# Political Agroecology in Switzerland: Exploring Transformative Capacities in a Post-Political Food System

**Author:** Julian Moritz Kronbach
**Registration Number:** 1388304
**Course Code:** RSO80436
**Supervisor:** Jessica Duncan
**Chair Group:** Rural Sociology
**Date:** 19 May 2025

WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

# Abstract

Scholars associated with post-political theory emphasise that socio-ecological transformations, including the transformation of food systems, require re-evaluating and re-forming established democratic practices, institutions, and circumstances that constitute the means and conditions of radical change. Such a re-formulation towards a transformative democratic framework demands the ability to consequently contest, negotiate, and deliberate on divergent values and identities to make space for alternative socio-political practices.

From this starting point, this research considers the political potential of agroecological social movements as agents of transformative change. Focusing on the context of Switzerland and combining an empirical case study of an agroecology event series with theory in an abductive approach, this work investigates the transformative capacities of the (re-)politicising and de-politicising practices within the agroecology movement in Switzerland. Bringing forward a political agroecology framework and building on an ethnographic analysis, the research concludes that the movement's practices imply both (re-)politicising and de-politicising effects, with the latter mainly identified on the level of agroecology's institutionalised network. Building on theories of the post-political, and especially radical democracy, the work proposes a diversification of political strategies and framings to strongly include both movement internal identity building and movement external public outreach for gaining political and hence transformational momentum.

# Acknowledgements

# Table of Contents

# 1  Introduction

To transform means to profoundly change the state and composition of a system (Meadows, 1997) with the aim of allowing an unknown or even unimaginable outcome to emerge (Sievers-Glotzbach & Tschersich, 2019). Transformation is becoming a more often used term and demand in sustainability research (Görg et al., 2017) and marks a "*new political-epistemic terrain*" (Brand, 2016). This is likely to be triggered by realising the severity of the ongoing destabilising developments of ecological and social systems such as biodiversity loss, climate change, degradation of democratic institutions, and polarisation within societies (Clarke et al., 2014; Dannemann, 2023; Görg et al., 2017). It is this realisation that calls for fundamental and holistic social-ecological transformation, which originates in the academic discourse around sustainability (Görg et al., 2017; Sievers-Glotzbach & Tschersich, 2019).

Transformative processes "towards socio-ecological sustainability" are inherently normative since they, ultimately, are perceived transgressions of the social norm, as in the violation of social values, expectations, and aspirations that inform the acceptability of the state of the natural world and societal structures (Blühdorn, 2015; Swyngedouw, 2010b). In other words, "environmental problems" and their respective politics may be seen as objective common sense based on scientific evidence, a problem that everybody agrees on, and that "we have to solve". However, despite their severity and urgency, environmental problems are at first subject to a political tension created by differing perceptions and "powered by concerns, that is, values […]" (Blühdorn, 2015, p. 159). Hence, calls for social-ecological transformations, as well as their rejection, are subject to political contestation and negotiation since they mark a political reaction to a value-based grievance, ultimately around the intersectional issues of socio-ecological injustice. As such, they put into question established socio-economic structures and practices, as well as culturally informed identities and privileges at large, for a re-distribution of power, resources, and social privileges, and to eventually let become a differing socio-ecological arrangement (Sievers-Glotzbach & Tschersich, 2019). Hence, these processes both require and trigger genuine political negotiation and democratic deliberation since they are necessarily embedded in conflictual tensions over values, worldviews, and ideologies in the question of "the kinds of Nature we wish to inhabit, preserve, and (un)make" (Swyngedouw, 2010b).

## 1.1  Socio-ecological transformations and post-political theory

Informed by the theory of the post-political, which presents the main theoretical entry point of this work, I draw on the notion that the demand for sustainability transformations in public and science discourses is by far not always recognised to be normative, and hence a subject of contestation and negotiation. In contrast, as scholars have shown, "the call for sustainability" is often perceived to be common sense and presented as a mere issue of administrative management based on reasonable argumentation and scientific evidence (Maeseele, 2015;

Swyngedouw, 2010a). Sidestepping the democratic deliberation over the conflictual tensions present relates to the practice of de-politicisation, as in removing "the political" in politics (Rancière, 1998; Swyngedouw, 2010a). Closing down space for disagreement and thus deliberation, in this case over pathways and definitions of sustainability, through the neglect and suppression of this underlying tension between values and worldviews, renders a so-called post-political or post-democratic condition (Crouch, 2004; Mouffe, 2005). In such a condition, the "articulation of divergent, conflicting and alternative trajectories of future socio-environmental possibilities" are forestalled by mechanisms of, among other, scientific evidence and its translation to a hegemonic common sense, and hence fundamental change and emancipation towards more just and desirable futures remain hindered (Swyngedouw, 2010b, p. 195). Thus, the theory of the post-political is put forward to critically analyse the ways modern democracies organise themselves and questions the current constitution of related governance processes by shedding light on their (post-)democratic nature. In this work, I focus on agroecology as a call for a socio-ecological transformation of the food system by considering the critical analysis of this theory, which argues that transformations are inhibited if they remain trapped in a post-political arrangement.

## 1.2 Political Agroecology

A great deal of scholarly work has contributed to the understanding and operationalisation of the transformation of food systems (e.g. C. R. Anderson et al., 2021; Duncan et al., 2022; Tschersich & Kok, 2022; Vincent & Feola, 2020), as the structures that shape the ways how food is grown, produced, traded, processed, eaten, thought of and politicised (Ingram & Thornton, 2022). Previous research has highlighted fundamental shifts in values, narratives, and paradigms as a crucial part of food system transformations (M. D. Anderson, 2024; Tschersich et al., 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2019). Following Abson et al.'s (2017) argumentation, values, narratives, and the resulting paradigms and norms are deep leverage points in (social) system transformations, because they shape actors' interests, attributions of meaning, and intentions on which their actions and the respective socio-material outcomes base upon.

In this thesis, I focus on social movements as key actors in transformation, understanding them as both institutionally collectivised or loosely connected social agents that "conceive of themselves as struggling against heteronomy and oppression and as defending citizen rights, political self-determination and authentic democracy" (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021, p. 260). In line with Kenis and Mathijs (2014a), I analyse social movements in their capability to provoke such shifts by breaking with the system's post-political and post-democratic logic. Kenis and Mathijs (2014a) argue that this presents (re-)politicisation and relates to opening up political space, bringing in and politicising different values, and hence contesting dominant norms, paradigms, and their respective hegemonic structures that hinder change. Social

movements are not only altering unsustainable systems through civil advocacy, but are further transforming these by reshaping and prefiguring social, ecological, economic, and cultural practices and relations (Dannemann, 2023; Frantzeskaki et al., 2016).

Building on this, I embed this research in the discourse and practice of the global struggle for more socially and ecologically just food systems and food sovereignty, understood as the work of social movements in contesting the neoliberal organisation of agri-food systems and claiming agency and autonomy in determining food policies (C. R. Anderson et al., 2022; Patel, 2024). Thus, this thesis centres around agroecology, which is here recognised as the culmination of a worldview, ongoing global process, and political movement in demanding food system transformation for organising the every-day realities of peasants, farmers, and civil society at large more democratically and through socio-ecological just principles (C. R. Anderson et al., 2021; Gliessman, 2016; Nyéléni, 2015; Rosset & Altieri, 2017).

In this work, I further expand the concept of agroecology with the theory of the post-political into a political agroecology framework and search for potential levers to re-politicise food systems and hence counteract respective post-political structures. Through this, I respond to the scientific and public discourse that frames agroecology as a mere form of agricultural practice and a technological tool, and therefore contribute to co-opt and de-politicise the political work of agroecology movements (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2020; Tittonell et al., 2022). The current time is recognised as a crucial moment for the agroecology movement, worldwide and in Switzerland, as the intertwined issues of the food system's lock-in into capitalist neoliberal structures and the democratic dismantling of food system governance through the rise of right-wing populism ask for the emergence of strong progressive social movements to prevent the co-optation and institutional appropriation of agroecology (Altieri & Holt-Giménez, 2016; C. R. Anderson et al., 2022; Van der Ploeg, 2020).

The political struggles subsumed under agroecology are by no means detached from other issues and processes seeking transformation of socio-ecological realities, such as in the movement's work around feminism, decolonialism, or migration. Nonetheless, researching the post-political in food system dynamics offers a valuable entry point to advance political strategies for and theoretical understandings of forming counterhegemonic leverage. This is because food-related practices are deeply grounded in people's daily lives, cultures, and identities, offering much potential for politicisation of these dynamics and the pursuit of justice within and between social and ecological systems (e.g., M. D. Anderson, 2024; Van Der Ploeg, 2021).

## 1.3   Research case, problem and question

This thesis primarily concentrates on the food system and agroecology movement within the geographical boundaries of Switzerland. In 2019 and as a response to the failure of

conventional agriculture in the Swiss food system to provide healthy food for all, produced in a way that respects ecological and animal welfare, and ensures a fair wage for everyone, multiple agroecological actors founded the agroecological network Agroecology Works! (Agroecology Works!, 2025b). In its public presentation, the Swiss agroecology network states to engage in the struggle for socio-ecological justice, embracing agroecology as a guiding principle for transforming the food system by a holistic approach while engaging science, agricultural practitioners, and civil society.

Meanwhile, there are antagonistic initiatives that de-politicise agroecology through reducing it to scientific-technical approaches (Syngenta & Bayer, n.d.) and subordinating it to agroecosystem management techniques or a mere tool to "improve on sustainability" (agroecology.science, 2024; Federal Office for Agriculture, 2023). This corporate and state-capture of agroecology suppresses its political cause and in effect renders it to "junk agroecology" (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2020).

Asked by a petition of the agroecology network to take a stand on agroecology, in 2022, the Federal Council of Switzerland acknowledged agroecology as "a key approach to achieve transformation towards a more sustainable food system" (Agroecology Works!, 2025c). Agroecology is then brought forward as an element in the *agri-food system vision until 2050* policy (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b). However, apart from embracing a systems approach by simultaneously addressing multiple stakeholders and issues along the value chain, agroecology is not further concretised in, for example, its dimensions of social justice or solidary economics.

Thus, agroecology in Switzerland remains a fuzzy and contested concept and struggles to be understood as a deeply political practice and process of democratically negotiated structural change. This makes it important to re-politicise and reclaim agroecology as a discourse and process of food system transformation from the bottom up, through a social movement.

Recent agroecological research on the Swiss food system focused on perceptions and politics of agroecology (Kummer, 2021), challenges and success factors for community supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives (Vaderna et al., 2022), queering gender norms in Swiss agriculture (Pfammatter & Jongerden, 2023), food democracy in the context of a national citizens' assembly (Amos, 2023; Lehner, 2023), an inquiry of the uses and perceptions of narratives around agroecology (Bossard, 2024), mapping out agroecology in Switzerland (Teuber, 2023), and the prioritisation and valuation of agroecology promoting policies (Hess, 2025).

Part of these previous studies specifically look at the emergence of agroecology and show that many actors and practices in the food system actively apply practices that, although not

necessarily mentioned under this terminology, are linked to values and principles of agroecology (Bossard, 2024; Kummer, 2021; Teuber, 2023; Vaderna et al., 2022).

Amos (2023) and Lehner (2023) provide a comprehensive analysis of formal food system governance processes through a systems transformation lens, focusing on the one hand from the perspective of food democracy and deliberation, and on the other from the perspective of political ecology. Assessing the transformative potential of a national citizen's assembly on food policy, Amos (2023) concludes that through its (overly) deliberative nature but even more due to its format, schedule and facilitation, the citizen assembly did not reach a level to provide space for of a radical alternative discourse. Supporting its reformist outcome and learnings on how to empower people to "food citizenship", the author advocates for more space for political contestation and "deep deliberation" in the Swiss context. Lehner (2023) further highlights that food system literacy of citizens to structurally understand and re-imagine the food system remains lacking, leading to a lock-in and a suppression of transformation processes through capitalist realism (Lehner, 2023). While suggesting that the Swiss citizen assembly brought beneficial educational outcomes, the author concludes that for transformative change further politicisation is required and that this could be brought about by agroecology.

As outlined above, a large part of the academic literature on agroecology in Switzerland has focused on the agri-food politics context and expression of agroecology but little is known about the political practice of (collectivised) agroecological actors. Such becomes important especially when considering a Swiss consensus-culture in food system governance (Amos, 2023) and neoliberal lock-in's in the public discourse and collective imaginary (Lehner, 2023). This research aims to work on closing this knowledge gap, in how actors claim political space for imagining and working towards a more desirable food system. To advance the understanding of transformatory processes of the agroecology movement, as an institutionalised organisation or informal collectivisation of agroecological actors, this research approaches agroecology from a political sociology perspective looking at its political engagement on both an institutional network and social movement level. I here ask the question whether the agroecology movement in Switzerland embraces the political practice inherent to agroecology.

Hence, this work addresses the knowledge gap on the lacking understanding of how agroecology in Switzerland, institutionalised as a network and on a movement level, is politicising the food system and the resulting (non-)transformatory consequences of these political practices. This leads to the overarching research question:

***In what ways does the Swiss agroecology movement's politicisation of the food system influence its ability to achieve its transformatory objectives?***

Through this research I mean to contribute to the societal struggle of agroecology in re-organising food system structures to move towards more socially and ecologically just (and negotiable) realities. This might entail to give an outer perspective, to share theoretical insights and further to encourage imagination and seemingly unusual approaches to gain a deeper level of (re-)politicisation[1] as a mean to counteract co-optation, capitalist-realism and hence increase movement building and agroecology affiliated actor's transformative capacity. Upon this recognition, I address the following set of sub-questions to give response to the main research question:

1) *How and in what ways is the food system in Switzerland shaped by a post-political condition?*
2) *In what ways does the Swiss agroecology movement politicise or de-politicise the food system?*
3) *How can the Swiss agroecology movement further politicise the food system to enhance its transformative capacity?*

To respond to the research questions stated above, this work proceeds as follows. First, I provide the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) and hence define the key theories, terminologies and concepts. This clarifies the lens through which I approach and derive the here stated problem and knowledge gap and further sets the base for the qualitative data analysis by operationalising the theory into a code book. In a next step, to enable the contextualisation of this thesis' empirical case study, I conceptualise agroecological social movements through a systematic literature review of their political practices, focusing on movements across Europe (Chapter 3). Having prepared the ground, a document analysis enriched with inputs from literature responds to the first sub-research question, sketching further out the post-political context in which the Swiss agroecology movement is operating in (Chapter 5.1). This is followed by analysing political practices of the agroecology movement and network, based on data collected during fieldwork at a public agroecology event series and responds to the second sub-research question (Chapter 5.2). Bringing together theory, literature review and the findings of the analysis, I then discuss the consequences of the political practices of the Swiss agroecology movement. At the same time, I provide respective trajectories to act on these consequences in order to enhance transformative capacities, responding to the third sub-research question (Chapter 6 and 7). I present the research approach, methods and data sources in Chapter 4.

Through the combination of theory and empirical analysis, I here seek to contribute to the academic debate on food system transformations and agroecology. Doing so, I provide an in-

---

[1] In this work, *re-politicisation* is often spelled out *(re-)politicisation*, to acknowledge that in the past previous political agents, such as the organic movement or peasant unions, have already been politicising issues that are addressed in this work.

depth analysis of the post-political condition's implications in transformative struggles of social movements in food systems and put forward a framework for political agroecology. By doing so, I aim to both inspire further steps in the political work of agroecology on the ground and in the realities of social movements, as well as in the academic debate around food systems transformation.

# 2  Theoretical Framework

In this section, I clarify the theoretical standpoint that informed the research questions and the lenses through which the data is analysed.

## 2.1  A world full of common goals and mutual understanding? Reconceptualising consensus and conflict with post-political theory

The theory of the post-political forms the main part of this thesis's theoretical framework. In the following section, I explain the theory's arguments and relevance and define the usage of this theory and its terms for this thesis. I further operationalise the interaction of the post-political with social movements theory to guide the empirical analysis later on.

### 2.1.1  The political in politics and the organisation of societies

Post-foundational authors like Rancière (1992, 1998), Mouffe (1999, 2005) or Žižek (1999) gave *the post-political* condition a theoretical basis from a political philosophy standpoint. The theory of the post-political describes the disappearance of *the political* in *politics* (Rancière, 1998) and the emergence of a *post-democratic* condition in the time after the Cold War period (Buller et al., 2019; Maeseele, 2015). To understand this claim, understanding the concept of the political is key.

For Rancière (1992) the political is the field of encounter between two heterogenous processes: First, the one of governing (in Rancière's word policy) that includes the practices of creating community consent based on the distribution of shares and hierarchy,  and second the emancipatory process of politics, which is the attempt to continuously verify and establish the supposition that everyone is equal. In Rancière's (1992, p. 1) understanding, "[…] the handling of a wrong remains the universal form for the meeting between the two processes of policy and equality.". For Rancière, then, the political is crucial, but only emerges when governance through the creation of structures and hierarchies by consensus is in constant tension with the aspiration to verify the equality of all based on the understanding of the *demos*. In the arguments of Mouffe (2005, p. 9), politics relates to "a set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organising human coexistence in the conflictuality provided by the political". This understanding of Mouffe is based on the claim that human societies inherently have an antagonistic dimension since the social life of people is shaped by deeply rooted differing values, identities and interests. This makes conflict the crucial category of politics and the political to the reflection of this antagonistic dimension (Mouffe, 1999, 2005).

From both theoretical standpoints, the differentiation between politics and the political is the elementary act in the analysis of the current state of democracy. It allows us to distinguish between a democratic condition in which the project of emancipation (Rancière, 1992) through an agonistic encounter of adversaries is enabled (Mouffe, 2005), or a state of post-

politics in which democratic debate is subordinated to deliberatively reaching *the one* rational solution to be accepted by all (Mouffe, 1999). In the context of the post-political theory, where values, worldviews, and norms are seen in opposition to each other, Mouffe advocates for the active engagement in this emergent conflict, not in a pugnacious or destructive way but pleads that liberal-democratic societies face the important task to participate in political conflict while refraining from undermining their opponent's legitimacy. In other words, it means to shift towards understanding political conflict as the agonistic confrontation of adversaries instead of enemies, and hence to avoid an antagonistic frontal fight between enemies (Mouffe, 1999).

Such understanding is ever so important in times of rising right populism and its contribution to the erosion of democratic institutions and processes, and with that the dilution and distortion of human rights, which Mouffe (2018) in part explains with the established post-political consensus. In Mouffe's argumentation, ignoring the antagonism inherent to human relations does not make these tensions disappear and renders the agonistic domestication of conflict, in the confrontation under a negotiated and "controlled" setting, indispensable. By making antagonisms visible and giving them outlet through democratic politics, a radicalisation into violent, oppressive and discriminatory forms of politics that "articulate essentialist identities – nationalist, religious or ethnic – and for increased confrontations over "non-negotiable moral values" may be prevented (Mouffe, 2002, p. 11). This is what the right populist movements' success draws on, "pretending to offer an alternative that gives back to the people the voice that had been confiscated by the establishment elites" (Mouffe, 2018, p. 10).

### 2.1.2  Processes of (re-)politicisation: time to talk turkey

In that context, this thesis aims to better understand processes of politicisation, de-politicisation and re-politicisation and draws from an expansive conceptualisation of these terms. Foster (2014, p. 227) describes politicisation and de-politicisation to reside at either end of a continuum on which "politicisation refers to the opening up of political space, [and] de-politicisation refers to attempts to close off public deliberation on a number of issues". Opening up political space can be understood as a contestation of supposedly non-negotiable truths and bringing forward the conviction that things could also be different (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021).

In the words of Swyngedouw (2010a, p. 216), the process of de-politicisation is "the colonisation of the political by politics" and hence leads to constructing a "hegemonic consensus that does not tolerate any alternative perspectives" (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021). To re-politicise in that sense refers to politicising a formerly de-politicised political issue or space and opposing its non-negotiability. The understanding of the post-political applied in this work sees de-politicisation not merely as an activity or a tool of governments, but broader

as a societal and socio-political problem and hence acknowledges the ubiquitous nature and lived experience of the political (Foster et al., 2014).

Looking closer at the mechanisms of re-politicisation, two main theoretical entry points are considered in this work, firstly, re-politicisation through disruption of common sense in a Rancièrian sense, and secondly, the way to oppose hegemony stated by Mouffe and Laclau. From the theoretical standpoint of Rancière, the state of post-democracy emerges through the avoidance of conflict by organising negotiation in a neutral frame (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a). The partaking parties have, intentionally or not, agreed on the borders of this frame, hoping to optimise their share of the objectives and outcomes. By setting this then unnegotiable space of deliberation, public opinion becomes identical to the opinion of the public's representatives. This obliterates the difference and dissensus of the political matter, and hence a post-political condition is established (Rancière, 1998). To re-politicise in that sense means to contest and disrupt the borders of what appears to be common sense, negotiable or part of the solution space and further challenge the constitution of inclusivity, representation and partnership. Kenis and Mathijs (2014a, p. 150) describe political action then as the activity of "creating a space where something new can be heard or seen" and stress that this requires a group of people to claim legitimacy, visibility and "act on the assumption of equality".

Understanding re-politicisation from the standpoint of Mouffe and Laclau requires a different entry point to what constitutes the post-political situation. While for Rancière it is fundamental equality, for Mouffe and Laclau it is the constitutive antagonistic dimension in human societies that requires consideration for a functioning democracy (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a). Somewhat counter-intuitively, Mouffe and Laclau do not advocate for erasing these conflictual and antagonistic tensions. Instead, they call for the acknowledgement of the unavoidability of them, noting that the suppression of conflict can lead to more conflict (Mouffe, 1997). The aim is to desist from the assumption of universal values and instead allow for the full implications of what Mouffe (1997) calls a "pluralism of values" (Mouffe, 1997). Pluralism here relates to a "tense" co-existence of multiple value systems that holds a space of incommensurable conceptions of what different actors perceive as good (Mouffe, 1997). The political can therefore be seen as an "ontological dimension of social relations" (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a; Maeseele, 2015), in which not one worldview can be rationalised as the universal or objective truth.

It is this recognition, and hence also the allowing for plurality, that re-politicises a political cause. Re-politicisation on a societal level, and through social movements, requires what Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xviii) have called to create a "chain of equivalences among various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination" and therefore establish a frontier and define adversaries. To re-politicise, and hence oppose the hegemonic order, a series of demands needs to collectivise and come together over a

shared disagreement (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a). This shared struggle is what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) call "nodal point", and which allows for political empowerment by a congregation to a "we" that is naturally in opposition to a "them" (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a). To counteract the post-political, and therefore to re-establish and strengthen democratic institutions and structures, re-politicisation, by recognition of pluralism and agonistic struggles, is crucial, as it gives way to transformational trajectories in which different futures of socio-ecological justice can be re-negotiated and "fought" towards.

### 2.1.3 Tracing down the post-political in the sustainability and food-system discourse

The theory of the post-political was further specified to realms of sustainability by scholars like Swyngedouw (Swyngedouw, 2010b, 2010a) and later to food system politics by the scholars Duncan and Claeys (2016; 2018). Duncan (2016) states three characteristics to operationalise the post-political condition in global food system governance, namely: increased technocratic governance processes, eradication of difference and disagreement and push for consensus, as well as a perceived inevitability of neoliberalism. These characteristics will subsequently be explained in depth, as they will guide the contextual embedding of the case study later on.

*Technocratic governance*: On the governmental level, de-politicisation through state actors unfolds when political questions are addressed as technical issues which have to be solved by experts (Mouffe, 2005). This process, in which the political "is transformed from a matter of ideological contestation to a matter of administration" leads to technocratic decision-making and a foreclosing of democratic struggle between alternatives (Maeseele, 2015, p. 2). Duncan (2016) presents narratives of evidence-based policy making and governance by indicators as two main examples of this de-politicising technocratisation. In this, the (neglected) political can be found in the way science-policy interfaces are constituted as well as what indicators were chosen to govern in an evidence-based manner, while the decisions to be made are often presented as a neutral process, they are inherently political (Duncan, 2016).

*Consensuality and neutrality:* Other de-politicising practices are the eradication of difference and disagreement and the push for consensus, which both seem to stem from what Mouffe (2005) calls liberal rationalism and means the belief in the availability of a universal consensus based on reason. Problems, e.g. those of "sustainability" or "food security", are presented in a way that nobody could be against them or dares to position themselves in disagreement as they would be labelled fundamentalist, blind radical, illegitimate, or ideological (Maeseele, 2015). Often, the push for consensus is, intentionally or not, used or instrumentalised in a manner that avoids the more

fundamental underlying issues of the problem discussed, as e.g. distribution, access, nutrition, autonomy in the case of food security (Duncan, 2016).

*Neoliberal lock-in:* A further trace of the post-political condition is a perceived inevitability of a neoliberal way to organise and structure economic and social life, which comes along with the avoidance to politically address the systemic unequal outcomes of liberal capitalism (Mouffe, 2005). As the democratic debate is de-politicised through the bespoken mechanisms of technocratic decision-making and the eradication of difference, any futures beyond the existing socio-political status quo, and more specifically the continuation of neo-liberalisation of all social spheres, remain invalid (Maeseele, 2015). Such can, for example, be found in applying technological fixes to increase efficiency and respond to the issues of small enterprises' economic feasibility or environmental impact.

