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## Sector blending: evidence from the German Food Bank

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### Abstract

This study investigates forms of sector blending practiced by the Federal Association of German Food Banks and respective benefits and drawbacks emerging for the organization. The study builds on a prior sector blending categorization system. Twenty in-depth interviews with food bank members were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. In addition, webpage materials from German food retailers and press releases from the German Food Bank were analyzed. Imitation, interaction and industry creation were forms of sector blending found. The main drawback found was that the food bank fails to serve those outside the German social security system, such as the homeless. Benefits include a more professional image of the organization, and the enhancement of social capital. Overall, the additional generation of funds and resources were the most important aspects of sector blending efforts in the German food bank, as it helps food pantries adjust to an increasing number of people in need.

**Keywords:** charitable food assistance, industry creation, in-depth interviews, qualitative content analysis

**JEL code:** D60, D71, I38, I39

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## 1. Introduction

The Federal Association of German Food Banks (abbreviated in the following as German Food Bank) is a charitable nonprofit organization that redistributes surplus food items to people in need (Lorenz, 2012). Founded in Berlin in 1993 as a social movement, the German Food Bank developed into a federal association with an umbrella structure since then (Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017). The organization consists of 900 local food pantries spread across Germany staffed with about 50,000 volunteers (Von Normann, 2011). The local pantries elect a representative for each of the 16 German states (Selke, 2011a; Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017). These state representatives form an executive board, which is supported by a head office and an advisory body (Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017; Selke, 2011a). According to the homepage of the Federal Association of German Food Banks (2017), all representatives meet once a year in a general assembly where the executive board is elected.

Local pantries differ in size, financial resources and operational structure (Von Norman, 2011). The webpage of the Federal Association of German Food Banks (2017) distinguishes between free and associated food pantries. While free pantries are independent in terms of their operating policies and procedures, they maintain close contact with the umbrella organization. Associated pantries, in contrast, are required to follow the umbrella organization's policies and procedures.

Food pantries in Germany served 1.5 million users in 2016 (Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017). Pantry users are socially disadvantaged people suffering from food insecurity (Selke, 2011a). The main goal of the German Food Bank is to form a bridge between socially and economically disadvantaged people and food retailers who provide surplus food items which cannot be sold in retail outlets. The items could be mislabeled, out of season or have defects in packaging, but must be safe for consumption (Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017). In addition to this bridging function, the German Food Bank actively fights food waste (Lorenz, 2012). Both goals are explicitly stated in the organizational motto 'Food, where it belongs' (Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017). The German Food Bank's activities can be seen as efforts to avoid food items being discarded. Further services provided by the German Food Bank are handing out meals in soup kitchens, providing breakfast to school children, distributing second-hand clothing and assisting users with medical appointments, banking tasks, dealing with government authorities and similar tasks (Lorenz, 2012; Reiniger, 2011; Von Normann, 2011).

The German Food Bank and its activities have been well researched. Existing studies focus on the sociological and political aspects of poverty and food insecurity (Selke, 2011a), the food bank user perspective in the context of dignity (Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011) and vulnerability (Sedelmeier, 2011). Other studies address public perceptions of the organization and its services (Häuser, 2011; Witt, 2011). Several studies (Selke, 2011b; Werth, 2011; Witt, 2011) indicate that the German Food Bank's operations are not purely nonprofit, but in fact overlap with the for-profit and public sectors. This overlap in operations can be framed as sector blending. Sector blending occurs when an organization operating in a defined sector uses various approaches, activities, and relationships that blur the distinctions between nonprofit, public and for-profit organizations. The organization operates either in a manner similar to organizations in other sectors or operates in the same realms or both (Dees and Battle Anderson, 2003; Park, 2008).

Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) emphasize the importance of sector blending as a means of organizational survival, as a way to establish legitimacy in the operating sector and to gain resources. At present, the number of food bank users is steadily increasing, of which mismatch between the quantity of food available in local food pantries and the number of users arises (Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017; Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011; Von Normann, 2011). Therefore receiving donations and funds is particularly important for the organization, and sector blending can contribute to receiving both. However, because its operational principles strictly emphasize the non-profit nature of the organization, adopting for-profit-business practices also could jeopardize the German Food Bank's reputation and existence. As the Food Bank has become an important factor in the German social welfare system, the demise of the organization could lead to serious

consequences for people in need. In this context, the present study adds an organizational perspective to the existing body of literature on food pantries in Germany, in which the German Food Bank's operations are examined for evidence of sector blending. The objectives are to explore which forms of sector blending are employed by the German Food Bank, and which potential benefits and drawbacks emerge from sector blending for the organization.

## 2. Literature review

Sector blending occurs due to global and cultural shifts (Wachhaus, 2013), as a consequence of organizations striving for market power and functionality (Bromley and Meyer, 2014), or due to resource dependencies and political pressure (Bromley and Meyer, 2014). The decline of governmental control in markets leads to market pressures that drive nonprofit organizations to adopt strategies similar to that of organizations operating in the for-profit and public sectors (Bromley and Meyer, 2014). Prior studies provide various examples of sector blending between the for-profit, nonprofit and the public sectors (Alcock, 2010; Billis, 1993; Brandsen *et al.*, 2005; Park, 2008; Sagwa and Segal, 2000; Tuckman, 1998). The creation of 'hybrid organizations' (Evers, 2005; Hoffmann *et al.*, 2012; Ménard, 2004; Pache and Santos, 2013), collaboration (Brandsen *et al.*, 2005) and contracting (Dees and Battle Anderson, 2003) are commonly identified practices. The housing, health and educational sectors in the U.S. serve as examples where sector blending has taken place (Dees and Battle Anderson, 2003). Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) grouped various forms of sector blending into four categories: imitation and conversion, interaction, intermingling and industry creation (Table 1). These four categories are closely interrelated and the different forms of sector blending also occur in association with one another.

Further, Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) explored benefits and drawbacks of sector blending. As benefits, they emphasized effective and appropriate resource allocation, sustainable solutions to social problems for social entrepreneurs, increased accountability for nonprofit organizations and increased financial strength. In terms of drawbacks, they enumerated threats to social performance (including mission drift), decrease in quality of service and decline in the level of advocacy against social injustice. Another critical aspect they addressed is the potential of undermining indirect social benefits. For example, Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) mentioned reduction in the creation of social capital as well as loss of the charitable character of the nonprofit sector. Another negative aspect of sector blending Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) emphasized is the creation of classes among service recipients.

