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Resource-Making and Proto-Institutions in the German Tafel Field: Applying a Hermeneutical Context Model

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Abstract

This paper studies resource making and the emergence of proto-institutions in Tafel Deutschland, an umbrella organization for more than 940 food banks or pantries in Germany, deploying a hermeneutical context model. Shedding light on value co-creation processes in the German Tafel field, we analyze how the activities and interpretations of or within Tafel organizations devoted to resource integration and resource making relate to their two missions and how their methods of dealing with conflict have led to the emergence of proto-institutions. The economic value co-created within in the Tafel field builds on the creation of social and ecological value. The context affects economic and social value co-created within the Tafel field differently: Whereas economic value rests on individual experience and perception, the social value resulting from the field actors' activities is subject to dispute and defense.

JEL Codes: A13, B52, B55, M31

Keywords: Hermeneutical Context Model, German Food Banks, Proto-Institutions, Resourceness, Value Co-creation

1. Introduction

The Tafel Deutschland e. V.[1] (registered association) is an umbrella organization for more than 940 food banks or pantries in Germany as of 2019. These nonprofit organizations integrate resources or engage in value co-creation processes with their stakeholders to achieve their social and ecological missions (Bechetti and Borzaga

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[1] The expression Tafel literarily translates as "dining table" or "meal."

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2010); as expressed by Tafel founder Sabine Werth: "We take what is superfluous and forward it to those who are in need of it" (ARD Mediathek 2018, own translation). However, the Tafel organizations cannot successfully pursue their missions if they cannot manage to change food "waste" into a resource for their clients. In this sense, the Tafel organizations are both resource integrators and resource makers.

The service-dominant (S-D) perspective undergirds our analysis of the Tafel organizations' value co-creation processes. We investigate these processes with regard to resource integration/making and the development of proto-institutions in reaction to two types of conflicts: those resulting from scarcity and those arising from the necessity of cooperation. These conflicts have affected the Tafel organizations' value co-creation processes, threatened their access to resources, and pushed for institutional change. Our research highlights the context-dependent emergence and dissemination of proto-institutions (i. e., "institutions in the making"; Lawrence, Hardy, and Phillips 2002, 283) within the Tafel system, as well as context-dependent resource uses and resource assessments (Kleinaltenkamp, Corsaro, and Sebastini 2018). We combine the S-D logic's lens and a sociocultural model of context (Thompson 1990) to study the structural commonalities and idiosyncrasies of the Tafel system, represented as a single case in which multiple units of analysis are embedded (Yin 2003, 40). In line with Clarke (2010), the case is the situation, meaning that the context is present in concrete interactions.

We adapted Thompson's (1990) sociocultural model devoted to the study of social context to use as a framework for our analysis. In our view, (social-scientific) context models connect social-scientific "grand" theories stemming from, for example, marketing, economics, or organization studies with basic theories of the constitution and study of the social with concrete entities such as situations, relationships, individuals, or events. On the one hand, a model of context is a systematic, theory-guided representation of context phenomena. On the other hand, it is an expression of scholarly interest in contextualization or contextual issues. Thompson's model provides information about context phenomena (what is to be studied in terms of context); it sets the stage for dynamics or the consideration of time and space. Thompson's methodology, which interconnects context model and depth hermeneutics, requires multilevel research designs.

Many Tafel organizations have faced shortages of food resources, which have led to rationing procedures, conflicts, and the "production of new institutions by facilitating their creation and making them available interorganizationally" (Lawrence, Hardy, and Phillips 2002, 282). Wieland, Koskela-Huotari, and Vargo (2016, 220) note that "institutions and institutional arrangements are crucial elements in how actors enact value co-creation practices, perceive value, and shape and reform markets." Referring to institutional theory, Lusch and Watts (2018, 6) include "the exchange of ideas through discourse, and even the exchange of information that occurs when observing the behavior of others" in their conception of exchange. In line with these views, we investigate the actors' understandings of value co-creation processes

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in the Tafel system and how these understandings affected conflicts and facilitated or thwarted the paths taken for their solution.

The widely varying concepts of value that prevail in the marketing literature and beyond notwithstanding (Domegan *et al.* 2012; Karababa and Kjeldgaard 2014; Löbler and Hahn 2013), the view that value creation is about the creation of economic value seems to be undisputed. We expand this view with two other types of value that can emerge from value co-creation processes: social and ecological value (Haase, Becker, and Pick 2018; Kokko 2018). This procedure gives rise to two research questions: First, what *kinds* of value do Tafel organizations co-create (for and with whom, why, and how) (Haase 2015; Saebi, Foss, and Linder 2019)? Second, how do the Tafel organizations' activities, that is, their employees' and volunteers' individual dynamic actions or interactions (Löbler and Hahn 2013, 263), depend on their (axiological) values and the meaning the missions have for them and their evaluators (Deephouse *et al.* 2017)?

This paper contributes to the literature on value co-creation in three respects. First, we identify activities devoted to the creation of economic value, on the one hand, and social and ecological value, on the other hand. According to S-D logic, value is created through subjective valuations of processes or outcomes. Subjective valuation does not mean that the valuation process takes place in a vacuum; on the contrary, there are "myriad … ways the world interferes" (Larsen 2018, 104) in valuation processes. The S-D logic does not address social or ecological value, at least not in its fundamental principles or axioms (Greer, Lusch, and Vargo 2016; Vargo and Lusch 2017; *cf.* also Webster and Lusch 2013).

Second, we draw on a sociocultural context model (Thompson 1990), which facilitates multilevel analyses that connect spatiotemporal aspects, social divergences and asymmetries, relationships and networks, and actors and meaning. This model sheds light on the meaning dimensions that are effective in the making of resources (Zimmermann 1951) and for the assessment of value, particularly economic and social value. Our approach to value-in-context includes both value-in-social-context (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber 2011) and value-in-cultural-context (Vargo and Lusch 2017).

Third, we identify the phenomenon of proto-institutions, which have developed in Tafel organizations in reaction to the emergence of conflicts. The Tafel system is governed by institutional arrangements establishing social and private orders at various levels of analysis. As our case shows, conflict management can spawn mechanisms (Kleinaltenkamp, Corsaro, and Sebastini 2018) that drive the development of organizations and induce flexible action in times of conflict (connecting to the concept of flexible schemata, as introduced subsequently).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: In the second and third sections, we introduce the theoretical framework (value-in-context and context model) and methodology. Using the context model as a template to structure the analysis, in the fourth section we apply our framework, composed of S-D logic, context model,

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and depth hermeneutics, to the Tafel system; in other words, we describe and analyze the case. To conduct a context-sensitive analysis, we reviewed the Tafel-related literature and media coverage, and we interviewed representatives of Tafel organizations and volunteers in Tafel organizations in Berlin (urban), Brandenburg (rural), Nuremberg, and Erlangen. We identify how members of Tafel organizations positioned themselves when they felt exposed to conflict; specifically, we explore their reactions to the Essen Tafel organization's decision to limit access to its service to people holding a German passport. The final sections are devoted to discussion and conclusions.

Two interrelated criteria guided our choice of context models: the research interest and the epistemological position of the researchers. In this regard, we combine weak constructivism (Howell 2013) and objective hermeneutics (Mantzavinos 2020). Thompson's (1990) model identifies the objective factors that can be subjected to research in the study of meaning/life world and are accessible by theoretical analysis. Thus, our approach complements first-order theories with second-order theories.

2. Context and Context Models

In their discussion of further development of S-D logic, Vargo and Lusch (2017, 46) state that it can evolve into "a general theory of the market and, even more broadly, … a general theory of value co-creation." Thus, S-D logic comes close to what Jackson *et al.* (2019) call "grand theory." As exemplified in its axioms (Vargo and Lusch 2016), it states basic characteristics of social reality, unlimited in time and range (Lusch 2017). In the organization and management research stream, Jackson *et al.* (2019, 21) argue that decontextualization "comes in two main forms: reductionism and grand theory." Reductionism is associated with micro-level theories (unconnected to macro-level theories or theories of the *between*, that is, meso-level theories), whereas grand theorizing refers to macro-level theories.