While these characteristics of de-politicisation are not exclusive to discourses on food systems and sustainability, they offer markers to analyse governance processes and policies on their de-politicising impact. Furthermore, another characteristic of de-politicisation that becomes visible in policies is how problems are presented. Inspired by the reading of Bacchi's (1999) "What's the Problem?" approach to policies, I complement the framework applied to the later analysis on Swiss agri-food politics with a focus on problem presentations. Focusing on how problems, or the solutions to problems, are presented, this approach allows us to mark situations where the political dimension, as in the problem's informing values and judgements, was obscured by claiming general agreement to the problem represented.

However, no theory is perfect, which also applies to the theoretical framework presented so far. Hence, I provide here some key arguments that question the productivity of post-political theory for issues around socio-ecological justice and change. Scholarly work has criticised post-political theory to pay insufficient attention to the political in a mundane dimension and through a political economy lens, as in how economic relations of capitalism shape unjust societal structures despite a politicised framework (Knutsson & Lindberg, 2020). Furthermore, concretely discussing the application of post-political theory in environmental governance, McCarthy (2013) challenges the idea that political projects must meet a universal set of criteria to be "properly political". The author argues that "there are multiple and indeterminate routes, sites, forms, and trajectories of politics and political change in environmental politics", pointing out that the (post-)political cannot anticipate or determine whether transformations will occur (McCarthy, 2013, p. 24). From another angle, Meyer (2020, p. 12) questions post-foundational theorists' proclamations of a "post-political era" within the times of neoliberalism and populism, arguing that such "occlude our ability to see parallels in past struggles against de-politicisation and to see political possibilities in contemporary movements and ideas.". The author instead advocates for looking for the alternative to technocratic elitism in everyday concerns and life-worlds of people and social

movements, which accordingly are both pluralist by their diversity and political by contrasting the narrative of inevitable technocratic management.

Much of the criticism of post-political theory, as presented above, focuses on how it appears to simplify and universalise much more complex correlations in the processes of politics. This work attempts to integrate this critique by drawing on ethnographic research and addressing the lived realities of actors. Thereby, universalisations or "properly political" criteria of the theory are tried to be avoided. The theory is further used not with the main goal to reach abstractable outcomes but also to provide a contextualised trajectory and approaches for strategically working towards radical change from a social movement perspective.

### 2.1.4 Transformative capacity: relevance for understanding sustainability transformation and agroecology

Having understood what constitutes a post-political condition and how it may manifest in food system governance processes, the question remains how the post-political links to sustainability transformations of food systems, and hence to agroecology.

Transformative capacity describes a social actor's practice, and essentially an idea's ability, to fundamentally change a prevailing (social) system and order (Walker et al., 2004). The concept stems from systems thinking literature and considers the decisiveness of intervention points in changing a system's overall behaviour. Abson et al. (2017) have operationalised the hierarchy of intervention points proposed by Donella Meadows (1997) to 12 levels, presenting a gradient that reaches from individuals' psychological *intent* (Level 1) to governance *parameters* (Level 12). The authors argue that, depending on their level, different interventions are more likely to cause transformational change (lower levels) or remain shallow and lead to incremental change only (higher levels). According to Abson et al. (2017), based on Meadows (1997), the lower six levels of intervention are underpinned by the values, goals, worldviews, and the surrounding social structures of actors that shape the orientation and hence provide the base of a system. In other words, intervening on lower levels and taking values, goals and worldviews, and their constituting narratives and paradigms, as the entry point, social actors can enhance their transformative capacity.

Post-political theory claims that (radical) democratic processes increase the ability of society to negotiate differing worldviews, work through conflict and disagreement, and include subordinated voices and positions (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a; Mouffe, 2018). The theory connects to socio-ecological transformation by shedding light on how the discourse on socio-ecological issues is to be understood and situated on an inherent normative political stage constituted by tensions between differing norms, concerns and hence values (Blühdorn, 2015; Swyngedouw, 2010b). That is to say that socio-ecological transformation is only possible in a

political condition in which policymaking is not directed at *policing,* meaning to keep the prevailing order (Rancière, 2010 in Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021).

Therefore, for social actors' transformative capacity to emerge, the actors pushing for change must intervene on foundational levels and ensure that their cause is object to and creates public debate and confrontation and hence is not made non-negotiable through, e.g. the retreat into expert opinions or technocratic governance. Researching the transformative capacity then means to investigate the system's (post-)political condition that a given intervention acts upon and shedding light on the depth and political appearance of social actors' interventions (Abson et al., 2017; Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a)

By looking through the lenses of politicisation and placing a social movement at the heart of the research, this work seeks to engage closely with such social-transformative processes. The relevance of approaching this work through the theory of the post-political is threefold:

- First, through the current pivotal standpoint of agroecology in the Global North (Altieri & Holt-Giménez, 2016).
- Second, by the overarching need to gain more traction in food system transformation without compromising democratic values (Tschersich & Kok, 2022).
- Third, through the democratic characteristic specific to the case of Switzerland's political landscape and system (Lehner et al., 2025).

Post-political theory provides an analytic approach to connect to the political status quo and the involvement of social movements, as well as to explain how to loosen up locked-in societal processes and thus advance understandings about agroecology movements in Switzerland. More broadly, the framework provided here has the objective to support not only an academic theoretical engagement and "academic production" but also aims to facilitate research that works on overcoming the political separation from agroecology in academia and embedding agroecology in the political arena of social movements (Altieri & Holt-Giménez, 2016). To do so, however, requires an in-depth understanding of social movements' role and engagement in post-political discourses, since they, as discussed in the next section, can both be agents of re-politicisation but also de-politicisation.

## 2.1.5 Collective politicisation: the political in social movements

In this sub-section, I operationalise the connection between post-political and social movements theory and define (post-)political practises that will be guiding the analysis of the agroecology movement in Switzerland.

Social movements, as agents that "conceive of themselves as struggling against heteronomy and oppression and as defending citizen rights, political self-determination and authentic democracy" (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021, p. 260), are chosen as main level of analysis in this work and seen as key actors in food system transformation, as they may present and provoke a

political reaction opposing the private sector and/or state governance. Based on the arguments of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) and Rancière (1998) political practises in that sense are active engagements within a democratic framework through which social movements articulate their identities and values, advocate for alternative ways of doing and being, and contest structures and processes that do not align with their position.

However, looking at the literature, the discursive engagement or implication of social movement's practices are situated on a narrow gradient between de-politicisation and re-politicisation and may easily be confused with their actual transformative consequences. While social movements clearly have the potential to re-politicise locked-in social systems through different mechanisms (Diaz-Parra et al., 2015; Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a; Tarazona Vento, 2025), they further bear the risk of perpetuating de-politicisation (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021; da Schio & van Heur, 2022; Diaz-Parra et al., 2015; Varvarousis et al., 2021) – especially when acknowledging that the category of social movements entails non-left and far-right movements as well (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021; Dannemann, 2023).

The main mechanisms of re-politicisation informing the inquiry of the data are presented in table 1 below. These were operationalised using examples in the literature that analysed social movement practices with post-political theory.

*Table 1: Political practices of social movements that have been argued to re-politicise the issue addressed and may have transformative impacts.*

| Mechanism | Description of practice | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Broadening the frame of dispute | Opening up narrowly discussed issues to further connect problems and increase the "political" load of a certain topic | Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a |
| Addressing the (ultimate) cause | Questioning the ways in which social, economic and governance structures have led to the problematic situation at stake | Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a |
| Creating self-legitimacy and visibility | Empowers marginalised groups and challenges the neutrality and positivity of societal debates, processes or events by making heard and visible unheard and invisible marginalised groups, which contrast the mainstream views and norms | Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a |
| Prefiguration | Embodying the dissent against the current organisation of social structures in enacting and materialising an equitable, ecological and solidary alternative and diffusing these into the broader cultural and institutional landscape | Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021 |
| Foregrounding difference and defining adversaries | Dismissing pseudo representations and consensuses by distancing from and criticising such framings to clearly define and address adversaries | Diaz-Parra et al., 2015; Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a; Tarazona Vento, 2025 |

| Creating nodal points and interacting within these spaces | Engage intersectional with other initiatives, actors and movements through solidarity and over a collective struggle to create alliances and foster and "Us-Them" differentiation | Kenis & Mathijs, 2014a |
|---|---|---|

1While social movements, as presented above, can be guiding to counteract a post-political condition, the literature also problematises how social movements engage in de-politicisation. According to Blühdorn and Deflorian (2021), claiming empowerment does not make a social movement, be it a right-wing populist or a leftist movement with socio-ecological demands, a re-politicising actor. In contrast, the literature, presented in table 2 below, mentions several ways in which social movements themselves may contribute to a post-political state.

*Table 2: Political practises of social movements with a potential reinforcement of the post-political condition and discourse.*

| Mechanism | Description of practice | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Projecting universality and manufacturing a "we" | Enaction of a pseudo representation of others' interests and positions, as well as the presentation of alliances which are based on common sense | Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021; Knutsson & Lindberg, 2020 |
| Dismissing the political nature of knowledge | Transformation of socio-political problems and conflicts into issues of scientific evidence and technical management, as well as the de-legitimisation of the opposing point of view through the assertion of the exclusive scientific validity of one's cause | Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021; da Schio & van Heur, 2022; Knutsson & Lindberg, 2020 |
| Prefigurative simulation | Creation and presentation of alternatives by social movements without seeking the politicisation of structural injustice beyond "the local, everyday practices and personal life worlds | Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021; Diaz-Parra et al., 2015; Kenis & Mathijs, 2014b; Varvarousis et al., 2021 |
| Democratic dismantling | Discreditation and destruction of democratic processes and institutions | Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021; Dannemann, 2023 |
| Use of floating signifier | Moving debates to the outside of the political encounter of the involved parties by pushing for topics that are seemingly non-rejectable and in "everyone's" best interest | Knutsson & Lindberg, 2020 |
| Strategic avoidance | Avoiding situations and topics that might cause political confrontation or conflict (internally or externally) and seem to threaten a created consensus over a common identity or position | Knutsson & Lindberg, 2020 |

As shown in the table above, to contest hegemonic post-political arrangements, social movements have to overcome several challenges such as misrepresentation, over-expertisation, or prefigurative simulation. But they also have to be able to manage internal and external conflicts (Dilley, 2017; Kenis, 2016), create cohesion and mobilisation (Kenis, 2019; Mocca & Osborne, 2019) as well as to persist over time and get active once windows of opportunity open (Tarazona Vento, 2025).

Connecting the above-mentioned points back to theory, to align with the theoretical standpoint of Chantal Mouffe on the political, social movements are overall faced with the circumstance to be embedded in a tension between constructing an "Us" through collectivising and movement building and engaging in pluralistic relations with the consequentially emerging "Them". This means, in essence, that the right of the political adversaries (the opposition) to defend their ideas must not be questioned nor delegitimised[2] (Mouffe, 2002). However, this is especially challenging for movements that strive for advancement in social-ecological justice, as these causes might be presented and seen as morally inviolable. This tension gives reason to the formerly mentioned narrow gradient of re- and de-politicisation and the political challenges of "the left" (Mouffe, 2018) and the environmental discourse (e.g. Swyngedouw, 2010b) more broadly. Social movements, through re-politicising public spaces, can therefore play a crucial role in facilitating democratic agonistic confrontation and counteracting the emergence of harmful essentialist identities.

In order to investigate what might be learned from other movements and then applied to agroecology movements, the social movement literature reviewed here concentrated on empirically based research conducted in Europe.

## 2.2   Agroecology and the political

Having linked food system transformation to the need to overcome post-political conditions, and operationalised the application of post-political theory in the research on social movements in the first part of this framework, this second part clarifies the connection to and definition of agroecology specific to this work. I first explain how agroecology is political and elaborate on its relation to the scientific discourse. Second, I zoom in on the dynamics of agroecology in Switzerland after positioning this work in different frameworks of agroecology.

---

[2] But, according to Mouffe (2002), to make space for political opposition and confrontation does not mean to legitimise sexistic, xenophobic, racist, colonialist, classist or any other oppressive and discriminative position and agenda. On the contrary, Mouffe argues that these essentialist identities raise out of post-political politics as they do not allow "to domesticate" the "hostility and potential antagonism" inherent in all human relations by guiding democratic spaces, processes and institutions.

## 2.2.1 Political agroecology in the scientific discourse

In the academic context, agroecology is generally defined as a conglomerate of science, practice and social movements (Rosset & Altieri, 2017; Wezel et al., 2009). A broad body of literature connects agroecology and food system transformation. Gliessman (2016) sketched out a framework with five levels for classifying activities and political agendas in food system change through agroecology. Only by reaching the higher levels 4, re-establishing a more direct connection between those who grow our food and those who consume it, and 5, building a new global food system, based on equity, participation, democracy, and justice, a transformative change of the (global) food system becomes possible. This connects to how C. R. Anderson et al. (2021) emphasise that transformation emerges through collective action, governance shifts, and the building of countervailing power, to contest the dominant food system paradigm rooted in capitalism, racism, patriarchy and colonialism. C. R. Anderson et al. (2021) further relate to agroecology as an ongoing transformative process that is based upon specific core principles, values, and politics. Hence, agroecology is recognised not as an end goal or a fixed manual, but as a directionality that requires contextualisation and a political self-conception.

The objective and meaning of agroecology across its three main components differ depending on the place where it is referred to (Wezel et al., 2018), which arguably also applies to the political perception of agroecology. Generally, in the case of the Global North, agroecology is described to be mainly established in science and mostly lacking a political dimension and foundation in civil society (Altieri & Holt-Giménez, 2016; Wezel et al., 2018), such it is, argued here, also the case for Switzerland.

Some agroecological scholars emphasise the need for a transformative agroecology to move from an NGO and academic based foundation into spaces of practitioners of agroecology and civil society to form a collective and political response to the socio-material implications of the corporate-industrial food system (Altieri & Holt-Giménez, 2016; C. R. Anderson et al., 2021). As Altieri & Holt-Giménez (2016, p. 2) put it: "It requires resituating agroecology from the political confines of academia and non-governmental organizations, into the political arena of progressive social movements that embrace agroecology as a pillar of food sovereignty, local autonomy, and community control of land, water and agrobiodiversity". In this context González de Molina et al. (2020) warn against seeing agroecology as a fragmented puzzle of practice, movement and science. They make the case that only by connecting the theory and practice as an "indivisible whole" can agroecology become transformative. One factor giving rise to the fragmentation of agroecology's parts, suspected here, is the political indifference, or the lack of a collective political identity and understanding for the (contextual) values and objectives of agroecology. This is important for the politicisation of the agroecological actors and values, particularly in the Global North.

As much as agroecology is positioned as a pathway of food system transformation, it also represents an alternative paradigm to the prevalent corporate-industrial food system (Altieri, 1989; C. R. Anderson et al., 2021; Shiva, 2016). However, agroecology is often depicted as a pathway for sustainable agriculture through different agroecosystem management techniques, for example analysed by Tittonell et al. (2022), leaving out its political aspects and hence de-politicising agroecology. However, agroecology is inherently political and normative by challenging the capitalist roots and linearity of the current industrial food systems (Altieri & Holt-Giménez, 2016; González de Molina et al., 2020) and further opposing the connected issues of heteropatriarchy and colonialism in its different forms (e.g. Domptail et al., 2023; Moreno Cely et al., 2023; Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021). This goes back to agroecology's origin in the knowledge and farming practices of Indigenous communities as well as in the struggles of peasant movements for food sovereignty, mostly in South America (Altieri & Toledo, 2011; Rosset & Altieri, 2017).

Due to the increased (mis)use of the term, co-optation and therefore the shaping of agroecology by a wide variety of actors (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2020), the emphasis on the inseparable connection of agroecology and perspectives from political ecology and political science has become more important in recent years. Scholars try to move the discourse around agroecology again to levels that engage with questions of power, justice, inclusivity and food system governance (Giraldo, 2019; González de Molina et al., 2020; Jacobi et al., 2021). **However, whether agroecology movements in the Global North also embrace the political practice of agroecology remains less clear and is the object of this research.**

### 2.2.2 Understanding the political dynamics of agroecology in the Swiss context

Recognising the political dimension of agroecology and the importance of opening the academic confines and merging to an "indivisible agroecological whole", I attempt here to engage with and acknowledge the international movement's understanding of agroecology. In 2015, under the name of the Nyéléni declaration, diverse organisations and international movements of small-scale food producers and consumers like peasants, Indigenous peoples, hunters and gatherers, family farmers, rural workers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and urban people gathered to decide on a common understanding of agroecology (Nyéléni, 2015). By their definition, agroecology expands the narrow picture of food system management and represents a way and a cosmological and spiritual understanding of how to relate to their land, nature, the planet, and Mother Earth. The Nyéléni declaration embraces the political and material conflict in the way that for these people to defend their rights, power structures in societies must be challenged and transformed. More specifically: "We need to put the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples who feed the world" (Nyéléni, 2015, p. 165). This more grounded understanding of agroecology contrasts with the mainstreamed and more technical and

abstracted definitions in the 10 elements presented by the FAO (2015) or the 13 principles by the CFS's High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE, 2019).

To understand how politicisation through agroecology manifests in the political practice of agroecological actors, the Nyéléni declaration and political agroecology literature presented before, served as a basis to define a political agroecology code set. Taking into account the on-ground experiences of agroecology actors, the code set, as shown in table 3 below, was expanded and sharpened during the research process.

*Table 3: Abductively derived code set presenting how the political reflects specifically in agroecology*

| Code | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Access to land | Access to land for small-scale farmers and community farming is guaranteed |
| Autonomy | Seed sovereignty, low dependency on external inputs |
| Integration of marginalised groups and care for people in agriculture | Codes for the care of marginalised groups, such as migrant workers, exploited practitioners, or the people working on farms in general |
| Knowledge production and sharing | Research agendas are democratically developed, creation, sharing and keeping of knowledge by agroecologists |
| Local economies | Decentral organisation of food supply chains, food system circularity, solidary economic relationships |
| More-than-human world | Recognition of interconnectedness of biological (and social) systems, stewardship for Mother Earth (natural world), rejection of commodification of all forms of life |
| Recognition of gendered roles and reproductive work | Equal distribution of power, care-work, tasks, decision-making and remuneration |
| Small-scale farming and peasant livelihood | Small-scale farming and food system structures are supported and not deemed secondary to the economy-of-scale |

Considering these processes and understandings of political agroecology, the current relevance for research on the manifestation of agroecology in Switzerland points towards creating a better understanding of agroecology as a political movement beyond its institutional representation. In the political analysis of Switzerland's agroecology, I differentiate between two levels of the manifestation of agroecology, once the network level and second the movement level. On the network level, agroecology is represented institutionally by the organisation Agroecology Works!, while the movement level refers to the spaces and actors in which agroecology manifests bottom up in the values, daily practices,

political work and lifestyle of people. **The argument made here, which is guiding the analysis of the empirical case study, is that the Swiss agroecological network would need to further evolve into an overarching movement by enhancing the politicisation of agroecology and hence increasing the transformative capacity of a collective political agroecological social movement.**

Hence, it is especially in the nexus between collective action, social movement building and politics that this thesis connects to agroecology. In search of a transformative political agroecology in Switzerland, in the following chapter, I first aim to contextualise the current situation of agroecology with literature on (political) agroecology and base it further upon the theoretical foundations of the post-political and social movements.

# 3  Literature review

Aligned with my theoretical framework, I here identify different (political) practises of agroecological social movements (AESM) by a systematic literature review. Doing so, I also pay attention to how such engagement can tilt to de-politicisation, as described in the theoretical framework. I elaborate and reflect on AESM's opportunities, strengths, limitations and leverage points for food system transformation as well as the difficulty to construct a definition of AESM. Lastly, I highlight the current stance of the Swiss agroecology movement and set it into context to the presented literature.

The literature used in this section was primarily obtained through the Scopus database. The search prompts focused on combinations of the terms *agroecology, movement, transformation, food sovereignty* and *Europe,* which led to a total of 141 results. Inclusion criteria included empirical work and excluded articles that focus on areas outside of the European continent. This led to a final sample of 10 articles from which I could identify further sources through snowballing. Most sources are academic articles and/or stem from the European agroecology mapping project (Wezel & Bellon, 2018). Table 6, shown in Section 9.2, presents the literature used.

## 3.1  Conceptualising agroecological social movements

When referring to AESM, I here specifically address social movements affiliated with the values and principles of agroecology on a political dimension. It is not synonymous with the term "agroecology movement" that often emerges in the literature (see e.g. Wezel et al., 2018), which further encompasses the engagement of agroecological agricultural practice and science. While the terminology of "agroecology movement" is popular both in public and academic discourse, I here aim to nuance the political relationship of agroecology to civil society. As the following literature review shows, AESM is an umbrella concept for a high diversity of initiatives that affiliate with the ideas of agroecology and food sovereignty. However, both agroecology and food sovereignty are concepts situated in a "territory of dispute" (Giraldo & Rosset, 2018), making it difficult to conceptualise the concept of AESM. As there is no single agroecological worldview, and likely not every AESM adopts food sovereignty as a key concept, the definition of AESM as well as its relation to food sovereignty can only remain loose.

This reflects in the literature, which shows the difficulties to identify initiatives[3] that intentionally affiliate with agroecology and see themselves as part of an AESM (Brumer et al., 2023; Kummer, 2021; Moudrý et al., 2018) or difficulties in identifying the (political) value set of agroecology in social movements at all (Seremesic et al., 2021). This might be caused

---

[3] Initiatives in this case can both relate to a single actor (e.g. pioneering farmer) or an established network of actors (e.g. food cooperative or community supported agriculture exchange network).

by the difficulty in working with the terminology of social movement and their often-attributed stereotype as "banner-waving activist" (Scoones, 2015), as well as the respective idea that social movements are clearly differentiable entities. Emerging with this idea comes a field of tension, where an initiative can be part of AESMs without having adopted this definition for themselves. AESMs can also be conglomerates of multiple initiatives, ranging from highly organised and formal networks (e.g. Stassart et al., 2018) to loose informal structures (e.g. Balogh et al., 2020). From a relational perspective, it is arguably less the self-definition and categorisation of an initiative to be agroecological that makes them part of AESMs. It is rather the value and politically informed interactions and hence the relations of an initiative that shape the "belonging" to a social movement. In that sense, AESMs can exist even without the usage of the terminology of agroecology or the partaking initiatives knowing each other. The other way around, an initiative or movement defining itself as agroecological might not embody the holistic understanding and its normative core of food sovereignty, creating practises of co-optation (e.g. Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2020).

The difficulty in identifying AESM in Europe reflects the challenge of agroecology in the Global North to arrive in the "political arena of progressive social movements" (Altieri & Holt-Giménez, 2016). Which however stands in a slight paradoxical relation to the Catalonian case analysis of Di Masso and Zografos (2015), that in the Global North, food sovereignty seems a higher motivation-factor to engage in action for social change, e.g. through organised consumption groups, for (urban) food consumers than (rural) producers. Following these lines, one would expect AESMs in Europe to emerge rather in the urban than rural context, which the reviewed literature provided here generally suggests. This marks an important point of reflection regarding the political consequences of these movements. Suggesting, for the European context, that alternative food system practices are more likely to occur through urban folks demanding alternative food provisioning practices, questions whether such practises may be de-politicising. If such practises only serve the goal of seeking a morally better lifestyle, such may fall into simulative prefigurative ways of de-politicisation. The depth and persistence of prefiguration are decisive for its transformatory outcome, as in the extent that the opposition to dominant patterns of commercialised and individualised economic relations is enacted and endured during times of rising inflation or crises.

## 3.2 Political practises of agroecological social movements

Diving into the literature on AESMs in Europe, a diversity of social and political activism that challenges the status quo of food production and consumption presents itself. The systematic literature search provided concepts such as Permaculture (Latvia), Living Labs (Germany, Austria), citizen-led Food Councils (Germany), food cooperatives and alternative food networks (AFN) (Germany, Austria, Poland), participatory guarantee systems (Spain), market gardening (Sweden), community gardens and farms (Hungary), eco-villages (Hungary) as

well as urban initiatives in city-regions like the transition town movement (United Kingdom) or initiatives focusing on time banks and social currencies (Spain). Many of these presented initiatives correspond to food provisioning or social practices and seemingly differ from a common understanding of social movements. Nevertheless, they represent "practised engagement" (Scoones, 2015), creating cohesion for a collective response in the light of agroecology.

The main themes identified in the literature on the political engagement of AESM are: Policy work, activism, prefigurative practices, public awareness building, and knowledge production and skill sharing. Subsequently, I elaborate further on the practices of these themes and present respective connections in the literature.

## Networking and public awareness building

The most obvious political practice of AESMs is to promote and advocate agroecology in public spaces. The literature presents multiple cases in which AESMs engage in creating awareness and legitimacy for agroecology as a crucial alternative to the industrial agri-food system. This may happen through formal agroecological networks (Raffle & Carey, 2018; Stassart et al., 2018), but can also be grounded in locality through the promotion of local brands and traditional food culture (Balogh et al., 2020; Felcis, 2021). Different forms of awareness building are present in the literature: Food festivals, food networks newsletter (Raffle & Carey, 2018), social media (Felcis, 2021) or events that showcase agroecology (Bossard, 2024). Considering the theoretical framework, creating public visibility does not necessarily present a political practice. Contrarily, if awareness building is only carried out without any (re-)politicisation of a political demand by responding to an issue of socio-ecological justice, and/or problematising and opposing other actors, attention may be created but with a lack of transformational, or even de-politicising, effects. The continuous use of neutral, mainstream, accommodating or conflict-free framings may lead to "good-washing" and co-optation of one's own political cause, similar to different analyses of the transition town movement (Dilley, 2017; Kenis & Mathijs, 2014b). Similarly, in public relations and campaigning, actors failing to realise that self-legitimisation through scientific knowledge and expertise is political can narrow the political space and hence may perpetuate a post-political state.

