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Systematic Review

Systematic Literature Review on Forms of Communitization That Feature Alternative Nutritional Practices

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Abstract

This article provides a systematic literature review of the scientific literature on forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices to reveal their organizational structures, opportunities, challenges, and transformative potential. The forms studied are alternative food networks and are characterized by their sustainable commitment in food production, distribution, and consumption practices. This review focused solely on articles investigating these forms of communitization in Germany. A systematic literature search was conducted using the databases Web of Science and Business Source Premier in accordance with the PRISMA statement guidelines. Forty-two articles were included in the final analysis, with the oldest article published in 2006 and the newest in 2025. The systematic literature review identifies five forms of communitization with alternative nutritional practices: community, urban and self-harvest gardens; food cooperatives or cooperative initiatives; food sharing and redistribution initiatives; community-supported agriculture and networks; and ecovillages, commune, food initiatives, and other partnerships. The review highlights key forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices, the methods used, and the geographical areas involved. Using content analysis, the organizational structures, opportunities, and challenges of various forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices are identified and their transformative potential discussed.

Keywords: communitization; alternative food network; nutritional practices; organization; transformative potential; systematic literature review

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1. Introduction

Everyday life is significantly influenced by different consumption practices, particularly those related to food. These practices affect future consumption possibilities and, when considered collectively, become an important aspect of society, especially when they result in environmental harm and exceed planetary limits [1]. Hence, a comprehensive transformation towards more sustainable consumption is needed.

Social-ecological transformation must be viewed as a process of social change connected to the objectives and interests of different social actors, and its direction is continually debated [2]. As Sommer and Schad [3] stated, these are transformation conflicts "that arise from specific guiding principles or imaginations and the practical implementation of a socio-ecological transformation towards greater ecological sustainability" [3] (p. 455). As a result, social-ecological transformations are complex processes of social change that lack simplicity [4]. This occurs because social-ecological changes, like those related to food

consumption, happen within a society where individuals and institutions have different levels of willingness and capacity for change, along with specific characteristics that need to be considered [5]. This creates a knowledge issue about how existing and habitual social structures and practices, which cannot be changed in a linear fashion, can be altered [6]. A suggested approach includes making small steps towards transformation and establishing evolutionary niches, meaning areas for and support of deviations [6].

Contemporary society and its eating habits are, on one side, in a fragile and vulnerable state where expectations of actions, concepts, organizations, and frameworks prompt constant adaptations. Nutritional structures and practices, conversely, tend to be quite stable and resilient. In public discussions, these opposing viewpoints clash, and this clash is referred to as a crisis in food systems [7], emphasizing the unsustainability of nutrition and concentrating on aspects of ecology, economy, social health, and animal welfare.

The future of nutrition is primarily influenced by its viability, which refers to adopting a more sustainable diet [8], requiring a shift in the food systems [9]. Options, as well as solutions, are observed in forms of communitization throughout the whole food value chain, from production to consumption, e.g., solidarity-driven agriculture, eco-villages, food cooperatives, and food sharing initiatives. These alternatives are likely referred to as social innovations in sustainable consumption. They possess the capability to excel in the evolutionary process of innovation, which includes variation, selection, and re-stabilization, thereby facilitating the development of more sustainable food system frameworks [10,11].

In discussions surrounding food and nutrition, it is mainly alternative food networks (AFNs) that are highlighted for their alternative nature and transformative potential [12,13], as they seem capable of addressing the increasing geographical, cognitive, and social gaps between food production and consumption. The word alternative food network (AFN) denotes practices "that emerged in the 1990s as a reaction against the standardization, globalization, and unethical nature of the industrial food system" [14] (p. 2). AFNs are defined by their local focus, involving production, processing, retailing, and consumption taking place within a specific geographic area. They focus on ecological sustainability, evident in the utilization of alternative distribution channels and reduced distances between producers and consumers. Social justice is mentioned as another important aspect [13,15,16]. Finally, it is asserted that AFN's business models prioritize the economic viability of the participants and are sustainable, decentralized, self-sufficient, and community-oriented [17,18].

AFNs address the shortcomings of the globalized, industrial food system and aim to enhance closeness and transparency between individuals and their food. Goodman et al. [15] state that AFNs have established new alternative economic and social environments for food production and exchange, characterized by unique qualities like organic, local, fair trade, and sustainability. These products are distinct from those offered by the traditional food supply chain [15]. Different forms of AFNs include community-supported agriculture (CSA), community gardens, food cooperatives, or food community networks [13,15]. Rosol [19] identified three pillars of alterity in AFNs: alternative nutrition, alternative networks, and alternative economies/economic models. Le Velly [20] suggested considering AFNs as projects and defined them as motivations and objectives that align the actions of collectives toward a desired future [20]. Accordingly, forms of communitization featuring alternative nutritional practices belong to AFNs. They are characterized by their sustainability, i.e., they reflect "a commitment to social, economic, and environmental food production, distribution, and consumption practices" [21] (p. 433).

Although there is considerable literature on AFNs, it is essential to examine these networks, and specially forms of communitization closely, through a systematic literature review. The aim is to uncover the organizational structures, opportunities, and challenges

of forms of communitization with alternative nutritional practices in Germany to identify their transformative potential.

Despite the rise in literature reviews concerning AFNs in recent years [13,21–23], they do not align with our research objective. They also neglected studies on AFNs in Germany despite their importance in the literature regarding sustainability and a requiring shift in the food systems [9]. Gori and Castellini [13] conducted a systematic literature review of AFNs and short supply chains to gain insights into the primary elements and themes examined. Laginová et al. [22] delineated the utilized organizational frameworks of AFNs, featuring just two cases from Germany. The latest systematic literature review on AFNs by Michel-Villarreal et al. [21] explored interpretations of AFNs aiming for conceptual clarity. Our systematic literature review addresses the shortcomings of previous systematic literature reviews by concentrating on the organizational structures, opportunities, and challenges present in AFNs in Germany and their transformative potential.

We seek to analyze AFNs with alternative nutritional practices in Germany, questioning which broad categories for objectives were explored in the articles, which forms of communitization, i.e., AFNs, were examined, which cities and regions were studied, and what methodologies were utilized. The primary aim was to analyze the current literature to enhance comprehension of the organizational structures, possibilities, and challenges associated with these AFNs. The research questions that guided our systematic literature review were: What forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices are explored in the literature, and what organizational structures, opportunities, challenges, and transformative potentials are highlighted?

This study offers empirical findings derived from a systematic literature review that explored forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices in Germany. As emphasized in the literature and in this systematic literature review, numerous forms of communitization, i.e., AFNs, exist. Our systematic literature review adopts a methodology that first identifies the forms of AFNs that feature alternative nutritional practices in Germany discussed in the literature and then provides a description of each form based on the main themes highlighted in the articles.

To answer the research questions, we developed general categories for the objectives explored in the articles both inductively and deductively, based on quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods research. We integrated the six main categories highlighted by Gori and Castellini [13], expanded on them, and established additional new categories. The analytical framework was developed in an iterative process, starting with theoretical concepts and refined through data analysis. From this, we identified the organizational structures, opportunities, and challenges of different forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices, and discussed their transformative potential to address the complex problems facing the food system.

2. Materials and Methods

We applied a systematic literature review [24–27] (see Figure 1 and Supplementary Material) and adopted bibliographical and content analysis techniques [28–30] to answer the research questions. The data collected were retrieved from the two scientific databases: Web of Science (WoS) and Business Source Premier (BSP). These two databases were selected as they are frequently used scientific databases for systematic literature reviews [31–33] and rank among the top databases in this area of research [21,22].