Can a grand theory avoid the problems associated with decontextualization? Vargo and Lusch (2017) highlight the importance of midrange theories for S-D logic. Jackson *et al.* (2019, 33) discuss, for example, institutional logics as an approach to *conceptualizing context.* An important aspect of our argument is that if decontextualization has a common form, then contextualization can have common forms as well. *Contextualization* is the practice of knowledge production related to theories (or models) of context. A context model is an expression of contextualization; and if there is one model, there could be more. From this, then, the question arises whether there are ill-defined contexts or criteria of adequate contextualization. Askegaard and Linnet, for example, ask, with reference to consumer culture theory: "To which contexts should consumption research pay attention" (2011, 390)? Context models provide answers to this question.

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2.1 Value Co-Creation in Context

Individuals and organizations exchange service for service, integrate resources, and engage in the co-creation of value. According to Chandler and Vargo, value co-creation is "the joint integration of resources by multiple actors associated with exchange" (2011, 35). The Tafel organizations are nonprofit organizations engaged in value co-creation processes (for a discussion of the centrality of processes in co-creation, see Payne, Storbacka, and Frow 2008) with their clients or cooperation partners in service ecosystems. Service ecosystems are spatial and temporal structures (Chandler and Vargo 2011), or "relatively self-contained, self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange" (Wieland, Koskela-Huotari, and Vargo 2016, 212). Thus, the Tafel organizations are connected with other Tafel organizations and their stakeholders, including donees, donors, and volunteers. Depending on how the context is framed, "exchange between two actors can be seen simultaneously as exchange within and among service ecosystems" (Chandler and Vargo 2011, 36).

The situation or context in which value co-creation processes take place affects both the creation and the experience of value. Chandler and Vargo emphasize that framing exchange through context "is a fundamental aspect in the study of markets and value co-creation that requires further exploration" (2011, 45). They distinguish between micro, meso, and macro contexts; the network is the macro-level context of the triad (meso-level), which forms the context of the dyad (micro-level). They go on to argue that "neither perspective is mutually exclusive; rather, each perspective occurs and must be understood in the context of the others" (*ibid.*, 45). In comparison, Thompson's model of meaning construction in social contexts "injects" the context into all levels and units of analysis. In line with Thompson's (1990) and Clarke's (2010) perspectives on situational analysis, we expand the view that higher-level entities form the context of lower-level entities. There is also no distinction between entities or events, on the one hand, and their context, on the other; the context is present in all interactions (Löbler and Hahn 2013). In this sense, the analysis of the Tafel system is contextual at all levels. According to situational analysis, "*the conditions of the situation are in the situation* (Clarke 2010, 870, emphasis in original); that is, "cases are situations" (*ibid.*, 870).

Thompson's (1990) model also interconnects situational analysis (Clarke 2010) and market sociology (Fligstein and Dauter 2007). According to Fligstein and Dauter (*ibid.*), structure operates in all situations, albeit differently. Regarding the interpretation of the context as spatial and temporal structure (Chandler and Vargo 2011), Thompson's model is compatible with S-D understandings of context and in line with the S-D logic's interest in webs of interactions and "'institutions' – social norms, collective meanings and other coordinating heuristics – as drivers of value creation" (Vargo, Akaka, and Vaughn 2017, 119).

Thompson's approach includes *a model of context*, but its objectives and methodology (depth hermeneutics) go beyond creating a scheme useable for the de-

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scription of meaningful social phenomena. This approach guides our description and analysis of the context, which includes in-depth interviews conducted in two regions in Germany (Berlin-Brandenburg and Erlangen-Nuremberg) and a media analysis of print and audio media.

2.2 Contextualized Structure and Symbolic Meaning

By including information about the spatiotemporal setting, fields of interaction, organizations, and social structure, Thompson's model interconnects many of the thoughts and ideas brought to the fore in the preceding discussion of the role of context in marketing. The model allows, for example, the integration of subjective and objective factors in what Thompson calls flexible schemata and social structures (Fig. 1). As we describe in more detail subsequently with regard to the Tafel system, the social structure, defined as a "series of elements and their interrelations," is reproduced through processes of "schematic generation of human action" (Thompson 1981, 174). Note that "schematic" does not mean that human action is conceived of as deterministic or unconscious on a regular basis; rather, the connection between social structure and its mental reflection expresses the actors' embeddedness and does not render impossible agentic subjects or social change (Seo and Creed 2002).

Thompson's (1990) sociocultural framework is based on the criticism and further development of Paul Ricoeur's and Jürgen Habermas's contributions to social philosophy (Thompson 1981). Thompson (1990) combines descriptive and symbolic approaches to culture; interpretation and explanation are conceived of as complementary elements of the hermeneutical approach. According to Thompson (1981, 218), the analysis of action (e. g., text) must be developed in such a way that the theoretical relationships can unfold by taking into account both the subjective constitution of life world actors and the objective constitution of social life worlds. From Ricoeur, Thompson (1981; 1990) adopts the term "depth hermeneutics," meant to express that a comprehensive interpretation of meaning should go beyond introspection and must include explanatory or *objectifying* analysis (e. g., explanations can illuminate the distortions caused by the exercise of power); and from Habermas, Thompson adopts the idea of theorists paving the way for social change by redescription, reconception, and reinterpretation of actions that deviate from the descriptions, conceptualizations, or interpretations of life world actors. In the continuation of and reflection on Ricoeur's and Habermas's works, Thompson (1981) characterizes the methodological framework considered adequate for the depth interpretation of human action as based on both subjective interpretations and theoretical (re)constructions of institutional schemata. Thus, the subjective interpretation of an action (the subjectively ascribed meaning to it) does not need to coincide with the meaning attached to it by the explanatory part of the hermeneutic argument.

Jackson *et al.* (2019, 34; emphasis in original) argue "that context itself means exactly an empirical reality of *specific* historical actors and their social and material

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circumstances." In line with this assertion, Thompson (1990, 138) introduces "a broad range of meaningful phenomena, from actions, gestures and rituals to utterances, texts, television programs and works of art" and draws attention to the specific historical and socially structured contexts in which such symbolic forms are produced, disseminated, and received (*ibid.*, 136). Actors produce symbolic forms through the conduct of actions, the use of language, the preparation of text, the creation of art, and so on.

3. Methodology and Case Study

Our study of the Tafel systems rests on two pillars, the first of which is the application of Thompson's (*ibid.*) context model to the Tafel system. If the case is the situation, and the description of the case is based on a model, then the description of the case is model application. Second, we make full use of Thompson's methodology, in which meaningful entities are analyzed according to their internal patterns and in relation to their social context. The depth hermeneutics (or depth interpretation) allows us to integrate aspects relevant for the understanding and explanation of Tafel organizations' objectives, means, and activities. The adjective "depth" placed in front of the nouns "interpretation" or "hermeneutics" expresses the connection of different levels of analysis required for the integration of subjective and objective factors – or of understanding and explanation – in the analysis of cases or situations, respectively.

3.1 Data Sources

Our single case study is based on multiple data sources, which makes data triangulation possible; that is, "multiple sources of data provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Ridder 2017, 288). Between May and July 2017, we conducted 13 in-depth interviews. In Berlin, we contacted all instances of Laib & Seele,[2] a cooperation of the churches in Berlin, and the RBB, a broadcasting station, for interviews; in Brandenburg, we contacted all Tafel organizations in the proximity of Berlin. Because of negative press coverage about volunteers' misappropriation of donations in one Tafel organization in Berlin in April 2017,[3] the Tafel organizations were facing public pressure, and many of them abstained from giving us an interview. For this reason, we considered starting a second round of interviews; however, ultimately, we chose not to because, given our interview guide and research questions, we concluded that a state of theoretical saturation was achieved after the first round.

[2] Laib translates as "loaf" and Seele as "soul." Laib (loaf) and Leib (body) are pronounced the same; thus, these names are homophones.

[3] https://www.tag24.de/nachrichten/laib-und-seele-berliner-tafel-veruntreuung-spende-lebensmittel-betrug-undercover-rtl-236102 (Accessed June 13, 2020).