Social capital has been extensively studied in various disciplines (e.g. in sociology, Coleman, 1988; in philosophy, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; in political science Putnam, 1995; in economics, Portes, 1998, refined concepts described by Bourdieu and Coleman), each of which has its own definition. Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) do not explicitly state which line of theory or school they follow. Instead, they provide examples of how social capital is created through members of organizations, within the organization and externally with other stakeholders and organizations (Dees and Battle Anderson, 2003: 23). These examples cover a broad enough spectrum to encompass the main themes included in each of the different schools mentioned above. Schneider (2009: 2) defined social capital as 'relationships based in patterns of reciprocal, enforceable trust that enable people and institutions to gain access to resources like social services, volunteers, or funding.' In developing this definition, Schneider identified the key elements common to all of the various schools of social capital theory – namely, networks, trust, norms and culture – and differentiated between different forms of social capital. The examples provided by Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) seem to relate well to Schneider's definition. Accordingly, Schneider's definition (2009) is used in the context of the present study, because it also fits well with the German Food Bank's operations.

To better understand the evidence of sector blending in the activities of the German Food Bank, the organizational structures of the German Food Bank are revisited, as these structures determine its operations. The term operations is used here to refer to the day-to-day activities of the food bank that serve both to create

**Table 1.** Sector blending classification system (adapted from Dees and Battle Anderson, 2003).

Category	Explanation
Imitation and conversion	Adoption of strategies, concepts and practices of the business world; identifying target markets and consumer segments; application of management strategies and tools; charging fees for services provided; changing from non-profit to for-profit status. Example: Habitat for Humanity in the U.S. – organization building houses for those who otherwise could not afford them; in exchange, the new owners must repay a modest mortgage (generating fees for services).
Interaction	
Competing	Nonprofit organizations entering profit or public sectors and competing for market share, resources or consumers. Example: hospice care in the US
Contracting	For-profit organizations contracting with nonprofit organizations for both ‘nonprofit-like’ goods and services and goods and services traditionally provided by other for-profit businesses. Example: universities contracting with technology companies to transfer curriculum to media suitable for distance learning.
Collaboration	Nonprofit organizations and for-profit organizations entering strategic partnerships and joint ventures that provide mutual benefits. Example: an anti-hunger organization in the U.S. entering into an agreement with American Express to market and raise money via cause-related marketing campaigns.
Intermingling	Creation of ‘hybrid organizations’; hybrid organizations are organizations, networks or umbrella groups with for-profit as well as nonprofit components; hybrid organizations allow nonprofit organizations to conduct activities not fitting neatly into the nonprofit structure. Example: Girl Scouts in the U.S. and the charity organization ‘United Way’ establishing for-profit subsidiaries to generate revenues to support their nonprofit programs by selling equipment and merchandise to local organizations and licensing the organizations’ names and logos.
Industry creation	Establishment of a new market within an existing market. Example: charter schools in the US are independent public schools that are often run and managed by parent-teacher partnerships, nonprofits, universities, and for-profit companies; some charter schools are new schools, others have been converted from traditional public schools; in return for demonstrated results, these schools are allowed to operate outside of traditional rules and regulations of the public school system.

unique value and achieve core objectives. Resources, capacity and output usually influence operations. As shown by Dees and Battle Anderson (2003), these three aspects are expected to improve due to sector blending.

Based on the international literature on food bank management (González-Torre and Coque, 2016; McIntyre, 2015; Vitiello *et al.*, 2015), particularly studies describing food bank structures and operations (Baglioni *et al.*, 2016; Mohan *et al.*, 2013; Tarasuk and Eakin, 2003, 2005), German food pantries can be classified as ‘front line systems’. In contrast to ‘logistical systems’ where food bank operations are focused on food bank donors and distribution to users is carried out by other organizations, front line system are dedicated to serve food bank users (Baglioni *et al.*, 2016). The pantries operate either as soup kitchens, where prepared food is served (Lorenz, 2012); as distribution centers, where available food items are apportioned to food bank users by food bank volunteers (Selke, 2011a); or as supermarket-like pantries, where food bank users can choose from the available options within a monetary limit that is based on their level of need (Werth, 2011).

To maintain the pantries and guarantee service to food bank users, collaborations with sponsors and donors are essential. Selke (2011b) and Witt (2011) explained the benefits of collaboration for food donors and the German Food Bank using the example of event weeks carried out by a German food retail chain that invite consumers to buy products and place them in bags for donation to food pantries. The retailer donates the purchased food items to the food bank, and adds a predetermined quantity of products to the donation. The practice creates a win-win situation for the retailer and the food pantries, as it confers a positive image to the retailer while providing a large quantity of food donations to the food pantries (Witt, 2011). The Food Bank advertises collaboration by retailers and social welfare organizations its collaboration partners to food pantry users as well as on their internet site. Usually collaborations work well, because both parties benefit; but operational conflicts can occur in case of dependency on individual donors or sponsors (Hiss, 2010; Selke, 2011b).

Selke (2011b) addressed another operational conflict related to brand protection. The Federal Association of German Food Banks protected the German name for food pantries ‘Tafel’ (dining table) as a brand name. Accordingly, only food pantries belonging to or associated with the organization are allowed to use the name, even though other nonprofit organizations provide the same service (Reiniger, 2011; Selke, 2011b). According to Selke (2011b), this creates conflict and hinders collaboration. Studies by Lorenz (2010b) and Witt (2011) researched the consequences of branding and the monopoly that resulted from it. They focused on the brand concept and emphasized the logo (a plate with cutlery and the slogan ‘Food where it belongs’). The brand concept can be associated with wealth, while food pantries are associated with poverty. Since logo and slogan should depict the reality behind the brand, both authors considered the branding questionable.

