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# Contrasting Prosumption Models: Experiences, Benefits and Continuation in Allotment Gardens and Community-Supported Agriculture in Switzerland

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**Abstract:** Agricultural prosumption is a transformative pathway, enabling individuals to reconnect to nature whilst producing food for their own consumption. Allotment gardens (AGs) and community-supported agriculture (CSA) are two main types of this practice, forming opposing sides on a continuous prosumption scale, ranging from prosumption-as-consumption (p-a-c), as in consumption focused CSA initiatives, to prosumption-as-production (p-a-p), as in the production-orientated AGs. Using a survey completed by Swiss CSA ($n$ = 250) and AG members ($n$ = 201), this study shows how prosumers perceive the benefits of their activity, how these experiences shape their likeliness to continue and how differently they rate the effects of prosumption on individuals, communities and society. In addition, it provides an outlook on associated societal developments, regarding these activities as forms of contributive economy. Although the two groups differed in their socio-demographics, their attitudes and experiences were similar. P-a-p organisations (AGs) enhance production-related individual benefits, while p-a-c organisations foster positive experiences around consumption activities. AG continuation is driven by the experienced health and food-related benefits, while CSAs rely on the communal and organisational involvement of their members. While AG members focus on individual benefits, CSA members strive to be part of a food system change, using their communal structures to create a social movement. This demonstrates the wide range and potential of food prosumption in fostering diverse forms of engagement, offering insights into its potential for sustaining participation and contributing to alternative economic models.

**Keywords:** allotment gardens; community-supported agriculture; personal experiences; contributive economy



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## 1. Introduction

Changing the significance and value of food in our society is crucial for a just and sustainable food system transformation [1]. Agricultural prosumption, where prosumers co-produce food for their own consumption, plays a key role in this transition by fostering sustainable food production and consumption. In addition to providing local, organic and seasonal food, agricultural prosumption practices contribute to the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) [2]. By strengthening local food systems, promoting short value chains and fostering community resilience, communal agricultural prosumption contributes to more sustainable urban environments and responsible food consumption [3,4].

In Switzerland, allotment gardens (AGs) and community-supported agriculture (CSA) are leading enablers of communal agricultural prosumption (CAP). Both involve members in food production for their own consumption while offering community engagement and recreational opportunities, an aspect that gained importance during the COVID-19 pandemic [5–9].

The main body of literature regarding CAP has focused on the motivations and the willingness to join [9–12], either framing these practices as activism [13–15] or part of a broader social movement [16–18]. A smaller part of research has taken a pragmatic approach, highlighting emotional and practical motivations for participation [19]. However, both perspectives lack research on how members actually experience CAP over time and which experiences lead to their continuous participation in these activities.

This study addressed this gap by adopting a mixed approach, analysing both pragmatic experiences and activist factors on different societal levels. We conducted an online survey amongst active CAP members to understand their experiences, benefits and other factors influencing continued participation. We also explored CAP's role in broader societal developments, particularly its contribution to sustainable food systems and its positioning within different models of prosumption. To provide a differentiated view of CAP, we compared experiences, benefits and the importance of social factors in two CAP types: AG and CSA.

Grounding our analysis in prosumption theory [20], we explored two potential societal developments. The first, "prosumption capitalism" [21], suggests the (self-)exploitation of prosumers through various social, digital and material capitalist infrastructures that progressively occupy the consumption dimension of a production process. The second, "contributive economy", is rooted in the individual and collective motivations of human activities, at the margin of commodification [22–25].

This approach allowed us to analyse prosumers' pragmatic experiences and characteristics and the factors influencing their continued participation, whilst framing these results within CAP's broader societal potential.

## 2. Background and Aims

### *2.1. Overview of Allotment Gardens and Community-Supported Agriculture in Switzerland*

Originating mostly during the industrialisation, allotment gardens (AGs) are the oldest type of communal agricultural prosumption (CAP), traditionally providing inexpensive food to their members [26,27]. In Switzerland, AGs are established on city-owned land but managed by local AG organisations, which rent out singular plots of up to 100 square metres to members [27,28]. Members have to adhere to allotment-specific usage rules, such as the required usage percentage for produce versus recreational use [29]. In Switzerland, there are more than 23,000 official members [28], but estimates project up to 58.000 AG adjacent households nationwide [30]. In addition, AGs positively impact the environment by contributing to urban ecosystem services and green infrastructure [31–35], as well as improving urban climate [36]. For their members, AGs offer numerous health and social benefits, including stress reduction, increased physical exercise and additional social contacts [37–39].

CSA, originating in 1960s Japan [40], has become a worldwide trend. Members finance professional farmers through membership fees and subscription costs, receiving a regular delivery of produce in return [41]. Most CSA initiatives require their members to contribute a set number of hours of labour to production, logistics or administration [42]. In 2015, Switzerland had approximately 60 CSAs, feeding up to 26,000 people [42]. Today, the two major Swiss CSA umbrella organisations list 46 initiatives [43,44]. Most CSAs follow organic production principles, making them sustainable with positive health and

environmental benefits [42]. Research on CSAs covers their economic advantages, such as short value chains [45] and transformative potential [11,46], as well as the motivation of members [9,10,16] and CSAs' political engagement [13,15]. CSA's advantages are generally seen from two perspectives: First, farmers achieve a higher income compared to traditional farming, as well as ecological, economic and social benefits [47], such as providing quality food to a tight-knit community as well a positive impact on soil and water quality [48]. Second, members profit from the high nutritional value and overall quality of the food and participate in communal activities as well as in CSA's democratic structures [17,49].

Communal agricultural prosumption (CAP) types offer a wide range of individual and social experiences that may influence participants' long-term engagement, especially if those experiences are perceived to be beneficial. Previous research has shown that outdoor activities, including gardening, contribute to physical and mental well-being through mechanisms such as increased physical activity, exposure to fresh air and biophilia [37,38,42,50]. Similarly, active participation in organisational processes and transparent decision-making can strengthen members' sense of involvement, potentially increasing their commitment [11,41]. Economic benefits, such as lower grocery costs or improved food security [45,51,52], as well as opportunities for social interaction and community building [10,16,53,54], may further encourage sustained participation. Finally, engaging in sustainable practices and perceiving self-produced food as healthier and higher-quality than store-bought food could reinforce members' motivation to continue prosuming [49,55,56].

