CSR activities are accredited at transnational level (i.e. in developed economies) but are designed according to the local contexts. They specifically address particular issues in the contexts where they arise. Further results in Romania where CSR focuses on infrastructure development and employees' needs confirm this contention. These new insights may also be related to the fact that the present study focused on mostly undisclosed and underreported primary CSR data that is usually not visible (especially for quantitative studies, building on published and reported data, where most of the CSR work has focused on). Hereby this study enriches the institution-based view on corporate social responsibility by providing a more encompassing conceptual analysis of the relationship between CSR motivation and the institutional context it emerges in.

The finding that companies prioritize actual CSR actions over communication of those actions challenges the widely held belief that CSR is just a public relations strategy. This belief is often based on the perception that companies engage in CSR activities only to enhance their image and reputation, rather than out of genuine concern for social responsibility. However, this study suggests that companies are actually taking meaningful actions to promote social responsibility, even if they are not always explicitly communicating about it. This is a positive development, as it shows that companies are responding to the growing demand for responsible business practices.

Moreover, the finding is consistent with research that highlights the discrepancy between CSR action and communication, but it is notable that this discrepancy is in favor of CSR action rather than communication. This highlights the importance of looking beyond enterprises' public statements and marketing materials to assess CSR efforts. It also indicates that enterprises should prioritize genuine CSR activities that have positive impact on society rather than using CSR as a tool for image building.

Overall, this finding suggests that the corporate world in the agricultural sector of the studied countries is moving in the right direction in terms of taking concrete actions to promote social responsibility. However, there is room for improvement in terms of the scale of these efforts and being more transparent about the impact they have on society. Future research should continue to explore the relationship between CSR action and communication, and how agricultural enterprises can effectively balance the two in a way that is meaningful and impactful.

In transition economies, Gagalyuk and Valentinov (2019) have argued for the presence of institutional turbulence to be a driver for farming enterprises to take on more social responsibility than requested. The thesis results complement this finding. In Argentina, the in-depth interviews point to institutional turbulence in addressing poverty and educational issues as well as rural infrastructure deficits, which the enterprises attempt to fill with their CSR activities. On the contrary, in Romania our results confirm this only for the few cases some CSR activities take place in but for the rest refute these findings, as institutional voids here lead to a sense of inertia and lack of hope in institutional change. While in the Argentina case we find a variety of initiatives and a moral individual mobilization of senior executives, in Romania we find a general disconcertment towards existing political institutions. As senior executives in Argentina mentioned their engagement with CSR concepts and worldviews in the US and other European countries where they have travelled and accumulated experience have contributed to their understanding of approaches to social issues. We may expect that this has had an impact on their approach to CSR (as Campbell 2007 had also argued such exchanges to have). However, some senior executives of farming enterprises in Romania also have similar experience and even studies abroad, so this may not be a defining factor. This difference also does not lie in the understanding senior executives have on social responsibility, since similar philanthropic, educational and health as well as infrastructure activities have been reported. Perhaps the existence of farming enterprises in Argentina over family generations compared to those recently privatized after the transition to a market economy, may explain the Argentine motivation to care for their communities. This difference in the motivation between enterprises in different countries deserves more in-depth investigation in future studies.

This point of difference certainly stimulates more in-depth comparative studies on these contrasts and their origins. Here the communitarian nature of the institutional settings that may prevent CSR (Shulimova 2013) as defined in developed countries may give stimulating new insights on the role of different farming enterprises' engagement for societal issues. Furthermore, the focus on non-regulatory (Zhao 2012) or informal processes (Kurakin 2015) will assist in better understanding the institutional context for CSR in these countries. A more detailed investigation of the elements contributing to environmental turbulence, institutional voids and weakness can further build on the findings of this thesis and give a more well-rounded understanding of the institutional context-related configuration that has shaped certain CSR practices and not others.

In line with the proposition of Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft (2018), the thesis finds that institutional turbulence may be the reason why CSR of farming enterprises in transition and emerging market economies is characterized by a proportionately greater role of the ethical and philanthropic responsibilities and, in normative terms, this fact is ambivalent. On the one hand, it enables enterprise managers to exercise moral behavior for strategic business success. On the other hand, it points to incomplete formal institutions. An ironic illustration of this ambivalence is the perception of the payment of taxes as a social rather than a legal responsibility. The companies interviewed consider themselves to be a minority that undertakes socially responsible conduct. According to interviewees, a majority of farming enterprises in Argentina would not even comply with basic legal and ethical requirements, carrying out tax evasion and illicit employment in Argentina. The interviewees declare to have only employment contracts that comply with Argentine laws where all social securities are covered and to not carry out tax evasion (a recurring theme during the interviews). Interviewees regard these activities as a social responsibility that their enterprises comply with. Bavorová *et al.* (2021) similarly found in the case of Russia that creating employment opportunities is regarded by enterprises as a CSR activity. The difference lies in the interpretation this thesis gives to these responses. The thesis does not find that the interviewees argue for employment as a CSR activity as a form of excuse to not providing other kind of support (i.e. acc. to Bavorová *et al.* 2021). Considering the background information on the variety of activities conducted as well as the individual values that motivate these, it rather reflects the employment norms and, therefore, the institutional context in Argentina, where "basic" institutional responsibilities are not considered by a majority of actors. Our novel finding is that the farming enterprises' response does not reflect an enterprise's level of shortcoming (i.e. acc. to Bavorová *et al.* 2021 'not providing real support') but reflects the institutional voids in Argentina, where the state is weak to either collect the taxes necessary to address the social issues and/or to devise multi-actor programmes that can cater to these issues.

The study additionally confirms that CSR unfolds along a "business case" (Grouiez 2014; Harbar 2020; Moser 2015, p. 261-262; Moser 2016), but adds new insights into the existing nexus of instrumental and moral motivations for CSR by confirming that instrumental and moral motivations do not exclude each other, as enterprises can conduct CSR for profit and at the same time based on intrinsic motivations (Falck and Heblich 2007; Guillamon-Saorin, Kapelko and Stefanou 2018; Graafland and van de Ven 2006) such as those identified as individual values of identification, benevolence, obligation. Beyond the dualistic focus of CSR as a moral or business strategy, this study shows that especially in contexts in which little is known about CSR activities, CSR needs to be approached from an inside-out perspective (as described in the theoretical background). This perspective allows for a more encompassing understanding of motivations for CSR activities with institutional theory assisting to elicit the institutional circumstances that shape the motivations for CSR activities.

A methodological contribution of this research lies in the inductive analysis of motivations for corporate social responsibility activities with the focus on Argentina as a case study country. Previous work on CSR in developing, emerging and transition economies have found that CSR activities are less formal and targeted at resolving socioeconomic issues (Visser 2010; Visser and Bidaseca 2010) due to a lack of suitable institutional setups to address these problems (Possenti 2012). This research confirms these findings gathering richly informative data through an on-the-ground approach to

the research design. These insights would not have been possible without in-depth and qualitative inquiries among a multitude of actors. A future focus on actors' mental models will be an innovative approach to these regions and the agricultural sector. Hereby this present work fills the gap identified by Egri and Ralston (2008, p. 235) who observed that on-the-ground need for CSR research is most pressing in institutional contexts with governance issues such as "Africa, Central/Eastern Europe, Central/South Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East". This research further complements the literature that distinguishes between different institutional logics (Jamali *et al.* 2017) within emerging and transition economies that can thus lead to differing CSR motivations and activities compared to those found in developed economies. By eliciting the motivations and activities here it responds to Pisani *et al.'s* (2017) call to focus CSR research on other economies besides developed ones.

This study has produced a unique data set on CSR activities and motivations based on extended hours of interviews with a variety of key informants (such as researchers, agricultural extension representatives, NGO senior executives, consultants, social movement members and farmers, in addition to our main actors - top-level and senior executives of large farming enterprises and a survey of hundreds of farming enterprises) as well as a diverse geographical focus in several regions in an emerging economy (Argentina), two Eurasian countries (Russia and Kazakhstan) and a Eastern European country (Romania). The senior executives are often considered unreachable, while a radical (agrarian) social movement skeptically lets researchers from other fields than those of critical agrarian and development studies engage with them. This points to a challenging methodological approach that, to the best of my knowledge, is the first of its kind relying on a large sample of in-depth interviews and overcoming ideological roadblocks.

Adopting an exploratory approach in which a large number of managers are inquired about their motivations for CSR activities allowed a) to identify the important gap-filling role of international formal institutions at the background of lacking national regulations that would incentivize responsible business conduct, as is the case with certifications in the horticulture sector (in Argentina); b) establish that individual values may become major motivating factors for CSR activities if institutional and organizational motives for CSR are weak (in Argentina); and c) operationalize institutional, organizational and individual factors of CSR (for Kazakhstan and Russia). These outcomes are very important for the way future research into corporate social responsibility activities in the agricultural sector is conceptualized. Rather than only identifying what enterprises do or not do (what most of the research has been focusing on), whether the motivations are instrumental or not, or how enterprises communicate what they do, it is important to understand the institutional conditions the companies find themselves in and their perceptions on what motivates to undertake or not undertake certain activities. This approach not only helps contextualize the activities and motivations within the existing informal institutions (e.g. cultural norms, trust etc.) of a country but also places companies on a moral continuum and shows that their morality is not set but evolves and changes over the years, perhaps with corresponding institutional changes. Having this understanding of where companies are placed may assist in better devising answers to how and when they can preempt, mitigate or address pressing societal issues.

Another contribution of the thesis is the one enriching the work of Bavorová *et al.* (2021), Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft (2018), Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin (2019), who have shown why and how large farming enterprises respond to societal expectations. The novelty of this study lies in complementing these results by adding two further layers of analysis. One of them focuses on the motivations for CSR activities that have so far been addressed by Bavorová *et al.* (2021); Gagalyuk, Valentinov and Schaft (2018); Grouiez (2012, 2014); Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin (2019), while another layer emerges from addressing multiple levels motivating CSR, addressed simultaneously and in three countries (Argentina, Russia and Kazakhstan). In comparison, Bavorová *et al.* (2021) only analyzed motivations in one country (Russia) and at two levels (organizational and individual).

An additional significant contribution of this study is to existing literature that has highlighted the potential conflicts that may arise between large farming enterprises and local stakeholders, as previously highlighted by Grouiez (2012, 2014) and Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin (2019). To my knowledge, no study until present has attempted to analyze CSR of large farming enterprises in concert with the CSR visions of an activist group. In line with den Hond and de Bakker (2007) who contend that the research on activist groups and enterprises has received limited systematic attention in the literature, the thesis analyzed the CSR activities of farming enterprises and how these reflect the demands of an activist group. While Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) found that interests and the identity of civil society groups are important, this thesis complements the understanding conveyed by den Hond and de Bakker (2007) that considering the ideology of the groups is important. Transferring and extending this understanding to the CSR studies of farming enterprises and to the agricultural sector is an important contribution of this study. A further contribution lies in combining these two topics-CSR of farming enterprises and activist groups. Herewith this thesis contributes to emerging research at the intersection of organization theory and social movements (Davis *et al.* 2005; den Hond and de Bakker 2007).

The study used insights from institutional theory and corporate social responsibility as well as insights from social movement studies to explore why the cognitive and normative understanding on CSR may not align between farming enterprises and radical activist groups. The articulation of social responsibility by the radical activist group, with the themes afferent to these, can be regarded as a process of mobilizing an aspired institutional change that in line with the findings of den Hond and de Bakker (2007) involves both the deinstitutionalization of practices in the established field frame (globalized capitalism) and the reinstitutionalization of an alternative set of preferred practices in an alternative field frame (anti-capitalist). As claimants in matters related to environmental and social issues, radical activist groups have traditionally acted politically, indirectly challenging enterprises through channels of public policy (den Hond and de Bakker 2007; e.g. in the context of farming enterprises, the land grabbing study of the European Parliament – Kay, Peuch and Franco 2015). Farming enterprises' improved understanding of the ideology of activist groups and their cognitive and normative understandings can give insight into the conditions of starting a debate and its contents, including reasons why the more radical activist groups would be less interested in participating in such a debate.

The business ethics literature on the moral conflict between civil society and farming enterprises (e.g. Jauernig and Valentinov 2019) has proposed a vision that enforces the mutual grounds between conflicting worldviews. As a result, de Olde and Valentinov (2019) have called for research that focuses on in-depth investigations to elicit specific trade-offs and conflicts of interest. There is recurrent research that argues for moral conflicts to be solved through communication (Habermas 2001) e.g. by achieving legitimacy. Furthermore, there is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions (Suchmann 1995), e.g. the corporate social responsibility of enterprises. This thesis argues that the CSR actions of large farming enterprises are not desirable, proper or appropriate within the definitions, norms and beliefs of a radical agrarian social movement. The thesis finds that large farming enterprises theoretically cannot achieve legitimacy as a communicative approach with all constituents, as no dialogue is present with radical activist groups.

This study suggests however that the level of 'radicalness' is not set but fluid across a social movement and within groups, similar to the morality level of farming enterprises. Understanding the interests of the different groups within a social movement, and their differing positionality to that of the broader social movement, as well as the positionality of key executive individuals may open up the potential for dialogue on certain matters. Practically, the study suggests that windows of opportunity exist that need to be further identified and analyzed as well as the possibilities and pitfalls for communication considering different cognitive and normative worldviews. The moral conflict may not be solved but may be a continuous (democratic) process, in which a certain level of conflict is beneficial to advancing norms for social responsibility. The level of conflict may be mitigated if both parties were more informed about each other's activities, interest and goals. Showing that stakeholders do not only differ in their interests and identity (Rowley and Moldoveanu 2003) but also ideology, the study underlines that communication is only possible with reformative NGOs. Young agricultural entrepreneurs may identify new business models that can cater to the demands of the radical agrarian social movement even when domestic institutions (whether formal or informal) are not yet up to task to cater to them. Although agrarian scholars may consider this as entrepreneurial opportunism (Borras 2016) and a way to co-opt and delegitimize radical social movements such considerations can be the work of future interdisciplinary studies on farming enterprises and agrarian social movements.

This part of the study also contributes to the literature on business-society relations as well as stakeholder theory, by addressing the interest of a general stakeholder for the primary agriculture sector. It is however not a one-string approach of only analyzing the farming enterprise approach or only the society-centric perspective to CSR (Whetten, Rands and Godfrey 2003). This work understands CSR as a multilevel actor approach and gives insight into the CSR understanding of farming enterprises as well as that of a stakeholder group. Thus, while it contributes to stakeholder theory it finds this approach to be too one-stringed to understand the multiple facets of CSR motivations. The managers interviewed in Argentina understand that the CSR activities they conduct not only have an instrumental benefit, to help their business, but often they have a sole benefit for the stakeholders they support. While some activities can have an immediate effect on their business, with improved wellbeing and education leading to improved work capacity and future potential employees, the senior

executives also understand that they contribute to the enhancement of the society their children will live in and of the rural environments they themselves live in. How these insights resonate with the acknowledgement that they do not have the resources to address all societal issues is a compelling point for future research focusing on CSR in farming enterprises.

The study finds that individual motivations play a role in genuinely undertaking CSR activities. Research into the exact processes of these CSR activities and their outcomes as interpreted by farms' employees and all stakeholder groups, would enrich our understanding of the limits of this genuineness. Literature has found that in a global environment it is impossible to achieve a broad consensus on morality (Habermas 1998) as values and expectations will not automatically overlap (Palazzo and Scherer 2006). Therefor scholars argue for enterprises to establish moral legitimacy, as political activist groups rely on moral legitimacy arguments (den Hond and de Bakker 2007). The academic literature however also showed that individual values can lead to moral entrepreneurs who play a substantial role in disrupting old institutions (Weber 1978) and initiating new ones (DiMaggio 1998) much in line with what radical activists wish for alternative institutional environments. Despite the irreconcilable ideological difference between stakeholders and organizations that academic literature (Huxham and Vangen 2000) as well as the present work have pointed to, this study argues that managers in large farming enterprises can focus on building mindsets (belief systems) and skills to restructure internal governance mechanisms and decision-making processes in ways that connect them to different stakeholder communities and that create broader CSR capabilities.

In this regard, further research can extend the literature on the integrator model of leadership (Pless, Maak and Waldman 2012). Leaders motivated by individual values may be able to going beyond just taking advantage of economic opportunities and behave as integrators. Organizational leaders as integrators have a stronger or broader sense of accountability and thus attempt to deliver on multiple bottom lines by reconciling or actively integrating goals across constituent or stakeholder groups. Integrative leaders are likely to pursue more proactive and transformative approaches to CSR that may go beyond simply seeking economic returns for „doing good" by trying to integrate social and environmental issues into formal and informal processes of the firm irrespective of the formal and informal external pressures. Aguilera *et al.* (2007) argue that an organization's ability to achieve social acceptance will depend in addition to efficiency concerns, on the ability of its leaders to demonstrate moral and relational responsibility by committing to stewardship management practices and stakeholder interests. If large farming enterprises are to build this legitimacy, in light of pluralization of societies, homogeneity of values and expectations with all societal groups in a global society will not automatically overlap as Habermas (1998) and Palazzo and Scherer (2006) have posited. Therefore, moral legitimacy will become the main means of gaining organizational legitimacy for organizations. Legitimacy in a transnational context has to be considered with regard to the emerging governance institutions and procedures beyond or above the nation state (Steffek 2003; Wolf 2005). Therefore, farming enterprises may have to satisfy larger demands for justifying their legitimacy. Individual values may play a defining role in weak institutional environments and especially those where institutions are captured and/or incomplete. Longitudinal studies will be an advancing step in understanding how CSR activities in large farming enterprises evolve depending on the changes and fluctuations of the

institutional context they experience in transition and emerging economies.

Activist groups are still considered secondary stakeholders by some scholars, as the firm's survival does not depend on their continuing support (Clarkson 1995). This research shows that activist groups are not interested in solely affecting the level of social responsibility activities in a farming enterprise bur rather strive for field-level change (Lounsbury, Ventresca and Hirsch 2003). Radical activist groups aim to influence a range of firms or the agricultural sector at large, and they often influence other activist groups' strategic options, not only at the moment of interaction but possibly also afterwards (den Hond and de Bakker 2007). Therefore, this study contributes to research on organizational fields and echoes the necessity highlighted by Leão Junior (2001) to understand the social actors involved, their objective and ideological presupposed ideas in addition to their behavior throughout the process of constituting the field. The three levels (institutional, organizational and individual) are levels representative of a state. At a supra-state level the transnational agrarian social movements are active. This is why they are likely to determine the way and extent to which institutional environments concerning CSR are modified in the future. Even if these movements are not present in the interviewed enterprises' immediate environment, and the farming enterprises do not perceive pressure from this stakeholder group, it is a movement present in the agricultural sector in Argentina. As in other countries it is present in – e.g. Romania, Ukraine, Georgia - the radical (agrarian) social movement lacks legitimacy. It does however have legitimacy at the supra-state level and will keep exerting pressure from there. While we found the farming enterprises to only respond to the immediate stakeholders in their environment, the stakeholder at the supra-state level keeps exerting indirect pressure and is actively shaping societal norms.

On their part, radical (agrarian) social movements that are active transnationally may want to understand that in weak institutional environments large farming enterprises that are proactive in their CSR activities may be rather a support than a deterrent in the movement gaining domestic legitimacy. This stems from the individual values of identification, benevolence and obligation of senior executives, values that are broadly comparable with the progressive motivations of radical (agrarian) social movements. For this understanding to take place however, the radical social movement needs to be aware of the presence of individual managers with individual values such as identification, benevolence and obligation. These individual values may be more relevant for advancing the radical social movements' legitimacy, than its focus on the institutional environment (globalized capitalism) inhabited by the farming enterprises. To sum up, tensions may perpetuate frictions despite potentially present CSR efforts from large farming enterprises. Building on Zollo *et al.* (2007) this thesis argues that cognition is necessary for all parties to frame their thinking about societal problems in similar ways to reach cognitive alignment on the understanding of social responsibility. I hope that this study contributes to motivation, as a second enabling factor, for all sides.

Previous research has shown that CSR may unfold along a public relations strategy (Visser, Kurakin and Nikulin 2019). Our results do not confirm this finding as the majority of farming enterprises do not report nor make their CSR activity fully visible, except to a small inner circle of stakeholders. On the contrary, the CSR activities conducted are driven by factors deriving from the different institutional levels. This study also refutes CSR as a political objective (Amelina 2000a, 2000b, 2001) and finds CSR to be rather present because of missing political institutions or on the contrary to

be apolitical in institutional environments with potentially captured institutions. The political objectives may lie with enterprises motivated by other values than those found in this study and additional methodological approaches would be needed to identify and integrate these enterprises in further studies.

This research also complements the literature on why CSR does not unfold. Three main reasons emerge for why CSR does not unfold: first, farming enterprises feel little institutional pressure to conduct CSR activities; second, CSR does not unfold due to captured and incomplete institutions (in Romania) and an associated lack of visibility; and third, CSR does not unfold in the perception of certain activist groups, as it represents a misalignment with the normative expectations of these groups.

Since farmland investments especially those conducted by financial investors require alignment with sustainability standards, this research also contributes to the farmland investment, land grabbing and large-scale land acquisitions literature by adding an account of farming enterprises' CSR activities. Further research could explore how investor requirements and those of certification standards correspond to accounting or not accounting for societal issues on-the-ground in the institutional contexts they find themselves in. The framework of CSR motivations developed in this study can further expand and connect the CSR literature to the farmland investments, land grabbing and LSLA (large-scale land acquisitions) and financialization literature. The gap between the perception of CSR by large farming enterprises and that of activist groups lies in their focus on the immediate environments and concerns that affect their activity much in line with what Valentinov (2019) refers to as functional systems. Organized in different functional systems, farming enterprises and radical activist groups encounter governance problems. This view contributes to the closed and open systems theories by Luhmann and Bertalanffy that Valentinov discusses (Valentinov 2014; van Assche, Verschraegen and Valentinov 2019). Luhmann's closed system theory suggests that social systems, including organizations, are self-referential and operate independently of their environment. According to Luhmann, social systems are operationally closed because they create their own internal structures and processes that are distinct from the environment in which they operate. Therefore, Luhmann's theory implies that social change is difficult to achieve because social systems are resistant to external pressures. The view of closed systems is aligned with radical social movements, which often seek to fundamentally transform social systems and create alternative structures outside of the existing system. Radical social movements may seek to break away from existing institutions and create their own closed systems based on different values and principles (as the LVC in this study's case).

On the other hand, Bertalanffy's open systems theory suggests that organizations are open to their environment and are influenced by external factors. This view emphasizes that organizations are constantly adapting to changes in their environment and that they must be open to feedback and input from their surroundings. Therefore, Bertalanffy's theory implies that social change can be achieved by altering the external environment of social systems. This view of open systems is more aligned with reformative social movements, which seek to make changes within existing institutions and systems. Reformative social movements may seek to change external factors that influence social systems, such as laws, regulations, and cultural norms, in order to achieve their goals. Overall, the closed systems theory of Luhmann and open systems theory of Bertalanffy provide different but complementary perspectives to how social systems operate.

Bourgeois (1980) argued that firms must know something about the external environment in order to respond or adapt to it. These perspectives from systems theory may assist future research to identify those farming enterprises (and stakeholders) that are open or closed (and the levels of openness and closure) to engage with their surroundings.

In the CSR literature there are debates surrounding the role of institutions and their interplay with individual-level factors, such as individual values or rational choice. These debates revolve around questions such as whether individual values or institutional factors have greater impact on CSR outcomes.

There is an ongoing debate in the literature about how institutions either hinder or support corporate social responsibility (CSR), specifically regarding the pressures that enterprises face in their institutional environment. Surprisingly, little attention has been given to the individual-level motivations (pressures), also addressed under micro-level CSR (Gond, Mena and Mosonyi 2020; Frerichs and Teichert 2023; Girschik, Svystunova and Lysova 2022), in the analysis of CSR. The literature on CSR and institutional theory lacks sufficient representation of a values-based approach, which is more prominent in mainstream CSR literature, as discussed by Bondy, Moon and Matten (2012). Two dominant views exist regarding individual pressures. One view focuses on the managers/leaders being motivated by instrumental reasons to implement CSR activities. The other view emphasizes motivations or pressures that go beyond rational choices and are driven by the moral values of the leaders.

This study reconciles these two views, informed also by the work of Waldman and Siegel (2008). The study finds that managers are indeed motivated by instrumental reasons to engage in CSR activities, such as improving the environment and working conditions for employees, which can ensure a future workforce for the enterprise through increased employee loyalty and attraction. However, the study reveals that this decision is not solely driven by instrumental motivations (to increase profits) but also influenced by the managers' individual values (identification, benevolence, obligation), such as providing ad hoc financial assistance to employees. The decision to conduct CSR activities is not driven by the economic impact enterprises expect to have on shareholder value, as instrumental approaches suggest (i.e. the economic approach, instrumental stakeholder theory and the resource-based view or Porter's model of competitive advantage), nor by an "intrinsic rationale" (Basu and Palazzo 2008) of managers of agricultural enterprises that restrains the economic calculus (as suggested by the political approach, normative stakeholder theory and integrative social contract theory).