German and international studies have highlighted equity and dignity as key operational principles for food pantry volunteers when serving food pantry users (Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011; Lorenz, 2010a; McIntyre *et al.* 2015; Tarasuk and Eakin, 2003; Van der Horst *et al.* 2014). Volunteers are expected to distribute the available food fairly amongst the users, to treat them respectfully and avoid any form of shaming (Tarasuk and Eakin, 2003). In practice, these operational principles are not always followed. Structural asymmetry between users and volunteers can cause conflicts (McIntyre *et al.* 2015; Reiniger, 2011; Selke, 2011b, 2016; Van der Horst *et al.*, 2014). With respect to dignity, Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011) found that in German food pantries, managers decide whether the food is provided free of charge or for a symbolic payment. Such payments are usually 10-30% of the prices charged at a local retailer. Payments are adjusted to the benefits users receive according to the Social Security Code (Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011; Lorenz, 2010a). Von Normann (2011) pointed out that having to provide an official proof of neediness from the welfare agency to receive food from a food pantry was perceived as humiliating by users. However, the German Food Bank decided that the eligibility assessment was necessary, because deception had been documented (Von Normann, 2011).

Lorenz (2010b) and Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011) criticized the German Food Bank on three main points. First, they posited that the German Food Bank has strayed from its foundational idea by bringing regular food items into the food pantry system, referring to the acquisition of non-surplus food items (e.g. through event weeks) in response to insufficient supply. Second, they confirmed prior work by Becker (2010) showing that the German Food Bank had also started addressing other aspects of poverty, such as education and youth unemployment. They postulated that food bank volunteers charged with these tasks are not necessarily qualified and suggested that these tasks were more appropriately carried out by what they see as better qualified personnel in other recognized German welfare organizations. Finally, they suggested that the German food bank aims to reach too many different target groups by opening food pantries for pets and children, and portrayed such operations as self-sustaining measures and attempts to create a social market within an existing social market (see also Selke, 2016).

Judging from the studies discussed above, the operations of the German Food Bank include various forms of sector blending (Dees and Battle Anderson, 2003). The establishment of different food pantry types (Lorenz, 2012; Selke, 2011a; Werth, 2011), such as soup kitchens (Lorenz, 2012) and pantries with a supermarket

character (Werth, 2011), can be summarized as imitation, as these structures mimic German food retail or food service venues on a smaller scale. Another example of imitation (in this case of the public sector, namely social security provision) is the eligibility assessment required of food bank users (Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011; Von Normann, 2011). Collaborations with donors and sponsors (Witt, 2011) as well as with food pantry users (Lorenz, 2012) are forms of interaction. Similarly, brand creation can be interpreted as a form of interaction, more precisely, avoiding competition (Reiniger, 2011; Selke, 2011b). By the same token, brand creation and monopoly building represent a form of imitation of the for-profit sector. Whether sector blending is strictly beneficial to the German Food Bank or whether drawbacks also occur has not yet been studied.

### 3. Methods

The study uses a qualitative research approach, because a qualitative approach is appropriate when a theory is to be developed, an unknown research topic to be explored, or a new perspective to be added to a previously well-investigated topic (Bitsch, 2005). The exploration of operations of the German Food Bank in relation to sector blending and its potential benefits and drawbacks takes a new perspective on researching food pantry operations. According to Bitsch (2005), a qualitative research approach is necessary when a study focuses on the perspectives and experiences of actors in their everyday lives. Further, it allows the identification of cultural framings and social realities (Bitsch and Yakura, 2007; Perera *et al.*, 2016). Exploring food bank operations and forms of sector blending requires examination of the perspectives of multiple actors involved in these operations (Darbyshire *et al.*, 2005). Also, food pantry users are considered a vulnerable population, which are more effectively reached using qualitative in-depth interviews (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005); thus, this approach was used here. Qualitative in-depth interviews allow the researcher to obtain answers to questions of a sensitive nature. This was particularly important in this study, as sector blending is not necessarily perceived as entirely positive. Potential negative effects on other parties might lead food pantry managers to avoid revealing operations that might be construed as sector blending (Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011; Von Normann, 2011).

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted in August and September 2015 and from January to March 2016. Following Suri (2011) and Noy (2008), emphasizing purposeful sampling as particularly suitable for qualitative research, the interviewees' roles at the German Food Bank, respectively their relationship with it, as well as their potential knowledge of forms of sector blending and their potential control over or benefits from sector blending activities were considered (Table 2). Interviewees included five food pantry managers, four food pantry users, five volunteers, one spokesperson from the head office of the Federal Association of the German Food Banks and five retail food donors, and represented both free and associated food pantries.

Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews were carried out either face-to-face or by phone, according to the interviewees' preferences. A semi-structured interview guide outlined the main topics of the interviews. Topics were addressed through open-ended questions that were asked according to the interview flow. The topics discussed included food waste, food redistribution as well as other food pantry operations. The initial interview guide focused on food redistribution and volunteering at the food pantries. During the research process, modifications to the research guide were necessary in order to better reflect each interviewee's duties as well as the terminology they used (see also Perera *et al.*, 2016).

Eighteen of the twenty interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim before data analysis. On two occasions, the interviewees did not agree to audio recording and, therefore, field notes were taken. In addition to the interviews, information from webpages of the German Food Bank and food retailers were analyzed. The internet site of the Federal Association of German Food Banks served as the starting point. Press releases and other materials from the German Food Bank published between 2015 and 2016 were collected and analyzed. As the site also identified partnerships with food donors and sponsors, information from collaboration partners' webpages were also included in the analysis. Field notes, press releases and interview transcripts were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. During the analysis process, raw text