### 2.2. Prosumption, Agriculture and Capitalism

The term "prosumption", first used by Alvin Toffler [57] and later established in social sciences by George Ritzer [20], captures the connectedness of production and consumption. While widely applied to digital and commercial contexts, such as Wikipedia or user-generated content [58,59], prosumption also provides a useful lens for understanding contemporary community-based agriculture.

Ritzer conceptualises prosumption as a continuum, with production and consumption forming two poles or 'moments in the overarching process of prosumption' [21]. Ritzer argues that production always includes elements of consumption and vice versa, framing these as prosumption-as-production (p-a-p), where production dominates but includes consumption aspects, such as in factory work, and prosumption-as-consumption (p-a-c), where consumption dominates but includes production elements, as it is the case with self-checkouts in supermarkets [21].

In agriculture, industrial farms exemplify p-a-p, as they primarily focus on production but still engage in consumption-related activities such as fodder or seed use. Conversely, consumer-driven food initiatives, such as produce subscription boxes or farmer-initiated projects such as direct marketing vending machines, represent p-a-c, as they are consumption-orientated yet involve production-related tasks, such as logistics and self-service. This contextualisation aligns with Ritzer's thoughts on the historic development of p-a-c, where labour once performed by paid employees is now increasingly performed by prosumers [21].

Within CAP, CSAs emphasise food provision and limited labour for their members, thus aligning themselves more closely with p-a-c, whereas AGs, through their members' focus on active cultivation and harvesting, are production-dominated and therefore p-a-p. The historic development from professional farming to CSAs aligns with Ritzer's proposition, as voluntary CSA work replaced paid farm labour. According to Ritzer, this replacement of paid labour suggests a pessimistic outlook, linking prosumption inevitably to capitalism. He argues that a shift towards a consumer-based prosumption regime will increase the exploitation of consumers, often without them realising their disadvantage [20].

While Ritzer's theory captures important aspects of prosumption, it does not fully account for CAP's non-profit and non-commodified nature. Unlike prosumption in commercial contexts, which often benefits corporations at the expense of consumers, CAP operates at the margins of the market economy, prioritising social and ecological goals over profit. To better understand this alternative economic model, we turn to the concept of contributive economy.

Contributive economy is orientated toward the creation of collective value at the margin of the market economy and commodification [22]. The concept emphasises collective management and production of goods and services to meet societal needs rather than generating private profit. Unlike traditional market economies, which operate on exchange-driven and profit-maximising principles, contributive economy incorporates gifting, reciprocity and redistribution [60]. Contributive economy involves a wide range of social entities as economic actors, such as communities, non-profit organisations and cooperatives, leading to a complex economic landscape [22,61]. This approach creates opportunities for sharing knowledge and resources, as well as generating a sense of community and mutual support [25]. CAP initiatives, such as AGs and CSAs, embody these principles: members contribute labour and resources not for direct financial gain but to sustain shared agricultural projects that benefit or establish a community. Rather than being a tool of capitalist exploitation, CAP represents a form of economic organisation that might resist market pressures and lays the foundation for a sustainable and resilient food system.

Recent research has associated alternative food systems and agroecology with the features of a contributive economy, highlighting their potential to create more sustainable and resilient food networks [23]. By embedding CAP within this framework, we move beyond Ritzer's critique of prosumption as an extension of capitalism and instead conceptualise it as a transformative economic practice that challenges conventional market dependencies and fosters long-term sustainability.

The concept of contributive prosumption aligns with broader discussions in economic geography and political economy that explore alternative and diverse economic practices. The diverse economies framework [62] challenges conventional economic classifications by making visible hybrid and non-capitalist practices that emerge in spaces of collective economic organisation. Studies on meal-sharing platforms and community gardens, as well as on CSAs, have demonstrated how these initiatives blend capitalist, alternative capitalist and non-capitalist elements, creating economic relationships based on care, reciprocity and ethical commitments rather than pure market exchanges [63,64]. Similarly, research on community gardens as commons has highlighted how these spaces function not only as sites of food production but also as social and cultural commons, reinforcing non-monetary forms of value creation [65]. These insights complement the notion of contributive prosumption by illustrating how CAP organisations foster economic diversity through their organisational structures, balancing individual and collective benefits. While CAP initiatives often integrate elements of market exchange (e.g., membership fees in CSAs), their embeddedness in community-oriented practices suggests that they operate beyond the conventional prosumer model, contributing to a reconfiguration of economic relations towards more participatory and ethically guided frameworks.

By situating CAP within the framework of contributive prosumption, we highlight its potential to cultivate resilient, community-driven food systems that challenge market dependencies. Understanding these organisational forms is crucial for developing sustainable agricultural models that prioritise social and ecological well-being over profit.

### 2.3. Aims

After examining communal agricultural prosumption's (CAP) theoretical foundations and its capitalist and contributive features, we turn to the pragmatic experiences within these organisations. By contrasting allotment gardens (AGs) and community supported agriculture (CSA) as opposites on the prosumption continuum, we highlight how differences in the organisational structure can influence participants' experiences and engagement, ultimately shaping the sustainability and continuity of these CAP types. This allows us to better understand how different organisational structures shape participants' roles, responsibilities and motivations. While AGs operate with a more individualised approach to food production, CSAs incorporate varying degrees of collective organisation, shared labour and decision-making. By situating them along this continuum, we can formulate three research questions.

**RQ1.** *How do the experienced benefits (e.g., health, nature connectedness) and the experienced organisational and community involvement in AGs and CSAs differ along the prosumption continuum?*

**RQ2.** *How do these pragmatic experiences, the involvement and activism shape the long-term commitment to prosumption?*

**RQ3.** *How important are individual-centred (connection to nature), community-centred (community involvement) and society-centred effects (social change/activism) of prosumption for members of AGs and CSAs?*

Hypotheses: We expect to see that the experiences and the continuity of the activity are closely linked to the position of each type on the prosumption continuum. We hypothesise that AGs will show a focus on individual experiences and benefits connected to production-related activities, while CSAs will be influenced by communal experiences and are driven through these social and consumption-related aspects. We believe that individual-centred effects will have the highest significance for AG members, while CSA members rate community- and society-centred effects as the most important factors.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Survey Design

In early 2023, we conducted an online survey with active prosumers in the German-speaking regions of Switzerland. To start, respondents indicated their consent and were informed about data management. Then, they were asked to specify their type of prosumption organisation, which allowed us to group them into allotment garden (AG) and community-supported agriculture (CSA) members. Respondents indicated the duration of their involvement and their likeliness to continue their communal agricultural prosumption (CAP) activity. Additionally, they responded to questions assessing their perceived benefits of prosuming related to health, food quality and biophilia, as well as their level of involvement in their organisation in terms of decision-making and community participation. We controlled for a perceived economic impact of the activity.