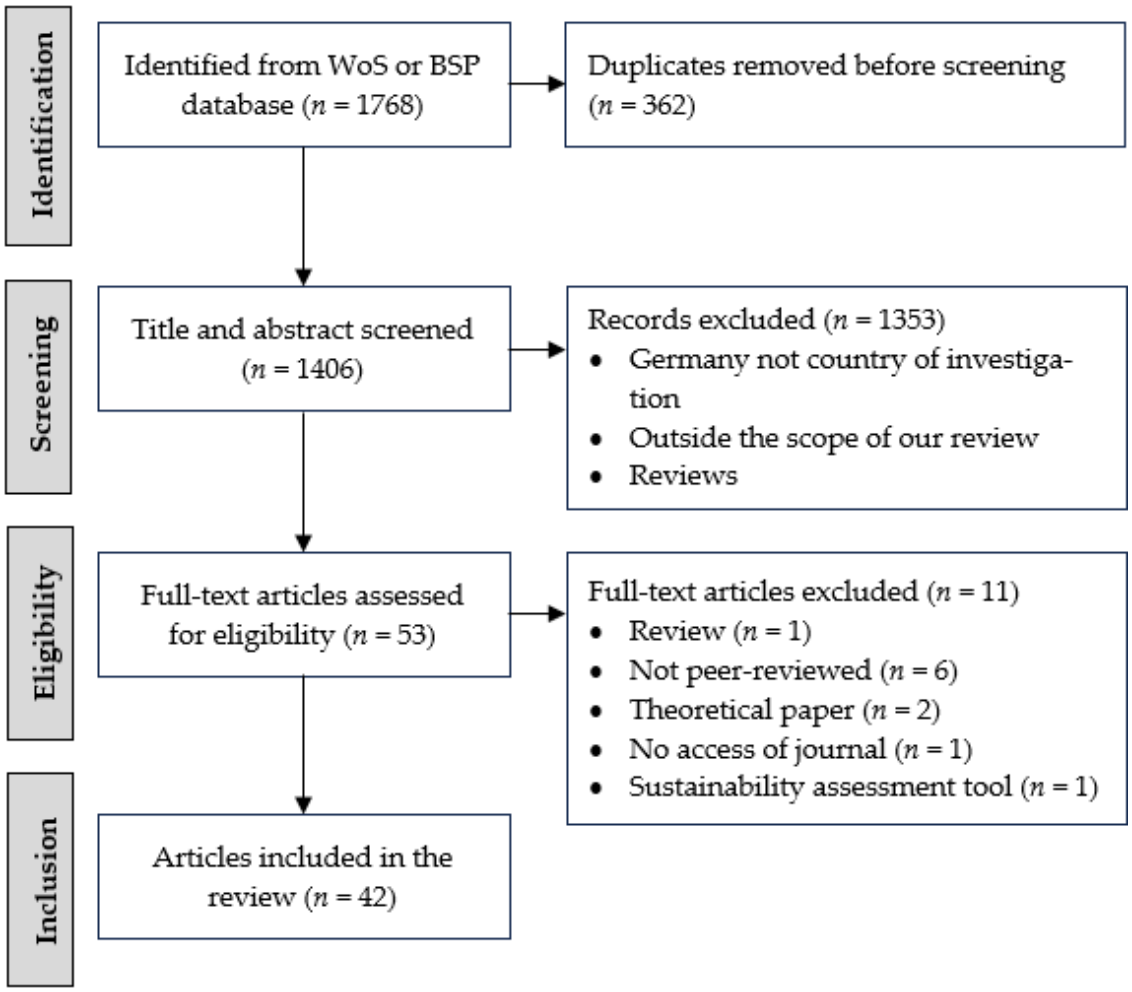


Figure 1. Flow chart of the systematic literature review according to PRISMA statement (adapted from [26,27]).

2.1. Literature Selection

A comprehensive literature search was performed to identify studies concentrating on forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices in Germany. A full-text search was conducted using the databases WoS and BSP to identify relevant literature. The final search was conducted on 28th of October 2025 with the following combinations of search terms: (1) "community-supported agriculture" AND "alternative food network", or (2) "community-supported agriculture" AND "Germany", or (3) "alternative-food network" AND "Germany", or (4) "alternative food network" AND "Germany", or (5) "alternative-food network" AND "Germany" AND "social innovation", or (6) "alternative food network" AND "Germany" AND "social innovation", or (7) "social food movement" AND "Germany", or (8) "food movement" AND "Germany" AND "community", (9) "community supported agriculture" AND "alternative food network*" OR "cooperative*" AND "alternative food network*", and (10) "ecovillage" AND "Germany". To ensure clarity, the syntax used for the literature search was included in Appendix A. The search covered all periods in the past. The wildcard (*) was used to include spelling variation and reduce the number of phrases while still providing a comprehensive reach result. For the search history with keywords and results included in the systematic literature search see Table 1.

Table 1. Search history of the systematic literature search.

Search	Keywords	Results	Duplicates	Included
1.	community-supported agriculture AND alternative food network	46	3	18
2.	community-supported agriculture AND Germany	83	36	7
3.	alternative-food network AND Germany	62	28	2
4.	alternative food network AND Germany	402	66	3
5.	alternative-food network AND Germany AND social innovation	8	7	0
6.	alternative food network AND Germany AND social innovation	34	34	1
7.	social food movement AND Germany	360	18	4
8.	food movement AND Germany AND community	287	109	4
9.	community supported agriculture AND alternative food network * OR cooperative * AND alternative food network *	479	60	2
10.	ecovillage AND Germany	7	1	1
		1768	**362**	**42**

Note: The wildcard (*) was used to include spelling variation and reduce the number of phrases while still providing a comprehensive reach result.

Duplicates were eliminated prior to the screening (n = 362). Following the elimination of duplicates, the titles and abstracts of 1406 articles were scanned (*Screening*). After the initial screening of the search results, the number of publications was reduced based on their relevance to the research focus. An article was considered for inclusion if it was (1) authored in English or German, (2) appeared in a peer-reviewed journal, (3) categorized as an article, early access, or a proceeding paper, and (4) investigated forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices within Germany (see Table 2).

Table 2. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of an article for eligibility.

Inclusion Criteria
• Accessible in the WoS or BSP database
• Written in German or English
• Full-text article published in a peer-reviewed journal
• Primary source
• An article, early access, or proceeding paper
• Examined forms of communitization in Germany that feature alternative nutritional practices
Exclusion criteria
• Not a primary source (i.e., conceptual paper, conference paper, review)
• Investigating forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices outside of Germany
• No access to the publication

A total of 1353 articles were excluded, and fifty-three full-text articles were assessed for *Eligibility*. Subsequently, eleven full-text articles were eliminated as they failed to satisfy the indicated inclusion criteria. In total, forty-two articles were included in the final analysis, with the oldest article published in 2006 and the newest one in 2025. Figure 1 illustrates the different stages of study selection from *Identification*, *Screening*, *Eligibility*, and *Inclusion* for the systematic literature review in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines [24–27].

2.2. Methodological Assessment and Analysis

Initially, all gathered articles were imported into MAXQDA (version 24.11.0) as PDF files. During a preliminary assessment of all articles, we categorized general information to understand the research field better. This encompassed the publication year, the journal, the utilized methods, and the kinds of communities studied (see Appendix B). The findings from this preliminary review were included in the creation of categories for our analytical framework (see Section 2.3). We integrated the six primary themes (actors' motivations (1), collaborative governance (2), sustainability (3), social ties and trust (4), boundary negotiations (5), and resilience (6)) highlighted by Gori and Castellini [13], expanded upon them, and established further new categories. The analytical framework was created through an iterative process, beginning with theoretical concepts and refining the categories throughout data analysis. To acquire an in-depth insight into the gathered literature, we performed a qualitative content analysis based on Mayring [30] and Kuckartz and Rädiker [29] using MAXQDA. We employed the analytical framework as a coding scheme and refined it throughout the analysis process. We subsequently categorized the texts of each article based on the established categories [29,30]. To ensure the reliability and quality of our analysis, different coding procedures were applied. These included intra-coder reliability, comparisons of codes to ensure consistency, and discussions among the authors regarding the outcomes of the coding process.

2.3. Analytical Framework

For the analytical framework, we created the categories both inductively and deductively (see Table 3). Deductive categories emerged from the preliminary review of the literature and were used for the bibliographic analysis, whereas inductive categories were derived from content analysis [29,30] and refined during the full-text analysis.

Table 3. Broad categories for objectives investigated in the articles.

#	Category	Source
1	Governance, organizational structures, and joint practices	[19,34–51]
2	Values, motivations, and participation drivers	[35,36,43,50–61]
3	Social cohesion, relationships, and impacts	[34,42,43,56,59,61–65]
4	Knowledge, information, and learning flows	[39,41,57,63,66]
5	Economic viability and market dynamics	[19,34,38,45,48–50,59,63,66–68]
6	Agroecology, resilience, and transformation potential	[19,34,38,47,50,63,66,69]
7	Framework development	[19,39–41,45,67,70]
8	Social justice, power, and privilege	[19,45,53,65]
9	Urban, cultural and social innovation	[19,38,45,47,49,56,59,60,68,69,71]
10	Political advocacy, boundary work, and institutional support	[45,47,65,70–74]

Note on category: (1) Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the studies, authors appear in several categories. (2) The categories were deliberately broadened so that overlapping objectives could be summarized. (3) Categories range from governance and organizational structures and practices (1) to more general socio-political issues (10).

3. Results

3.1. Bibliographic Analysis

3.1.1. Journals and Number of Publications

Eight articles appeared in *Sustainability*, seven articles in *Agriculture and Human Values*, four articles each in *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* and *Journal of Rural Studies*, and two articles in *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. The remaining seventeen articles were published in different journals (see Appendix C). The systematic literature search indicated that forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices in Germany have been identified from 2006 to the present (see Figure 2). Specifically, starting in 2022, research interest within this research field seems to have grown.