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Table 1

Data Sources and Description

Organization (Location)	Data Sources	Number of Interviewees / Length of Interview
Bernauer Tafel GmbH	Personal interview Newspaper/online articles: Märkische Online Zeitung diesseits – das Humanistische Magazin Die Linke	Interviewee (1) / 2:00 hours
Tafel Martin-Luther-Gemeinde Berlin-Neukölln	Personal interview	Interviewee (2) / 1:45 hours
Tafel St. Jacobi Kirche	Personal interview	Interviewee (3) / 1:00 hour
Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Alt-Lichtenberg Laib & Seele (Berliner Tafel e.V.)	Personal interview	Interviewees (4) and (5) / 1:30 hours
Arbeitslosenverband und Strausberger Tafel	Personal interview Official Tafel documents: on-site rules, information	Interviewee (6) and (7) / 1:30 hours
Berlin-Karow, Kirchliches Begegnungszentrum, Achillestr. 53, Berlin	Personal interview	Interviewee (8) / 1:00 hour
Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Treptow, Bekenntniskirche	Personal interview	Interviewee (9) / 0:30 hour Interviewee (10) / 0:20 hour
Tafel Potsdam	Personal interview	Interviewee (11) / 0:50 hour
Erlanger Tafel (Diakonisches Werk Erlangen e.V.)	Personal interview Official Tafel documents: "customer" information, on-site rules	Interviewee (12) / 0:30 hour
Nürnberger Tafel e.V. (later Bayerisches Rotes Kreuz [Bavarian Red Cross])	Personal interview	Interviewee (13) / 0:40

Note: For most cases, if there were two interviewees at one place, all people sat on one table. The situation in Berlin-Treptow was an exception to this rule: Interviewee 10 stopped by after the end of the interview with Interviewee 9.

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Table 1 summarizes the interview information. Secondary data sources in the form of newspaper articles and official statements by the national association of the German Tafel and individual Tafel / Laib & Seele organizations complemented the interviews. We selected press releases based on two criteria: (1) their appearance in one of the four (daily and weekly) national newspapers with the largest circulation, to ensure a political balance between center-left/liberal and center-right/conservative (*Süddeutsche Zeitung:* center-left, *Die Zeit:* center-left, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung:* center-right, *Die Welt:* center-right); and (2) being published between February and March 2018, when the Tafel organization in Essen drew nationwide attention to distribution conflicts in Tafel organizations. Using these criteria, we chose a total of 47 articles to analyze (see appendix). We determined which interpretations press actors had attributed to the Tafel field and connected them to our interviewees' interpretations. We suspect that larger discursive patterns as part of the social context are not irrelevant but rather are closely linked to the history, structural asymmetries, and the distribution of resources in the Tafel field, which in turn are reflected in the individuals' experiences. This alone is an investigation in itself that can be performed within the framework of our hermeneutical model in connection with discourse analytical methods. With our hermeneutical model, we particularly emphasize that individual speech acts (despite their respective contexts) can still produce novel moments and expressions.

The public interest in social processes taking place within Tafel organizations and the situation in which Tafel organizations suddenly found themselves in 2015 guided data collection and analysis. In accordance with Burawoy (1998; 2009), interviewing is understood as entering into a conversation with the research participants. At the time, participants were aware of the public attention the Tafel was receiving; their situation intertwined with media coverage, the language used by press actors, and press influence on Tafel clients, volunteers, and donors. People holding distinct positions in the Tafel field and its organizations provided their descriptions and interpretations, thus offering understanding of the situation – an understanding we interpret (Ridder 2017) and use to create our representation of the Tafel field.

3.2 Interpretation and Reinterpretation

We used various data sources to shed light on "layers of meaning, describing and re-describing actions and expressions which are *already meaningful* for the very individuals who are producing, perceiving and interpreting these actions" (Thompson 1990, 131; emphasis in original). Thompson (*ibid.*) uses the concept of reinterpretation (where other authors use "interpretation") to emphasize that the interpretations that researchers and theorists consider already draw on interpreted meaning (e. g., the meaning that Tafel actors have created). The term "reinterpretation" expresses the possible divergence of interpretations ascribed to life-world actors and those resulting from researchers' theoretical frameworks, perspectives, or lenses. Researchers are "projecting a possible meaning which may diverge from the meaning

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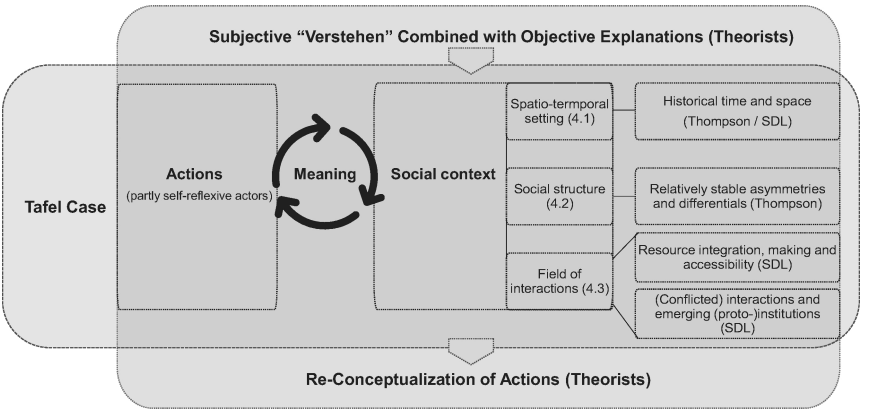

Figure. 1: Action – Meaning – Context
Source: Modification adapted from Thompson (*ibid.*, 151)

construed by subjects who make up the social-historical world" (*ibid.*, 290). This divergence is intrinsic in the attempt to interpret. In our study, possible instances of reinterpretation are the interpretation of the Tafel clients' resources and the social value created by the Tafel organizations.

4. The Contextualized Representation of the Tafel System

In this section, we describe the Tafel field in terms of Thompson's context model; that is, we use and extend the analytical categories introduced by the model. We adjust items that represent the social context and form our units of analysis to the particularities of the Tafel field (Fig. 1). After describing the social context according to its spatiotemporal setting (4.1) and its structural aspects (4.2), we analyze the Tafel field's interactions using the S-D lens (4.3). In line with Thompson (*ibid.*), we assume that individuals who act and react (re)produce symbolic forms embedded in a specific setting. To fully utilize the methodological framework of depth hermeneutics, we interpret and situate the entities that are symbolically relevant for the actors (as they emerged in interviews and press coverage) in their contextual environment.

4.1 The Spatiotemporal Setting: Historical Development of the Tafel System

The idea of collecting food and passing it on to people in need originated in the United States in the 1960s. The first German Tafel was founded by a women's initiative in Berlin (Berliner Frauen e.V.) in 1993 with the objective of improving the city's homelessness situation (Tafel Deutschland 2018). One member of the group,

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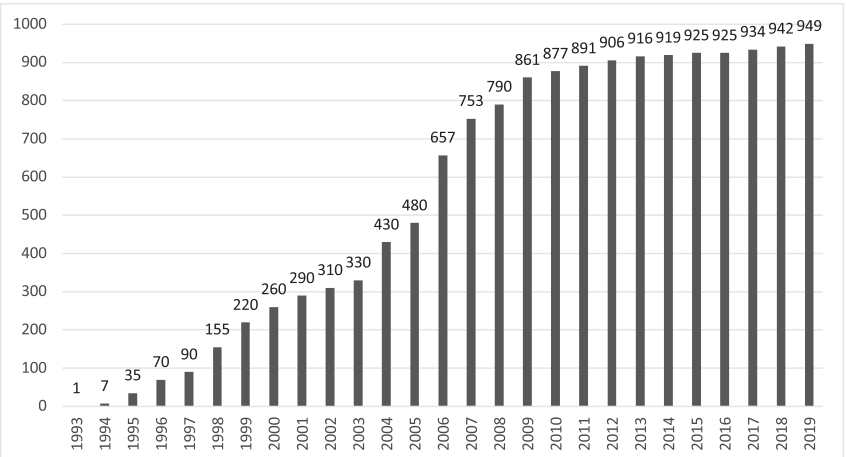

Figure 2: The Tafel Organizations: Increase in Numbers Since 1993
Source: Tafel Deutschland (2020)

who had just returned from the United States, proposed transferring the concept of the New York City Harvest to Germany. After homeless shelters had confirmed the need for such an initiative in Berlin and local food suppliers signaled their support, the first Tafel organization started to operate, and the media followed this organization with interest. As shown in Fig. 2, the number of Tafel organizations has increased since 1993, moving beyond borders to include the Wiener Tafel in Austria, the Tafel in Switzerland, Feedback in Cape Town, and other food banks operating on similar principles worldwide. The spread of charitable food assistance is accelerating on a global scale, as exemplified by the largest food bank in the United States, Second Harvest, which changed its name to Feeding America in 2008 (Lorenz 2014).