Respondents then indicated their general perceptions of environmental issues, especially in relation to food. Additionally, we assessed the importance they attributed to community interaction, social change and biophilia. Finally, their socio-demographic data (i.e., age, gender, education level, employment status, living environment) were recorded, as well as information on respondents' political orientation, citizenship status, living environment (urban or rural) and whether they had access to a garden in their childhood.

### 3.2. Data Sampling

To sample active prosumers, we selected three AGs as well as nine CSAs in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The AG organisations, as city-wide consolidation of allotments, ranged from having 1100 to 2600 members in total. Swiss CSAs vary substantially in their sizes; we therefore included three small CSAs (50 to 100 members), three mid-sized organisations (150 to 250 members) and three large CSA initiatives (350 to 400 members). To account for different environments, we selected five rural, two semi-urban and two urban CSAs, along with two AGs in mid-sized cities and one in a large city. We only focused on CSAs which required physical labour as part of their membership. Using a snowball sampling method [66], the surveys were then send to the organisations, which used their email lists to distribute them to their members. The sampling took place between December 2022 and January 2023. Participants were incentivised with a railway voucher draw.

### 3.3. Participants

The overall sample consisted of $N$ = 451 participants, with $n$ = 201 participants from AGs and $n$ = 250 from CSAs. With 3800 potential participants, the response rate was estimated at 12.6%. All the information about the sample can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation (SD) of socio-demographic characteristics of total sample and CAP types.

| | | | **Total ($n$ = 451)** | **AG ($n$ = 201)** | **CSA ($n$ = 250)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **[Unit]** | **Mean (*SD*)** | **Mean (*SD*)** | **Mean (*SD*)** |
| Age | | [Years] | 49.75 (14.15) | 54.23 (14.87) | 45.70 (12.29) |
| Gender | Male | [%] | 37.8 | 48.8 (98) | 28.8 (70) |
| | Female | [%] | 58.7 | 48.8 (98) | 68.4 (170) |
| Education | Basic | [%] | 21.3 | 37.3 (75) | 8.8 (22) |
| | Intermediate | [%] | 19.4 | 24.4 (49) | 15.2 (38) |
| | High | [%] | 59.3 | 38.3 (77) | 76.0 (190) |
| Left–Right Scale (0 = left, 100 = right) | Slider Scale [(a)] | [0–100] | 30.66 (21.64) | 40.75 (21.96) | 21.83 (17.65) |
| Living Environment | Urban (>20 k) | [%] | 66.4 | 83 (172) | 56.4 (141) |
| | Rural | [%] | 33.6 | 17 (34) | 43.6 (109) |
| Access to Garden in Childhood | Yes | [%] | 80.4 | 83.5 (178) | 79.6 (199) |
| | No | [%] | 19.6 | 16.5 (33) | 20.4 (51) |
| Employment | (Self-)Employment | [%] | 70.4 | 56.2 (113) | 81.2 (203) |
| | Retired | [%] | 19.2 | 31.8 (64) | 8.4 (21) |
| | School, Studying, Vocational Training | [%] | 10.4 | 3 (6) | 5.6 (14) |
| Citizenship | Swiss | [%] | 91 | 92 (185) | 90.8 (227) |
| | Non-Swiss | [%] | 9 | 8 (16) | 8.8 (23) |
| Duration of Prosumption | <1 year | [%] | 8.6 | 4.0 (8) | 11.6 (29) |
| | 1–3 years | [%] | 34.4 | 21.9 (44) | 42.4 (106) |
| | 3–6 years | [%] | 25.5 | 25.4 (51) | 26.85 (67) |
| | >6 years | [%] | 31.5 | 48.8 (98) | 19.2 (48) |

[(a)] Description of scale.

### 3.4. Socio-Demographics of Sample

The analysis of the demographics revealed notable differences between the two prosumption types. AG members were significantly older ($M$ = 54.2, $SD$ = 14.9) than CSA members ($M$ = 47.7, $SD$ = 12.3), where $t$ (386.49) = 6.53, and $p < 0.001$, which suggests distinct demographic profiles, also found regarding their employment status. While among AG members, 56.2% were employed, 31.8% were retired and 3% were in school, undergoing vocational training or studying, CSA membership mainly consisted of employed or self-employed individuals (81.2%). Only 8.4% were retired, and 5.6% were in vocational training. A total of 48.8% of AG members had been involved in their activity for more than six years, while the majority of CSA members (42.4%) had been active for one to three years or less than a year (11.6%).

48.8% of AG members identified as male and 48.8% as female. CSAs exhibited a larger number of members identifying as female with 68.4% and only 28.8% as male.

Whilst our study confirmed the trend [67,68] that CSA members' educational backgrounds are predominantly high (76%), AG members exhibited a varying distribution between low (37.3%), intermediate (24.4%) and high educational backgrounds (38.3%). These numbers reflect AG members' traditional working-class backgrounds [27,69], as well as the modern generational shift towards highly educated members [70].

Regarding the political orientation on a scale from 0 (completely left) to 100 (completely right), CSA members displayed a significantly stronger left-leaning tendency ($M$ = 21.83, $SD$ = 17.65) than AG members ($M$ = 40.75, $SD$ = 21.96), where $t$ (379.52) = 9.91 and $p < 0.001$. A total of 92% of our respondents were Swiss citizens. The majority of our sample reported having had regular access to a garden in their childhood (83.5% of AG members and 79.6% of CSA members).

### 3.5. Measurement Scales

In order to depict the variances of participants' experiences and attitudes, we used slider scales (0–100) and five-point Likert scales. The latter measured agreement assessments, while the slider scales captured nuanced differentiations in respondents' responses to CAP-specific questions. Additionally, to maximise participation, the survey was designed to be as concise as possible while still capturing key aspects influencing continued engagement.

From the Likert and slider scale items, several measurement scales were constructed to assess key dimensions of the CAP experience, such as perceived health benefits, perceived food quality and involvement in communal and organisational structures, as well as the economic impact a member felt from their activity. These scales were designed to directly reflect participants' subjective experiences. To assess the internal consistency, we calculated Cronbach's alpha, a statistical measure that indicates how closely related a set of items are as a group. Each multi-item scale demonstrated at least good reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$).

