

Research Paper

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The role of constructive journalism in the diffusion of social innovations

The example of community-supported agriculture

Abstract: The alternative reporting approach of constructive journalism has been extensively researched in recent years in terms of its effects, albeit primarily in the form of individual psychological experimental research. Its effects on the emotional state and behavioural intentions of recipients are well documented. But to what extent can constructive journalism promote social progress, for example by contributing to the spread of ecological or social innovations? In this study, we expand the impact research on constructive journalism by applying the theoretical approach of ›diffusion of social innovations‹ to the question and retrospectively asking the adopters of a specific social innovation, namely community-supported agriculture (CSA), about the influences on their decision. The quantitative online survey of 431 members and operators of CSA farms in Germany shows that constructive media or media formats did not play a role in the diffusion. Instead, interpersonal communication with CSA farm members was decisive for the initial contact, followed by local print and TV journalism, as well as advertising materials and events organized by CSA farms. This is also in line with diffusion theory for later stages of innovation diffusion. It cannot be ruled out that constructive media coverage of other social innovations (especially those more recent than CSA) plays a greater role in the respective early stages of the diffusion process.

Keywords: Constructive journalism, media effects, community-supported agriculture, social innovation, innovation diffusion, socio-ecological transformation, decommodification

1. Introduction: Hopes for the effects of constructive journalism

Since constructive journalism emerged in the media industry in the early 2010s, a great deal of hope has been placed in it: it is expected to counteract widespread news fatigue and avoidance (cf. Behre et al., 2023, p. 17) as well as polarization and factionalism in society (cf. McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018, pp. 668-669; Constructive Institute 2022; Alpuim & Ehrenberg, 2024). It is intended to be a tool for media companies to tap into new target groups and strengthen audience loyalty, as well as a way to increase trust in the media (Kretzschmar et al. 2025, pp. 281-282). It shall strengthen »prosocial behavioural intentions« (cf. Steinigeweg, 2021) and prevent recipients from becoming apathetic, cynical and depressed in view of the state of the world. After all, it is empirically well established that constructive journalism brightens the mood: According to a meta-study of 22 relevant experiments, it triggers positive emotions or weakens negative ones (cf. McIntyre & Lough, 2023).

As if these hopes were not already enough of a burden on the narrow shoulders of constructive journalism (after all, the media specializing in it are often small and precariously financed), it is also expected to promote social progress in general and show the way to a better future. Its initiators and pioneers already hoped for this: The futurologist and journalist Robert Jungk, who published what was probably the first constructive medium, the *Good News Bulletin*, in New York in 1948 (cf. Krüger, 2016, pp. 101-102), not only wanted to criticize the threatening and bad things in the world, but also to focus on »social inventions and experiments that attempt to educate differently, work differently, live differently, build differently, generate energy differently, inform differently« (Jungk, 1990, p. 204). Journalist and German newspaper *taz* co-founder Ute Scheub, who (inspired by Robert Jungk) was already practising »encouraging journalism« before the idea broke through, calls herself a »midwife of eco-social innovations« (Krüger & Gassner, 2014, p. 25). And Ulrik Haagerup, founder of the Constructive Institute at Aarhus University and the most influential multiplier of the approach in Germany (cf. Krüger et al., 2022, p. 68), says that innovations do indeed spread through appropriate reporting: A Danish television report produced under his aegis on the subject of antibiotic resistance in humans due to the consumption of pork containing antibiotics presented a Dutch farmer who sprayed probiotics instead of antibiotics in his pigsty as a solution – and this led many pig farmers in Denmark to adopt this innovation (Haagerup, 2017, pp. 91-93).

This study attempts to empirically investigate the effects of constructive journalism on a »higher« than the individual micro level, beyond the already well-researched psychological and short-term effects on the emotions, mood, sentiment and intentions of recipients. If constructive journalism is conceived as a »midwife for eco-social innovations« and as »development communication

for Western capitalist societies in crisis« (Krüger, 2021), does it actually succeed in changing social practices or entire socio-technical regimes (in the terminology of Science and Technology Studies, cf. Krüger 2022, pp. 165-167) in the sense of a socio-ecological transformation towards sustainability? In order to make this question tangible and operationalizable using an example, this article examines the role of media or formats of constructive journalism¹ in the dissemination (diffusion) of a specific social innovation: namely, community-supported agriculture (CSA), which is seen as a socio-ecological alternative to market-based and capital-driven industrial food production.