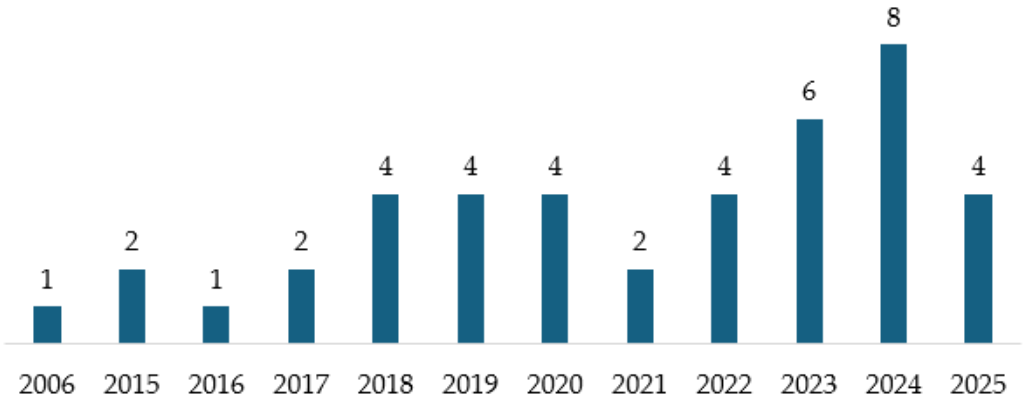


Figure 2. Number of publications per year.

3.1.2. Methodologies Applied

All articles refer to literature on forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices, while nine studies explicitly mention that they have reviewed and analyzed existing literature, incorporating this literature review directly into their study as applied methodology. The majority of studies employed a mixed-method approach, indicating they utilized multiple methods to address their research questions or objectives. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were frequently combined. Interviews were the most commonly used research method. A total of thirty-three articles employed this method for data collection. An average of twelve interviews were carried out per study. Twenty-four studies integrated the interviews with at least one additional method. Nine studies relied solely on a qualitative approach and carried out semi-structured interviews [38,41,49,51,53,57,59,62,63]. Six studies applied a purely quantitative method and carried out a nationwide survey [40,42–44,55,61]. For detailed information on the methodologies applied see Table 4 and Appendix D.

Table 4. Methodologies applied.

Source	Literature Review	Documentary Analysis, Website	Interviews	Fieldwork, Participatory Observation	Expert Workshop, Focus Group	Survey
[34]		✓	✓			✓
[60]			✓			✓
[52]		✓	✓	✓		
[35]		✓	✓	✓		
[53]			✓			
[36]	✓	✓	✓	✓		
[54]	✓					✓

Table 4. *Cont.*

Source	Literature Review	Documentary Analysis, Website	Interviews	Fieldwork, Participatory Observation	Expert Workshop, Focus Group	Survey
[55]						✓
[67]			✓		✓	
[71]		✓	✓	✓	✓	
[62]			✓			
[72]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
[73]		✓	✓	✓		
[56]	✓	✓		✓		✓
[37]		✓	✓	✓	✓	
[38]			✓			
[68]	✓	✓	✓	✓		
[63]			✓			
[39]	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
[40]						✓
[41]			✓			
[64]		✓	✓			
[42]						✓
[44]						✓
[43]						✓
[57]			✓			
[50]			✓	✓		✓
[45]			✓	✓		
[19]		✓	✓	✓		
[46]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
[58]		✓	✓			
[70]			✓	✓		
[74]	✓	✓	✓	✓		
[65]		✓	✓	✓	✓	
[66]			✓	✓		
[69]	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
[47]	✓	✓	✓			
[48]			✓		✓	
[59]			✓			
[61]						✓
[49]			✓			
[51]			✓			
	10	**18**	**33**	**19**	**9**	**13**

Note: A check-mark (✓) indicates that the authors have investigated at least one case in this category of forms of community building that feature alternative nutritional practices.

3.1.3. Objectives of the Papers

To determine the objectives of every article, the "aim, objective" category was established in MAXQDA, and all articles were examined and coded based on this category. Due to the varied objectives of the identified articles, the main research objectives of the authors were determined, and broad categories were established. Eight main categories were identified. Table 5 illustrates the categories along with the articles that cover each category.

Table 5. Investigated forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices in Germany.

Forms of Communitization	Source
Community, urban and self-harvest gardens or public space food projects	[41], [42], [43], [44], [47] [3], [49], [51], [53], [59], [65] [2], [71] [1]
Food cooperatives or cooperative initiatives	[19] [5], [34], [41], [45] [4], [49], [51], [53], [56], [59], [65] [6]

Table 5. *Cont.*

Forms of Communitization	Source
Food sharing and redistribution initiatives (also over digital platforms)	[45] [7], [47] [9], [57], [59] [10], [65] [8]
Community-supported agriculture networks	[35], [36], [40], [41], [52] [11], [64], [72], [73], [74]
Community-supported agriculture	[35], [36], [39], [40], [41], [47] [15], [48], [49], [50], [51], [52] [12], [53], [54], [55], [56], [58], [60], [61], [62], [63], [64] [13], [65] [14], [66], [67], [69], [70], [74]
Ecovillage and commune	[46] [16], [47] [17], [70]
Food initiatives	[37], [47] [20], [57], [65] [18], [66] [19], [68]
Policy, municipal, and institutional partnerships	[36], [38], [40], [66] [21]

Notes: [1] NeuLand; [2] Paradies, Stachelbeet, interkulturelle Gärten; [3] GrüneBeete e.V.; [4] Futterkreis e.V.; [5] Ökonauten eG, Futterkreis e.V.; [6] CoopCafé, The People's, Shuk; [7] Marktschwärmer; [8] Bellies; [9] Foodsharing Münster; [10] App: too good to go; [11] Mittendrin; [12] Kleine Beete e.V., Rote Beete, Gemueseinsel, Streuobstwiese, Solawi Marburg, Solawi Kassel, Solawiese, Gemuesebau Heckenbeck, Solawi PeterSilie; [13] Trier, Ortenau; [14] Alfalfa; [15] Entrupp 119; [16] Ökodorf Sieben Linden; [17] Laakenhof GbR; [18] Zakopane, Rotacker28, Die Flamme; [19] Das Baumhaus; [20] Slow Food Youtgh Münster, Münster isst veggie; [21] Fachhochschule—Food Hub.

3.1.4. Forms of Communitization as well as Cities and Regions Examined

The forms of communitization analyzed in the studies show that CSA are the most commonly researched form. The research conducted within the CSA network is directly connected to this. We made a conceptual difference between CSA and CSA network, as a CSA focuses on the individual farm-to-consumer level, whereas the CSA network acts as an organization or informal system that connects and supports multiple individual CSAs and associate initiatives [52,60]. Another research focus is on community gardens and food cooperatives, while ecovillages and communes are rarely found in the English-language publications.

Berlin is the city most often examined for communitization research that feature alternative nutritional practices, with ten studies, while Munich and Hamburg each have three studies (see Figure 3). Sixteen studies conducted their research throughout Germany, but typically included a restricted number of cases, apart from national surveys. Two cases examined Berlin-Brandenburg, Eastern Germany, Central Germany, Southwestern Germany, and Southern Germany.

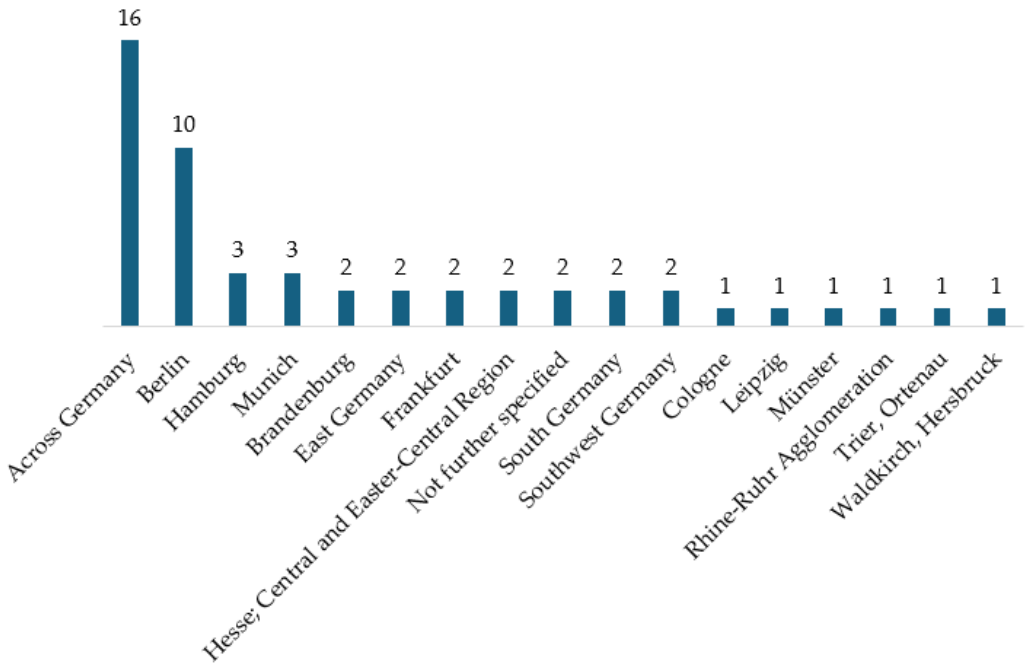


Figure 3. Investigated cities and regions within Germany.