If managers invest their capital in CSR activities such as participating in the Global Compact this may be considered an instrumental approach, as citrus and soy producing companies have access to global markets by adhering to their guidelines. If managers voluntarily support NGOs and health organizations this may be both interpreted as an instrumental and an individual motivation. An instrumental motivation is that they maintain legitimacy within the local communities that expect certain social actions from enterprises and ensure that they keep being seen as a good employer. Another instrumental motivation, as it overlaps with the neoclassical view of the firm, is that of few interviewed enterprises where the owners mention that their social responsibility is the provision of employment and payment of taxes. (However, they do not mention that

these are exclusively their responsibilities). A moral concern is related to the fact that managers increasingly understand the conditions of employees from the communities and want to create better environments. If managers donate employees sums of money for certain personal concerns (health issues, promoting the education of family members, organizing workshops for subsistence farming etc.) these activities can be understood as an altruistic motivation deriving from moral concerns, a non-economic influence on their behavior that can have instrumental benefits in the future.

Thus the spectrum of instrumentality and morality is dependent on the types of CSR practices. Not one or the other activity is present, but rather a mix between instrumental, instrumental and moral and moral. Managers also mention that there is an expectation from society to be helped, so in effect there is a view of a quasi-moral obligation for agricultural enterprises to be involved. This study has an important contribution of showing that this view is present with owners of the business as well as executives in the agricultural enterprises.

The perspective developed here allows for a wide range of motivations for engaging in CSR, including authentic concern for the social good (as assumed by normative approaches), as well as instrumental concern for economic profit (as suggested by the various instrumental approaches). Thus, it overcomes the limitations of one-sided treatments of the relationship between profit and pro-social behavior.

While research on CSR in developing countries has been slower and less cohesive, it has shown that CSR in these contexts has distinct features and characteristics. It is broader in scope and less integrated into corporate strategies, as highlighted by Jamali (2014). The vast majority of comparative CSR research has been conducted in developed economies, while insights from developing, mixed and 'transitional' post-socialist countries have been scant (Jamali and Mirshak 2007; Tatoglu *et al.* 2014). This study argues that a rational choice for engaging in philanthropic activities with limited budgets may not necessarily be driven by monetary (instrumental) considerations, as it does not hinder the profit-making aspect of businesses. One notable contribution of this study to the existing research is that, in addition to the instrumental motivations tied to profit making, managers' individual values also serve as a rational choice for responding to the absence of state institutions in solving social matters.

This brings us to a second point of debate, namely that corporations are more likely to act in socially responsible ways the more they encounter strong state regulation and collective industrial normative pressure. Furthermore, the existing CSR and institutional theory suggests that CSR is done either by passive firms pressured by stakeholders, or because it improves profitability. This study shows that these situations all do not apply in the case of studied farming enterprises in Argentina and Romania. Despite this, CSR activities are present in different shapes and at various levels in one context, pointing to the interference of agentic choices (individual values) and institutional structures. Results of previous studies are inconsistent as to which play a more important role in motivating CSR activities, as literature has tended to examine either agentic (individual) choices *or* institutional structures as influencing CSR (Walker, Zhang and Ni 2019). This study finds that in certain institutional contexts (e.g. enterprises analyzed in Argentina) both play a role, while in other contexts (enterprises in Romania) the agency of managers tends to be more restrained. This may point to the understanding that the presence of managers' agency is reliant on or interferes with

other institutions in the institutional context (e.g. economic, political, and/or cultural institutions) and potentially the level of institutional turbulence present in each context. While an institutional approach to CSR assists in understanding the variety of pressures that motivate CSR activities, it does not help to understand why these motivations are present and are different across actors within the same field (the cash crop sector in Argentina) or across different institutional contexts (Argentina and Romania). The individual approach applied to the institutional perspective to CSR provides answers to the why. In this context, the results in Kazakhstan show that the role of individual factors may diminish if one considers three (and not just two) levels of interplay, namely institutional, organizational and individual levels, with only institutional and organizational factors playing a significant role in CSR engagement of enterprises. However, the types of individual factors considered in the evaluation may play an importance in how this role shifts.

One third point of debate in institutional theory and CSR research is that values are a point of interest for both business and societal stakeholders, as they provide them with a reference point for designing business-society interactions (Risi *et al.* 2023). Although the role of values in managers' decision-making process related to CSR is analyzed from both a psychological and sociological school of thought, there is reluctance in arguing for their normative need out of a reluctance of moralizing. In line with the arguments above and associating to the ordonomic approach this work argues that understanding the values of managers and their role in decision-making related to CSR is crucial.

The ordonomic approach emphasizes the significance of values in shaping economic behavior and highlights the interplay between economic rationality and normative considerations. It recognizes that managers are not solely driven by self-interest and profit maximization but also by ethical and moral considerations. This understanding not only enhances our comprehension of CSR practices but also facilitates the development of more effective and responsible business-society interactions. The study's contribution to this approach, at the example of a radical social movements, lies in highlighting that the business-society interaction may not be a dual win-win resolution (Pies, Hielscher and Beckmann 2009) but a complex map of varying degrees of win-win-lose, win-lose-win, loose-loose-win etc. depending on the number of stakeholders and the quality of reception competence and communication (acc. to Pies, Beckmann and Hielscher 2010) with each of these to account for potentially conflicting interests. Additionally to Pies, Beckmann and Hielscher's (2010) call for introduction of these competences to management studies, this thesis argues that not only the knowledge of managers is important for the competences of reception and communication, but also that of stakeholder groups.

Another approach in the literature that captures individual managers' pro-social preferences beyond economic considerations is the Managerial Utility Approach (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004). While the institutional approach to CSR is able to capture pro-social behavior beyond economic self-interest, it is limited in its potential at explaining variations in pro-social behavior across different corporations within the same organizational field (van Aaken, Splitter, and Seidl 2013). These authors argue that neither the managerial utility approach, nor institutional theory examine specifically or sufficiently the interplay between economic and non-economic motivations. Van Aaken, Splitter and Seidl (2013) propose Bourdieu's theory of social

practice for this purpose. Bourdieu's theory of social practice posits that CSR initiatives undertaken by enterprises are not solely driven by individual altruism or ethical considerations but are also influenced by the social and economic interests of the company and its position within the field. These practices can serve as symbolic displays of corporate social responsibility while potentially perpetuating social inequalities. While the current study could not give an answer either to the interplay between economic and non-economic motivations, future studies could potentially fruitfully combine these three approaches (ordonomic approach, managerial utility approach, theory of social practice) to enhance our understanding of why there are such a large variety of CSR practices across the agricultural enterprises analyzed, e.g. in Argentina, and how the economic and non-economic motivations interact. While they offer different perspectives highlighting the importance of ethical considerations, social context, individual decision-making and broader social structures, the intersections of the three approaches could provide opportunities for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in CSR. Institutional theory and an individual approach alone cannot provide an answer to this question.

The normative approaches to CSR (e.g. ethical approach, stakeholder approach, sustainability approach, triple bottom line approach, human rights approach, shared value approach; integrative social contract approach, to some extent political approach) are all influenced by and are responsive to the institutional context in which agricultural enterprises operate. They reflect the understanding that organizations are influenced by and must conform to institutional norms, values and expectations.

6. Conclusions

Regarding the empirical context, transitional and emerging countries, as well as the agricultural sector, have received relatively less attention in the CSR literature. Much of the research on CSR has traditionally focused on developed countries and industries such as manufacturing, services or the food sector. However, there is growing recognition of the importance of considering diverse contexts, including transitional and emerging countries and agricultural sectors.

The empirical context can significantly influence the dynamics and contestation between different theoretical perspectives. Transitional and emerging countries often have unique institutional environments due to political, economic and social transitions, which can shape CSR practices differently compared to developed economies. Similarly, the agricultural context presents specific challenges and opportunities that may require tailored CSR approaches. Transition and emerging economies often undergo significant changes. Domestic as well as transnational agricultural enterprises may face new challenges and opportunities in each particular institutional context and organizational field. Enhancing our knowledge about how agricultural enterprises currently tackle these can provide agricultural enterprises enhanced knowledge about market access, competitive advantage, and potential partnerships. Additionally, the knowledge of the present stakeholders in their immediate and distant fields can encourage farming enterprises to identify innovative solutions to tackling social challenges in the agricultural sector. Knowledge sharing can lead to innovative collaborations with different actors and capacity building, ultimately driving structural change.

Processes and challenges related to CSR that may be particular to a transition economy or emerging economy context are still little known in the agricultural sector. Research on the role of CSR can provide insights into these, driving positive structural changes, such as promoting sustainable practices, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and addressing social inequalities. Transitional economies typically experience institutional transformations, including changes in legal frameworks, regulatory systems, and governance structures. Studying CSR in these contexts helps to explore how CSR practices interact with and influence institutional changes. It can shed light on the role of CSR in shaping new institutions and norms.

This study is a first analysis of CSR activities in primary agriculture in Argentina, Romania and Kazakhstan. Literature focused on emerging and transition economies has systematically shown that countries in these geographical areas face institutional turbulence. The current study breaks new ground by showing that the institutional context, as well as individual values, play a role in motivating enacting of CSR. However, the institutional logics at play within those environments may influence how these values are manifested by different enterprises within the same organizational field and across different organizational fields. This study is the first to devise a framework along which such questions can be further investigated in transitional and emerging economies and may be useful for other sectors aside the primary agriculture sector. Another significant contribution of the study is integrating organization studies on CSR with social movements studies. Stakeholder analysis and multistakeholder dialogues are little to non-existent mechanisms in these geographical areas. Integrating CSR and stakeholder analysis can shape scholarly understanding of the prerequisites for agricultural enterprises to apply stakeholder analysis and multistakeholder dialogues as tools in the collaborative shaping of policies, programmes and strategies, thus promoting more inclusive and sustainable structural change trajectories.

Appendix

Additional information for Fig. 1 - Info Box 1, p.15

1- An example of a *context-specific activity* is a farm manager who organizes fire prevention courses in the community he is active in, due to a history of fires the members of the community have experienced

2 - A main reason for not including this definition is that the majority of interviewed enterprises do not have an online presence, while online platforms are mostly used for PR activities. Another reason is the researcher's resource constraints. For the purpose of this thesis it was not feasible to investigate how much of the CSR activities are done for PR strategies. Partly, this is due to time and resource constraints – interviews were conducted only with senior executives and not other stakeholders (e.g. employees, communities, local administration, other external stakeholders etc.). An extensive analysis of local communication channels (enterprise newspaper, local community newspaper and radio channels, communication through NGOs and municipality) would enable future studies to analyze the PR focus of and communication strategies for CSR activities.

[a] The theory deals with the ways in which an organization manages its relationship with various stakeholders to ultimately benefit business performance (Backhaus, Stone and Heiner 2002; Donaldson and Preston 1995)

[b] This stream of research argues for organizations as political actors (Frynas and Stephens 2015; Scherer *et al.* 2016)
[c] This term includes theories, which consider that business ought to integrate social demands. They argue that business depends on society for its continuity and growth and even for the existence of business itself (more in Garriga and Melé 2004).
[d] These can be stakeholder normative theories based on two major ideas. First, where stakeholders are identified by their interest in the corporation and second, where the interests of all stakeholders are of intrinsic value (Donaldson and Preston 1995). Different ethical theories also apply - Rawlsian, Kantian, feminist ethics, care ethics, Aristotelian approach and so forth (Garriga and Melé 2004).

Footnotes

1, p. 5
As Chiles *et al*. (2020) underscore, this includes, for example, the ethical dimensions of supply chain management (Barham 2003; Konefal, Mascarenhas and Hatanaka 2005), third-party certification (Hatanaka, Bain and Busch 2005), transparency initiatives (Barham 2002; Fuchs, Kalfagianni and Havinga 2011), codes of conduct (Konefal, Hatanaka and Constance 2014; Fuchs *et al.* 2011) and privatized standard setting for agri-food firm products and processes (Busch 2000; Fuchs, Kalfagianni and Havinga 2011,; Fuchs *et al.* 2011; Konefal *et al.* 2014).

2, p. 6
Here the thesis makes a distinction between agricultural and farming enterprises, agricultural being those that include all types of agricultural activities, while farming enterprises focusing on those specifically active in primary agriculture.

3, p. 13
Large agricultural enterprises have been a point of contention at least since the early 1900s in the United States of America. As a starting point, see literature by Highquest Partners and Koeninger 2007; Oltmans 1995; Raup 1969, 1978, 1986. More recent studies focus on land deals/investments (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009; Cotula 2009) and land grabbing (Borras and Franco 2010).

4, p. 18
Deininger *et al.* 2013; Grouiez 2018; Kuns, Visser and Wästfelt 2016; Lapa, Gagalyuk and Ostapchuk 2015; Matyukha 2017; Moldavan and Pimenova 2021; UCAB 2016; Visser and Spoor 2011; Visser, Mamonova and Spoor 2013; Visser, Spoor and Mamonova 2014; Walther 2014; Wandel 2011 discuss their development and activities in more detail. A holding company is a joint-stock company that owns, uses and disposes of holding corporate shareholdings (parts and shares) of two or more corporate enterprises (Gorb, Greblikaite and Yasnolob 2018). Using merger and acquisitions mechanisms (Ostapchuk *et al.* 2021; Ostapchuk, Gagalyuk and Curtiss 2021) they have increased the size of their land use.

5, p. 22
The pressures coming from the institutional level are external, while those at the organizational and individual level internal. Certain studies adopt the view of the

pressures at organizational level also being external, e.g. when organizations face pressure within their sectors from other organizations.

6, p. 29
This thesis supports the view of Zollo *et al.* (2007) that salience of a stakeholder is not social responsibility. Categorizing stakeholders according to their salience and impact on the company operations implicitly focuses on the view of what stakeholders can do for the company rather than what the company can do for stakeholders. This points to a subtle but fundamental misalignment related to the notion of social responsibility. As Zollo *et al.* (2007) contend one is responsible for the impact of his/her actions on others' wellbeing. In the same way, CSR is about the impact of the company's decisions and actions on stakeholders' wellbeing, rather than the opposite. Stakeholders tend to reason in terms of responsibility, rather than salience, which creates a subtle, implicit gap of which managers are rarely aware (Zollo *et al.* 2007).

7, p. 29
The study in Romania focused also on cereal producers while that on Russia and Kazakhstan included livestock farming, too.

8, p. 32
There is a possibility of social desirability bias, where companies may be hesitant to reveal that they are under pressure from governmental environmental inspections. This is because it may be perceived as an admission of non-compliance with environmental norms, which could harm their image during the interview, even if they are actually in compliance.

9, p. 34
While a simplification, in this study I consider the agrarian vision (Thompson 2010) to overlap with the rhetoric of the La Via Campesina radical (agrarian) social movement. While such an analysis has not taken place yet and certainly discrepancies exist between the agrarian vision and the LVC vision, this minimalist definition is suitable for the scope of this study. The stakeholder groups that represent the agrarian vision are not homogenous but highly heterogeneous in their scope, ideology, tactics, activities and visions for future food systems. The same is valid for the groups part of LVC.

7. Literature

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Special Issue: Growth of agroholdings and mega-farms in transition and emerging market economies: institutional and organizational aspects

Institutions and individual values motivating corporate social responsibility activities in large farms and agroholdings

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities have been shown to derive from external and internal motivations of a company. Little attention has been given to motivations of managers in large farms and agroholdings to undertake CSR activities thanks to individual values and pressure from institutions. We therefore investigate the types of CSR activities conducted by 18 managers in large farms and agroholdings in Argentina. We underline their perception of social issues and their motivations to do CSR activities. The framework developed in this paper shows that given the lack of pressure from national-level formal and other informal institutions, individual values (informal institutions) and international institutions (certification schemes-formal institutions) carry more weight in managers' decision to do CSR activities. While some of these motivations have an instrumental background, they overlap with normative motivations that underlie the business activity.

Keywords: Argentina, large-scale farms, social issues, grounded theory, large-scale land acquisitions
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1. Introduction

The agricultural sector has been under increased societal scrutiny for a number of social and environmental ills. Agriculture has contributed not only to a rapid increase in food production (De Olde and Valentinov, 2019) but also to mounting concerns over animal welfare, genetic engineering, industrialization and extinction of family farms (Balmann *et al.,* 2016; Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018), with growing societal (and state) pressure to address these concerns (Barham, 1997; Blandford and Fulponi, 1999; Van der Ploeg, 2020). A majority of studies have pointed to scores of social issues (Balmann *et al.*, 2013; Clapp, 2017; Hermans *et al.*, 2017; Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2010; Lambin and Meyfroidt, 2011; Lapa *et al.*, 2015; Messerli *et al.*, 2015) and partly also identified the types of social issues these farms seek to address or not (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Grouiez, 2014; Visser *et al.*, 2019).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been one of the tools employed by the private sector to respond to societal pressure to address social issues. In agribusiness research, CSR has been more widely discussed in relation to the food industry (Dennis *et al*., 1998; Hartmann, 2011; Ness, 1992). Studies on CSR in agriculture were virtually absent, but have become somewhat more frequent over the past years (Heyder and Theuvsen, 2008, 2009, 2012; Luhmann and Theuvsen, 2016). Those studies that have focused on agricultural corporations operating large farms have underlined their social function (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Grouiez, 2014; Mamonova, 2018; Visser *et al.*, 2019*).* A few studies discuss agricultural managers' perceptions of social issues and/or their motivation to address them through CSR (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Heyder and Theuvsen, 2012; Ortega *et al.*, 2016). Visser *et al.* (2019) found in one of the studied Russian regions that large farms apply CSR for the purpose of image management rather than a proactive commitment. Therefore, the CSR applied by these farms does not address the actual social issues villagers experience due to the actions of large farms. Given the rapid proliferation of large-scale organizational forms of agricultural production and associated scrutiny of the agricultural sector, a majority of work focuses on the social issues. However, it is counterintuitive that only a few studies address how managers in the farming companies perceive social issues and why they are motivated to address certain social issues.

Motivations for CSR activities have often been associated with reasons that are external to an organization (e.g. stakeholder theory, legitimation theory). Often companies' instrumental motivation is highlighted as the main motivation behind CSR (following instrumental CSR theories). Furthermore, Amaeshi *et al.* (2016) underlined that the motivation for CSR activities can be present in the case of institutional voids especially in developing countries; and Gagalyuk *et al.* (2018) argued that farms aim at filling these voids. From a neo-institutional theory perspective, motivations for CSR activities derive from external reasons (e.g. pressure of formal and informal institutions) as well as internal reasons (pressure at the organizational or individual level). According to new institutional economics, formal and informal institutions are the 'rules of the game in a society, or… the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction' (North, 1990: 3). While written laws establish the formal framework, social values (a society's values) are the result of both its formal and informal institutions (Kingston and Caballero, 2009). Individual values are according to some authors (Aparicio *et al*. 2018; Schnebel, 2000; Tabellini, 2008, 2010), a subset or feature of informal institutions.

This paper investigates how managers in large farms and agroholdings perceive and act to address social issues. In particular, our research questions aim to identify the type of social responsibility activities these undertake and the main social issues the managers perceive as salient and may address through CSR activities. A third research question inquires into the managers' motivation to do these activities from an institutional theory perspective.

Our focus is on managers in agricultural companies active in two regions in Argentina producing cash crops such as wheat, corn, sunflower and soy, with additional insights from the citrus sector. Interviews with managers in these types of companies analyzed with thematic analysis and grounded theory, help to shape a broader understanding of formal and informal institutions that underlie CSR activities. Cotton, coffee, timber,

cocoa, fruits have been crops that attracted mounting scholarly investigation, as these products have been inserted into value chains with fair trade and other social certification schemes; but less so the production of cash crops such as wheat, corn, soybean and oilseeds.

CSR activities in Argentina have historical roots dating back to at least colonial times, particularly when it comes to the philanthrophic elements regarding social issues (Milberg *et al.*, 2001; Newell and Muro, 2006). Globalization appears to be a crucial determinant of CSR responsibility strategies, as many sectors, e.g. the citrus industry in Argentina, are strongly influenced by international standards (Newell and Muro, 2006). Newell and Muro (2006) go as far as to argue that the embeddedness within global markets emerges as perhaps the single most important driver for CSR behavior. To our knowledge, no research has focused so far on the CSR activities of large farms and agroholdings in Argentina and how they address social issues.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section explains the theoretical framework and elaborates on how we define CSR for this purpose. The third section discusses the empirical context. The fourth section focuses on the methods and methodology used, while the fifth section provides the results and a discussion conceptualizing the nature of company managers' motivations for conducting CSR activities. A final section concludes the paper and discusses its limitations and future research directions.

2. Theoretical framework

Before proceeding to discuss definitions of CSR and the institutional and individual levels motivating it, first we highlight the global, historical changes that spurred the rise of CSR. According to Dolan and Rajak (2011) CSR has emerged, as a result of the downsizing of the state in the past decades as well as a shift of power to the management of corporations due to separation of ownership from control (Berle and Means, 1932). Structural adjustment policies, and neo-liberal reforms more broadly, have led to the privatization of state functions, reduced taxing of the private sector (contributing to reduced state budgets), leaving voids that CSR partly tries to address (Dolan and Rajak, 2011; for Argentina see Newell and Muro, 2006). There are various caveats related to a broad shift of social functions from the state to the private sector, which might undermine the democratic, universal and inclusive aspects of welfare (Blowfield, 2007; Visser *et al.*, 2019). Rather than seeing CSR as a substitute for state welfare, or a new era of corporate citizenship (Zadek, 2001), we only study the local role of CSR and where it might complement limited voids left by the wider welfare state.

CSR is a complex construct that has emerged along a variety of conceptual framings and definitions (see instrumental, political, integrative and ethical theories, in Blasco and Zølner, 2010; Garriga and Melé, 2004; Secchi, 2007) but arguing for one or the other definition is not within the scope of this paper. It has also been tied into a duality of either/or economic maximization versus benevolent practices (Amaeshi and Adi, 2007). Our study argues both from a business case and a normative case perspective for CSR (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006). A variety of definitions of CSR have been put forward (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Carroll, 2016; Dahlsrud, 2008; Maignan and Ralston, 2002; Michael, 2003; Rahman, 2011). Useful for the purposes of this article is the definition given by Wood and Logsdon (2002) that CSR is about the contribution that the corporation provides for solving social issues.

Different reasons for the adoption of CSR activities have been analyzed. The institutional approach argues that managers face pressure from different institutions in society. Scott (1995) categorizes regulative, normative and cognitive institutions that exist in a company's environment and constrain or enable its strategic decisions (Aguilera and Jackson, 2003; Campbell, 2007). Shnayder *et al.* (2016) provide a forthright description of each of the three pillars. The regulative pillar comprises institutions that exercise their pressure over companies through laws, and other compulsory regulations. Governments, as a type of formal institution, impact CSR practices by seeking compliance with regulations and penalizing non-compliance. The normative pillar consists of institutions that encourage companies to behave morally or ethically, usually in compliance with industry or other external standards. The cognitive pillar encompasses less tangible institutions that

encourage companies' behavior through social mechanisms like social pressure and conformity. These are the least formal institutions. No official rules are established and the consequences for non-compliance are not always clear or understood. Institutions from this pillar can encourage isomorphism between companies – companies copy each other's behavior. As more companies adopt certain behaviors, they become 'normal' or standard, which may encourage the remaining companies to follow suit (Shnayder *et al.*, 2016).

According to Campbell (2004, 2007), Doh and Guay (2006) and Hiss (2009) institutional settings are shaped by institutional legacies that reflect the culture, history and polity of a particular country or region. Neo-institutionalists also differentiate between formal and informal institutions (Campbell, 2004, 2007; Doh and Guay, 2006; Hiss, 2009; Keim, 2003). Written norms, rules, laws, regulations and directives, property rights are 'formal' institutions while habits, cultural traits, customs, religions, languages and values are 'informal' institutions (Doh and Guay, 2006; Zucker, 1987). This theoretical framework is conceptualized in Figure 1.

Research on determinants of CSR explored the effects of external normative values (e.g. the ethical concerns of particular stakeholder groups or of the formal institutional environment) on CSR. Scholars have argued for an interaction between individual, organizational and institutional motivations for CSR (Filatotchev and Nakajima, 2014), individual and organizational representing internal motivations and institutional representing external motivations for CSR. Studies on the interplay between organizational (e.g. corporate culture) and institutional motivations for CSR activities are more prevalent. Fewer studies have examined the effects of internal values at the organizational or individual levels (e.g. the ethical concerns, the political ideology of top management, etc.) on CSR (Petrenko *et al.*, 2016). In the management literature individual/managerial values are among the primary determinants of CSR (Neubert *et al.*, 2009; Schminke *et al.*, 2005). Yet empirical evidence and theoretical elaboration on managers' motivations for conducting CSR at the individual level have been scarce (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Yin *et al.*, 2016). Authors have also shown that instrumental motivation is not the only driver for CSR but could be associated with managers' values that indicate a normative motivation (Hemingway, 2005; Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004; Yin *et al.*, 2016).