Another example of AESMs' general political engagement is the collectivisation of agroecological actors. The most prominent agroecological collectivisations mentioned in the literature are organic farmer movements or unions, which in many cases represent the initial manifestation of agroecological principles in European countries (Balogh et al., 2020; Brumer et al., 2023; Migliorini et al., 2018; Seremesic et al., 2021; Stassart et al., 2018). However, the organic sector cannot simply be subsumed to agroecology, as critiques of a "conventionalised" organic sector raise the issue of applying the industrialised linear logic to

organic agriculture (De Molina Navarro, 2015), which may even co-opt and hence de-politicise the issues that the organic movement originally addressed for systematic socio-ecological change. Nevertheless, the core values of organic farming and the corresponding social networks are important to be recognised in the further building of re-politicising AESMs in a European context, as they present the origin of agroecological values, practices and pioneers.

Urban and city-region initiatives form another cluster of interesting actors in the formation of localised AESMs. The analysed literature showed in the case of Valencia (Spain) and Bristol (UK) that, through prefigurative action and political organisation, well-established urban initiatives enabled the integration of agroecological principles into municipal policies (Raffle & Carey, 2018; Sarabia et al., 2021). While Brumer et al. (2023) do not mention the impact of the citizen-led food policy councils of Vienna (Austria) and Frankfurt (Germany), their work might be influential to the municipal agri-food policy once a window of opportunity opens. Sarabia et al. (2021) conclude through their analysis of urban initiatives that networks, bridging the urban-rural dichotomy of food producers and food consumers, are important in the pursuit of broadly manifesting agroecology. In this light, Felcis's (2021) analysis of the Latvian permaculture movement showcases the importance of having diversity of initiatives in the collectivisation for AESMs. Permaculture as part of agroecology might not offer a silver-bullet approach to "sustainable food systems", but presents a "condensation-nuclei" which can bring together "city dwellers, recent and aspiring 'back-to-the-landers', small town inhabitants, and rural people" over a shared interest (Felcis, 2021, p. 19). This might be due to permaculture's popularity and easily accessible ethical and philosophical framework, which provides an interesting entry point to think about the popularisation of agroecology for a broad audience and a factor of building AESM.

Beyond more formal and mainstream approaches, in the case of Belgium's "potato-war", civil disobedience helped to raise awareness and public debate on the future development of food production. Van Dyck et al. (2018) describe how another action in 2011, when activists swapped genetically modified potato plants with organic substitutes in a field trial, triggered a public debate on the collaboration of universities with multinational corporations and GMOs in food. While such activism is often quickly stigmatised as extreme or radical, it poses a form of resistance against hegemonic and oppressive structures that is deeply political and should not be too quickly denounced as a threat to liberal democracy or social welfare. In contrast, depending on the action and its context, such activists' practices can be seen as political care and an act to strengthen (or safe) democratic values and structures (Rosenthal, 2018).

## Policy work and activism

The literature shows that through their political presence in policy and public spaces, AESMs work on gaining influence in changing legal frameworks, financing and prevailing power structures. In the example of the case study on the city-region of Valencia, Sarabia et al. (2021) identified main factors which enabled the integration of agroecological principles into policy as well as the signing of the Milan Urban Policy Pact. These were the creation of informal agri-food governance spaces by empowered social movements; the promotion of networking, reflection and social learning in these spaces (e.g. the generation of awareness for territory); the elaboration of a vision of radical changes for sustainability; and the promotion of disruptive agri-food initiatives embodying the paradigm of agroecology and food sovereignty. The citizen-led food councils in Germany and Austria, mentioned by Brumer et al. (2023), also represent such informal agri-food governance spaces. These connect politically to agroecology by their objectives to both promote regional, fair and ecological food supply as well as decentralising food systems and decision-making processes.

Political space can also be claimed by civil disobedience, which was a common tool in Belgium for movement mobilisation and problematising the cooperation of public universities with agri-business (Stassart et al., 2018; Van Dyck et al., 2018). In the act of public land occupation against the construction of a new prison, activists cultivated the plot with potatoes. This way of movement building shows the strength of food movements in reinforcing broader struggles and ways in which food can be politicised (Van Dyck et al., 2018). Such is to be considered a crucial tool in the politicisation of agroecology in the Global North, as it comes from grassroots actors, activism brings political agroecology into society outside the involvement of NGOs or academia, making it more connectable and part of a collective struggle.

## Prefigurative practices

A central element in the collectivisation of agroecological actors and initiatives are AFNs, which exemplify different ways of organising food provisioning. While having different forms and sizes, the commonality of AFNs lies in the creation of networks and the sidestepping of the highly commercialised mainstream food supply chains to support decentralised agroecological ways to grow and market food. Examples from the literature are CSAs (Balogh et al., 2020; Brumer et al., 2023; Drottberger et al., 2021; Migliorini et al., 2018; Popławska, 2020), (organic) cooperative supermarkets (Popławska, 2020; Sarabia et al., 2021) and further farmers' markets, community and allotment gardens, farm-to-table box schemes (Popławska, 2020), and participatory guarantee systems (Sarabia et al., 2021). Poplawska (2020, p. 57) ascribes AFNs the role as the backbone of the informal agroecology movement in Poland, but also disenchants them from being a silver bullet solution as "not all AFNs represent food decommodification" and might not be alternative in terms of their

economic practises. However, Poplawska (2020) highlights the focus on social integration, the grounded nature, the preservation of small-scale farming and an increased reflexivity towards eating practices and environmental objectives that AFNs can facilitate. Through this broadness, AFNs can connect to political agroecology as they can prefigure an agroecological food future and therefore make visible that alternatives to the industrialised food system exist. Such as in the example of Swedish market gardeners of Drottberger et al. (2021), where market gardeners prefiguratively oppose mainstream food system actors like retailers and wholesalers and seek a redistribution of power and strong lateral collaboration with other market gardeners.

In the search for AESMs in Europe, living labs further make an interesting case as they link different stakeholders in open innovation networks to develop and implement agroecological practises (Brumer et al., 2023). By transcending separations between farm-level, value-chain and research, such initiatives connect actors and enable the co-creation of alternative (local) food systems and knowledge based on agroecological principles. However, such projects may only sustain if they are funded continuously or emerged bottom-up and found independence from large-scale funding schemes.

### Knowledge production and skill sharing

In many cases of European AESMs, agroecology is related to knowledge production and skill sharing around land management. This happens often in the form of practitioner networks or research-practice collaborations. In fact, Anderson et al. (2022) stress the importance of collective agroecological learning experiences as a main factor in connecting abstract politics around food sovereignty and the on-ground practices of agroecology. From their perspective, building empowered AESMs relies on the advancement of learning and knowledge production that resists the cultural/technical hegemony imposed through mainstream agricultural education and other mainstream knowledge institutions (C. R. Anderson et al., 2022). An important part of practitioner networks, in which agroecological knowledge is preserved and developed, is further the collective conservation of heirloom varieties (Felcis, 2021). Also, Migliorini et al. (2018) describe how seed sovereignty represents a central core of collectivisation of agroecological actors in Italy. Such examples show the importance of recognising these seemingly mere practical activities (e.g. seed swaps) in their connection to the political levels of agroecology (e.g. seed sovereignty).

## 3.3 The agroecological social movement in Switzerland

Agroecology as a term and concept has only recently become more prominent in Switzerland, even though practices, science and social movements aligned with the contemporary definition of agroecology have already existed and developed for decades. Some important manifestations are the creation of vegan-organic farming principles by Mina Hofstetter in

1915 (Winistörfer, 2001), the creation of the first known CSA in Europe in the 1960s (Adam, 2006; DeMuth, 1993), the founding of the *FiBL* research institute for organic agriculture in 1973 (FiBL, 2019), or the work of the peasant union *Uniterre* since 1951, nowadays the Swiss member of La Via Campesina (Uniterre, 2024).

Since 2019, agroecology in Switzerland was institutionalised by the loose network *Agroecology Works!,* which later in 2022 was further established as a formal association (Agroecology Works!, 2022). The Agroecology Works! network, subsequently mentioned by the agroecological network, is formed by 34 different institutions reaching from universities, research institutes, small-holder farmers unions, development cooperation NGOs, grassroot movements, labelling organisations to foundations, with the goal to push for a "people before profit" paradigm shift in the food system (Agroecology Works!, 2022). *Agroecology Works!* takes next to the 9 pillars of Nyéléni, also the 10 FAO elements (FAO, 2015) and the 13 HLPE principles (HLPE, 2019) of agroecology as their foundation (Agroecology Works!, 2022). To increase public attention of agroecology has been one of the main objectives of Agroecology Works!. For that reason, Agroecology Works! has, for the past four years, been organising the event series *The Days of Agroecology* (TDA)[4], to showcase, connect and strengthen agroecological initiatives throughout Switzerland (Agroecology Works!, 2024b).

As part of the agroecology mapping project of Agroecology Europe, Teuber (2023) defines other (agroecological) social movements, next to Agroecology Works!, engaged with agroecology. These initiatives range from NGOs, citizens' assemblies, farmer unions to popular CSAs and cooperatives. Based on key-informant interviews, Teuber (2023) identifies three topics that are seen to be most relevant for these AESM in Switzerland: establishment of regional value chains and true costs and fair prices in food trade, peasant rights, and the importance of building networks. In the context of the literature presented here, the AESM in the case of Switzerland appears both formally and informally. Formally, through the representation of the agroecology network, which also solidarizes with the global agroecology and food sovereignty movement. And informally through grassroots initiatives that mostly grow out of social experimentation on alternative food provisioning strategies. Agroecology in Switzerland has had two clear political appearances through the two open petitions launched by Agroecology Works!. These petitions requested a response from the federal council on the national implementation of the agroecological principles and, second, on the ongoing decreasing numbers of (small-holder) farm operations and the respective implications of the growing average farm size. Many other informal political practices also took place, such as citizens' assemblies on the Swiss food system (Lehner, 2023; UVO & FiBL, n.d.), the

---

[4] In German the event series is called *Tage der Agrarökologie* which gives the same abbreviation TDA as from *The Days of Agroecology*

formation of CSAs (Vaderna et al., 2022), and many other local agroecological initiatives that involve civil engagement (e.g. Bossard, 2024).

## 3.4   State of agroecological social movements in Europe

To conclude, there is not a lot of empirically based literature in Europe which characterises the food system related social movements in their formation, functions and practices (see table 6 in the appendix). Much of the literature on agroecology in Europe focuses on mapping and defining agroecology in different geographical contexts. While much of this research describes the history of agroecological practises, different networks and educational programs, often little is known about political action from the involved actors.

In the attempt to develop a framework for AESMs, it became clear that such social movements are not differentiable entities. They appear in various forms, sizes and compositions, both formal and informal, and also overlap and merge nationally and internationally. While in both rural and urban spaces AESMs were identified, the importance of increasing the transformative capacity of agroecology in Europe lies in the connection of these initiatives over political positions and collaborative political action. It is not farmers doing agroecology, researchers studying agroecology, and civil society actors promoting and attending an agroecology lifestyle, but eventually the connection and culmination of these practises that give momentum to the agroecology movement and the political project of food sovereignty.

The understanding of AESMs gained through this literature review, as collectivised practices around agroecological values and worldviews, seems a promising approach for researching AESMs' transformative capacity. Furthermore, the different mechanisms of politicisation as well as existing practises of AESMs identified in the literature present an inspirational collection, presented in table 4 below, of how AESMs could generally politicise agroecology in Europe. However, it should be recognised that, as discussed in Section 2.1.5, such practises can tilt to de-politicisation through different mechanisms such as simulative prefiguration, expertisation, or continuous conflict avoidance.

*Table 4: In the literature identified socio-political practices of Agroecological Social Movements in Europe with potential (de-)politicisation*

| Category | Examples | Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Public awareness building | Agroecology networks, promotion of local brands and traditional food culture, local food festivals, food network newsletters | Balogh et al., 2020; Bossard, 2024; Felcis, 2021; Raffle & Carey, 2018; Stassart et al., 2018 |
| Collectivisation | Organic movement, CSA network, permaculture groups, | Balogh et al., 2020; Brumer et al., 2023; Felcis, 2021; Migliorini et al., 2018; Seremesic et al., 2021; Stassart et al., 2018 |
| Policy work and activism | Citizen-led food policy councils, civil-disobedience | Brumer et al., 2023; Van Dyck et al., 2018 |
| Prefiguration of alternative food systems | CSAs, alternative food networks, time banks, social currencies | Balogh et al., 2020; Brumer et al., 2023; Drottberger et al., 2021; Migliorini et al., 2018; Popławska, 2020 |
| Knowledge production and preservation, skill sharing | Knowledge exchange groups (farmer-to-farmer), seed swaps | C. R. Anderson et al., 2022; Felcis, 2021; Migliorini et al., 2018 |

# 4  Methods

This chapter presents the general research approach and the methods for data collection and analysis. I further clarify my positionality as a researcher, as well as this work's position in the political process around agroecology.

## 4.1  Research approach

For this research, I have chosen an iterative research approach in which the research questions, methods and analysis are revised cyclically based on the theory and data collected. The choice of this approach was a result of the fact that I had to conduct my fieldwork before I had fully developed the research design and theoretical framework. The research objective was sharpened and concretised throughout the research process to make full use of the data collected and to look at the case from the perspective of social movement theory rather than from a broader governance perspective.

Researching a contextualised socio-political phenomenon, I employ ethnographic methods for data collection and qualitative data analysis. Following an abductive coding approach, this work not only works with hard theory, which is deductively applied to the data, but further seeks to expand the theories through inductive coding to a political agroecology framework.

As presented in the visualisation of figure 1 below, the three main theories and concepts used in this work, agroecology, post-political theory, and social movement theory, are brought together to advance the understanding of food system transformation in the specific case of Switzerland, and further on a theoretical level. To respond to the research questions, I analyse the data through the lens provided in the theoretical framework while using different sources of data.

In a first step, through the analysis of the political condition of the food system in Switzerland by using public policy documents and further literature, I respond to sub-research question 1 (SRQ 1) and set the context within which this research is embedded. Second, to answer SRQ 2 and research the politicisation of the agroecology movement in Switzerland, I draw on fieldwork conducted during the event series "*Tage der Agrarökologie*" from October 2024. The results of SRQ 1 and 2, together with further insights from the literature and theory, respond to SRQ 3 in the discussion.
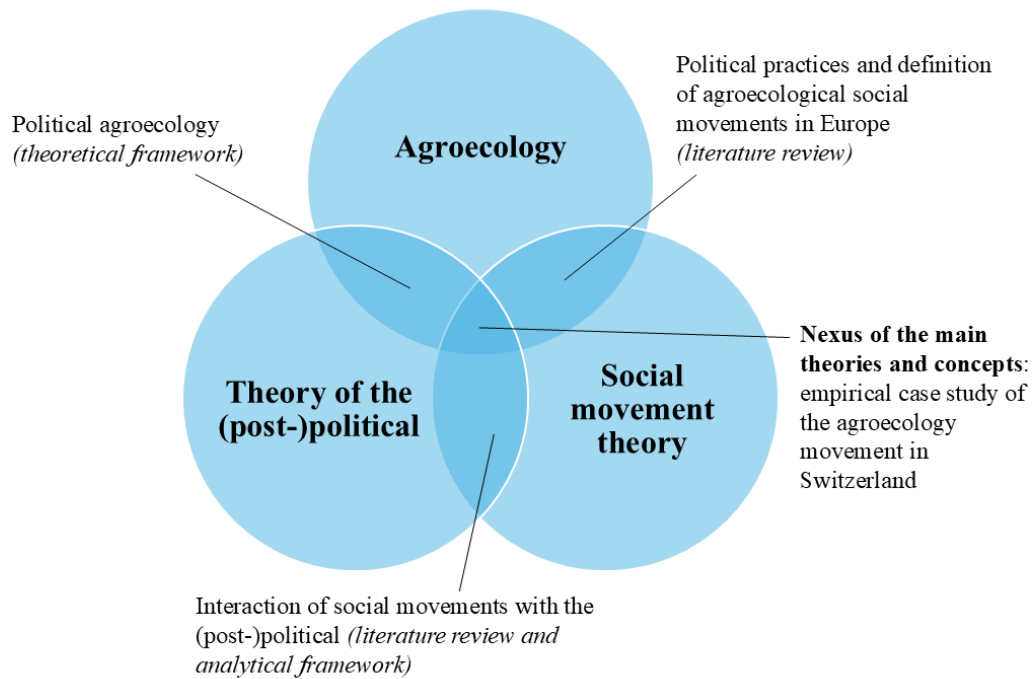
*Figure 1: Use of theories and concepts in the structure of this research*

## 4.2   Data collection methods

Subsequently, I briefly explain for each of the first two research questions the main methods and sources through which data was obtained. Two different data sets, empirical data and documents/grey literature, were utilised in the research process. These were chosen to both present the bottom-up perspective of the movement, through grounded ethnographic methods (empirical), as well as representing the top-down formal policy framework (documents) that the agroecology movement is, partly, opposed to. To mediate between the two, further grey literature is employed to highlight how recent important moments in agri-food politics in Switzerland have related to a potential post-political arrangement. I further deliberately chose not to base the analysis of SRQ1 on empirical data for reasons of feasibility, as this would have required much more fieldwork.

### 4.2.1   Data for sub-research question 1: food policy and politics

This part of the analysis draws on specific political points of the Swiss food system to analyse its post-political complexion and differentiates between policy and general food system politics. The response to SRQ 1 is based on context-specific agroecological literature, a brief review of recent popular referendums in food system politics, as well as on coding two decisive policy documents of the Swiss Federal Office of Agriculture (FOAG) through an interpretative document analysis approach. These documents are namely, the agri-food system

vision until 2050 (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b) and the newest reform of the FOAG's climate strategy (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2023).

After the suspension of the AP2022+ reform on the legal framework of agriculture in the year 2021, much weight was shifted to the follow-up processes and the upcoming reform in the year 2030, whose preparations are currently underway. I hence centre the post-political's contextual analysis around the preparatory processes of the AP2030+ reform (*Agrarpolitik nach 2030,* agricultural policy after 2030), which is the current centre piece of food system politics in Switzerland. The two policies were chosen for two reasons. Once, both strongly inform the AP2030+. Further, I take their respective official website articles and presentations into account (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024a, 2024c). Second, the political processes and institutional mechanisms within the Swiss Federal Office of Agriculture are central to the understanding of the political dimension in formal food system governance. The FOAG is responsible for the management of the legal framework that regulates the allocation of finances, resources, rights, ordinances and laws in agriculture. Hence, the ministry is a powerful actor in informing the direction of how and what food is produced, traded, distributed and consumed. Next to these societal consequences, land management related to food and agriculture accounts for just a bit more than a third of Switzerland's surface area (Federal Statistical Office, 2024) and hence has a dominant influence on the ecological balance and manifestations of the natural environment.

### 4.2.2 Data for sub-research question 2: participant observation and action research

To answer the second research question, I conducted fieldwork during the event series TDA, which was organised by the agroecology network Agroecology Works!. This event series presents an interesting opportunity to look at the manifestation and representation of agroecology on different levels and across different food system practices in Switzerland. A total of 71 events were held during this event series, spreading out to all geographical and cultural areas of the country (Agroecology Works!, 2024b). The event series, held under the theme *"Die Zukunft schmeckt! Wir haben Lösungen!"* (*"The future tastes delicious! We have solutions!"*), was highly diverse in its forms and, for example, entailed farm visits, conferences, webinars, tastings, practical workshops, or reading sessions.

I collected data mainly through participant observation and spontaneous interviews during a total of 18 events, six online and 12 on-site and one event outside of the TDA event series (see table 5 of events in Section 9.1). I conducted two more formal interviews on-site, for which informed consent for recording and transcription was given, and many short informal interviews, which often happened in breaks of the events and only notes were taken of. The interviews were conducted without a prepared interview guide but followed questions and themes that related to the event. To reflect on the event series' impact as a whole, the data collection is further expanded to the concept, the summary, and the website of the TDA

(Agroecology Works!, 2024a, 2024b). The collected data consists of extensive field notes, recordings, pictures, reflections and journaling.

During the participant observation, I used an observation guide that I had previously prepared (see appendix in Section 9.3). While I used it as a printed-out guide and for my notes more in the beginning, later in the research process, I familiarised myself well with it and wrote down observations mostly independently from it. My role in participant observation differed between the events, but also during events. As the situations I studied were highly diverse, my role as a researcher and hence my relation to the other participants changed constantly. Following Kawulich's (2005) descriptions of the stances of the observer, during conferences, for example, I often experienced myself as *observer as participant,* while during farm visits in small groups, I would identify more as *participant as observer* due to the more personal atmosphere and proximity. But this role could quickly change, e.g. during the breaks of the conference. When I exchanged perspectives with other participants, I moved from being a more passive observer to an active participant while still trying to obtain data. I never found myself as a *complete participant* or *complete observer,* the extremes of the participant observation's gradient, since I'd always either ask questions to participate and provoke more useful data or share beforehand that I attend as a researcher. Also, the difference between online and on-field events impacted my involvement, as online events are less interactive by nature. However, it happened in both online and on-field situations that I, and my role as researcher, were introduced, and hence my position as observer was emphasised.

I understand this thesis as part of an action research framework, to which multiple formats have been sought along the research process. Already in the formation phase of this research, much contact with the agroecological network was sought. The research direction was developed in cooperation with ETH professor and scientific representative of Agroecology Works! Johanna Jacobi. Also, at that stage and later, I was in contact with both co-coordinators and other team members of the Agroecology Works! network and exchanged ideas, concerns and reflections. I further received a letter of confirmation from the network that my research was collusive with Agroecology Works! for when I reached out to the event organiser to ask for informed consent and participation in the events. Participant observation as the method for the main data collection further suited this objective and was used to disseminate the ideas of political agroecology during the research process. The perspectives worked out in this thesis will be shared back to the agroecology network, at a stage after the writing process and outside the thesis's formal part, for reasons of time limitation[5].

---

[5] However, only sharing back results does not seem to be sufficient in preventing a further scientisation of agroecology in the context of this work. While I here may contribute to triggering new perspectives, exchanges, strategies and collaborations within the agroecology network (and beyond in the movement), it requires to step back from mainstream understandings of consultancy, which are often based on an assumed hierarchy of

I was restricted by language choices and could not attend events held completely in French, but I participated in four national-level events, where diverse perspectives (from Switzerland's French and German parts) were present. Therefore, the result might not be fully representative of all parts of Switzerland. Apart from this restriction, I chose a diverse selection of event formats to conduct fieldwork in. These choices were guided by the event's direct relevance for food system politics, the aim to capture a broad diversity of food system actors' perspectives, the potential to gain insights into institutional processes and positions, as well as by practicalities such as the event's accessibility (financially, spatially, and timewise). At times, I had to decide which events I would attend while excluding others. Many of the events were not clear on their connection to agroecology or didn't seem to have a political dimension at all. However, I would not exclude them as potential important sources of data, as they might have surprisingly political dimensions (e.g. farm visits and alternative direct marketing strategies). Other events were clearly related to agri-food politics (e.g. conference on the future of agriculture in Switzerland), which made it interesting to look at how political elements were presented or obscured.

## 4.3   Data analysis

The qualitative data analysis was conducted in *atlas.ti* and followed a content analysis approach as its main method. The coding was done abductively and hence combined deductive coding, along the lines of the theoretical framework (sub-section 2.1.5) and inductive coding. The objective of the abductive approach is to "understand topics better and form more complete theories" (Delve & Limpaecher, 2023), hence, in abductive coding, anomalies in the data are embraced, as they inform new codes and give input for the theory. Abductive coding was chosen as the theories used are well developed and suitable for deductive analysis, while at the same time, the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of the political requires to analytically react highly context specific and hence work from data to theory. This approach appears further useful to not only create inputs to the theory, but also to inform actors of the agroecology movement in Switzerland through contextualised and concrete insights.

### 4.3.1   Data analysis of sub-research question 1

Part of the answer to SRQ 1 was derived through a deductively driven document analysis of two main state-level policies of the FOAG. The codes used in the analysis of Swiss food governance were derived through the theoretical framework (see sub-section 2.1.3) and

---

knowledge holders. Hence, I here understand the contribution of this work less to the extent that knowledge is made available to others, but in the triggering of reflection and debate on the cause, situation and values of agroecology as a movement this may cause. Whereby I mean to raise attention to how agroecology is itself inherently embedded in the antagonistic tensions and political processes of human societies, with which it has to engage in order to be transformative and counteract the ongoing hegemony.

mainly focused on the three preliminary described post-political characteristics: *push for consensus, technocratic governance, and neoliberal lock-in*. The policies were in a first round coded deductively using this characterisation to show mechanisms of de-politicisation, as well as with characterisations that mark politicising sections showing interaction in a profoundly political dimension. These codes of politicisation were derived from the theoretical framework and were defined as follows: *contestation of power structures, dissent and conflict, foregrounding of inequalities, ontological problematisation,* and *pluralism*.

In a second round, the formerly defined excerpts were refined with inductive codes to expand the post-political analysis into further detail, such as in the dimension of time and constituting factors of the (post-)political characterisations. These codes were: *conflict mitigation, conflicts of objectives, consumer/structural/individual responsibility, problem representation, long-term vs. short-term,* and *food system transformation framework.*

### 4.3.2 Data analysis of sub-research question 2

The qualitative analysis for the second research question is based on the ethnographic fieldwork carried out and was conducted with reference to the theoretical framework. In a first step, recordings made during events and interviews were transcribed (see Section 9.4 on this) using transcription software. If there were obvious errors in the transcription, these were corrected in the sections from which quotations were made for coding.

