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# Moral premises of (social) sustainability in agriculture

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# Background



# Sustainability in agriculture

- The notion of sustainability contains both analytical and normative dimensions  
(OMANN & SPANGENBERG 2002, HOLDEN et al. 2016)
- Rising key words ‘sustainable agriculture’ & ‘agricultural sustainability’  
(VELTEN et al. 2015, JANKER et al. 2018)
- ‘Sustainable agriculture’ often perceived as ‘good agriculture’  
(DE OLDE et al. 2016, JANKER & MANN 2018),  
thus a normative ideal (SCHWINDENHAMMER et al. 2017, SLÄTMO et al. 2017)



# Social sustainability in agriculture

- Previous research: Discrepancies in the understandings of political and scientific actors (JANKER ET AL. 2018)
  - social sustainability as rural development (e.g. market access for small-scale farmers)
  - social sustainability as agroecological small-scale farming (e.g. diversification & risk-reduction, resilience)
  - social sustainability as agricultural intensification (e.g. adapting to market needs & technological innovation)

Research idea:

Grasp conflicting moral norms through conflict scenarios in agriculture



# Approach



# Step 1) Expert interviews & literature review

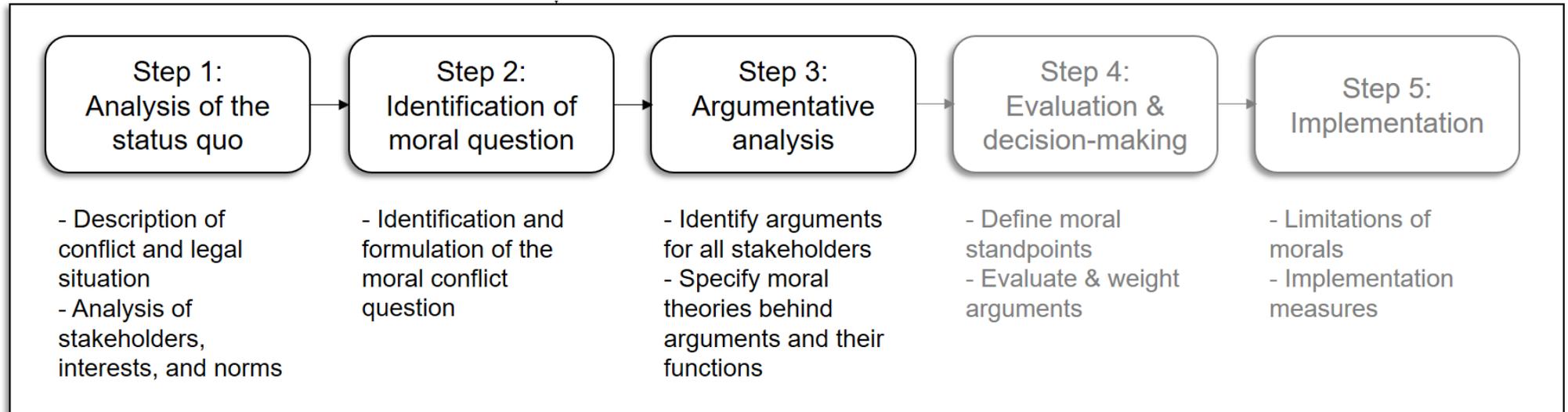
- Semi-structured problem-oriented interviews (MAYRING 2002) with five 'experts' in agricultural systems in Central Europe and in Latin America
- identify the most important stakeholders on and beyond the farms
- Scientific literature was reviewed on conflicts typically arising between these agricultural stakeholders (typifying content analysis, cf. MAYRING 2002)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> round of informal talks with four of the experts to review the importance of derived conflict scenarios and complement / add information
- **7 exemplary moral conflict scenarios between agricultural stakeholders**





# Step 2) Ethical decision-making framework

- Apply ethical decision-making framework by BLEISCH & HUPPENBAUER (2011)
  - extract interests, moral arguments, and moral theories





# Step 3) Moral premises in agriculture

- Extract reappearing moral arguments and their moral philosophical background

Scenario	Interest	Moral Argument	Moral School	
Work-Life Balance	High income for family	Responsibility for caring of family's basic needs	Deontology	} Premise 1
...	...	$x_1$	Consequentialism	
...	...	$x_2$	Consequentialism	} P2
...	...	$y_1$	Virtue ethics	
				} P3



# Results



# Conflicting moral argumentations

- **Deontological arguments** describe **minimum thresholds** to be fulfilled for all people (micro scale) to live adequately,  
e.g. exercise free will, access to food, a minimum income, care for the farm family and children, care for any potential employees, while reinforcing their abilities to care for their families,  
and that others must have the same **right to fulfil their lives**, precluding negative influences from the farm
- **Consequentialist arguments** support **food security**, based on macro-scale utility, through increased production, intensification, market access, better education, technologies and innovation, as well as the consideration of **future generations** needs
- **Virtue ethics** proposes **care arguments** on micro- and macro-level,  
e.g. the good farmer and/or family member, responsible business and caring society



# Moral premises of 'sustainable agriculture'

Recap:

- social sustainability as rural development  
(e.g market access for small-scale farmers)
- social sustainability as agricultural intensification  
(e.g. adapting to market needs & technological innovation)
- social sustainability as agroecological small-scale farming  
(e.g. diversification & risk-reduction, resilience)

Deontology:  
basic rights for all

Consequentialism:  
Food security today  
and tomorrow

Virtue ethics:  
Best practice,  
focus on  
environment

➤ **Conflicts in agriculture and sustainable agriculture  
utilize conflicting moral argumentations and theories**



# Summary



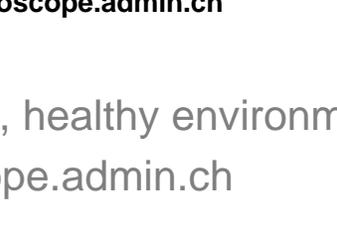
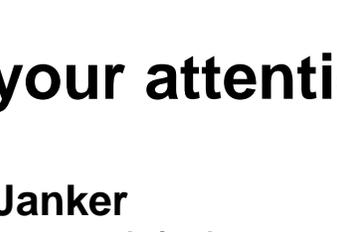
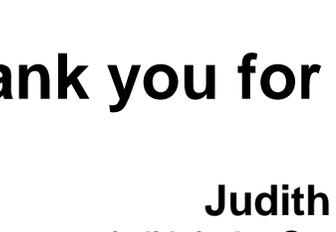
# Summary

- Conflicting moral premises in agriculture can be detected in the (social) sustainable agriculture discourses where they are reproduced
- Central conflicts: basic rights for everyone today and consideration of future needs, as proposed by UN (WCED 1987)
- Core values that should be considered when speaking of 'sustainable agriculture':
  - Human rights and a decent life,
  - the fulfilment of future generations' needs,
  - and the responsibility of individuals towards society



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Thank you for your attention.

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