The Health Benefit Perception scale assessed the perceived mental and physical health benefits experienced by agricultural prosumers. Research has shown that gardening and similar outdoor activities increase physical activity and help individuals to de-stress [37,38]. Participants were asked to rate two items focused on the perceived physical and mental health benefits on a scale from 0 (not beneficial at all) to 100 (completely beneficial). The internal consistency exhibited a good Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.80$.

Similarly, the Food Quality Perception scale measured how members perceived the healthiness and environmental friendliness of their self-produced food, factors that may reinforce the motivation to continue engaging in prosumption [55]. The scale exhibited an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.71$. It contained two items concerning the participants'

perception of the healthiness and environmental friendliness of the self-produced food on a scale from 0 (not beneficial at all) to 100 (completely beneficial).

The Community Involvement, the Organisational Involvement and Economic Impact scales were based on five-point Likert scale agreement statements, ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree). We created these scales after conducting principal component analysis (PCA) and reliability analysis.

The Community Involvement scale assessed the social experiences within CAP organisations, as social interaction and a sense of community may enhance long-term engagement [53,54]. The scale exhibited a good Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.84$. The survey contained eight items in relation to the participant's interactions with other members and the impact of the organisation on their social life. PCA revealed that two items related to how welcome the participants felt in their organisation and if other members taught them new ways to produce food had a low correlation with the overall scale ($r < 0.2$); hence, they were not included in the scale. The final scale was built with the six remaining items (cf. Table 2). A high score on the community involvement scale indicated experiencing strong involvement in the organisation's community.

The scale for Organisational Involvement captured the extent to which members felt engaged in the decision-making process of their organisation. Research has suggested that active participation and transparent decision-making can enhance members' sense of involvement and commitment [11,41]. This scale exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.73$. It was constructed using three Likert-scaled agreement items regarding the members' active participation in the organisation, especially concerning the decision-making process and the transparency of decisions for members, on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree). PCA revealed that all items had a strong correlation with the overall scale, and they exhibited a good total item correlation. The higher the rating on this scale, the more involved the members were and the easier it was for them to get involved in the organisation processes of their respective organisation.

The Economic Impact scale evaluated whether active membership provided financial benefits, such as reduced grocery prices or improved food security, which are often cited as important benefits in CAP [45,51,52,71]. The scale was constructed using three agreement items concerning whether the activity saved the members money on groceries, if it helped them afford food they otherwise could not and if it had a positive impact on their livelihood, scaled from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree). PCA revealed a good correlation for the three items and the overall scale ($r > 0.8$). The scale exhibited a good Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.73$. The higher the rating, the more positive the economic impact of the activity on the participants.

Participants' connection to nature was measured using the Nature Connectedness scale, as biophilic experiences are known to enhance well-being and engagement in agricultural activities [50,72]. Respondents were asked to indicate how connected to nature they felt during their activity on a scale ranging from 0 (not connected at all) to 100 (completely connected).

Similarly, the Continuation scale used the introductory question on the continuation of prosumption to measure the participants' likeliness to continue their activity on a slider scale from 0 (not likely at all) to 100 (completely likely).

The General Environmental Concern captured how environmental values may have influenced members' motivation to engage in prosumption [73]. The scale consisted of four agreement statements regarding the participants' general concern about environmental problems and climate change in the decision-making process and the transparency of decisions for members on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree). PCA

showed that the items fit well with the overall scale, which additionally exhibited a solid Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.68$.

**Table 2.** Comparison of mean and standard deviation (SD) of scales of total sample and CAP types.

| | | **Total ($n$ = 451)** | **AG ($n$ = 201)** | **CSA ($n$ = 250)** | ***t*-Test** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **[Unit]** | **Mean (*SD*)** | **Mean (*SD*)** | **Mean (*SD*)** | ***p*-Value** |
| Health Benefit Perception<br>*Level of benefits from activity regarding*: | [0–100 [b]] | 81.31 (17.82)<br>*"Physical health benefit perception (SLI)"*<br>*"Mental health benefit perception (SLI)"* | 88.21 (12.14) | 76.77 (19.14) | 0.000 |
| Food Quality Perception<br>*Level of benefits from activity regarding*: | [0–100 [b]] | 90.53 (11.44)<br>*"Environmental friendliness of food perception"*<br>*Perception of healthiness of food (SLI)* | 86.94 (13.83) | 93.48 (8.01) | 0.000 |
| Community Involvement<br>*Total level of agreement with the following statements:* | [1–5 [a]] | 3.37 (0.86)<br>*"I regularly talk to other members"*<br>*"I meet members outside the organisation"*<br>*"I regularly share food with other members"*<br>*"I made new friends in the organisation"*<br>*"Activity had positive impact on my social life"*<br>*"Other members appreciate my work"* | 3.43 (0.86) | 3.36 (0.86) | 0.344 |
| Organisational Involvement<br>*Total level of agreement with the following statements:* | [0–5 [a]] | 3.85 (0.82)<br>*"I can easily participate in decision making process within the organisation"*<br>*"I actively participate in decision making processes"*<br>*"My organisation's decisions are transparent"* | 3.63 (0.93) | 4.01 (0.67) | 0.000 |
| Economic Impact<br>*Level of agreement with the following statements*: | [0–5 [a]] | 2.81 (0.80)<br>*"Activity saves money on groceries"*<br>*"Access to food I otherwise could not afford"*<br>*"Activity supports my livelihood"* | 2.86 (0.88) | 2.78 (0.74) | 0.228 |
| Nature Connectedness Perception<br>*Level of connectedness with nature during activity* | [0–100 [b]] | 86.34 (15.48) | 90.18 (11.83) | 83.24 (16.02) | 0.000 |
| Continuation<br>*Level of likeliness of the following statement*: | [0–100 [b]] | 88.92 (17.45)<br>*"Continuation of activity in next 3 years"* | 87.89 (20.25) | 90.26 (14.27) | 0.477 |

[a] Five-point Lickert scale (disagree, mostly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, mostly agree, agree). [b] Slider scale ranging from 0 to 100.

Lastly, respondents indicated how important biophilia [50], being part of a community and taking part in social change (food system transformation) [15,54] was for them, as these broader motivations may have influenced their continued engagement in CAP. The importance of these aspects was recorded on a scale from 0 (not important at all) to 100 (highly important). In addition, they indicated their political orientation. This was relevant since alternative food systems tend to incorporate left-leaning ideologies and

are therefore often sought out by those who share these attitudes [68]. These general measurements were used directly as scales.