**Table 2.** Purposeful sampling approach.

<b>Group of interviewees</b>	<b>Role in/for the organization</b>	<b>Information sought from interviewee<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Assumed level of control over or benefits from sector blending activities<sup>1</sup></b>
Managers of local food pantry	Manage food pantry operations	Managers are knowledgeable about all types of food bank operations within their food pantry, within the umbrella organization and about external collaboration partners. They are knowledgeable about all forms of sector blending practiced by the German Food Bank.	Managers have control over sector blending activities. If the organization would not benefit from sector blending, these efforts would not be undertaken.
Food pantry users	Receive food	Food bank users are knowledgeable about the forms of sector blending they perceive when coming to the food bank to receive food and interact with personnel and other users. They are likely knowledgeable about forms of imitation and possibly interaction, if collaboration partners are advertised by the food pantries personnel.	Users benefit from sector blending activities but have no control over it.
Volunteers at a food pantry	Serve food bank users, sort and pack food, collect food from retail chains	Due to volunteers' diverse tasks, they are likely to be knowledgeable about imitation and interaction. Since they are not involved in strategic decisions of the umbrella organization, they are not likely knowledgeable about industry creation.	Volunteers mostly follow the instructions of managers. They do not have direct control over sector blending activities, and also do not benefit.
Spokesperson of the German Food Banks	Official communications	The spokesperson communicates on behalf of the umbrella organization. Therefore, she is expected to know all forms of sector blending practiced by the German Food Bank.	The spokesperson has no control over sector blending activities, and also does not benefit.
Managers in food retail chains	Cooperation with local food bank, food donations	Managers in food retail chains are expected to be knowledgeable about forms of interaction, due to the collaborations between food retail chains and the German Food Bank.	Retail chains are likely to benefit from sector blending activities; otherwise, the collaboration would not exist. Extent and frequency of collaborations provide indirect control to retail chains.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Dees and Battle Anderson, 2000; Dart, 2004; Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011; Lorenz, 2012; Selke, 2011b; Witt, 2011.

was systematically broken down and common themes were extracted. This was achieved through constant comparison and contrasting of the material. Ultimately, various forms of sector blending carried out by the German Food Bank were identified.

The analysis process consisted of two main steps: open coding and the establishment of categories. During open coding, labels were assigned to text fragments. These labels reflected the key thought behind each text fragment. During the coding process, field notes, transcripts and other materials were carefully read several

times. Throughout the analysis process, codes were conceptualized and relabeled. The coding process linked all relevant interview excerpts with codes and their corresponding definitions (Table 3).

In the second step, categories were established by grouping codes according to their meanings and associations. Each category was named using content-characteristic words and defined. Category definitions were created by combining all related codes and their definitions. This process of qualitative content analysis was carried out using the software package Atlas.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, Berlin, Germany), which allows for systematic analysis of documents. Atlas.ti includes tools for annotating and coding the data. Prior to the analysis of the empirical data, the categorization of Dees and Battle Anderson was used to identify forms of sector blending in the existing body of literature on operations of the German Food Bank (Table 4).

**Table 3.** Codes for the category ‘Industry creation’ with excerpts from interviews and web pages.

Code	Excerpt
<p><b>Receiving regular food items</b> Operations of the food bank reflecting industry creation; the German Food Bank uses different strategies to receive regular food items from German food retailers directly or indirectly through collaborations.</p>	<p>‘From Monday (7 November 2016) on: [German food retailer] and [German food retailer] are asking you to buy a bag with seven products! These products will be donated to our local food banks. The bags are filled with products that are rarely donated due to their long shelf life. Spaghetti, ravioli, ketchup, milk rice, jam, tea and biscuits. The actual cost is currently 5.09 €, but the products are made available for 5.00 € in our markets. [Name of German food retail] will add 40,000 extra bags to the customer donations’ (Announcement on the webpage of a German food retailer).</p>
<p><b>Focus on other aspects of poverty</b> Operations of the food bank reflecting industry creation; the German Food Bank offers services and products dedicated to other aspects of poverty that are not related to food; services can overlap with those of other welfare organizations.</p>	<p>‘The Food Bank Academy is a 100%-owned subsidiary of the Federal Association of German Food Banks and a nonprofit limited liability company. The purpose of the Food Bank Academy is to promote education. We would like to educate people that come actively to the food bank. We want to ensure the professional work of our boards and support volunteers in their commitment’ (Description on the webpage of the Food Bank Academy).</p> <p>‘The food bank is helping greatly and is the solution for so many of us. I know that the food bank is supporting four schools in Munich’ (User of an associated food pantry, female, 50-60 years old).</p>
<p><b>Supply and demand</b> Demand for food is higher than the amount of food that can be supplied in the food pantries; impetus for the German food bank to focus on industry creation.</p>	<p>‘What I am also doing is speaking with the big supermarket chains and the big donors. For example, I really go to the logistics center of [Name of a supermarket in German food retail] or [Name of a discounter in German food retail] to make sure that we have enough supply for the next year. The level of supply has dropped over the last year, but the number of people who want to receive food from the food bank has increased. So now you have an imbalance’ (Manager of an associated food pantry and country representative, male, 60-70 years old).</p>

**Table 4.** Forms of sector blending activities carried out by the German food bank.

Form of sector blending	In the literature	In this study	Excerpt
<b>Imitation of the for-profit sector</b>			
Retail structures, food service structures	Selke (2011a); Werth (2011); Lorenz (2012)	Yes	‘Every station gets basic food, number one, potatoes, carrots, onions. In addition, bread is given out. Yes, yogurt, cheese, sausages. Rarely meat. Meat is not often available. We emphasize a healthy diet for these people [food bank users]. Fruit and vegetables’ (Manager and founder of a free pantry, female, 50-60 years old).
Choice provided to food bank users	Selke (2011a); Werth (2011); Lorenz (2012)	Yes	‘They give me a small choice. However, in fact, I am not the only one. There more than 100 people and if I would say, I want 10 or 20 bananas, and then they would say, are you crazy? I mean I cannot’. (User of an associated food pantry, female, 20-30 years old).
Home delivery service for users	No	Yes	‘Some guests get the food delivered to their home. We also pack for new families, a box, which is packed beforehand at the distribution center, which we pick up and deliver to them. We do this for the ones that cannot come here, because they are disabled.’ (Volunteer at an associated food pantry, female, 60-70 years old).
Payment for food	Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011)	Yes	‘So they have the feeling of buying something with very little money. Nevertheless, they have the feeling of buying something. And for us it’s about 300 € income per week’ (Manager of an associated food pantry, male, 50-60 years old).
Branding	Witt (2011)	No	Not applicable
Motto	Witt (2011)	No	Not applicable
<b>Imitation of public sector</b>			
Proving eligibility	Lorenz (2010a); Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011); Von Normann (2011); Lorenz (2012)	Yes	‘What helps us, is that, at the entrance of the food bank, the customers have to show their certificate’. (Volunteer at an associated food pantry, female, 20-30 years old).
Rating standards	Normann (2011)	Yes	‘And so we separate them [food bank users]...the ones on Wednesday have green passes, and for Thursday they have white passes’ (Manager of an associated food pantry, male, 50-60 years old).
<b>Interaction</b>			
Resource competition	No	Yes	‘Lunch table! Our food bank in [Name of a North German town] recently got competition from the neighboring town. Another organization in [Name of the neighboring town] is collecting surplus food items for their purposes’ (Announcement on the webpage of an associated food pantry in North Germany).