In relation to agroholdings as an object of our analysis, several studies have shown that companies may adopt an instrumental approach while fulfilling at the same time social functions. Gagalyuk *et al.* (2018) based on case studies of four agroholdings involving interviews with 11 managers of these, identified that Ukrainian agroholdings adopt an instrumental approach to CSR but fulfill at the same time social functions. Similarly, Grouiez (2014) found in the Orel Oblast of Russia that social policies of farms could not be separated from

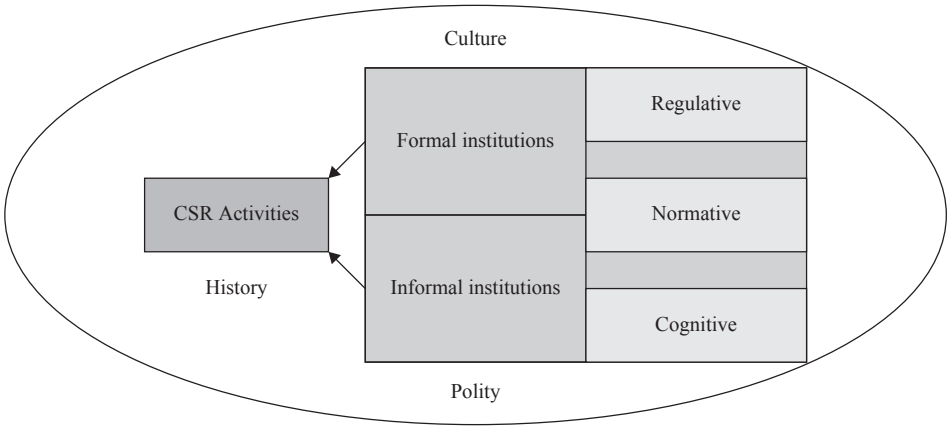

Figure 1. Institution categories (formal and informal OR regulative, normative and cognitive) that influence managers' inclination towards practicing corporate social responsibility activities under existing institutional legacies (culture, history and polity). Devised by authors according to Scott (1995), Keim (2003), Campbell (2004, 2007), Doh and Guay (2006), Hiss (2009), Shnayder *et al.* (2016).

their economic development strategies. Our approach may provide additional insights into how institutions and individual values motivate managers' behavior to conduct CSR activities or not. We have not identified further studies specifically focusing on the motivation for CSR in farming companies.

3. Empirical context

Argentina has not been devoid of pressing ongoing social issues, such as high unemployment rates and recurrent economic crises with increases in poverty levels (Cooney, 2007; Stiglitz, 2002). Corruption, inefficient public health infrastructure, lack of proper sanitation in rural and urban areas and growing poverty rates and inequality are the most urgent social issues the country has to tackle currently. A report of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina showed that 40.8% of people are below the poverty line, which manifests in food insecurity, poor environmental quality and deficient access to water, energy, sanitation services and decent housing (CNA, 2019). Rural poverty is a crucial part of the poverty pictures here; however, it is not strictly an agricultural problem (Verner, 2006). Scarce provision of rural public services related to health, education, infrastructure and transfer programs further deepen this picture.

The agricultural sector plays an important role in Argentina's economy being also a key player in global food security (World Bank Group, 2018). In 2019, the share of agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (% of GDP) was reported at 6.1% (The World Bank, 2020). According to data of the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS-USDA) and Rosario Grain Board (2020, 2021), Argentina is a top 5 producer and exporter of soybeans and its derivates, corn, sorghum, sunflower and its derivates, lemons and its derivates, pears and garlic. In 2020, it was the third largest global producer of soybeans, with 50 million tons (behind Brazil and the USA) and the third exporter of beans but first exporter of soybean oil and meal. With a production of 51 million tons of corn in 2020, the country is the fifth producer globally (after the USA, China, Brazil and the EU) and the third exporter. Argentina also ranks ninth in the world in wheat production with 20 million tons (after the EU, China, India, Russia, USA, Canada, Ukraine and Pakistan) and it is the sixth exporter. It is also the eleventh producer and sixth exporter of barley, and the eighth producer and second exporter of sorghum. Among the provinces in the northern part of the country, Tucumán province has contributed the highest shares in the production of wheat in addition to the province of Santiago del Estero (Table 1).

Argentina is one of the countries that have registered an expansion of agroholdings and large farms. These farms are active in large-scale land acquisitions and constitute a primary agriculture actor, whether through ownership or leasing of land (or a combination of both). Agroholdings are very large farms that are organized over a few hundreds to tens of thousands of hectares, under a variety of organizational and legal forms, and names (Hermans *et al.*, 2017). They have been defined as an agricultural organization whose shares are owned by a holding company that acts as an umbrella for a number of horizontally and vertically integrated units in the agri-food chain (Visser *et al.*, 2012). In the case of Argentina they are not only horizontally and integrated units but they can also include vertical and horizontal coordination (Senesi *et al.*, 2017). These farm structures are network-based rather than connected through ownership via equity or shares.

The Pampas and the Northwestern part of Argentina are the main cereal and oilseeds producing regions. Historically, crops rotated with permanent pastures that could restore soil structure and fertility covered the Pampas (Lence, 2010). Switching to continuous cropping changed these cycles, while double cropping (mainly wheat and soybeans) has become a very popular choice for agricultural producers in the Pampas (Bert *et al.*, 2011; Lence, 2010; Medan *et al.*, 2011). Especially from the 1980s onwards with the adoption of no-tillage techniques and genetically modified crops, agriculture intensified and led to the replacement of mixed cattle grazing-cropping systems to continuous cropping and increases of field sizes (Gras, 2009; Medan *et al.*, 2011). Tucumán province in the Northwest is home to sugarcane producers and in the second half of the nineteenth century its main activities focused on alcohol production from sugarcane, tobacco and leather crafts (Bravo, 2008). Wheat cultivation registered notable increases in the 1950s and Tucumán province became one of the provinces with the largest wheat-producing surfaces after Santiago del Estero among those in the Northwest.

Table 1. Argentina crop production TOP6 extensive crops – 2019/2020 harvest (Ministry of Agriculture and Rosario Grain Board, 2020).

Crop area (in hectares)

Province	Wheat	Barley	Corn	Sorghum	Soybean	Sunflower	Total	Share/ total	Winter cereals	Summer cereals	Oilseeds	Total
Buenos Aires	2,304,200	855,682	2,308,200	238,138	6,180,061	875,043	12,761,323	34%	3,159,882	2,546,338	7,055,104	12,761,323
Cordoba	1,530,050	53,325	2,614,910	121,688	4,971,202	18,599	9,309,774	25%	1,583,375	2,736,598	4,989,801	9,309,774
Entre Rios	365,800	4,120	382,500	151,750	1,426,400	4,547	2,335,117	6%	369,920	534,250	1,430,947	2,335,117
La Pampa	371,900	60,785	479,000	39,875	516,000	213,786	1,681,347	5%	432,685	518,875	729,786	1,681,347
Santa Fe	903,900	28,234	890,800	141,288	3,057,363	206,234	5,227,818	14%	932,134	1,032,088	3,263,597	5,227,818
San Luis	24,200	–	377,800	17,125	327,340	8,509	754,974	2%	24,200	394,925	335,849	754,974
Central Argentina	5,500,050	1,002,147	7,053,210	709,863	16,478,366	1,326,717	32,070,353	86%	6,502,197	7,763,073	17,805,083	32,070,353
Catamarca	34,700	–	9,300	375	29,900	–	74,275	0%	34,700	9,675	29,900	74,275
Chaco	115,800	–	325,500	51,613	511,068	495,243	1,499,223	4%	115,800	377,113	1,006,311	1,499,223
Corrientes	–	–	14,000	5,000	20,000	–	39,000	0%	–	19,000	20,000	39,000
Formosa	–	–	40,000	28,750	18,500	6,546	93,796	0%	–	68,750	25,046	93,796
Jujuy	3,265	–	5,244	–	7,238	–	15,747	0%	3,265	5,244	7,238	15,747
Misiones	–	–	22,200	–	1,850	–	24,050	0%	–	22,200	1,850	24,050
Salta	75,900	–	262,150	–	493,800	–	831,850	2%	75,900	262,150	493,800	831,850
Santiago del Estero	288,900	6,351	684,500	109,500	971,840	46,121	2,107,212	6%	295,251	794,000	1,017,961	2,107,212
Tucuman	145,400	947	65,750	5,250	203,900	–	421,247	1%	146,347	71,000	203,900	421,247
Northern Argentina	663,965	7,298	1,428,644	200,488	2,258,096	547,909	5,106,399	14%	671,263	1,629,132	2,806,005	5,106,399
Country total	6,164,015	1,009,444	8,481,854	910,350	18,736,462	1,874,626	37,176,751	100%	7,173,459	9,392,204	20,611,088	37,176,751

Production (in metric tons)

Buenos Aires	11,305,002	3,781,477	12,955,509	714,945	18,542,729	2,050,108	49,349,770	34%	15,086,479	13,670,454	20,592,837	49,349,770
Cordoba	7,312,869	120,958	16,170,280	546,339	16,704,156	49,759	40,904,361	28%	7,433,827	16,716,619	16,753,915	40,904,361
Entre Rios	1,680,170	17,232	2,298,225	743,617	3,948,452	10,256	8,697,953	6%	1,697,403	3,041,842	3,958,708	8,697,953
La Pampa	1,454,897	205,157	1,096,620	108,096	1,356,692	486,477	4,707,938	3%	1,660,054	1,204,716	1,843,169	4,707,938
Santa Fe	4,360,239	98,176	5,802,581	475,662	10,413,337	376,521	21,526,516	15%	4,458,415	6,278,243	10,789,858	21,526,516
San Luis	84,110	–	2,500,970	39,962	893,314	20,135	3,538,490	2%	84,110	2,540,932	913,449	3,538,490
Central Argentina	26,197,287	4,223,000	40,824,185	2,628,621	51,858,681	2,993,255	128,725,029	88%	30,420,287	43,452,806	54,851,936	128,725,029
Catamarca	55,881	–	50,050	1,119	78,111	–	185,161	0%	55,881	51,169	78,111	185,161
Chaco	163,670	–	1,999,884	218,572	1,509,004	773,233	4,664,363	3%	163,670	2,218,456	2,282,237	4,664,363
Corrientes	–	–	34,020	9,990	42,668	–	86,678	0%	–	44,010	42,668	86,678
Formosa	–	–	153,000	87,915	48,134	12,724	301,773	0%	–	240,915	60,858	301,773
Jujuy	10,166	–	15,012	–	12,819	–	37,998	0%	10,166	15,012	12,819	37,998
Misiones	–	–	64,293	–	4,933	–	69,226	0%	–	64,293	4,933	69,226
Salta	133,565	–	1,521,555	–	1,188,651	–	2,843,771	2%	133,565	1,521,555	1,188,651	2,843,771
Santiago del Estero	816,269	–	4,483,905	405,596	3,370,597	77,788	9,154,155	6%	816,269	4,889,501	3,448,385	9,154,155
Tucuman	173,162	–	329,991	14,186	524,144	–	1,041,483	1%	173,162	344,177	524,144	1,041,483
Northern Argentina	1,352,713	–	8,651,710	737,379	6,779,062	863,745	18,384,609	12%	1,352,713	9,389,089	7,642,806	18,384,609
Country total	27,550,000	4,223,000	49,475,895	3,366,000	58,637,742	3,857,000	147,109,637	100%	31,773,000	52,841,895	62,494,742	147,109,637

This expansion has registered increases, stagnations and decreases over the past thirty years due to a number of institutional changes (Senesi *et al.*, 2017). The country has gone through periods in which its economy has been liberalized and then recontroled intermittently. Despite this, increasing connections to global agricultural markets have favored agricultural modernization and intensification. Geographically, Argentina has vast areas of scarcely populated land and is characterized by insecure property rights and weak institutions (Bidaseca and Visser, 2010). The development of agriculture via expanding land areas has been associated with conflicts over land (Vom Hau and Wilde, 2010) in provinces such as Santiago del Estero (Bidaseca and Visser, 2010), demise of family farms, restructuring of social relations and expansion of monocultures[1] (especially soy) in the Pampas and other regions, which according to Pengue (2005) and Gras (2009) place food sovereignty[2] and food self-sufficiency[3] in jeopardy (Gras, 2009; Pengue, 2005). Displacement of small-scale producers (Urcola *et al.*, 2013), deforestation and biodiversity depletion due to agricultural intensification in the Gran Chaco region (Mastrangelo, 2014; Zak *et al.*, 2004), habitat destruction due to deforestation, depletion of soil nutrient stocks and biomass in the Pampas (Viglizzo *et al.*, 2011) are additional problems raised.

CSR in the agricultural sector in Argentina has been widely driven by North American and European certification standards (Newell and Muro, 2006). The authors underline that the approach to CSR activities is rather passive and concentrated in its 'soft, voluntary and philanthropic phase, receiving proposals from NGOs, employees or neighboring communities and then offering the time of their employees, money or goods to successful applicants (Haslam, 2004; Newell and Muro, 2006). Our analysis in Argentina contributes to this literature.

4. Research design and methods

This study is an exploratory qualitative study that combines qualitative thematic analysis with theoretical development. To address the first two research questions on the types of CSR activities undertaken by large farms and agroholdings and how they perceive social issues we use thematic analysis. Perception precedes behavior (Yin *et al.*, 2016) and this is why we also focus on managers' perception of social issues. To address the third question on the motivation to conduct these types of activities, we apply grounded theory according to Corbin and Strauss (2015). The first two research questions complement the core purpose of the paper to ground the analysis in the perspectives of key informants and how they give meaning and conceptualize their motivation around undertaking CSR activities. Building on the work of Nielsen and D'haen (2014) who pointed to the widely missing methodological information of qualitative research, we give a more detailed overview of our methodology.

We conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews with key informants from large farming organizations. Our definition of 'large' is broad and refers to the amount of hectares the companies operate themselves or through contractors, either by owning or leasing land. Therefore, all farms over 1000 ha are considered large for the purpose of this paper. Preliminary in-depth face-to-face interviews conducted during 10 days in June 2018 in Buenos Aires have guided our understanding of the activity of the companies and the types of CSR activities conducted by these. The purpose of these interviews was to inform the choice of the methodology. Contacts to the companies approached during this period were provided through partners of the Lascala Project at the University of Buenos Aires (FAUBA). An element of judgment approach (Marshall, 1996) is present since we made efforts to contact exclusively large farms and agroholdings and participants coming from a range of managerial and organizational backgrounds. Ten companies accepted our request for an in-depth interview.

[1] Monoculture as defined by Pengue (2005), but actually duoculture, as soy is rotated most commonly with wheat in Argentina

[2] Food sovereignty is defined as the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (La Via Campesina, 2003).

[3] Food self-sufficiency is defined as a country producing a proportion of its own food needs that approaches or exceeds 100% of its food consumption (FAO, 2016)

In the course of a second stage of data collection we conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews during 5-31 August 2019. Three more interviews were conducted remotely with companies that were not available during this period. We used a mix of convenience, judgment and snowball sampling (Marshall, 1996). We approached the same participants that had been contacted during the first field trip and five of them accepted to give a second interview. The main author identified and contacted additional participants directly by consultation of various online sources and through recommendations from various international and domestic researchers and researchers at an environmental research institute in Argentina (judgment sample). Interview participants recommended us additional interviewees (snowball sample). All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded with ATLAS.ti 8 (ATLAS.ti, Berlin, Germany). In total, 18 managers from 17 companies were interviewed. 12 of 18 managers interviewed represented family-owned companies. In addition to these, among the companies we had contacted initially, one company refused to contribute to the research, ten companies did not reply at all, four companies did not follow up and two companies had ceased their activity. Table 2 provides an overview of the types of interviewed companies.

The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews aimed at: (a) identifying the type of CSR activities conducted; (b) the motivation to undertake these activities; (c) the problems faced as a large farm and opinion on how the agricultural sector is perceived; (d) the main social issues in Argentina's rural areas. A list of questions prepared before the fieldwork assisted the interviews (see list of interview questions in the Supplementary Material). We did not indicate to the interviewees how we define CSR but let them inform us what they understand under CSR.

We conducted the interviews in two regions in Argentina. One is the Pampas region, where we interviewed companies in Buenos Aires that are active in one or more provinces in this region (Cordoba, Santa Fe, Entre Rios). A second region is the Northwestern part of Argentina, the province of Tucumán. In the city of San Miguel de Tucumán we conducted interviews with companies splitting their activity between Tucumán province and at least one additional province in the Northwestern region (e.g. Salta, Santiago del Estero, Catamarca, Jujuy). Wax (1971) urges to select respondents as broadly as possible. Since most of the studies on agroholdings are focused on cereal and oilseed production, our selection criteria for companies was

Table 2. Number of hectares operated and type of company.

Company	Operated ha land[1]	Agroholding	Domestic (D) / International (I)	Family-owned
1	28,000	x	I	x
2	60,000	x	D	x
3	4,000	no	D	x
4	50,000	x	D	
5	over 7,000	x	D	
6	7,200	no	D	
7	30,000	x	I	x
8	over 20,000	no	D	x
9	200,000	x	I	
10	na	no	D	x
11	over 20,000	no	D	
12	6,000	no	D	x
13	over 20,000	x	D	x
14	188,000	x	I	x
15	20,000	no	D	x
16	3,000	no	D	x
17	over 5,000	no	D	x

[1] na = not available.

motivated by these large farms and agroholdings producing wheat, corn, sunflower and/or soybean. To give depth to the sampling we also interviewed managers in agroholdings that in addition to cash crop production are active in citrus and sugarcane production, two activities that are specific to the Northwestern region. Therefore, we ensured heterogeneity of key informants by geographic and crop diversification and diversification among company managers. We aimed at conducting the interviews with the company owner or CEO. In the cases where this was not possible we conducted the interviews with sustainability/corporate social responsibility managers, farm managers, chief financial officers or chief operations officers. This diversified composition of interviewees helped to capture differences in perceptions and interpretations of CSR activities, social issues and motivations.

5. Results and discussion

The research questions of this study are about the perceptions of managers in large farms and agroholdings on the types of social issues present in rural areas in Argentina, the types of CSR activities they conduct to address certain social issues and their motivations to do so.

We find that most companies have an active approach to CSR activities, taking responsibility for certain CSR activities despite lack of public pressure to do so. Some managers have a motivational basis for CSR activities that is normative and that complements an instrumental interest for the success of the company. Instrumental motivations would be those that are intended to benefit the existence of the company and further their economic success in the long run. Normative motivations suggest those behaviors that managers chose because they believe it is morally correct to do so. In the results section we first present managers' perceptions on social issues in Argentina's rural areas. Secondly, we discuss the types of CSR activities conducted. Finally, we explain the motivations for CSR activities along the institutions that managers identify to be or not to be present to motivate CSR activities. We identify a lack of national-level institutional pressure, lack of sectoral institutional pressure, pressure from international institutions (certification schemes) and presence of expectations from local educational and health organizations. Among family-owned companies we also identify three main individual values company managers highlight to motivate their activities: identification, benevolence, and obligation. These individual values unfold along the dimensions of available time and knowledge (core competence).

5.1 Managers' perceptions of social issues

- *Normative and instrumental approach to social issues*

Poverty and education are two main social concerns in Argentina, in urban as well as in rural areas. Problems such as land grabbing, displacements from land or conflict over land between small and large farms, demise of family farms (issues that the literature has increasingly pointed to) are not problems the company managers confront. It is rather social issues that they perceive to affect the long-term business activity and existence of their company, such as poverty and associated lack of education and skills of community members. Managers consider communities' and employees' wellbeing a main focal point, as one of them argues: 'You cannot be well if the people around you are not well.' (Interview 7 August 2019). Interviewees recognize that if their employees and the communities they are active in are not well off, they themselves will not be in the future. Employees are considered crucial stakeholders of the companies, while the communities the companies are active in will provide them with the future needed labor force. In this sense, the CSR activities the companies undertake to support peoples' development through educational and health programs is instrumental, as the purpose is to maintain and/or enhance the wellbeing of the own company in the future. However, in several cases it overlaps with a normative motivation: 'My motivation is to improve the living conditions of the people who live here…and if I need a technician – to not have to look for him in another city.' (Interview 5 August 2019).

Much of the CSR literature has treated CSR as a dichotomy between an economic and an ethical purpose (Garriga and Melé, 2004). From the interview responses however, instrumental and normative (ethical) considerations are not mutually exclusive. This is in line with Jones and Wicks (1999) who have also argued that CSR can have both a normative and an instrumental dimension. Graafland and Mazereeuw-Van der Dijn Schouten (2012) contend that in the case of managers who are motivated to do CSR by intrinsic/normative (e.g. ethical or altruistic) motives, policymakers should be careful with providing incentives, because extrinsic (instrumental) motives may crowd out intrinsic (normative) motives (Frey and Jegen, 2001).

Another manager states that it is not easy to separate financial from social performance because in most of the situations at the operational level the economic and social or environmental aspects of a decision are highly interlinked:

> A basic example – no-till is a business decision, but it is a sustainable policy as well, because you have benefits […] with the money, and […] with enhancing the environment. So there are many, many situations like that […] where you take the decision for business performance but it also has a positive impact on the environment or social aspect. (Interview 15 August 2019)

This example further supports the argument that normative and instrumental motivations cannot be easily separated.

Among our interviewees we have not identified a company with an exclusively economic focus as an underlying motivation to its CSR activity. Thus, managers did not state that CSR activities with a social focus are conducted to derive financial benefits but two companies underlined that they need to be economically viable to be able to undertake CSR activities: 'To be a sustainable company […] for the long term […] the economic pillar is the first most important to us […] we need some return, because if not, we have to close down the operations.' (Interview 15 August 2019). Not having returns would signify for the company to not be able to further contribute to social and environmental dimensions of CSR.

There is no consensus among the interviewees about whether the companies need to be economically profitable in order to conduct social responsibility activities. One manager mentions:

> No, I would not be able to tell (if there is a financial benefit) […] There is a direct donation with an approved budget, and that is not directly related to business profits, the budget is available regardless of the company's economic balance. (Interview conducted 22 August 2019)

This company may be more intrinsically motivated, as it continues doing philanthropic activities even if it does not have a profit. At the same time this can point to the reduced amount of resources the company allocates, so that independent of circumstances these resources can still be allocated. Companies generally agree that the amount of financial resources they allocate for CSR activities is small. Another company's motivation for social contribution appears to be instrumental, as the manager underlines:

> We are very involved in the local situations of communities […] they have a lot of underdevelopment […] they need basic things, like education, nutrition, health and so on. […] And we understand that we need people from those communities, to operate our farms, to operate tractors, etc. We need those communities to be healthier than they are today, so, it's a win-win situation. If we help them, they will help us by providing better and more skilled workers, and better labor force. (Interview 15 August 2019)

However, the manager states that they consider labor provision for the communities an important contribution on the social side as they have generated a large number of jobs:

> On the social side […] we believe that […] the most important thing that we do for society or the communities, is providing labor for the communities, because we started from zero and today we are almost nine thousand people. (Interview 15 August 2019)

In relation to labor the manager also underlines that in comparison to other companies they:

> pay all the taxes, pay all the social services and benefits for the workers, which is something not very common in Argentina. Here 40% of the economy is 'under the desk'; no taxes, no security services, nothing, so we believe that one of our most important impacts on the communities is offering these jobs […] That is a huge impact on the rural areas of Argentina. (Interview 15 August 2019)

Thus the main social issues the companies perceive to be salient in rural areas in Argentina are poverty and education. The way they contribute to addressing these issues is firstly through job creation. In an institutional context, where formal institutions such as laws and regulation enforcement lack (as 40% of the economy runs illegally according to the interviewee) these companies regard their contribution to social issues by complying with tax and labor laws and additionally developing educational and health projects with other organizations and educational institutions. Kuznetsov *et al.* (2009) found similar results in Russia. Russian managers from different industries included activities like tax payment, employment creation and abiding by the law into CSR activities. This view of CSR compared to countries where the rule of law and other formal and informal institutions are in place is, according to the authors, reflective of the country's weak institutional environment, 'in which laws are abused, rules are either feeble or not enforced, and institutions are incomplete, tendentious and corrupt' (Kuznetsov *et al.*, 2009).

5.2 Types of corporate social responsibility activities

The companies interviewed conduct workplace and community CSR both out of normative and instrumental motivation. The CSR activities range from a mix of basic charitable giving in the form of product and money donations for educational and health purposes to targeted programs devised by the company or together with schools and health organizations for addressing specific issues (e. g. substance abuse, child labor, sexual education, women's employment opportunities, first aid and fire prevention courses, environmental education activities). Even though we have specifically inquired the companies about CSR activities with a social goal, some companies underlined conservation and biodiversity monitoring activities. The companies imply a positive social effect of these environmental activities in the long term.

All the 18 managers interviewed undertake some form of philanthropic activities, except one (two managers come from the same company in different regions, this is why Table 2 shows 17 companies). On a first level of engagement, some managers resume to ad hoc donation of goods or money to charity or assistance of employees with educational or health matters, a type of CSR Newell and Muro (2006) framed as 'rather passive and concentrated in its 'soft, voluntary and philanthropic phase'. On a second level companies channel their philanthropic activity in a more coordinated way by collaboration on health and educational projects with NGOs. A third level of engagement is that of devising own projects and goals through a company NGO and establishing partnerships with other private sector organizations, NGOs and educational institutions. Another level would comprise companies that also collaborate with research institutes to address environmental problems that may have social consequences (e.g. monitoring of bees for cross-contamination with pesticides, wildlife monitoring). A number of companies in the Tucumán region have established collaboration with a consultancy comprised of social experts. The programs devised by these companies specifically address social matters of their employees and are aimed at improving their living conditions (e.g. remediation and enhancement of housing conditions). The collaborations with educational institutions such as research institutes derive from the public-private partnerships that have been promoted since the late 1990s in Argentina (Arza and López, 2011). One agroholding that also operates among the largest number of hectares in our sample is a company that has established an NGO as an independent activity of the company.

Among other activities, this NGO supports other multinational companies that invest in Argentina with addressing community development projects.

The categorization (depicted in Figure 2) enables an overview of the variety of engagements companies choose but does not signify that one company exclusively chooses to engage at one level. The categorization also does not imply a ranking, although we identify that ad-hoc donations require less time and labor resources compared to projects where more private sector, public and civil society organizations are involved.