Building on the code set that was operationalised in the theoretical framework, I first coded for the mechanisms of de-politicisation and re-politicisation more deductively. By going through the data non-chronologically and focusing on events I was present in person over online events, I aimed to gain deep analytical insight and refine my code set for inductive coding, which mostly followed in the second round, but partly also at the same time. The respective code book is provided in Section 9.4.

At first, the analytical entry point to the TDA was to understand the event series as an open forum in which political practices of agroecological actors could be observed in the general discourse of the TDA and on the level of individual actors and initiatives[6] (movement level). However, after coding the first few events, as part of the iterative research process, a revision of the respective sub-research question was considered, as the data revealed tensions in essentialising the agroecology movement and categorising actors and initiatives inside or outside the movement. Eventually, SRQ 2 remained the same, but the analytical focus was

---

[6] The TDA of 2024 are based on a decentralised organisation with AgroecologyWorks! facilitating an online platform and promotion, but only giving guidelines (Agroecology Works!, 2024a). The guidelines mainly requested event organisers to team up with at least one other organisation and align their event with the theme, they further explained the objective of the TDA and regulated the role distribution of facilitators and organisers. None of the applicants have been declined (personal information from D. Hürlimann, main coordinator of the TDA, during a phone call on the 11.11.2024).

broadened to research the event series as a whole, as a political practice of the agroecology network (network level). The focus on the actor's level remained part of the analysis and is understood to inform a more general learning about how politicisation of food system dynamics through agroecology takes place. Eventually, most of the fieldwork data was coded and analysed following the theoretical framework, including the code set on political agroecology. Inductive codes emerged during the coding process and were grouped in the "Inductive codes" code group or labelled in the codebook with an "Ind_" prefix.

## 4.4 Positionality and reflections

My positionality shapes and interacts with this research. Being born and (re-)politicised in Switzerland led to conducting this research in the chosen context. The work on different farms and as an intern in agricultural politics has shaped my perspective on what it means to bring about change through formal politics or in everyday life. When starting this thesis, I was led by a need and wish to open up people's imaginative capacities and encourage them to rethink our fundamental beliefs and value systems.

Conducting much of the fieldwork through ethnographic methods, the "I" clearly and intentionally becomes part of the research process and outcome. By strongly relating the analysis and interpretation of this work to literature and documentation, I aim for a coherent and transparent outcome. This is especially important as already during fieldwork (at the very beginning of this piece of research), it became clear to me that my own beliefs and values were also tested and affected through the experiences made. Such is, for example, the case in my position as (agroecological) researcher, which I have found to be more political than expected at the start of this project.

Much thought about the usefulness and the performativity of this work has been given to the research design. The research objective of this thesis is generally driven by a wish for change, while acknowledging that its directionality must remain within an antagonistic and negotiable relationship to others' visions and worldviews. Nonetheless, through this thesis, I personally aim to contribute to agroecology's work and struggle in the Swiss context and its global connections. This also shapes my motivation for action-oriented research.

Through this work, I aim to politicise agroecology, which consequently raises the necessity to reflect on the de-politicising consequence of the academic format this work is based. From the start, I had the goal to strive for a balance between societal and academic contributions and engage constructively with the criticism on European agroecology to be stuck in academic and NGO institutions. I embraced the practice of bridging the theory-oriented and abstract scientific work and the practical and grounded work of agroecology by being concrete and constructive about the outcomes, making visible the thought process behind, as well as

searching for ways to integrate the gained perspectives and knowledge back into the political process of agroecology.

## 4.5  Ethical issues and data management

To align with the ethical procedures for academic research, informed consent for participant observation during events, interviews, the creation and use of audio recordings during events and interviews is required in this research. These requirements were adhered to, and for each event at which participant observations was carried out, the event organisation was informed, and an informed consent form was signed by both parties. Some of the events are publicly available (e.g. recordings uploaded to YouTube), and therefore, according to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), informed consent was not obtained.

Two notebooks with notes from the observation are kept confidential, and the digital data related to the fieldwork is stored in my personal WUR OneDrive. None of the data is thought to cause harm to any of the observed participants or interview respondents. All data will be stored on the WUR W-drive in accordance with the CSPS Data Management Plan.

# 5 Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative data analysis, answering sub-research questions 1 and 2 in two respective sections. For SRQ 1, I contextualise the case of the Swiss food system with regard to the post-political theory by including context related literature and applying the theoretical framework to policy documents. The response to SRQ 2 is based on the data collected during fieldwork at the TDA 2024 and the theoretical framework operationalised in Section 2.1.5.

## 5.1 Analysis of the (post-)political framework of the Swiss food system

To better understand the political conditions in which Swiss agroecological initiatives are emerging and operating, this section first looks into context-specific agroecological literature and second presents an analysis of two decisive public policy documents through deductive coding, based on the theoretical framework. In the context of the call for stronger, more progressive social agroecological movements in the Global North (Altieri & Holt-Giménez, 2016), this context-based understanding is becoming increasingly important. I here argue that for an effective political agroecology to unfold, it is especially important to better understand where formal governance, in this case in the reform of the legal agri-food framework, conceals conflicts and power asymmetries, pushes for consensus, or de-politicises issues by technocratic management.

### 5.1.1 General (post-)political framework of the Swiss food system

A remarkable event signifying the condition of the political in Swiss agri-food politics happened in spring 2021, when the 4-year revision of Swiss federal agricultural policy (AP2022+) was suspended by an alliance of market-liberal and conservative parties in the parliament (EATC-N, 2021). Such side-stepping of the political conflict by shutting down the overall revision of the legal agri-food framework strategically closed down political space. The trajectory leading to the suspension was shaped by the apparentness and the increasingly accepted evidence of the food system's harmful socio-ecological implications. Responding to these, formal Swiss agri-food politics generated different policy measures and instruments following the inclusion of articles on multifunctionality and food security in the Swiss federal constitution in the years before the suspension in 2021. The analysis of Lehner (2023) points to deep contradictions in these policy instruments (e.g. maintaining natural resources in the long term vs. high short-term productivity for market orientation) and explains that they, as a consequence, triggered a deadlock in agri-food politics to which a de-politicising reaction followed.

Lehner (2023) further worked out an elaborate analysis of the Swiss food system from a political ecology perspective that supports the understanding of the underlying contradictions within formal agri-food politics. The author describes how formal agri-food politics try to

respond to the harmful dynamics of the food system, which it is itself supportive of by perpetuating capitalist mechanisms, shaping mainstream food production, marketing and consumption to undemocratic, unjust, unhealthy and ecologically untenable configurations. Lehner (2023) contextualises this in the case of Switzerland along the conflict lines of state-supported industrialisation of agriculture, capital-intensive animal farming, structural farm die-back and growing farm sizes, high rates of food waste and unhealthy diets. The author further points out manifold and diverging responses to the harmful ecological impacts and sociopolitical developments of the Swiss food system: Alternative farming and food provisioning practices (such as organic farming and CSAs), calls for individualistic ethical consumerism, corporate co-optation of the discourse around alternative and just food systems, as well as the emergence of social movements and political reactions of civil society (Lehner, 2023).

Such responses of civil society organisations have been diverse and numerous. Parallel to the reform processes initiated by the government in the food system sector, civil society actors were active and made use of democratic means to show their disapproval with the conditions and outcomes of the current food system. Farmers' protests (SRF, 2024), citizens' assemblies (Bürger:innenrat für Ernährungspolitik, 2022; Rat für Ernährung, 2025) and popular referendums indicate these political practices.

In recent years, multiple popular referendums related to agri-food politics have tried to directly influence the Swiss constitution. These petitions concerned the ban of synthetic pesticides (Federal Office, 2021), nutrient management and clean drinking water (Federal Office, 2021), the abolition of factory farming (Federal Office, 2022) and the protection of biodiversity (Federal Office, 2024b). All these popular petitions were rejected by the voting population, often with more than 60 % of disaffirmation. But their formation (through the collection of 100'000 signatures within 18 months), and the two further upcoming popular referendums on domestic production[7] as well as GMO-regulation (Federal Office, 2024a, 2024c) show, nonetheless, that a demand for change of the food system is present in the public.

In all these political processes two strong poles got activated, on one side an allegiance of the farmers union with the organisations of the cooperate sector (e.g. Triaca, 2024), and on the other side nature and animal protection NGOs, small farmers associations and a majority of the organic farming sector (MTI, 2022). Correspondingly, conservative parties affiliated with the former and the social-democrat and green parties with the latter pole.

---

[7] The referendum's full name is "*For food security - by strengthening sustainable domestic production, more plant-based food and clean drinking water (Food Initiative)*" (translations by the author)

The processes of these food system reforms triggered a strong polarisation between the responsibility of consumers and producers in the public debate and confirmed the relevance of political agroecology to contest the prevalent power structures (Kummer & Jacobi, 2023). An in-depth political discourse analysis could here further show how the launch of these referendums and the ensuing interactions of the involved actors affected the politicisation and de-politicisation of the food system, but this would go beyond this thesis's scope.

Still, generally speaking, the popular referendum as a tool of the Swiss direct democracy makes an interesting case, as it creates a lot of public debate and civil involvement. While there is critique on overuse and even counterproductivity of the tool in regards to the popular referendums mentioned before (FiBL, 2024), from a theoretical standpoint the popular referendum seems capable of creating political space for conflictual and emancipatory encounters and it allows social actors to politicise a cause and expressing their dissent (also in opposition to a launched referendum).

Despite it being an interesting democratic tool, focus should not be lost on the content, framing, problem representation, and underlying narrative of individual popular referendums. Because these are not naturally resistant against fortifying de-politicisation or giving legitimacy to hegemonic neoliberal structures and capitalist realism. An example of this tension presents the referendum for domestic production (Federal Office, 2024c), one of the two upcoming referendums that has successfully collected the required signatures. It demands alteration in the Swiss federal constitution to orient agri-food politics in the long-term on reaching a domestic self-sufficiency grade of 70% by supporting plant-based food and nutrition and protecting the foundations of agricultural production, such as biodiversity, soil fertility, water and seedfast (non-hybrid) seed and plant material.

In the turbulence of realpolitik and the already strongly polarised politics of the Swiss food system, this particular and most recent referendum appears to seek a narrative that enables support of conservative constituencies while advocating for environmental regulations. Doing so, it leaves out to address dominant economic and social relations such as power asymmetries, the distribution of capital, access to land and means of production, and profit-oriented food trade that necessitate the current destructive socio-ecological consequences of the food system.

This renders an ambiguous situation between the theoretical perspective and the use of referendums in realpolitik: It is likely impossible to address all these issues in a popular referendum, since it has to be able to secure a majority. Still, leaving them out might contribute to perpetuating the dominant food system discourse based upon business-as-usual economic and social structures by the lack of politicisation of these foundational, ontological issues.

As initially stated, such political processes appear to take place in the tensions between politicising "properly political" (Mouffe, 2000) and de-politicisation. However, it seems impossible to ultimately ascribe the popular referendum a fixed political consequence, as the debate might trigger responses and open political spaces not yet conceivable, where more basal structures of the food system are contested.

### 5.1.2 Vision 2050 and Climate Strategy 2050 of the Swiss Federal Office of Agriculture

The two policies chosen for the analysis of formal agri-food politics are the agri-food system vision until 2050 (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b) and the newest reform of the FOAG's climate strategy (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2023), which both strongly inform the AP2030+.

*Vision 2050*

The report "*Postulate report on the direction of agricultural policy until 2050*" (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b), analysed here, was issued as a response to the suspension of the AP2022+ agricultural policy reform. The parliament mandated the federal council, in this case represented by the FOAG, to assess eight subtopics that were the main points of disagreement in the preparation of the AP2022+ reform and to clarify the vision and strategic development of agri-food policy until 2050. The policy report, subsequently mentioned as Vision 2050, is structured by a situation analysis, future condition assessment, a vision for the agri-food system in the year 2050, implementation strategy, and the corresponding role of food system actors as well as respective synergies and conflicts of objectives. The development of the policy included food system stakeholders' participation to the extent that they were invited to an initial workshop and were consulted for their feedback on the first draft of the report.

In front of this backdrop, I assess the interaction of the policy with the political and hence infer from this relation how formal governance is de-politicising the food system. The policy revealed both political and post-political arrangements. As shown in the subsequent paragraphs, these can be made visible through assessing different mechanisms of how the FOAG navigates responsibility, conflict, expertise, narratives and problem representations.

*Problem assessment*

In its situation assessment of the Swiss food system, the FOAG takes on some clear positions regarding the current system's failures on social, economic and ecological levels. The FOAG acknowledges the persistence and predominance of unhealthy diets (among others, too much ultra-processed foods, meat, sugar, alcohol) and the significant negative ecological impact of the current food consumption, which, according to the report, occurs especially outside of the country. Further, the ministry is aware of the relatively small proportion of arable land per

capita in Switzerland, and problematises the predominant use of this land for feed instead of food production. In this, the current set-up of animal farming (mainly pigs and poultry) is presented as a major environmental issue. The FOAG also points out the failure of the market to reflect negative externalities from agricultural production in food prices, leading to malfunctioning market mechanisms and the necessity for state intervention. And with regard to the structural organisation of the food system, the FOAG also addresses the problem of power asymmetries and concentrations of upstream and downstream actors in agriculture that, for example, lead to unequal shares of the burden to adapt to climate change.

In this assessment, however, it occurs that these problems are abstractly put forward into an open space, unclear what actors are asked to act upon the targeted issues. The adhered conflicts of the presented problems and their respective consequences and responsibilities remain mostly obliterated just when they are mentioned. For example, instead of giving more in-depth explanations, the policy tends to relativise the assessed problem by comparing it to other problems or following up on a more positive note, as seen in the following quotes:

*"Despite the comparatively small amount of arable land per capita, less than 40 percent of arable land in Switzerland is used for direct human consumption. Although livestock numbers are relatively stable overall, imports of animal feed have almost doubled in the last 20 years. The sector's added value has remained stable and average incomes have risen at individual farm level."* (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b, p. 5, translation by the author)

*"Agricultural markets are characterised by high market concentrations and asymmetries at both the upstream and downstream levels. More and more processors and retailers are setting themselves ambitious environmental targets, particularly in the area of greenhouse gas emissions."* (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b, p. 5, translation by the author)

Although the policy documents draw conclusions and address stakeholders in their roles, the problem assessment and its related consequences are most often split into different areas of the policy. This makes it more difficult for a reader to allocate responsibility to the respective actors and avoids the framing of stakeholders as part of the problem. Even though the policy, in the case of the "*Postulate report on the direction of agricultural policy until 2050",* is to be understood as a vision and not an action plan, the roles and responsibilities of actors would need to be brought closer together for a more genuine political policy. Political space is closed down because the FOAG, through this underlying separation of roles and responsibilities, is reticent to take a clear position by attributing responsibility over public issues to specific actors and hence allows the agri-food policy negotiations to continue along the current lines.

*Problem representation*

In its mandate from the parliament, the FOAG is asked to report on the future direction of agricultural policy until 2050 concerning eight specific issues[8]. Given these guidelines, the FOAG's room for manoeuvre is to some extent set, and hence these expectations preliminary restrict or narrow down within what socio-political dimensions and solution spaces the Vision will be embedded in. From a post-political perspective, it is nevertheless interesting to look at the ministry's problem representation and the way these include or exclude the political and, hence, also different ways to organise food systems or, respectively, how to approach the issues framed as problems. Starting from the vision to be achieved by 2050 pictured by the FOAG, and it's therefore assumed present problematics of the present, the policy also gives an indication of how much political depth the ministry allows.

The main themes for the 2050 Vision, according to the policy (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024c), centre around inland production, production efficiency, climate mitigation, new technologies, food waste and consumer diets. Including also the proposed solution approaches, the FOAG's picture of the future food system hence seems to consist of an agricultural production that is more labour-efficient, technology-based, and lower in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. And regarding the downstream value chain, it consists of lowering the negative health and climate impacts of people's diets and food waste. While the FOAG repeatedly speaks of embracing holistic approaches to these systemic issues, a deeper integration and change of the food system structures appear absent. The connection between resource lower production and a healthier diet appears as the main, if not only, systemic approach, while most other issues remain addressed mostly unconnected. Opposed to e.g. strategies for structural support to bring in a higher involvement of human work power in agriculture, to reduce GHG emissions, and lessen the dependence on labour-efficiency and technology, which may cause rebound effects.

The Vision shows the intention to *lower* environmental risks, *promote* biodiversity, *anticipate* climate change, *strive* for fair shares of the value added, and *support* consumers in making sustainable consumption choices, but leaves out fundamental re-negotiations of the social and economic relations. The Vision gives hardly any space to ideas beyond a continuation of the current distribution of means of production or current ways of marketing and relating to food, as in strategically aiming to *stop* certain practices. In subtle ways, the proposed vision hence closes down political spaces for developing fundamentally different food systems and the necessary conflict and emancipation to make these negotiable.

---

[8] See https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20203931 and https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20213015 for details on this.

*Technocratic governance*

Another aspect which points out post-political configurations of governance is the level and way how problem-solving is undertaken. Framing problems as mere technical issues can conceal underlying social, economic and power relations that cause the problem in the first place. While indicators, monitoring, and measurements are important governance tools, an overemphasis on them can lead to a state where the negotiation of what indicators matter and who is legitimised as the experts to inform policy is neglected. From that lens, the Vision 2050 partly forces the problem assessment and hence the solution space of the Swiss food system into a technocratic framework and conceals processes of (likely contesting) political deliberation and negotiation. The policy draws attention to indicators of greenhouse gas or nitrogen emissions, increasing relative labour efficiency, and reducing the percentage of food waste. But since it is a strategic and visionary document, with few points of action, such technocratic elements do not appear overly dominant. However, an awareness of the political nature of the development and use of knowledge and scientific expertise is not visible, indicating that such requires to be re-politicised for more representative and just policy outcomes.

*Conflict management*

The policy shows internal tensions, which the FOAG itself brings up in a section on conflicts of objectives and interests, showing an awareness by the ministry of the political tensions the strategy is embedded in. Such conflicts of objectives, in the assessment by the FOAG, go along with the rifts between ecology vs. economy, farm feasibility vs. lower animal produce consumption, or long-term goals vs. short-term benefits. From a post-political stance, the proactive management of conflict appears interesting, as it again shapes the political space. The FOAG's conflict representation is already normative and, in the same way as the formerly discussed problem representation, entails assumptions on what parameters to focus on for "solving" these trade-offs. This, in return, closes off the political negotiation and solution space. This is demonstrated by the way to present the conflict around the demand for reduced amounts of animal produce, which would, as argued by the policy, lower the added value on farms and therefore lead to lower economic farm feasibility:

*"Animal production allows many farms to increase their added value compared to exclusively crop farming without having to expand the cultivated area (especially through pig and poultry farming). […] A reduction in animal production in favour of arable use for direct human consumption can result in economic losses, because the value added per area in animal husbandry tends to be higher today than in plant production."* (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b, p. 56/57, translation by the author)

The higher added value for animal produce is presented as a set parameter, necessitating (or giving attention to) problem solving strategies like economy of scale, diversification of

production with high(er) value-added goods, increased direct marketing through digital tools or labelling, to reach more profitable market segments. This shift, caused by the presented inevitability of the value added in animal production, covers up the more fundamental political debate on the role of animals in the Swiss farming and food system, which should be in place of the discussion on fixes and workarounds of this conflict of objectives. In other words, the tensions presented by the FOAG do not include alternative agroecological trajectories and are still formulated based on the current hegemonic neoliberal model. Further, the presentation of the conflict is very dichotomic (either ecology or food security) and stuck in this either/or, closing space for and debate on in-betweens even more.

Another way to manage (or mitigate) conflicts appearing in the Vision 2050 policy is how the FOAG presents opportunities and ways forward to which nobody could say no, and seemingly are a win for all parties involved. Such all-conforming solutions appearing in the policy document are digitalisation of farm administration, the improvement of production efficiency, general technical improvements, or the call for "innovation power". These solutions are presented as benefiting farmers (less administrative effort, higher production), civil society (less environmental damage and concurrent stable food prices), and the private sector (markets for technology). How these solutions would eventually play out may be put aside at this point, but bringing forward these solutions as a space-holder allows the FOAG to side-step fundamental debates which would be at their place instead. Such is the case for the call for a seemingly ever-increasing production efficiency by further on-farm technology implementation, which leaves out questions on the factors that drive these investments and dependencies in the first place.

In the policy, the Ministry of agriculture appears in a position where it tries to form a vision in which all the problems it was asked to address are solved in one big framework. But this seems to be impossible due to the inherent contradictions and the incommensurability of these issues. Rather than facilitating this administrative management of conflicts, the ministry could also have started to more clearly show the antagonisms within the current situation by, e.g. drawing clear lines for environmental indicators or power asymmetries in the value chain and their impact on farmers' economic situation. The effort to manage conflicts then also appears in the repeated call for collaboration and sharing responsibilities of actors across the value chain, and in the effort to present symbiotic energies between the actors:

*"Achieving the goals of the vision for the future by 2050 at the same time is a challenge and requires a joint commitment at all stages of the value chain, from consumption to retail, processing and raw material production. The Federal Council is convinced that the targets can be achieved within the time horizon of a generation if both private actors and politicians assume their responsibility and make their contribution to achieving the targets."* (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b, p. 57, translation by the author)

*Responsibility attribution and diffusion*

Following up on conflict management, the perception of a vision that underlies the policy is to some degree already depoliticising. Once, it shifts the focus from the present food system's consequences and the urgency to act to the future, making it seem like "*we* will get there", and it is merely a question of "fixing *our* problems". And second, it is through the formulation of such a vision, where the different actors are asked to collaborate towards this (non-negotiated) common future, that an "all-inclusive we" is constructed. Such representation suppresses the conflictual dynamics of the affected actors and pushes for consensus where there is none.

A decisive factor for the (a)political rendering of such a policy is the (non-)allocation of responsibility. If all actors involved are made responsible, then responsibility is likely to diffuse as it is allocated to *all* and does not hold *individual* actors accountable for specific issues. This might occur through the demanded shift in food system politics. While it is crucial to move away from linear notions of cause and effect, engage in nexus thinking, and hence strive for food policy integration, having more actors at the table does not necessarily lead to more socially and ecologically just policy outcomes. A means-end reversal might occur, where the goal is devalued to simply involving more actors, while the most-affected parties still lack sufficient political access and power. Traces of this are found in the FOAG's repeatedly appearing call for a shift from agricultural to food system politics, with little specification on the expected responsibilities of the actors involved. The ministry acknowledges the necessity and its own responsibility to address issues structurally by regulations on, e.g. food trading taxes, food environments, consumer information and education, as well as true-cost accounting. Nevertheless, in many parts of the policy, the responsibility is individualised to *everybody* (the consumer) by e.g. tools like personal environmental footprint indicators, which eventually also diffuses responsibility to *nobody.*

> *"At the same time, the Swiss population's diet is unbalanced and associated with a large ecological footprint. For example, greenhouse gas emissions from food consumption account for around 20 percent of total household emissions, two-thirds of which are generated abroad."* (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b, p. 5, translation by the author)

Overall, the Vision 2050 presents multiple ways and points that show a de-politicisation of the political discourse in formal food system governance. Such are an individualisation and unclear attributions of responsibilities, mitigation of political conflict, and projecting common agreement to problems presented. The FOAG shows awareness of the multifaceted issues in the Swiss food system, by, for example, presenting conflicts of interests, but remains reluctant to address root causes, such as the focus on industrialised agricultural practises, to the problems presented.

The policy "*climate strategy for food and agriculture 2050*" was updated in 2023, following up the Vision 2050 policy with more concrete measures. In the first part, the policy describes the baseline, the need for action and its potential, and then concretises its vision with main and sub-goals as well as strategic points of action. The second part of the climate strategy specifies the policy further by listing measures in eight different categories and discussing the respective monitoring and reporting. The policy discusses how agriculture and the general food sector both contribute to and are affected by climate change, and hence focuses on climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience. The climate strategy was reformed in collaboration with the federal office for the environment as well as with the federal food safety and veterinary office, ensuring better coherence of its implementation.

Much of the analysis of the Vision 2050, conducted in the section before, aligns with the strategic orientation of the climate strategy's first part. While in this case, strategies of conflict management are less prominent, the policy's centring of GHG quantifications, and the respective problem representations and outsourcing of authority to scientific expertise still render a post-political framework. Also in this case, the policy contains clear political directionalities (e.g., less feed-food competition, importance of dietary changes), but in many other ways, it clings to technical optimisation and implementation, appearing to avoid addressing the social relations and ecological problems of the industrialised agri-food system.

The actions proposed in the second part of the climate strategy are centred around the eight themes of consumption patterns, food waste, international trade, production portfolio, nutrient management, water management, soil management and energy management. These are approached on the three strategic directions of action to expand knowledge, to strengthen participation and to develop policies further. To discuss each measure would go beyond the scope of this thesis, which is more interested in the general transformational consequence of the policy as a whole. The way the solutions are put forward by the policy represents an understanding of the underlying problems it tries to respond to. It is interesting in that regard to reflect on the depth of change the policy considers, and to look into what political conflicts are approached or avoided in this.

The presented actions are generally divided into a consumer dimension (n=16) and a production dimension (n=26), with a majority of actions on the production side. In the production dimension, many measures focus on the technical management of water, soil, energy, plant breeding, animal welfare and nutrients. However, the systemic dependency on fossil fuels of current agricultural production appears unacknowledged. While the actions aim for more efficient usage or the substitution of diesel, the industrialised character of agriculture, leading to the high demand for inputs, is left out of the debate. Similarly, the

policy's focus on nutrient balances and efficiency obscures the problems of the large-scale and linear organisation of the dominant industrialised food system.