2. Definitions

2.1 Constructive journalism

Constructive journalism is an »alternative reporting approach« (Meier, 2018, p. 7) that aims to complement traditional news journalism and counterbalance its tendency towards negative bias – which arises from a focus on conflicts, damage and problems – with a focus on »options for action and solutions« (Hooffacker, 2021, p. 4). It adds »What now?« to the classic W questions of who, what, when, where, how and why (Constructive Institute, n.d.). The aim is to highlight perspectives for the future, not through opinion pieces, but through research into possible solutions (Hooffacker, 2021, p. 2) that have been devised and tested by specific actors in specific places and could be replicated and scaled up elsewhere. It is therefore not a question of journalism becoming the inventor of solutions or the advocate or even propagandist of certain approaches, but rather the »observer of attempts to solve problems« (Beiler & Krüger, 2018, p. 181) and thus the illuminator of additional aspects of reality.

Organizations promoting constructive journalism, such as the Solutions Journalism Network in the USA or the Bonn Institute in Germany, emphasize that constructive journalism must adhere to rules and meet quality criteria: Details of the implementation or effectiveness of a solution must be described, evidence of its effectiveness must be provided, the transferability of the approach to other contexts must be discussed and the limitations or boundaries of the solution must be pointed out (Bonn Institute, n.d.; Solutions Journalism Network, n.d.). These rules are intended to ensure that this reporting pattern does not drift

1 In Germany, constructive journalism can currently be found in magazines founded specifically for this purpose (*Good Impact*, *taz.FUTURZWEI*, *Atmo*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Quarterly*, etc.) and online portals (*Perspective Daily*, *Klimareporter*, etc.), in sections and columns of general interest media (the »Future« section of *wochentaz*, the »Green« section and the »Plan D« series of *Zeit*, the *Plan B* series on ZDF, NDR Info *Perspektiven*, etc.) and news services or aggregators such as *Squirrel News*, *Good News* and *bachrauf.org*. Unfortunately, there is no scientific monitoring of the constructive media landscape.

into PR or advertising when presenting solutions, which is a frequently raised criticism.

Krüger (2022, pp. 165–167) sees a great potential in the function of constructive journalism as a benevolent but critical companion to innovations that arise or are developed in social niches and gain in popularity and quality through publicity, so that these innovations can make their breakthrough in times of crisis, rise to the social mainstream and transform established socio-technical regimes. The focus here is not on new technologies and technical innovations (that is the domain of technology journalism), but on social practices – hence the following section takes a look at the concept of »social innovations« and their diffusion.

2.2 Social innovations and their diffusion

We understand social innovation to mean »an intentional, targeted reconfiguration of social practices in specific fields of action or social contexts, initiated by certain actors [...] with the aim of solving problems or satisfying needs more effectively than is possible on the basis of established practices« (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010, p. 54). The new – the Latin word *innovatio* refers to the new, renewal or novelty – »manifests itself here not in the medium of technical artefacts, but at the level of social practices« (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2021, p. 257). »Social« in this definition is explicitly meant in a non-normative sense and, unlike in activist and political discourses, not in the sense of socially desirable, oriented towards the common good or good, but rather in a descriptive, practice-theoretical sense (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2021, p. 257). Previously, sociologist Wolfgang Zapf had defined it similarly, but in some places more concretely in the context of modernization theory: »Social innovations are *new ways of achieving goals*, in particular new forms of organization, new regulations, new lifestyles, *which change the direction of social change*, solve problems better than previous practices, and are therefore worth imitating and institutionalizing« (Zapf 1994, p. 33; emphasis in the original). Referring to Zapf, Gillwald (2000) places social innovations in the context of social change and discusses relevant examples – also in contrast to technical innovations – such as the development and introduction of assembly line work, fast food chains, social insurance and non-marital cohabitation.

Anthropology and sociology have been investigating how innovations spread in society for over a hundred years; important impetus for research came from agricultural sociological studies in the 1940s and 1950s on the diffusion of hybrid corn (Karnowski, 2023, pp. 35-40). Agricultural sociologist and communication scholar Everett M. Rogers systematized all research on the diffusion process from various disciplines and combined it into an independent field of research and a »diffusion theory«. According to this theory, the diffusion process is significantly influenced

by characteristics that are inherent in or attributed to the innovation: 1.) the relative advantage that an individual expects from an innovation, 2.) the compatibility of the innovation with existing values and practices, 3.) the opportunity to try out the innovation, and 4.) the opportunity to observe other adopters of the innovation (Rogers, 2003, cited in Karnowski, 2023, p. 24).