3.1.5. Keywords and Co-Occurrence Analysis

Co-occurrence analysis was employed to identify the co-occurrence and relationship of the most frequent keywords in the included articles [75]. To achieve this, the keywords were organized into distinct colored clusters through the graphical representation of VOSviewer [75]. Keyword co-occurrence analysis serves as a useful tool to contribute to the understanding of the knowledge framework of a research area by assessing the association between keywords [76]. The resulting network embodies the collective knowledge and helps to understand the knowledge components and framework of the research field [77]. The connections between the circles indicate the intensity of the relationship among the individual keywords [78]. Color coding identifies circles with similar characteristics [77]. A total of 137 keywords were identified in the forty-two articles, with twenty-six reaching the threshold according to the inclusion criteria of at least three co-occurrences. Figure 4 illustrates the map of keyword co-occurrence network analysis.

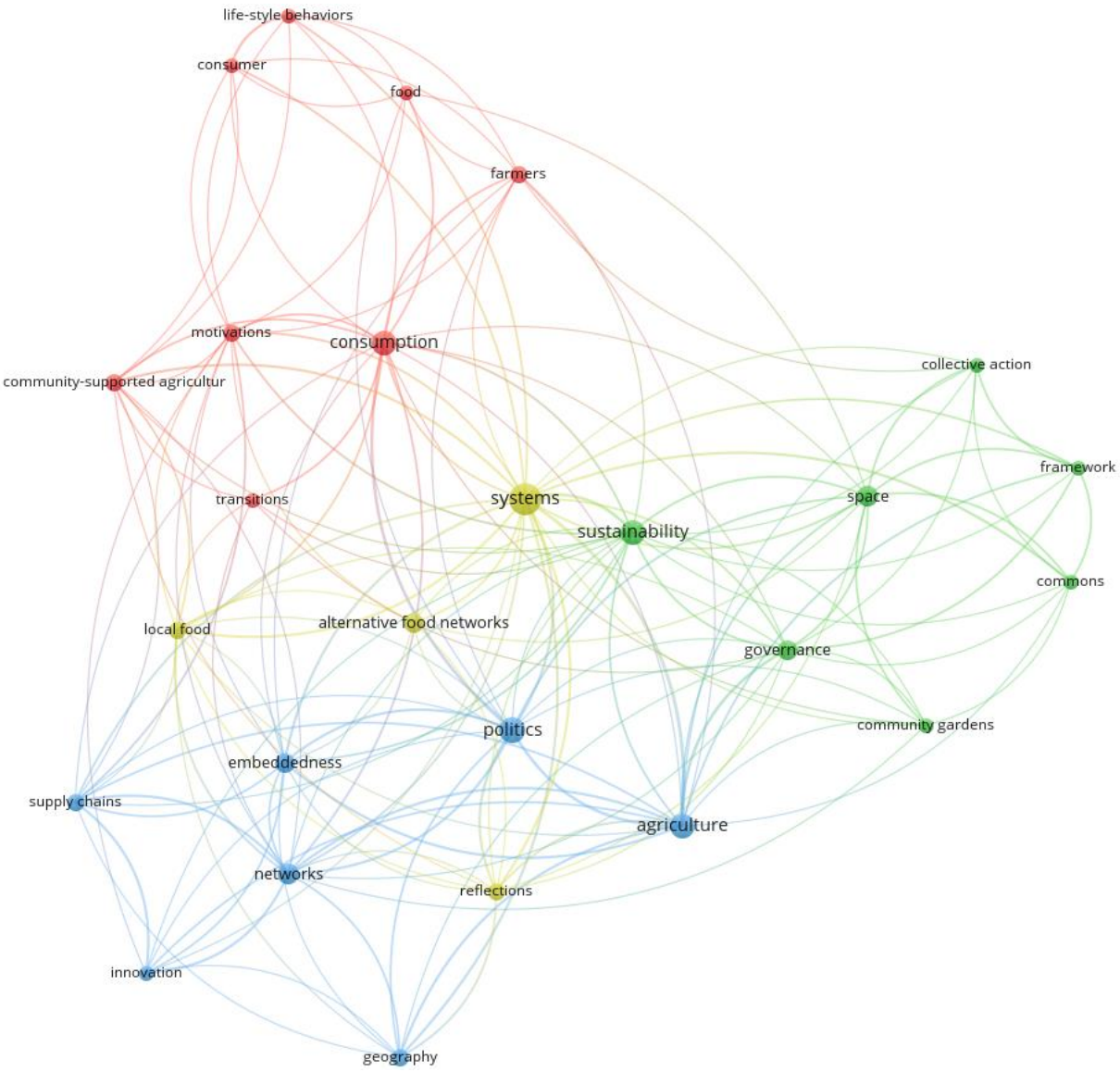


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence network analysis map.

The co-occurrence analysis identified four major clusters (see Table 6). The red cluster includes the whole food cycle, that is, from the producers (farmers) to how individuals eat and live (motivations, lifestyle, and consumption) to the cooperative model that links them

(CSA) and the system that emphasizes sustainability and civic involvement. Consequently, this cluster was categorized as "Community-oriented sustainable food systems". The green cluster includes cooperative approaches to manage shared spaces in a sustainable way, highlighting joint efforts, governance, and common resources. It was titled "Participatory framework for community commons". The blue cluster encompasses the spatial (geographic) and relational (networks, embeddedness) elements of agricultural systems, highlights the role of innovations and supply chain structures, and stresses the political dimensions that share and are shaped by these networks. It was therefore labeled "Political-ecological agricultural networks". The yellow cluster combines local food, the cultural reflections tied to it, and the broader alternative food network and systems. It was named "Alternative food systems".

Table 6. Keyword cluster identified using keyword co-occurrence analysis.

Community-Oriented Sustainable Food Systems (Red)	Participatory Framework for Community Commons (Green)	Political-Ecological Agricultural Networks (Blue)	Alternative Food Systems (Yellow)
Consumption (8)	Sustainability (8)	Politics (9)	Systems (13)
Community-supported agriculture (4)	Governance (5)	Agriculture (8)	Alternative food networks (5)
Farmers (4)	Collective action (3)	Networks (6)	Local food (4)
Motivations (4)	Commons (3)	Embeddedness (5)	Reflections (4)
Consumer (3)	Community gardens (3)	Geography (4)	
Food (3)	Framework (3)	Supply chains (4)	
Life-style behaviors (3)		Innovation (3)	
Transitions (3)			

3.2. Content Analysis of Forms of Communities that Feature Alternative Nutritional Practices

The present articles focus on individuals who join and participate in AFNs for reasons related to sustainability, food, and nutrition, as well as for health, social, and ethical motives; experience personal and collective changes; negotiate different leadership formats; and create, uphold, or reside within these networks through learning-oriented innovations. The level of involvement, and consequently the shared decision-making of consumers or members in these AFNs, is contingent upon their forms. Individuals join and participate in AFNs for various motives, including environmental and ethical concerns, such as rejection of so called conventional food, a desire for organic or regional products, along with political or ideological beliefs, like opposing neoliberal food policies, emphasizing degrowth, or embracing anti-capitalist concepts [65,70,74]. Social and community reasons contribute as well, including the wish for belonging, solidarity, building relationships with like-minded individuals, and creating a "common good" [41,49,53,59,65]. Gaining knowledge in sustainable cultivating, harvesting, and processing is mentioned as another motive for engaging in or becoming a part of AFNs [41,51]. Community and social relationships alone do not guarantee the existence of communities. While individuals join and participate in AFNs for social reasons, the community frameworks of these networks may result in cultural and economic exclusion, restricting the number of individuals who feel accepted [59,65]. Securing funding for community projects demands significant investment in relationship management, consuming crucial personal time [34,49]. The majority of AFNs must locate affordable land or green areas to survive [41]. The following results describe five forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices that have been examined in the literature in terms of their organizational structures, opportunities, and challenges.

3.2.1. Community, Urban and Self-Harvest Gardens or Public Space Food Projects

The majority of community gardens function as associations that utilize democratic decision-making [42]. They serve as inclusive social environments that intentionally reduce physical, linguistic, and cultural obstacles, welcoming refugees, individuals with disabilities, families, seniors, and women [42,47,53,65]. Individuals engage due to their desire to aid environmental sustainability, such as by minimizing waste, employing organic or permaculture techniques, or cultivating and eating healthier, locally sourced food [47,49,65]. As the gardens operate as a community, the financial responsibility rests with the group instead of with individuals, in contrast to a private allotment [59].

Along with tangible benefits, gardeners frequently mention significant emotional rewards like happiness, a sense of purpose, and a stronger bond with nature [41,47,49,51,59]. Community gardens act as informal educational centers where information regarding gardening, sustainability, and community matters circulates among various generations and levels of education [41,42,47]. Numerous community gardens see themselves as small political players, contesting prevailing agricultural and food systems, engaging in demonstrations, and fostering discussions about post-capitalist possibilities [47,65,71].

