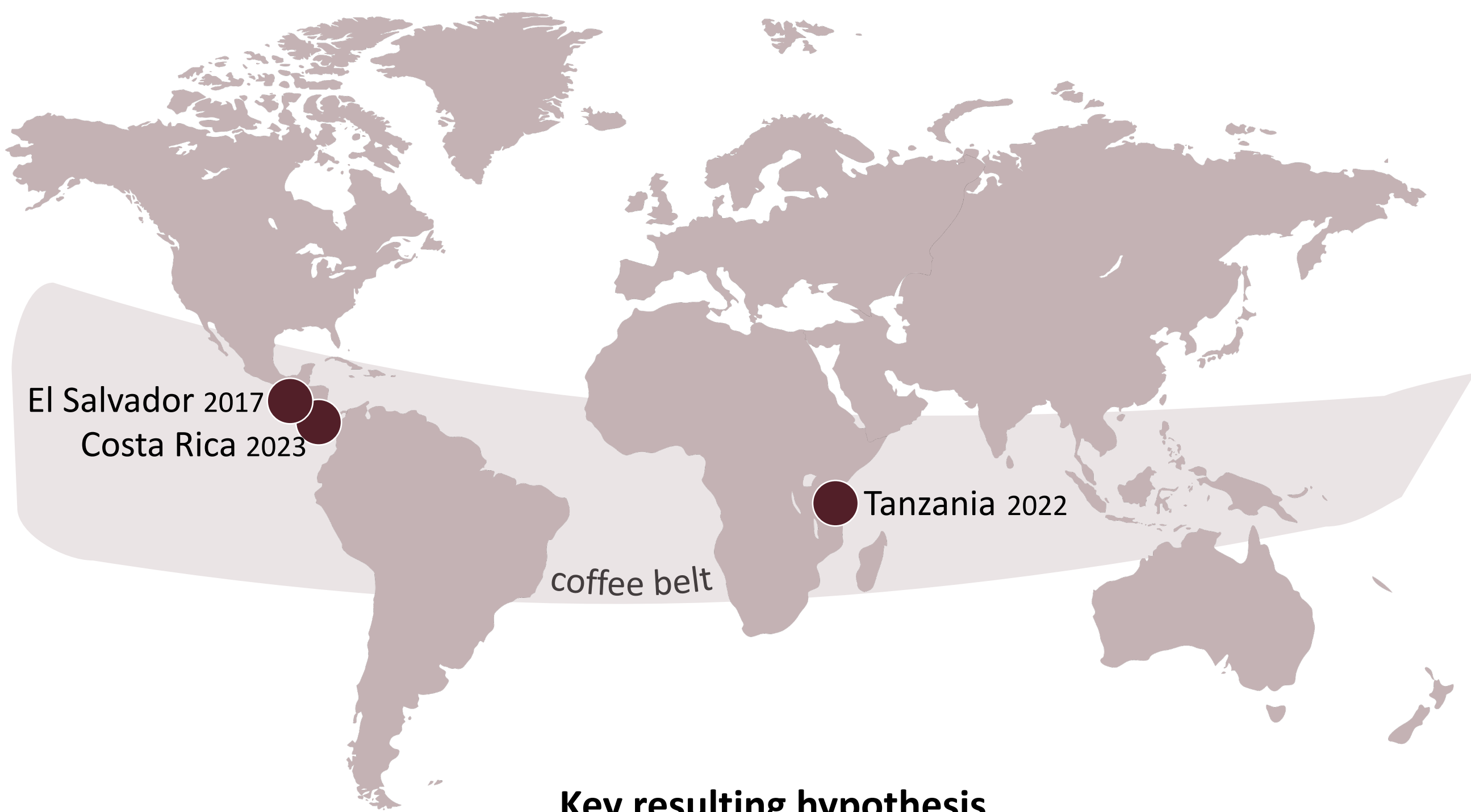


Brewing a more equitable cup

Game changers for coffee producers: Learnings from El Salvador, Tanzania and Costa Rica

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Problem statement and research question

Coffee cultivation has been highly criticized for multiple reasons: Its production has been linked to soil degradation and erosion, biodiversity losses and environmental pollution.¹ On top of that, coffee production has been shown to be of low economic viability. Price volatility as well as climate impacts make returns from coffee produce unpredictable.² Food insecurity and malnutrition have been shown to occur frequently in coffee farming households around the globe.³

Why then do smallholder households stick to coffee production and which strategies do they pursue to serve a more equitable and sustainable development in coffee cultivation?

Methods

This poster brings together key game changers formulated by smallholder coffee growers from El Salvador, Costa Rica and Tanzania and an estimation of opportunities available to implement these. Results were retrieved through interviews, focus group discussions and workshops in the context of different research activities in 2017, 2022 and 2023. The cases represent highly diverse contexts incorporating different socio-economic, political and bio-physical conditions. Therefore this poster provides insights into frequent demands and evaluations without stating that these are valid, compatible or even feasible in every context.