**Table 4.** Continued.

<b>Form of sector blending</b>	<b>In the literature</b>	<b>In this study</b>	<b>Excerpt</b>
<b>Interaction (continued)</b>			
Competition with other organizations providing same service related to food	Selke (2011b); Reiniger (2011)	No	Not applicable
Competition with other welfare organizations	Selke (2011b)	No	Not applicable
Collaboration with sponsors and donors	Selke (2011b); Witt (2011); Lorenz (2012); Von Normann (2011)	Yes	‘So companies donate their stuff, big companies like [name of an online retailer], they put their stuff in these containers to help’ (Manager and founder of a free pantry, female, 50-60 years old).
Collaboration with other welfare organization	Selke (2011b)	Yes	‘For many people it is quite normal to have a warm meal every day. Moreover, to eat something healthy. For many people this is not normal. For example, they do not have enough money. That is why there is the food bank’ (Announcement on the webpage of a welfare organization dedicated to helping people with disabilities).
Contracting	No	No	Not applicable
<b>Intermingling</b>	No	No	Not applicable
<b>Industry creation</b>			
Supply and demand	Lorenz (2010b); Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011)	Yes	‘Yes 200 people on Wednesday and 120 people on Thursday. On Thursday there are almost only refugees...90% of the refugees are Muslims. They do not eat pork and mostly we get pork’ (Manager of an associated food pantry, male, 50-60 years old).
Focus on other aspects of poverty	Becker (2010); Lorenz (2010b); Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011); Selke 2016	Yes	‘After our lunch, at around 2 p.m., we support the children doing their homework. The ones that would like to can sit down in our food bank café and do their homework. If needed, we are there to help’ (Offer on the webpage of a food pantry for children in Eastern Germany).
Bring regular food items into the food bank system in addition to surplus items	Lorenz (2010b); Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011)	Yes	‘Since 2009, [Name of a German food retailer] has been involving its customers in the engagement with the food bank. Every year, for the period of a few weeks, our customers and we are ‘filling plates together.’ In 2014, a total of 318,000 food bags were given to the local food banks’ (Announcement on the webpage of a German food retailer).

## 4. Results and discussion

Forms of sector blending identified in the recent body of literature reviewed above focus predominantly on operations taking place within food pantries, partnerships with sponsors and donors, and the process of serving food pantry users. Therefore, the following sections are structured accordingly. The final section describes the benefits and drawbacks of sector blending for the German Food Bank. The discussion includes both, findings from this study as well as forms of sector blending identified in prior studies.

### 4.1 Forms of sector blending related to operations within German food pantries

Given that different forms of food pantries exist in Germany (see also Lorenz, 2012; Werth, 2011), operations and duties described by the food bank volunteers interviewed are specific to the pantry in which they serve. Volunteers emphasized driving and reloading food trucks, inspecting, sorting and preparing food as their main duties in food pantries. Even though the operations volunteers are involved in seem diverse, they are related to food pantry users and how they receive food in the pantries. While some volunteers reported serving users coming to the pantry, others emphasized operations such as home delivery.

Yeah. You can choose, but not everything. We give them prepared options they can choose. It is broccoli or cabbage, what do you like? (Volunteer at an associated food pantry, female, 20-30 years old).

Some guests get the food delivered to their home. We also pack for new families, a box, which is packed beforehand at the distribution center, which we pick up and deliver to them. We do this for the ones that cannot come here, because they are disabled. The ones that cannot carry the food by themselves get it delivered to their home. (Volunteer at an associated food pantry, female, 60-70 years old).

As shown in the statements on the food pantry operations in which volunteers are involved, forms of sector blending are present. The volunteers' statements are focused on the imitation of practices found in food retail, for instance, providing a variety of products or home delivery service. These findings correspond to the findings of Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011), Von Norman (2011) and Werth (2011). Von Normann (2011) discussed the existence of various types of food pantries which operate differently. Adding to this information, Werth (2011) more explicitly outlined the existence of supermarket-like food pantries where users are able to choose relatively freely from the available food items. As these prior studies were not dedicated to sector blending, these activities were not identified as forms of imitation. The sociological background of the prior studies likely led the authors to interpret their observations as forms of dignity and respect towards food pantry users (Hoffman and Hendel Kramer, 2011).

When discussing their duties, managers focused on challenges, for instance, how to prevent cheating by food pantry users. They reported further challenges, such as the acquisition of funds and food donations. Managers emphasized food distribution schemes, quantities of food and partnerships with sponsors and donors. They mentioned their personal efforts as well as the importance of the Federal Association of German Food Banks as an umbrella organization with regard to the generation of funds and donations.

We have different colors, yellow, pink and green. Then you know immediately. A person can come only once to each station. Through the color system they cannot try again through the back door. (Manager of an associated food pantry and country representative, male, 60-70 years old).

We [the Federal Association of German Food Banks] have an agreement with them [a German wholesaler for food and tobacco] to keep 40 pallets. Therefore, we receive a pizza delivery from [a company producing frozen pizza]. And biannually, we receive a delivery of pizza on pallets. So, we can keep for example 30 pallets in our pantry in [a city in Bavaria]. The rest is distributed in other

pantries following the plans of the Federal Association. (Manager of an associated food pantry, male, 60-70 years old).

Eleven million euros – We thank all [a discounter in German food retail] customers. Eleven million euros this incredible amount of money has been donated by [a discounter in German food retail] customers at the bottle deposit machine. (Headline on the webpage of a discounter in German food retail).