A combination of several engagements depicted in Figure 2 may be possible. Table S1 of the Supplementary Material gives a broader overview of the types of CSR activities conducted by the interviewed managers in the companies. The different levels of CSR activities are such that no company resembles the other one in the number of CSR activities engaged in. We can classify the companies along a spectrum of passive to proactive behavior. This spectrum implies the topics they address; the amount of personnel they dedicate to these activities; whether they coordinate the activities themselves through an own NGO; whether they collaborate with organizations such as specialized NGOs on the different topics; whether they also engage with organizations such as consultancies or research organizations and a mix of these. This spectrum can give an overview of the variety of activities companies choose to engage in, although it is insufficient to inform us in this format on the resources allocated and the depth and actual impact of CSR activities on employees, communities and society overall. We could argue that within the same industry large farms and agroholdings pursue different responsibility business models and that there exist distinct patterns of responsibility embedding (Laasch and Pinkse, 2020).

5.3 Motivations for CSR activities

- *Lack of national-level institutional pressure*

Institutional theory has largely argued for institutional drivers as a reason for CSR activities. Scholars have shown that companies may develop CSR as a response to wider social and institutional pressures (Aguilera *et al.*, 2007; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). For instance, the state could exert pressure through instruments of public policy or local governmental organizations, legal regulation or other formal institutions according to Crouch (2006). Our thematic analysis, however, shows that managers of large farms and agroholdings do not experience sectoral nor national-level institutional pressures. No coercive political regulation nor formal constraints or normative pressure of professional groups through for example farmers' associations or other independent organizations exist. Most of the companies are part of at least one farmers' organization. Especially in Aapresid (Argentine Association of Direct Sowing Producers – Asociatión Argentina de Productores en Siembra Directa) social issues are discussed and awareness about them is raised but the companies unanimously do not perceive pressure to be socially responsible. This situation is further coupled with non-existing activism from consumers and employees and the apparent lack of other formal organizations such as NGOs, who have not been critical of these companies' activity to specifically address a wider array of social issues. Agrarian movements have been active in Argentina for at least two decades and the pressure on

Figure 2. Engagement spectrum of large farms and agroholdings and the types of activities and entities they engage with.

the agricultural sector has increased over this period with a strong focus on deforestation, agrichemical use and a reform of the national seed law. However, our interviewees do not point to pressure in these respects. One company underlines that they do not conduct their activity in areas associated with deforestation:

> We try not to do deforestation, we are not involved in the huge forests, we don't want to be there, and we don't want to be in the huge wetlands. We don't want to be operating in the most sensitive areas of our planet, that's for sure. There are some situations that are 'in the middle' […] a lot of parts in Argentina, that have some wet areas or trees and maybe we operate in those areas, always by the law. (Interview 15 August 2019)

On the contrary, we find that formal regulative and informal normative institutions are lacking as a pressure for these large farms and agroholdings to undertake or improve their social responsibility activities. Two company managers mention that they encountered demands by a local neighbor regarding their spraying activity, which they however do not perceive as a critique from society but consider being legitimate demands and are open to address:

> From time to time […] there is something that is quite common in the rural sector, that maybe another farmer, a neighbor says: you sprayed my crop instead of yours, because of the wind. (Interview 15 August 2019)

Thus pressure from villagers does exist but as the interviewee argues it is few and very localized cases, which are addressed by the company:

> Sometimes it happens, that is not a big issue; it is something that has a very low frequency. And it is something that every farmer at some point in life will have to go through once. (Interview 15 August 2019)

These types of situations or other low frequency claims regarding noise or dust the company considers to be 'a 'common situation', but not an issue, it's not that society will try to close down our operation.' (Interview 15 August 2019). These problems are not experienced as major problems but as one-off situations that can be addressed right away by the company. This company expressed its interest in communication with affected communities in those situations where demands are posed to them, to be able to identify the source of the problem and the way to tackle it. The solution-orientation of these companies shows that they do not perceive such problems as threats but rather as opportunities to improve their activities. However, scholarly research has shown that those demands have priority in which the stakeholders are perceived as powerful, those who can directly impact the firm (Hart and Sharma, 2004). In case the company does not perceive the stakeholders as powerful they may not consider the issue a priority. This is why authors increasingly underline the importance to address fringe stakeholders – stakeholders who are remote but can exert increasing pressure and question a company's legitimacy to operate (Hart and Sharma, 2004).

Without exception companies mention that they comply with laws. One manager states: 'We, as a company, we do everything on […] the right side […] by the law.' (Interview 15 August 2019). Managers regard this compliance as a condition for social responsibility and for engagement in other responsibility levels such as ethical and philanthropic (discretionary according to Carroll, 1991) responsibility. Our interviewees indicate an agreement that with undertaking CSR activities they represent a minority and that a majority of economic entities do not comply with legal regulation regarding labor practices or taxes. Indeed, Ronconi (2010) and Bergman (2010) have shown that in Argentina only half of the workforce receives all the benefits to which they are legally entitled, while tax evasion is 'a well-entrenched phenomenon'. An explanation could be that adhering to laws under conditions where the majority of entities would comply with laws and regulations would not be considered CSR by the interviewees but institutional conformity. However, in a context where the majority of economic actors do not conform and it is not the norm to abide by formal institutions such as laws and regulations because of weak governance and lack of enforcement (Ronconi, 2010), abiding by the

law is considered socially responsible behavior by these managers (much in line with Carroll's definition of CSR). Similar tendencies have been observed for instance in Russia by Crotty (2016) as well as by Gagalyuk *et al.* (2018) in Ukraine. Legal responsibility of companies is about complying with the basic rules that have been set. Independent of their economic performance, the companies indicated that they conduct ethical (e.g. fair working conditions for employees, payment of all contributions, etc.) and philanthropic CSR activities, while abiding by laws and regulations. However, the companies do not experience external institutional pressure (by local administrations, by civil society, etc.) to do so.

■ *Pressure from international institutions (certification schemes)*

Argentina's adherence to the Mercosur regional trading bloc came with increased international investment and demands for compliance with social and environmental standards. From an institutional theory perspective this experience is termed the 'country-of-origin-effect' (Noorderhaven and Harzing, 2003) and especially applies to citrus and soybean production among interviewed companies. The certifications companies need to apply (e.g. UN Global Compact, Round Table for Responsible Soy (RTRS)) reflect the norms and values of Western democracies but have led to changes in institutions in Argentina in these sectors. Muthuri and Gilbert (2011) argue that the changes in institutions in so-called developing countries are wide-ranging due to the 'country-of-origin-effect.' Certifications are a variant of formal institutions that act as a pressure to adapt to normative requirements of Western clients. The countries of origin of these clients are the US or European countries and increasingly Japan and South Korea. By engaging with the global market where the clients of this origin are present, the agricultural producers are aware that informal institutions such as norms in their country may change in the future, too.

In one case, existing certifications drive more responsible behavior in relation to waste disposal and community CSR. One interviewee talks about his habitual way of disposing waste, burning it like everyone else does, instead of taking it to the waste dump. Only when the RTRS certification for soybean imposed to dispose of his waste appropriately he engaged with the destination of his waste:

> […] Historically I did what everyone does, dug a well, put the litter in, burned it and covered it. When I began to certify (with RTRS), they told me that I have to take the garbage to the dump and not burn it. Then I went to the dump, to see it, because it had never happened. I arrive and see that it is an open-air dump, all the garbage scattered there, animals, pigs, and cows eating, so I wondered: What am I doing with my garbage!?… Many people were going to look for things in the dump; there were people stirring the garbage, but people did not look for food in the garbage, only in Sachayoj; what they were going to look for was bits of cable, to be able to join them and have electricity, and they make an illegal connection to the electric network, and that way, three times everything was set on fire. So, those types of situations that you see make you aware of the things that are important to see from the social point of view, in which one hopes to contribute. (Interview 5 August 2019)

The RTRS certification scheme requirements motivated the manager to check the conditions for his waste disposal. He thereby identified the lack of state involvement in securing an electricity infrastructure in rural areas and saw what the lack of regulation enforcement for waste disposal (that he had benefited from like everyone else) looks like. Poverty is directly associated with the lack of these means that cause problems, such as fires, in rural communities. Therefore, the manager hopes to contribute to these communities by having organized a fire prevention and first aid course for the community. Scholars would argue that hereby the manager only addresses the effects and not the cause of the problem while maintaining a status quo (Eikenberry and Mirabella, 2017). However, the manager points to the structural national institutional deficiencies – institutions that did not pose a pressure on the company owner to dispose the waste at the waste dump and do not ensure electricity for the communities. The company manager recognizes that he has been part of this system for a long time until new institutions and norms (certifications from Western countries) required him to change his behavior. Structurally he will still be part of the problem, as long as the Argentine state cannot devise mechanisms for companies to dispose of their waste in an environmentally and socially

friendly way. Even though his behavior has changed, now that he feels pressure from a normative point of view, his individual efforts can only have a minor impact, as other companies who do not have the pressure of international certifications or domestic institutions will keep to their old habits.

From a theoretical perspective, the manager's response to the waste issue before the RTRS certification and after the decision for RTRS certification can be interpreted as his company inhabiting different institutional spaces. His decision to address waste management issues without being pressured by local institutions to do so, points to what Laasch and Pinkse (2020) argue as motivations not being defined by the institutions within the national boundaries but by stakeholders dominating another institutional space, in this case that of RTRS certification within which the company is now active. The location of a company inside or outside of a space's boundaries distinguishes the type of institutional complexity it responds to leading to distinct responses.

At the same time the manager underlines that he cannot address the cause of the waste disposal problem by himself, without the support of the state. The manager identifies that addressing poverty or educational issues is a matter of shared responsibility. In his view, companies in each category of the supply chain in the private sector, customers, civil society and the state have the responsibility for their share of social responsibility:

> This is not only the responsibility of the producer, it is the responsibility of the entire value chain, and also of the state. Because it is useless for me from my humble place to make all the effort I make if I do not have a livelihood from the state, in this case to solve the issue of waste disposal. (Interview 5 August 2019).

Several managers share this view and especially companies that would be considered small and medium-sized motivated this with a lack of resources and also a lack of supportive infrastructure to conduct their agricultural activities. Their CSR engagement needs to therefore address basic needs that are not covered by state institutions and which turn into problems for the communities because they are not covered (e.g. fires because of lacking electricity infrastructure).

In the Tucumán region we identified several companies that collaborate with a consultancy on social issues. One company argues that up until collaborating with this consultancy, they were not aware of the poor living conditions of their own employees.

> I was involved with social activities personally but never with the company. [The consultancy owner] and I established the food bank in Tucumán. […] We discussed with [consultancy company] about a project for our employees. They have architects, psychologists, social workers […] they talked to the families and at the end they showed us the results and it was very surprising for us because we didn't know how bad the living conditions of our people were. (Interview 26 August 2019)

Orcos *et al.* (2018) categorize consultancies as market-supporting institutions that facilitate capital and information flows within a market and a regulation that encourages business development. They stimulate competitive advantage and while the consultancy owner argues for an ethical motivation of these companies to do these activities ('They really care' – Interview 27 August 2019) one underlying motive may be that as first-movers these CSR activities increase competitiveness in the market for these companies and enable an easier entrance into new markets (Tetrault Sirsly and Lamertz, 2008). For example, when attempting to enter new markets, companies with a good CSR reputation rarely face the same level of resistance as companies with poor CSR reputations (Lougee and Wallace, 2008). The company owner also mentions that the unpredictable political situation in Argentina makes the agricultural sector highly competitive and those companies have a higher chance of survival that constantly invest in new technology and approaches. On the other hand, the companies collaborating with this consultancy company are engaged in an interactive environment that fulfills the gap of expertise the company needs to be able to address social issues. Campbell (2007) underlined that corporations will be more likely to act in socially responsible ways if there are private, independent organizations in their environment that monitor their behavior and mobilize to change it.

We also find that in the case of sugarcane or citrus growers who produce for international markets, the pressure from international clients is much higher for exporting than for domestic producers to comply with social and environmental standards. One manager argues: 'Coca-Cola was our motor…they started asking us about the ISO 14000 standard of food safety. […] if we cannot accomplish their suggestions, we have to cancel our lemons to them.' Not only does the lack of pressure from domestic formal regulations and organizations (e.g. NGOs) in this respect come here to the fore but also the lack of an educational institutional environment with a larger availability of specialized programs that can prepare professionals for better approaching environmental and social issues. Two CSR managers underlined that they identified the need to have a higher education in environmental and social issues to be able to handle certification matters and manage NGO programs. For this purpose, upon own initiative they took up environmental engineering and social project management qualifications: 'Higher education specialization with focus on environmental and social issues applicable for the corporate environment is not common in Argentina and is difficult to study in any location.' (Interview 22 August 2019). International standards and norms may thus further spark the need of professionals to specialize in social and environmental fields, which may increase the request and availability of educational specializations in these sectors. The 'country-of-origin-effect' may be able to unfold thus also at the level of educational development in Argentina and play an important role in how social issues are addressed in the future by agricultural companies.

■ *Local expectations (from educational and health organizations)*

Interviewees also underline that an expectation to be involved within the communities they are active in is present and usually these activities unfold through existing local educational and health organizations, such as schools and NGOs. In this respect, those social issues can be attended to that the local specialists identify and have the expertise and resources to attend to. 'The directors of the schools tell [the company CSR representative] what they need for topics such as gender diversity, child labor.' (Interview 22 August 2019). Additional social issues may exist but the companies are either not aware of them or do not have the means (own financial or human resources and suitable local organizations) to address them. In this sense, international certification standards act in some cases as a pull factor for becoming more aware of social issues and tuned in to one's environment.

Local educational and health organizations seem to play a key role in the types of social issues the company managers identify. Where schools and NGOs focusing on education, healthcare and problems such as alcoholism, womens' access to employment exist, companies not only have a pressure but an incentive and a gateway to address those problems, with resources (e.g. human resources with expertise in those communities and with social issues) they may only difficultly be able to put into place. These organizations thus play a key role in pointing to which the main social issues are that need to be addressed. Relying on a number of local organizations and people also entails that certain social issues will remain unaddressed. In this context, a manager in one company underlined that some people do not want to be helped or are not interested in the programs put at their availability and underlines the necessity of cooperation with communities: 'It depends a lot on the communities if they are receptive […] which is not easy.' (Interview 22 August 2019).

Berger *et al.* (2005) had pointed out that more proactive companies in Argentina have formed partnerships with NGOs, which have a closer relationship with poorer communities. However, the needs of poorer groups are not solicited or not integrated into CSR strategies, Berger *et al.* (2005) argue. One interviewee also mentions that: 'Maybe there are some communities that I still don't know about.' (Interview 15 August 2019). However, as another interviewee argues CSR activities is not only a question of money but 'it is a question of who takes care of a good application of this money'. (Interview 6 August 2019). Thus not only the presence of NGOs with the expertise of developing certain projects is important but also the trust these organizations can impart. As we find, institutions such as trust and local organizations play a key role for companies in addressing the communities' needs.

Furthermore, a lack of pressure by the government and municipalities exists, as the interviewees argue unanimously that they do not have any pressure from them. Also, those social issues appear to have immediacy, which aside from local NGOs, health and educational organizations, employees point to. Usually these are case-by-case events where an employee is assisted with a loan or with support for education of his child, with treatment of a health issue, etc.: '[…] we have many policies in our company for credits, for helping, for scholarships for their kids.' (Interview 28 August 2019). Even if interviewees argue that they allocated a small amount of their budget (between 1-2%) to addressing CSR issues, in a context in which the state has few resources to allocate for social issues and where the preconditions of economic and lawful activity are permanently at risk due to the highly volatile political and financial environment, these activities point to the ethical behavior of managers despite institutional weakness.

■ *Individual values-motivated corporate social responsibility activities*

To analyze the individual values-driven motivation for undertaking CSR activities we adopted the grounded theory methodology. Complementary to thematic analysis, with grounded theory we can formulate a theoretical framework for the motivation that unites managers' perceptions from a variety of differing large farms. Individual values are one element that is repeatedly described by managers part of a family-owned company. As one interviewee argues, these values seem to be present independent of the pressure from certification schemes: 'We are certified since eight or ten years ago. But the culture of the company as a family business meant we were involved in all the communities. Not certified but we did that work. We don't change our culture or our manner of working because of certification.' (Interview 2 September 2019). Different dimensions form this motivation. 14 out of 18 managers interviewed make reference to individual values that motivate them to conduct CSR activities.

■ *Identification*

A culture of philanthropic activities has been historically present in Argentina. Dating back to colonial times the Catholic Church promoted charity organizations to address issues such as homelessness (Newell and Muro, 2006). Eva Peron later consolidated this trend of philanthropy for the poor, called asistencialismo, with the programs for hospitals, children's homes and refuges for young women that she devised through her foundation. During the 1970s due to the repression of military dictatorship traditional ways of civic engagement disappeared. Engagement by the state in civil society elements fell away and community-based and self-help organizations formed (Newell and Muro, 2006). Later with rising levels of capital investment CSR ideas came to grow in the 1990s and several groups of companies became active in this respect. Privatization resulted in an increased role of the private sector in areas it had been previously absent such as health and education (Newell and Muro, 2006). Company managers, however, do not point to such a cultural influence on their motivations. A reason for not explicitly mentioning culture to be an element of influence may be the family as a reference point: 'We always participated in NGOs or social activities. […] It is part of the 'sense', because it is a family company. […] It is our family's approach.'

One interviewee argues that a cultural element may be present as a motivating factor for undertaking CSR activities. However, in the case of this agricultural company, individual values of the owners and managers are a criterion with more weight in choosing to engage in CSR activities. While not mutually exclusive, individual values can be driven by culture and norms and vice versa. Schnebel (2000) has shown that the values that a person is committed to are deeply rooted in their social and socio-cultural background.

Marques *et al.* (2014) have shown that individual values such as identification are more frequent in the discourse of family firms. The value of 'identification' is expressed by managers through an emotional attachment to CSR activities because of the role of family tradition and references to the founder's legacy. In the literature this discourse is connected to the socio-emotional wealth approach (Marques *et al.*, 2014): 'The CSR Manager has a strong imprint of her father's legacy.' (Interview 16 August 2019). The managers describe at least one of the owner's values to be the foundation for individual values that motivate corporate social responsibility activities.

■ *Benevolence*

Managers expressed a will ('voluntad' from *in vivo* coding) to have an overall positive contribution to society and the communities they are active in. We associate this to Schwartz's (2012) value of benevolence. Benevolence values emphasize voluntary concern for others' welfare. Critical here are the relations with the family and primary groups. For the companies the primary groups constitute the employees and the communities (e.g. 'We belong to our community and we think you can't be well if the people around you are not well'; they are friends [the owners] they see Argentina, they see the reality, they see what things are happening and say: 'We have the money, we should help, what can we do? 'It is not a great strategy, it is just: let us help.') (Interview 6 August 2019).

At the same time, managers' normative motivations are associated with benevolence. No financial motive is mentioned as an underlying reason for this motivation but rather an intrinsic motivation to do good. This is in line with what Freeman and Liedtka (1991) described as 'new conversation' instead of CSR. From this perspective companies represent an interconnected web of different interests, which combine caring goals, as a form of altruistic behavior, with a pragmatic behavior that gives them the opportunity to express creativity and personality. Within this framework 'self-creation' and 'community creation' do not exclude each other but constitute an adaptive process. Further arguments of the interviewees complement this view as they mention that they do not react to current pressures, as these are non-existent but adapt themselves to future societal demands.

■ *Obligation*

Jackson and Apostolakou (2009) and Oliver (1991) contend that in some cases the patterns of CSR activities show a lack of national institutions and act as potential substitutes for these. Similarly, Frynas (2005) and Amaeshi *et al.* (2006) based on a study in the Golf of Guinea region and Nigeria, respectively, found that CSR provides a social buffer where public institutions are weak, especially in the social domain where the role of government is limited and falls short to address social issues (Jamali and Neville, 2011). While we have shown the lack of pressure from national formal institutions, it could be assumed that managers proactively attempt to fill institutional voids. However, our interviewees argue that their activity is not a matter of overtaking the responsibility of the state (even if communities often perceive them as the state, because as companies they are the ones to react to inquiries for assistance: 'People have very high expectations from us. They want us to take politician's responsibilities, to be the 'intendente' (translation from Spanish – mayor), to be in charge of the community'). However, as this interviewee argues, she considers having the obligation to capacitate people to have good education and access to seeds to grow their own food, rather than only donating money.

One interviewee argued that social responsibility is a personal obligation:

> The 2,4-D herbicide does not do anything bad on its own, it depends what is done with it. No one would think of banning alcohol because when people drink and drive they kill people. Therefore, the responsibility of doing things well is of oneself. (Interview 5 August 2019)

The interviewee acknowledges that the problem with misuse of herbicides exists but that it does not necessarily require a ban on the products, but rather more education and heavier enforcement as the ultimate responsibility lies with the person who applies it. Another interviewee states:

> It is a system. The state has more responsibilities, the companies have another, and the people have another. We all have a part of responsibility. (Interview 15 August 2019).

From a utilitarian perspective Secchi (2007) and Perez (2002) argue for an either or responsibility assumption, by either the state or the corporation. The companies however regard their responsibility in a frame of 'collective responsibility', in which each entity in society has its share of responsibility. This is why company

managers argue also for the future sharing of responsibilities between themselves and the state in a format in which all entities have an obligation to address social issues but also have a supportive frame to do that. Without the support of the state one interviewee argued that companies may solve one social issue but may be easily prone to create another one:

> I cannot solve my own problem and generate another one … There are fields which I rent that have no water and are 30 km from my own fields. I have a well of 60 m depth that I could use to make the applications. I can do it, but it is not right, because I should implement other types of actions. And that's what I did. My systematization process causes all the surplus water to come together in three dams, and that is the water that I use for my applications. (Interview 5 August 2019)

The farmer underlines that a basic part of farming infrastructure-water connection-is not available to him in some farm locations. If he would be unethical in his conduct he could use the water from the well as no other possibility exists, but that would leave the community with no water source. He finds such an action to be unethical ('it is not right') and instead of doing it he decided to invest in technology that collects the surplus water from one activity and redirects it to another activity where it is needed. This alternative is regarded as an obligation ('I should'). This is an additional pointer to the companies perceiving the state as incapable of addressing social issues, whether because of lack of resources, corruption or incompetence. It also points to the institutional void in what would be basic infrastructure for agricultural activity, as this type of infrastructure is lacking according to the interviewee.

A shared participation between government, companies and society has been discussed as 'relational CSR' (Albareda *et al.*, 2008). The authors argue that governments would have a mediating role to manage the complex set of relationships between the different actors. However, considering the weak institutional capacity of Argentina, the state may have a difficulty in enabling structures that are consistent with the behavior to be promoted in the agricultural sector. Figure 3 gives an overview of the institutions and their level of pressure on managers' motivation to conduct CSR activities.

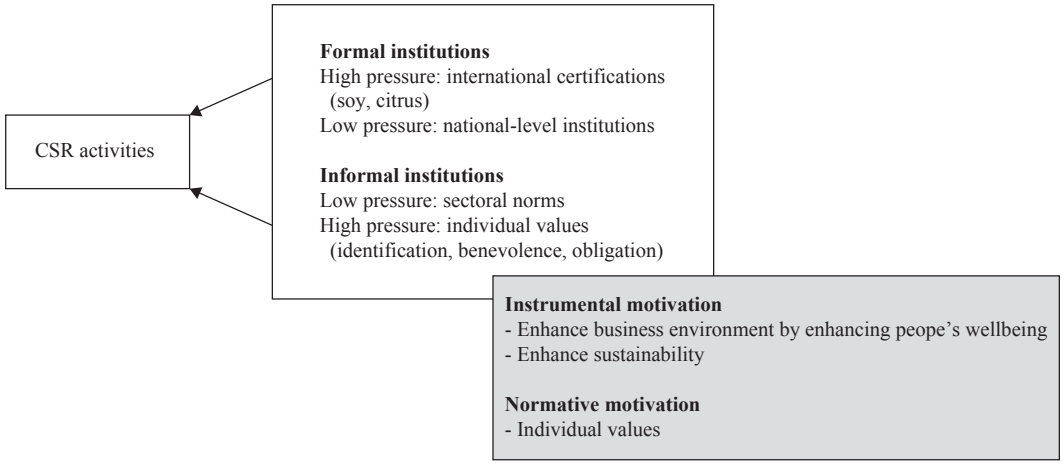

Figure 3. Depicting the determinants for social responsibility activities among primary agriculture companies with individual values (informal institution) as main motivating factors despite other missing formal and informal institutions. Instrumental motivations overlap with ethical individual motivations.

6. Conclusions

Institutional theory argues that organizations are embedded within broader social structures that are composed of different types of institutions, which exert significant influence on the decision-making process of a corporation (Campbell, 2007; Campbell *et al.*, 1991). Additional work has underlined that CSR activities are framed within the existing social context and are thus influenced by institutions that are present in such contexts (Jackson and Apsotolakou, 2010). Our study finds that despite the lack of multiple entangled institutions, individual values of managers such as identification, benevolence and obligation are predominant in family-owned companies and motivate philanthropic CSR activities even in the absence of pressure from other formal and informal institutions. Local organizations such as schools, research institutes and a professional consultancy group, in the case of Tucumán, further enable managers to transpose their ethical and instrumental motivations into a variety of CSR activities. These organizations are enabling organizations that channel resources to more systematic and substantive forms of CSR. For the interviewed managers in family-owned companies the main motivating factor for CSR activities constitute these managers' individual values, while other formal and informal institutions, whether regulative, normative or cognitive lack or exert less pressure. Isomorphism between the companies is less feasible as cognitive institutions are not present to pose a pressure on the companies.