The tremendous food waste in Germany – seven million tons of foods are destroyed every year – is the source of the Tafel organizations' ecological mission. This phenomenon prevails in many industrialized societies that have shifted from facing scarcity to being affluent (Galbraith [1958] 1998; Lorenz 2014). The Tafel organizations save more than 260,000 kilograms of edible food per year from destruction (Tafel Deutschland 2019). From the beginning, the Tafel organizations' ecological and social missions were connected. The Tafel organizations were founded to reduce food waste and help the poor who still struggle after monetary assistance in form of Hartz IV, pensions, or benefits. Relying on the work of 60,000 volunteers (Tafel Deutschland 2019) who collect and redistribute discarded but still edible food from private donors such as supermarkets or bakeries, the Tafel organizations provide more than 1.6 million people with food in 2,000 local distribution centers all over Germany (Tafel Deutschland 2020). Of the Tafel organizations, 60 % are projects of charitable or religious associations (e. g., the German Red Cross, the Diakonie, the Caritas) and operate under their sponsorship; the other 40 % are independent registered associations (Tafel Deutschland 2020). Laib & Seele is a major cooperation partner of the

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Tafel Berlin, serving 50,000 people per month in Berlin (TAZ.de 2020).[4] In the following, we put Laib & Seele on par with Tafel and differentiate between them when necessary.

The Tafel organizations operate in specific locales. Regional differences affect living expenses and risks of poverty in Germany. According to Munich's poverty report (Landeshauptstadt München 2017), 17.4 % of Munich's citizens were affected by poverty in 2017. The positive economic development in the region notwithstanding, the number has increased by 2.7 % since 2011 when the first poverty report was issued. In Bavaria, there are currently 170 Tafel organizations, providing for 200,000 people, 25 % of whom are pensioners. By comparison, although North Rhine-Westphalia has a far higher population and unemployment rate (Bayerischer Rundfunk 2018), approximately the same number of people are dependent on Tafel's support there. As Reiner Haupka, head of the Tafel association Bavaria, notes: "If you want to have a pension of 2,000 euros, you would have to earn 4,500 euros a month for over 45 years. Many retirees currently have around 1,000 euros, how are they going to survive today in a region like Munich" (Bayerischer Rundfunk 2018, own translation)?

4.2 Structural Aspects

Thompson (1990) analyzes social structure in terms of relatively stable asymmetries, differentials, and divisions in social life. Bavaria's capital, Munich, is an example of a city where particularly large asymmetries exist between population groups. If such characteristics are enduring, relationships among field actors are regarded as *systematically asymmetrical.* Analyzing the social structure requires identifying those asymmetries "which are manifestations not simply of individual differences, but of collective and durable differences in terms of the distribution of, and access to, resources, power, opportunities and life chances" (*ibid.*, 283). If members of a society or organization have limited resources at hand, they are also limited in their capacity to interact with other parties or exchange services with them. As we show subsequently, this limitation characterizes the situation of many Tafel clients and, with it, their ability to exchange service for service. Power and domination can be observed both at Tafel sites and in the relationships between donors and Tafel organizations.

Structural asymmetries play an important part in the understanding of the Tafel organizations' two missions. Slipping into and remaining in poverty and subsequently becoming a customer of Tafel organizations is associated with multiple (connected) incidents, which include earning little or no income, receiving insufficient social benefits, experiencing expensive housing and debt, chronic illness, and mental health issues. Poverty can be passed down through generations; a recent study by Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk (2018) reveals that poverty affects every fifth child in Germany.

[4] http://www.berliner-tafel.de/laib-und-seele/die-idee/geschichte/ (Accessed July 9, 2019).

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Child poverty is characterized not only by food and material deprivation but also exclusion from educational and cultural activities. According to numbers issued by the Tafel Deutschland (2020), 30 % of the regular users of Tafel services are children and teenagers.

As Findsrud, Tronvoll, and Edvardsson (2018) have argued, the fact that actors integrate resources says nothing about their motivation to do so. The reasons we enumerated herein (our reinterpretation) draw on interviews and media analyses – explanations and interpretations of structural asymmetries. Especially after 2005, the year in which the so-called Hartz IV reform was implemented and unemployment benefits were tightened (Fig. 2), Tafel organizations as well as the amount of donated food saw rapid growth. The number of elderly people requesting access to Tafel organizations' services has doubled in the past few years. The poverty rate of seniors and retirees (those receiving less than 969 Euro net income per month) has been steadily increasing (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2016). Additionally, single parents are more likely to be at risk of poverty than childless couples and couples raising their children together (Tafel Deutschland 2016). Another group of Tafel customers has emerged as well: those who are employed or self-employed but whose wages or income are comparatively low. They are Tafel customers because of the money that they can save if they collect fresh vegetables and fruits at the Tafel site and spend the savings for other things, for example, for the homework supervision of their children (Anthony 2017).

4.3 The Field of Interaction

Pierre Bourdieu ([1984] 1988; [1989] 1996; [2000] 2005) introduced the concept of *field of interaction.* Thompson uses Bourdieu (1977; 1984) to stress that individuals "act within sets of circumstances which are given in advance, and which provide different individuals with different inclinations and opportunities" (1995, 12). The social context determines the positions acquired by individuals and the life trajectories they follow to a certain degree. Such positions and trajectories shape and express the relations between individuals and the opportunities to access resources and the institutional settings available to them. In the next subsections, we analyze the possibilities for action offered by resources and (proto-)institutions separately, though we understand them to be interdependent. For example, some groups of refugees have access to the resources distributed by the Tafel organizations, whereas other groups of refugees do not: Specifically, only refugees who live in their own apartments and fulfill the Tafel regulations have access to the Tafel service; refugees who live in accommodation facilities established for their group, and are provided with food rations at these sites, have no access to the Tafel organizations' offerings on a regular basis.

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4.3.1 The Making of Resources

Access to resources is essential for the Tafel organizations' and their stakeholders' ability to engage in value co-creation processes. The limitation of resources and disparity in the types of resources available are ongoing sources of tension and conflict within the Tafel system. In our case study, we address conflicts inherent to the Tafel system as well as those driven by external influences or caused by the refugee crisis in 2015 (when the Tafel organizations had to serve an additional 280,000 refugees in 2015 and 2016 (Hausel 2017) without having had sufficient time to prepare themselves for the greater demand).

Webster and Lusch (2013, 395), drawing on the basic distinction between tangible and intangible resources, further distinguish between static and dynamic resources, and (to an organization) internal and external resources. Greer, Lusch, and Vargo note that "resources often arise externally and can include market facing, public, and social resources" (2016, 30). The Tafel system's effectiveness depends on the cooperation and the resources of diverse groups of stakeholders: the donors, the donees, the volunteers (who are often donees as well), the public, the churches, welfare organizations, other nonprofit organizations, and the government. Due to space limitations, we cannot analyze the contributions of all stakeholders in detail; rather, we focus on volunteers and donees, two important groups of providers of resources within the Tafel system.

Resources and potential resources: As mentioned previously, from the very beginning, the Tafel organizations' social and ecological missions were not independent of each other – serving the needy in connection with the avoidance of food waste. Food retailers and local producers (e. g., farmers, bakeries) donate what they call "waste," and the Tafel organizations change material entities designated as "food waste" into resources for the pursuit of the Tafel's social mission. The national association of the German Tafel organizations receives mainly food donations;[5] it in turn distributes to local Tafel organizations, which also collect food from nearby supermarkets, grocery stores, or bakeries on their own (Tafel Deutschland 2016). What characterizes waste donations differs greatly: Sometimes, it simply means that fresh vegetables have grown too big to be sellable in a supermarket (ARD Mediathek 2018). Other times, donations are in bad shape, however. The groceries picked up from supermarkets by the Laib & Seele organizations in Berlin are often shoddy and mingled with trash (e. g., broken glassware). Interviewees 2, 3, 9, 10, and 11 report finding about 20 % trash among the food they obtain from supermarkets (two of ten food boxes).

We therefore differentiate the donated waste into resources and trash. The Tafel organizations obtain resources for their value co-creation processes, which they change into potential resources for the donees. As Findsrud, Tronvoll, and Edvardsson put it, "'integration' means combining into a whole, so resource integration is self-

[5] In Bernau and Brandenburg (rural), the Tafel organizations receive donations from other types of donors as well (e. g., craftspeople who help them repair things, furniture stores).

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evidently combining resources into something new" (2018, 496). This change is related to activities and processes which consume time and other resources as well. The majority of the Tafel organizations, for example, bear the operation costs for the vehicles, which they use to pick up the donations. The efforts the Tafel organizations must put into the separation of edible food (the potential resource for the donees) from trash generates further costs (Interviewees 2, 6, 10, and 11). The Tafel organizations must dispose of the trash, which further increases their costs and can become a source of conflict with their neighbors, such as when garbage bins at Tafel sites become overly full.