### 3.6. Analysis

To determine if there were significant differences between the two CAP types, we ran *t*-tests for continuous variables (age, left–right scale, as well as all general and specific scales) and used Chi-Square tests for categorical variables (gender, education, living environment, access to a garden during childhood, employment, citizenship, duration of prosumption).

Multiple linear ordinary least square regression analyses were conducted to examine which factors (i.e., age, gender, education, political orientation, living environment, access to a garden during childhood, health benefit perceptions, food quality perceptions, community involvement, organisational involvement, economic impacts) were important for a prolonged commitment to prosuming in CSAs and AGs. Prior to that, we ran Pearson's correlations to check the relationships between the independent variables and to identify potential issues with multicollinearity for the subsequent regression analysis. Data were analysed using SPSS version 28, IBM (Armonk, NY, USA) [74].

In order to assess the relative importance of biophilia, community involvement and engagement in social change, we conducted a comparative analysis between the two CAP types. The results were processed visually to clarify the different ratings.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Experienced Benefits and Experienced Involvement

In order to answer the first RQ and to test our hypotheses, we compared the results for the prosumption experience-specific scales between allotment gardens (AGs) and community supported agriculture (CSA). On the Nature Connectedness perception scale (cf. Table 2), AG members ranked significantly higher ($M$ = 90.18, $SD$ = 11.83) than CSA members ($M$ = 83.24, $SD$ = 16.02), where $t$ (449) = 4.82 and $p < 0.001$. This could partly be explained due to CSA members experiencing reduced physical labour, which meant they did not feel as close to nature as AG members, who spent more time in their allotments and used them as green spaces to retreat to. AG members therefore felt highly connected to nature whilst performing their activity. Nevertheless, all participants perceived a strong connection to nature even though both activities were in highly cultivated surroundings and not in a natural outdoor area.

In regard to the experienced benefits of their activity, we continued to see significant differences. Whilst still experiencing a large benefit for their physical and mental health, CSA members ($M$ = 76.77, $SD$ = 19.14) seemed to perceive this significantly less than AG members ($M$ = 88.21, $SD$ = 12.14), where t (427.39) = −6.40 and $p < 0.001$. While CSA initiatives and AGs both share the goal of producing fresh vegetables, AGs require regular physical work and therefore regular exercise, whilst CSAs demand only a few working days from each member per year.

The distinction between production and consumption could be seen on the food benefit perception scale as well. CSA members rated the environmental and health benefits of the produced food as highly positive ($M$ = 93.48, $SD$ = 8.01). Although this was also the case for AG members ($M$ = 86.94, $SD$ = 13.83), CSA members perceived the food-related benefits as significantly higher, where $t$ (304.54) = −5.95 and $p < 0.001$. Here, it is important to mention that CSA members receive regular boxes of produce throughout the year, whereas the harvest from an allotment is heavily dependent on the choices and skills of a single gardener and can be quite sparce.

While there was no significant difference between the two types of CAP in terms of their community involvement, with $t$ (428.61) = 0.88 and $p$ = 0.379, CSA members reported

significantly easier involvement in the organisational structure ($M$ = 4.01, $SD$ = 0.67) of their activity compared to AG members ($M$ = 3.63, $SD$ = 0.93), where $t$ (353.74) = −4.86 and $p < 0.001$. This result confirms the effectiveness of the democratic and open concepts employed by CSAs [42]. Overall, we saw that both types are highly social, and members of both perceive them as having positive social benefits for themselves.

No significant difference was found between the two types in regard to their economic impact on an individual, where $t$ (390.46) = 1.00 and $p$ = 0.317. While both groups of members perceived a slight positive economic impact ($M_{AG}$ = 2.86, $SD$ = 0.88; $M_{CSA}$ = 2.78, $SD$ = 0.74), saving money seemed not to be as important as the other social and individual benefits.

### 4.2. Factors Influencing the Continuation of Communal Agricultural Prosumption

To identify potential issues with multicollinearity for the subsequent regression analysis, Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to test for correlations between the likeliness to continue, as the dependent variable and the specific activity-based measurements as independent variables (health and food benefit perception, economic impacts, organisational and community involvement, nature connectedness and the duration of prosumption (cf. Table 3)).

Table 4 displays the results of the two multiple linear regression models, such as the standardised regression coefficients, the $p$-values and the confidence intervals. The models could explain 16% of the variance in the likeliness to continue participating in AGs and 21% in CSA initiatives. Due to missing values for some variables, the $n$ was lowered to 196 for AGs and 243 for CSAs. The regression models were significant for AGs ($F$ [13, 182] = 3.79, $p < 0.001$) and CSA ($F$ [13, 229]) = 5.90, $p < 0.001$).

Based on the AG-specific estimates, health benefit perceptions had a significant positive influence on the continuation of communal agricultural prosumption (CAP), signifying that members who experienced mental and physical health benefits from their activity were more likely to continue in their organisation.

Food quality perception was found to be a significant positive influence as well. AG members who saw their produce as healthy and environmentally friendly were therefore highly likely to continue prosuming. In addition to the perception of individual benefits, education exhibited a slightly significant positive effect, predicting a higher continuation rate if AG members had a higher level of education.

Within the CSA model, health benefit perceptions had a significant positive relationship with continuation as well, albeit not one as strong as for AGs. The effect of food benefit perceptions was not significant in this model. The role of social influence was exhibited by the significant positive effects of organisational involvement and community involvement. This means that CSA members who were able to actively take part in the community and were able to easily participate in the decision-making process were more likely to continue their activity, which is in line with the literature [10,16]. It seems that CSA members' motivation to continue is not solely based on pragmatic reasons [19] but rather through social and communal aspects. In addition to the effect of these communal and social experiences, we saw a significant negative impact of the living environment on continuation. Rural CSA members were more likely to continue prosuming than their urban counterparts. This difference could in part be rooted in the higher mobility of urban populations, linking their engagement in a CSA to their current residence. Additionally, the community in CSA initiatives could have higher significance for rural participants, who might have less access to other clubs or social institutions. Compared to literature on the differences between urban and rural AGs, we found that rural CSA members valued food-related benefits higher and were therefore more inclined to continue participating [75].