There is a weakness or absence of normative societal expectations and lack of positive peer pressure at least as experienced by these managers. The managers express a moral responsibility toward society driven by future normative societal expectations. Companies collaborate at different levels with NGOs, public institutions (e.g. schools, academic institutions, health organizations) to develop the social and environmental projects that mirror their core competences. Since there are no perceived incentives from the state or from civil society as yet to conduct such activities, and since the majority of companies do not engage in CSR activities in Argentina as stated by our interviewees (interview 15 August 2019; interview 26 August 2019), the interviewed companies act as first-movers in their fields in establishing collaborative projects. The only demand or pressure comes from international buyers in the case of citrus or soy production, who impose certification standards. The local community poses weaker pressure while national-level institutions are not perceived to exercise pressure at all. Individual values keep companies undertaking philanthropic activities independent of instrumental motivations and pressure of other formal and informal institutions.

From the point of CSR definition encompassing those companies who behave in a manner that is beneficial, or at least not detrimental, to a larger group of stakeholders our study shows that these companies may address certain social issues but fail to address others. They cannot be regarded as 'social champions' in this respect. However, in the context of a majority of agricultural entities not engaging in CSR activities (interview 26 August 2019), the motivations of these companies as well as the impact their activities have on stakeholders require further analysis.

The main social issues the companies perceive to be salient in rural areas in Argentina are poverty and education. Individual values are a motivating factor for CSR activities that target these issues. Similar findings are highlighted by Bavorová *et al.* (in press) and Visser *et al.* (2019), suggesting the presence of intrinsic motivations of farm managers in Russia to showing responsibility for the local community.

The question remains what actions can be taken to further inspire or foster CSR activities. Farmers' associations can play a significant role in making the results of these activities visible as well as those farming companies who are forerunners in their undertakings. More emphasis on the role of individual values in the farming operations may incentivize farming companies to gather resources for collectively addressing certain issues.

7. Limitations and further research

There are also limitations to our methodology. This research is based on the perceptions of the managers and their indications of individual values and the actions they undertake. Our research can be complemented by longitudinal studies that would observe the real actions and conduct interviews with the beneficiaries (assuming they feel free to speak) and the communities the companies are active in. Our study allows primarily to study managers' views on and motivations for CSR, but not CSR actions themselves or their impacts.

There is a possible bias because of our selection methods. We could therefore assume our interviewees to respond positively about their behavior due to a social desirability bias. However, the companies ranked their CSR involvement at different levels.

We have only interviewed managers and further studies could analyze whether the individual values are spread also at organizational level through a corporate culture.

Our research further contributes to the CSR and institutional theory literature and finds that value-driven managers do exist in the regions studied. Understanding the broader institutional framework in which these values and associated CSR activities exist may give additional insights into the motivations for acting socially responsible amongst managers in large farms and agroholdings. Further studies on social responsibility activities of large farms and agroholdings active in regions confronted with issues of land access, deforestation and other social and environmental issues, as well as on those farms that do not undertake CSR activities, will contribute to a more overarching understanding of formal and informal institutions shaping farms' social responsibility.

The advantage of our methodology, using thematic analysis and grounded theory, is that CSR activities may remain undetected as the majority of companies in this study do not communicate about them or do not explicitly formulate them as CSR activities. This can easily be mistaken as an absence of responsibility and an absence of motivation to involve in socially responsible activities.

Our research contributes to the work conducted so far on CSR (Gagalyuk and Schaft, 2016; Heyder and Theuvsen, 2012; Ortega *et al.*, 2016; Visser *et al.*, 2019) in the agricultural sector and extends the view that individual motivations play an important role in undertaking CSR activities. Also, while Visser *et al.* (2019) found CSR to be a public-relations type of activity in one region in Russia, with instrumental motivations for CSR prevailing, in another studied region, the motivations were more mixed, with stronger intrinsic (social) motivations. Our study shows that instrumental and ethical considerations for CSR activities do not exclude each other but are both present. Furthermore, we have found companies to acknowledge that they cannot address all social issues, that they may be unaware and would not have the capacity to address these. This is why our research may partly confirm Berger *et al.'s* (2005) findings that the needs of poorer groups are not solicited or not integrated into CSR strategies. Our findings point however to the important role that local organizations play in addressing social issues. Further research can investigate the collective roles of these organizations and of agricultural companies to address social issues.

We have also pointed to the fact that the poverty and educational issues the interviewees point to are part of an institutional setting that reflects a culture for 'asistencialismo' (assistance) as well as the turbulent financial environment in Argentina. We find that the companies consider themselves a minority in their sector to act socially responsible. Our research also complements Filatotchev and Nakajima (2014) work to show the dynamics of individual and institutional motivations for CSR. Further focus on CSR in the agricultural sector would extend this work by also analyzing CSR at organizational level as well as interactions between the individual, organizational and institutional levels.

Jamali *et al.* (2009) found that in developing countries personal motivations for CSR philanthropic activities characterize small-and-medium sized enterprises. In the case of our interviewed companies we show that this can also be the case with large enterprises, where the owners' individual values and commitment drive

the engagement in CSR activities. Further research can focus on the understanding of the role different farm categories play in addressing and preventing social issues in rural areas. Studies analyzing the types of activities conducted by small farms as well as the different size categories of small and large farms would create a more encompassing picture of the benefits created for communities and hurdles farms face in addressing social issues. Looking into the different characteristics of these farms such as ownership, legal structure may increase the insights on similarities and differences of CSR motivations between different farm size categories, including agroholdings. The framework depicted in Figure 1 can also be applied to other institutional contexts for comparative studies.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material can be found online at https://doi.org/10.22434/IFAMR2020.0103

Table S1. Types of CSR activities and responsible engaging with CSR activities.
List of interview questions.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no known competing interests.

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Determinants of corporate social responsibility among farms in Russia and Kazakhstan: a multilevel approach using survey data

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract

Building on the institutional theory of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and research on CSR in the agriculture of post-Soviet transition economies, the present paper investigates the institutional, organizational and individual factors of farm engagement in CSR activities. Based on a survey of 800 farms in Russia and Kazakhstan, the interaction between the farms' social role and multilevel institutional characteristics is addressed. We observe notable positive effects of local labor sourcing, insecure land use conditions and farm size (in terms of land area) on farms' CSR engagement. Individually owned farms, as opposed to corporate farms, tend to be more CSR affine. In addition, we find weak statistical evidence of CSR engagement among the farms affiliated with agroholdings. We discuss the results in the context of different levels of CSR analysis.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, primary agriculture, organizational-level factors, institutional-level factors, transition economies
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1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is generally considered an action that appears to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law (McWilliams and Siegel, 2000: 117). According to institutional scholars, pressures arising at the institutional, organizational and individual (personal) levels motivate CSR activities (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Campbell, 2007; Lin *et al.*, 2017). Scholars have increasingly recognized the interplay between institutional and organizational levels that determines CSR engagement (Aguilera *et al.*, 2007; Vaz *et al.*, 2016; Wood, 1991). Little focus has been directed so far on empirically analyzing all three levels. However, it is important to do so to fully understand the underlying motivations for CSR (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012). In addition, focusing on all three levels helps to recognize existing and potential frictions between the levels that may hamper organizations' CSR commitment and implementation (McWilliams and Siegel, 2000).

The present paper aims to fill the above gap by studying CSR at the institutional, organizational and individual levels. We apply a multilevel framework of CSR to quantitatively analyze the drivers of CSR engagement in the agricultural sector of newly emerging global breadbaskets – Russia and Kazakhstan. While the agricultural sector has increasingly become a focus of societal scrutiny (Balmann *et al.*, 2016; Heyder and Theuvsen, 2012), the concept of CSR has still scarcely been researched in the context of both primary agriculture and transition countries. We adopt institutional theory and its offspring, such as stakeholder theory and the resource-based view of the firm, which outline a number of factors that impact CSR engagement. Drawing upon a survey of 800 farms in six provinces of Russia and Kazakhstan, we analyze the determinants of CSR activity at the farm level using logistic regression analysis. In doing so, we extend the existing CSR literature in several ways.

First, we contribute to the generally limited knowledge about CSR in primary agriculture. Related studies focus mainly on consumer-proximate industries and deal with the institutional- and organizational-level factors of CSR in the agri-food business (Hartmann, 2011; Heyder and Theuvsen, 2012). However, it is also important to address CSR in primary agriculture since policymakers and development specialists have recognized it as a feasible driver for rural development (Arato *et al.*, 2016). Hajdu *et al.* (in press) have developed such a qualitative study focusing on primary agriculture in Argentina and show the institutional and individual-level motivations for CSR in the large farms and agroholdings studied.

Second, in contrast to developed countries where CSR analyses are widespread (Li and Zhang, 2010), research on CSR in post-Soviet transition economies is particularly scarce. Notable exceptions in agribusiness research have appeared only recently and include studies by Gagalyuk *et al.* (2018) and Gagalyuk and Valentinov (2019) for Ukraine and Grouiez (2014), Visser *et al.* (2019) and Bavorová *et al.* (2021) for Russia. At the same time, research on CSR in Kazakhstan, an important player in global agricultural markets, is missing. By focusing on the CSR engagement of farmers in Russia and Kazakhstan, our study is the first of its kind to fill this gap.

Third, the mentioned studies on CSR in post-Soviet agriculture focus predominantly on the institutional-level drivers of CSR. Based on qualitative case studies and in-depth interviews, they find that post-Soviet path dependencies, inconsistent land and rural development policies, imperfections of agricultural factor markets and regional power configurations influence farmers' CSR engagement (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Grouiez, 2014; Visser *et al.*, 2019). The study by Bavorová *et al.* (2021) quantitatively assesses the effects of farm-level indicators and individual farm managers' characteristics on the farms' support of rural infrastructure. However, altogether, these studies fail (or do not aim) to address all three levels of CSR analysis simultaneously. Our multilevel approach extends these research efforts and verifies their results. In addition, our framework includes several important factors, such as production specialization and farm managers' gender and education, which were outside of the focus of the mentioned studies.

Fourth, except for the research by Bavorová *et al.* (2021), the studies on farms' CSR in transition economies focus exclusively on the CSR of large-scale agroholdings (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Grouiez, 2014; Visser *et al.*, 2019). Structurally, these large farming entities represent horizontally and vertically integrated enterprises consisting of a mother company that controls and manages numerous corporate farms and operates dozens or even hundreds of thousands of hectares (Hermans *et al.*, 2017; Visser *et al.*, 2012). Previous studies show that agroholdings engage in CSR to resolve their problems of legitimacy, access to farmland and labor, while some moral considerations of agroholding managers also play a role (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018). At the same time, socially responsible activities of farm types other than agroholdings remain scarcely researched. By differentiating between corporate and individual (family) farms in our framework, we extend previous research on CSR in the agricultural sector of transition economies. We also assess whether agroholding affiliation affects farms' CSR.

Our findings indicate notable positive effects of local labor sourcing, insecure land use conditions and farm size (in terms of land area) on farms' CSR engagement. Individually owned farms, as opposed to corporate farms, tend to be more CSR affine. In addition, we find weak statistical evidence of CSR engagement among the farms affiliated with agroholdings.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, we outline the empirical context of our study – the agricultural sectors of Russia and Kazakhstan and their evolution during the past three decades. Second, we elaborate theoretically and review up-to-date empirical evidence to develop hypotheses on the effects of the institutional environment and organizational-level and individual-level characteristics on farmers' engagement in CSR. Third, we describe the survey design and data. Fourth, we present and discuss the results of the regression analysis. Finally, we conclude and make propositions for future research on CSR in agribusiness.

2. Institutional forces, farm structures and corporate social responsibility in Russia and Kazakhstan

Historically, a dichotomy of large-scale collective (kolkhoz) and state (sovkhoz) farms versus small-scale subsistence farming dominated all Soviet Republics. In addition to being a major source of food and agricultural products for the urban population, the Soviet Republic's large-scale farms were nearly exclusive employers for the rural population (Pallot and Nefedova, 2007). The Soviet Union's decay left all other former republics with a similar legacy. Different approaches to the institutionalization of private property rights, land reform, farm decollectivization and restructuring led to three dominant forms of agricultural producers in Russia and Kazakhstan: (1) agricultural enterprises; (2) individual farms; and (3) subsistence rural household farms.

Agricultural enterprises represent corporate farms of various legal forms that include limited liability companies, joint stock companies, partnerships and agricultural cooperatives. An individual farm refers to a legal entity created by an individual, a family or a group of individuals on the basis of jointly owned land and assets. Individual farms rely mainly on family labor and family-owned resources, although they may employ hired labor and leased resources. The main objectives of agricultural enterprises and individual farms are commercial. The third type of farm, rural households, produces to primarily satisfy the consumption needs of the family members. Surplus products may be sold outside of the household, and the income from sales of farm products from the household farm is exempt from taxes. Similar to individual farms, rural household farms operate as individuals and rely on family labor. However, in contrast to individual farms, rural household farms operate without formal registration. Individual farms, such as agricultural enterprises, are subject to taxes, but the legislation that applies to them differs substantially from corporate legislation and typically comes along with some tax simplifications or exemptions. In contrast to corporate and individual farms, rural household farms have very limited access to commercial credit and rarely receive any financial support from the state (Lerman *et al.*, 2004; Petrick and Oshakbaev, 2015).

While being a cornerstone of the Soviet rural economy, collective farms were also central to the life of rural communities during the Soviet period. They maintained a tight 'informal contract' between large-

scale producers and the rural population. Economically, such symbiosis implied (and often forced) a flow of labor from rural households to large-scale farms. However, in exchange, workers gained wage top-ups and subsistence farming support that was informally encouraged by the collectives (Visser *et al.*, 2019; Wädekin, 1973). Due to this symbiosis, the rural population received secure employment and gained access to production inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, machinery, etc. In the long term, such symbiosis provided rural communities with secure employment, social services (education, medicine, legal services, cultural life, etc.) and infrastructure (roads, post, electricity, water, sanitation, energy resources, etc.).

The end of the Soviet era and ensuing farm restructuring dismantled this social contract. No central planning office forced the agricultural enterprises to continue their social obligations anymore. Legislation entrusted local authorities with the task of providing social, cultural, entertaining and servicing facilities, formerly residing with collective and state farms, while some facilities were privatized. However, central governments did not provide sufficient financial resources to allow local authorities to meet their new responsibilities (Wegren, 2009). As a result, many social facilities were closed, whereas privately owned facilities adopted a commercial orientation with higher service charges that took them out of reach for average rural people. With decollectivization and privatization, a substantial share of the rural population became unemployed. An increasing migration of the economically active population to urban regions and an increasing mortality rate among elderly individuals within the rural population have emerged as a consequence (Pallot and Nefedova, 2007; Wegren, 2009).

Along with the recovering productivity and profitability of agribusinesses in Russia and Kazakhstan, farming enterprises in transition economies face a substantial moral burden due to high societal expectations. Grouiez (2014), Gagalyuk *et al.* (2018), and Visser *et al.* (2019) have shown that local rural communities, farm employees and local authorities are primary claimants for various sorts of social support from agroholdings in Russia and Ukraine. In part, the reminiscences of the abovementioned symbiosis between agricultural enterprises and rural households that existed during Soviet times (Gagalyuk and Schaft, 2016) drive these expectations. However, new expectations of the farming sector arose in the transition period as a result of worsening living conditions in rural areas (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Grouiez, 2014; Visser *et al.*, 2019).

To meet these expectations, farming enterprises may conduct various CSR activities. For instance, agroholdings in Russia sponsor social infrastructure and services, such as clearing roads from snow and supporting schools and culture clubs (Visser *et al.,* 2019). Furthermore, in Ukraine, agroholdings support individual rural inhabitants and invest in improvements of rural technical infrastructure: roads, electricity lines, and water and gas pipelines, as found by Gagalyuk *et al.* (2018). Based on these findings, we adopt the definition used by Visser *et al.* (2019) and Bavorová *et al.* (2021) of CSR as the social and technical infrastructure provided by farms in rural areas. This is in line with CSR scholars who have increasingly pointed to the relevance of contextual factors in defining corporate social responsibility activities (Amaeshi *et al.*, 2006; Fifka and Pobizhan, 2014; Matten and Moon, 2008; Pisani *et al*., 2017; Tilt, 2016) and in considering how CSR is locally embedded (Amaeshi *et al.*, 2006). Existing theories and scarce empirical evidence suggest that factors shaping the types of CSR activities undertaken by farming enterprises in transition economies pertain to different levels.

3. Theoretical background: levels of corporate social responsibility analysis

The corporate social responsibility activities of organizations are influenced and implemented by actors at different levels. Institutional theory widely recognizes three levels of analysis of antecedents and outcomes of CSR activities, namely, the institutional, organizational, and individual levels (Aguilera *et al.*, 2007; Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Wood, 1991). Wood (1991) showed that the CSR activities of businesses are reflective of the pressures arising at these levels. Defined at the institutional level, CSR is a way to respond to the pressures of legitimacy and power that society grants to businesses. At the organizational level, it represents public responsibility for problems and social issues that derive from business operations and interests. At the individual level, it is characterized by managerial discretion or the morality of managers. In their extensive

review of the CSR literature, Aguinis and Glavas (2012) found a dearth of individual-level focus of CSR analysis and called for the advancement of CSR research through the integration of a multilevel analysis. We respond to this call by simultaneously analyzing the drivers of CSR at three different levels. The present section builds upon up-to-date theoretical and empirical research to develop hypotheses on the drivers of farmers' CSR engagement in transition economies of Russia and Kazakhstan. Our study does not inquire directly about the motivations for CSR implementation. Instead, it focuses on a broader set of internal and external contextual factors that shape the motivations of farmers to engage in CSR activities.

3.1 Institutional level factors of corporate social responsibility engagement

Imperfections of the legal system in conjunction with incomplete land reforms are among the major pressures on the agribusiness sector of transition economies (Kvartiuk and Petrick, 2021; Wegren, 2009). Farmers may be compelled to provide social services to their rural communities (e.g. construction of roads, gas and water supply pipelines, electricity lines and so on) to secure land leases in the long term (Gagalyuk and Valentinov, 2019).

In the case of Krasnodar Krai in Russia, Visser *et al.* (2019) found that lease agreements were established for 10 years. Even in such cases, the best way to ensure farming enterprises against the insecurity of losing land is to provide social support, as the authors further argue. For Altai Krai of Russia, Bavorová *et al.* (2021) reported that maintaining good relations with local authorities ensures access to land. Therefore, investing in developing communities is a way for farmers to ensure long-term land use in an uncertain environment. Additionally, unlike Ukraine, where a moratorium on farmland sales seems to drive farmers' CSR engagement, Russia has a full-fledged land market whereby both lease- and ownership-based land uses are in place. We thus hypothesize the following:

H1a: With increasing land use insecurity, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

H1b: With an increasing share of leased land in a farm's land use, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

The dynamics of the agricultural labor market are also subject to institutional turbulence in transition economies. Unsuccessful rural development policies, which tended to prioritize the development of commercial agriculture over the maintenance of social infrastructure, resulted in poor publicly provided safety nets and substantial outmigration of rural citizens to urbanized areas (Bednaříková *et al.*, 2016; Wegren and Elvestad, 2018; White, 2007) and to other countries (Kvartiuk *et al.*, 2020). Several studies point to the high need for skilled workers in rural Russia (Unay-Gailhard *et al.*, 2019; Visser *et al.*, 2019), especially in large-scale agriculture (Kvartiuk *et al.*, 2020). This problem compels farmers, especially large agroholdings, who are often a single employer in a village, to develop rural social infrastructure (schools, kindergartens and hospitals) and design qualification improvement programs for their own and for potentially recruited employees (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Visser *et al.*, 2019). In addition, some agroholdings have been found to design above-average compensation packages for workers to attract talented employees (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018). Farmers attempt to reduce the outflow of labor from their rural communities.

Attracting seasonal employees from outside the region of farm operations can be one of the solutions of the labor deficit problem. In addition, it can provide an opportunity for a farm manager to engage in off-farm activities, including CSR. However, the study by Visser *et al.* (2019) also shows that such labor market dynamics should be treated as context-specific. In labor-abundant Krasnodar Krai of Russia, characterized by proximity to the heavily populated north Caucasus republics and high in-migration rates from these republics, pressures of worker deficits on agroholdings are much lower. Therefore, agroholdings have less interest in supporting local rural communities. Thus, farmers in labor-abundant regions and regions with

the opportunity to hire migrant and seasonal workers may be less prone to engage in CSR. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H2a: With increasing reliance on local labor, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

H2b: With an increasing share of seasonal labor in a farm's employment structure, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities decreases.

Another feature of the institutional environment in transition countries is the underdeveloped financial markets. Stock markets are either volatile or poorly functioning, while commercial banks provide loans under very restrictive refinance rates (Gagalyuk and Valentinov, 2019). Large-scale agroholdings are generally able to overcome these difficulties by attracting outside investors, listings on international stock exchanges and lending from international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) (Gagalyuk, 2017; Petrick *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, to receive loans from renowned lenders such as IFC and EBRD, agroholdings have to comply with the IFIs' extensive requirements for corporate conduct, which have been shown to stimulate agroholdings' commitment to CSR (Gagalyuk and Valentinov, 2019).

However, a poor financial condition of firms is generally associated with less CSR (Campbell, 2007), while the majority of commercial farms in countries such as Russia and Kazakhstan are small individuals as well as corporate non-agroholding farms. Unlike agroholdings, they have generally less favorable conditions to access capital. For instance, small farms in northern Kazakhstan encounter more difficulties related to access to finance, inputs and marketing channels than larger vertically integrated farms (Dudwick *et al.*, 2007; Petrick *et al.*, 2017). To this end, access to credit is still limited in the Russian agricultural sector (Lioubimtseva and Henebry, 2012; Nizalov *et al.*, 2015). We therefore hypothesize the following:

H3: With increasing credit constraints, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities decreases.

Problems of illegal business takeovers, corporate raiding and land grabbing have been shown to frequently threaten the agricultural business environment in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan (Gagalyuk and Valentinov, 2019; Oshakbayev *et al.*, 2018; Visser *et al.*, 2012). Non-agroholding farms are particularly exposed to these negative developments (Gagalyuk and Valentinov, 2019). This evidence points to the inability (or unwillingness) of the existing legal system to prevent such illegal behavior. If farms recognize this inability and find themselves unable to change the status quo by appealing to the legal system, they may attempt to establish productive exchange with their stakeholders through credible commitments or 'hostages' (Jauernig and Valentinov, 2019; Williamson, 1983) in the form of CSR. In Williamson's (1996: 56) interpretation, the tendency of opportunistic behavior leads to social dilemmas between exchange parties, while the adoption of CSR that fulfills the function of credible commitments can forestall such opportunism. The motivation for such CSR can be simultaneously moral and instrumental (Jauernig and Valentinov, 2019; Visser *et al.*, 2019). We thus hypothesize the following:

H4: With increasing farmers' distrust in the country's legal system, their engagement in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

3.2 Organizational level factors of corporate social responsibility engagement

Earlier research on corporate social performance and social change in organizations has shown that it is important to consider the complementarities and conflicts between external institutional factors and internal organizational drivers of CSR (Aguilera *et al.*, 2007; Wood, 1991). One of the most notable interlevel frictions that may arise in this regard is associated with the necessity to devote organizational resources to deal with

external pressures for CSR (McWilliams and Siegel, 2000). Accordingly, the resource-based view of the firm (RBV) presents a useful framework to study factors of CSR engagement at the organizational level (i.e. farm level in the context of this article). The core idea of RBV is that the firms' idiosyncratic attributes, such as assets and competences, represent valuable, rare, inimitable and nonsubstitutable resources that generate sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984).

In particular, the RBV highlights the importance of organizational size as a factor for CSR engagement. Many studies have focused on identifying the relationship between organizational size in terms of the number of employees and CSR activities (Arato *et al.*, 2016; Orlitzky, 2001; Stanwick and Stanwick, 1998). Organizational size has been found to be positively associated with philanthropic expenditure (Adams and Hardwick, 2002; Brammer and Millington, 2006; McElroy and Siegfried, 1985). Economies of size likely decrease the cost of CSR activities for larger farms (Ho and Taylor, 2007). Larger companies are also more visible and are subject to greater pressures from the general public to improve their societal and environmental impacts (Bavorová *et al.*, 2021; Gagalyuk, 2017).

For the agribusiness and food sectors, studies by Hartmann (2011), Heyder and Theuvsen (2012) and Bourlakis *et al*. (2014) confirmed that size is an important determinant of CSR engagement. Bavorová *et al*. (2021) found a positive relationship between farm size and the support of social and technical rural infrastructure in Russia. For Ukraine, Gagalyuk (2017) and Graubner *et al.* (2021) revealed that primarily large and resourceful agroholding-affiliated farms, driven by considerations of positive image in local communities and of securing farmland from competitors, engage in various CSR initiatives. Thus, empirical research produces mixed results with regard to the effects of farm agroholding affiliation on CSR engagement. We therefore predict a positive relationship between farm size and farmers' CSR engagement as well as between farm affiliation with agroholding and CSR engagement:

H5: With increasing farm size, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

H6: With a farm's agroholding affiliation, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

The abovementioned agroholdings predominantly consist of corporate farms (Hermans *et al.*, 2017). At the same time, commercial farming in Russia and Kazakhstan is, for the most part, conducted by farms of other legal forms and ownership types, such as individual and non-agroholding corporate farms (cooperatives, joint stock companies, limited liability companies, etc.). Enterprise ownership/legal forms are considered to play a role in CSR (Li and Zhang, 2010), but research on the effect of legal forms on CSR is scarce, especially in transition economies (Bavorová *et al.*, 2021; Fifka and Pobizhan, 2014). The present study distinguishes between the CSR engagement of individual (family) farms and corporate farms (including both affiliated and non-affiliated with an agroholding), as these types of ownership are typical of commercial farms in Russia and Kazakhstan (Kvartiuk and Petrick, 2021; Wegren, 2018). With this differentiation, we extend previous research on CSR in post-Soviet agriculture that focused mainly on the CSR of corporate agroholdings.