Regarding consumption, the policy presents an agenda based on strategic, educational, market-related and policy revision mechanisms. Changing food environments, educating people on sustainable and healthy nutrition and regulating food trade are key themes. But most of the proposed actions are within the current economic framework and food supply chain, where food is processed in large quantities and marketed by retailers. This way, the policy closes off space to deliberate and negotiate over the support for alternative food networks and food provisioning strategies and further reinforces the power asymmetries present in the food system.

To summarize Section 5.1, here I respond to SRQ 1 "*How and in what ways is the food system in Switzerland shaped by a post-political condition?*" and sketch out the (post-)political framework the Swiss agroecological initiatives and actors operate in. A full post-political analysis of the discourses and processes in the Swiss food system is beyond the scope of this thesis. Hence, I here focus on the impact of specific key policies, political actors and processes, related to where and what agroecological actors are confronted with. The presented analysis is therefore to be understood as a rough sketch that outlines and hints at the post-political aspects of the (formal) governance in the Swiss food system with broad brushstrokes.

Looking at the FOAG's Vision 2050 and the climate strategy policies, in many cases, the differing positions, points of conflict, and problems are mentioned, showing a political awareness of the food system's current situation (e.g. feed-food competition, food waste, or unhealthy consumers' diets). However, the response to them is approached through a consensual and compromising, and even contradictory culmination of strategies, which appears to have to please all stakeholders involved. These contradictions reflect the institution-internal conflicts and inherent antagonisms in the orientation of agri-food politics. The mitigatory management of these conflicts, however, takes up much space and might close down political engagement, which would allow a re-distribution of power and the negotiation for different visions as guiding for future policy regulations.

Furthermore, it is not only important how the policies have de-politicised certain aspects in agri-food politics, but also what points and perspectives have not been considered and are therefore completely excluded from political deliberation and negotiation. Such is, for example, the case for the mental-physical well-being and working conditions of people employed on farms, especially those with migratory backgrounds.

The policies also engage with agroecology, which it frames as "an important approach for supporting holistic food system transformation" (Federal Office for Agriculture, 2024b, p. 67,

translation by the author). The FOAG defines agroecology as a knowledge-intensive and system-oriented agricultural system, and further as an approach that includes social change regarding local and innovative food marketing models. While it relates to the 13 FAO principles and states that agricultural farming orients itself on cultural, political, economic and ecological values, the Vision does not specify what this would entail. By embracing a holistic food system approach, the FOAG claims to do justice to the concept of agroecology. From the perspective introduced in the theoretical framework, however, the FOAG's implementation of agroecology appears to co-opt and de-politicise agroecology.

Through the analysis presented here, within formal policies, **I argue that the Swiss food system is mainly de-politicised by the government's push for consensus, conflict management and technocratic governance, which closes off political space to deliberate and negotiate on alternative solutions. Political actions of civil society actors manifest mainly in popular referendums, whose political nature and usefulness are not entirely uncontested, looking at it through the lens of the post-political.** The questioning of the basal social and economic relations in the food system, as through political agroecology, has only a marginal place, especially in formal governance processes. A more thorough analysis of the Swiss food system's political discourse and the inclusion of further data might show that foundational discourses can be found on provincial levels or in other political spaces and processes which were not included in this analysis. Still, the government's post-political engagement in and de-politicisation of Swiss agri-food politics strengthens the call for re-politicisation of these issues and agroecology through AESM. In this context, the subsequent section looks at how the Swiss AESM politically positions itself and hence politicises the food system.

## 5.2   Practises of politicisation during the days of agroecology 2024

This section is based on an abductive content analysis of transcripts, recordings, interviews, notes, reflections, and documents collected during the TDA in October 2024. I shed light on the ways how both informal and institutionalised agroecological actors politicise the food system and publicly represent agroecology, responding to SRQ 2: "*In what ways does the Swiss agroecology movement politicise or de-politicise the food system?*". Looking at different situations where the advancement and implementation of agroecological principles in the food system were intended, I reflect on the transformative effect of these intentions through their politicising and de-politicising occurrence. Following the argument that food system transformation is only possible within a genuine political framework, I here prepare the ground to discuss current and propose further practises for the Swiss agroecology movement to contest and influence the dominant food system dynamics.

As discussed in Chapter 3, in the case of Europe, social actors' identifications with the term agroecology do not necessarily reflect their affiliation with the agroecological principles and

values. This, in combination with the event series' open-platform format, requires stepping back from understanding every event and participating actor as genuinely agroecological or framing the event series throughout as an agroecological appearance. To work within this tension, three entry points are chosen for the subsequent analysis. First, I look at the days of agroecology as a whole, reflecting on the politicisation through how the event series publicly represents agroecology. Secondly, I abductively coded for political moments, where actors of the agroecology movement challenge dominant food system dynamics on a genuine political level and look into their practises of contestation. Thirdly, special attention is given to situations where actors that clearly identify and/or fully align with the agroecology movement engage in de-politicising practises[9].

### 5.2.1 The (post-)political in agroecology's public representation

In this sub-section of the analysis, I focus on the politicisation outcomes of the events series as a whole, understanding the organisation and facilitation of the TDA as a political practice of the agroecology networks. The scope here lies on how the political dimension emerges, is obscured, or mitigated in the TDA's public representation of agroecology, looking for the respective implications on the (de-)politicisation of the food system and movement building. I derive this analysis both from the reflections and insights I gained as participant observer during the events attended, as well as through the outer appearance of the days of agroecology.

Looking at how political the events appear to the outside, three categories of events can be delineated:

- Direct political engagement: In some cases, events address the political dimension directly. Their objective appeared to be to politicise specific topics and fuel debate (e.g. an open conference on power relations in food markets).
- Neutral political engagement: In other cases, the framing of the event's objective was based on a seemingly neutral, objective, and scientific common ground, making their agroecological cause seem apolitical (e.g. an innovation forum for agricultural practitioners).
- Unclear political engagement: In the third and biggest category of events, the political engagement is not directly visible. The engagement with civil society, education, culinary experiences or knowledge sharing seems to be the main objectives.

Interestingly, in the sample of events attended as participant observer, I often found events of the third category to have the deepest degree of agroecological re-politicisation. Marked by

---

[9] The specific orientation to agroecological actors here is crucial to prevent redundancy with the preliminary analysis of Section 5.1, which focused on de-politicising practices by actors in the context outside of the agroecology movement (such as the public administration).

higher civil society engagement and more direct contact with the issue of the lived experiences, tangible problems and their underlying causes, made clearer where they are in disapproval with the current status quo, e.g. the lack of societal appreciation for food in civil society as expressed by a farmer during a farm visit.

Going through the list of events[10] (Agroecology Works!, 2024b), many practices and spaces allocated to the food system, spanning from educating on the entanglement with the natural world, the knowledge sharing on ecological farming practices, the cultural and culinary engagement with food, to spaces dedicated to the debate on economic and political questions were represented. The diversity of activities, topics and places that were provided reflects the holistic framework of agroecology, which spreads over cultivation, processing, consumption and meaning of food, reaching from local scales to transnational relations. Making tangible and visible this multifaceted manifestation of agroecology, the event series as a whole presents a prefiguration of agroecology. The TDA further claims self-legitimacy for many alternative food provisioning practices, such as complex agroforestry, permaculture or CSAs, and makes space for voices that are less heard in the mainstream agri-food discourse, such as feminist decolonial perspectives or farmers searching for economic autonomy. This empowerment of agroecology and its many voices challenges the public norm and the inevitability of the current power dynamics and structures through which the food system is organised.

The TDA, through its diversity, has further the capacity to (re-)politicise the public perception of food, seeds, agriculture, and science. Presenting these themes and related issues under the umbrella of agroecology, the event series foregrounds the connectedness of food provisioning, ecological farming practises, economic relations, power distribution, gender equality and performativity, and food's transnational implications. This frames agroecology as a nodal point and makes it approachable from many angles, connecting different political struggles through solidarity and shaping the political antagonist that agroecology opposes.

With the format, pricing and location of an event, I found that the audience also changed. With high entry fees and the setting of scientific or political conferences, some events had a fairly exclusive character, selecting a formal and professional audience. This exclusivity, in which agroecology is restricted to connect more broadly outside formal, scientific and NGO based spaces, closes down political space and social movement building. I have generally observed a stronger politicisation in event formats that were based on a less formal but interactive framework, such as workshops, discussion groups, or farm visits during which people with different backgrounds and roles were present. In webinars and conference formats, in which monological presentations (in the best case with time for questions

---

[10] https://www.agroecologyworks.ch/de/tage-der-agraroekologie/2024/events

afterwards) are the default, the setting made collective critical engagement, formation of solidarity, and the inclusion of different voices much more difficult.

Overarching individual events, the concept for the TDA edition of 2024 wanted to engage and attract people by showing that, unexpectedly "tasty", solutions for a common and more socio-ecologically future exist. (Agroecology Works!, 2024a). Event hosts were encouraged to use the theme as the basis for their event, to make concrete projects and their contributions and solutions tangible, and collaborate with at least one other initiative or actor. The main objective of the 2024 edition of the TDA was to reach a broader audience and hence increase media work, and to collaborate with new actors. This impacts the public representation of agroecology, which is mainly framed in the way how agroecology provides a way forward. While the claim to offer solutions implies that agroecology responds to a problem, the socio-ecological issues to which agroecology in Switzerland, also through the TDA events, wants to respond, remained mostly unaddressed or covered up by the solution-focused framing. Framings that show conflictual relations, oppose specific dynamics, or problematise other actors remained in the background, representing agroecology mostly through its constructive aspects. However, this may come with de-politicising side-effects, as agroecology's political dimension and its manifestation in social movements to resist oppressive structures, as described in sections 2.2 and 3.2, are given much less weight and attention.

The TDA's open-platform format served the strategy to engage and collaborate in broader alliances, which aligns with the ideas of political agroecology to transcend the boundaries of practice, science and consumption. But it should also be recognised that this requires a certain degree of common political ground with the actors to be connected with, which might necessitate adaptation of the involved parties or implies certain agreements on what political elements are included or excluded in the cooperation. Looking at the event descriptions and the data collected as a participant observer, different levels of engagement with and embedding of agroecology by the event hosts became apparent. In many cases, events connect to agroecology through questions around social and ecological justice, power asymmetries, prefigurative practises of local economies and alternative food networks, or knowledge creation and sharing. However, in other cases, agroecology is not relatable or seems to be approached as a form of "more sustainable agriculture" or a mere scientific discipline. Such events appear detached from agroecology's political struggle for food system transformation. Hence, the broad inclusion of events and the necessary collaboration behind may render agroecology less clear and politicised in the context of the TDA.

In the broadness of the TDA's platform, Agroecology may be perceived as a blurry and neutral concept that any actor can connect their cause with. This way, the public representation of agroecology in the context of the TDA can partly contribute to the post-political discourse in the Swiss food system, as agroecological values and struggles are not

setting an inclusion/exclusion criterion for it to be political. Through this, agroecology may move into becoming a floating signifier, an empty sustainability concept that (almost) every party can affiliate with. This de-politicisation may negatively affect the building of a political, and thus transformative, social movement by compromising the foregrounding of political values in favour of broad collaboration and public attention.

### 5.2.2 Political contestation of food system dynamics during the days of agroecology

Coming from the network to the movement level, this sub-section highlights political moments and events that were experienced during the TDA, which foregrounded genuine political dissent, conflict and ontological problematisation of food system dynamics from an agroecology perspective. Following the mechanisms operationalised in the theoretical framework, this sub-section presents acts of politicisation from all parts of the agroecology movement: practitioners of agroecological farming, scientists, and civil society representatives (in this case NGO delegates). While many more practices and situations of politicisation were identifiable, this subsection presents a representative sample, showing how agroecological politicisation can manifest. As the mechanisms of politicisation share overlaps, the practice or situation of politicisation is presented in the section where it shows the strongest engagement.

*Prefiguration*

Practises of politicisation became visible in the setting of farm visits. These events presented prefigurative sites of agroecology, opposing mainstream agriculture and food provisioning by embodying different ways of farming and creating local economic structures.

For example, during one farm visit, the market and consumer relations were discussed at the core of the event. It was the dependence of and power imbalance against the big food market players that necessitated a shift to a decentralised marketing model on the farm. The economic pressure in connection with a growth imperative led to exhausting and depleting the farm workers and their natural foundation, which went completely against the agroecological vision of the people running the farm that is based on healthy soil, healthy social relations, healthy economic balance, and ecological health. Over the years, their raising awareness for the soil as a living system that sustains agriculture and hence our lives triggered innovation and the restructuring of the agricultural and marketing practices based upon agroecological principles.

Talking about their journey, the team of the farm made clear that it is not normal to make that step towards holistic care on a farm and the economic struggles that come with it. By creating this visibility, the organisers challenge the continuous normalisation of industrial agriculture and set a clear example of the current neoliberal framework's unsustainably extractive

consequences, and how caring through agroecological relations is itself a political response to this.

The promotion for the cultivation and establishment of a value chain for alternative protein sources, such as grain legumes, showcased how this causes a political rift against the capital-heavy animal farming sector. During an event on grain legumes, a multifaceted (re-)politicisation of the dominant food system came to light. Establishing grain legumes through participatory and organic breeding programs fosters autonomy of producers (independence of mineral fertilisers), reduces the ecological degradation of ecosystems through (industrialised, soil-unbound) animal production, and offers a diversification of risk and hence improved climate resilience. Re-establishing the dietary inclusion of grain legumes politically challenges the support for animal protein sources in a prefigurative manner, showing that other ways are possible. It is further an interesting nodal point for social movement and network building, as it requires collaboration and solidaric economic relationships along the whole value chain from breeding varieties to bridging production and consumption. The interdisciplinary team working on grain legumes also shows great solidarity across diverse roles, taking into account that a shift away from the labour- and capital-intensive animal farming would require new opportunities for value creation in rural areas.

### Adressing the (ultimate) cause

In different settings during the TDA, the framing of food as political emerged through the argumentation that it is not only an individual's choice how and what food is produced and distributed, and what consequences it has on society and the planet as a whole. Addressing what is ultimately contributing to the erosion of biodiversity in agricultural landscapes and the economic and mental pressure on people working in agriculture, a speaker, who is an organic farmer and politician, addressed the awareness of food and nutrition as one key factor to enable change in agriculture.

In their argumentation, it is not "the consumer" that is to be held accountable for change, politicising beyond the narrative of "consumerist behaviour change". The argumentation reaches a deeper relational level by stressing the basal relationship to food and nutrition in modern-day societies as the root problem:

*"I believe that we should think about how much value we attach to grocery shopping, cooking and food processing. That really is a question that needs to be addressed. We enslave ourselves to paid labour, earn and then buy food, perhaps processed if possible. And things have to be quick in the kitchen. And that is certainly against our health, against agriculture, against diversity."* (personal communication, 29. October, 2024)

During the conference, which was on the future of Swiss agri-food politics, the speaker challenged how little value is generally attributed to food and hence how the economic

structures are built around the narrative of "cheap food", giving way to industrialised practices. When arguing about the severe environmental impacts of animal farming, the speaker stated that consumption of animal produce (especially meat) should be halved, and the price doubled. Further, they criticised the selling of wage labour and the ever-accelerating lifestyles as contributing problems to the undervaluation of food. Essentially, the farmer and politician challenged the dominant norms of food provisioning and foregrounded the social and ecological implications of normalising this current dominant and "convenience" culture. Based on agroecological values of local and solidary economies, integrated care work and autonomy, the speech opposed current agri-food politics that favour large-scale solutions, industrialised food chains, and ultra-processed food, and hence problematises large-scale agri-business corporations, food industry actors and supermarket chains.

Similarly, the organisers of a farm visit raised a major point on consumerism and the alienation of people from local economies, further addressing the ultimate cause of the difficulty in making agroecological farming economically feasible in the current economic framework. An alternative narrative was presented and repeated throughout the event: "*creating instead of consuming!"*, questioning how people attribute value to goods and services, specifically in the context of the agri-food system. At the heart of this, criticism was raised on the dispersing impact of the dominant economic framework on social relations and the roles of "consumers" and "producers". To the practitioners present, the collaboration with local communities and social networks and institutions outside the monetary and labour market relations, as a practice of *creating,* seemed crucial to enable regenerative land cultivation. Otherwise, within the current economic framework, the price for their produce would need to be doubled to ensure regenerative ecological production and socially just working conditions.

*Creating self-legitimacy and visibility*

Multiple agroecology practitioners and generally farmers, throughout different events, addressed issues of the economic framework they are embedded in. Such were mainly about unequal power asymmetries in the food value chain, economic dependencies and a lack of autonomy. While in two cases alternatives were enacted, problematising the economic framework by prefiguration, in most situations, the dissent and frustration of the situation were voiced during discussion groups with other farmers and a more general audience participating in events of the TDA.

The politicisations found in these practises of prefiguration and discussion groups mainly emerged by the practitioners questioning their relationship to civil society. They made a case that the growing distance and the understanding of each other's social realities constitutes and reinforces an economic framework in which price-competition, instead of solidarity and cooperation, remains the key driver. The main framing around which the politicisation of the

economic dependence centres is the realisation that "*others earn more from our products than we do*", and shows how self-legitimisation for more equitable market relations was obtained. Multiple strategies were then presented how the practitioners work on their economic autonomy by building stronger (local) economic relationships outside of the mainstream market, showing a building up of counterhegemony to these oppressive structures. Social media, brand development, farmers markets and on-farm education were the main practices identified through which the practitioners established stronger and more solidary economic relationships. The respective events facilitated such a critical encounter, making space for farmers voicing disapproval, creating farmers-to-farmers support networks, and including, hence educating, a broader civil-society audience. The combination of having mixed groups may be especially crucial since conversations with different farmers and CSA practitioners also made clear how difficult it is to have sufficient and engaged members.

### *Broadening the frame of dispute*

On the International Day of Action for People's Food Sovereignty and Against Transnational Corporations (World Food Day), a public conference on *Macht und Markt* (Markets and Power) was organised and promoted through the TDA platform. The conference had the objective to question the underlying structures that decide over "our" food, both nationally in Switzerland but especially internationally. In its total appearance, the conference, while it was rather monological, broke with the narrative of the consumer's freedom of choice and individual responsibility for sustainability, shedding light on the institutional and structural power dynamics of the (dominant) market economy and its regulation. Such created a political moment, where the lever of negotiability of structural power shaping the food system was made visible. The broadening of the often narrowly discussed question of consumer responsibility vs. market regulation emerged through multiple framings on a discursive level. One of them was showing the difference between consumers and citizens by an NGO representative:

> *"Above all, consumers can make a difference by getting involved as citizens."* (personal communication, 16. October, 2024)

Implying that people are not just economic subjects but also democratically legitimised persons, who have authority and a say, counteracts the distracting debate on consumer responsibilities that sustains the neoliberal market economy framework. This was similarly brought up by another panellist, stating that the focus on the discourse around supply and demand mechanisms distracts from the ultimate causes of power asymmetries. It is thus more important to build alliances to empower individuals, such as agricultural workers, and to think more politically than about our personal groceries. However, while this conference was public, its politicisation mainly remains on a discursive level. Its effect lies in making visible and hearable marginalised perspectives and shedding light on structural problems and unjust

economic regulations and frameworks influencing and opposing mainstream narratives in the moment. But it may not necessarily present an ongoing politicisation of the issues addressed.

During the same conference, on a different level and stronger focused on the food system's transnational consequences, the presentation of a law professor on the Swiss foreign trade policy of agrarian trade highlighted the important political role of science-policy interfaces. Making clear that trade is always organised and regulated by political decision-making, foregrounded the normativity in trade policy reforms and opened the frame of dispute to acknowledge that trade has to be politically negotiated:

*"Trade can support sustainable processes, but it can also trigger the opposite. Trade is always organised and always regulated. The question is, what does future-oriented trade regulation look like?"* (personal communication, 16. October, 2024)

At the same time, in the problem statement the speaker put forward, a counternarrative challenging the win-win idea of the free trade narrative. Comparing the current situation to the approaches of 20 years ago, the topic moved to a level of contestation and dissent by stating that trading policies of today need different baselines and tools:

*"Over the last 100 years, the flows of capital, goods, information and people around the world have increased dramatically. We have a situation in which many of the world's environmental boundaries have been greatly exceeded. And we have a very strong inequality [...] in the world [...]. It is against this background that this process is taking place today: how must trade be regulated so that we can meet these challenges? We are no longer there, 20 years ago, when it was said that we had to liberalise trade, and then we would have solved our problem."* (personal communication, 16. October, 2024)

Following this argument, the speaker presented an upcoming project to explore the democratic possibilities of a just economic food system framework by writing fictive trade policies and facilitating debate through a citizens' parliament. The citizens' parliament will be guided by the question of what international trade systems could look like that support local food systems and, at the same time, enable fair trade. It is problematising the insufficient current-day trade policies and the role and responsibility the Swiss state and the Swiss citizens (and inhabitants generally) have towards the realities of, e.g. smallholder farmers in the Global South. By making democratic deliberation on this issue possible, these approaches open up political space, both discursively in the moment and, through the project, also continuously publicly.

Focusing on engaging civil society through an arts exhibition, constructed around the topics of new genetic engineering techniques, power relations in the food system and the history of agriculture, an agroecological NGO elegantly re-politicised the interaction of science, knowledge, and technology. Making visible that technologies cannot be discussed

independently from their economic, societal and political embedding, the exhibition has the objective to fuelling the public debate around these issues. The exhibition politicises the mainstream GMO-debate by questioning the assumed neutrality and objectivity of science and technology through showing the interactions between corporate involvement, power monopolies, legal frameworks of patents and the lack of transparency and knowledge extension to the public on the impacts of bioengineering technologies. The exhibition offers a different frame in the dispute on GMOs and new breeding technologies, which is often debated on the level of whether the technology is capable of fulfilling the promises behind it or whether genetically modified foods are safe for consumption. Such re-framing creates political space and educatively problematises the underlying narratives, power structures and monetary interests by making the actual drivers explicit and public.

*Foregrounding difference and defining adversaries*

Another theme relating to agroecological farmers was their call to "*get things done – and move from talking to acting*". This message emerged on three independent occasions directly in discussions and could be seen as both bearing a political and apolitical directionality: It is politically strong in the sense that it points out a lack of engagement and courage for transformative actions, but it might also neglect the importance of change on deeper systems levels such as paradigms. The statements' context was shaped by the farmers' lack of support and solidarity from civil society, and pointed out that they felt restricted in their agroecological practices due to little engagement financially, cooperatively or community-supported approaches. Hence, these farmers practitioners seem clearly to politicise the relationship to civil society, problematising the lacking engagement and collaboration of "consumers" that become "the other side" in the agonistic field this problematisation creates.

The lack of involvement of civil society was further brought up in an interview with an agroecological farmer and event organiser. The problematisation of the substitution of human labour with big machinery and technology, and hence the increasing dependencies of farmers on profit-driven corporate structures, was one of the interview's main themes. This was made explicit by the statement "W*e cannot do ecological farming with only 1% of society working in agriculture." and "So not rural exodus, but urban exodus."* (personal communication, 6. October, 2024). Hence, the practitioner thematised the labour involvement of civil society at large as a way to reduce fossil fuel input, and to decentralise food production and decrease the dependence on capitalist corporate structures. This was exemplified by the prefigurative practices enacted by the practitioner, which were showcased during the event by a tour around the farm and an expansive Q&A session. Highly diverse intercropping on a small-scale farm in combination with direct marketing connections to the purchasers of the produce as well as a focus on manual labour and engagement with the local social surroundings through events on the (semi-rural) farm, represent these political stances as a practical reality. Therefore,

organising the event and providing insight into the manifestation of this agroecological alternative, the farmer created a prefigurative politicisation of fossil fuel driven and individualised agriculture.

*Creating nodal points and interacting within these spaces*

Further in the talk during the conference on the future of Swiss agri-food politics, the farmer and politician's criticism on societal structures, the connection to unpaid care work and re-valuing care work surfaced, exemplifying the importance of intersectionality in political advocacy for just food systems:

*"The work is just so badly paid and that's the case with all jobs that are close to people and cover our basic needs. Even the jobs in cleaning, retail, catering and cooking are so badly paid that nobody wants to do them anymore. And yes, it goes on afterwards, washing the dishes and putting them away after the meal. Who does that? We want to get all this over with as quickly as possible and we have to realise that this has a value and that it also has an ecological value and a value for society as a whole. We have to give this work value again."*
(personal communication, 29. October, 2024)

This not only broadens the frame of dispute, shifting the discussions away from and opposing the de-politicising consumer-producer polarisation, but also politicises the agri-food system by addressing the deeper intricate causalities of care work, wage labour, and food provisioning.

## 5.2.3 De-politicising practises in the context of agroecology

To better understand where the agroecology movement in Switzerland might lose transformative capacities to the post-political discourse, this subsection zooms in to moments where de-politicisation occurred by actors affiliated with or situations related to agroecology.

Throughout different events, the allocation of actors' responsibility in transformative action to individuals was one key topic of discussion. The call for consumers to change their dietary and food provisioning choices, or farmers to be more innovative in their ecological and economic practises, was a framing appearing from different actors associated with agroecology. One actor stated that: "*Our shopping receipt is more important than the ballot paper*". This marks a discursive practice with potential de-politicisation, as it shifts the attention away from the need to collectively question the legal and financial frameworks that enable, support or restrict certain practices through politics. It shifts the responsibility for change to the individual, overlooking the prevalent systemic challenges and reinforcing a neoliberal framework, which is perpetuating socio-economically unjust agri-food system dynamics by obscuring its necessary re-negotiation.