Resourceness: Volunteers receive no monetary resources from the Tafel organizations in exchange for their service. The groups of volunteers and donees overlap to a large degree; this overlap is a striking example of the interdependence of stakeholder groups in the Tafel field. Volunteers are selected from the group of donees for two main reasons: (1) it makes sense to recruit volunteers from this group because the person in question is well-known in the respective Tafel organization, is available, and has skills useful for the Tafel organization (e. g., he or she can drive a car, lift heavy boxes, speak Arab); and (2) few other options are available because the number of volunteers who would volunteer for honorary reasons only is too low.

As Vargo, Akaka, and Vaughan note, "social, cultural and situational contexts of value creation influence the resourceness/usability of a particular resource, as well as its worthiness in exchange" (2017, 5). While it is obvious that volunteers integrate important resources – their skills and knowledge – into the Tafel field's value co-creation processes, a more subtle reason is the resourceness, or usability, of the donees' contributions. Yet, exchanging service with representatives of both groups is essential for the Tafel organizations to achieve their missions. The disregard of the resourceness of the donees' contributions seems to reflect a fundamental societal asymmetry marking the labor market, expanding it into the Tafel field. Interviewee 12 observed that the Tafel customers' competences or their skills and knowledge, respectively (Findsrud, Tronvoll, and Edvardsson 2018), are not appreciated in the labor market:

> "There are many people in our society who are physically ill and mentally weak and are no longer able to fit into the labor market. In our society today, everything is geared towards performance, and these people are not able to withstand this pressure. They cannot do that. They fall out of the grid [the market]. And so, we also have young people at the Tafel."

However, the donees are not simply recipients of others' benevolence; rather, they integrate their resources with those of other actors in the field. Among other things, they transfer information about their financial status (yearly) and preferences (regularly); they invest time to go to the Tafel sites to bring bags or other appliances for the transport of the food they collect; they spend time at Tafel sites; and sometimes they engage in making or maintaining social contacts, thereby improving the atmosphere there. Interviewees 3 and 4 mention donees who returned (potential) resources (clothing) to the Tafel site for further use. One donee donated money that she, as a

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Tafel client, did not have to spend for groceries to another nongovernmental organization.

4.3.2 Conflict-Related Interactions and Emerging (Proto-)Institutions

Fields of interaction are characterized by various rules and conventions. Some of them are explicitly formulated (i. e., formal institutions). For example, all donees must document their entitlement to the Tafel service at the local Tafel site they approach.[6] The best-before date is another example of a formal institution nourishing the Tafel organizations' business within the field.

The importance of formal institutions notwithstanding, "action and interaction in social life are often guided by implicit, unformulated, informal and imprecise rules," that is, "flexible schemata" (Thompson 1990, 148). As Thompson elucidates, "flexible schemata are not so much 'drawn upon' by individuals as implicitly implemented by them. They are socially inculcated and socially differentiated conditions of action and interaction, conditions which are, to some extent, fulfilled and reproduced every time that an individual acts" (*ibid.*, 148). On the one hand, "schemata become inscribed in the desires, inclinations, attitudes and beliefs of the subject" (Thompson 1981, 174), leading to durable dispositions that affect different fields of action (Bourdieu 1977; 1984). On the other hand, "schemata generate action in a way which is not deterministic, establishing flexible boundaries for the negotiation of unanticipated situations; and one must not preclude the possibility that under certain circumstances, subjects may reflect upon and transform such schemata" (Thompson 1981, 174 f.). Even if concrete schemata generate action in the sense Bourdieu had in mind, that is, if acting individuals reproduce them, the reproductions are often not identical to the origin. Volunteers distributing food at a local Tafel site, applying a certain rule in this regard, will not reproduce exactly the same action consequence in each instance of action, and their (spontaneous) interactions might contribute to the change of rules. One reason for this is that there is always a *window of opportunity* for the other party to negotiate on the result (e. g., getting cucumbers instead of carrots). Another reason is that institutionally embedded agency (Seo and Creed 2002) does not exclude rule adaptation and institutional change (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca 2009).

Conflicts at Tafel Sites: The donees have varying interests, experience societal asymmetries in different ways, and have different cultural backgrounds. The regional and nationwide press has reported conflicts among donees, or between donees and volunteers (Rieck 2017; Süddeutsche Zeitung 2015). These conflict-laden inter-

[6] The collectors' documents do not provide information about their nationality. They provide name, address, access, and size of the family. Refugees have only numbers, and at the end of the distribution process, people without numbers are served as well.

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actions among stakeholder groups can spawn problems within the Tafel system, placing the inflow of resources into the Tafel field at risk.

Scarcity is a major source of conflicts in the Tafel field; a poor understanding of how the Tafel system works is another. These two sources often goad each other. The majority of interviewees (Table 1) report that supermarkets donate less food than they have in previous years. The Tafel organizations try to balance out the fact that the supermarkets have increased their efficiency and produce less food waste because of progress in logistics or changes in order systems. Supermarkets have also learned that they can sell groceries that are approaching the freshness date to a reduced price to their own customers. As the national association of the German Tafel (Tafel Deutschland 2016) reports, and our interviewees confirmed, sometimes donees can choose from a greater variety of food, and sometimes far less variety, depending on the donations raised. Based on the interviews, we identified three sources of internal system conflicts and one externally caused conflict, which we discuss in thematic order.

First, there is little or no freedom of choice during the distribution process of resources at Tafel sites. Although various distribution rules (or proto-institutions) have developed at Tafel organizations, all have in common that, if an item that is a resource for many donees is scarce, it is not the donee who chooses it; in many cases, volunteers allot presorted assortments. Interviewee 6 differentiated "getting the very same" *(genau dasselbe)* and "getting the similar" *(das gleiche)* explicitly and, with it, a rule governing the distribution procedure at all Tafel sites we visited. For instance, families with children have a higher chance of getting scarce chocolate than single retirees. In addition, vegetables are offered to all donees, but not necessarily the same ones. Sometimes, a conflict originating from scarcity can change into a cultural conflict – for example, if a particular demand of Tafel clients for some sorts of vegetables (e. g., eggplants) or a particular type of bread cannot be met (Derkas 2015).

Thus, scarcity is an ongoing source of conflicts among donees who often seem to interpret these conflicts as zero-sum games (Binmore 2007). If a Tafel organization does not manage to establish rules suited to govern the distribution process accepted by all or at least a majority of the players in the game, then these players tend to invent own problem solutions, such as investing more time or engaging in trickery. Cottbus, a city in East Germany, is an example for the first-mentioned solution strategy: there, Tafel customers begin to stand in line at 4 a.m. to make sure they are among the first to get vegetables and fruit (the site opens at 9 a.m.) (Anthony 2017). With regard to the second strategy, the interviewees reported trickeries observable at many Tafel sites, the main objective of which is to improve the juggler's position (the juggler's objective is to get more and better resources than he or she would have gotten without trickery) in the distribution process.

Second, external shocks have aggravated available problems at local sites. The Laib & Seele organizations in Berlin faced decreasing food donations by local supermarkets, leading to shortages in their supply of potential resources for donees;

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therefore, they were forced to cut down rations (Interviewees 2 and 3). Against this backdrop, the humanitarian refugee crisis in 2015 caused particular problems for some Tafel organizations, especially in Berlin. Interviewee 1 noticed that the asylum seekers were without any means during their first days after their arrival in Berlin: "As they [asylum seekers] arrived, they had nothing. We went there first [to the places where the asylum seekers were concentrated]" (*da sind wir erst mal hingefahren*). In Berlin, governmental organizations, such as the local job centers and the LaGeSo,[7] sent refugees for food to Tafel organizations without informing the organizations in advance (Interviewees 6, 7, and 8). According to Interviewee 2, some Tafel organizations sent refugees from their place to other Tafel sites.

Some of the Tafel organizations had to limit the food rations after the "external shock" occurred – for example, in Arzberg and in Coburg, both rather small Bavarian cities. The media reported conflicting incidents between the Tafel organizations' established customers and the refugees, including volunteers being verbally attacked by refugees (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2015). In the city of Coburg, the increasing number of refugees brought the food supply to its limits (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2015); and homeless people[8] came less often to this Tafel site.