The first manager statement above emphasizes the use of colors as a measure to ensure fair food distribution. This also reflects a form of imitation. In this case, the food pantry has borrowed measures from the public sector. The colors reflect the extent of neediness, evidence of which is required before becoming a food bank user. Similarly, before receiving any basic benefits, users must prove to the social security office the extent of their neediness. Standard rates of basic security benefits are payed accordingly. The managers interviewed and the webpages of German food retail discounters and supermarkets all reported on the amounts of food and funds being donated. In addition, webpages in particular, emphasized the partnerships between various food retail chains and the Federal Association of German Food Banks. According to Dees and Battle Anderson (2003), partnership presents a form of interaction, more precisely, collaboration between a non-profit organization and a for-profit organization.

#### *4.2 Forms of sector blending within operations with respect to sponsors and donors*

German food retailers are important collaboration partners of the German Food Bank and are deeply involved in food bank operations. Within the partnership, both partners need to be able to trust each other. Accordingly, it is important to understand whether retailers evaluate the collaboration in the same positive light as it is presented by the Federal Association of German Food Banks. Some of the retailers interviewed confirmed the positive nature of the collaboration, while others expressed concern and shared examples of conflicts between themselves and the food bank. Other retailers addressed the issue of resource competition amongst various organizations involved with collecting surplus food items.

We cannot stand them anymore; this is not correctly put. Well, those people came again and again. They always came back and said: ‘this is not alright. We will take this with us, but not that.’ But it depends on the person [the food bank volunteer who is collecting the food items]. Now we just donate it all to the...youth center. This does not hurt me, because I think, now the food is with someone who is very active in youth work, and the kids are very happy, even though the chocolate is expired. (Manager of a German food retail chain, female, previously donated to the German Food Bank once a week).

Because after all it is the acceptance. It is not easy to explain to someone, clearly the food bank, they already do it, and now how should I best explain that? They are giving it to the needy...But again, on the other side, the Food Sharers, what they do is simple, they distribute it among themselves. There are certainly many who are not needy. And there it would, I think, diverge a bit. (Manager of a German food retail chain, male, donates once a week to Food Sharing).

Some of the retail managers interviewed stated that they preferred to collaborate with organizations other than the German Food Bank, some stated that they wanted to end their current collaborations with the food bank, and some stated they had never wanted to collaborate with the German Food Bank to begin with. As these interviewees are giving their surplus items to other nonprofit organizations, competition was identified as another form of interaction. In contrast to Witt (2011) who highlighted the German Food Bank’s efforts to avoid competition with other organizations providing the same service through branding and monopoly creation, the present study found that resource competition could not be fully avoided. The contrasting findings can be explained by retailers’ evaluation of the partnership. Witt (2011) stated that both parties – food pantries and retailers – benefited from the collaboration, and that retailers are positively perceived by

society due to the collaboration. However, in the present study, some retailers interviewed feared reputational damage caused by publicity surrounding donations of surplus food items.

#### *4.3 Forms of sector blending within operations related to food pantry users*

When focusing on the food pantry user as one of the central actors in the operations of the German Food Bank, managers, volunteers, donating retailers and the users themselves enumerated problems related to the current user situation and users' demand for food as well as supply problems. Interviewees highlighted an increase in the number of food pantry users and a decline in the amount of available food. The interviewees mentioned increasing poverty among the elderly, provision of food to refugees and efforts to increase the amount of food available for users.

The reason for the decrease in goods is that retailers have changed the way they do their logistics. Before they calculated more days and then received the goods from their logistics centers for the days they calculated. And if not enough was distributed then they had to give them out...This acquisition is now done daily, yeah. So now, they do not work with such a huge amount of goods but with fewer. (Volunteer at an associated food pantry, male, 60-70 years old).

Well, the first reason is that we have many more asylum seekers. That is the first reason. The second reason is that the income of the women whose husbands have died is 400 €. That means that is the problem. And it is just getting worse. Yeah. Unfortunately, that is how it is. The women or retirees who come to the food bank have never worked before or do not work anymore because the husband worked and they looked after the children. Therefore, they have no income anymore. That is the problem today. (Manager of an associated food pantry and country representative, male, 60-70 years old).

I did not know about it. It was a little bit a gift for me. There were some presents for my children on Christmas. It was a big event at the food bank...I feel thankful for it. It is very nice. Every child whose parents get standard social benefits gets a present. Lovingly done by people. Gifts, yeah! Socks or hats...and books, gloves. Very nice. (User of an associated food pantry, female, 20-30 years old).

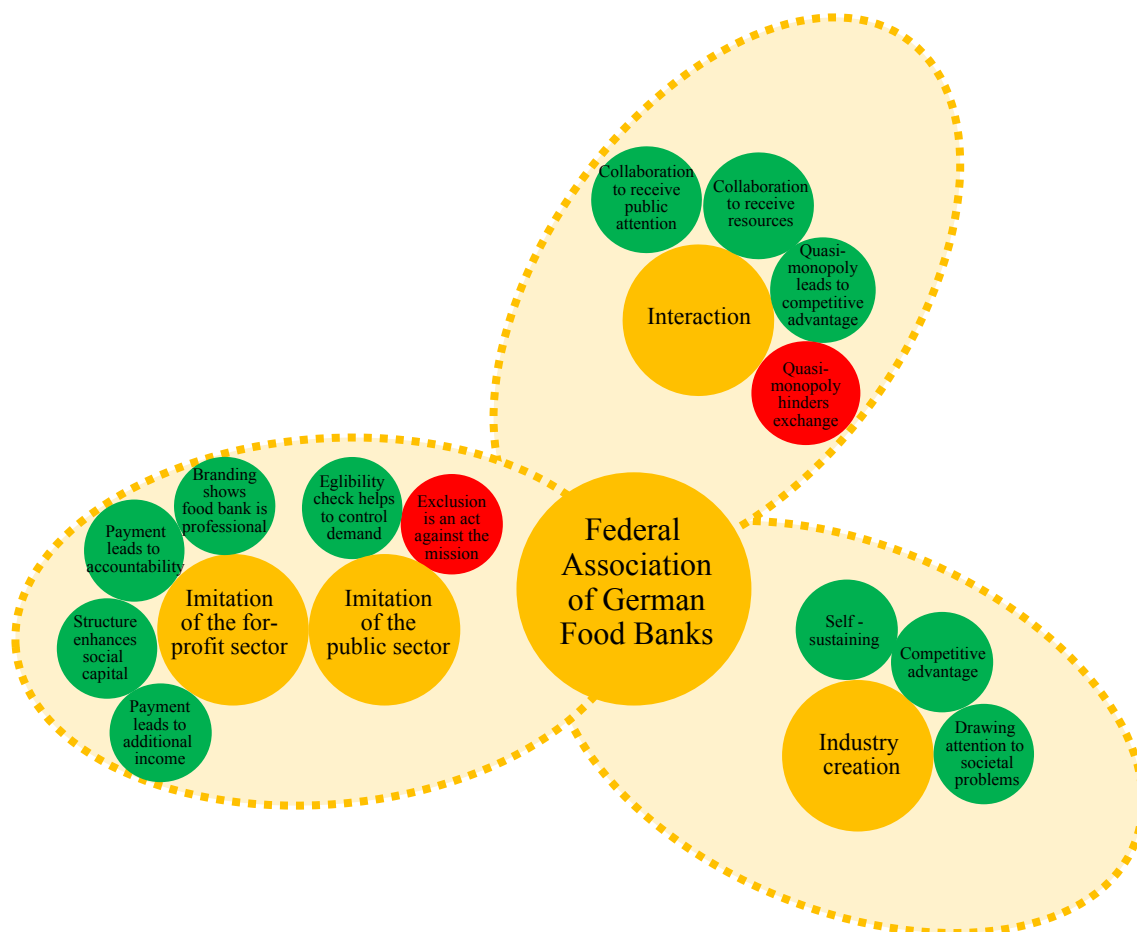
If you are a customer and see, uh, I can help the food bank, you buy the bags. And then the bag gets a sticker and goes to the food bank. And with this we also bring this idea to the public. (Manager of a German food retail chain, male, donates to the German Food Bank once a week).