**Table 3.** Pearson's correlations between predictors for continuation by CAP types.

| | Variables—AG | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Likelihood of Continuing with Current Prosumption Activity | - | | | | | | | |
| 2. | Health Benefit Perception | 0.30 *** | - | | | | | | |
| 3. | Food Benefit Perception | 0.35 *** | 0.42 *** | - | | | | | |
| 4. | Economic Impact | 0.17 * | 0.21 *** | 0.24 *** | - | | | | |
| 5. | Organisational Involvement | 0.11 | 0.23 *** | 0.24 *** | 0.18 ** | - | | | |
| 6. | Community Involvement | 0.10 | 0.42 *** | 0.25 *** | 0.23 *** | 0.56 *** | - | | |
| 7. | Nature Connectedness Perception | 0.21 *** | 0.53 *** | 0.49 *** | 0.21 ** | 0.18 ** | 0.26 *** | - | |
| 8. | Duration of Prosumption | 0.05 | 0.22 *** | 0.16 * | 0.06 | 0.27 *** | 0.29 *** | 0.21 ** | - |
| | Variables—CSA | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. |
| 1. | Likelihood of Continuing with Current Prosumption Activity | - | | | | | | | |
| 2. | Health Benefit Perception | 0.29 *** | - | | | | | | |
| 3. | Food Benefit Perception | 0.25 *** | 0.34 *** | - | | | | | |
| 4. | Economic Impact | 0.19 *** | 0.30 *** | 0.18 ** | - | | | | |
| 5. | Organisational Involvement | 0.33 *** | 0.17 ** | 0.22 *** | 0.26 *** | - | | | |
| 6. | Community Involvement | 0.35 *** | 0.26 *** | 0.10 * | 0.28 *** | 0.51 *** | - | | |
| 7. | Nature Connectedness Perception | 0.19 *** | 0.44 *** | 0.43 *** | 0.24 *** | 0.21 *** | 0.21 *** | - | |
| 8. | Duration of Prosumption | 0.20 *** | 0.04 | 0.08 | 0.10 | 0.21 *** | 0.27 *** | 0.02 *** | - |

*: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

Economic influences did not have a significant effect in either model; nor did nature connectedness or the duration of the prosumption activity. Although there were significant differences between the groups in terms of their age, political orientation and gender, these factors were not significant in the regressions. Despite being similar between the groups in the socio-demographical data, participants having access to a garden in their childhood and the subsequent memories made were also found to have no significant influence.

**Table 4.** Summary of regression analysis for predicting continuation of allotment gardening (AG) and community-supported agriculture (CSA).

| | AG ($n$ = 196) | | CSA ($n$ = 243) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Predictors** | **(β)** | **95% CI** | **(β)** | **95% CI** |
| (Constant) | | [−25.60, 36.92] | | [22.82, 74.40] |
| Health Benefit Perception | 0.24 ** | [0.11, 0.70] | 0.17 * | [0.03, 0.23] |
| Food Benefit Perception | 0.28 *** | [0.18, 0.65] | 0.12 | [−0.02, 0.45] |
| Economic Impact | 0.09 | [−1.17, 5.27] | −0.01 | [−2.60, 2.27] |
| Organisational Involvement | 0.05 | [−2.36, 4.71] | 0.14 * | [0.13, 6.02] |
| Community Involvement | −0.04 | [−5.16, 3.24] | 0.16 * | [0.25, 4.99] |
| Nature Connectedness Perception | −0.03 | [−0.28, 0.20] | −0.03 | [−0.15, 0.10] |
| Duration of Prosumption | 0.04 | [−2.80, 4.41] | 0.12 | [−0.08, 3.75] |
| Age | −0.09 | [−0.34, 0.10] | −0.00 | [−0.16, 0.15] |
| Education | 0.18 * | [0.32, 3.78] | −0.10 | [−2.71, 0.30] |
| Left–Right Scale | 0.01 | [−0.15, 0.16] | −0.06 | [−0.15, 0.05] |
| Gender | 0.09 | [−2.39, 9.32] | −0.00 | [−3.81, 3.74] |
| Living Environment | −0.01 | [−2.94, 2.72] | −0.13 * | [−2.95, −0.08] |
| Access to Garden in Childhood | 0.01 | [−2.85, 3.14] | 0.10 | [−0.17, 3.25] |
| F | 3.78 *** | | 5.90 *** | |
| Adjusted R Squared | 0.16 | | 0.21 | |

*: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

### *4.3. Importance of Individual-Centred, Community-Centred and Society-Centred Factors*

Looking at the descriptive statistics (cf. Figure 1, Table 5) of the importance measurements for the individual-centred (biophilia), community-centred (community involvement) and society-centred effects (social change), we found that there were differences in the order of importance between the two prosumption types. AG members rated 'Biophilia' ($M$ = 89.62, $SD$ = 11.83) as the most important aspect, 'Being Part of a Social Change' ($M$ = 74.9, $SD$ = 24.36) as the second most important and 'Community Interaction' ($M$ = 62.39, $SD$ = 25.58) as the least important factor. CSA members perceived 'Being Part of a Social Change' ($M$ = 87.60, $SD$ = 16.03) as the most important factor, followed closely by 'Biophilia' ($M$ = 84.42, $SD$ = 17.95) and 'Community Interaction' ($M$ = 68.97, $SD$ = 21.39). Although all the scores were relatively high, a trend in AG members towards an emphasis on individual-centred factors could be seen, while CSA members exhibited a focus on society-centred effects.

**Table 5.** Importance ratings for nature connectedness, community interaction and social change: means and standard deviation ($SD$) for total sample and CAP types.

| | | **Total ($n$ = 451)** | **AG ($n$ = 201)** | **CSA ($n$ = 250)** | ***t*-Test** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **[Unit]** | **Mean ($SD$)** | **Mean ($SD$)** | **Mean ($SD$)** | ***p*-Value** |
| Nature Connectedness Importance | [0–100] [(a)] | 86.64 (15.77) | 89.62 (11.83) | 84.42 (17.95) | 0.015 |
| *Level of importance of the following*: | | *"Connection to nature"* | | | |
| Community Interaction Importance | [0–100] | 66.12 (23.56) | 62.39 (25.58) | 68.97 (21.39) | 0.008 |
| *Level of importance of the following*: | | *"being part of a community"* | | | |
| Social Change Importance | [0–100] | 81.64 (21.19) | 74.90 (24.36) | 87.60 (16.03) | 0.000 |
| *Level of importance of the following*: | | *"being part of food system change"* | | | |

[(a)] Slider scale ranging from 0 to 100.