Third, gender ideology is an ongoing source of conflict at Tafel sites. Women represent a large share of volunteers. Some Tafel organizations have replaced female volunteers during the service because some male Tafel customers do not take them seriously (Interviewees 4 and 5), although this would not be necessary if, as in Berlin-Karow, female refugees pick up the food while the men stay at home. Note the difference between collectors and claim holders: claim holders are all family members, whereas collectors are those who go to the Tafel place and pick up the food. Interestingly, gender discrimination has been turned into a source of access to resources. Sometimes the women and children of a family are sent out to collect food in order to get more and better rations; the men sit together and talk during this time. Interviewee 3 reports that women from foreign countries are especially pugnacious to get the food they want for their families.[9] It is also possible that the male heads of households require the women and children to stay at home, such that they are deprived of meeting other people or making relationships even within their ethnic group. While the interviewees observed that donees use the Tafel sites as meeting places, no one reported that contacts emerged between different ethnic groups at Tafel sites.

Fourth, misuse of control over Tafel resources has been detrimental to the Tafel organizations' reputation. The press reported fraud and embezzlement in one Laib & Seele organization in Berlin (Rieck 2017). In many Tafel organizations, especially in

[7] *LaGeSo* is a shortcut for *Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales* (Local authority for Health and Social Affairs).

[8] Note that this type of conflict is rather atypical, as homeless people are usually not Tafel customers, because they cannot make use of the food rations.

[9] Interviewee 3 means women of Turkish or Arab origin who are born in Germany; that is, she does not refer to refugees.

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Berlin, volunteers are donees as well; in these cases, volunteers and donees compete over the resources to be distributed by the Tafel organizations or the volunteers, respectively. A small number of volunteering donees have misused their opportunities and arrogated privileges for themselves in the process of food distribution.

The way Tafel organizations are run results in people with various social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, as well as donees, volunteers, employees, children, adults, and the elderly, all meeting at a place where they experience lack and excess at the same time (Tafel Deutschland 2016). Although this is not a source of conflicts per se, it can aggravate looming problems. Institutions (i. e., rules and norms that have been established or are emerging) in the Tafel field may be considered proper or adequate by established customers, but not by outsiders. For example, the rule of queuing governs the distribution process at many Tafel sites, achieving the status of an institution in the Tafel field (meaning that it is taken for granted by established clients or customers); however, its status has been threatened by donees not able or willing to understand or accept it.

Conflict Solution Mechanisms at Tafel Sites: Each Tafel organization can be conceived of as a cluster of resources and rules (Thompson 1990). With regard to conflicts arising from scarcity, the Tafel organizations try to compensate for resource limitations by increasing the number of donees on a day-to-day basis, starting activities such as the campaign "*Eins mehr*" ("one more") in cooperating supermarkets in Berlin. "*Eins mehr*" invites the customers of supermarkets to buy *one more* of durable items (e. g., noodles, rice) than they need and to donate the extra to the Tafel organization. As the interviewees emphasize, because of the campaign no customer has yet had to go home with an empty bag (interviewees 2 and 3).

Because "[resource] integration requires process(es) and forms of collaboration" (Kleinaltenkamp *et al.* 2012, 203), mechanisms of relational governance enabling and guiding the collaboration must be established. Furthermore, the Tafel organizations' activities are recognized and assessed by evaluators (Deephouse *et al.* 2017) who can influence the stakeholders' willingness to provide the Tafel field with resources. Rules can govern interactions; for the management of an organization, they are a means of control as well. For instance, for the Tafel organizations it is important to document that the donations are received by the needy – and that there are needy people and who they are. As interviewee 1 remarked: "Control is my security." Because the Tafel organizations must document their work carefully, bureaucracy has found its way into their offices – an issue voiced by Interviewees 1 and 3.

The first formal rule that the potential Tafel donees encounter is that they are requested to confirm their neediness. This presupposes that Tafel donees receive some form of state benefits, such as unemployment payments. The local Tafel organizations use some leeway in the definition of "neediness" (a flexible scheme); in our study, the numbers range from 930 to 1,050 euros monthly. If people qualify as donees, they receive a membership card valid for one year for themselves and their families. The

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membership card allows them to pick up food at a certain time slot, usually once a week.

Formal rules have also been developed to avoid conflicts resulting from the scarcity of resources and volunteers simultaneously being donees. These rules do not solve the problem of scarcity; they are conflict avoidance mechanisms established to achieve or come close to just nonmarket distributions of scarce goods. In the Tafel field, we observed the emergence of a family of similar rules that share characteristics of proto-institutions; in other words, each single rule is not necessarily widely accepted within the field but has nevertheless positively affected the emergence of self-organized change processes. Although they differ to a great extent, Tafel organizations have implemented rules governing the ways volunteers are allowed to pick up food for themselves, and the distribution of food is organized very differently. At some sites, groceries are packed before the donees are let in; other organizations offer the groceries unsorted and allow the donees to pick them up or have volunteers hand them over to the donees, if possible, in accord with the donees' preferences. Many Tafel organizations conduct lotteries or let the time slots rotate, so that everyone can equally often choose from the greater variety of food available when the Tafel organization opens its doors.[10]

Tensions have been reported when donees unfamiliar with the customs or rules at a Tafel site violate the informal rule of ordered queuing. Therefore, explaining the Tafel rules and the particularities of value co-creation in the Tafel field is an important task of volunteers at the Tafel sites. As a consequence, Tafel volunteers and employees started communicating the rules via leaflets, displays, or direct talks, if possible in the language of the donees; and they also began checking the donees' compliance. In some cases, they deployed security personnel, and in extreme cases, people who repeatedly violated the local rules were banned from Tafel sites.

While the majority of Tafel organizations seem to have coped with establishing and enforcing such proto-institutions, not all Tafel organizations found what all of their stakeholders considered a proper solution to the conflicts. For example, consider a local conflict at the Tafel site in Essen: customers had violated the rule of queueing, and the Tafel organization's chairman, Jörg Sartor, explained, "I was approached several times because there was too much pushing and shoving [by non-German donees]. I want the people here to behave in an orderly way toward each other" (Deutsche Welle 2018). It seems that the food-distribution procedure in Essen fostered the undesirable behavior, and the local management was not able to solve the problem adequately (Wernicke 2018). The Tafel organization in Essen temporarily limited the registration – and, with it, access to Tafel resources – to people holding a German passport, thus spawning a national debate over poverty, social segregation, and integration, in which even Chancellor Angela Merkel voiced an opinion (Deutsche Welle 2018). Table A1 provides an overview on how the press reported the conflict.

[10] Another option that we observed at one Tafel organization is modifying the food supply such that the greatest variety is not always offered at the beginning of the distribution process.

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As revealed by our media analysis, the understanding of the conflicts taking place throughout value co-creation processes has been mingled with criticisms of welfare policies and cuts of the social security system associated with increasing risks of sinking below the poverty line for the unemployed, a rise in low-income jobs, both of which are accompanied by social fragmentation. How the Tafel organizations manage to deal with conflicts is important to their self-understanding and influences the public interpretation of their activities and legitimacy. As a consequence of conflicts reported in the media and discussions about poverty and social segregation in Germany (Anthony 2017; Hildebrandt 2013; Selke 2013), the Tafel organizations deemed it necessary to explain themselves – who they are, what they do, and how they do it – to the public (ARD Mediathek 2018).

Values-Based Value Co-Creation in the Tafel Field: In our analysis, we found evidence that actors within the field held a broad variety of values. The majority of stakeholders who engage in interactions with Tafel organizations seem to advance their own interests or objectives. Societal asymmetries and poverty foster the willingness of potential donees to engage in service exchange with Tafel organizations. While the primacy of the economic motive is obvious for donees, the donors and volunteers may have mixed motives; for example, donors who misuse the Tafel organizations as a litter service give rise to doubts about the primacy of their social or ecological motives.

The Tafel organizations strive to run their operations in accord with the values underlying their missions, in particular, justice, respect, and sustainability. Although the Tafel organizations aim to act in accord with efficiency and effectiveness, they do not compete with other organizations on the basis of these principles. While it is true that "if the benefit is not evident to the actors, collaborative activity is unlikely" (Kleinaltenkamp *et al.* 2012, 203), at the same time if the actors cannot make sense of activities or processes and feel unjustly treated, collaboration can become hampered as well. Tafel clients often feel a sense of shame when they approach a Tafel site for the first time (ARD Mediathek 2018).