Rogers described the process of an individual adopting an innovation – the »innovation-decision process« (Karnowski, 2023, p. 14) – in five phases: 1.) Knowledge: The individual learns about the innovation and how it works – mass media communication, especially advertising, plays a major role here; 2.) Persuasion: The individual considers the advantages and disadvantages of the innovation and thinks through the consequences; 3.) Decision: The opinion formed is translated into concrete behaviour, i.e. the innovation is adopted or rejected; 4.) Implementation: The individual uses the innovation, changes their behaviour and often actively seeks information about opportunities and problems. This can lead to reinvention, i.e. the innovation is changed in the course of its use; 5.) Confirmation: The individual primarily seeks information that supports their decision to adopt the innovation in order to avoid cognitive dissonance.

In addition to this process at the micro level of individuals, Rogers also conceptualized the diffusion process at the macro level of the social system or population: If the number of adopters per unit of time is considered, successful innovations result in a bell-shaped normal distribution curve in which five types of adopters become visible. The first adopters are the risk-taking »innovators,« who ideally make up 2.5 percent of all adopters and have many social contacts through whom they spread the innovation. Next, the innovation spreads among the »early adopters« (13.5 percent), who are usually well connected locally and act as opinion leaders in their social groups. Once the »critical mass« has been exceeded, the innovation is adopted by the »early majority« (34 percent), who are no opinion leaders, and then by the »late majority« (34 percent), who tend to act out of economic necessity or social pressure. The last group are the »laggards« (16 percent), who are strongly oriented towards the past and sceptical of innovation (Rogers, 2003, in Karnowski, 2023, pp. 21-23).

Another core element of Rogers' diffusion theory is the communication channels through which information flows. Different channels have different levels of importance in the respective phases: As a rule, at the beginning of the diffusion process, (primarily national) mass media play a major role, effectively reaching many people and bringing information to »innovators« and »early adopters.« As the process progresses, regional media and, above all, interpersonal communication channels become more important when it comes to convincing a large number of potential new users (Karnowski, 2023, pp. 30-31). In the age of digitalization and platformization, the boundaries between mass media and

interpersonal communication are blurring, and recent research has shown that social media – probably due to its similarity to interpersonal communication – has »a significant influence [...] on the persuasion phase of the innovation decision-making process« (ibid., pp. 32-33).

2.3 Community-supported agriculture as social innovation

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) is a concept for food production that views itself as an alternative to conventional market-based agriculture. There is a self-sufficient economic community between producers and consumers in which costs, risks and harvests are shared among members (Falk & Madsen, 2015). Specifically, the community of participating consumers bears the costs of the entire agricultural operation for the coming year; in return, all members receive a certain share of the harvest. This practice removes the link between price and product, as consumers finance the entire agricultural operation, including risks such as crop failures due to extreme weather events and the purchase of new technical equipment (Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft, n.d.). This decoupling of product and price is also referred to as decommodification (Boddenberg et al., 2017a). This form of agriculture is not only based on solidarity with farmers, but also among members themselves, as CSA farm members can choose the amount of their financial contribution within certain limits according to their resources, so that, ideally, members with higher incomes support those with lower incomes. Another innovative component is participation or *prosuming*: members can usually have a say in the course of their CSA farm, but are also called upon to help out or work on the farm. All these factors make CSA a social innovation that differs significantly in its functioning from established agricultural practice with its capitalist marketing structure.

In Germany, CSA began in 1988 at the Buschberghof farm in the Northern state of Schleswig-Holstein, and is in German labelled as »Solidarische Landwirtschaft« (solidarity-based agriculture). It experienced an upswing in Germany comparable to other countries like the USA or Japan (where the concept is named »Teikei«). Previously, the concept of community-supported food production had largely disappeared with the onset of industrialisation (Boddenberg et al., 2017a). The German Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft (2023, p. 12) shows an almost exponential increase in the number of such farms in Germany from 19 in 2010 to 467 in 2023.