Workshops and gardening guides serve as marketing instruments. Advertising is therefore of great importance because, although most gardening communities are organized as democratic associations [42,71] and receive support from local authorities or universities, they ultimately depend on collective funding for their continued existence [41,47,49,65]. Due to their dependence on ad hoc funding and volunteer work, the economic viability of community gardens is threatened [37,49,65,71]. Moreover, community gardening efforts are frequently perceived by local authorities, funders, and the public as marginal or "strange", leading to diminished support and amplifying sentiments of exclusion.

According to Zoll et al. [49], community gardens function in a niche, missing formal political integration, defined governance, and a consistent legal framework. Securing and preserving sustainable land represents the greatest structural challenge; numerous projects rely on brief, voluntary leases [37,42,43,49]. Wittenberg et al. [47] emphasize that the absence of permanent, legally recognized land ownership significantly hinders the sustainability of urban gardens. Finding sufficient space and fertile soil for gardening can be challenging, particularly in city environments and urban areas. Often, land is rented for brief periods, requiring ongoing negotiations for lease renewals [71]. This suggests that extended usage cannot be guaranteed, which is crucial for cultivating in community gardens. In addition, this limits succession planning and decision-making while generating internal conflicts that may hinder cooperation and learning among members in the absence of clear mechanisms for conflict resolution and avoidance [42,44,56].

3.2.2. Food Cooperatives or Cooperative Initiatives

Food cooperatives, or cooperative initiatives, connect farmers with consumers, fostering mutual trust and facilitating the exchange of knowledge [51,56]. They are characterized by decentralized, participatory management, where members distribute responsibilities, cast votes, and have unrestricted access to internal records [19,65]. Members carry out routine tasks like ordering, weighing, logistics, accounting, and farm visits on a voluntary basis. These voluntary works are crucial for the functioning of the food cooperatives [41,45,49]. Social interactions, such as leisure activities, regular meetings, and collaborative work enhance community connections and promote a feeling of belonging [49,65]. Most articles highlight the motivation to join and participate in a food cooperative arises from the need for high-quality, local, and healthy food [49,65] and participation in community activities, such as protests, workshops, or political events [34,53,61,65].

Trust among interested parties and members is built through farm visits and marketing efforts like newsletters. Additionally, implementing an open-door policy and creating direct communication channels between producers and consumers is crucial for building trust [19,49,51,65]. Cooperatives either rent or possess storage facilities and equipment that is shared collectively by the members [41]. Membership frequently provides substantial discounts on organic products, reduced prices via bulk buying, or fair pricing models that help make sustainable food more affordable [49,56]. Additionally, participants are willing to pay higher prices to support independent, environmentally friendly producers and guarantee farmers a consistent income, regardless of short-term crop yields [49,65]. Through impacting production techniques, supporting farmers' autonomy, and promoting democratic decision-making, members experience a sense of empowerment and heightened involvement in the process [49,65]. In the end, being a member of or engaging in food cooperatives promotes the development of practical skills (such as handling seasonal food, preserving food, and employing agroecological approaches) and increases the understanding of food systems [56].

Involvement in food cooperatives typically necessitates financial resources or other tangible assets that are usually available only to those who are relatively well-off [19,45]. Cultural norms of the middle class (such as academic language, concepts of fine dining, and technical knowledge) function as exclusionary criteria and unintentionally marginalize individuals who do not conform to these norms [19,45,65]. Food cooperatives depend on their members to volunteer several hours each week without compensation [56,65]. Only individuals with a flexible timetable or good income can fulfill this requirement [45,56,65]. The level of active involvement required can be a challenge for participants, particularly those with limited personal or financial resources [45,56]. In food cooperatives, members and customers can usually only pick up their food at set times and also have to coordinate pickup times with each other, which takes more time than shopping at the traditional retailers [49]. Other obstacles cited include limited space, particularly in urban areas, and the difficulty of finding suitable storage and logistics facilities [49]. Isolated farms or storage facilities represent an access barrier for people without personal transportation [56].

3.2.3. Food Sharing and Redistribution Initiatives (also over Digital Platforms)

The initiatives for sharing and redistribution food share the goal of reducing food waste. Accordingly, uniting and raising awareness around food waste is their primary ideological goal [45,47,57,59,65]. Through community activities (such as disco soup, communal meals, and cooking workshops), they seek to encourage social engagement, food education, and a feeling of connection [57]. Thus, a community forms around the food aimed for preservation and collaborative efforts, such as combating waste, are designed to strengthen social ties [47].

Initiatives that focus on food sharing and redistribution dismiss solely utilitarian reasons and strive to function as autonomously as possible from financial assistance [57]. Nonetheless, charging fees or contributions is frequently essential as the initiatives function outside of market logic. They navigate a conflict between ethical, ecological, or community-oriented goals and profit-driven mechanisms to sustain themselves [65].

Participants frequently originate from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Nevertheless, others join for financial motivations, such as to reduce food expenses [57]. Although numerous initiatives assert their openness, social stratification and access barriers are frequently apparent. For instance, their workshops primarily draw middle-class attendees, restricting their wider societal influence [57]. Cooperation between initiatives is considered important and necessary to enhance their outreach, share resources, and strengthen common goals [47,57,65].

3.2.4. Community-Supported Agriculture Networks and Community-Supported Agriculture

CSA networks and CSA provide a socially integrated, environmentally aware alternative to conventional food systems. They provide tangible environmental advantages—minimizing food waste, decreasing emissions, and enhancing biodiversity—while informing their participants about sustainable practices [47,50,63,66,67,69,72,73]. By participating, members seek to evade the adverse external effects of the conventional food system [49,54,55,67,69]. CSA supports equitable prices for farmers, community funding, and sharing of risks [35,39,49,50,56,63,64,67].

Governance in CSA is intentionally participatory, varying from producer-oriented to fully member-oriented models, frequently utilizing consensus or majority decisions to achieve a balance between efficiency and inclusiveness [36,39–41,52,53,60]. The CSA networks function as non-profit organizations featuring a council, coordination, unit, and various working groups [72,73]. The approach to decision-making follows sociocracy, with operational responsibilities assigned to employees, while the council focuses on strategic leadership [72,73]. Participants take part by voting at the annual general meetings [36,39,49]. Consensus and sociocratic processes are employed to settle conflicts and guarantee inclusive results [35,36]. Veto rights or majority requirements safeguard minority perspectives [35,41]. Biannual conferences, workshops, open spaces, and digital platforms promote collaborative learning, democratic discussion, and the establishment of collective values [72,73]. These occasions function as arenas for democratic experimentation, enabling attendees to collaboratively develop solutions and enhance the network's vision [72,73].

The community principle relies on pricing that emphasizes solidarity, i.e., prices represent real costs rather than market values [39,64]. Risk sharing is a key commitment between producers (farmers) and members, meaning they jointly bear the production costs and, consequently, also share crop losses and price fluctuations [49,62,67]. Community financing, which ensures full cost coverage and risk sharing, provides members with confidence that the financial model is equitable [35,39]. Farmers showcase their projected cost estimates (yearly budget) at the start of a new fiscal year. During bidding rounds, each member presents a binding offer for the whole year according to their financial capabilities [35,56,64]. This can encompass the annual budget [35,39,49], and economic stability for producers can be achieved through steady income and minimal reliance on market variations [40,47]. Nonetheless, this indicates that farmers profitability is not as high as in the competitive market [49,67]. Membership dues serve as the main source of income, enhanced by contributions and funding for the CSA networks [72,73].

The foundation of CSA is based on social bonding that promote social engagement [51,52,60]. The feeling of belonging and "being part of a movement" is consistently highlighted [36,49,70,74]. Direct interaction and exchange of information (e.g., newsletters, reputation, farm visits) among producers and consumers foster trust, transparency, and a shared identity [58,61,63,64]. Direct interaction with farmers enhances transparency and confidence in food production. Additionally, the perceived skill and trustworthiness of farmers influence the length of membership [40,41,61]. Key indicators of trust, arguably surpassing certifications, are personal interactions, on-site farm visits, and the observable involvement of farmers [47,49,61,62]. Zoll et al. [61] assert that trust in CSA relies on three pillars: reputation, information sharing, and direct social engagement, all of which positively impact overall trust.

Personal development and gaining knowledge, such as learning from farmers, are typically a secondary yet commonly mentioned reason for engaging in CSA [63,69]. Members of CSA exhibit greater awareness regarding nutrition and ecology [69]. Nonetheless, information frequently travels from the farmers to the consumers. Systematic feedback

from members to producers is uncommon [49,63,66]. In addition to supplying food, CSA foster social connections, enhance empowerment, and encourage civic participation, often acting as entry points to larger sustainability initiatives.

Even with all this, economic sustainability is still fragile. For instance, external funding and project financing are often mentioned in the articles as crucial for survival [48]. Concerns over declining revenue and the absence of role models for CSA hinder farmers from embracing or creating a CSA model [48,67]. For prospective members and farmers, the perceived substantial risks (financial, regulatory, and social) surpass the perceived advantages [48,58,74]. Also included are land shortages, high costs of urban or suburban areas, and the pursuit of appropriate, affordable land [47,58,66]. Bureaucratic obstacles occur because the current agricultural, tax, building, and food safety regulations are not suited to the "alternative" characteristics of the CSA [48,49,58]. This is paired with an absence of specialized advisory services, policy incentives, and coordinated financing programs [52,58,66].