Key resulting hypothesis

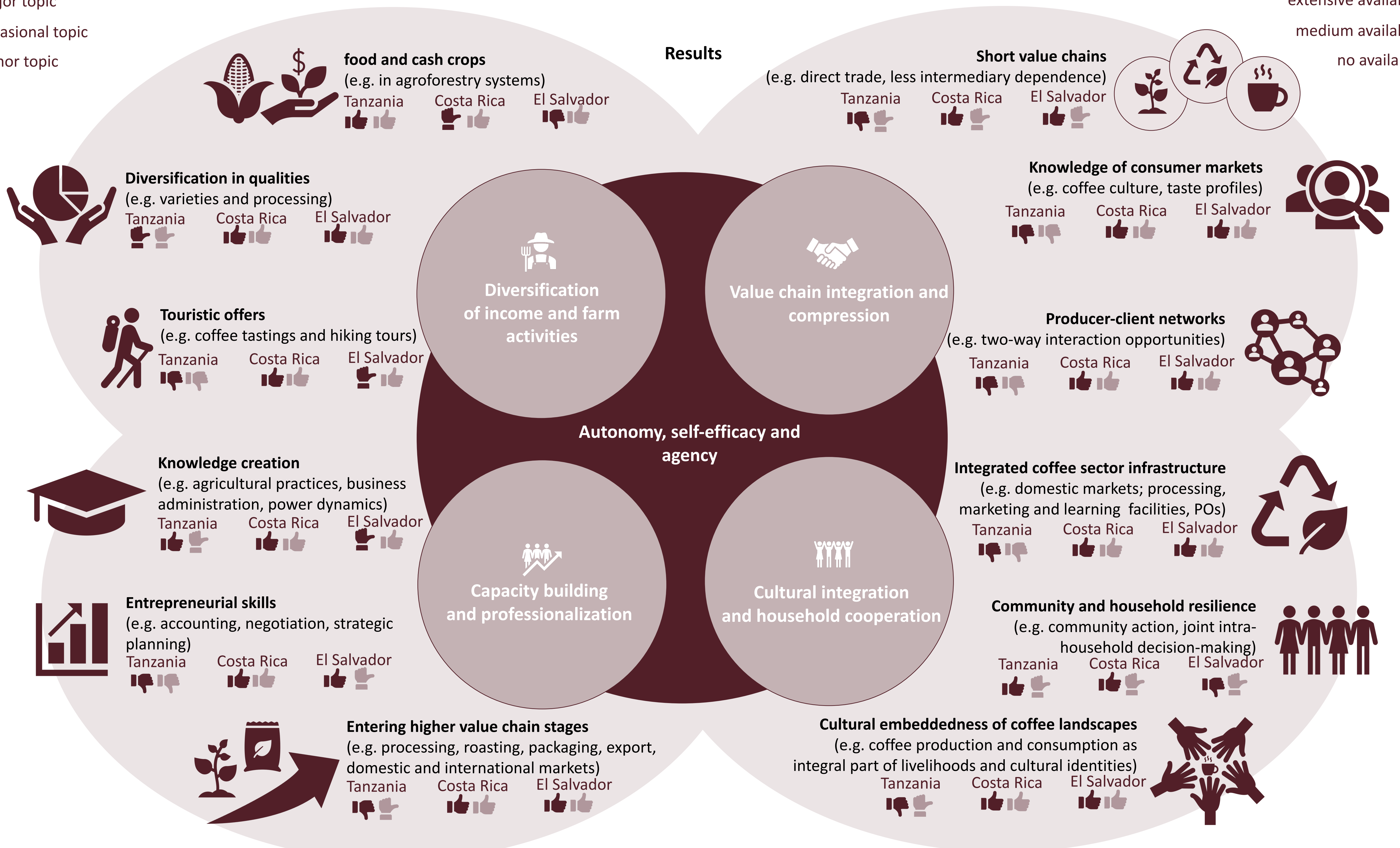
Equality and sustainability of coffee production systems may find most fertile ground where coffee represents an integral part of a society's cultural identity and where domestic markets are well-established

Key: Significance of topics in interview narratives on achieving equitable and sustainable coffee businesses

- major topic
- occasional topic
- minor topic

Key: Availability of necessary resources, infrastructure or opportunities to implement the strategy

- extensive availability
- medium availability
- no availability



Conclusion and Discussion

Smallholder coffee growers perceive different aspects in the arenas of diversification, capacity building, value chains and socio-cultural embeddedness as game changers towards a more equitable and sustainable coffee system. This perception correlates strongly with an availability of resources, infrastructures and opportunities to implement these game changer. Living in embedded coffee communities and cooperation in smallholder households was linked to a provision of mutual help, social support and strengthening resilience.

However, the vast majority of aspects named cannot be executed by individual smallholders alone. They are provided on regional, national or even global levels. Moreover, the arenas seem to be highly interrelated and mutually reinforcing: If a society disposes over a vital local coffee culture, it self-provides the demand for local coffee produce, allowing for shorter value chains and direct producer-client relations. This opportunity for business development opens windows for a step-wise expansion to higher value-chain stages and a global market entry, eventually. If coffee production represents a core economic sector in a region, governance structures, policies, training, processing and marketing facilities will be more likely available than elsewhere.

Overall, this provides grounds to formulate the hypothesis that equality and sustainability of coffee production systems find most fertile ground where coffee represents an integral part of a society's cultural identity and where domestic markets are well-established, because diverse opportunities for development are available and dependencies on single actors and intermediaries are reduced, thus increasing autonomy, self-efficacy and agency of smallholder coffee growers.

Literature

- ¹ e.g. Sporchia, F., Taherzadeh, O., & Caro, D. 2021. Stimulating environmental degradation: a global study of resource use in cocoa, coffee, tea and tobacco supply chains. *Current Research in Environmental Sustainability* 3: 100029.
- ² e.g. Lerner, D. G., Pereira, H. M. F., Saes, M. S. M., & Oliveira, G. M. D. 2021. When unfair trade is also at home: the economic sustainability of coffee farms. *Sustainability* 13(3):1072.
- ³ e.g. Mequanent Muche & Degefa Tolossa. 2022. Comparative analysis of household food insecurity between selected coffee and wheat growers of Ethiopia. *Cogent Food & Agriculture* 8:1.