For the welcoming speeches of a scientific symposium dedicated to agroecology at a university which is itself a member of the agroecology network, space was given to multiple speakers from the public administration, university board, and parliament, to share their perspective on agroecology and the challenges in the food system. These perspectives, broadly ranged from the importance of holistic thinking in agri-food policy making, to the (co-optative) advocacy for complementing low-tech agroecological technologies with hi-tech solutions, and the importance of market incentives and true cost accounting for what these actors understood as agroecological transformations. In that context, de-politicisation of the food system and agroecology discourse appeared in how technological and economic fixes were put forward. For example, under the problem framing of "*feeding 10 billion within planetary boundaries*", the role of technology was elaborated on. The presenter bounced back and forth between centring technology as the most important tool for food security and, in the next sentence, relativising the role of technology for the sake of behavioural change. This unclarity obscured the positionality of the actor and the role of technology, covering up the conflictual dimension of access to and benefit from technological implementation.

Further, presenting only two viable options, technology-driven increase in production and efficiency or behavioural change (of consumers), closed off the political space around questions on the distribution of resources and hence social equality and justice. In a similar fashion, agroecology was presented as a holistic framework to make the food system more sustainable by addressing all actors involved, bringing about behavioural change of consumers, paying attention to direct marketing of farmers' produce, and adopting technologies at the farm level that ensure less negative environmental impact. The advocacy for technology and the implementation of holistic agroecological practises, serve as a floating signifier, making it possible to mobilise support around while shifting attention away from more political levels, such as the (re-)negotiation of, e.g. economic situations of food producers or low-income households and their underlying neoliberal paradigm.

# 6  Discussion

In a first step, this chapter discusses the findings of the analysis of the identified political practises by the agroecology movement and network, and the post-political food system discourse in Switzerland presented in Chapter 5. The previously presented analysis took place on two levels: Once, on the more organised and institutionalised level of the agroecology network, and second, on a movement level of agroecological actors and initiatives, independent of their degree of organisation and cohesion. The following section will draw further on this differentiation.

## 6.1  Social network perspective: practises of (de-)politicisation in the public representation of agroecology

The organisation of the 2024 TDA event series was conducted by the Swiss agroecology network Agroecology Works!, under which 35 civil society, science and farmers' institutions and other NGOs come together. The organisation of the TDA represents a political practise that, as defined through the literature review in this work, goes along with other AESM's efforts to influence hegemonic industrialised food system structures through networking and public awareness building and to a lesser extent also to knowledge production and skill sharing. **To look at the TDA as a way of politicisation through prefiguration, as in the capacity of resistance beyond the capitalist market and the state through processes of experimentation and demonstration** (Varvarousis et al., 2021), hence appears logical, since already the slogan of the event series claims that "we have solutions".

One of the main aims of the concept of the TDA 2024 was to enable the public's experience of agroecological solutions (Agroecology Works!, 2024a), which makes prefiguration the main identified mechanism of politicisation on the level of the agroecology network. According to Blühdorn and Deflorian (2021), prefigurative practises politicise an issue by embodying dissent against its capitalist organisation and technocratic governance, the materialisation of alternatives to it, and the diffusion of these alternatives into the cultural and institutional landscape. Such is enacted on by the agroecology network in continuously framing the success of agroecology and showcasing the outcomes during the events of the TDA. The TDA have been facilitated in their 4th edition in 2024 and will be followed by a 5th edition in 2025 (Agroecology Works!, 2025a), showing a continuous practice of embodying dissent, showcasing materialised alternatives and shaping the food system's cultural and institutional context.

However, Blühdorn and Deflorian (2021) advocate for a nuanced analysis of social movements' prefigurative politicisation by expanding the analytical frame to co-optation and simulation, since re-politicisation practises by social movements, as presented in the theoretical framework, can be ambiguous. The authors point out that social-ecological oriented social movements can contribute to de-politicisation through simulating an

alternative future without necessarily contesting the problematic and oppressive structures in the present. Furthermore, in a form of co-optation of one's cause, social movements can get entangled in "the collaborative management of sustained unsustainability", when their resources and capacities are insufficient to successfully deal with social-ecological issues on the required depth (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021, p. 265). Hence, where is the facilitation of the TDA, as prefigurative politics, simulative or sustains unsustainability?

As covered in Section 5.2, the embedding of the TDA in a mostly positive and constructive framing of agroecology might hint at such de-politicising mechanisms. Mostly by simulating an agroecological future, without the necessary confrontation of unjust food system structures (e.g. migrant workers' exploitation) or pointing out adversaries (e.g. highlighting the political entanglement of the agri-business industry) in the present. This ties in with Kenis' (2019) findings that social movements are in a tension between being more politically radical through direct-confrontative actions, public shaming and strong statements, or focusing on softer, constructive-collaborative, eco-citizenship approaches. The TDA event series and individual events would likely seem less attractive to the public if they are more problem-centred or confrontational. **Hence, additional forms of political activism alongside the TDA seem necessary to complement the prefigurative and constructive character of the TDA with stronger political confrontation, which aligns with the findings of other social movement studies** (Dilley, 2017; Mocca & Osborne, 2019).

Furthermore, the tension described by Kenis (2019) similarly marks an interesting entry point to the question of how the Swiss agroecology movement navigates being politically confrontative without losing the prefigurative agroecological practises as its ground. As brought up in Section 5.2.1, the allowance for broad inclusion of events and actors in the TDA is a way to broaden the movement but may also weaken its political sharpness. Nevertheless, not all actors may have the capability or motivation to be engaged in the direct political struggle, which does not make their prefigurative practise less important. **To emerge as a (political) agroecology movement, as intended to be presented during the TDA, hence requires pluralisation of its roles and contributors, but also a balance between prefiguration and political confrontation.**

In comparison with Mocca and Osborne's (2019) analysis, the agroecology networks' political practice in facilitating the TDA appear to take place both inside and outside of the mainstream political circles, while tending to be mostly on the outside. The bigger part of events had a prefigurative character, aiming to highlight agroecological alternatives, and hence, can be situated outside the dominant political regime. On the other hand, a few interactions and cooperations with the established political elite took place during the events, such as by hosting events under the umbrella of the TDA, during which official representatives of the public administration were invited to the stage. This engagement shows an openness of the

agroecology network to engage with the mainstream political system. This inclusion and non-confrontational approach may be criticised to fortify a post-political discourse by giving voice and space to the mainstream political agenda under the name of agroecology.

However, following Mouffe's argumentation, Mocca and Osborne (2019) argue that social movements' engagement, in this case the agroecology network, with the established political regime is not necessarily de-politicising. By way of contrast, a strategic engagement with political elites is deemed necessary to undermine the neoliberal system, because "even when these groups seek to distance themselves from the political system, they ultimately come to terms with it, as the latter seeks consensus by engaging with them" (Mocca & Osborne, 2019, p. 638). How strategically the interaction with the mainstream political actors was sought by the agroecology network marks its respective consequence on (de-)politicisation, to which the data provided here does not allow a sufficiently supported statement.

But still, in light of Mocca and Oscborne's (2019) analysis and the FOAG's co-optative understanding and use of agroecology in Switzerland, the public problematisation of the co-optation of agroecology by the formal political elite seems all the more important as engagement and confrontation with it is unavoidable. Such would seem crucial to prevent the (further) de-politicisation by co-optation of the agroecological discourse. Furthermore, the reclamation of agroecology and counteracting the appropriation of its concept and meaning can also take place through self-legitimisation and empowerment via an identity as AESM. This makes it interesting to look next at the politicisation mechanism that underlies the TDA on a social movement level, searching for political signifiers for movement building.

## 6.2 Social movement perspective: practises of politicisation beyond institutionalised agroecology

Agroecology, understood not only as a scientific research agenda and agricultural practice but also as a political project, encompasses a set of values, principles and attitudes, and hence stands for a political directionality and an ongoing political process (C. Anderson et al., 2021; González de Molina et al., 2020). Since agroecology, as defined in this thesis, is fundamentally rooted in a struggle for socio-ecological justice (e.g. Nyéléni, 2015), it implicitly emerges from a collective political response to oppose the hegemony and oppression of the neoliberal and capitalist organisation of the dominant industrialised food system. This collective response is here understood through the lens of a social movement, as discussed in sub-section 3.2.1, and zooms in on individual agroecological actors' and initiatives' political practice.

### 6.2.1 Practices of politicisation in agroecology

On the movement level, the various other forms of political contestation, as brought forward in the theoretical framework, emerged separately but often also in combination. Actors on the

one hand were prefiguring agroecological alternatives, such as developing ecologically regenerative farming practises in combination with solidary value chains, presenting that what is commonly perceived as the norm, is socio-ecologically problematic and not normal at all. On the other hand, in different situations, actors during the TDA spoke up for agroecological values, engaging discursively in opposing the hegemonic discourse of the Swiss food system.

The main counter-hegemonic discourses of agroecological actors, to contest dynamics within and in connection to the Swiss food system, identified are:

➢ questioning the passive role of "the consumer" and attributing responsibility to the citizens in and behind consumers for collectively caring about the public socio-ecological welfare
➢ criticising the lack of valuation and prioritisation of food, food provisioning and nutrition in modern-day societies
➢ making a case for the re-framing of farming as undervalued and underpaid care work, providing indispensable goods and services
➢ provoking public engagement on the unquestioned neutrality and role of science and technology
➢ breaking with the solutionist narrative of the free market and problematising power dynamics leading to insufficiently regulated and hence socio-ecologically unjust agri-food trade treaties

Political agroecology, during the TDA, surfaced most in the practice of broadening the frame of dispute and addressing the ultimate cause of an issue. Agroecological actors opened political space and opposed dominant narratives by, for example, enlarging the consumer-producer polarisation by re-framing the consumer as citizen, attributing people democratic agency as well as responsibility in their strategies of food provisioning. Similarly, by pointing out the "convenience culture" and the (non-monetary) valuation of food prevalent in civil society, agroecologists emphasise the more genuine reason behind the economic organisation of value chains, for the extractive pressure on people and agroecosystems.

The agroecological value of solidary economics was identified as the strongest in the case of the TDA. The re-politicisation of economic roles of and relations between people, to be more personal, solidaric, tangible, and caring, formed a main and transversal theme. It presents a political signifier around which an agroecological identity in the Swiss context seems to be emerging. However, all of the signifiers around which agroecology politicises, as presented in the theoretical framework, have been encountered in the process of this research.

The agroecological initiatives and actors politicise the valuation of and the right to food, opposing its commodification and further advocate for awareness building and food system literacy of civil society. But a theme that has only marginally emerged in the discourse of the TDA are post-anthropocentric narratives of connectedness and care between the natural world and civil society. This goes along with the findings of Bossard (2024), who has found such

narratives also only at the movement level. The author proposes to politicise agroecology and promote movement building in Switzerland by bridging the public's separate perception of ecological and social crisis by creating resonance and emotional affection through (counter)narratives of connectedness.

## 6.2.2 Movement building

Understood as the social movement perspective, the focus shifts from institutionalised structures of the Agroecology Works! network, to the actors and spaces where agroecology is grounded in and shaped by lived experiences and practices of farmers, farming collectives, food processing facilities, gastronomists, food-coops, living-labs, CSA members, citizens and consumers. On this level, actors appear to be less connected and collectivised around a common political cause, such as the identification with agroecology, which indicates insufficient political connectivity with agroecology as political signifier at this level.

The research on AESM in Europe suggests that such a collectivisation has evolved in the formation of the organic sector, which at its roots stems from a social movement (Balogh et al., 2020; Brumer et al., 2023; Migliorini et al., 2018; Seremesic et al., 2021; Stassart et al., 2018). This movement building has arguably revolved around an "Us-Them" identification, as in being different from mainstream conventional agriculture by applying organic farming practices. However, the organic movement also faces critiques of "conventionalisation" (De Molina Navarro, 2015) and little involvement in "social issues" (Migliorini & Wezel, 2017), marking it de-politicised. Hence, the relation between the concepts of political agroecology and the organic sector, respectively the organic movement, appears crucial in understanding the spaces where, through collectivisation around agroecological values, a transformative politicisation of the socio-ecologically unjust food system dynamics may be emergent. Such seems to be the case for agroecology in Switzerland, given the similarities of the organics movement and sectors political-economic embedding and the lacking politicisation of hegemonic unjust structures rendering multifaceted social injustice.

To conclude this discussion**, agroecology is subject of politicisation on two levels: movement level and network level. Practices and mechanisms of re- and de-politicisation are manyfold, with the trajectory of questioning market roles and economic relations being most apparent on the movement level. The TDA as a political practice of the network challenges the normalisation of the mainstream food system by its prefiguration of alternatives, which, however, can also tilt towards de-politicisation if it becomes a mere (showcase) simulation of these alterative practices.** There are certainly more practices in politically contesting the food system politics and discourse in Switzerland that were not presented and discussed in the two sub-sections above. This case study, centred

around the TDA, did not include further (grey) literature or data to map all such agroecological politicisations. However, it is acknowledged that such exist, for example, in the work of Uniterre (Swiss LVC division) or the VKMB, two peasant associations that actively politicise issues such as food sovereignty, peasant livelihood, access to land, and women in agriculture (Uniterre, 2024; VKMB, 2025). Nonetheless, the analysis conducted here implies a tension between the political practice of the agroecology network and the level of the agroecology movement. These seem, seen from the difference of their political practices, distanced, which consequently poses the question of lacking movement building by politicisation and renders the importance of searching for trajectories of deepening the democratic practice of agroecology in Switzerland.

# 7  Conclusion

Understanding the need for transformative processes to deconstruct current harmful dynamics of the food system, the work presented here aims to break with the "collaborative management of sustained unsustainability" (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021, p. 265), which indicates the necessary re-orientation to effective interventions on deep leverage points (Abson et al., 2017). Argued by post-political theory scholars, the perseverance of unsustainability in socio-ecological system is established in a post-political condition and held in place by mechanisms of de-politicisation (Duncan, 2016; Swyngedouw, 2010b). In search of ways to break with post-political discourses and open political space through which privileges, positions, roles, resources, outcomes and regulations in and of the food system become subject of negotiation, democratic deliberation and hence re-distribution, this research centres social movements as political actors and, in turn, democratic agents of change.

Concretely, practices of an agroecological social movement rooted in ecological food provisioning, research and political struggle have been analysed for their politicisation and de-politicisation, and consequential implications on the movement's transformative capacity. Focusing on the European context of the Swiss agroecology movement and drawing on literature, policy documents and participant observation, this study both analysed the political practice of the Swiss agroecology movement and the post-political context it is embedded in. This was undertaken to better understand the transformative pathways of the Swiss agroecology movement and to answer the overarching research question: *In what ways does the Swiss agroecology movement's politicisation of the food system influence its ability to achieve its transformatory objectives?*

The analysis indicates that the Swiss agroecology movement is generally operating within a de-politicised socio-political framework. Such analysis is derived by looking at the formal agri-food governance of both state and civil society actors. The policies on the vision for agri-food politics until 2050 and related strategies of the responsible Ministry of Agriculture are shown to contribute to the de-politicisation of formal agri-food governance by their focus on consensus and conflict mitigation, and further their practice of responsibility diffusion and technocratic governance. The Ministry of Agriculture appears ambiguous in dealing with the multifaceted interests and power asymmetries present in the governance of the food system and tends to obscure conflict lines, which would enable negotiation and deliberation crucial to emancipatory and transformative politics.

Furthermore, formal political practises by civil society organisations, like the recent popular referendums on nutrient levels, pesticides, or the degree of self-sufficiency and plant-based foods, appear double-edged when looked at through a lens of the properly political. While these mechanisms of direct democracy offer the opportunity to publicly problematise an issue and fuel debate, such forms of political action can arguably contribute to a post-political

condition when their framing and position does not sufficiently address the normative root cause of the problem put forward and hence normalises incumbent unsustainable paradigms (e.g. through putting forward a productivist narrative or the overuse of technocratic approaches).

The values and worldviews underlying what can today be called the Swiss agroecology movement have been present and politicising the food system long before the term agroecology emerged in Europe, through, for example, the organic movement or NGOs working nationally and transnationally on socio-ecological justice issues. This work claims that agroecology marks an overlapping continuation of this political process, responding to the absence of transformational change but appearing foremost in the realms of NGOs and academia and lacking a grounding in a political civil society movement. Agroecology in Switzerland, apart from research, appears most explicit in its institutionalisation by the network Agroecology Works!. The network spearheads the socio-political agroecology movement, which, even though it appears less visible as a political force, is implicit in the political struggle of agroecology. This gave reason to analyse the transformative capacity of the Swiss agroecology movement on two levels: the network level and the movement level.

As its main political practice, the agroecology network has been organising the TDA event series, which is here understood as a practice of publicly representing agroecology and hence shaping agroecology's discourse in relation to agri-food politics. Showcasing manifold ways in which agroecology manifests in alternatives to organise ecological food provisioning and more solidary forms of economic relations, the TDA presents a form of prefigurative politics. Creating self-legitimacy for agroecological practices and challenging the normalisation of conventional agriculture, industrialised food system structures, and individualised economic relations, the TDA, as a web of agroecological realities and social networks, forms a counterhegemonic political moment that politicises the food system.

While such a prefigurative politicisation may mark a transformative intervention point, building on Blühdorn and Deflorian's (2021) analytical frame of prefigurative simulation, the TDA also simultaneously appears as a practice that conceals the political space needed for food system transformation. Through its focus on broad outreach and hence framings that attract the public and support the building of alliances, the TDA edition analysed in this work shows little discursive problematisation and political confrontation of the issues it aims to address. The representation of agroecology appears mostly in its capacity to offer solutions and draws on a non-conflictual and neutral language doing so. Such reflects a social activism that, while it prefigures alternatives, mostly evades the necessary collective practice of problematising the deep-rooted structures of neoliberal capitalism in the food system.

Looking at the practises of politicisation through agroecology on a movement level, the analysis conducted here identified counter-hegemonic discourses that surfaced during the

TDA. Such mainly revolve around criticising the lacking valuation and prioritisation of food and nutrition and the respective economic and cultural consequences, the under- and non-valuation of the (care) work involved in these goods and services, as well as re-framing "the (food) consumer" from a passive subject to a (food) citizen making food provisioning a common responsibility. On the other hand, while no direct actions of de-politicisation by agroecology-affiliated actors were observed, a tension to the discourses identified above was present within the agroecology movement. This mostly became visible in the emergence of the discourse centring around the responsibility for enabling more ecological and socially fair food provisioning by making the individual consumer the main responsible agent.

Even so, the previously mentioned emerging counternarratives hint at the strong political sense that underlies the base of the agroecological movement, indicating how its actors are already working on opening political spaces by broadening the frame of dispute. Such takes place, for example, by expanding the narrow focus of debates on (convenient) commercial food provisioning to include perspectives of care work and solidary economic relations. Further, counternarratives also address the ultimate cause of the issues involved, such as the cultural and economic undervaluation of food and farming that supports individualised market approaches in organising the food system's structures. Through these practises of politicisation, movement actors ultimately work on breaking with their post-political surroundings.

However, a tension appears when considering the degree to which these counter-hegemonic discourses connect with the practises of the agroecology network, and hence the public representation of agroecology, which shows differing depths and modes of politicisation between movement and network. Such implies a tension between top-down and bottom-up movement building in the framing, representation, and respective agroecological counternarratives and political values the movement as a whole is advocating for. This, in turn, marks an important entry point for enhancing agroecology's transformative capacity in the Swiss context and shows a need for continuous internal exchange and political deliberation on the normative orientation of the movement.

This study, therefore, highlights the significance of engaging with apolitical entry points, such as the individualisation of responsibility of consumers and technocratic and expert-based governance processes, when strategising for a stronger political agroecology. Looking ahead and taking into account the analysis of the de-politicised discourse of the Swiss agri-food system presented in Chapter 5.1, efforts of agroecology movements to form counter-hegemonic discourses and (re-)politicise through political action appear crucial. In other words, this research points to the importance of asking: what perspectives and approaches could support the (political) agroecology movement in Switzerland in (re-)politicising the agri-food system and social movement building?

Two directions are to be considered in this: First, politicisation practices are applicable internal to the agroecology movement for movement building, and second, they can be applied external to the movement to coalesce into a broader political force[11]. The creation of the Swiss agroecology network in 2019, and its work through public relations, research and internal support networks, can be seen as a first step in this strategic process. Concretely looking at the double-edged political practice of the TDA as argued in this work, it could be considered to strategically focus on a combination of events, formats, frames or further practices next to the TDA that are more normative and serve internal movement building. Such would complement the representation of agroecology with its current focus on broad public outreach and non-confrontational framing.

The main goal in enhancing the transformative capacity of the agroecology movement proposed here is to create a counterhegemony against and a politicisation of the prevailing mechanisms of the dominant food system regime in place. Inspired by what Mouffe (2018) calls radical democracy and left-populism, and focusing on movement building and the politicisation of the food system more concretely, **the agroecology movement and network could gain political momentum in a number of ways**.

First, such could be enacted by **internal consolidation over defining common struggles** like lacking economic autonomy, valuation of one's work and societal contribution, or recognition of one's reduction to a consumer. And, in turn, by **problematising other social actors** such as large agribusiness corporations or government agencies.

Second, **stating clear and concrete demands** that are achievable and resonate with the everyday experience of the people involved and address their concerns would support creating a common, yet pluralistic, identity. Such demands could, for example, revolve around the support for small-scale operations of farms and food distribution, stronger market regulations to balance power asymmetries, a ban of synthetic pesticides, dignified working conditions for farm workers, or organic food for everyone.

Third, to ensure connectivity and cohesion between members it is key to **give space to the different experiences, positions, concerns** and enable contribution to the movement's goals and strategies from different angles through using languages and forms of communication accessible to everyone and paying attention to those who, due to care work or high workloads in different occupations (like farming), may have less resources for contributing.

---

[11] Looking at the transformative objective and process of agroecology from a radical democracy point of view necessitates to engage beyond problematising economic distributive issues along the food value chain and seeing food as the entry point of the struggle, but not its boundaries. Therefore, understanding and addressing the underlying oppressive structures and issues from intersectionality, inherently request to solidarise with the fight against oppression such as from heteropatriarchy and colonialism.

Fourth, for building political space, it is crucial to **focus on democratic structures** and engagement internally, as in encouraging participation, democratic decision making within the movement, and the organisation of assemblies, with the goal to discuss and strategise around agroecology collectively. Such could be facilitated by creating the agenda and methods of meetings or exchanges collaboratively and sharing the lead amongst the roles and contributors.

Fifth, to create transformational political momentum, **collaboration with other social movements**, organisations, and unions is required. This could include facilitating exchanges with movements focusing on environmental justice, human rights, farm worker rights, anti-globalisation, animal rights, migrant integration and anti-racism, climate, activism, and rural development.

Sixth, **engaging in direct political action and creating public attention** by forms of protest, prefigurative practices, and public awareness campaigns would emphasise an "Us-Them" differentiation through problematising the adversary. Such would need to refrain from (over)using abstractions, like fighting against capitalism, as people are more likely to be moved to act on the basis of concrete situations and concerns rooted in their everyday life. By organising an agroecology festival or summit to strengthen the movement identity or focus political campaigns around an agonistic relation towards a certain actor or group, such could be taken into account.

Seventh, it is important to **be visible, appealing and emotionally connective** through crafting narratives that are disseminated through media, literature and art by pointing out and connecting problems publicly (e.g. through a narrative like: "we need less people wearing suits but more hands weeding the fields").

The practical implementation and the conversion of the theoretical ideas presented here may not always strive for radical political positions and the abolishment of actors that are less political. Such an over-politicisation might lead to an alienation towards civil society, but also affiliated actors. The findings and discussion presented here however, aim to encourage strategic orientation towards understanding agroecology as a political project and process that is based on a common struggle for ecological and social justice while acknowledging its internal diversity of actors.

This research, due to its format as a thesis, could not present a full post-political analysis of the discourses and processes in the Swiss food system and offers only a selective empirical insight into the political practise of the agroecology network and movement at large. Extended time of fieldwork, participatory methods, and further engagement in action research would be required to respond to Frantzeskaki et al.'s (2016) call for more longitudinal social movement studies to better understand the dilemmas of realpolitik that such civil society organisations are faced with. In particular, further interaction and exchange with the agroecology network would have been necessary to understand its internal dynamics, political strategy and decision-making. This could also entail investigating mechanisms of

politicisation and de-politicisation, such as politicising agroecology through "foregrounding difference and defining adversaries" or depoliticising the agroecology movement by "dismissing the political nature of knowledge", on which this study has not elaborated. The present work should therefore be seen primarily as a continuation of earlier studies on agroecology in Switzerland, but also as a first step in a longer research process to better understand the political dynamics between agroecology as a social movement, an institutionalised network, civil society and formal governance.

To move the debate around the transformative capacity of political agroecology in Switzerland forward, a better understanding of the political work, actors, and strategy of the agroecology network, during but also outside the TDA event series, needs to be developed. This would entail further investigating the politicising practices within the network, movement building and the interaction with mainstream political circles. In a bigger scheme, researchers (as well as agroecological practitioners, policy-makers and the media) could focus on understanding and advocating for the political understanding of agroecology more broadly, in a Swiss but also in a European context. Little research was found specifically on the political practices and structures of agroecology movements in Europe and their relation to the (post-)political. Europe-wide agroecological research could contribute to the transformative political process of agroecology by facilitating comparison and exchange of different political practices, strategies of contestation, and conditions for movement and (transformative) capacity building.