Producers and members alike have restricted time resources, which hinder their full participation in CSA [53]. Newsletters, messaging groups, arranging meetings, and managing farmers' logistics are consistently reported as exhausting and time-intensive [58,63,64]. Also present are the challenges of sourcing skilled labor, volunteers, and committed coordinators for vegetable farming and logistics [36,48,52,66], alongside issues in securing funding and attracting new members, particularly regarding the essential numbers required to sustain the budget [35,49,67]. Membership costs, upfront payments, and the requirement for consistent contributions create barriers for low-income families in accessing CSA. The absence of adaptable payment options worsens this issue [50,56,64]. Consequently, a majority of CSA participants tend to be highly educated and possess substantial-incomes [39,54–56], suggesting inherent obstacles for those with low incomes [56,64].

3.2.5. Ecovillage, Commune, Food Initiatives, and Other Partnerships

Structured, pre-established frameworks, like specified roles, are common in these forms of communitization and aid in their consistent implementation [36,37]. Decisions are typically reached as a group, and collective decision-making is valued as part of the democratic spirit [36,46]. Nonprofit or cooperative legal structures (limited liability companies and cooperatives) are utilized to incorporate communities into current regulatory frameworks [38,70]. Collaboration, particularly in overcoming administrative challenges, is more effective when the involved parties are located in the same municipality or region [38,40]. In particular, food initiatives aim to increase awareness of food waste and seek to minimize it. Environmental stewardship serves as an overarching incentive [47,57,68].

The articles mention ideological opposition to capitalism as a primary motive for engaging in these forms of communitization [57,65]. Recruitment aimed at specific groups, including tasting events, job programs, inexpensive meals, and staggered feeding times, is another element in attracting participants [37,65,70]. Activities consist of social gatherings that address the needs of the members, serving as a type of activism that advances change in accordance with the movement's objectives. Volunteers handle cooking, serving, and logistics, while typically a sole paid coordinator manages the project [37,65]. Another motivating factor for participation is cooperative financing which enables members to purchase shares [40,66]. Tiered or solidarity-based pricing for low-income participants lowers the barriers for participation and allows wealthier members to provide financial support [65,70]. This capital allocation spreads the risk, and long-term agreements strengthen the stability of the community [40,66,70].

Members promote nutrition-related activities, like reducing food waste, within their communities and arrange these for the public [36,40,66]. Public events have both educa-

tional and social benefits. This frequently entails collaborative knowledge creation. For instance, when farmers and community members collaborate to devise sustainable cultivation techniques, modify crops, and influence policy [40,66]. In food initiatives and community programs, teaching cooking skills, increasing awareness of food quality, and sharing knowledge about food are clear elements of the educational programs [37,57,68]. The emphasis is placed on real, personal experiences with food instead of theoretical concepts [37,57]. Shared meals fulfill a social and an educational purpose [37,57].

Nonetheless, there are conflicts and critiques concerning inclusivity [65,70]. Certain communities and initiatives primarily draw in middle-class individuals [57]. Potential exclusivity, including the formation of middle-class bubbles, jeopardizes the community's egalitarian nature [36,65,70]. Low social proximity can hinder trust-building and lead to relationships that stay formal [38,57]. Financial sustainability relies on secure funding like membership fees and government grants [37,40]. Time management and scheduling present challenges to communal dining experiences [37,46].

4. Discussion

The aim of this work was to uncover the organizational structures, opportunities, and challenges of various forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices in Germany and to discuss their transformative potentials. Despite personal developments in their food-related lifestyles, many participants in forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices doubt whether these forms can really replace the current food system [47,49,51,74]. An immediate, comprehensive desire for systemic transformation is often not mentioned by those involved [19,40,47,51,53,59,63], and it remains unclear whether they would even want to strive for this or actively addressed it. These concerns are based on the fact that these forms of communitization are niche phenomena, and some deliberately intend to remain so. The question of transferability to an entire population is complex, as few people are willing to fundamentally change their food-related lifestyles or participate in these forms of communitization [49,51,74]. The primary advantages of engaging in these forms of communities include personal growth, like gaining knowledge, establishing connections, and shifting perspectives towards sustainability. That alone does not seem to be enough to attract a broad audience, as these communities are perceived as unconventional, left-leaning, or exclusively for vegans. This hinders wider acceptance, particularly within conservative or low-income populations, and results in bias and disputes across different generations [49,56,58,64,69].

Nonetheless, forms of communitization lead to a gradual, additive transformation that can permeate society, even if they do not fundamentally reshape the entire food system [19,47,49,59]. Cooperatives and CSA show particular potential for transformation, especially when compared to other forms of communitization [45,52,74]. This is possible due to their strong community ties, such as trust, solidarity, shared values with a focus on sustainability, and social cohesion [43–45,49,56]. As a result, CSA can influence and change personal behavior and food-related lifestyles of their participants. At the same time, this pose considerable difficulties in terms of inclusion, as dealing with socioeconomic diversity requires targeted strategies that often lead to the exclusion of certain individuals or groups [53,56,65]. Since the influence is limited to a specific group, far-reaching societal transformation is prevented [49,51,74]. To avoid remaining in a niche and to achieve transformative purpose, scaling (upwards and downwards), the creation of political conditions and reliable financing could support the transformation potential [53,56,59,72].

Since profitability in forms of communitization is secondary to their social, ecological, and ethical goals, financial sustainability often proves problematic [45,49,67]. Contrary to their own fundamental principle of non-commercial orientation, these forms rely on market

dynamics to attract members, secure financial support, and be visible in densely populated areas [52,58,69]. Access to the market and changing consumer preferences pose significant obstacles to securing the long-term viability of communities [49,50]. To increase accessibility to them, value-oriented marketing, i.e., the promotion of sustainability and reliability, and tiered pricing structures for various participant groups are frequently mentioned [19,36,64].

To move from niche projects to a broader, more systematic effectiveness and overcome structural barriers, public funding, land-use protection programs, and legal support appear to be essential [36,37,53,72]. According to the articles, existing funding programs, legal structures, and European Union regulations often do not sufficiently take into account innovative AFN models, leading to insufficient support for them [35,36,49]. Cooperation with other movements such as degrowth, climate protection, and food justice is seen as an opportunity to create strategic alliances and thus exert a stronger influence on politics and towards transformation [19,47,74]. Digital platforms and matching tools are mentioned as a further contribution to networking and improving the representation of interests [39,52,72].

5. Conclusions

The results indicate that forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices can achieve or already have transformative potential when they establish strong institutional ties, ensure consistent access to land, implement inclusive governance structures, apply transparent financial practices, and create mechanisms that use the diversity of participants as a collaborative strength rather than a source of conflict.

Our systematic literature review addresses the shortcomings of previous systematic literature reviews by concentrating on the organizational structures, opportunities, and challenges present in AFNs in Germany, and their transformative potential. It significantly contributes to the literature by first pinpointing overarching categories for objectives explored in the articles. Secondly, it gathers the methods used to explore forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices. Thirdly, the different examined forms of communitization in Germany are shown. Fourthly, the most commonly used keywords are displayed. Finally, through content analysis, the organizational structures, opportunities, and challenges of various forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices are highlighted and their transformative potential is discussed.

This research has the following limitations. Initially, it offers a comprehensive overview of forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices. As a result, a more through and in-depth analysis of each individual form could not be conducted in this study. Since the review is limited to selected search terms and to two databases, the actual potential of the research area is not fully demonstrated. Additionally, because we focused on studies concerning forms of communitization that feature nutritional practices in Germany, we overlooked studies that explored similar subjects in other countries. There could also be a publication bias on the part of the authors of the articles due to their selection of more successful, visible, and urban AFNs.

Future studies could expand the body of research by providing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the various forms of communitization. This requires a clear analysis and comparison of their organizational characteristics to better understand the differences between AFNs. This will allow for more meaningful comparisons across different contexts, including their potential for food system transformation and overall sustainability. Furthermore, the various definitions of prerequisites for AFNs used in the literature should be explained in a differentiated manner, taking into account changes at the micro and macro levels within these networks and forms of communitization to gain a better understanding of the intersectional barriers towards transformation. As the systematic literature review focuses on Germany, future research could investigate which

actors support the different forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices within Germany, and the individuals or groups with whom these forms and practices resonate. One could also examine the level of resistance or persistence regarding these forms in Germany, thus uncovering potential reasons for the unsuccessful adoption of these alternative nutritional practices. Furthermore, research could investigate how certain forms of communitization that feature alternative nutritional practices stabilize in Germany, and how they integrate into or alter current market structures in Germany.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/su18020879/s1, PRISMA Checklist from [26].

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

AFN	Alternative food network
AFNs	Alternative food networks
BSP	Business Source Premier
CSA	Community-supported agriculture
MAXQDA	Max Qualitative Data Analysis
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
VOS	Visualization of Similarities
WoS	Web of Science

Appendix A

Table A1. Syntax used for literature search.