The integration of resources and the individual experience of value are context-dependent phenomena: "the human experience of a service is based on the integration of resources and hence on the activity of the actors in a specific context" (Löbler and Hahn 2013, 262). What one typically sees at Tafel sites in larger cities is not always in accord with respect, one of the values mentioned previously: people must stand in line for hours while waiting to receive food, often without being protected from heat, rain, or snow – or from being seen by other people. Some Tafel organizations, as well as Laib & Seele in Alt-Lichtenberg, Berlin, offer waiting rooms; for example, in bad weather, the entire church center at Laib & Seele is occupied by clients, volunteers, and resources. This Tafel organization also offers coffee and cake while donees wait. From our reinterpretative point of view, that people arrive at the place hours before the beginning of the service (which starts at 1 p.m. in Alt-Lichtenberg) means something different than the same phenomenon at other Tafel places.

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Many volunteers engaged in the distribution of food are aware that social asymmetries cannot be dissolved by the Tafel organizations. However, they want to make sure that the distribution process at local sites is organized in a respectful and fair manner. They report an increasing number of retirees, students, and young persons among their customers. They consider it as unjust that people who have worked all their lives cannot afford a reasonable living as pensioners.

5. Discussion

This section is devoted to the discussion of contextualized (economic and social) value and management implications. Because ecological value was not in the foreground of the Tafel field interpretations during the time period our investigation lasted, we focus here on economic and social value.

5.1 Economic and Social Value

Using the value-creation framework proposed by Haase (2015, 343, Fig. 1), we distinguished four questions and answers with regard to value co-creation: Why? For whom? How? and With whom? In case of the Tafel organizations, the social and the ecological missions most likely answer the "why" question. The answer to the "for whom" question distinguishes the beneficiaries of value co-creation processes, including society, nature, and stakeholders, from the valuators or evaluators of processes and outcomes. The Tafel organizations contribute to the generation of social or ecological value by building it on economic value co-creation with members of important stakeholder groups, including clients, volunteers, and donees. Without the Tafel clients who see their participation as an opportunity to receive resources via a nonmarket distribution mechanism, the Tafel organizations' social and ecological missions were unattainable. The "how" question refers to principles or values that affect value co-creation processes. The "with whom" question sheds light on the parties engaged in service exchange with the Tafel organizations: donees, volunteers, supermarkets, and so on. Webster and Lusch point out that "customer-defined value" goes hand in hand with "value co-created by all participants in the system" (2018, 394).

Whereas economic value is "perceived and experienced by customers" (Karababa and Kjeldgaard 2014, 122), social value cannot be determined by individual assessment. It is difficult if not impossible to objectify subjective experiences or perceptions. As the text analysis, the media sources, and information gained from the interviews show, the creation of social value in which the field actors are involved is subject to interpretation and negotiation. This likely applies to the ecological mission as well. A number of evaluators from outside the Tafel field have assessed the Tafel

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organizations' activities in light of political or economic ideologies. Kibler *et al.* (2018, 945) differentiate social market economies dominated by a *socialist logic* from economies based on a *liberal logic*. In a social market economy, the "state's responsibility is generally construed as applying primarily to individuals who are not in a position to meet their basic material needs" (Snower 1998, 35). In Germany, the role of nonprofit organizations as social service providers rests on the principle of subsidiarity underlying the German social security acts, implying that "public bodies must refrain from providing services if there is a non-profit organization performing the same function" (Grohs, Schneiders, and Heinze 2017, 2577). In this light, the Tafel organizations complement the activities of the welfare state. As Lorenz, quoting the former president of the national association of the German Tafel organizations, points out, the Tafel field "is a necessary part of our social security system" (2014, 272).

Notwithstanding this role, the German Tafel system has faced criticism from both critics and advocates of the welfare state conception. While representatives of the liberalist camp fear that this field's activities crowd out individual responsibility and motivation, representatives of the socialist camp have argued that the Tafel system crowds out the responsibility of the welfare state (Hildebrandt 2013), in that it whitewashes but does not correct the available social asymmetries and divergences and, with it, the government's failure to solve the underlying structural problems.

It is evident that such divergences in perspective touch on the interpretation of the social value or the social good co-created within the Tafel field. However, for the Tafel organizations it does not matter if market failure or government failure, or both, or neither of the two, is the origin of their activities (Dufays and Huybrechts 2014; Snower 1998; Trivedi and Stokols 2011). Regardless, they engage in value co-creation within the contemporary economic system, changing the meaning of material objects from being waste to being a potential resource, thereby fulfilling their missions.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The Tafel organizations' success in achieving their missions depends on the availability of resources forwarded *inter alia* by donors, volunteers, and donees. Without resources, organizations cannot survive (Hannan and Freeman 1977); survival, however, is not the main objective of Tafel organizations. Members of the Laib & Seele organizations in Berlin have noted that if their (social) mission is completed, they would prefer that the organization no longer exist.

We identified two types of conflict constitutive for the Tafel system. The first type originates from scarcity. The Tafel organizations have several opportunities to react to conflicts of this type, including limiting access to its service in general or for certain groups only, rationing the food supply for clients, and looking for new sourcing strategies. The second type of conflict originates from the resource integration processes, the activities of the actors involved in them, and the rules governing them.

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These conflicts accrue from the interactions of (members of) Tafel organizations with human beings who lack a shared understanding of the meanings related to activities, practices, or rules. As our study shows, type 2 conflicts can be solved or mitigated by the development of proto-institutions or the establishment of private orders.

Proto-institutionalization requires that mechanisms exist by which "strategies and structures [pass] from one form to another" (Fligstein and Dauter 2007, 117). What would be considered board interlock in case of corporations could be information exchange between Tafel organizations at regular meetings, trading strategies and structures. It is therefore important that the Tafel organizations reflect on the proto-institutions that have emerged in the field with regard to their problem-solving ability and generalizability.

A "working together philosophy" (Greer, Lusch, and Vargo 2016, 32) implies the "recognition that everyone is a co-creator of value" (*ibid.*, 33). Therefore, should the Tafel organizations exclude customers from their service at all? Tafel organizations exclude customers for different reasons. First, they exclude those who are not considered needy. Furthermore, they have banned people who did not accept the Tafel rules, as the enforcement of rules has been deemed essential for the maintenance of resource integration activities at Tafel sites. And without rule enforcement, a proto-institution cannot emerge and develop into a "full-fledged institution" (Lawrence, Hardy, and Phillips 2002, 283). However, establishing proto-institutions does preclude establishing social relationships to "establish trust and guarantee access to scarce resources" (Fligstein and Dauter 2007, 117). In comparison, the exclusion of potential Tafel customers from a Tafel site, as happened in Essen, amounts to the neglect of their competences' resourceness. CEO Sartor made institutional change and the development of cooperation impossible. Instead of preparing a solution to the conflicts at the site in question, he referred to categories and typifications discriminating against whole groups of Tafel clients.

"Competences have value only if used and directed toward desired outcomes" (Findsrud *et al.* 2018, 501). That competences are used, however, does not mean that they are properly used. For instance, it is questionable if all field actors (including both Tafel organizations and donees) are aware of the part the donees play in this type of service exchange. If economic value creation builds on social and ecological value creation, leeway for a reassessment of the donees' resources emerges even for those who recognize them for their instrumental value for the achievement of social and ecological value only.

Sigala, advocating a market-based approach for creating social value, "identified three market capabilities for generating social value and change" (2019, 27): first, establishing and maintaining the network structure "with the purpose to exchange resources and co-create value"; second, developing "institutions that support and frame actors' interactions and resource exchanges; and third, advancing actors' interpretation and understanding of the market" (*ibid.*, 31). While Sigala's analysis does not address the particularities of the Tafel field, that is, the conflicts emerging from or

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aggravated by resource scarcity and external shocks, the results of our research concur with the capabilities she identifies: the making of resources is conducted within networks; both the type of conflict and the values of network actors affect the emergence of proto-institutions; and the understanding of the Tafel organizations' value co-creation processes within the Tafel system is essential for establishing and maintaining cooperation. Understanding can be considered a precondition for the development of and the reflection on motives. Intrinsically motivated actors often express particular interest in cooperative conflict solutions (Findsrud *et al.*, 2018).

From a marketing perspective, the Tafel organizations have "a responsibility for educating, not just informing potential [as well as actual] customers" (Webster and Lusch 2013, 394). They fulfill a range of tasks that are similar, as they explain the Tafel rules to their stakeholders and improve their understanding of the whole system.