The study presented here suggests that post-political theory has much to offer to the practice and strategy of agroecology movements as well as to agroecological research. Further, due to their ubiquitous character and interwovenness into the social realities, food and hence the politics of food, offer an interesting and arguably productive entry point for the (re-)politicisation of undemocratic, oppressive and harmful logics that cause the need for transformation. Agroecology, by its broadness of actors, roles, and experiences, further provides conducive conditions to establish new frontiers to break the dominant (food) system's hegemony from the ground up, while acknowledging the need for remaining in a genuine democratic framework with pluralistic and agonistic relations.

Such is a transformative process by its engagement on the level of values and paradigms, shifting discourses, forming new social relations and, likely to the latest stage, showing change in formal politics. This presents itself as a framework of political agroecology that acknowledges and links the key principles of plurality, political agonism, and deliberation for a genuine democratic framework and connects to agroecology as a political position based on worldviews and values. Such values and worldviews of agroecology, however, embracing the core argument of post-political theory, remain specific to place and subjects and should hence be kept fluid through continuous negotiability of themselves. Yet, drawing on the experiences

made and data captured in this research, a main directionality of values in the case of the Swiss agroecology movement crystallises: notions revolving around (mutual) care for the natural world and the people working (with) the land, and recognising the importance of solidary, collective and decentralised ways to exchange goods, services, and knowledge appear as a fruitful base for further movement building and transformative politicisation of the Swiss food system.

# 8 Bibliography

Abson, D. J., Fischer, J., Leventon, J., Newig, J., Schomerus, T., Vilsmaier, U., Von Wehrden, H., Abernethy, P., Ives, C. D., Jager, N. W., & Lang, D. J. (2017). Leverage points for sustainability transformation. *Ambio*, *46*(1), 30–39. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-016-0800-y

Adam, K. L. (2006). *Community Supported Agriculture*. https://ruralinnovationinstitute.yolasite.com/resources/CSA_ATTRA1.pdf

Agroecology Works! (2022, September 12). *Empfehlungen des Netzwerks "Agroecology works!"— Wie die Schweiz die Agrarökologie innen- und aussenpolitisch fördern soll*. https://www.agroecologyworks.ch/media/pages/politik/empfehlungen/c24cd798a1-1718036375/220912-plattform_ae-works_d_final.pdf

Agroecology Works! (2024a). *Konzept Tage der Agrarökologie 2024*. https://www.agroecologyworks.ch/media/pages/tage-der-agraroekologie/2024/events/46f88a16a7-1718036375/konzept-tda-2024.docx.pdf

Agroecology Works! (2024b, November 26). *Events | Agrarökologie funktioniert!* (Schweiz) [Text/html]. Agroecology Works!; Agroecology Works! https://www.agroecologyworks.ch/de/tage-der-agraroekologie/2024/events

Agroecology Works! (2025a, April 1). *2025 | Agrarökologie funktioniert!* (Schweiz) [Text/html]. Agroecology Works!; Agroecology Works! https://www.agroecologyworks.ch/de/tage-der-agraroekologie/2025

Agroecology Works! (2025b, April 23). *Agrarökologie | Agrarökologie funktioniert!* (Schweiz) [Text/html]. Agroecology Works!; Agroecology Works! https://www.agroecologyworks.ch/de/agraroekologie-kopie

Agroecology Works! (2025c, April 30). *Petition* (Schweiz) [Text/html]. Agroecology Works!; Agroecology Works! https://www.agroecologyworks.ch/de/politik/petition-2021

agroecology.science. (2024, September 4). *agroecology.science—Agrarökologie Schweiz*. https://www.agroecology.science/projekte/rp-agraroekologie-schweiz.html

Alonso-Fradejas, A., Forero, L. F., Ortega-Espès, D., Drago, M., & Chandrasekaran, K. (2020). Junk Agroecology': The corporate capture of agroecology for a partial ecological transition without social justice. *ATI, TNI, Crocevia*.

Altieri, M. (1989). Agroecology: A new research and development paradigm for world agriculture. *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*, *27*(1–4), 37–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-8809(89)90070-4

Altieri, M., & Holt-Giménez, E. (2016). Can agroecology survive without being coopted in the Global North? *SOCLA Peper*.

Altieri, M., & Toledo, V. M. (2011). The agroecological revolution in Latin America: Rescuing nature, ensuring food sovereignty and empowering peasants. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *38*(3), 587–612. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2011.582947

Amos, S. (2023). *Contestation, Expertise, and Time: An Ethnographic Case Study of the Swiss Citizens' Assembly on Food Policy* [Application/pdf]. 105 p. https://doi.org/10.3929/ETHZ-B-000627972

Anderson, C., Bruil, J., Chappell, M. J., Kiss, C., & Pimbert, M. P. (2021). *Agroecology Now!: Transformations Towards More Just and Sustainable Food Systems*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-61315-0

Anderson, C. R., Bruil, J., Chappell, M. J., Kiss, C., & Pimbert, M. P. (2021). *Agroecology Now!: Transformations Towards More Just and Sustainable Food Systems*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-61315-0

Anderson, C. R., Maughan, C., & Pimbert, M. P. (2022). Transformative Agroecology Learning in Europe: Building Consciousness, Skills and Collective Capacity for Food Sovereignty. In C. Anderson, R. Binimelis Adell, M. P. Pimbert, & M. Rivera Ferre (Eds.), *Critical Adult Education in Food Movements* (pp. 11–27). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-19400-9_2

Anderson, M. D. (2024). *Transforming Food Systems: Narratives of Power* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003260264

Bacchi, C. L. (1999). *Women, policy, and politics: The construction of policy problems*. Sage.

Balogh, L., Katalin, R., & Balint, B. (2020). *Mapping Agroecology in Hungary*. https://www.agroecology-europe.org/mapping-agroecology-initiatives-hungary/

Blühdorn, I. (2015). A Much-Needed Renewal of Environmentalism?: Eco-Politics in the Anthropocene. In *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis* (pp. 156–167). Routledge.

Blühdorn, I., & Deflorian, M. (2021). Politicisation beyond post-politics: New social activism and the reconfiguration of political discourse. *Social Movement Studies*, *20*(3), 259–275. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2021.1872375

Bossard, N. (2024). *'Du bist mit allem verbunden'—Praxisbeispiele und Narrative des Wandels für eine transformative Schweizer Agrarökologie* [Master Thesis, ETH Zürich]. https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000692433

Brand, U. (2016). "Transformation" as a New Critical Orthodoxy: The Strategic Use of the Term "Transformation" Does Not Prevent Multiple Crises. *GAIA - Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society*, *25*(1), 23–27. https://doi.org/10.14512/gaia.25.1.7

Brumer, A., Wezel, A., Dauber, J., Breland, T. A., & Grard, B. (2023). Development of agroecology in Austria and Germany. *Open Research Europe*, *3*. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.15431.1

Buller, J., Dönmez, P. E., Standring, A., & Wood, M. (2019). Depoliticisation, Post-politics and the Problem of Change. In J. Buller, P. E. Dönmez, A. Standring, & M. Wood (Eds.), *Comparing Strategies of (De)Politicisation in Europe: Governance, Resistance and Anti-politics* (pp. 1–24). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64236-9_1

Bürger:innenrat für Ernährungspolitik. (2022). *Bürger:innenrat für Ernährungspolitik*. Bürger:innenrat für Ernährungspolitik. https://www.buergerinnenrat.ch/de/jetzt-wird-aufgetischt/

Clarke, L., Jiang, K., Akimoto, K., Babiker, M., Blanford, G., Fisher-Vanden, K., Hourcade, J.-C., Krey, V., Kriegler, E., & Löschel, A. (2014). *Assessing transformation pathways*.

Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-democracy* (Repr). Polity Press.

da Schio, N., & van Heur, B. (2022). Resistance is in the air: From post-politics to the politics of expertise. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, *40*(3), 592–610. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544211034182

Dannemann, H. (2023). Experiments of authoritarian sustainability: Völkisch settlers and far-right prefiguration of a climate behemoth. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, *19*(1), 2175468. https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2023.2175468

De Molina Navarro, M. G. (2015). Agroecology and Politics: On the Importance of Public Policies in Europe. In M. Monteduro, P. Buongiorno, S. Di Benedetto, & A. Isoni (Eds.), *Law and Agroecology* (pp. 395–410). Springer Berlin Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-46617-9_20

Delve, L., & Limpaecher, A. (2023, August 7). *Abductive Coding in Qualitative Analysis*. Delve. https://delvetool.com/blog/abductive-coding

DeMuth, Suzanne. (1993). *Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): An annotated bibliography and resource guide*. National Agricultural Library. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007399112

DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2011). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers* (2nd ed). Rowman & Littlefield, Md.

Di Masso, M., & Zografos, C. (2015). Constructing food sovereignty in Catalonia: Different narratives for transformative action. *Agriculture and Human Values*, *32*(2), 183–198. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-014-9528-0

Diaz-Parra, I., Roca, B., & Romano, S. (2015). Political activists' frames in times of post-politics: Evidence from Kirchnerism in Argentina and Podemos in Spain. *Contemporary Social Science*, *10*(4), 386–400. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2016.1218042

Dilley, L. T. M. (2017). Avoiding the political in transition: A micro-analysis of the micro-politics of conflict. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *51*, 178–188. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.02.009

Domptail, S. E., Hirsch, J., & Nuppenau, E.-A. (2023). Decolonizing Nature? Worldviews of Agroecological Farmers in Germany to Address the Global Environmental Crisis. In *Degrowth*

*Decolonization and Development* (pp. 115–147). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25945-6_6

Drottberger, A., Melin, M., & Lundgren, L. (2021). Alternative food networks in food system transition—Values, motivation, and capacity building among young swedish market gardeners. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *13*(8). Scopus. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13084502

Duncan, J. (2016). Chapter Five—Governing in a Postpolitical Era: Civil Society Participation for Improved Food Security Governance. In D. Barling (Ed.), *Advances in Food Security and Sustainability* (Vol. 1, pp. 137–161). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.af2s.2016.09.001

Duncan, J., & Claeys, P. (2018). Politicizing food security governance through participation: Opportunities and opposition. *Food Security*, *10*(6), 1411–1424. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-018-0852-x

Duncan, J., DeClerck, F., Báldi, A., Treyer, S., Aschemann-Witzel, J., Cuhls, K., Ahrné, L., Bisoffi, S., Grando, S., Guobys, L., Kohl, J., Hansen, H. O., Hudson, R. L., Lutzeyer, H.-J., Nielsen, V. H., Ruiz, B., Saggau, E., Valceschini, E., Siebielec, G., & Brunori, G. (2022). Democratic directionality for transformative food systems research. *Nature Food*, *3*(3), 183–186. https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-022-00479-x

EATC-N, S. of the C. for E. A. and T. (2021, February 2). *AP 22+: Zurück auf Feld eins*. https://www.parlament.ch/press-releases/Pages/mm-wak-n-2020-02-02.aspx

FAO. (2015). *10 elements | Agroecology Knowledge Hub | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*. http://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/overview10elements/en/

Federal Office. (2021, June 13). *Bundesbeschluss über die Volksinitiative «Für sauberes Trinkwasser und gesunde Nahrung – Keine Subventionen für den Pestizid- und den prophylaktischen Antibiotika-Einsatz»*. https://www.bk.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/rf/cr/2020/20202893.html

Federal Office. (2022, September 25). *Eidgenössische Volksinitiative 'Keine Massentierhaltung in der Schweiz (Massentierhaltungsinitiative)'*. https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/politische-rechte/pore-referenzseite.html

Federal Office. (2024a, August 20). *Eidgenössische Volksinitiative 'Für gentechnikfreie Lebensmittel (Lebensmittelschutz-Initiative)'*. https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/politische-rechte/pore-referenzseite.html

Federal Office. (2024b, September 22). *Eidgenössische Volksinitiative 'Für die Zukunft unserer Natur und Landschaft (Biodiversitätsinitiative)'*. https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/politische-rechte/pore-referenzseite.html

Federal Office. (2024c, September 23). *Eidgenössische Volksinitiative 'Für eine sichere Ernährung – durch Stärkung einer nachhaltigen inländischen Produktion, mehr pflanzliche Lebensmittel und sauberes Trinkwasser (Ernährungsinitiative)'*. https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/politische-rechte/pore-referenzseite.html

Federal Office for Agriculture. (2023). *Klimastrategie Landwirtschaft und Ernährung 2050—Verminderung von Treibhausgasemissionen und Anpassung an die Folgen des Klimawandels für ein nachhaltiges Schweizer Ernährungssystem—1. Teil: Grundsätze, Ziele und Stossrichtungen* (1; Klimastrategie). FOAG. https://www.blw.admin.ch/dam/blw/de/dokumente/Nachhaltige%20Produktion/Umwelt/Klima_neue/klimastrategie_teil1.pdf.download.pdf/KSLE_2050_Teil_1_D.pdf

Federal Office for Agriculture. (2024a, November 13). *Agrarpolitik 2030+*. https://www.blw.admin.ch/de/agrarpolitik-2030

Federal Office for Agriculture. (2024b, November 13). *Langfristige Strategie*. https://www.blw.admin.ch/de/langfristige-strategie

Federal Office for Agriculture, B. für L. (2024c, April 4). *AP30+: Zukünftige Politik für eine nachhaltige Land- und Ernährungswirtschaft*. https://www.blw.admin.ch/blw/de/home/politik/agrarpolitik/agrarpolitik30plus.html

Federal Statistical Office. (2024). *Agricultural areas*. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/content/bfs/en/home/statistics/territory-environment/land-use-cover/agricultural-areas.html

Felcis, E. (2021). *Agroecological practices as sustainable management of common natural resources: The case of latvian permaculture movement*. *36*, 15–20. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.22616/rrd.27.2021.002

FiBL. (2019). *FiBL - Milestones*. https://www.fibl.org/en/about-us/milestones-en

FiBL, F. für biologischen L. (2024, November 1). *Podcast: Volksinitiativen – nützen sie noch oder schaden sie vor allem?* https://www.fibl.org/de/infothek/meldung/podcast-volksinitiativen-nutzen-oder-schaden

Foster, E. A., Kerr, P., & Byrne, C. (2014). Rolling back to roll forward: Depoliticisation and the extension of government. *Policy & Politics*, *42*(2), 225–241. https://doi.org/10.1332/030557312X655945

Frantzeskaki, N., Dumitru, A., Anguelovski, I., Avelino, F., Bach, M., Best, B., Binder, C., Barnes, J., Carrus, G., Egermann, M., Haxeltine, A., Moore, M.-L., Mira, R. G., Loorbach, D., Uzzell, D., Omann, I., Olsson, P., Silvestri, G., Stedman, R., … Rauschmayer, F. (2016). Elucidating the changing roles of civil society in urban sustainability transitions. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *22*, 41–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.04.008

Giraldo, O. F. (2019). *Political Ecology of Agriculture: Agroecology and Post-Development* (1st ed. 2019). Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11824-2

Giraldo, O. F., & Rosset, P. M. (2018). Agroecology as a territory in dispute: Between institutionality and social movements. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *45*(3), 545–564. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1353496

Gliessman, S. (2016). Transforming food systems with agroecology. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, *40*(3), 187–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2015.1130765

González de Molina, M., Petersen, P. F., Garrido Peña, F., & Caporal, F. R. (2020). *Political agroecology: Advancing the transition to sustainable food systems*. CRC Press.

Görg, C., Brand, U., Haberl, H., Hummel, D., Jahn, T., & Liehr, S. (2017). Challenges for Social-Ecological Transformations: Contributions from Social and Political Ecology. *Sustainability*, *9*(7), 1045. https://doi.org/10.3390/su9071045

Hess, S. (2025). *Prioritäre Handlungsbereiche zur Förderung agrarökologischer Praxis in der Schweiz: Analyse und Priorisierung politischer Massnahmen zur Stärkung agrarökologischer Praxisbeispiele im Schweizer Ernährungssystem* [Master Thesis, ETH Zürich]. https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000729724

HLPE. (2019). *Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.*

Ingram, J., & Thornton, P. (2022). What does transforming food systems actually mean? *Nature Food*, *3*(11), 881–882. https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-022-00620-w

Jacobi, J., Villavicencio Valdez, G. V., & Benabderrazik, K. (2021). Towards political ecologies of food. *Nature Food*, *2*(11), 835–837. https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00404-8

Kawulich, B. B. (2005). Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *Vol 6*, Reuse. https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-6.2.466

Kenis, A. (2016). Ecological citizenship and democracy: Communitarian versus agonistic perspectives. *Environmental Politics*, *25*(6), 949–970. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2016.1203524

Kenis, A. (2019). Post-politics contested: Why multiple voices on climate change do not equal politicisation. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, *37*(5), 831–848. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263774X18807209

Kenis, A., & Mathijs, E. (2014a). Climate change and post-politics: Repoliticizing the present by imagining the future? *Geoforum*, *52*, 148–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.01.009

Kenis, A., & Mathijs, E. (2014b). (De)politicising the local: The case of the Transition Towns movement in Flanders (Belgium). *Journal of Rural Studies*, *34*, 172–183. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.01.013

Knutsson, B., & Lindberg, J. (2020). Depoliticisation and dissensus in the global partnership for education: Rethinking the post-political condition. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, *23*(2), 436–461. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0141-5

Kummer, C. (2021). *Agrarökologie in der Schweiz – Erfassen der Verständnisse und politischer Handlungsnotwendigkeiten.* https://digitalcollection.zhaw.ch/bitstream/11475/24101/1/2021_Kummer_Carmen_MA_ENR.pdf

Kummer, C., & Jacobi, J. (2023). Ein Leitbild der Transformation—Agrarökologie in der Schweiz. *Ökologie & Landbau*, *1*. https://digitalcollection.zhaw.ch/handle/11475/26722

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics* (2. ed). Verso.

Lehner, I. (2023). *From the ground up: Exploring the potential role of citizens' assemblies in radical food-system transformation: a Swiss case study* [Application/pdf]. 200 p. https://doi.org/10.3929/ETHZ-B-000631820

Lehner, I., Amos, S., Mathys, P., & Jacobi, J. (2025). From the ground up: Exploring the potential contribution of citizens' assemblies in radical food-system transformation. *Journal of Political Ecology*, *32*(1). https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.5842

Maeseele, P. (2015). *Beyond the post-political zeitgeist* (pp. 429–443).

McCarthy, J. (2013). We Have Never been "Post-political". *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, *24*(1), 19–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2012.759251

Meadows, D. (1997). Places to Intervene in a System. *Whole Earth*, *91*(1), 78–84.

Meyer, J. M. (2020). The politics of the "post-political" contesting the diagnosis. *Democratization*, *27*(3), 408–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1676737

Migliorini, P., Gkisakis, V., Gonzalvez, V., Raigón, M. D., & Bàrberi, P. (2018). Agroecology in Mediterranean Europe: Genesis, State and Perspectives. *Sustainability*, *10*(8), 2724. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10082724

Migliorini, P., & Wezel, A. (2017). Converging and diverging principles and practices of organic agriculture regulations and agroecology. A review. *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*, *37*(6), 63. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13593-017-0472-4

Mocca, E., & Osborne, S. (2019). "Solidarity is our weapon": Social Mobilisation in Scotland in the Contest of the Post-Political Condition. *Antipode*, *51*(2), 620–641. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12466

Moreno Cely, A., Cuajera-Nahui ,Dario, Escobar-Vasquez ,Cesar Gabriel, Torrico-Vallejos ,Domingo, Aranibar ,Josue, Mendieta-Perez ,Reynaldo, & and Tapia-Ponce, N. (2023). Transforming higher education in Bolivia by linking two contra-hegemonic movements: Agroecology and the Decolonial turn. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *36*(7), 1386–1403. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2021.1930259

Moudrý, J., Bernas, J., Moudrý, J., Konvalina, P., Ujj, A., Manolov, I., Stoeva, A., Rembiałkowska, E., Stalenga, J., Toncea, I., Fitiu, A., Bucur, D., Lacko-Bartošová, M., & Macák, M. (2018). Agroecology Development in Eastern Europe—Cases in Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. *Sustainability*, *10*(5), 1311. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10051311

Mouffe, C. (1997). *The return of the political* (2. impr). Verso.

Mouffe, C. (Ed.). (1999). *The challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1. publ). Verso.

Mouffe, C. (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. Verso. https://books.google.nl/books?id=5rwu0FA9aO4C

Mouffe, C. (2002). Politics and Passions. *Ethical Perspectives*, *7*(2).

Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the Political* (Issue 4). Routledge.

Mouffe, C. (2018). *For a left populism*. Verso Books.

MTI. (2022). *Unterstützende Organisationen*. Initiative gegen Massentierhaltung. https://massentierhaltung.ch/unterstuetzende/organisationen/

Nyéléni. (2015). Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, Nyéléni, Mali: 27 February 2015. *Development*, *58*(2–3), 163–168. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-016-0014-4

Patel, R. (2024). *Seeds of Sovereignty: Contesting the Politics of Food* (pp. 22–29). Alameda Institute. https://alameda.institute/publishing/dossier-food-sovereignty/

Pfammatter, P., & Jongerden, J. (2023). Beyond farming women: Queering gender, work and family farms. *Agriculture and Human Values*, *40*(4), 1639–1651. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-023-10449-z

Popławska, M. (2020). Towards producer-consumer cooperation: Collective learning in alternative food networks as a food sovereignty practice. *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, *38*(4), 49–73. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.14746/prt2020.4.3

Raffle, A. E., & Carey, J. (2018). Grassroots activism, agroecology, and the food and farming movement: Ten years in Bristol's food story. In *Routledge Handbook of Landscape and Food* (pp. 500–513). Scopus. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315647692-34

Rancière, J. (1992). Politics, Identification, and Subjectivizatio. In *The identity in question* (pp. 58–64). October.

Rancière, J. (1998). *Disagreement: Politics and philosophy*. Minneapolis (Minn.) : University of Minnesota press. http://lib.ugent.be/catalog/rug01:000690495

Rancière, J. (2010). *Dissensus: On politics and aesthetics*. Continuum.

Rat für Ernährung. (2025). *Rat für Ernährung*. aufgedeckt. https://www.aufgedeckt.net

Rosenthal, I. (2018). Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair: Bonnie Honig Fordham University Press, New York, 2017, xiii+144pp., ISBN: 978-0-8232-7641-7. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *17*(S4), 205–208. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-017-0149-4

Rosset, P., & Altieri, M. (2017). *Agroecology: Science and politics*. Fernwood Publishing ; Practical Action Publishing.

Sarabia, N., Peris, J., & Segura, S. (2021). Transition to agri-food sustainability, assessing accelerators and triggers for transformation: Case study in Valencia, Spain. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *325*. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.129228

Scoones, I. (2015). *The Politics of Green Transformations* (M. Leach & P. Newell, Eds.). Taylor & Francis.

Seremesic, S., Jovović, Z., Jug, D., Djikic, M., Dolijanović, Ž., Bavec, F., Jordanovska, S., Bavec, M., Đurđević, B., & Jug, I. (2021). Agroecology in the West Balkans: Pathway of development and future perspectives. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, *45*(8), 1213–1245. https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2021.1913464

Shiva, V. (2016). *Who really feeds the world? The failures of agribusiness and the promise of agroecology*. North Atlantic Books.