Database	Search	Syntax
WoS	1.	Refine results for (ALL = (community-supported agriculture)) AND ALL = (alternative *) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and Article or Review Article (Document Types) and English or German (Languages) and Article or Review Article or Early Access (Document Types)
WoS	2.	Refine results for (ALL = (community-supported agriculture)) AND ALL = (Germany) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and English or German (Languages) and Article or Review Article or Proceeding Paper or Early Access (Document Types)
WoS	3.	Refine results for (ALL = (alternative-food network)) AND ALL = (Germany) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and English or German (Languages) and Article or Review Article or Early Access (Document Types)
WoS	4.	Refine results for (ALL = (alternative food network)) AND ALL = (Germany) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and English or German (Languages) and Article or Review Article or Early Access (Document Types)

Table A1. *Cont.*

Database	Search	Syntax
WoS	5.	Refine results for ((ALL = (alternative-food network)) AND ALL = (Germany)) AND ALL = (social innovation) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and English (Languages) and Article (Document Types)
WoS	6.	Refine results for ((ALL = (alternative food network)) AND ALL = (Germany)) AND ALL = (social innovation) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and English (Languages) and Article or Review Article or Early Access (Document Types)
WoS	7.	Refine results for (ALL = (social food movement)) AND ALL = (Germany) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and English or German (Languages) and Article or Review Article or Early Access or Proceeding Paper (Document Types)
WoS	8.	Refine results for ((ALL = (food movement)) AND ALL = (Germany)) AND ALL = (community) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and English or German (Languages) and Article or Review Article or Early Access or Proceeding Paper (Document Types)
WoS	9.	Refine results for (((ALL = (community supported agriculture)) AND ALL = (alternative food network *)) OR ALL = (cooperative *)) AND ALL = (alternative food network *) and English or German (Languages) and Article or Review Article or Early Access or Proceeding Paper (Document Types)
WoS	10.	Refine results for (ALL = (ecovillage)) AND ALL = (Germany) and GERMANY (Countries/Regions) and English (Languages) and Article or Review Article (Document Types)
BSP	1.	Search all fields (community supported agriculture AND alternative food network) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	2.	Search all fields (community-supported agriculture AND Germany) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	3.	Search all fields (alternative-food network AND Germany) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	4.	Search all fields (alternative food network AND Germany) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	5.	Search all fields (alternative-food network AND Germany AND social innovation) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	6.	Search all fields (alternative food network AND Germany AND social innovation) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	7.	Search all fields (social movement AND Germany) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	8.	Search all fields (food movement AND Germany AND community) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	9.	Search all fields (community supported agriculture AND alternative food network * OR cooperative * AND alternative food network *) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal
BSP	10.	Search all fields (ecovillage AND Germany) with filter Academic Journal, English, German, Scientific (Peer-reviewed) Journal

Note: The wildcard (*) was used to include spelling variation and reduce the number of phrases while still providing a comprehensive reach result.

Appendix B

Table A2. The forty-two articles included in the final sample of the systematic literature review.

Behrendt, G.; Peter, S.; Sterly, S.; Häring, A.M. Community financing for sustainable food and farming: A proximity perspective. Agric. Hum. Values 2022, 39, 1063–1075. doi:10.1007/s10460-022-10304-7.	[34]
Blättel-Mink, B.; Boddenberg, M.; Gunkel, L.; Schmitz, S.; Vaessen, F. Beyond the market—New practices of supply in times of crisis: The example community-supported agriculture. Int. J. Consumer Studies 2017, 41, 415–421. doi:10.1111/ijcs.12351.	[60]

Table A2. *Cont.*

Bonfert, B. Community-supported agriculture networks in Wales and Central Germany: Scaling up, out, and deep through local collaboration. Sustainability 2022, 14, 7419. doi:10.3390/su14127419.	[52]
Carlson, L.A.; Bitsch, V. Applicability of transaction cost economics to understanding organizational structures in solidarity-based food systems in Germany. Sustainability 2019, 11, 1095. doi:10.3390/su11041095.	[35]
Darkhani, F. Investigating the role of women producers in alternative food networks implementing organic farming in Berlin Brandenburg. Front. Sustain. Food Syst. 2024, 8, 1294940. doi:10.3389/fsufs.2024.1294940.	[53]
Degens, P.; Lapschieß, L. Community-supported agriculture as food democratic experimentalism: Insights from Germany. Front. Sustain. Food Syst. 2023, 7, 1081125. doi:10.3389/fsufs.2023.1081125.	[36]
Diekmann, M.; Theuvsen, L. Non-participants interest in CSA – Insights from Germany. J. Rural Stud. 2019, 69, 1–10. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.04.006.	[54]
Diekmann, M.; Theuvsen, L. Value structures determining community supported agriculture: insights from Germany. Agric. Hum. Values 2019, 36, 733–746. doi:10.1007/s10460-019-09950-1.	[55]
Doernberg, A.; Zasada, I.; Bruszewska, K.; Skoczowski, B.; Piorr, A. Potentials and limitations of regional organic food supply: A qualitative analysis of two food chain types in the Berlin Metropolitan Region. Sustainability 2016, 8, 1125. doi:10.3390/su8111125.	[67]
Follmann, A.; Viehoff, V. A green garden on red clay: Creating a new urban common as a form of political gardening in Cologne, Germany. Local Environ. 2015, 20, 1148–1174. doi:10.1080/13549839.2014.894966.	[71]
Gruber, S. Personal trust and system trust in the sharing economy: A comparison of community- and platform-based models. Front. Psychol. 2020, 11, 581299. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2020.581299.	[62]
Guerrero Lara, L.; Kapusta, B.; Duncan, J.; Feola, G. Organising for political advocacy—the case of the Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft. Int. J. Polit. Cult. Soc. 2025, 1-32. doi:10.1007/s10767-025-09537-1.	[72]
Guerrero Lara, L.; Feola, G.; Driessen, P. Drawing boundaries: Negotiating a collective 'we' in community-supported agriculture networks. J. Rural Stud. 2024, 106, 103197. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103197.	[73]
Hennchen, B.; Pregernig, M. Organizing joint practices in urban food initiatives—A comparative analysis of gardening, cooking and eating together. Sustainability 2020, 12, 4457. doi:10.3390/su12114457.	[37]
Hennchen, B.; Schäfer, M. Do sustainable food system innovations foster inclusiveness and social cohesion? A comparative study. Front. Sustain. 2022, 3, 921169. doi:10.3389/frsus.2022.921169.	[56]
Martens, K.; Rogga, S.; Hardner, U.; Piorr, A. Examining proximity factors in public-private collaboration models for sustainable agri-food system transformation: A comparative study of two rural communities. Front. Sustain. Food Syst. 2023, 7, 1248124. doi:10.3389/fsufs.2023.1248124.	[38]
Mayer, H.; Knox, P.L. Slow cities: Sustainable places in a fast world. J. Urban Aff. 2006, 28, 321–334. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9906.2006.00298.x.	[68]
Meyer, J.M.; Hassler, M. Re-thinking knowledge in community-supported agriculture to achieve transformational change towards sustainability. Sustainability 2023, 15, 13388. doi:10.3390/su151813388.	[63]
Middendorf, M.; Rommel, M. Understanding the diversity of community supported agriculture: A transdisciplinary framework with empirical evidence from Germany. Front. Sustain. Food Syst. 2024, 8, 1205809. doi:10.3389/fsufs.2024.1205809.	[39]
Opitz, I.; Zoll, F.; Zasada, I.; Doernberg, A.; Siebert, R.; Piorr, A. Consumer-producer interactions in community-supported agriculture and their relevance for economic stability of the farm – An empirical study using an analytic hierarchy process. J. Rural Stud. 2019, 68, 22–32. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.03.011.	[40]
Opitz, I.; Specht, K.; Piorr, A.; Siebert, R.; Zasada, I. Effects of consumer-producer interactions in alternative food networks on consumers' learning about food and agriculture. Morav. Geogr. Rep. 2017, 25, 181–191. https://doi.org/10.1515/mgr-2017-0016.	[41]
Parot, J.; Wahlen, S.; Schryro, J.; Weckenbrock, P. Food justice in community supported agriculture – differentiating charitable and emancipatory social support actions. Agric. Hum. Values 2024, 41, 685–699. doi:10.1007/s10460-023-10511-w.	[64]
Rogge, N.; Theesfeld, I.; Strassner, C. The potential of social learning in community gardens and the impact of community heterogeneity. Learn. Cult. Soc. Interact. 2020, 24, 100351. doi:10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100351.	[42]
Rogge, N.; Theesfeld, I. Categorizing urban commons: Community gardens in the Rhine-Ruhr agglomeration, Germany. Int. J. Comm. 2018, 12, 251–274. doi:10.18352/ijc.854.	[44]

Table A2. *Cont.*

Rogge, N.; Theesfeld, I.; Strassner, C. Social sustainability through social interaction—A national survey on community gardens in Germany. Sustainability 2018, 10, 1085. doi:10.3390/su10041085.	[43]
Rombach, M.; Bitsch, V. Food movements in Germany: Slow food, food sharing, and dumpster diving. IFAMA 2015, 18, 1-24. doi:10.22004/ag.econ.208398.	[57]
Rosman, A.; MacPherson, J.; Arndt, M.; Helming, K. Perceived resilience of community supported agriculture in Germany. Agric. Syst. 2024, 220, 104068. doi:10.1016/j.agsy.2024.104068.	[50]
Rosol, M.; Barbosa, R. Moving beyond direct marketing with new mediated models: Evolution of or departure from alternative food networks? Agric. Hum. Values 2021, 38, 1021–1039. doi:10.1007/s10460-021-10210-4.	[45]
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Appendix C



Figure A1. Number of publications by journal.