6. Conclusions

This research is the first to our knowledge that applies Thompson's (1990) sociocultural context model to study (proto-)institutions, resource integration, resource making, and value co-creation in a service ecosystem. Thompson's model provides more than one "slice of context" (Jackson *et al*. 2019, 33) in that it interconnects levels of analysis and both idiosyncratic and general aspects of cases or situations (Clarke 2010). It also specifies the topic of contextual analyses or what is constitutive for the situation, as well as the topics, subjects, or entities of interest. The insights gained from our study conform to major stipulations of the sociology of markets in that structure operates in all situations, but differently; markets reflect the political and social construction of each society; and power and resource dependence characterize social relationships and fields (Fligstein and Dauter 2007).

Our research addresses two research questions: What kind of value do Tafel organizations co-create with whom, for whom, why, and how? and How do Tafel organizations' activities depend on the values and meanings the missions have both for them and their evaluators? We found concrete but nevertheless incomplete answers. First, although not detailed with regard to all beneficiaries, our case study substantiates the view that the Tafel organizations co-create value with and for beneficiaries, including their clients, the communities in which they operate, society, and the environment. We address the "why" question with reference to the two missions – social and ecological. In the case of the Tafel system, the economic value co-created with the clients of Tafel organizations does not collapse into the social value or the ecological value corresponding to the Tafel organizations' missions (and vice versa); rather, economic, social, and ecological value are co-created, each with or for different beneficiaries. How the Tafel clients create value at the diverse Tafel places through conducting valuations of processes and outcomes (potential resources) needs further investigation.

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Second, some Tafel organizations have struggled with solving conflicts and coping with crises. Notwithstanding these struggles, the majority of Tafel organizations were able to deal with the types of conflicts our analysis documents. Werth, the German Tafel founder, sees a positive moment in the conflict at the Tafel organization in the city of Essen in that it is drawing attention to economic and social injustices: "Never waste a good crisis," she states, seemingly as a protest rather than with charitable intent (Die Welt, 2018). The Tafel field always risks actors withdrawing their commitment because of conflicts, their interpretation, or the way the Tafel organizations deal with them. This adds the specific contextual issue that critics of the Tafel organizations have instrumentalized conflicts to push their own agendas or to negatively influence perceptions of the social value resulting from the activities or processes conducted or taking place within the Tafel field. The two missions are both meaningful projects (Askegaard and Linnet 2011) and taking into account the views of critics from inside and outside the Tafel field, their interpretation differs. In this light, social value is inherently contextual.

We identified social mechanisms involved in the generation of patterns observable in the Tafel system. The attempt to solve conflicts has given rise to new practices regarding the distribution of food and potential resources at local Tafel sites. Regarding the light shed on the impact of external or environmental factors on changes within the Tafel system, the insights gained from our research are in accord with institutional theory. The results of our analysis helped us identify structural-situational aspects affecting value co-creation in the field; discourse analysis proves to be a promising approach that can be combined with our model. In our case study, the proto-institutions formed "the basis for a broader, field-level change" (Lawrence, Hardy, and Phillips 2002, 283), thereby increasing the Tafel organizations' ability to continue in their activities devoted to the achievement of their missions.

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Appendix: Press Coverage of the Conflict at the Essen Tafel

Table A1

Press Coverage of the Conflict in Essen

Newspaper	Title	Vol./No. Page	Original Quotation	Translation
Die Zeit	Arme gegen Arme	Die Zeit 01.03. 2018, No. 10, p. 1 / (Politics)	"Arme gegen Arme" "Weil viele Flüchtlinge sich vordrängelten und nicht zu benehmen wüssten. Er sagte, manche Flüchtlinge hätten ein 'Nehmer-Gen'."	"The poor vs. the poor". "Because many refugees were queue-jumping and did not know how to behave. He [Sartor] said some refugees have a 'taker gene.'"
SZ	Essener Tafel nimmt nur noch Deutsche auf	SZ 22.02.18	"'Wir wollen, dass auch die deutsche Oma weiter zu uns kommt,' sagte der Vorsitzende der Essener Tafel Jörg Sartor, der Westdeutschen Allgemeinen Zeitung."	[Sartor:] "We want that the German grandma keeps coming to us."
SZ	Vorsitzender der Essener Tafel verteidigt sich	SZ 23.02.18	"Unter den Syrern und RusslandDeutschen gebe es 'ein Nehmer-Gen'," sagte Sartor zum Spiegel.	"Among the Syrians and Russian Germans there is 'a takers-gene'," said Sartor to Spiegel.
SZ	Dafür ist mein Kopp zu klein	SZ 24.02.18; München Bayern p. 6	"Aber es ist richtig, dass erst mal wir Deutsche dran sind." An manchen Tagen, so erzählt er (Detlef G.), "sind nur fünf oder sechs Bio-Deutsche hier – und 80 Prozent Migranten"	"'But it is right that we Germans are served first.' On some days, he (Detlef G.) says, 'only five or six Bio-Germans are here – and 80 percent migrants.'"

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Table A1 (Continued)

Newspaper	Title	Vol./No. Page	Original Quotation	Translation
FAZ	Redet Tacheles	FAZ, 28.02.18, p. 8	Zitat von Sartor wird angeführt "In Wirklichkeit haben wir Deutsche diskriminiert" […] Jahrelang habe sein Sohn Fußball gespielt, erzählt der Vater dreier Kinder. In allen Mannschaften habe der Ausländeranteil 80 Prozent betragen. (wieder Zitat Sartor:) "Probleme gab es nur, wenn mehr als drei von einer Sorte waren."	"'In reality, we have discriminated against Germans' […] For years, his son played soccer, does [Sartor] the father of three children tell. In all soccer teams, the proportion of foreigners was 80 percent. [again, a direct quote by Sartor:] 'There were only problems if there were more than three of a kind.'"
FAZ	Bundessozialministerin kritisiert Essener Tafel	FAZ 24.02.18, Politics, p. 1	"Zuletzt seien [in Essen] Alleinerziehende und Rentner zunehmend von Ausländern verdrängt worden"	"In the meantime [in Essen] single parents and pensioners were increasingly displaced by foreigners."
FAZ	An Merkels Tafel	FAZ 28.02.18, Politics, p. 1	"Weil sie verdrängt wurden, unter anderem von robust auftretenden jungen Männern"	"[…] because they were suppressed, in part by robust young men."
FAZ	Die Regeln der Tafel Runde	FAZ 25.02.18, p. 24	[Sartor:] "Dass auch die deutsche Oma weiter zu uns kommt" "Allerdings hat auch die Tafel gute Argumente. Wer will bezweifeln, dass sich Rentnerinnen und alleinerziehende Frauen durch sehr viele fremdsprachige Männer abgeschreckt fühlen."	"[Sartor: We want] that the German grandma keeps coming to us." "However, the Tafel also has good arguments – who wants to doubt that pensioners and single women feel deterred by many foreign-language men." (FAZ, February 25, 2018, p. 24)

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Table A1 (Continued)

Newspaper	Title	Vol./No. Page	Original Quotation	Translation
FAZ	Hausverbote nützen nichts	FAZ 25.02.18, p. 22	"Ältere Tafelnutzerinnen hätten ihm mitgeteilt, sie fühlten sich 'unwohl' und wollten nicht mehr kommen."	"Older female Tafel users had told him [Sartor] that they felt 'uncomfortable' and don't want to return".
FAZ	Grenzen der Integration (wieder von Reiner Burger)	FAZ 03.03.18, Politics, p. 1	"Darwinistische Verdrängung ist das Gegenteil von humaner Ordnung. Wer das Recht des Stärkeren walten lässt, organisiert soziale Kälte."	"Darwinian repression is the opposite of human order. Those who accept the rule of the strongest, organize social coldness."
FAZ	Fremde an unseren Tafeln	FAZ 11.03.18, p. 22	"Falsch ist die Unterstellung, die Zunahme der Tafeln sei ein Beleg zunehmender Armut. Eher schon sind sie ein Beleg für die dauerhafte Anwesenheit von Fremden in unserer Mitte." "Manchmal reicht für schnelleres Vorankommen schon eine furchterregende Geste, manchmal braucht es den Ellenbogen, oder Gewalt."	"It is wrong to assume that the increase in the number of Tafel organizations is evidence of increasing poverty. Rather, this is proof of the permanent presence of foreigners in our midst." "Sometimes a fearsome gesture is enough to move forward faster, sometimes it takes elbows or violence."

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