Sociological research has identified three different types of CSA farms (Boddenberg et al., 2017a, pp. 134-138): 1.) *CSA as a pragmatic strategy*: Here, the members merely play the role of financiers and consumers. The decision-making authority over cultivation or pricing remains with the operators, and the members' involvement or participation in production is limited to a minimum. 2.) *CSA as*

a spiritual community practice: Here, the aim is to resolve the alienation between people and the soil or nature or food, with the focus on a sense of togetherness, for example by sharing the experience of working together in nature. 3.) *CSA as part of a socio-political change*: Here, the alternative practice is understood as »a step towards [...] emancipation from a neoliberal capitalist economic and social system« (Boddenberg et al., 2017a, p. 135); food production without global exploitation and with high ecological standards is seen as part of a socio-ecological transformation.

Finally, there is also interesting survey data on the socio-demographic characteristics and motives of members and farmers in CSA farms: Members are predominantly academically educated, usually have children, a decent income from stable employment and live in or near the city. Over 50 percent of respondents were aged 30 to 49 years, and around 20 percent were aged 20 to 29. The farmers are similar to the members in this respect, but have a lower income (Boddenberg et al., 2017b, p. 257-258). The motives of those involved in CSA farms are dominated by the desire for regional food (91 percent), good working conditions in agriculture (84 percent), fair prices for farmers (78 percent) and organic food production (75 percent) (Boddenberg et al., 2017b, p. 256). The researchers note a »pronounced awareness of the problems associated with conventional agriculture and, in some cases, with large-scale, market-oriented organic farming« (Boddenberg et al., 2017b, p. 256).

3. Method and limitations

We are interested in the role that constructive journalism has played to date in the dissemination of the social innovation CSA. Against the backdrop of the preceding theoretical explanations, we ask two research questions which target different phases of the innovation-decision process:

RQ1: What proportion of CSA participants first learned about the innovation through media outlets or formats of constructive journalism?

RQ2: What proportion of CSA participants had their decision to adopt the innovation influenced by media outlets or formats of constructive journalism?

To answer these questions, a quantitative, standardised online survey was conducted among farmers and members of CSA farms throughout Germany. This took place between 15 September and 15 October 2023 using the SoSci Survey tool. The Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft, which connects a large proportion of existing farms, served as a multiplier. The call for participation in the survey was sent out via the network's mailing lists (one nationwide and 13 regional), asking farmers to fill out the questionnaire themselves and forward it to their members.

At the time of the survey, 280 SoLawi farms were organized in the network (Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft, 2023, p. 13). With a total of 467 farms at that time (Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft, 2023, p. 12), this means that 60 percent of all farms were potentially reached by our questionnaire.

A total of 454 people took part in our survey, 23 of whom abandoned the questionnaire early on and were filtered out. This means that 431 questionnaires were included in the analysis. The survey cannot claim to be representative: the number of respondents probably did not even account for one percent of all member households in Germany², and three of 16 federal German states are not represented in the sample (as the Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft does not maintain any structures there). What the survey can do, however, is provide an impression of the trends in the dominant channels of dissemination of this alternative social practice. There is no reason to suspect systematic distortions in the recruitment process resulting from the research questions.

The survey focused on the initial contact with the CSA concept, general media use and sociodemographics. When designing the questionnaire, care was taken to ensure that participants were not pushed in a particular direction: for example, when asking about media use or the channel of dissemination, no reference was made to constructive journalism or corresponding media and formats. The aim was for respondents themselves to name a constructive medium if it had played a role in their decision to become part of a CSA farm. When interpreting the data, it must be borne in mind that people may have forgotten (or misremembered) how they learned about the CSA concept over time – unless it was a »formative media experience« according to Leonhard (2025, p. 83), which is subjectively perceived as particularly intense or consequential and is remembered for a long time.

Before the field phase, a pre-test was carried out with five people from different CSA farms. After completing the questionnaire, they made suggestions for improvement, so that some of the wording and possible answers were adjusted.