Appendix D

Table A3. Methodologies applied (in detail).

Source	Literature Review	Documentary Analysis, Website	Interviews	Fieldwork, Participatory Observation	Expert Workshop, Focus Group	Survey
[34]		Document analysis reviewing websites of selected cases, news articles, and crowdfunding campaigns	4 semi-structured interviews with representatives of the selected cases			Short online survey to obtain an overview
[60]			10 semi-structured interviews with members and farmers of 3 selected farms			570 standardized surveys addressing the members and farmers of all existing CSA farms in Germany at the time of circulation
[52]		Document analyses of CSA publications and online posts	9 semi-structured interviews with CSA actors (local CSA members and regional network organizers)	Participatory observations at CSA network gathering		

Table A3. *Cont.*

Source	Literature Review	Documentary Analysis, Website	Interviews	Fieldwork, Participatory Observation	Expert Workshop, Focus Group	Survey
[35]		Archival data: copies of membership agreements, bylaws, and websites	In-depth interviews (general interview guide) with CSA participants and consultants from the CSA network; additional interviews conducted during the visits to the production cites of 4 CSA	Participatory observation as a seminar, visit to the annual membership meeting of the CSA network, field notes from production site visits of 4 CSA, field notes from workday at production site		
[53]			7 interviews (3 CSA, 2 food cooperatives, and 2 self-harvest gardens) were conducted with active female respondents (producers, prosumers, and consumers) with 17 open-ended questions using Zoom (except for 3 interviews that were conducted face-to-face)			
[36]	Analyzing existing literature	Analyzing documents and webpages of CSA organizations	10 semi-standardized expert interviews with members of single CSA, the CSA network, consultants, and further experts in the field	16 participatory observations in meetings (carried out in every semi-annual conference of the CSA network since fall 2020), other network meetings, and workshops hosted by the CSA Network		
[54]	Literature analysis					Standardized survey with 1139 participants
[55]						Standardized survey (Schwartz's Portrait Value Questionnaire) with 204 CSA members
[67]			8 in-depth interviews with 4 farmers, 2 participating consumers, 1 consultant, and 1 non-governmental organization		Workshop with 6 purposefully selected practitioners (farmers or participating consumers) from CSA initiatives in the region and 6 experts from policy, administration, and research directly involved in the CSA topic	

Table A3. *Cont.*

Source	Literature Review	Documentary Analysis, Website	Interviews	Fieldwork, Participatory Observation	Expert Workshop, Focus Group	Survey
[71]		Analysis of media coverage, publications, websites, and blogs	Interviews	Participatory observation	Focus-group discussion with students and gardeners	
[62]			Interviews with farmers and consumers			
[72]	Selective literature review to identify key concepts	Internal documents including protocols of council and coordination meetings	8 semi-structured and 1 in-depth interview with current and former active members of the CSA network	Participatory observations in bi-weekly meetings over one year	1 focus group interview with the working group on politics of the CSA network	
[73]		Web content and documents as well as videos and radio features	12 semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees, former board and council members, and members (some interviews were conducted online)	Research notes from participatory observations of 3 semi-annual network meetings		
[56]	Literature search with 37 documents for analysis	Secondary information from literature		2 focus group discussions with shareholders of 1 citizen shareholder company (9 women and 8 man) with a short questionnaire filled out in advance		Survey of shareholders
[37]		Articles published by local newspapers	16 semi-structured interviews (participants or people in charge of the respective initiative)	Participatory observations at 2 urban gardening events and 1 cooking event (short protocols with information about initiatives' procedure, initiatives' behavior, informal conversations, and group dynamics)	Group discussion	
[38]			Semi-structured interviews (first round: 2 municipalities; second round: 2–3 farmers)			
[68]	Review of literature	Documentary data: cities' histories, planning documents, online resource, and newspaper articles	Telephone interviews and 20 semi-structured interviews in both cities (on-site) with elected official, planning staff members, environmental nonprofit representatives, and small business owners	Sight and event visits for participatory observations		

Table A3. *Cont.*

Source	Literature Review	Documentary Analysis, Website	Interviews	Fieldwork, Participatory Observation	Expert Workshop, Focus Group	Survey
[63]			Semi-structured interviews at 22 CSA farms with owners, farmer, members, and employees in Hesse by telephone or Zoom call (2 directly at the farms)			
[39]	Literature search: Inaugurated sample of CSA literature (n = 35 publications) starting from 2019		6 individual interviews	Participatory observations at 10 non-scientific network conferences	4 focus groups with 25 participants, various discussions with 16 participants	Survey of all CSA members of the CSA network in Germany (contacted over the CSA network): 81 farms that are part of 70 CSA organizations responded the survey
[40]						10 surveys with experts (5 CSA farmers, 3 researchers from university and non-university research institutes, and 2 experts from agriculture associations)
[41]			26 guided interviews with consumer and producers			
[64]		Individual CSA websites and CSA network websites as well as recordings of a series of webinars	7 semi-structured interviews (2 in Germany)			
[42]						123 surveys of leaders or members of the core group of a garden (expected well-founded knowledge)
[44]						11 surveys of leaders or members of core groups of a garden
[43]						123 surveys of leaders or members of the core group of a garden (expected well-founded knowledge)

Table A3. *Cont.*

Source	Literature Review	Documentary Analysis, Website	Interviews	Fieldwork, Participatory Observation	Expert Workshop, Focus Group	Survey
[57]			25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews face-to-face or over the phone: 10 Slow Food members (5 leading roles and 5 Slow Food Youth movement members between 20–40 years (3 students, 2 people from education and gastronomy)) and 15 dumpster divers (20–30 years old)			
[50]			1 in-depth interview	A resilience perception assessment and a Fuzzy-Cognitive-Mapping workshop		Survey with CSA farmers
[45]			Semi-structured interviews with key informants	Participatory observations in meetings and during collection and open farm days		
[19]		Analysis of websites, media coverage, grey literature, newsletters, reports, and more	Semi-structured interviews with key actors	Participation in meetings		
[46]	Review of existing academic literature on intentional communities	Review of self-published material such as websites, promotional materials, and academic reports	2–3 in-depth face-to-face interviews per case with informants (founders and people involved in the area of food)	Site visits	A half-day workshops per case	
[58]		Baseline data concerning founding year, location, and certification type	10 semi-structured interviews (5 on-site and 5 online per Webex) with farmers (management position in the CSA, either on the board or as farm manager)			
[70]			30 semi-structured interviews with producers and consumer members of CSA and local residents	Participatory observations (1 week per 2 cases) on each site		
[74]	German degrowth literature	Documentation analysis of network's vision and core principles	19 semi-structured interviews with degrowth scholars and activists with a broad overview of the degrowth community (5 degrowth movement, 5 CSA movement, and 9 individual CSA initiatives)	Participatory observations during network working groups and 4 network conferences		

Table A3. *Cont.*

Source	Literature Review	Documentary Analysis, Website	Interviews	Fieldwork, Participatory Observation	Expert Workshop, Focus Group	Survey
[65]		Documentary analysis and photographic data gathering	26 in-depth interviews	Activist ethnography with 10 food initiatives (participatory action research) and informal interviews documented in a research diary	2 focus groups with activists and participants	
[66]			Walking interviews on-site with 10 farmers	Complemented with ethnographic approaches (participatory observations and spending time or working with the farmers)		
[69]	For reference data	Documentary method: for analyzing the results of group discussion		Field work with standardized protocol	Group discussion	Standardized survey
[47]	Literature review	Desk research	Face-to-face interviews with 9 long-term, active members with sound knowledge of their initiatives			
[48]			10 expert interviews (leadership positions: board members or farm managers)		Expert workshop with 19 participants (farmers, gardeners, and representatives from CSA advisory services, CSA consulting, and CSA research)	
[59]			15 qualitative, problem-centered interviews (5 community gardens, 4 cooperative supermarkets, and 6 too good to go app)			
[61]						Cross-sectional study of German CSA members using convenience sampling: survey with 69 questions (not all included in the data analysis)
[49]			26 qualitative interviews (8 producers and 18 consumers)			
[51]			18 qualitative interviews (consumers/members)			
	10	**18**	**33**	**19**	**9**	**13**

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