In their social responsibility activity, individual and corporate enterprises may differ due to the effects of diverse stakeholders and regulatory environments that shape the adoption of CSR practices. In particular, corporate enterprises may face greater challenges than individual enterprises due to a broader set of pressures pertaining to both general public and private investor interests (Gagalyuk, 2017; Panwar *et al*., 2014). However, the CSR of individual enterprises in the primary agriculture sector has been considerably understudied compared to the widely reported CSR of agroholdings. We therefore assume that they may be involved in a range of implicit CSR activities (Visser *et al.*, 2019), i.e. non-reported CSR. To this end, interactions and cooperation among farmers themselves are conducive to the farms' performance in terms of the social support provided to employees and to communities (Bavorová *et al.*, 2021; Smedley, 2012). The reasons for this involvement may vary from instrumental motives, such as additional protection of farm assets under the full liability

condition, to moral considerations such as self-identification with a village. We therefore expect the CSR of individual and corporate farms in our Russian and Kazakh cases to differ, with individual farmers being more prone to engage in CSR:

H7: With individual farm ownership, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

H8: With farmers cooperating with each other, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

We expect that another farm-level factor significantly affects farmers' engagement in CSR, namely, production specialization. During the transition, livestock production has considerably declined in Russia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries. Former kolkhozes have transformed from diversified farm entities into mostly crop-producing farms (Visser *et al.*, 2019), while the new production form, agroholdings, has specialized in crop production almost by default (Graubner *et al.*, 2021). However, livestock production in Russia is gradually recovering. Since livestock producers are largely associated with negative environmental impacts by the general public and are more labor intensive and consumer proximate than crop producers, they face higher pressures for CSR activities (Heyder and Theuvsen, 2008). We thus hypothesize the following:

H9: With increasing farm specialization in livestock production, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

3.3 Individual level factors of corporate social responsibility engagement

The microlevel of CSR analysis reflects the individual motivations, traits and attitudes as well as psychological processes for CSR engagement (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012). This level emphasizes questions of behavioral conduct, moral values of individuals or their characteristics (leadership profiles, age, education, gender, etc.). Our empirical analysis focuses on farm managers' sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, gender and education, as individual factors influencing CSR engagement.

Bavorová *et al*. (2021) propose that farmers' age can play a positive role in CSR engagement. They assume that older farm managers would be more CSR-affine because they may remember Soviet times when collective farms were responsible for the delivery of social services in rural areas. We therefore hypothesize the following:

H10: With an increase in farm managers' age, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

Interest in studying the impact of women in management positions on CSR practices and CSR performance has increased in recent years (Adams and Ferreira, 2009; Bear *et al.*, 2010; Boulouta, 2013; Larrieta-Rubín de Celis *et al*., 2015; Setó-Pamies, 2015; Soares *et al.*, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2013). However, studies on the effects of gender on CSR in transition economies are very scarce. Tleubayev *et al*. (2020) found a strong positive relationship between female representation on corporate boards and firm performance in the Russian agri-food business. In line with this finding, we hypothesize the following:

H11: With a female farm manager, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

A higher level of formal education and training has shown a positive effect on the implementation of social welfare policies in companies (Quazi, 2003). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H12: With higher education, college education and agricultural education of a farm manager, the engagement of farmers in corporate social responsibility activities increases.

4. Methods

4.1 Data description

The subsequent analysis draws on survey data collected from a sample of 800 agricultural producers in 2019: 600 farms in Russia and 200 in Kazakhstan. In Russia, questionnaires were administered among 120 randomly selected farms in five provinces (Belgorod, Ryazan, Stavropol, Altai Krai and Novosibirsk). In Kazakhstan, 200 farms were sampled randomly in Akmola Province. These regions were purposively selected for data collection to capture the diversity of the main agricultural regions in Russia, inside and outside of the black earth region, European and Siberian regions and the major grain-producing region of Kazakhstan (Petrick and Götz, 2019).

Between March and June 2019, professional enumerators collected the data in a series of face-to-face interviews with farm managers, owners or persons who participate in the decision-making process of the farm. The data capture inputs and outputs of crop and livestock production in the one-year period preceding the data collection. In each of the six provinces, up to six districts were purposefully selected. Then, in each district, 30 to 50 farms (for Russia or Kazakhstan) were randomly selected from the total population of actively operating farms. Local governments provided the population lists of farms in 2015 for a previous wave of the farm survey, which did not focus on CSR (Petrick and Götz, 2019). To compensate for attrition, additional districts were added in 2019. See Supplementary Table S1 for details on the attrition.

To determine whether a farm participates in CSR activities, we asked interviewees four questions on whether their farm conducts CSR activities targeting the development of: (1) the local community; (2) rural inhabitants; (3) physical infrastructure; or (4) social infrastructure. Each question allowed for Yes/No/Don't know answers.[1] Finally, based on the four questions, we constructed a dependent variable 'conducts any CSR activity', which takes the value of 'Yes' if any of the four CSR variables states 'Yes', 'No' if all non-missing CSR variables are 'No', and 'Do not know' if all CSR variables have a missing answer.

Figure 1 summarizes the frequencies of answers to the CSR questions by province, suggesting substantial differences between the provinces. In Russia, in Ryazan, approximately 39% of farmers conduct some CSR, showing no distinct preference for any specific type. In Belgorod, farmers tend to focus on physical infrastructure development approximately three times more frequently than on other CSRs. Other provinces of Russia demonstrate low rates of CSR activities. In Akmola in Kazakhstan, approximately 73% of farms perform some type of CSR activities, favoring local community development in 63% of cases.

[1] The exact formulation of the question was the following: (1) our enterprise engages in support of local community development (e.g. promotion of entrepreneurship or cooperation among rural inhabitants, provision of legal or economic advice to rural inhabitants, etc.); (2) our enterprise engages in individual support of rural inhabitants (e.g. help with education of young people, medical treatment of elderly people, provision of machinery to inhabitants to farm their individual land plots, etc.); (3) our enterprise engages in support of development of physical infrastructure (e.g. repair and construction of roads, cleaning of roads/drains, installation of electricity lines/water pipes, landscaping, etc.); (4) our enterprise engages in support of development of social infrastructure (e.g. construction/equipment of schools/kindergartens/hospitals, charitable giving, etc.).

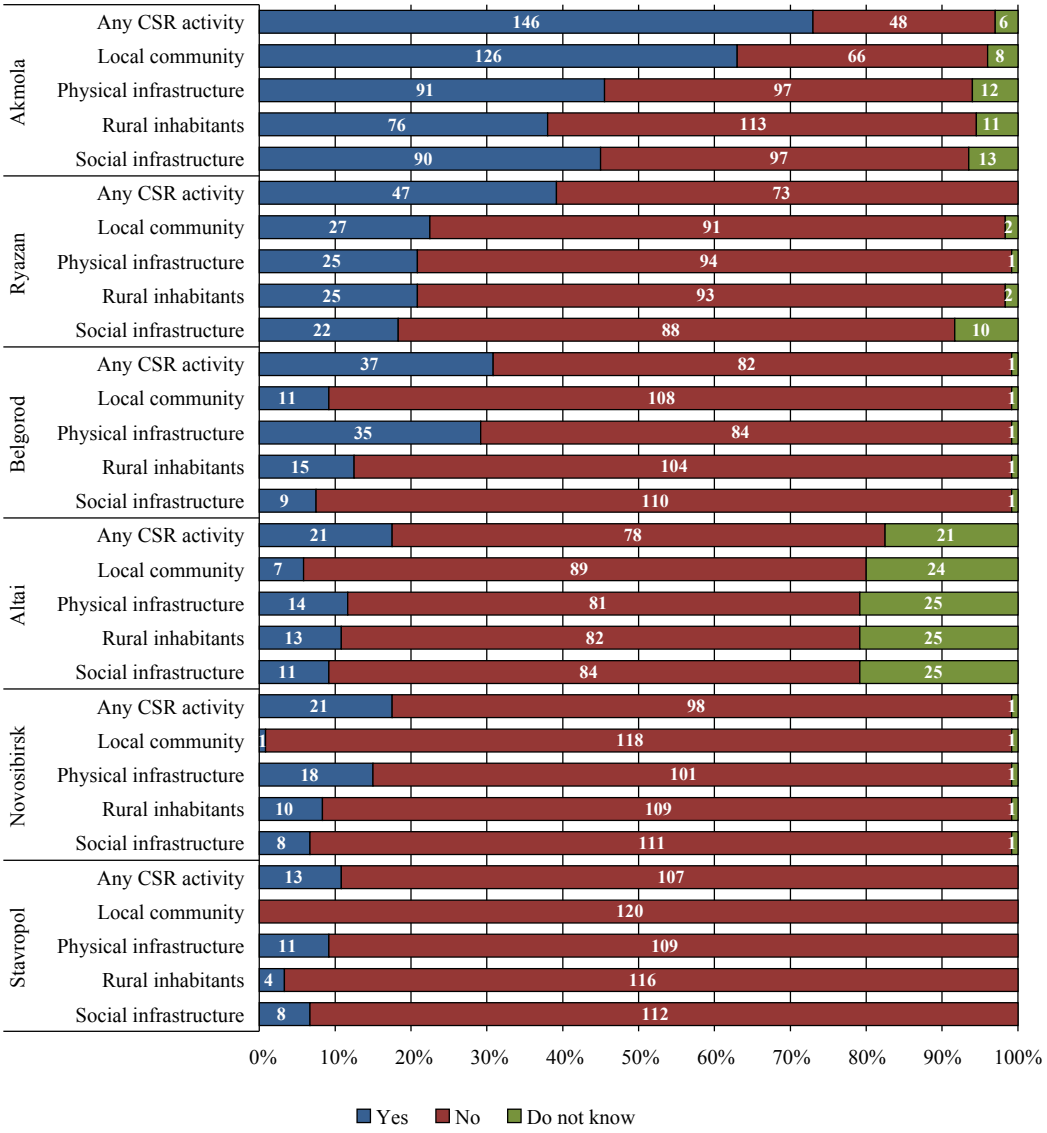

Figure 1. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity by province. Provinces are ordered by descending frequency of 'Yes' in the dependent variable of conducting any CSR activities.

4.2 Model specification and summary statistics

To identify the determinants of CSR, we estimate a logistic regression model, assuming that the logit transformation is an appropriate approximation to the binary dependent variable CSR, which is '1=Yes' for farms conducting and '0=No' for farms not conducting any CSR activities. We dropped 29 observations that contained the 'Do not know' value and estimated the following model (Greene 2020: 776):

$$\log(P/1–P) = \beta X,$$

where P is the probability of a farm engaging in CSR, so that $P/1–P$ is the odds ratio. X is a vector of determinants, and β is a parameter vector to be estimated. An odds ratio equal to one means an equal chance of engaging or not engaging in CSR. Values higher than one increase the chance, and lower values decrease it.

The vector of independent variables consists of continuous, categorical and indicator variables (Supplementary Table S2 and S3).

Among the institutional-level factors to test Hypotheses 1 to 4, we include the farmers' response to the question 'How likely is it that you may lose your ownership or land use right in the next 3 years?', measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1=absolutely unlikely and 5=absolutely likely. Moreover, we include the share of rented-in land in total land use (0 to1) and the total, permanent and seasonal labor in full-time equivalent (FTE) computed as the total number of days that all types of labor (seasonal and permanent, hired and household-based) worked on the farm (in both livestock and crop production) divided by 242 (the typical number of working days in a year). In addition, there are indicator variables for local seasonal labor if seasonal workers are hired from the local community, if any land is rented out, and if the farm is classified as a credit constraint. The credit constraint indicator takes the value of one if a farm applied for credit in the previous twelve months and was refused (liquidity-constrained), or it was granted an amount that was less than requested (quantity constrained); see Petrick *et al.* (2017) for details on this methodology. We also incorporated the manager's trust in farmers, investors and the state, each measured on a Likert scale from 1=never trust to 5=always trust.

To test Hypotheses 5 to 9 at the organizational level, we include total land, rented-in and owned land areas in hectares (ha) and the monetary value of fixed capital and machinery in thousands 2019 USD. Based on self-reporting by the respondents, we indicate whether the farm belongs to an agroholding farm or is an individual farm. Corporate farms are the residual category of these two indicators. Farms that cooperate with others in production activities are indicated as well, and whether a farm produces any crops or any livestock.

At the individual level and referring to Hypotheses 10 to 12, we use indicator variables of the manager's gender, college education and any agricultural training along with the manager's age and an education index. The index ranges from 3 for incomplete secondary education to 8 for higher education.

To take into account provincial differences, indicator variables for provinces are included with Stavropol omitted to intercept (as the province with the lowest CSR rate). Finally, a set of reverse dummy variables is used to account for zero input use and not-reported observations following Battese (1997).

We specify three models: Model 1 is our reference, Model 2 employs an alternative specification of land and labor, and Model 3 excludes the monetary variables fixed capital and value of machinery. Model 2 is specified to check the robustness of the results with regard to alternative measurements of land and labor variables. Model 3 explores the robustness of the estimates when the monetary variables are left out, as these may suffer most from imprecise measurement and missing observations. In all three specifications, the selected variables did not exhibit any problematic collinearity. The estimation results reported as odds ratios are presented in Table 1.

Finally, for each model, we compute goodness of fit measures and tests to validate their qualities. Overall, all three models appear to be appropriate for the data (based on a highly significant likelihood ratio (LR) test). Moreover, all models show an excellent goodness of fit based on the pseudo R-square as well as the area under the receiver operating characteristic (AUC) curve (Hosmer *et al.*, 2013: 173-182), which is above 85% for all models, or the coefficient of discrimination (Tjur, 2009), which suggests that approximately 40% of variance is explained.

5. Results

In support of Hypothesis 1a (H1a), we find that a farmer's subjective assessment of the likelihood of losing land has a positive and robust effect on the odds of CSR engagement. An increase in the perception that losing the land is likely by one point on the Likert scale increased the odds of engaging in CSR activities by a factor of 1.8.

Table 1. Logistic regressions of engagement in corporate social responsibility activities.[1,2]

	Model 1		**Model 2**		**Model 3**	
Intercept	<0.1 ***	(<0.001)	<0.1 ***	(<0.001)	<0.1 ***	(<0.001)
Individual farm (0|1)	2.5 **	(0.005)	2.6 **	(0.004)	2.6 **	(0.004)
Agroholding (0|1)	13.4 *	(0.031)	12.0 *	(0.031)	7.0	(0.079)
Crop (0|1)	0.4	(0.095)	0.4	(0.110)	0.5	(0.160)
Livestock (0|1)	2.0 **	(0.005)	1.8 *	(0.018)	2.0 **	(0.004)
Farm cooperates with others (0|1)	2.3	(0.078)	2.0	(0.143)	1.9	(0.128)
Total land use (log), ha	1.5 ***	(<0.001)			1.5 ***	(<0.001)
Owned land area (log), ha			1.4 ***	(<0.001)		
Rented land area (log), ha			1.5 ***	(<0.001)		
Share of land rented in (0...1)	2.0 *	(0.045)			2.1 *	(0.020)
Any land rented out (0|1)	5.9	(0.101)	7.2	(0.070)	4.3	(0.119)
Labor (log), FTE	0.9	(0.382)			0.9	(0.241)
Share of seasonal labor (0...1)	0.7	(0.511)			0.5	(0.317)
Permanent labor (log), FTE			1.0	(0.975)		
Seasonal labor (log), FTE			1.0	(0.893)		
Local seasonal labor (0|1)	2.6 **	(0.007)	2.0	(0.059)	3.2 ***	(<0.001)
Credit constrained (0|1)	1.7	(0.061)	1.7	(0.096)	1.7	(0.066)
Fixed capital (log), thsnd. USD	0.7 ***	(<0.001)	0.7 ***	(<0.001)		
Machinery (log), thsnd. USD	1.3 *	(0.030)	1.2	(0.112)		
Manager female (0|1)	1.6	(0.076)	1.5	(0.125)	1.5	(0.107)
Manager's education level (1...8)	1.0	(0.727)	1.0	(0.891)	1.0	(0.928)
Manager's college education (0|1)	1.5	(0.339)	1.3	(0.536)	1.5	(0.331)
Manager's ag. training (0|1)	1.0	(0.874)	1.0	(0.864)	1.0	(0.843)
Manager's age, years	1.0	(0.217)	1.0	(0.386)	1.0	(0.096)
Manager's trust in farmers (1...5)	1.2	(0.133)	1.1	(0.213)	1.1	(0.176)
Manager's trust in investors (1...5)	1.1	(0.375)	1.1	(0.579)	1.1	(0.367)
Manager's trust in the state (1...5)	0.9	(0.195)	0.9	(0.281)	0.9	(0.336)
Land losing likelihood (1...5)	1.8 ***	(<0.001)	1.7 ***	(<0.001)	1.8 ***	(<0.001)
Farm's age, years	1.0	(0.590)	1.0	(0.894)	1.0	(0.575)
Akmola (0|1)	24.0 ***	(<0.001)	27.5 ***	(<0.001)	21.5 ***	(<0.001)
Altai (0|1)	1.9	(0.251)	1.5	(0.438)	1.9	(0.146)
Novosibirsk (0|1)	0.3	(0.050)	0.2 *	(0.014)	1.0	(0.947)
Belgorod (0|1)	7.5 ***	(<0.001)	8.9 ***	(<0.001)	7.4 ***	(<0.001)
Ryazan (0|1)	9.9 ***	(<0.001)	10.4 ***	(<0.001)	14.2 ***	(<0.001)
Pseudo R-squared	0.363		0.375		0.333	
Coef. of discrimination	0.433		0.444		0.398	
AUC	87.3%		87.7%		86.2%	
Likelihood-ratio chi-squared	368.6*** (df: 35)		380.9*** (df: 38)		338.2*** (df: 29)	
Log likelihood	-323.6		-317.5		-338.8	
Degrees of freedom	736		733		742	
No. of observations	771		771		771	

[1] *** $P<0.001$, ** $P<0.01$, * $P<0.05$.

[2] Odds ratios are reported for each model and parameters along with *P*-values of the significance tests in parentheses. We do not report reverse dummy variables representing zero and unreported capital, machinery, labor and land input.

The effect of the land area share that is rented-in confirms H1b, as it increases the odds of CSR engagement, making farms with all land rented-in two times more likely to engage in CSR than farms with no land rented-in. Nevertheless, the mean predicted probabilities of CSR given the share of land area rented (and keeping all other continuous variables at means and indicator variables at zero) range between 2.4 and 5% in Model 1 and 2 and 3.6% in Model 3.

Regarding H2a and H2b, we do not find significant effects of labor on CSR involvement. Neither total labor endowment in FTE combined with the share of seasonal labor (Models 1 and 3) nor the separate inclusion of permanent and seasonal labor in FTE (Model 2) have any statistically significant effect on the CSR odds ratio. However, when the farm sourced seasonal labor from the local community (as declared by the farmer), the odds increased by a factor of 2.6 to 3.2.

Contrary to expectations in H3, the effect of a credit constraint is positive, and it increases the odds of CSR by 1.7 for farmers facing quantity and liquidity constraints. However, these effects are only statistically significant at the 0.1 level across all models. Finally, we did not find significant effects of trust-related variables (H4).

In support of H5, the regression results show that with a 1% increase in farm size, the odds of performing CSR activities increase by 0.4% (Model 1 and Model 3). In addition, it does not matter exactly how the farm increases size. The odds of CSR increase by 0.32 or 0.4% for farms increasing land use by 1% through purchase or rental, respectively.

As another measure of farm size, an increase in the book value of capital (in thousands 2019 USD) by 1% reduces the odds of CSR by approximately 0.4% (Models 1 and 2). The effect of the book value of machinery (in thousands 2019 USD) is the opposite, as a 1% rise in the machinery value increases the odds of CSR by 0.24% (Model 1). The simultaneous exclusion of both variables in Model 3 does not affect the other parameter estimates. Nevertheless, we need to treat these results cautiously, as 23% of observations in fixed capital and machinery were reported as zero. Such cases are plausible, as old machinery or fixed capital could still be in use but fully depreciated and contain zero book value. In addition, 5% of observations were not reported at all. To compensate for missing values and zero-reported values, we introduced four reverse dummy variables following Battese (1997) (Supplementary Table S4); therefore, systematic self-selectivity may affect these two variables.

Only eight farms out of 771 indicated that they belonged to an agroholding, out of which six reported conducting any CSR activities. Thus, the number of agroholdings in the sample is too low to draw conclusions with any statistical power (Hosmer *et al.*, 2013: 401-408). In the context of H6, the limited available evidence indicates that agroholdings regularly engage in CSR.

The effect of cooperation with other farms is positive and statistically significant at the 10% level. However, only 37 farms indicated engaging in formal cooperation, and 20 of them performed CSR. This is weak evidence in favor of H8.

All three models speak in favor of H7, showing strong and robust evidence that being an individual farm increases the odds of engaging in CSR by a factor of 2.5. Supplementary Figure S1 provides additional descriptive statistics on this outcome.

We also find strong evidence in favor of H9, as producing livestock increases the odds of CSR between 1.8-2.0 in all models. At the same time, the effect of crop production remains rather insignificant.

Individual-level factors such as manager age, gender and education (H10, H11, H12) have no statistically significant effect on CSR engagement across the three model specifications.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The present paper focuses on socially responsible activities of farms in Russia and Kazakhstan. We use farm survey data from both countries and apply the multilevel framework of CSR to understand the drivers of farms' CSR engagement arising at the institutional, organizational and individual levels. In doing so, we go beyond existing research on CSR in post-Soviet agriculture in a number of ways. First, unlike other studies, we address all three levels of CSR simultaneously. Second, unlike most studies on farms' CSR in transition countries, we assess the factors of CSR quantitatively. Third, our model includes several previously unaccounted transition-specific factors. We consider farms' characteristics with regard to land use structure, labor hiring, corporate and individual ownership, specialization and perceptions of the strength of existing institutions.

At the institutional level of analysis, our findings demonstrate that the suggested need to address weaknesses of the general legal system of a transition economy (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018) is not perceived as an important motive for farms to engage in CSR. Farmers' trust (or mistrust) in the courts' conflict resolution capacity has no significant effect on farms' CSR engagement. Rather, farms' CSR activities in the form of rural infrastructural support are likely to address the uncertainties of local institutional environments, associated primarily with the risk of losing land and dependence on local labor supply. This finding is generally in line with previous research (Bavorová *et al*. 2021; Visser *et al.*, 2019). However, given that not only large and powerful agroholdings but also small and medium-sized farms are the focus of our study, this finding also reveals that the role of the farming sector in local power configurations appears to be generally less dominant than previously suggested by these authors. Here, CSR seems to result from local power imbalances favoring large agroholdings, local authorities and landowners. In the future, a more detailed research focus on the local institutional environments can shed more light on existing power configurations and their role in farms' social engagement.

However, the growth motivations of farms themselves seem to drive farms' exposure to greater societal pressures. Our results at the organizational level show that the likelihood of CSR engagement increases with increasing farm size. Farms that both lease and own larger land areas are more likely to engage in CSR. Previous research has underlined land lease as a factor that makes farms conduct CSR to address the uncertain lessee-landowner relationships in transition countries (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Visser *et al.*, 2019). Our novel finding is that a farm's ownership of land increases the likelihood of the farm's CSR. On the one hand, this result points to a potentially positive effect of farms' embeddedness within local communities through land ownership on farms' social conduct. This proposition is supported by a strong effect of local labor sourcing, but not the amount of labor a farm employs, on the farms' CSR. On the other hand, the effect of land ownership has to be juxtaposed with a strong effect of land use insecurity and power imbalances on the institutional level, which implies that landowners may fear losing land just as land lessees do.

One possible reason for this finding is the presence of individual farms in our sample. In contrast to corporate farms, individual farms operate mainly on their own land.[2] At the same time, they are considerably smaller and have less power on the land market than corporate and agroholding-affiliated farms, and thus, they may be concerned about the resilience of their own operations. To this end, our results demonstrate that individual farm ownership makes farms' engagement in CSR more likely. We also find that a farm's CSR engagement tends to increase if the farm is affiliated with an agroholding. Higher visibilities towards the general public and legitimacy problems related to distributional injustice have previously been discussed as drivers of the CSR of agroholdings (Gagalyuk *et al.*, 2018; Visser *et al.*, 2019). In this study, the positive effects of both individual farm ownership and agroholding affiliation imply a nonlinear relationship between farm size and CSR engagement (Udayasankar, 2008): small individual farms and large agroholding-affiliated farms are more CSR oriented than medium-sized farming enterprises.

[2] This holds only for Russian individual farms. In Kazakhstan, all farms operate leased land due to the specifics of local land market regulations (Kvartiuk and Petrick, 2021).