Sievers-Glotzbach, S., & Tschersich, J. (2019). Overcoming the process-structure divide in conceptions of Social-Ecological Transformation: Assessing the transformative character and impact of change processes. *Ecological Economics*, *164*, 106361. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2019.106361

SRF. (2024, February 27). *Bauernproteste in der Schweiz—Darin unterscheiden sich die Proteste in der Schweiz und der EU*. Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF). https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/bauernproteste-in-der-schweiz-darin-unterscheiden-sich-die-proteste-in-der-schweiz-und-der-eu

Stassart, P. M., Crivits, M., Hermesse, J., Tessier, L., Van Damme, J., & Dessein, J. (2018). The Generative Potential of Tensions within Belgian Agroecology. *Sustainability*, *10*(6), 2094. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10062094

Swyngedouw, E. (2010a). Apocalypse Forever? *Theory, Culture & Society*, *27*(2–3), 213–232. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409358728

Swyngedouw, E. (2010b). Impossible Sustainability and the Post-political Condition. In M. Cerreta, G. Concilio, & V. Monno (Eds.), *Making Strategies in Spatial Planning* (pp. 185–205). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-3106-8_11

Syngenta, & Bayer. (n.d.). *Agrarökologie*. Swiss Food. Retrieved 28 November 2024, from https://swiss-food.ch/glossar/agraroekologie

Tarazona Vento, A. (2025). Megaprojects in austerity times: Populism, politicisation, and the breaking of the neoliberal consensus. *Urban Studies*, *62*(1), 92–108. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980241246704

Teuber, R. (2023). *Mapping agroecology in Switzerland* [ETH Zürich]. https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/handle/20.500.11850/654930

Tittonell, P., El Mujtar, V., Felix, G., Kebede, Y., Laborda, L., Luján Soto, R., & De Vente, J. (2022). Regenerative agriculture—Agroecology without politics? *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, *6*, 844261. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.844261

Trevilla Espinal, D. L., Soto Pinto ,María Lorena, Morales ,Helda, & and Estrada-Lugo, E. I. J. (2021). Feminist agroecology: Analyzing power relationships in food systems. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, *45*(7), 1029–1049. https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2021.1888842

Triaca, L. (2024, August 17). Gülle vor Geld: Die Allianz zwischen Bauern und Wirtschaft steht auf der Kippe. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/guelle-vor-geld-die-allianz-zwischen-bauern-und-wirtschaft-steht-auf-der-kippe-ld.1843982

Tschersich, J., & Kok, K. P. W. (2022). Deepening democracy for the governance toward just transitions in agri-food systems. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, *43*, 358–374. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2022.04.012

Tschersich, J., Sievers-Glotzbach, S., Gmeiner, N., & Kliem, L. (2023). The transformative potential of Seed Commons: Applying the social-ecological transformation framework to agri-food systems. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *97*, 290–302. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.12.005

Uniterre. (2024). *Uniterre—Über uns*. Uniterre. https://uniterre.ch/de/ueber-uns/

UVO, & FiBL. (n.d.). *Aufgedeckt*. aufgedeckt. Retrieved 14 February 2025, from https://www.aufgedeckt.net

Vaderna, C., Home, R., Migliorini, P., & Roep, D. (2022). Overcoming divergence: Managing expectations from organisers and members in community supported agriculture in Switzerland. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *9*(1), 105. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01115-6

Van der Ploeg, J. D. (2020). Farmers' upheaval, climate crisis and populism. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *47*(3), 589–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1725490

Van Der Ploeg, J. D. (2021). The political economy of agroecology. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *48*(2), 274–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1725489

Van Dyck, B., Tornaghi, C., Halder, S., von der Haide, E., & Saunders, E. (2018). The making of a strategizing platform: From politicizing the food movement in urban contexts to political urban agroecology. In *Urban Gardening as Politics* (pp. 167–185). Scopus. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315210889-17

Varvarousis, A., Asara, V., & Akbulut, B. (2021). Commons: A social outcome of the movement of the squares. *Social Movement Studies*, *20*(3), 292–311. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2020.1793753

Vincent, O., & Feola, G. (2020). A framework for recognizing diversity beyond capitalism in agri-food systems. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *80*, 302–313. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.10.002

VKMB. (2025, April 2). *Kleinbauern-Vereinigung: Bauern- und Konsumentenorganisation › Kleinbauern.ch*. https://www.kleinbauern.ch

Walker, B., Holling, C. S., Carpenter, S. R., & Kinzig, A. (2004). Resilience, Adaptability and Transformability in Social–ecological Systems. *Ecology and Society*, *9*(2). JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.wur.nl/stable/26267673

Wezel, A., & Bellon, S. (2018). Mapping agroecology in Europe. New developments and applications. *Sustainability*, *10*(8), 2751.

Wezel, A., Bellon, S., Doré, T., Francis, C., Vallod, D., & David, C. (2009). Agroecology as a science, a movement and a practice. A review. *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*, *29*(4), 503–515. https://doi.org/10.1051/agro/2009004

Wezel, A., Goette, J., Lagneaux, E., Passuello, G., Reisman, E., Rodier, C., & Turpin, G. (2018). Agroecology in Europe: Research, Education, Collective Action Networks, and Alternative Food Systems. *Sustainability*, *10*(4), 1214. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10041214

Winistörfer, K. (2001). *Mina Hofstetters viehloser biologischer Landbau (1915–1950) | infoclio.ch*. https://www.infoclio.ch/de/mina-hofstetters-viehloser-biologischer-landbau-1915%E2%80%931950

Wittmayer, J. M., Backhaus, J., Avelino, F., Pel, B., Strasser, T., Kunze, I., & Zuijderwijk, L. (2019). Narratives of change: How social innovation initiatives construct societal transformation. *Futures*, *112*, 102433. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2019.06.005

Žižek, S. (1999). *The ticklish subject: The absent centre of political ontology*. Verso.

# 9 Appendix

## 9.1 Table of the events attended during the Days of Agroecology 2024

*Table 5: Overview of events attended and included in the data set on the TDA*

| N° | Date | Format | Event style | Title/Topic (translated from original language to English) | Organisers | Main actors involved/attending |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3.10.2024 | online | Conference | Agroecology Science Days | UNIL | Academia, administration, policy makers |
| 2 | 3.10.2024 | online | Webinar | Food Future: Climate-Neutral Agriculture Grisons | Flury & Giuliani GmbH, Klimaneutrale Landwirtschaft GR | Consultancy company, practitioner |
| 3 | 6.10.2024 | on-field | Farm visit and presentation | Agrarological Revolution in Cuba | Cuba Solidarität Vilma Espin Zürich-Ostschweiz und Snack de Heck | Civil society, practitoner |
| 4 | 7.10.2024 | on-field | Reading circle | Decolonial feminist perspectives on Agroecology | SAE Greenhouse Lab und arvae Kollektiv | Academia, arts, civil society |
| 5 | 8.10.2024 | on-field | Conference | Social Sustainability in the Swiss Agriculture and Food Industry | Verein Qualitätsstrategie | Academia, representatives of the agri-food industry |
| 6 | 8.10.2024 | online | Webinar | Agroecology and the Transistion to Sustainable Food Systems | World Food System Centre ETH Zürich | Academia |
| 7 | 11.10.2024 | on-field | Farm visit and workshop | 2 farms & 27 years of practice: How can agroecology work? | Farngut und Gerbehof | Practitioner, civil society |
| 8 | 15.10.2024 | online | Webinar | Policy Perspective on Agroecological Transformation | World Food System Centre ETH Zürich | Academia |
| 9 | 16.10.2024 | on-field | Conference | Power and market - Who decides on our food? | Agrarinfo, SIWSSAID, HEKS, Uniterre | Academia, representatives of the agri-food industry, NGOs, |
| 10 | 17.10.2024 | on-field | Exhibition and presentation | Exhibition "Diversity instead of genetic engineering" and presentation of the food protection referendum | Schweizer Allianz Gentechfrei | NGOs, civil society |
| 11 | 21.10.2024 | online | Webinar | Regional supply from the field | SVIAL-My Agro Food Network und Dirnln am Feld | NGOs, consultancy/extension service |
| 12 | 22.10.2023 | online | Webinar | Agroecology as a Tool for Food System Transformation | World Food System Centre ETH Zürich | Academia |
| 13 | 22.10.2024 | on-field | Farm visit | Experience permaculture (in agriculture) | INFORAMA, Birchhof | Civil society, practitioner |
| 14 | 23.10.2024 | online | Webinar | Research for agroecology - focus agroforestry | HAFL und terre des hommes schweiz | academia, NGO |
| 15 | 23.10.2024 | on-field | Presentations | More peas, beans and co.! The potential of grain legumes for the Swiss agricultural and food system | gzpk, Critical Scientists Switzerland, UNIL | academia, NGO |
| 16 | 24.10.2024 | on-field | Workshop | Innovation Group Future-Oriented Agriculture | Swiss Food Research | NGO, academia |
| 17 | 26.10.2024 | on-field | Fundraiser event | Something good grows - How healthy value creation systems thrive | Biovision | NGO, civil society |
| 18 | 29.10.2024 | on-field | Conference | AP 2030+: What future for the Swiss food system? | Pro Natura | NGO, administration, policy makers |
| 19 | 30.10.2024 | on-field | Workshop | Closing event: What does the future taste like? - A visionary table talk | Agroecology works!, Biovision | NGO, civil society, practitioner |

## 9.2 Overview of literature on agroecological social movements

*Table 6: Literature overview of empirical research on agroecological social movements in Europe*

| | Authors | Year | Title | Context | Concepts | Research design | Sourcing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Brumer et al. | 2023 | Development of agroecology in Austria and Germany | Germany and Austria | Living Labs, citizen-led Food Councils | Key informant interviews of different dimensions of agroecology | Scopus search |
| **2** | Anderson et al. | 2022 | Transformative agroecology learning in Europe: Building consciousness, skills and collective capacity for food sovereignty | Europe | N.A. | Interviews with initiatives that are directly linked to policial movements for food sovereignty and agroecology | Scopus search |
| **3** | Sarabia et al. | 2021 | Transition to agri-food sustainability, assessing accelerators and triggers for transformation: Case study in Valencia, Spain | Spain (city-region Valencia) | Time banks, social currency initiatives, participatory guarantee systems, organic cooperative supermarkets, | Document analysis, literature review, semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. | Scopus search |
| **4** | Drottberger et al. | 2021 | Alternative food networks in food system transition—values, motivation, and capacity building among young swedish market gardeners | Sweden | Market gardening "movement", AFN | In-depth interviews | Scopus search |
| **5** | Felcis | 2021 | Agroecological practices as sustainable management of common natural resources: The case of latvian permaculture movement | Latvia | Permaculture | Historical anaylsis | Scopus search |
| **6** | Popławska | 2020 | Towards producer-consumer cooperation: Collective learning in alternative food networks as a food sovereignty practice | Poland | Cooperatives, AFN | Theoretical analysis | Scopus search |
| **7** | Raffle and Carey | 2018 | Grassroots activism, agroecology, and the food and farming movement: Ten years in Bristol's food story | UK (city-region Bristol) | Transition town | Historical anaylsis | Scopus search |
| **8** | Di Masso and Zografos | 2015 | Constructing food sovereignty in Catalonia: different narratives for transformative action | Catalonia (Spain) | Agroecology movement | Q methodology, interviews | Scopus search |
| **9** | Montesinos and Pérez | 2015 | Rurality of 15-M. Initiatives from the Alicante agroecology movement | Spain | Agroecology movement | Historical anaylsis | Scopus search |
| **10** | Bossard | 2024 | Praxisbeispiele und Narrative des Wandels für eine transformative Schweizer Agrarökologie | Switzerland | Agroecology movement | Document analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. | Snowballing |
| **11** | Moudry et al. | 2016 | Agroecology development in eastern europe - cases in Czech Republich, Bulgaria, Hungars, Poland, Romana and Slovakia | Czech Republich, Bulgaria, Hungars, Poland, Romana and Slovakia | N.A. | Historical anaylsis | Snowballing |
| **12** | Seremesic et al. | 2021 | Agroecology in the West Balkans  pathway of development and future perspectives | Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia | N.A. | Historical anaylsis | Snowballing |
| **13** | van Dyck et al | 2019 | The making of a strategizing platform: From politicizing the food movement in urban contexts to political urban agroecology | UK, Belgium, Germany | N.A. | Autho-ethnography | Scopus search |
| **14** | Stassart et al. | 2018 | The Generative Potential of Tensions within Belgian Agroecology | Belgium | Agroecology movement | participatory observation, secondary data, and semi-structured interviews | Snowballing |
| **15** | Balogh | 2020 | Mapping agroecology in Hungary | Hungary | N.A. | grey literature, interviews | Snowballing |
| **16** | Migliorini et al. | 2018 | Agroecology in Mediterranean Europe: Genesis, State and Perspectives | Italy, Greece, Spain | N.A. | grey literature, interviews | Snowballing |

## 9.3 Observation Guide

**1. Context**:

- Situation description: what is going on?
- Presentation/moderated workshop/group setting in breaks/1:1 moments
  - Who is in front of me? In what social surrounding is the data produced? What is the group dynamic like? How is the group moderated?
- What persons speak? Age, gender, position, function, representation?
- Who is listening? Does it maybe affect what the person(s) dares to say?

- What constitutes the identity of the person(s)?
  - Do they identify with being an "agroecologist"?
  - What believes or values drives the person, brings them to this event?
- What constitutes the identity of the group?
  - Is there a common ground, a directionality?

**2. Content:** *2.1 Criteria of a political discourse:*

In relation to the situation
- State one's own positionality
- Advocate for worldview or vision
- Adress what remained unaddressed so far / point at the "elephant-in-the-room"
- Address underlying problem

In relation to others
- Opposing opinions of others
- Reframe comment of others
- Speak out feelings – make something personal
- Framing issues of inequality from an intersectional perspective
- Create polarization between good and bad (naming and shaming, address a "other side")

*Criteria for a politicised agroecology:*
- Overcoming economic reductionism
- Addressing issues around ecological injustice, agroecology as a means to:
  - mediate between human and more-than-human perspectives and establish ecological balance, finding harmony and interconnectedness
  - ecological reparation: re-generate / improve soil, water, agro-biodiversity
- Addressing issues of colonization:
  - issues of epistemic injustice, white saviourism
  - unjust market and trade relations between the GN and GS
- Addressing issues of power asymmetries

*2.2 Criteria of an apolitical discourse:*

In relation to the situation
- No space for pluralist perspectives

In relation to others:
- neutralize opposing standpoints and pretend to have the same opinions and hence consensus

*Criteria for a de-politized agroecology:*
- framing Agroecology only as technological approaches to ("the") sustainability problems
- allowing only for scientific evidence and expert knowledge to be a source for informed decision-making
  - framing opinions and ideologies as problematic in decision making
-

- o in the value chain
- o in (participative) political processes
- Addressing unequal gender relations
  - o Gender equality in agriculture (recognition, care work, social security)
  - o Stereotypes of work distribution

### 3. Political effectiveness

-
-

--> if not obvious, do actors feel like their work is political in some sense?

--> when did actors felt success or failure in regards to their (political) work? With what do they relate their success or failure?

## 9.4 Codebook

| | Code | Comment |
|---|---|---|
| **Inductive codes** | Inductive Codes: Agroecology | Is coded for when agroecology is explicitly mentioned |
| | Inductive Codes: Anomaly | Is applied to a quotation when situations fall out the theoretical framework and provoke or imply changes to and reflection on the theory |
| | Inductive Codes: Conflict mitigation | Is coded when in the same quotation the intention to balance the implication of a problematic situation becomes visible |
| | Inductive Codes: Conflicts of objectives | ; Political tensions of different pathways is made visible and framed as conflictual |
| | Inductive Codes: Consumer responsibility | Is coded for when the responsibility is put on the consumer, through market relations |
| | Inductive Codes: Counternarratives | Is coded for agroecological initiatives' and actors' political (counter)narratives that they see within the agroecological movement |
| | Inductive Codes: Days of Agroecology | When the days of agroecology are mentioned |
| | Inductive Codes: Education and media | Codes for the advocacy of actors to educate citizens, consumers, practitioners about food system related connections and socio-ecological implications |
| | Inductive Codes: Food system transformation framework | Code is applied to quotations when the holistic management of the food system is advocated for |
| | Inductive Codes: Limitations of and criticism on agroecology | Is coded for agroecological initiatives' and actors' criticism on the current situation or orientation of the agroecological movement or the understanding of agroecology |
| | Inductive Codes: Long term vs. short term | Quotation is indicating differences when different time frames are taken into account |
| | Inductive Codes: Movement building | Is coded for when social networks around a defined cause form |
| | Inductive Codes: Movement diversity | Is coded for situations in the data when the heterogeneity of agroecological actors' values and visions surface |
| | Inductive Codes: Opportunities and new ways forward within agroecology | Is coded when strategies, necessities for political agroecology to develop further are pointed out |
| | Inductive Codes: Problem representation | Quotations where problems are presented, but not explained why they are problematic |
| | Inductive Codes: Relationship Agriculture-Society | shows moments in which the relationship between food production and society are subject of discussion |
| | Inductive Codes: Responsibility diffusion | In the quotation it becomes unclear what actor is eventually responsible and therefore responsibility is "in-between" and unattributed |
| | Inductive Codes: Responsibility individual | Quotation shows how responsibility is attributed to individuals such as farmers, consumers and citizens. |
| | Inductive Codes: Responsibility structural-politics | Quotation shows how responsibility is attributed to public institutions in changing structural restraints for food system change |
| | Inductive Codes: Shocks, crisis and turning points | Is coded for when the influence of shocks and crises are mentioned |
| **Charactersation of the Political** | Political_Debate and democracy: Contestation of power structures/distribution | The political manifests by social actors contestations of power structures and distribution, e .g. in the way how laws are made or economic relations regulated |
| | Political_Debate and democracy: Dissent, conflict and antagonism | The political manifests by obvious disagreement, agonistic conflictual encounters and antagonisms between social actors or the dissent with the legal and economic framework, e.g. |
| | Political_Debate and democracy: Foregrounding of inequalities | The political manifests by social actors efforts to foreground inequalities |
| | Political_Debate and democracy: Ontological problematisation | The political manifests by social actors problematisation of issues on the foundational level of social and economic relations |
| | Political_Debate and democracy: Pluralism | The political manifests by co-existing value systems that do not align and can not find a common ground |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Level, spaces, actors, processes of politics** | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: Administration | (De-)Politicisation happening by the involvement of the governmental ministries |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: Civil society | Is coded for civil society stakeholders participation |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: Industry | Is coded for industry stakeholders participation, or their representation |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: National level | (De-)Politicisation happening in national level politics |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: NGO | Is coded for NGO stakeholders participation |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: Participatory spaces | (De-)Politicisation happening in participatory governance spaces |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: Policy makers and politicians | Is coded for agricultural policy makers and politicians |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: Practitioner | Is coded for agricultural practitioner participation |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: Science and universities | Is coded for scientific and university stakeholders participation |
| | Politics_level_spaces_actors_processes: Social movements | (De-/Re-)Politicisation happening by social movements |
| **SRQ1_Post-political characterisation** | | |
| | SRQ1_Post-political characterisation: Consensuality and neutrality | ; Relentless search for a universal consensus through rational deliberation  ; Representations of "the norm" and "the universal desirable" and making of extremists who would not believe in this through moralisation   ; Unquestioned problem representations  ; Creation of a consensual "we" |
| | SRQ1_Post-political characterisation: Neoliberal-lock in | ; Presenting neoliberalism as the only and inevitable way to organise the social and economic life  ; Concealing the structural inequalities and constraints that emerge from neoliberal-capitalism.  ; Capitalist realism |
| | SRQ1_Post-political characterisation: Technocratic governance | ; Political questions are addressed as technical issues  ; Experts are legitimised and prioritised  ; Governance by indicators |
| **SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology** | Code Category | This code category presents codes which reflect the political in agroecology and therefore picture the contrasting vision of agroecology against the industrial food system    --> with these codes I capture unique politicisations of agroecology |
| | SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology: access to land | ; access to land for small-scale farmers and community-farming is guaranteed  (Nyéléni, 2015) |
| | SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology: autonomy | ; seed sovereignty  ;low dependency on external inputs  (Nyéléni, 2015) |
| | SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology: Ind_integration of marginalised groups and care for people in agriculture | Campe up inductively, codes for the care of marginalised groups such as migrant workers, exploited practitioners, or the people working on farms in general |
| | SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology: knowledge production and sharing | ;research agendas are democratically developed  ;creation, sharing and keeping of knowledge by agroecologists  (Nyéléni, 2015) |
| | SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology: local economies | ;decentral organisation of food supply chains  ;food system circularity  ;solidary economic relationships   (Nyéléni, 2015) |
| | SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology: more-than-human world | ;stewardship for mother earth  ;rejection of commodification of all forms of life  (Nyéléni, 2015)  ;recognition of interconnectedness of biological systems |
| | SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology: recognition of gendered roles and reproductive work | ;for Agroecology to achieve its full potential, there must be equal distribution of power, tasks, decision-making and remuneration  (Nyéléni, 2015) |
| | SRQ2_Political Agroecology_politicising through agroecology: small-scale farming and peasant livelihood | ;such structures are supported and not deemed secondary to economy-of-scale   (Nyéléni, 2015) |
| es of de- | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Academic and NGO involvement | ;de-politicisation of the AESM by the leading role of academia and NGOs in representing agroecology ;the definition and practice of agroecology being taken over by NGO and science actors in the global north ;role of AESM in the global north ;internal tension of this thesis |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Floating signifier | ; The use of concepts that make mobilising support around easy as they are seemingly non-rejectable; increasing wellbeing, sustainability, effectiveness or efficiency (Knutson and Lindberg, 2018) |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Ind_Economic reductionism | Is coded when statements reduce complex social relations and problems to mere market economic issues |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Ind_individualising responsibility | Is coded when responsibility it put on the subject/individual instead of adressing the structural causes politically |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Ind_Junk Agroecology | Is coded when agroecology is de-politicised/co-opted (Alonso-Fradejas, 2020) |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Ind_Non-positioning and obscuring the field of conflict | The actors position is not tangible and varies between statements, which prevents a field of conflict to emerge, as the actors are everywhere and nowhere at the same time |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Ind_Positivity | Is coded when a strong focus on opportunities, solutions, utopias, positive aspects of the problem, is obscuring the conflictuality of the underlying problem and hence covering up the necessary conflict for transformation |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Ind_Technocratisation | Is coded when solutions to social problems are approached based on heavy involvement of scientific quantification (monitoring, measuring, indicators) or technological solutions |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Ind_Technofix | Is coded for when (complex) problems are reduced to technical issues which don't require structural change |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Manufacturing a "we" | ; Strategies, processes and organisational structures that are built on the idea that consensus can be reached among its heterogenous partners ; Obligatory codes of conducts that partners/stakeholders must ascribe to, subjectification of actors as contracting partners obfuscates the political nature and the power asymmetries between different stakeholders ; The use of elastic language to downplay controversies and creating a sense of we ; The belief in the possibility of rational solutions that can favour all concerned parties (Knutson and Lindberg, 2018) |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Moralisation | There is a shift from a political to a moral discourse (right or wrong) in which the political gets lost as opponents are de-legitimised of their position |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Scientisation | ; authorities discursively transform political problems into matters of scientific 'evidence' : administrations view themselves as a body that adapts continuously to scientific evidence and hence apply more and more a technocratic governance approach ; actors outsource decisions to an external and supposedly neutral authority (Knutson and Lindberg, 2018) |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Social movement_dismiss political nature of knowledge | The standpoint and management of a social movement regarding scientific evidence and knowledge production is a crucial factor of its politicising footprint. When an initiative claims to uphold objective truth through scientifically derived knowledge and therefore presents their position unnegotiable, the political dimension of the issue is eluded. By closing off plurality of different epistemologies, the legitimacy of the opponent is undermined. (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021) |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Social movement_perpetuate neoliberal lock-in | It is important to understand, whether a social movement strategically aims to work under or against the neoliberal hegemony in the food system which perpetuates an industrial-capital driven logic to it. If actors deliberately support neoliberal policy (e.g. privatisation, market liberalism, state hands-off, individual responsibility) or the further capitalisation and financialization of the food system, the researched initiative might be de-politicising by not questioning the hegemonic consensus around these policies. (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Social movement_project universality | When movements rhetorically make use of an "all-inclusive we" through campaigning for the survival of the "whole human species" they project their demand to be representative to all. This draws on a consensual notion of what should be perceived as common sense, which constitutes a post-political situation. (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021) |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Social movement_simulative-prefigurative politics | Prefigurative politics refers to a collective performance of new social practices, subjectivities and socio-ecological relations (Blühdorn and Deflorian, 2014). While they can be powerful tools to politicise a cause and show that alternative realities are possible, they can also tilt over to the simulation of an alternative reality, that represents a retreat into everyday practices and personal life worlds, instead of politically opposing structural inequalities. (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021) |
| SRQ2_Processes of de-politicisation: Strategic avoidance | ; Safeguard the fragile consensus of a share "we" by avoiding, tip toeing around or leaving certain positions, issues, topics ; Takes place when it is not possible to reach a consensus through rational deliberation (Knutson and Lindberg, 2018) |

**SRQ2_Processes of re-politicisation**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| SRQ2_Processes of re-politicisation: Addressing the (ultimate) cause | By answering the question why societies have evolved in a way that the foods system has the respective socio-ecological consequences in order to function, the problem is addressed on a systemic level making it possible to problematize the core issue e.g. the capitalist organization of society, patriarchy, colonialism itself. |
| SRQ2_Processes of re-politicisation: Broadening the frame of dispute | broadening the frame of dispute and negotiation by questioning established consensus e.g. to "fight against $CO_2$". A social movement can target such consensus by creating awareness around connect issues e.g. of land grabs, corporate control, carbon trading or neo-colonialism through political action and hence stress the inclusion of these issues in the debate. |
| SRQ2_Processes of re-politicisation: Create nodal points and interact through solidarity | Through broadening the frame of dispute a social movement creates opportunities for nodal points to emerge. In this emergence of collective struggle lies the possibility of further foregrounding the ontological dimension of the problem at stake and gain a broader impact and louder voice. |
| SRQ2_Processes of re-politicisation: Create self-legitimacy and visibility | Claiming of power and enhanced recognition of the many unheard social groups such as women, LGBTQIA+ people or migrants working in the agri-food system, or affected Indigenous people and people from the Global South. Next to publicly claiming legitimacy and representing groups who are most-affected through the issue of negotiation, this further challenges the perception of (direct-democracy) politics, as space of representation and progress. |
| SRQ2_Processes of re-politicisation: Foreground difference and define adversaries | To cut through the eradication of difference and showing the heterogeneity of actors, leads to a definition of adversaries, a us/them distinction, and hence a conflictual revivification of the political. |
| SRQ2_Processes of re-politicisation: Ind_Prefiguration | Is coded when practises embody the dissent against the current organisation of social structures in enacting and materialising an equitable, ecological and solidary alternative and diffusing these into the broader cultural and institutional landscape |

## 9.5  Use of AI

For the writing of this thesis, I did not use any generative AI. However, for the transcription of recordings made during interviews and the events attended I used multiple AI powered tools since manual transcription of the data would have been impossible in the given timeframe of this thesis. For the transcription from Swiss German and German the tool of Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz (https://stt4sg.fhnw.ch/) was used. For transcription from English to text, I used Otter (https://otter.ai/) and Transcri (https://transcri.io/en). Especially the transcription from Swiss German to text was partly incorrect. For quotations that were coded, the transcript was corrected according to the audio.