The statements presented indicate industry creation as another form of sector blending. Interviewees described features of a market system, alluded to the concepts of supply and demand and the inclusion of food items in the German Food Bank system which are not surplus items. They also elaborated on aspects of poverty that are not related to food but are being addressed by food banks. These findings corroborate findings by Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer (2011). The criticism that the German Food Bank is not adhering to its foundational idea by carrying out activities not related to food and food insecurity may be appropriate from Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer's point of view. However, from an economic point of view, the food bank is simply adapting to market conditions, which have changed between 1993 and 2017. The concern over not only supplying surplus food items is also questionable. Since 1993, the number of food pantries in Germany has increased to 900. The number of food pantry users has increased as well during this period (Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017; Von Norman, 2011). In order for the services provided by the German Food Bank to be more than purely symbolic (i.e. to actually come close to meeting demand), it has become necessary to find ways to bring regular food items into the system. The inclusion of other market segments such as children, pets, and refugees is a consequence of cultural changes (Bromley and Meyer, 2014) and represents the German Food Bank's adjustment to these changing conditions.

The various operations of the German Food Bank identified in the present study correspond with the sector blending categorization system described by Dees and Battle Anderson (2003). Aside from contracting (which is a form of interaction) and intermingling, all forms of sector blending described by Dees and Battle Anderson were identified in the present study (Table 3). Whether contracting and intermingling are not used by the German Food Bank or whether they could be identified in other materials than the ones analyzed remains to be determined in future research. Because the German Food Bank is advertising its nonprofit and charitable character, these forms are most likely not used, as they could harm the organization’s image. Donors and sponsors might not want to support any form of for-profit business. The forms of imitation identified here were mainly related to concepts and practices common in German retail operations and furthermore in the German public sector, most notably the requirement for provision of proof of neediness in order to receive social security benefits. In contrast to findings from prior studies, aspects of industry creation identified at the German Food Bank were not found to be negative, but rather present necessary adaptations to cultural and market developments.

4.4 Benefits and drawbacks of sector blending

The sector blending activities identified here with regard to the German Food Bank have both benefits and drawbacks for the organization. All forms of sector blending found in the present study as well as operations described in prior studies and identified as forms of sector blending here (Table 3) are evaluated below, following the classification of Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Overview of the benefits and drawbacks of sector blending. Benefits are depicted in green and drawbacks in red.

Imitation of food retail and food service structures in German food pantries can be evaluated as beneficial, as these structures allow the creation of social capital. According to Dees and Battle Anderson (2003), social capital can develop at sites where many volunteers are involved. Soup kitchens and supermarket-like food pantries (Lorenz, 2012; Selke, 2011a; Werth, 2011) allow food pantry users to receive food and interact with one another as well as with volunteers. Following Schneider (2009), volunteers can be seen as the connection between the organization, the users and society, because the frequent interaction between volunteers and the users leads to reciprocal trust-based relationships that also benefit the German Food Bank as an organization. Another form of imitation – the establishment of an organizational logo and slogan (Witt, 2011) – is beneficial for the German Food Bank, as branding signals professionalism to current and potential users.

In addition to imitation of retail practices and elements of branding, symbolic payments by users (Lorenz, 2010; Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011) also have beneficial consequences for the German Food Bank. As explained by Dees and Battle Anderson (2011), shifting from a completely charitable relationship (where food is provided free of charge) to a customer relationship (where users are asked to provide a symbolic payment) improves accountability of the organization. The payment requirement increases the likelihood that food pantry users will hold the organization accountable if the food or services received are not of acceptable quality. Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) posited that paying customers usually provide feedback to the organization, make their complaints public, or seek other options for receiving goods or services in cases where the quality of the product or service is insufficient. Furthermore, charging users a symbolic payment results in a small amount of income for the food pantry, which can be used for other purposes, for instance, to buy equipment. Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) pointed out that earned income can lead to greater financial strength of nonprofit organizations.

The German Food Bank's imitation of the public sector (Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011; Lorenz, 2012; Von Normann, 2011) also has both benefits and drawbacks. The eligibility assessment and distribution according to the extent of users' neediness allows German food pantries to control supply and demand. Moreover, the eligibility assessment avoids cheating and free rider effects. However, the eligibility assessment also causes the exclusion of some people suffering from food scarcity, e.g. homeless people. Since people outside the social security system are excluded, this can be seen as a threat to the social performance of the German Food Bank, reflecting mission drift. According to Dees and Battle Anderson (2003), business structures or operations can steer nonprofit organizations away from their original mission. In the case of the German Food Bank, the original mission was to reduce food waste and provide food to socially and economically disadvantaged people. This mission would include homeless people. Dees and Battle Anderson (2003) further explained that many social services originally intended to serve the extremely poor focus instead on less disadvantaged people, rather than finding ways to serve both populations.