However, our analysis shows a lower likelihood of CSR engagement by farms with a greater value of assets. We relate this result to the need of farms with large asset endowments to commit vast farm resources to maintain and operate those endowments, which reduces the possibility of using resources for other purposes, e.g. CSR. In addition, investments in those assets are mostly credit financed (Epshtein *et al.*, 2013), which makes farms spend additional resources on service debts. Another farm-level characteristic – the share of livestock production on a farm – is positively associated with CSR engagement. Provided that the effect of labor input on CSR is insignificant, we cannot conclude that a higher labor intensity of livestock production (compared with crop production) makes farms care more about employees as part of these CSR activities. Rather, more CSR on the part of livestock-producing farms can be attributed to their role as an 'infrastructure improver' in a region. Associated with high capital intensity, livestock farms attract a large volume of state-subsidized investments to build new production facilities (Epshtein *et al.*, 2013). These construction works involve not only farm buildings but also access roads, electricity lines, wastewater disposal and sanitation facilities. Another reason why livestock farms would engage in CSR is their closer consumer proximity than pure crop farms. Livestock farms, especially in Russia, are often vertically integrated with processing facilities and have their own brands. Along with infrastructural improvements, these enterprises may engage in explicit, Anglophone-type CSR activities (Visser *et al.*, 2019) to gain a positive public image for their brands.

At the individual level, we do not find any significant effect of farm managers' characteristics on CSR engagement. This result is similar to the findings by Bavorová *et al. (*2021) and suggests using a different set of individual-level indicators in future studies of CSR in the region.

7. Study limitations and outlook on future research

Our results suggest more future research into farms' local institutional environments. A focus on farms' organizational fields is one of the promising ways to address this suggestion. The concept of organizational field has been recognized as a useful level of analysis in the domains of institutional theory (Scott, 1991; Wooten and Hoffman, 2008). It builds on the premise that an organization's actions are structured by the network of relationships within which it is embedded (Wooten and Hoffman, 2008). This network represents a population of organizations operating in the same industry, including organizations' stakeholders who may impose a coercive, normative or mimetic influence on organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Therefore, the notion of organizational field provides a useful theoretical lens to give a detailed account of local power configurations as a driver of farms' CSR engagement.

Another direction for scrutiny of farms' local institutional environments involves focusing on the characteristics of the provinces in which the farms operate. Our results demonstrate strong differences among provinces with regard to farms' engagement in socially responsible activities. In particular, these differences may be subject to provincial institutional settings in countries with a federal form of government such as Russia. Therefore, we propose a more detailed analysis of local power configurations, historical developments, socioeconomic indicators, farm structures and their role in farm social engagement in the future.

Future research on the drivers of farms' CSR should also strengthen our understanding of the role of a generic institutional environment and its interplay with local institutions. Our study uses a perception-based measure of the weakness of a country's legal system and finds no statistically significant effect of it on farms' CSR engagement. We suggest future research efforts to address this limitation and employ a wider scope of indicators measuring the generic institutional environment. These may include indices of economic freedom, corruption perceptions and political constraints (Garrido *et al.*, 2014). Studies incorporating such measures may be particularly insightful with respect to the role of a level playing field in explaining motivations for and abilities of CSR engagement among different farm types.

Future qualitative and quantitative inquiries into the drivers of CSR in transition economies will benefit from disentangling the effects of regulatory, normative and cultural-cognitive institutions (Scott, 1995) on CSR engagement. Our results emphasize the need of farms to engage in CSR to reduce the uncertainties

associated with land and labor relations. However, how much of that need is caused by the gaps in existing formal institutions and how much of it stems from norms and values prevailing among farms' stakeholders remains to be studied. The latter is particularly interesting in view of our results that produced no significant evidence of the individual farm managers' backgrounds on CSR. One way to obtain more in-depth insights on the individual level of analysis is to inquire explicitly about the personal motives of farm managers to conduct CSR. Moreover, a clear distinction between moral and instrumental rationales needs to be made. Lastly, it would be important to explore whether and to what extent the individual motives of farm managers are induced by their farms' corporate culture.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material can be found online at https://doi.org/10.22434/IFAMR2020.0197

Table S1. Breakdown of the sample size by country and year and reasons for dropouts.
Table S2. Summary statistics.
Table S3. Country specific summary statistics.
Table S4. Frequency of zero and missing observations.
Figure S1. CSR engagement by province and farm type.

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Prospects of Agrarian Populism and Food Sovereignty Movement in Post-Socialist Romania

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Abstract

Progressive agrarian populism and food sovereignty have recently been discussed as having the potential to erode the right-wing populist agitation that is currently widespread in rural areas. However, these ideas are unpopular in post-socialist Eastern Europe. This paper studies the Romanian 'new peasant' movement 'Eco Ruralis' – a member organisation of La Vía Campesina. It argues that there is a critical mismatch between the progressive objectives of Eco Ruralis and the main worries of villagers in Romania. It also demonstrates the ways in which communist legacies influence societal attitudes towards capitalism and socialism, making the adoption of La Vía Campesina's anti-capitalist and pro-socialist ideologies problematic. Finally, it shows that the concept of 'food sovereignty' can be misleading, as this concept is alien to the Romanian countryside. Instead, we reveal that other sustainable practices, such as seed sovereignty, are more culturally appropriate and may play an important role in eroding right-wing sentiments in the countryside.

Keywords

agrarian populist movements, Eastern Europe, food sovereignty, La Vía Campesina, right-wing populism, social movements

Introduction

There is an on-going global revival of far-right, nationalist, conservative political movements, many of which have found support in the countryside. Indeed, rural and suburban voters have backed the recent entries of right-wing political parties into national parliaments (Scoones *et al.* 2018). Recent studies on right-wing populism in rural areas have tried to explain the growing rural support

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for populism and to find progressive solutions to these dangerous trends (Strijker et al. 2015; Borras 2018, 2019; Scoones *et al*. 2018; Mamonova and Franquesa 2020). These studies have concluded that rural communities have been the most affected by both the crisis of globalised capitalism and the crisis of representative democracies, making rural voters receptive to right-wing populist agitation and propaganda.

As a solution to this trend, Borras (2018, 2019) has suggested fostering agrarian populism in the form of a food sovereignty movement. He has argued that agrarian populism 'holds the potential to radicalize the discourse, erode right-wing populist agitation, and advance a more promising progressive alternative' (Borras 2018, p. 15). Agrarian (food sovereignty) movements have established a strong presence in the Global South. The international peasant movement La Vía Campesina has emerged as a major promoter of food sovereignty. However, the ideas of agrarian populism and food sovereignty have not found fertile ground in the Global North, particularly in post-socialist Eastern Europe (Higgins 2015).

This study aims to understand the constraints and prospects of agrarian populism (and food sovereignty) in Eastern Europe, considering the case of Eco Ruralis – the association of peasant men and women in Romania. Eco Ruralis unites various family farmers, organic producers, rural and urban gardeners, and agricultural activists. Together, they advocate and employ sustainable, peasant-like farming practices and lifestyles, which they contrast with the agriculture conducted by large farms and agribusiness. Eco Ruralis is one of the few Eastern European members of La Vía Campesina and can be characterised as a progressive agrarian populist movement.

Romania is currently experiencing a rise in populist, socially conservative, religiously dogmatic, and nationalist sentiments and politics[1] (Țăranu and Nicolescu 2017; Buzasu 2019; Dima 2019). Rural areas and small towns have become the bastions of this conservative turn, as was indicated by the results of the same-sex marriage vote in the recent 'Family Referendum' (Bursa 2018) and the electoral support for the conservative 'illiberal' agenda of the ruling Social Democratic Party (Paun 2019). Similar xenophobic and nationalist tendencies existed in Eastern Europe and Romania in the interwar period. Some scholars have raised concerns that the discourse of Romania's political parties and domestic media shows signs of a return to the fascist movements of the interwar period (Bucur 2004; Frusetta and Glont 2009).

This paper investigates how Eco Ruralis mobilises diverse rural groups and promotes a progressive agenda in the current challenging environment. In particular, it examines how Eco Ruralis articulates an agrarian populist discourse of 'Us' versus 'Them', engages in political and ideological debates, and deals with societal scepticism towards food sovereignty and other grand mobilising schemes. The paper analyses an agrarian populist movement in a conservative, post-socialist setting and explores how past legacies influence societal politics and perceptions related to agrarian populism.

Our research contributes to the literature on agrarian populism and food sovereignty in three ways. First, it reveals a critical mismatch between the progressive (but somewhat abstract) objectives of the agrarian populist movement Eco Ruralis and the main worries of rural residents. This mismatch results in a division between 'Us' (the 'new peasants' – members of the movement) and 'The rest' (the majority of rural

population). This mismatch then limits the potential for the agrarian populism of Eco Ruralis to erode right-wing sentiments in the countryside. Second, this study demonstrates that the communist legacies influence societal attitudes towards capitalism and socialism. The influence of such legacies on public attitudes creates additional obstacles and ambiguity in introducing La Vía Campesina's anti-capitalist, pro-socialist discourse and ideology in post-socialist settings, such as that of Romania. Finally, this study shows that the concept of 'food sovereignty' can be misleading and should not be universally applied. Instead, the study reveals that other sustainable practices (such as seed sovereignty in Romania) may be more culturally appropriate and could regenerate a sense of belonging and restore local identity. Their potential to bring a renewed sense of belonging and identity means that these practices could be important elements in eroding the nationalist, xenophobic, exclusionary sentiments seen in the countryside.

The paper is structured as follows: The next section presents the study's methodology. After this, a section introduces the study's theoretical framework and provides background information. The empirical sections are organised around the main features of agrarian populism: 'Us' versus 'Them' discourse, political orientation, capitalist versus socialist ideology, and use of food sovereignty as a mobilising tool. The final section provides a discussion about the relevance of this study to other contexts.

Studying agrarian populism in Romania

This research is the first study of a contemporary rural social movement in Romania. Rural mobilisation and grassroots activism have been largely overlooked in the literature and in debates on post-socialist rural politics (with some notable exceptions such as Mamonova and Visser 2014; Dorondel and Şerban 2018; Brett 2019). This case study of Eco Ruralis is exploratory research. It was chosen in order to investigate the obstacles and opportunities that might be encountered by a progressive grassroots peasant association, which operates in a post-socialist environment. Although the leaders of Eco Ruralis do not themselves call it an agrarian populist movement (populism has negative connotations in Romania), the association can be seen to share several features of agrarian populism. These include the way it draws a dichotomy between 'Us, people-of-the-land' and 'Them, elites', the way in which it presents the 'peasant way of life' as an alternative path of development, as well as the way in which it uses food sovereignty as a mobilising tool.

The analysis presented here is based on 23 interviews. The first author conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six coordination committee representatives and five members of Eco Ruralis in January–February and October–December 2019. Three committee members were interviewed twice. The interviews with the six coordination committee representatives focused on the organisational structure and membership of Eco Ruralis, as well as the movement's values, ideology, and its goals and strategies. The five Eco Ruralis members were asked about their motivation for joining the association as well as their awareness about, and support for, the movement's activities. In addition to the interviews, the first author conducted participant observation at three events: one conference, one consultation meeting, and

one general assembly held by Eco Ruralis.[2] She also attended two conferences where Eco Ruralis was a participant.[3] All interviews were recorded and conducted in person or online. Alongside this, document analysis was carried out to examine how Eco Ruralis represented itself and its agrarian populist discourse. The content of internal documents and online publications produced by Eco Ruralis was analysed thematically using the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti 8.

Additionally, the second author organised structured interviews with eight rural residents of the Teleorman county (southern Romania) and Sibiu county (central Romania), and one Bucharest resident who has relatives in the countryside. At the time of these interviews, all respondents were not members of Eco Ruralis. The respondents were asked about their attitudes towards authoritarian governance, strong leadership, minority groups (Roma minority, Jewish minority, and the LGBTQ community), the European Union, and rural movements and organisations including Eco Ruralis. The interviews were conducted by external research collaborators,[4] and by the author herself in person or by email. The interview guide was developed to include a set of predetermined questions that were asked in the same order and within the same context to increase the reliability and credibility of research data. The external research collaborators were instructed about the objectives and methodology of the present study. The selection of respondents was done based on principles of representativeness to include various socio-economic groups of different age, gender and education. However, due to a small sample size and a selection bias (the author was unable to ensure absolute control of the sampling), these interviews are used here only to illustrate the tendencies in the countryside, not to reveal new trends and make any generalisations.

The second author also engaged in email correspondence with three[5] Romanian scholars specialised in rural and agricultural development in Romania. These interviews were designed as exploratory expert interviews, they contributed to the specification of the research focus and provided insightful information into the situation in rural Romania. The scholars were interviewed about their knowledge of Eco Ruralis; they were asked about how the movement deals with conservative groups in rural society, the political engagement of villagers, and the relevance of the food sovereignty concept. Due to the lack of published empirical studies on rural mobilisation in Romania, the exploratory expert interviews complemented the primary interview data and were useful in drawing the conclusions.

In addition to the primary research data, the present study utilises a vast variety of secondary data. The secondary data are derived from statistics (the Romanian National Institute of Statistics), public opinion polls (research conducted by the Center for Insights in Survey Research), as well as various academic and media publications.

Populism, agrarian movements and their key features

Populism is one of political science's most contentious issues. While broadly used, it lacks a settled definition and a coherent theoretical framework (Woods 2014). Some scholars understand populism as an ideology. Other scholars view it as a form of

political mobilisation, or as a discursive frame (see the discussion on the slippery concept of populism by Mamonova and Franquesa 2020).

For the purpose of this paper, we adopt the definition of populism by Borras (2018). Borras has defined populism as 'the deliberate political act of aggregating disparate and even competing and contradictory class and group interests and demands into a relatively homogenized voice, i.e., "us, the people", against an "adversarial them" for tactical or strategic political purposes' (Borras 2018, p. 3). This definition allows us to engage with the two ideologically opposite variants of populism – right-wing populism and agrarian populism. These two types of populism target similar issues and adversaries, which makes the boundaries between them 'constantly porous, blurring and malleable' (Brass 1997, 2013; Borras 2018, p. 26).

Recent studies have shown that right-wing populism and agrarian populism are both societal responses to the crisis of globalised neoliberal capitalism. This crisis is associated with economic impoverishment, social polarisation, commodification of nature, and the failure of national governments to put the interest of 'ordinary' people ahead of the priorities of wealthy elites (Harvey 2004; Borras 2018, 2019; Scoones *et al*. 2018). Both types of populism, right-wing and agrarian, aim to give 'power back to the people' and reconfigure the existing order. Borras (2018) outlined the principal difference between the two types of populism. For him, right-wing populism is a reactionary, conservative, nationalist movement that promotes and defends capitalism in the name of 'the people'. Meanwhile, agrarian populism is a progressive, liberal, socially inclusive movement of various rural-oriented social groups and classes that advances a 'peasant way' as a sustainable alternative. Borras (2018) argued that agrarian populism has the potential to subvert right-wing populism as it channels rural discontent into a more progressive form of politics.

Agrarian populism has its roots in *'narodnichestvo'* – the 19th century ideological and political movement of Russian intelligentsia, who saw the peasant commune as a prototype of an ideal socialist society (Bernstein 2018). Members of the Russian narodnik movement in the mid-19th Century and the People's Party in the USA – that emerged thirty years later – designated themselves as populists (Goodwyn 1976). Canovan (1981) identified as many as seven different types of populism in the world's history: farmers' radicalism, peasants' movements, intellectual agrarian socialism, populist dictatorship, populist democracy, reactionary populism and politicians' populism. The contemporary variant of agrarian populism is primarily associated with the activities of the international movement La Vía Campesina and other transnational agrarian movements that have gained popularity in the Global South (Borras and Edelman 2016).

Agrarian populism is often incorrectly discussed as a unified and homogeneous movement, when it is actually plural and diverse (Bernstein 2014). In his study of class divisions in rural society, Byres (1979) distinguished between three types of agrarian populism: classical populism, neo-populism, and liberal populism. Later, he added a fourth type – neoclassical neo-populism (Byres 2004). These types of populist movement differ in class composition, attitudes towards private property and capitalism, and mobilisation techniques. Whilst Byres demonstrates the main varieties of agrarian populisms, none of the contemporary agrarian movements fit perfectly into any category in this typology (Borras 2019). Hence, Bernstein (2018) calls for

concrete analysis of the particular movements, which have been labelled by academics as 'agrarian populists'.

Despite the variety of agrarian populisms, there are several features that are shared by the majority of the contemporary agrarian movements. These are: use of 'Us' versus 'Them' rhetoric; an anti-capitalist political orientation; advocacy of small (peasant) production as a sustainable future model; emphasis on diversity and collaboration of its members; and use of food sovereignty as a mobilising tool (Desmarais 2007, 2008; Wolford 2010; Borras and Edelman 2016). Below we discuss features we consider crucial for our analysis.

Two antagonistic groups: 'Us' versus 'Them'

Similar to populist movements, agrarian populism considers society to be separated into two antagonistic camps: 'Us, the people' versus 'Them, the elite' (Brass 2013). While right-wing populists adopt a nativist, homogenising approach when conceiving the 'Us' group, agrarian populists aggregate various socio-economic groups and classes into the 'people of the land' community. This community is open to everyone regardless of gender, generation, race, ethnicity, religion and nationality. The diverse members of this community are united by their effort to defend their way of life and subsistence from the threatening activities of 'Them'.

The 'Them' in agrarian populism includes transnational agri-food corporations, the industrial food system, supermarket chains, corrupted national governments, banks, landed classes, and other powerful groups that constitute the so-called 'one per cent' which controls most of the land and associated resources (Desmarais 2007, 2008; Scoones *et al*. 2018; Mamonova and Franquesa 2020).

However, in agrarian populism there is also a group of actors that fits into neither the 'Us' nor the 'Them' category. We refer to this group in this study as 'The rest'. 'The rest' consists of ordinary people who neither share progressive ideas of agrarian movements, nor are they aware of those. They often are more receptive to right-wing populist agitation and propaganda. For these people, the group 'Them' not only includes elites and the political establishment, but also ethnic and cultural minorities, as well as immigrants. They often blame 'Them' for taking prosperity, job opportunities, and public services from their collective 'Us' (Scoones *et al*. 2018; Mamonova 2019). According to Borras (2019), agrarian populists have the potential to win over the supporters of right-wing populism by advocating structural social reforms and engaging in broader political initiatives.

Anti-capitalist (pro-socialist) political orientation

In the ideological and political representation of their members, agrarian populist movements often follow the principles of the agrarian myth and peasant essentialism (see Brass 2013 on the return of the agrarian myth). Although not many of these movements' members are peasants, the idea of 'peasant-ness' – as antagonistic to capitalism – is commonly employed in their politico-ideological framework. The peasant essentialism largely influences the anti-capitalist (pro-socialist) agenda of many

contemporary agrarian movements (albeit with numerous variations and deviations as discussed by Borras 2019).

While agrarian populism used to be an apolitical or third-way ideology, in the postmodern world it has become a political project (Brass 1997, 2013; Borras 2019). Brass (1997, p. 27) has described how agrarian populism underwent two significant transformations. First, 'revolutionary agency passes from the proletariat to the peasantry'. Second, 'peasant-ness'-as-alienation metamorphoses into 'peasant-ness'-as-empowerment. Indeed, if previously peasants were portrayed as powerless victims of capitalism, the 'new' agrarian populism celebrates their persistence, sustainability and revolutionary character (Brass 2013). The contemporary agrarian movements aim to transform the existing capitalist order into a fairer (socialist-inspired) system by means of 'a political revolution and not just a reform programme' (Borras 2019, p. 22).

Food sovereignty as the main 'glue'

Contemporary agrarian populism is commonly associated with food sovereignty, which is itself a political project and campaign, an alternative, a social movement, and an analytical framework (Holt-Giménez *et al*. 2018). Food sovereignty is 'the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems' (Nyéléni 2007). Agrarian movements use the idea of food sovereignty to mobilise groups of food producers and consumers and create cross-national networks of solidarity and collective action. The groups mobilised cut across racial, gender, generational, ideological, and urban-rural divides.

Food sovereignty is not articulated as a universal principle, and thus, differs in meaning when compared between Europe and Latin America, combining differing food discourses (McMichael 2011; Thivet 2019). As a concept it is virtually absent in post-socialist Eastern Europe (de Master 2013; Visser *et al*. 2015). In Eastern Europe, the right of the people to culturally appropriate food, as well as their right to define their own food system, are both grounded in the longstanding tradition of food self-provisioning and regarded as a matter of fact. These rights therefore represent what Visser *et al*. (2015) have called 'quiet food sovereignty'. There are several factors that hinder the transformation of 'quiet food sovereignty' into an overt food sovereignty movement. First, rural dwellers perceive that their rights to food and to define their agri-food systems are part of the natural order of things. They therefore do not engage in political mobilisation around these rights. Second, smallholders do not perceive their farming as an alternative to industrial agriculture and do not regard themselves as powerful enough to enact changes. Third, communist legacies limit the propensity for collective actions related to the peasant way of life and farming. Finally, peasants were for many years manipulated for political gain. As a result, they have developed mistrust towards any 'grand' mobilising scheme (see De Master 2013; Visser *et al*. 2015; Mamonova 2018 on constraints of food sovereignty in post-socialist Poland, Russia and Ukraine, respectively).

The previous failures of agrarian populism in Eastern Europe

Agrarian populism is not new to Eastern Europe. During the interwar period, agrarianism – a social and political movement that regarded rural society as superior to urban society – was popular in many Eastern European countries, including Romania. Its proponents advocated for development that was neither capitalist nor socialist, based on small land tenure and the large system of cooperatives (Neagoe 2008).

Eastern European agrarianism was primarily a peasant-oriented movement, in contrast to farmers' movements in Western Europe and the US (Karaömerlioğlu 2002; Eellend 2008). Small-scale peasant farmers – who used to be politically dormant – became the inspiration for many intellectuals who had been searching for a new vision of an ideal society. Then, the idealised notion of 'peasant-ness' became popular in avant-garde social and cultural circles and various peasant parties entered the government in many countries in Eastern Europe (Fairlie 2015). This period is known as the Green Rising (Bizzell 1926). The Green International became the name for the international cooperation between Eastern European peasant-oriented parties and groups (Eellend 2008; Daskalov 2014).

Prior to the First World War, the Romanian rural political scene was characterized by frequent peasant unrests, albeit with little revolutionary activity (Roberts 1969). These localised unrests were rooted in quasi-servile social and labour relations (neo-serfdom) and directed against the expansion of large landed estates, excessive fragmentation of smallholdings and decay of medium-sized properties (Roberts 1969). To deal with the growing rural discontent, the Romanian government launched a land redistribution reform that provided peasants with land and constitutional rights, contributing to the emergence of the peasantry as a social class (Mitrany 1951). This new class became the backbone of the agrarian populist parties and movements.

Agrarian populism in interwar Romania was a diverse movement with various ideological outlooks (Trencsényi 2014). Among the best-known peasant-oriented movements were: poporanism (an ideological and cultural movement that championed Romanian language and spirit, and aimed at liberating the peasantry through the organisation of cooperative farms); samanatorism (a political and literary movement focused on folklore traditions and national values); and taranism (a political movement aimed at promoting an alternative development path based on peasant principles).[6] These movements became the bases for peasant-oriented political parties. However, the parties were rather unsuccessful and failed to maintain political power.

Five main aspects can explain the failure of these peasant-oriented political parties during the interwar period. First, the peasant political mobilisation was rather weak and did not provide enough support for the parties' initiatives (Murgescu 2010). Second, the political leadership was characterised by demagogy and suffered from a lack of both experience and networks (Mitrany 1951; Radu 2018). Third, these parties committed to non-violence and democratic principles and were therefore unable to counter their corrupt and violent opponents (Mitrany 1951). Fourth, the National Peasants' Party – which was the only peasant-orientated political party that succeeded in entering the Romanian Parliament – was unable to implement the promised

reforms in the context of economic depression and the emergence of a dictatorial regime aimed at counteracting the rising fascist movements (Mitrany 1951). Finally, the ideological inconsistency and ambiguity of agrarian movements led to their oscillation between the radical left and the radical right (Trencsényi 2014). As a result, far-right parties and then the communist dictatorship gained power in Romania. At the international level, the Green International also failed to become a powerful political force due to differences in the agrarian structures and national priorities of Eastern European countries (Trencsényi 2014).

During the communist period in Romania, agrarian populist ideas were subverted by the communist regime and many of the agrarian representatives were jailed (Mitrany 1951). The communist government aimed at transforming the peasantry into an agricultural proletariat (Gallagher 2005). Peasants' land and assets were confiscated in favour of large collective farms, where the rural population was employed. The collectivisation campaign was carried out through abusive schemes and met with significant rural resistance that was severely repressed (Deletant 1999). Later, in order to deal with rural discontent and food shortages, the communist government allowed rural dwellers to conduct small-scale subsistence farming on household plots. This farming was very productive and thrived outside of state control, but it was not associated with the peasant way of life and peasant farming.

Land grabbing and the emergence of Eco Ruralis

After the collapse of Communism in 1989, land reform was initiated to transform formerly state-owned farmland into private ownership. The reform resulted in the highest level of land fragmentation in Europe (Hartvigsen 2014). Today, small-scale farms dominate the agricultural structure in Romania (INS 2010). The majority of rural residents conduct peasant-like farming on land plots averaging 3.1 hectares (Csáki and Kray 2005). They use manual labour (combined with some simple farm machinery) and grow primarily staple food crops. This semi-subsistence farming has become the poverty alleviation strategy for many rural households. It provides a safety net for food security (Hubbard and Thompson 2007) and a buffer for unemployment.

