

Title: Sustainable Economics in Practice: The community supported agriculture project Ouvertura

Intro (ca. 100 words)

Hey, did you know that **today's agriculture accounts for 80% of all deforestation in the world (Gonzaga 2021)**? And that almost all of this is caused by industrial agriculture, producing the food in your supermarket? Yes, if you go shopping around the corner, the food you get kills a lot of trees. Furthermore, the energy and material input for today's industrial agriculture is far more than its output (Haberl et al. 2011; Krausmann 2016). Now this can't be sustainable economics. However, the good thing is, alternatives already exist, and this video will show you one.

Together we will:

- **Scrutinize the problems of industrial agriculture and food production**
- **Explore the alternative farming project Ouvertura**
- **Find out how Ouvertura implements sustainable economics in practice**

Main part (ca. 800 words)

So, let's start with today's **unsustainable industrial agriculture**. Industrial Agriculture means the **large-scale production of animals and crops to be sold with profit at the global market**. It is **heavily dependent on the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides**, and **often run by large, multinational corporations (Gonzaga 2021)**. Furthermore, it is **frequently linked to bad working conditions for farmers, violence, and human rights abuse**, and depends on the mechanization of agricultural processes allowing cheaper production costs through exploitation and economies of scale. (Make a Bullet point list)

Despite industrial agriculture's negative effects on nature and humans, **many people still believe that it is the only efficient form to produce food** on little space, and thus the best way to feed the world. While it is true that industrial agriculture can cultivate much more food than alternative forms through industrial fertilizers, machinery, and other industrial ways of production in the short term. It nevertheless requires far more land to maintain itself and generate yields to make profits in the long run. Because of that, the input of land and resources it needs stand in no relation to the output it produces, especially when compared with non-industrial forms of agriculture! Here is an elucidating example: **Small farms – smaller than two hectares in size, make up 84% of all farms worldwide. They occupy just 24% of agricultural land on our planet and produce 30% of all food in the world (GRAPH1)**. In contrast, large farms, which account for only 1% of the world's farms, occupy 65% of the world's agricultural land. This means that economically **small farms produce more efficiently, and they even create more biodiversity (Ricciardi et al. 2021)**. In agriculture, sustainable businesses with ecological economic approaches are hence definitely a viable alternative for the future.

Being and staying small to counter the self-destructive imperative of endless growth is a good starting point for sustainable economics (Schumacher 1973). But of course, this not enough.

So, **let's take a look at how the farm project Ouvertura puts sustainability into practice**, and what really makes it a socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable enterprise.

To achieve sustainable economics Ouvertura follows the **approach of Community Supported Agriculture**, in short CSA. This means that the separation between consumers and producers is broken up. Big multinationals and most intermediaries like supermarkets are skipped, so that **producers stand in direct contact with consumers and vice versa**. Instead of letting the global market decide on the available products, their price, and the wages of producers, the community does so itself.

In practice, this functions through **a system in which the operation of a farm is supported by shareholders within a community who shares both the benefits and risks of food production**. Consumers and producers organize as members of an association and buy a share of the farm's production for each growing season. Thereby they share the economic, social and ecological risks and benefits of food production with the producing farmers. In return, members receive regular distributions of the farm's bounty throughout the season. **Next to receiving food herself, the farmer gets working capital, gains financial security, and benefits from producing for the real needs of members, rather than having to produce yields as big as possible to be sold with profit at the markets.**

Due to the direct relationship with members, the distances are short and so is the supply chain. Ecological sustainability is achieved by products that are usually seasonal, freshly harvested or preserved by natural methods. In addition, cultivation of land happens within natural circuits and according to principles of regenerative agriculture. Like many other CSA projects, Ouvertura does not use any synthetic fertilizers, and does its best to preserve biodiversity for instance through taking part in a species conservation programme.

To achieve **social sustainability**, Ouvertura furthermore follows a **solidarity based** and social justice-oriented approach. In this context, solidarity means that everyone, regardless of their financial means, can get a share of the farm and respectively its products. In practice, this works through a **redistributive financing system** allowing for **needs-based financial contributions**. In an annual assembly, the production team of the farm proposes a yearly financial **budget** that needs to be met jointly by all members. **Depending on their wealth and income and not based on market prices or averages**, members buy single shares for higher or lower **financial contributions**. Because wealthy and high-income members pay their fair, higher share, people like lone parents with a part-time job can afford for instance to pay only half of what is needed on average – jointly still meeting the budget.

Ultimately, being a farm sharer means sharing not only the harvest, but also the risk and fun of the work, and everything else what a farm life brings along. Without the support of the community, CSA would not be possible. Whether it is helping with the harvest, the financing or social media. The community is a necessary but also intended support for the producers and often a welcomed change for the helpers from the daily grind of the office or the gray of the city.

Outro (ca. 200 words)

In this video, we explored how to put social and ecological economics into practice, taking a look at the example of the community supported agriculture project Ouvertura. We started from the insight that **today's agriculture accounts for 80% of all deforestation in the world, and that most of it comes from industrial agriculture**. Because **many people still believe that industrial agriculture is the only efficient form to produce food and the best way to feed the world**, we scrutinized this claim and showed that **small-scale farms produce more efficiently and even create more biodiversity, giving hope for sustainable farming in the future**. By taking a closer look at the project Ouvertura, we found out how a **variety of organizational structures and everyday practices make socially and ecologically embedded economics possible: Community based organizing, solidarity and social-justices-oriented financing, needs-based production, and working with natural circuits.** (

If you are now interested into community supported agriculture, visit Ouvertura's Website <https://www.ouvertura.at/> or a mapping of all CSA's in Austria <https://solawi.life/solawi-finden/>. For community supported organizations in other areas check out CSX (Community Supported X), a network that tries to apply the principles of CSA to health, care, or energy provisioning: <https://gemeinschaftsgetragen.de/>.

Sources:

- Ricciardi, V., Mehrabi, Z., Wittman, H., James, D. et al. (2021). Higher yields and more biodiversity on smaller farms. *Nature Sustainability*, 1-7.
- Gonzaga, Diego (10.15.2021): 4 myths about industrial agriculture. (retrieved 11.08.2023 from <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/49981/myth-industrial-agriculture-food-climate-health/>).
- Ritchie, Hannah (2021) - "Smallholders produce one-third of the world's food, less than half of what many headlines claim" Published online at OurWorldInData.org. (retrieved 11.08.2023 from: <https://ourworldindata.org/smallholder-food-production>).
- Schumacher, E. (1973): *Small is beautiful. Economics as if people mattered.* Harper Collins: New York.