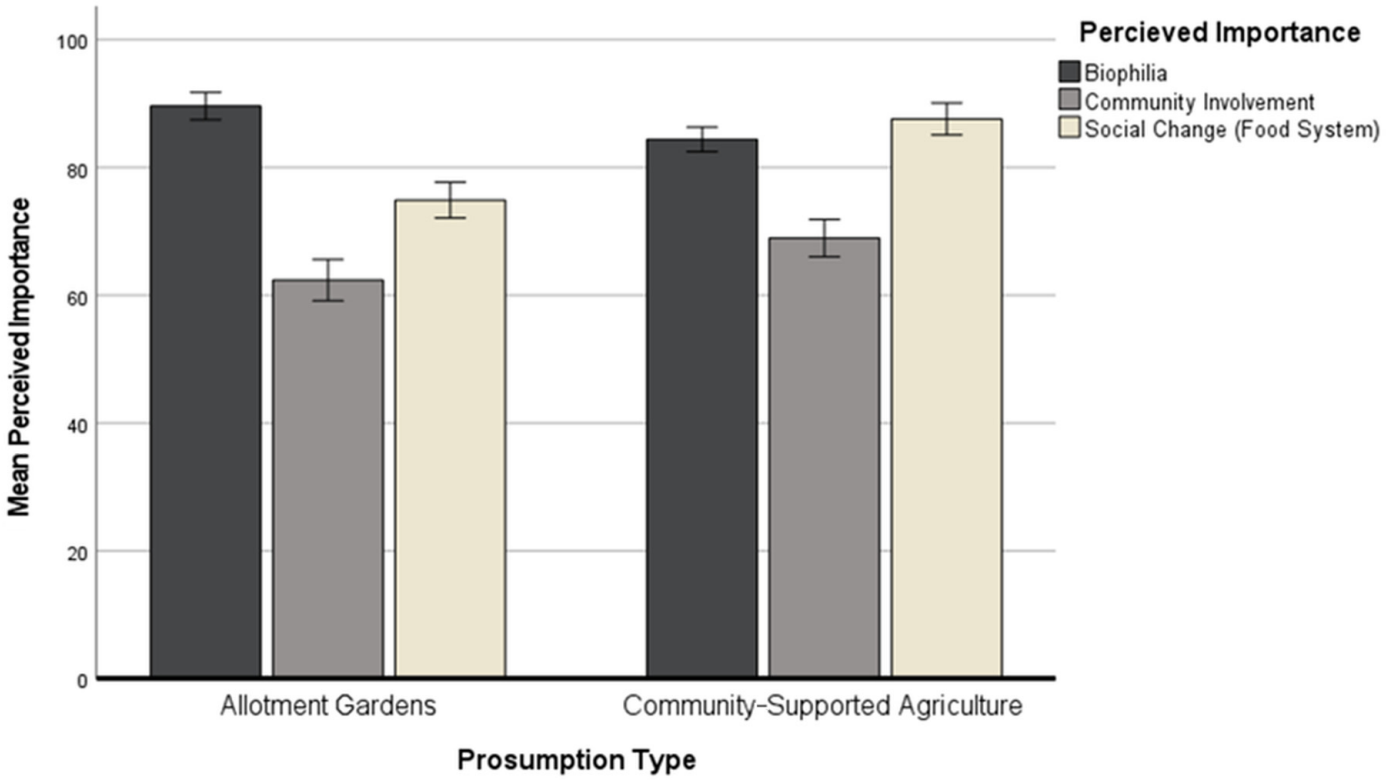


**Figure 1.** Mean perceived importance of nature connectedness, community interaction and social change for CAP types.

## 5. Discussion

### *5.1. Experienced Benefits and Experienced Involvement*

The allotment garden (AG) members' higher physical and mental health benefits can be explained by the prolonged time they spend outdoors in their garden in the pursuit of their activity, leading to more exercise and exposure and a stronger connection to nature. This was mirrored in the nature connectedness perception as well and is also regularly described in literature on AGs and similar forms of gardening [38,76]. These benefits are highly production-related and are experienced during the active production part of the members' prosumption activity.

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) members, in contrast, tend to emphasise positive experiences regarding the quality and sustainability of their food. Unlike AGs, where harvests are concentrated in specific seasons, CSAs provide members with a steady supply of food throughout the year, often on a weekly basis [42]. While this regularity may contribute to their positive perception of food-related benefits, it is important to note that our study did not directly assess whether this was the determining factor. Rather, our findings indicate a general tendency for CSA members to associate their experience with consumption-related aspects, such as food diversity and sustainable sourcing [77].

Despite the historical aim of AGs to provide people from less wealthy backgrounds with affordable and healthy food [27] and a major criticism of CSA initiatives being their pricing [78], our analysis did not reveal a significant difference between the two groups in this regard. Both AG and CSA members exhibited a slight economic benefit from their activity.

In terms of community involvement, both CAP types exhibited high levels of social engagement. However, CSA members reported significantly greater involvement in organisational processes and found it easier to participate in decision-making. This difference likely stems from the distinct governance structures of each type: CSAs often include

mechanisms for member participation in farm planning and financial decisions, while AGs, despite fostering strong social bonds, are typically structured around individual plot management with fewer collective decision-making opportunities.

Our findings confirm our hypothesis that the experienced benefits for each type are linked with their position on the prosumption continuum. AGs, which are more production-dominated, offer benefits that emerge primarily through direct engagement in cultivation (p-a-p). CSAs, with their emphasis on food distribution and consumption, align more closely with prosumption-as-consumption (p-a-c), where benefits arise through food access and dietary diversity rather than direct involvement in production. This supports Ritzer's [21] conceptualisation of prosumption as a spectrum where different organisational forms structure the balance between production and consumption in distinct ways.

### 5.2. Influence on Continuity of Communal Agricultural Prosumption (CAP)

The regressions indicated that AG continuation revolves around the experience of individual benefits, while CSA continuation is linked to communal and organisational benefits. This reflects the connection between the experienced benefits, their role in continuity, and each CAP type's prosumption structure.

In AGs, as a prosumption-as-production (p-a-p) type, members spend most of the prosumption process in their allotment, their individual place of production [21]. Therefore, the perception of individual benefits directly related to the p-a-p activity is enhanced though their prolonged exposure to production. In CSA, a prosumption-as-consumption (p-a-c) activity, members experience influential benefits through communal interactions and organisational engagement. Only a small part of the prosumption process takes place within the community, be it the production part on communal workdays in the field or social events with other members, whilst the main part of the process, the consumption, takes place at home. Regardless of the spatial segregation, sharing the harvest could connect members with each other. While we cannot directly measure the extent to which sharing the harvest fosters a sense of connection, it is plausible that the regular distribution of produce reinforces members' identification with the CSA and its community. Receiving food grown through a collective effort may serve as a recurring reminder of their involvement, even if much of the prosumption process takes place individually at home. This regular exposure to a feeling of belonging could further deepen the influence of the experienced communal and organisational benefits.