4. Results

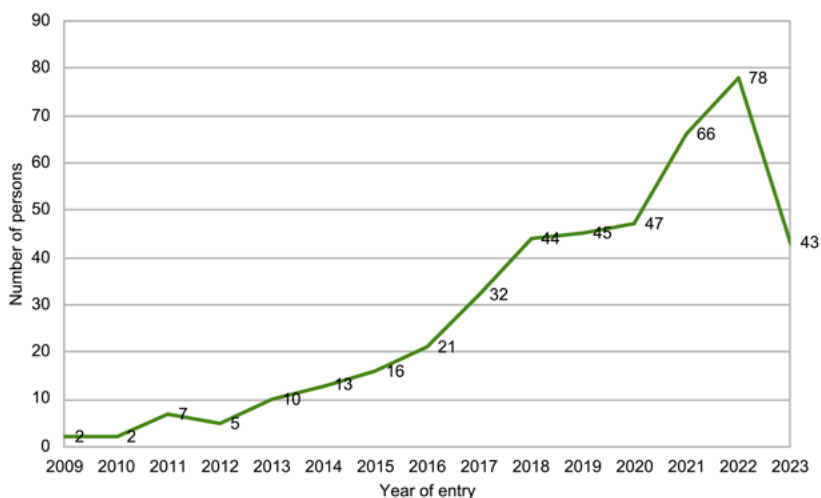
4.1 Sociodemographic data of the sample

Of the 431 respondents, 349 were members of a CSA farm, 26 were owners of a CSA farm, 15 were on the board of a CSA cooperative, and 11 were employees or staff members. Four people described themselves as interested parties, founders or

2 According to a survey, each SoLawi farm supplied an average of 112 members or households in 2013 (Boddenberg et al., 2017, p. 127). If this ratio had been similar in 2023, 467 farms would have supplied over 52,000 member households.

former members. The federal states are unevenly represented in the sample: Hesse (25 percent), Lower Saxony (22 percent) and North Rhine-Westphalia (13 percent) are the most strongly represented, followed by Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg with 7 percent each. Thuringia, Bremen and Saarland are not represented at all, as Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft does not have any regional structures there and was therefore unable to distribute the questionnaire. As Figure 1 shows, most have been active in a CSA since 2022, followed by 2021. A total of 74.9 percent of all participants joined a CSA since 2018. The steady increase until 2022 reflects the overall growth in German CSA farms and thus the increasing spread of this social innovation during the same period (see section 2.3). The ›slump‹ in 2023 can be explained by the fact that the survey started in mid-September 2023 and most participants completed the questionnaire at the beginning of the field phase.

Figure 1
Year of joining a community-supported agriculture scheme



n=431, own representation

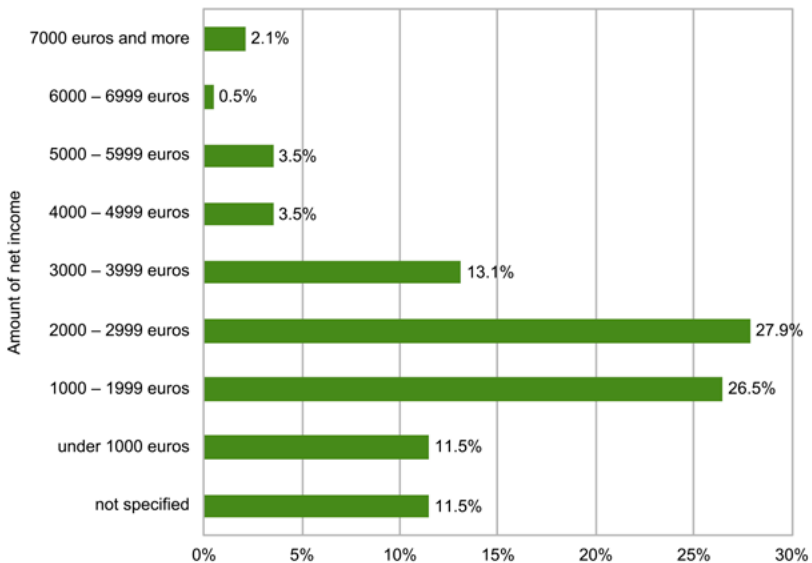
Of those surveyed, 70.4 percent identified as female and 26.8 percent as male (0.5 percent: diverse; 2.3 percent: no response). The age range of respondents was 18 to 76 years, with an average age of 47 and a median age of 45.

The sample is above average (when compared to the general population) in terms of urbanization and academic education: 25.3 percent lived in a larger city (more than 500,000 inhabitants), 18.7 percent in a smaller city (100,000 to 500,000) and a further 24.8 percent in a medium-sized town (20,000 to 100,000).