Competing with other organizations that provide food to the needy as well as other welfare organizations with different foci also has both benefits and drawbacks for the German Food Bank. Providing education and other services, e.g. the Food Bank Academy (Federal Association of German Food Banks, 2017) can lead to improved service quality and distinction in the market. In addition, the legal protection of the organization's name and the branding concept create a quasi-monopoly, which provides advantages over other organizations with similar objectives. Consequently, some of these organizations might be unwilling to collaborate and exchange knowledge.

The relationships with sponsors, donors and other welfare organizations that consider the German Food Bank as a favorable collaboration partner are beneficial. Sponsors provide resources in the form of food items and funds that are needed by the food pantries (Lorenz, 2012; Selke, 2011b; Witt, 2011). In particular, event weeks dedicated to the German Food Bank have positive effects, because the food bank and its collaboration partners receive positive public attention. During event weeks, the food bank also receives food items rarely donated due to their long shelf life, e.g. canned food and cookies. These extra items received through collaborations are beneficial, since they help adjust the food supply to demand. Further, cooperation with

other welfare organizations not deterred by the German Food Bank's quasi-monopoly are beneficial, as resources and knowledge can be exchanged.

The present study as well as prior literature (Hoffmann and Hendel-Kramer, 2011; Lorenz, 2010) show aspects of industry creation. Industry creation can be evaluated as beneficial for the German Food Bank, as this form of sector blending has a self-sustaining effect that, from an economic point of view, is considered desirable even for a nonprofit organization. Including other aspects of poverty and different target groups is particularly beneficial, because these forms of diversification can lead to a competitive advantage. Also from a social point of view, such diversification is beneficial, because it helps both to draw attention to societal problems, such as poverty among children and the elderly, and to identify gaps in the German social security system.

When evaluating the German Food Bank's operations on the background of sector blending as a whole, social capital is enhanced through the adjustment of structures. But sector blending also leads to the exclusion of potential users from the system through eligibility control. With respect to economic benefits, the German Food Bank's efforts of sector blending are aimed at addressing user demands and adjusting to cultural changes. A resulting drawback is interference with potential collaborations. Since the German Food Bank has remained focused on its mission and kept its charitable character, sector blending can be evaluated as positive overall.

## 5. Conclusions

The study presented identified sector-blending activities in the German Food Bank, and showed that these are largely beneficial in both economic and social terms. Sector blending increases the generation of funds and resources, supports adjustment to increased demand by users, contributes to the professional appearance of the organization and enhances social capital. Drawbacks are mostly of a social nature, because the German Food Bank is not serving people outside the social security system. However, since the organization has neither lost its charitable character nor significantly jeopardized its mission, its activities benefit the German society overall.

Sector blending efforts of the German Food Bank are of interest to marketing managers of food retail chains as well as agricultural producers considering collaborations. On the one hand, sector blending efforts emphasize the focus and professionalism of the German Food Bank as a potential collaboration partner. On the other hand, there are drawbacks, e.g. the exclusion of certain groups from the system, which are of importance for potential collaborators wanting to support the extreme poor. Since the present study emphasizes both benefits and drawbacks, it contributes to informed decision making as to whether the German Food Bank is a suitable collaboration partner for sponsors and donors.

Furthermore, the study is valuable to organizations providing services similar to those provided by the German Food Bank. Other organizations could fill the niche that it is not serving. This strategy would lead to more effective and appropriate resource allocation in the market dedicated to supporting the poor, by allowing those not participating in the German social security system to be served. This includes not only the homeless, but also others who choose not to use the system due to embarrassment. In addition, the study serves to bring further attention to the fact that food insecurity is not only an issue in developing countries. In many developed countries such as Germany, food insecurity is a societal problem. In Germany, stigmatization of people, e.g. children and retirees, suffering from food insecurity still occurs (Selke, 2011a). Accordingly, governmental campaigns, social media as well as other forms of media reaching a large share of the German population could contribute to increased awareness. The German Food Bank may be willing to support these efforts with accumulated experience and knowledge.

A limitation of the present study results from it being carried out in Bavaria, one of the wealthier German states. Inclusion of less wealthy states with higher unemployment, for instance in eastern Germany, may lead to somewhat different results, including other forms of imitation and interaction. However, conversion

and intermingling are not likely to exist, because their for-profit nature contradicts the German Food Bank's mission. Furthermore, an important actor was not included in the sampling for the present study, state and local government. Government representatives were not included, because their viewpoints were intensively discussed in prior sociological studies (Selke, 2011a,b; Von Norman, 2011). Still, these actors might have provided insights into forms of interaction between the German Food Bank and the official welfare system, e.g. collaboration and competition.

With respect to sector blending, food bank structures and operations in countries with a similar economic situation should be investigated to identify solutions for current problems and further potential to improve food banks' services and functioning. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) can be seen as a collaboration partner supporting food pantries with food for emergency programs (USDA, 2017), while in the German context there is no such support from the government directly to the German Food Bank. Instead, there is an underlying tension, because the German Food Bank assumes duties of the German welfare system, and cutbacks in support to the poor have resulted in increased user dependence on the German Food Bank (Selke, 2016).

Future research could also investigate the German Food Bank from a management perspective, since prior studies were mainly focused on users and on sociological issues. Accordingly, an investigation from a managerial perspective could benefit the German Food Bank's operations and effectiveness and may allow comparison with prior U.S. (Vitiello *et al.*, 2015) and European studies (González-Torre and Coque, 2016). For example, it would be beneficial to investigate human resource management in food pantries. As shown in Canadian studies (McIntrye *et al.*, 2015; Tarasuk and Eakin, 2003), European studies (Van der Horst *et al.*, 2014; Von Normann, 2011) and the present study, some of the operations and the sector blending efforts of the German and other food banks resulted in problems for food pantry users. Examples of eligibility assessments leading to exclusion or user shaming by volunteers do not necessarily imply mission drift, but might result from lack of management skills.

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