In 2007, Romania joined the European Union. EU membership resulted in increased foreign direct investment (Goschin 2014) and a number of positive effects on the economy such as lower unemployment and inflation rates, as well as income growth for poor households. However, according to Mau (2005), Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002, 2004), Toader and Radu (2018) European integration has not achieved economic benefits for all citizens. The prospect of EU accession has triggered rural outmigration (Horváth 2008; Roman and Voicu 2010) and land grabbing (EP Report 2015). In turn, regional disparities between rural and urban areas deepened (Goschin 2014). Besides that, there has been increased multinational interest in direct investments in the Romanian agricultural and mining sectors (Mihai *et al.* 2015; Hajdu and Visser 2017). Arable land investments have resulted in re-cultivation of abandoned land, improvements in farming technologies, and increased domestic agricultural output (Csáki and Jámbor 2013). They also resulted in the presence of a variety of farmland investors with speculative objectives (Hajdu and Visser 2017). The

investments in the mining sector are expected to boost tax revenues in the federal budget and contribute to local employment and business opportunities (Mihai *et al.* 2015). However, the investments are often described as 'land grabbing' or 'resource grabbing' because of their negative impact on local communities and the environment (see Vesalon and Creţan 2012, 2013, 2015; Mihai *et al.* 2015 on the impact of mining and fracking in the Romanian countryside).

Eco Ruralis emerged in 2009 in the context of the 'Save Rosia Montana' crisis. 'Save Rosia Montana' became Romania's largest and longest environmental and social campaign. It was a campaign against the development of an open-pit mine initiated by a Canadian company for the mining of gold deposits (Ştefănescu *et al.* 2013; Vesalon and Creţan 2013; Mihai *et al.* 2015). Eco Ruralis was established by four peasants from Mures, Sibiu, Cluj and Alba counties in Romania together with two volunteers from the USA. In 2011, the association became a member of the La Vía Campesina movement. Eco Ruralis is legally registered as a non-governmental organisation (NGO), a part of civil society, and it currently has 12,000 members. Eco Ruralis calls itself a peasant organisation, however is made up of rural people from economically, culturally, and ideologically diverse backgrounds. Eco Ruralis closely mirrors La Vía Campesina in terms of the heterogeneity of its members, its horizontal organisational structure, and its democratic decision-making process.

According to our interviews with various members of Eco Ruralis, the propagation and free distribution of local seed varieties are the key practices that attract the majority of members to join the organisation. Upon registration to receive seeds, one automatically agrees to become a member of the organisation. Activities for the propagation and distribution of seeds are organised at local nested markets taking into account the low income of the rural population. The annual free distribution of local seeds, and the organisation of seed exchanges, have given thousands of people access to local seed varieties and have established Eco Ruralis' reputation as a source of high-quality seeds. In the future, the association plans to set up five seed banks to preserve the genetic diversity of domestic seed varieties. Following peasant traditions, these seed gene banks will be located in small traditional houses (from interviews with Eco Ruralis committee member, 3 November 2019).

Constraints of agrarian populism and food sovereignty

Us – they – the rest

In a similar way to many other agrarian movements that adopt agrarian populist rhetoric, Eco Ruralis reproduces a discourse of 'Us versus Them'. According to our analysis of speeches and texts of committee members of Eco Ruralis, the movement defines '*Us*' as the group of so-called 'new peasants' – former urban dwellers and rural smallholders who are inspired by ecological and traditional food production. Eco Ruralis portrays this collective 'Us' as a group of liberal, progressive and pro-European citizens. They are described as aiming for the creation of a socially inclusive and fair society based on peasant principles. Meanwhile, the group '*Them*' consists of large-scale agro-industrial projects, multinational corporations, supermarket chains,

and governments. This collective 'Them', forms the main adversary of Eco Ruralis (Eco Ruralis 2019a, 2019b). The Mission of the organisation underlines: 'We will strengthen the capacity of the people to defend themselves collectively against the abusive / unfair actions taken by corporations and governments' (Eco Ruralis 2019a). However, the identity building and mobilisation of Eco Ruralis' members are also enacted through implicit contrast with another category or collective grouping, which we will call 'The rest'.

For Eco Ruralis, this 'The rest' consists of smallholders who do not engage in agro(ecological) practices (they often use chemical inputs and are not interested in organic farming). Members of this group are described as being unconcerned about biodiversity and ecosystem problems. They are referred to as not supporting multiculturalism and cultural diversity in their villages (from our interviews with Eco Ruralis members and committee representatives). However, various studies indicated that 'The rest' group, which constitutes a majority, is a major supporter of conservative, anti-Roma, and anti-LGBTQ politics in Romania. Both elderly, as well as young, rural residents hold such political views. In the recent 'Family Referendum', for example, 65 per cent of students coming from rural areas (in contrast to 57 per cent coming from cities) voted in favour of restricting the definition of marriage to exclude same-sex unions, seeking to defend traditional family values (Fulga 2017; Youngs 2018).

To justify their position against same-sex marriages 'The rest' group uses the notion of 'peasant-ness' and 'the peasantry'. Contrary to the progressive understanding of the peasantry presented by Eco Ruralis, 'The rest' portrays the peasantry in a conservative way. In one of our interviews, a rural dweller (man, 28 years old, non-member of Eco Ruralis) from Dârlos (Sibiu county) explained support for the 'Family Referendum' in his village by referring to the 'divine nature' of the peasantry:

> 'Peasants are closer to divinity than those people in towns, and the priest still influences their way of thinking to some extent. [Therefore] the traditional definition of the family is an important religious topic here'. (interview conducted 25 October 2019).

In contrast with members of Eco Ruralis, 'The rest' do not see large corporations and land or resource grabbing as a major scourge of rural areas. In their interviews, they indicated that 'infrastructure decline', 'lack of educational and health institutions', and 'depopulation' were the major problems (these problems were named in six out of eight interviews with non-members of Eco Ruralis, conducted 5–25 October 2019 in Teleorman and Sibiu counties). Indeed, these issues have been found to be the main concerns of rural residents in Romania among issues of poverty, insufficient off-farm employment opportunities, low quality of drinking water, rising tensions between ethnic groups in studies by Hubbard *et al.* (2014); Mikulcak *et al.* (2012).

Some rural residents also blame the EU for problems in their areas. A rural woman (35 years old, non-member of Eco Ruralis) expressed her disappointment with the EU: 'it is not what it was supposed to be, otherwise Brexit would not happen' (interview conducted 20 October 2019, Sibiu county). Although Romania has generally remained immune to the anti-EU wave (Dijkstra *et al.* 2019), attitudes about the EU are divided and the strongest anti-EU sentiments are found in the Romanian countryside (Buzasu 2019). A 2018 survey conducted by the Center for Insights in Survey

Research found that 35 per cent of Romanians believed that the EU had brought economic benefits to the majority and 31 per cent thought that it had brought benefits to some whilst harming others (CISR 2018).

Another adversary of 'The rest' is the largest ethnic minority in Romania – the Roma minority. Many Roma communities have settled in rural areas and have become an object of hate for rural residents (Dinca 2014). Roma are commonly blamed for '... stealing, cheating, begging and [receiving] social support from the government, [which] encourages them to stay at home without looking for a job' (interview with a woman, 34 years old, non-member of Eco Ruralis, conducted 20 October 2019, Sibiu county). Indeed, there is a strong tendency towards negative social representations of Roma ethnics, which reinforces racist attitudes and prejudicial beliefs (Creţan and O'Brien 2019).

The anti-LGBTQ, anti-Roma, anti-EU sentiments of many rural Romanians go against the principles of Eco Ruralis and constitute a major challenge for the movement. The leadership acknowledges the existing discrepancies between the rural residents' mainstream sentiments and the ideology of Eco Ruralis. One interviewee mentioned:

> 'In one of our discussions around migration, the opinions were very divided. Some were against migration. [...] "We see how right-wing sentiments arise in our discussions, especially when we talk with male peasants" (interview conducted 26 February)'.

Within the organisation these discrepancies are solved through consensus. This also means that those who have controversial opinions that do not fit the organisation's positions are 'naturally excluded by the dynamic of the organisational process' (interview conducted 17 January 2019). Thus, the conservative and traditional way of thinking is not only an attribute of 'The rest'. Some of Eco Ruralis members share xenophobic and nationalist sentiments as a result of right-wing populist discourse generated by the media, national government and other authorities (interview with administrative member, conducted 18 October 2019).

Eco Ruralis describes itself as strictly against any type of exclusionary, nationalistic, and xenophobic rhetoric and practices. The movement demonstrates its openness to various people regardless of their race, gender, or sexual orientation. However, the movement does not undertake any proactive actions to combat the conservative and xenophobic ways of thinking that are present in the Romanian countryside. In an interview with one of the committee members, the person mentioned the following about dealing with the anti-Roma sentiments of rural residents: 'We have a few Roma members. [...] We haven't done any specific initiatives for this group. [...] We should do more' (interview conducted 3 November 2019).

Eco Ruralis focuses on those people who share their progressive values but it does not actively engage with 'The rest' group. In our exploratory expert interviews, Ştefan Voicu – an academic researcher specialising in property rights and agricultural development in Romania – argued that the movement's limited engagement with the conservative and traditionalist members of Romania's rural population is largely the result of its leftist agenda and its membership of La Vía Campesina. He stated that: 'they [Eco Ruralis] need to deploy a progressive discourse to be affiliated with ECVC,[7]

which does not resonate with the local population' (interview conducted 5 November 2019).

Besides ideological discrepancies, Eco Ruralis does not address the main concerns of the majority of rural dwellers (such as the decline of infrastructure and depopulation). This makes the movement uninteresting and unattractive to the majority of the rural population.

Apolitical character of the movement

As we discussed earlier, agrarian populism has become a political project in the postmodern world. However, political organisation is problematic in rural Romania. Rural dwellers appear to be politically apathetic and unwilling to participate in any kind of politics. While political alienation used to be commonly ascribed to older generations, recent studies have demonstrated that young people also feel a sense of estrangement from the prevailing political system (Robertson 2009; Pranzl 2017). In an interview, a rural resident (man, 28 years old, non-member of Eco Ruralis) from Dârlos, Sibiu County, said: 'Politics in my country is a big disappointment right now and it has been for 30 years' (interview conducted 22 October 2019).

Such disappointment with politics greatly influences the activities of social movements and NGOs in Romania. In our exploratory expert interviews, Dr. Ştefan Dorondel – a Romanian scholar specialising in environmental and economic issues in the post socialist-countryside – suggested that the apolitical character of Eco Ruralis is a conscious strategy:

> 'they want to be *perceived* as apolitical simply because the actual political class in Romania is quite unprofessional and badly perceived by the population. They would not serve their own cause if they would allow people to perceive them as affiliated with one or the other political parties. Not in the current situation anyway' (interview conducted 5 November 2019).

Eco Ruralis therefore faces a challenging task: it aims at strengthening rural civil society and representing its members politically, while staying out of politics. One of the Eco Ruralis committee members explained the movement's apolitical approach to political matters:

> 'You need to have the capacity to constantly apply political pressure and to sit at the table [with politicians] when they talk about you. [...] We wrote the whole chapter on agriculture for XX [political party] but we won't publicly say this because we are interested in consolidating civil society. [...] If everyone would jump into the same boat of forming a political party, the boat would sink' (interview conducted 17 January 2019).

However, there is no consensus regarding the apolitical approach taken by Eco Ruralis. Thus, at the meeting of the General Assembly, a new member of the movement stressed the importance of the group's members acting as politicians. She wanted to run as a mayoral candidate in her village and represent peasant interests through her membership in Eco Ruralis. However, political engagement contradicts the statute of Eco Ruralis, which defines it as an apolitical, non-governmental organisation. The following discussion illustrates the tension in the movement:

> New Member: 'How many members of Eco Ruralis are now in the Romanian Parliament'?
>
> Other members: 'None'.
>
> New Member: [...] 'This is very bad. What could we do then? [...] How do you want to solve things if decisions are taken by them [politicians] not by us? [...] You are talking here about agricultural policies. Thus, 'policies' require 'politics'. [...] I don't trust politicians anymore. We have a convicted mayor in our village [...] I want to run as a candidate for the town hall. Otherwise, I won't have any decision-making power in my village. [...] Does this mean that I must leave Eco Ruralis'?
>
> Coordinating committee member: 'Also in France, José Bové and other europarliamentaries left the Confederation Paysanne, a LVC member, like us. [...] They publicly said they don't have anything to do with the popular movement because they could discredit it. This is a deliberate action aimed at supporting the peasant organisation from the European Parliament'. (the discussion was noted at the Working Group on Land Access at the General Assembly, Sâncraiu, 5 October 2019).

The discussion quoted above alludes to the apolitical approach to political matters of La Vía Campesina, something that largely influences the politics of Eco Ruralis. This remains an unresolved issue for many rural movements and NGOs in Europe (Mamonova and Franquesa 2020).

Not against capitalism

The post-socialist countryside is the arena for an ideological (and habitual) struggle between capitalism and the legacies of socialism. As Humphrey (2002, p. 12) noted: 'there is rather an unpredictable propensity to "turn back", or at least resolute refusal to abandon values and expectations associated with socialism'. Although many rural Romanians appreciate the changes brought by neoliberal capitalism and globalisation, many remain nostalgic about public services and social security that they experienced during the communist period (Murgescu 2012). A city dweller in Bucharest, who has relatives in the countryside, shared his insights about rural attitudes to communism and capitalism:

> 'They [rural dwellers] are still nostalgic about the communist times. [They witnessed] the destruction of the collective [farms] from the communist period, [which were] "privatized" by some of their former bosses who became rich entrepreneurs and exponents of capitalism' (interview conducted in Bucharest, 20 October 2019).

Eco Ruralis defines itself in opposition to communism and puts forward a progressive liberal agenda. The communist legacies prevent the movement from adopting the socialist ideology of La Vía Campesina. One of the coordinating members of Eco Ruralis said: 'Socialist terminology that is used by the LVC community scares us very much. We are more left wing but without ideological content, minus the socialist terminology' (interview committee member 17 January 2019). At the same time, Eco Ruralis follows La Vía Campesina's critique of capitalism, globalised agriculture, and free trade agreements. Thus, Eco Ruralis has to find its way between two 'evils'

– communism and capitalism. This is something, which is not easy, as one of the movement's leaders stated:

> 'This is a big discussion in Eco Ruralis [...] in our essence we are anti-establishment, more than anti-capitalist. [...] We recognise Capitalism's contribution to our contemporary condition. [...] We also recognise that Capitalism has done more harm to peasants than good and we recognise at the same time that Communism has done much more harm to peasants than good. [...] Still Capitalism offered more than Communism [...] but this area of Capitalism that is about corporate domination, about corporations and free trade agreements and markets and this globalism, this digital age, these are aspects that we look at critically as Eco Ruralis and indeed we have another vision' (interview committee member, 22 January 2019).

Recently Eco Ruralis launched Acces La Pamant Agroecologic (ALPA-Access to agroecological land) – an organisation that aims to collect donations to purchase farmland. This provoked internal debates because ALPA is based on capitalist principles, contradicting Eco Ruralis' ideology. The same contradiction is visible in the movement's attitude towards the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Despite La Vía Campesina's critique of the CAP, Eco Ruralis has supported the CAP, albeit whilst acknowledging its limitations. It advocates for the inclusion of peasant rights into the CAP. According to Eco Ruralis, the CAP can facilitate smallholders' access to land and associated resources and it therefore contributes to the creation of a sustainable agrifood system, which is based on peasant principles (from interview with a committee member, 17 January 2019). Thus, instead of criticising and rejecting the CAP, Eco Ruralis has tried to influence the CAP to make it represent the interests of farmers whose land parcels are smaller than 1 hectare (until recently, the CAP had a five-hectare payment threshold for agricultural subsidies).

Food sovereignty and seeds sovereignty

Food sovereignty is the mobilising framework of international agrarian movements, including La Vía Campesina. However, as we have discussed earlier, food sovereignty has many limitations in post-socialist settings. In Romania, societal recognition and mobilisation around food sovereignty rights is very weak and might even be described as virtually non-existent. In our exploratory expert interview with Ștefan Voicu, he stated that in Romania there is still 'some version of "quiet food sovereignty"'. However, 'it takes different forms depending on the region, as different types of agriculture are practiced in different parts of Romania' (interview conducted 5 November 2019).

Eco Ruralis is aware of food sovereignty's constraints in Romania. The movement supports activities carried out by its members, who aim at practicing, maintaining, and developing sustainable, small-scale farming and peasant lifestyles. However, some of the concepts, which have been promoted by the international food sovereignty movement, have led to controversy in Romania. For example, some members do not accept ideas about ecology or agroecology because these concepts are perceived as tools, which are used to fine-tune the industrial agribusiness system and are not

seen as offering peasant-based alternatives. At the same time they are perceived to be sophisticated and to hamper the interpersonal communication among rural people, as the terms need to be explained and put the organisation members into a didactic posture. A coordinating member explains:

> 'We recently had in Cluj the first workshop on political training and the concept (food sovereignty) has been intensively debated. The term can easily be distorted and misunderstood [...] Not all people accept the terms ecology or agroecology, even though we have been working with them for a long time now' (interview conducted 2–4 December 2019, via online written communication).

Instead, Eco Ruralis practices something similar to seed sovereignty. Seed sovereignty is understood as the reclaiming of 'seeds and biodiversity as commons and a public good'. It is taken to mean 'the farmer's rights to breed and exchange diverse Open Source Seeds which can be saved and which are not patented, genetically modified, owned or controlled by emerging seed giants' (Seed Sovereignty 2019). A coordinating committee member of Eco Ruralis emphasised that more than half of the movement's members regarded seeds as an important element of peasant identity. According to the committee member, this makes members want to preserve seeds and not be dependent on seeds distributed by agro-companies (interview conducted 26 February 2019).

However, this committee member also stated that there was confusion among members. He stated that the other half of Eco Ruralis members regarded the seeds as 'Romanian seeds' and saw them as a part of national identity, rather than as a part of peasant identity. Indeed, a new member of Eco Ruralis explained that local seeds gave him an identity, connecting him to a place. He said this sense of identity gained from the seeds was 'very similar to how Parmesan is associated [with] Italy or Emmental cheese [with] Switzerland'. (interview conducted 5 October 2019). This mix of understandings results in a mixing of a seed-based identity, a peasant identity, and a national identity. Eco Ruralis' coordinating committee is currently working on shaping the discourse on seed-related identity so that 'a peasant understanding [of it] does not transform into a nationalistic one':

> 'Considering that we are mostly a left-wing oriented movement, we do not allow that this view is hijacked by right-wing ideologies. Whenever we talk about seeds, we clarify our approach and specify that we do not refer to "Romanian seeds" but "Peasants" seeds' and we explain what Peasants' seeds mean' (interview conducted 26 February 2019).

The preservation and propagation of local seed varieties are important activities for Eco Ruralis members. However, 'The rest' does not always appreciate these activities. A member of Eco Ruralis described how she has been growing traditional seeds to continue the activity carried out by her grandmother, but that she is 'regarded as a strange person because of this'. She says that other people in her community (including her family members) 'do not see the value of working so hard to maintain the seeds and to grow the crops organically' (interview conducted 5 October 2019).

By bringing back a sense of belonging and restoring local identity that is under pressure through globalisation, multiculturalism and Europeanisation (Kymlicka (2013), seed sovereignty and related activities in Romania may offer a sustainable

alternative to the nationalist, xenophobic, exclusionary sentiments in the countryside. However, as we have argued, Eco Ruralis defines 'Us' in opposition to 'The rest'. This creates exclusion and disregard of 'The rest'. The exclusionary understanding of 'Us' undermines the ability of seed sovereignty to unite people. Eco Ruralis's current focus on 'the new peasants' divides rural society and could drive a larger gap between an 'Us' (who care more about seed varieties and are more mindful of agricultural practices) and 'The rest'.

Discussion

Recent studies of rural populism claim that agrarian populism, in the form of food sovereignty movement, has the potential to erode right-wing sentiments and advance a more promising progressive alternative. However, food sovereignty is not a popular concept in Eastern Europe. This paper has studied the activities of the Romanian 'peasant' movement Eco Ruralis, which is a member of the international movement La Vía Campesina that is the main advocate for food sovereignty. In this study, we have examined how Eco Ruralis engages in political and ideological debates around food sovereignty and 'the peasant way of life', as well as how it mobilises post-socialist rural dwellers for collective actions.

We revealed a critical mismatch between the progressive (somewhat abstract) objectives of the agrarian populist movement and the main worries of rural residents. This mismatch generates a division between 'Us' (the 'new peasants' – members of the movement) and 'The rest' (smallholders who are non-members of the movement). The division then limits the potential for agrarian populism to erode right-wing sentiments in the countryside. Moreover, this study has demonstrated that communist legacies influence societal attitudes towards capitalism and socialism, making the adoption of the anti-capitalist pro-socialist ideology of La Vía Campesina problematic in Romania. Finally, this paper has shown that the concept of 'food sovereignty' can be misleading, as it is alien to the Romanian countryside. Instead, other sustainable practices, such as the preservation and propagation of local seed varieties, could be more culturally appropriate, and therefore, may have the potential to play an important role in eroding the nationalist, xenophobic, exclusionary sentiments which are seen in the countryside.

But how relevant is this study to other contexts and what can we learn from it? In this final section we will discuss some implications of this research as well as the generalisability of our findings.

The mismatch between the progressive ideas of Eco Ruralis and the local concerns of Romanian villagers found in this study is not unique. Scholars have identified similar tendencies in other places. In his study of transnational activism and the palm oil boom in Indonesia, for example, Pye (2010) showed that the global campaigns of rural social movements do not match the interests of local communities. Whereas the movements advocated for biodiversity conservation and climate justice, villagers were concerned about land rights and employment conditions in the context of the palm oil expansion. Similarly, Bilewicz (2020) has revealed that there is a critical misunderstanding between urban activists such as members of alternative food networks

and farmers in Poland. The Polish urban activists focus on food relocalisation, agroecology, and social justice, while the farmers are concerned about defending land ownership and traditions. These discrepancies result in hostility and distrust between urban activists and farmers.

Other scholars have also made similar findings about the constraints encountered by the food sovereignty movement in post-socialist contexts. Studies by Mamonova (2018), and Visser et al. (2015) for example, have argued that the post-socialist tradition of food self-provisioning hinders the emergence of an overt food sovereignty movement in Ukraine and Russia. Meanwhile, De Master (2013) has demonstrated that the spread of food sovereignty in Poland is limited by the cultural legacies of communism as well as the deep-rooted societal mistrust of social movements associated with 'grand' universal schemes. Her study argued that universal models for food sovereignty could accentuate existing splits between 'cosmopolitan' Western Europe and 'backward' Polish smallholders. This increase in existing divisions could then unintentionally strengthen the right-wing nationalistic sentiments of some Poles. Our research contributes to the studies of post-socialist food sovereignty with its discussion about rural attitudes towards communism and capitalism.

Various authors have identified the apolitical character of the rural population in post-socialist countries. In their study of rural mobilisation in Russia, Mamonova and Visser (2014) demonstrated that post-socialist rural residents tend to distrust any political action and to assume that hidden self-interest lies behind every form of collective action. This study has similarly found that societal estrangement from politics and from civil mobilisation defines the apolitical character of rural social movements.

In this study, we have also highlighted the uneasy relationship between the transnational movement La Vía Campesina, and its national member-organisation Eco Ruralis. In Romania, the approach and political stance of La Vía Campesina does not always fit with locally specific practices and discourses. This mismatch creates obstacles for the popularisation and practical application of La Vía Campesina's ideas in Romania. This finding echoes the arguments made by Ferguson and Gupta (2002). In their study, they argued that, when they are acting locally, global NGOs tend to impose their informal power. Therefore, the global approach to food sovereignty and the ideas of La Vía Campesina may need to be adjusted to local norms, traditions, and politics.

Finally, in this paper we follow the suggestion of Bloch who argued, 'misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past' (Bloch 1954, p. 36). Although it is very difficult to draw parallels between the interwar period and the contemporary situation in Europe, some lessons might be learned from the past. It might be noted, for example, that in the inter-war period the failure of the Green International of peasant-oriented political parties was due to the fact that the individual countries' national projects were considered a priority and no overarching Eastern European organisation of agrarian parties was established. Today, La Vía Campesina faces a similar challenge. To create a coherent all-European food sovereignty movement, La Vía Campesina may need to engage with the specific national and local conditions in its member countries. At the same time, it may need to also embrace common interests and identify new connecting elements that go beyond domestic norms, traditions, and politics.

Conflict of interest

The authors do not have any conflict of interest to declare.

Notes

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1 The contemporary Romanian political discourse and politics are often termed as 'left-wing conservatism'.

2 2nd Nyéléni Europe Forum 26–30 October 2016 Cluj-Napoca, Romania; Food sovereignty consultation June 2016 Cluj-Napoca, Romania; General Assembly Eco Ruralis October 2019, Sancraiu, Romania.

3 Food Otherwise Conference 21–22 February 2014, Wageningen, The Netherlands; Access to land in Europe: Learning from the field Seminar 19–20 June 2017, Brussels, Belgium; Access to land conference 21st June 2017, Brussels, Belgium.

4 The author is immensely grateful to her colleagues – Oana Moro and Dr. Marian Zaloaga for conducting the interview with rural dwellers.

5 One of the interviewees would like to remain anonymous.

6 For more information see the studies of Mitrany 1930, 1951; Korkut 2006; Şerban 2006; Harre 2008; Musat 2011; Daskalov 2014; Marin 2018; Radu 2018 on peasant movements and parties in Romania during the interwar period.

7 The European Coordination of La Vía Campesina.

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