Small towns (5,000 to 20,000) and rural communities (up to 5,000) were less well represented, at 13.1 and 16.4 percent respectively. When asked about their highest level of education, 62.9 percent stated that they had a university or technical college degree, 7 percent had a doctorate and 10 percent had a high school diploma or equivalent university entrance qualification.

In terms of employment, 54.8 percent stated that they were permanent employees, while a further 15.6 percent were self-employed or freelancers. Ranked third to fifth were pensioners (10 percent), civil servants (4.2 percent) and students (3.5 percent). The personal monthly net income of the respondents (see Figure 2) is probably close to the average monthly net salary for full-time employees in Germany of 2,549 Euro in 2023 (Statista, 2025), although this cannot be calculated precisely because the questionnaire provided the ranges shown in the figure as possible answers.

Figure 2
Respondents' personal monthly net income



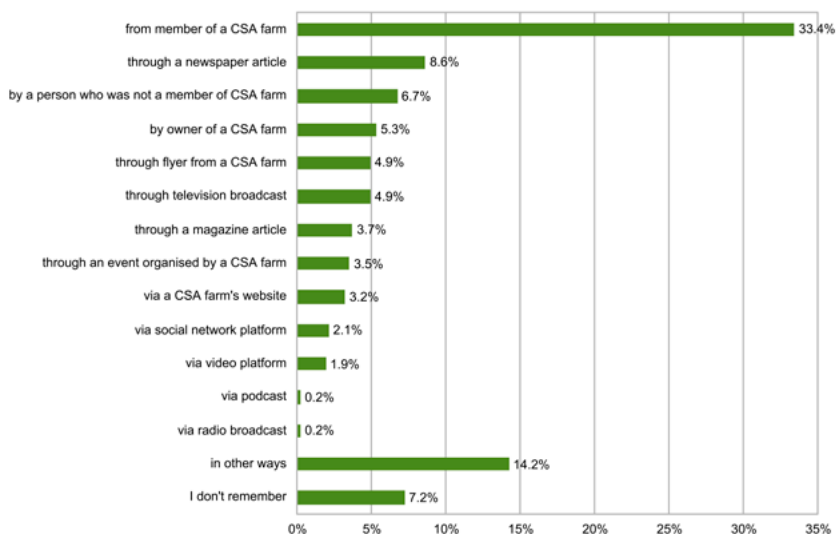
n=427, own representation

4.2 Initial contact with the CSA concept

When asked how they first learned about the CSA concept, a total of 45.4 percent of all respondents cited interpersonal communication channels – primarily people who were already members of a CSA farm, and to a lesser extent non-CSA members and owners of a CSA farm. A total of 17.4 percent cited traditional journalistic products such as newspapers, magazines, television or radio. Advertising materials and activities by CSA farms were also relevant: 11.6 percent said they had learned about the concept through a CSA farm’s flyer, website or event (see Figure 3).

Of the 14.2 percent who had learned about the CSA concept in ways other than those specified, the following channels were mentioned most frequently: through university (8 mentions), at a market stall of a CSA farm (4 mentions) and by friends or acquaintances asking whether the respondent could help set up a CSA farm (4 mentions).

Figure 3
Initial contact with the CSA concept



n=431, own representation

Of the 37 respondents who stated that they had first learned about the CSA concept through a newspaper report, 29 could remember the newspaper. The most frequently mentioned were the regional newspapers *Waldeckische Landeszeitung* in Hesse (4 times) and *Nordwest-Zeitung* in Lower Saxony (3 times). National

newspapers that were each mentioned once were *taz*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Zeit*. Of the 16 people who remembered first coming across the concept in a magazine, six could remember the name of the publication, three of whom mentioned *Bankspiegel*, the customer magazine of GLS Bank (which is committed to social and environmental sustainability). In the sector of radio and podcasts, the public broadcaster SWR's podcast *Das Wissen* was remembered, while in the television sector the public channels WDR, NDR and Arte were mentioned, and two respondents specifically mentioned the WDR programmes *Land & Lecker* and *Lokalzeit*. Of the eight people who first heard about CSA via social media, four mentioned Facebook and two mentioned nebenan.de (»Germany's largest social network for neighbours«). Of the eight respondents who mentioned video platforms, seven specified YouTube.