These findings confirm our hypothesis: prosumers are mainly influenced to continue their activity by factors which align with their organisations' position on the prosumption continuum—production-related aspects for AGs and consumption-related aspects for CSAs.

Although monetary aspects are often seen as a highly important part of joining a CAP organisation, economic factors did not influence the likeliness to continue, neither for active AG nor CSA members.

### 5.3. Importance of Individual-Centred, Community-Centred and Society-Centred Effects

Regarding the comparison between the general importance of different prosumption-related aspects, we observed similar tendencies, with AGs exhibiting an individual-centred trend and CSAs a communal and societal trend. Nevertheless, we found that communal aspects were the least important aspects for members of both CAP types. It is possible that these community interactions are overshadowed due to the nature of the two types. While in pragmatist p-a-p organisations, a community exists to enable the member to pursue their individualistic, production-related goals, p-a-c organisations need community structures to facilitate a form of consumer-driven grassroots activism, reflected in their importance to

be part of food system transformation. This suggests that while AGs and CSAs differ in their orientation—individual production versus collective activism—community aspects may not be the primary motivator for prolonged participation in either CAP type. Instead, members may prioritise their personal production goals in AGs and broader societal change in CSAs. This does not mean, however, that communal aspects, especially in AGs, should be overlooked, as these spaces can foster strong social interactions despite their individuality.

Overall, our data illustrate how different CAP organisations on the prosumption continuum differ from each other. Yet, being part of the field of prosumption, we need to discuss how these organisations fit into Ritzer's theory of prosumer capitalism. Contrasting with the positive responses within our survey, Ritzer paints a gloomy picture of the '*defining form of capitalism in the 21st century*' [21], suggesting it opens up new ways to exploit not only the workers but also the consumers. Nevertheless, due to their non-profit characteristics, AGs and CSAs do not take part in a profit-driven economy. We therefore argue that CAP can be seen as a blueprint for a transformation towards a contributive economy or as a first point of contact for citizens with an alternative economic model.

The results of this study and the characterisations of CAP organisations are mirrored in Bernard Stiegler's definition of contributive economy [61]. Prosumption activities inherently blur the boundaries between production and consumption. Beyond monetary value, CAP organisations contribute to the creation of social cohesion and community structures, as is reflected in the role of communal aspects in organisational continuity. In CSAs, the emphasis on societal benefits suggests the potential to foster shared ethical values and social meaning alongside the production of material goods [22]. Meanwhile, AGs exhibit other aspects of alternative economy approaches, particularly through the partial decommodification of work, shifting from profit-orientated labour towards pragmatic, individual benefit-orientated labour.

From the perspective of diverse economies [62], CAP organisations exemplify the coexistence of multiple economic logics beyond capitalist market exchange. While AGs enable forms of self-provisioning that operate outside dominant wage labour structures, CSAs create alternative economic relationships based on solidarity and shared responsibility in food production. Both models demonstrate how economic activities can be structured around non-monetary values such as reciprocity, collective care and sustainability. By embedding economic activities within social and environmental ethics, CAP organisations challenge the notion of a singular capitalist economy, illustrating the possibility of economies that prioritise well-being over profit.

### *5.4. Limitations and Future Research*

Sampling was one limitation of this study, since snowball sampling can lead to possible bias. We also only offered the questionnaire in English and German, which could have led to the exclusion of minority groups within the CAP membership. While the timing of the survey at the beginning of the year enabled more people to reply, it could have biased their perception of the actual workload. Additionally, the sampling only included participants who had continued their CAP involvement, meaning we could not account for individuals who may have left due to economic constraints. Future research should explore the reasons for discontinuation to better understand potential economic barriers.

To control the bias due to a reliance on self-reported intentions, further studies should monitor the actual continuity of CAP members over time. Additionally, studies in other parts of Switzerland could show if there are significant cultural differences between regions, as well as focus on non-prosumers and check if the experienced benefits have any influence on the likeliness to join a CAP organisation.

The insights obtained in this study should be used to look into other forms of agricultural prosumption, such as subscription boxes, home gardening, gathering or even non-agricultural but food-related prosumption such as hunting or fishing. These approaches could shine a light on currently underrepresented forms of food production and could lead to a better understanding of a sustainable transformation within the field of food system transformation. In addition, a deeper insight into farmers' experiences within CSAs might lead to further insights into different prosumption types.

Lastly, the apparent overlap between contributive economy and prosumption should be analysed in more detail, and the theoretical implications of this development need to be addressed in a separate paper.

## 6. Conclusions

In this study, we examined which factors influenced continuation in communal agricultural prosumption (CAP) organisations. We showed how different organisational structures shaped members' experiences and engagement.

Our results indicate that the core activities of CAP organisations—individual production in AGs and communal consumption in CSAs—define their position on the prosumption continuum. Strengthening the benefits associated with these places of action could enhance CAP organisations' overall continuity, ensuring they remain viable alternatives to dominant food system models. By maintaining stable participation, CAPs can act as blueprints for alternative economic models, such as contributive prosumption, offering a counterpoint to Ritzer's vision of the rise of prosumption capitalism.

Beyond their internal benefits, CAP organisations contribute to broader sustainability goals, particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Their role in strengthening local food systems, enhancing community resilience and supporting sustainable food consumption highlights their potential use as policy tools for governments aiming to promote sustainable urban and rural development. Given these contributions, policymakers should consider incentivising CAP organisations and integrating them into national and regional food strategies to ensure their long-term viability and impact.

Our findings suggest that CAP organisations could strengthen membership involvement by aligning participation opportunities with the experienced benefits of each CAP type. While most AGs already offer optional community events or shared initiatives, they could try to enhance social ties further, without interfering with the individual focus on production. For CSAs, fostering and strengthening transparent decision-making structures, such as regular feedback mechanisms or participatory budgeting, could reinforce the sense of collective ownership and commitment. Additionally, both AGs and CSAs could improve continuity by lowering entry barriers, such as by implementing flexible membership models or financial accessibility measures, to attract a broader range of participants.

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board. Due to the very low sensitivity of the subject and the single question, this member (Nadja El Benni) decided to waive the ethical approval by the Ethical Committee of Eastern Switzerland.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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