Research question 1 has therefore been answered: *The proportion of CSA participants who first learned about the innovation through media outlets or formats of constructive journalism is zero percent.* Or, to put it more mildly: No one remembered explicitly constructive media (see footnote 1) as their first contact. It cannot be ruled out that, apart from institutionalized constructive journalism, constructive contributions from local or regional journalism or even in the national papers *taz*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Zeit* were meant, as the reporting style can also occur unmarked in »normal« journalism.

People who did not mention a mass media channel when asked about their first contact were asked later in the survey whether there had been a media report that had additionally supported their decision to become part of a CSA farm. Of the 307 participants who were asked this question, 44 said that there had been such a report. Of these, 13 stated that they had seen a report on television. In the open text box, five of them specified that it was a report of a public broadcaster, with NDR being the most frequently mentioned (two mentions). One person also remembered the NDR programme *Das!*. Only one person stated that they had heard a report on the radio that had influenced their decision, specifically on the public radio Deutschlandfunk. Of the 13 people whose decision was influenced by a newspaper, 10 could still remember its name. Once again, the regional newspaper *Waldeckische Zeitung* was the most frequently mentioned (two times), while other newspaper titles were only mentioned once. Of the seven people who were influenced by a magazine article, one could still remember the outlet, namely *Bioland*. Three respondents' decision to join a CSA farm was influenced by posts on social media, one of them recalled the Facebook account of »Wir haben es satt« [We're fed up] (self-description: »Tackling agricultural reform – good food for everyone!«) and one the Instagram account of Imke Tjaden, a music teacher in Aurich (East Friesland). Ultimately, it can be said that there is no explicitly constructive format among the media brands and programmes mentioned. Instead, interpersonal communication and – at a considerable distance – local

journalism formats in print and tv played important roles in spreading the concept.

This also answers research question 2: *The proportion of CSA participants whose decision to adopt the innovation was cast in part due to media or formats of constructive journalism reporting on it is again zero percent.* The same restriction applies here as in the above answer to research question 1 with regard to marked and unmarked constructive journalism.

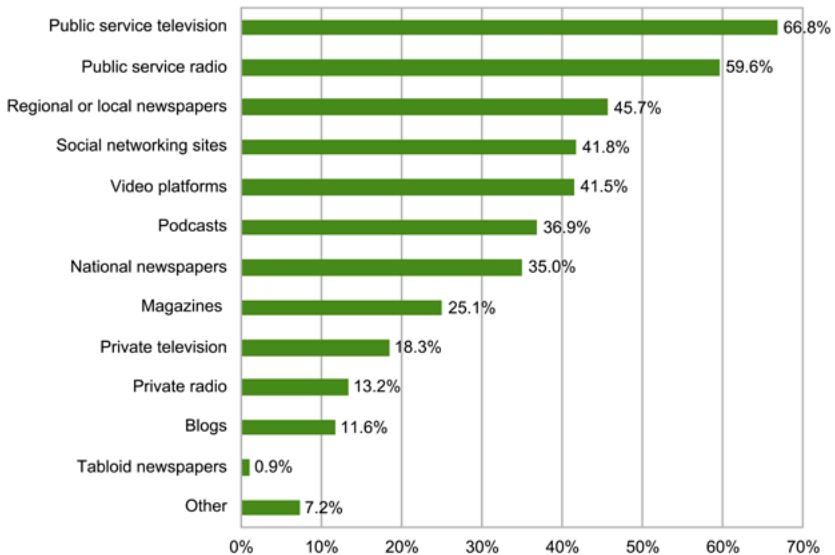
We also tested the hypothesis that »early adopters« of the CSA innovation were disproportionately likely to have first come into contact with it through the mass media – precisely what Rogers’ diffusion theory postulates (see section 2.2). Our data does not confirm this assumption: Of the 55 respondents who joined a CSA farm between 2009 and 2015, only 7 had their first contact through the media, but 27 through interpersonal communication, 17 through »other« ways and 4 could not remember. At first glance, this is a remarkable discrepancy from established diffusion theory. However, it must be kept in mind that the CSA has been on the »marketplace of ideas« in Germany since 1988 and that we do not know when its diffusion will be complete. It is possible that those who joined between 2009 and 2015 are not the »early adopters« at all, but rather the »early majority,« and that the true »early adopters« are not part of our sample.

4.3 General media usage

We also asked which types of media are used frequently or regularly. It became apparent that the majority of respondents regularly consume public service broadcasting, followed by regional and local newspapers and digital platforms (see Figure 4). One participant mentioned national public broadcaster ZDF’s solution-oriented programme *plan b* in the »other« category, the first time a constructive journalism format was mentioned.

In another question, participants were asked to name the three specific media outlets from which they primarily obtain information on political and social issues. Respondents most frequently mentioned newspapers (299 times), with local and regional newspapers being mentioned 74 times, *Die Zeit* 57 times, and *taz* 42 times. This was followed closely by national public broadcasters ARD (290 mentions) and ZDF (76). At this point in the survey, constructive journalism was mentioned for the second time: two respondents stated that *Perspective Daily* and *Good Impact* (until 2022 called *enorm*) were among their main sources of information.

Figure 4

Regularly used media

n=431, own representation

5. Conclusion and outlook

This study expands on previous research into the impact of constructive journalism – which has mainly used experiments to measure short-term effects on emotional well-being – and asked adopters of a social innovation how they found out about the innovation in the first place, enabling us to answer the question what role media outlets or formats of constructive journalism played in the diffusion of this innovation.

The expectation that constructive journalism might have played a decisive role in the relatively rapid rise of community-supported agriculture was thoroughly disappointed by the empirical evidence: Media outlets, formats or programmes that are explicitly dedicated to this reporting style apparently played no role at all in our sample when it came to initial contact with the CSA concept (at least as it is remembered – the limitations of the method were discussed in section 3). Nor is there any evidence of explicitly solution-oriented reporting playing a supportive role in the decision to become a member of a CSA farm. Three respondents did state that constructive media – namely the public broadcaster ZDF's

programme *plan b*, the online magazine *Perspective Daily* and the print magazine *Good Impact* – are generally among their regular sources of information.

However, the dominant channels of diffusion revealed by the survey – interpersonal communication and local print and television journalism – correspond in some ways to Rogers' diffusion theory. While at the very beginning of the diffusion process, national media (and perhaps also national *constructive* media) convey the information to »innovators« and »early adopters«, word of mouth and regional media play the decisive roles on the way to the »early majority«. In this sense, it could perhaps be said that the social innovation CSA has already outgrown its infancy, i.e. it is already so old or established (it is around since the late 1980s) that it no longer has any news value for explicitly solution-oriented media, and when it was new, the reporting style of constructive journalism did not yet exist (it emerged in Germany around 2010). Whether this explanation for our empirical finding is accurate – i.e. that there is no »failure« on the part of the constructive media, but rather a mismatch of historical timelines that did not coincide – could be clarified by a content analysis: Has there been any journalistic content published in explicitly self-described constructive media (formats) on the topic over the last few years and decades that could have had a corresponding impact?

This leads to ideas for further research. On the one hand, it would make sense to reconstruct Rogers' »innovation-decision process« in more detail. It would be useful to conduct qualitative interviews with adopters of an innovation in order to trace the respondents' path from initial contact to adoption (e.g., membership in a CSA farm) as accurately as possible: How exactly did the initial contact take place, at what point in time were which communication channels or media used, and what ultimately convinced them to take the plunge? Here, the concept of »innovation networks« from Science and Technology Studies (STS) could also be useful: STS conceptualize networks as a form of coordination of (technological) innovations and analyses chains of interactions that create or disseminate innovations (Häußling, 2020) – and, in our view, constructive media can be understood as potential nodes in innovation networks, i.e. as actors of knowledge transfer or »brokers« who bridge »structural holes« in these networks (Burt, 1992). It would therefore even be possible to describe the role of constructive journalism in the diffusion of innovation using formal network analyses, calculating and visualising the centrality of its media outlets in innovation networks and the strength of their ties to other actors in the network.

On the other hand, it would be interesting to examine the role of constructive journalism in the dissemination of other social innovations related to the UN's sustainability goals or to a desirable socio-ecological transformation of society. Concepts such as regional currencies, food sharing, car sharing, citizen energy cooperatives, urban gardening, repair cafés, cultural tables and much more

would be suitable. It would make sense to first conduct a content or topic analysis of the most important constructive media in Germany to find out which social innovations have been reported on in recent years, and then to ask the adopters of these innovations about any media influences. We assume that constructive journalism has played a greater role in the diffusion of innovations that are more recent than CSA, especially in the early phases of the respective diffusion processes.

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